*The following excerpt is from Wole Soyinka’s April 17, 2006 talk at Carnegie Council about his memoir,*[You Must Set Forth at Dawn.](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/037550365X/sr%3D8-1/qid%3D1145889087/ref%3Dpd_bbs_1/104-0177045-1276719?%5Fencoding=UTF8) *Soyinka was a critic of Nigeria's military dictatorships and was imprisoned for 22 months in the late 1960s He was the first African to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.* *In the 1990s, Soyinka was forced to flee Nigeria and went to the United States.*

*This excerpt has been modified for the classroom.*
**Is authoritarianism endemic to Nigerian politics?**

There's nothing endemic in the Nigerian nature towards authoritarianism. Independence did not come in a straightforward way. The memoirs of some of the British colonial officers note that they were instructed by the Home Office to rig the first elections, so as to give power to the less progressive side of the nation. The British not only rigged the elections, they even rigged the census to make lopsided the proportional relation between the north and the south in terms of population and to ensure that power remained with the north, which the British felt could be more easily manipulated after independence.

As a result, some areas of Nigeria feel that they are divinely appointed to rule. It has been a contest for power, rather than for service, participation. The issue of power, of who runs Nigeria, has become obsessive. It transfers from groups to individuals. The military came in and contested one after the other.

So you never had the culture of democratic participation, even during those periods when we had democratically elected rulers. One side always felt, and could prove, that elections had somehow been manipulated. We have not gotten over that syndrome.

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**Why and how does corruption take place in Africa?**

Corruption has eaten deeply into Nigerian society and into much of African society. But much of that responsibility also lies with the outside world, the trading partners, the multinational corporations, who place tempting, irresistible deals before our leaders. The culture of dictatorship has not helped matters. These companies, and the Western world, for a long time, loved the myth of the strong man. [Mobutu Sese Seko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobutu_Sese_Seko) [dictator of Zaire from 1965-1997] could not have acquired as much as he did [he is said to have embezzled between $5- $15 billion] without the shameless complicity of the Belgian government and the Swiss banks. Most of the money which has been siphoned away was done so with the assistance of the international banking industry.

Businesses encouraged the strong-man syndrome, because all they had to do is pick up the phone and say, "Listen, where's your account? Can we do what we like here without intervention? If the natives get restless, would you please get ready to send a few soldiers?" It has been a collaborative system of corruption.

I praised Obasanjo [president of Nigeria 1999-2007]…that, very belatedly, he has begun to do something about it [corruption]. He has unleashed the EFCC [Economic and Financial Crimes Commission], and we are having some very big names quaking in their boots, making confessional statements and working out deals. It's the first time in Africa that a chief of police was hauled up before the courts for massive corruption, disgraced, and thrown out of office.

But this man was charged with having stolen thirteen billion naira. What did he get in the end? Six months in jail, all of which he spent in prison hospital. Six months for a man in that position who abuses office. We had unsolved murders, the sack of an estate by an assistant inspector-general of police, disappearances. Corruption goes beyond the mere stealing of money….

So politics, greed, and outside collaboration are the reasons for the phenomenon of corruption in the African continent.

**Additional questions:**

**This commentary comes from an African point of view. What do you think the response to this would be from a Western country? A multinational corporation? A development bank?**