

FAILURE OF GOVERNANCE IN THE NIGERIAN STATE: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The failure of governance in Nigeria is a significant issue in scholarly discourse. This paper critically examines the nature and character of political leadership in Nigeria and its impact on the well-being of its citizens. It argues that the Nigerian State demonstrates characteristics of a failed State, with widespread insecurity, corruption, poverty, and an absence of social justice and the rule of law. This paper concludes that selfless, people-centred governance is urgently needed to remedy this situation. The article further discusses practical solutions for better governance in Nigeria and offers recommendations for a way forward.

Keywords: Nigeria, Governance, Leadership, Political System

Introduction

According to Waype (1971), "Political thought is thought about the State, its structure, its nature and purpose." In his view, "political philosophy (theory) is a rational inquiry into all that concerns man and his relationship with his fellow men in the state." The reason for the existence of the State and why some persons should wield political power is one of the basic problems of political Philosophy. In the view of Aristotle (as cited by Copleston, 1962, p. 93), man is by nature a social being and is bound to live as a citizen of a state because he is not self-sufficient. The final end of the State according to him is the good life. Plato in his work *The Republic* states that, "the State exists in order to serve the wants of men. Men are not independent of one another, but need the aid and co-operation of the other in the production of the necessities of life." In his view on the necessity for the existence of the state Laski (2008, p. 16) states thus:

Man finds himself, in the modern world living under the authority of government: and obligation to obey their orders arises from the fact of his nature. For he is a community-building animal, driven by inherited instincts, to live with his fellows...

Further elucidating on the purpose of the State, Laski (2008, p. 16) noted that the State is "an organisation for enabling the mass of men to realise social good on the largest possible scale." The gregarious nature of man makes him live as a "being with the others." This social interaction brings in the need for control; and this necessitates the need for leadership, to control the conduct of men living in a civil society. The leadership of a State that is clothed with authority is called government. The performance of the State in every democracy is significant and of interest, as its purpose and operation affects everyone alike. Power on its own is dormant except put into effective use. Its usefulness can only be felt by the impact on

the lives of the people. On the need for inclusivity in the sharing of power and resources of the state Laski (2008, p. 16) again holds thus:

Classes excluded from a share in power have always been classes excluded from a share in benefit. The limitation in the number of those upon whom social good is conferred, whose personality, that is to say, finds satisfaction in the workings of the political institutions, has always meant in the end, assault upon the foundations of the state by those excluded from his direction.

The identity of man's nature makes him need a common minimum of satisfaction. The State then needs to be responsible because it possesses its power with responsibilities and a duty. It has a duty to create the enabling environment for men to realise the best they can be. It is judged not by what it is in theory but what it does in practice. The question then is, has the Nigerian State especially in the 4th Republic performed? Has she met the yearnings and aspirations of the people? This and other questions we shall attempt to answer in the course of this discourse.

There has been an unending debate that the Nigerian State like her counterparts in other parts of Africa has underperformed, despite the huge revenue accruing from the proceeds of the sales of crude oil, due to the ineptitude of her political leadership. Bryant critically examines the underdevelopment of African nations and drew a nexus between States' failure and Africa's historical heritage of weak political leadership, corruption, conflict and wars. This plethora of security challenges and socio-political problems are yet to be solved by the government. The symptoms of State failure are noticeable in almost all States of Africa, but our focus in this research paper is the Nigerian State, with emphasis on the political leadership and some State institutions. Kogbara and Odoche (2024, p.16) succinctly capture the state of affairs in Nigeria in the following words: "My brain is dead because of the general gloom in the country." They noted:

Let us not delude ourselves, we need to terms with the real essence of governance. It encompasses various aspects of laws, policies, processes and management of resources which focused on the people and on development. Development by itself is predicated on value addition, fairly which we either stagnate or retrograde.

The State of Nigeria

Nigeria is in a state of social morass due to the inability of successive leaders to deal with the intractable problems of insecurity and the welfare of her citizens, grand official corruption, social justice and the rule of law. According to Mimiko (2010), Nigeria is now a "killing field" From the prolonged Boko Haram insurgency, to the mass abduction of school children in Chibok in Borno State, Dapchi in Yobe state, Kankara in Kastina State, Jangebe in Zamfara State, the list is endless; there are uncountable incidences of cattle rustling, armed banditry and violent attack of villages, mass killings, kidnappings for ransom and farmers herders clashes. Like in Hobbes' state of nature, life in Nigeria has become "solitary, nasty, brutish and short"

On 26th of June 2018, The American cable TV network CNN, reported that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have crowned Nigeria the poverty capital of the world, just exceeding India with the largest number of people living in abject poverty. Stating that Nigeria has about 86.9 million people living in severe poverty, which is about half of the

entire population. The Chandler Good Governance Index in their inaugural global ranking release on 27th of April 2021, ranked Nigeria as the third least governed nation in the world using, poverty corruption etc as their key performance index (Kogbara and Odoche, 2024). The standard of living of the average Nigeria continues to deteriorate year on year. This is mainly due to poor governance. While her leaders continue to swim in opulence, the vast majority of her population, live below the poverty line. There is hunger in the midst of plenty due to the mismanagement of her resources. Mimiko (2010) opines that The Nigerian State has degenerated to the point where it is unable to provide minimal social security for its vulnerable population. In the view of Sagay (1996), it is notes:

With each succeeding regime, Nigeria has being plunged deeper and deeper into a social political wilderness, or worse still, a jungle, overwhelmed by indiscipline, greed, depravity, inhuman insensitivity and oppression. It is tragic enough that a territory naturally endowed by God with limited resources and wealth should wallow in poverty, destitution and abject misery.

Sobowale (2024, p.11) opines that “...most of the 220 millions Nigerian are alive today are not in any way better than their fore fathers....” This is in response to the hardship cost by the hike in prices of petroleum by the Tinubu regime. Akinola opines that, the “petrol rich” Nigeria State is confronted by social political instability, high degree of corruption, mass hostility to the “public” and poor macroeconomic management continues to exhibit the characteristics of a state in crisis. Ukhun (2004, p. 17) in his own view states that the vicious cycle of poverty and human degradation remains entrenched in The Nigerian body polity. Social and political philosophy is an analysis of government institutions from an ethical point of view. The study of ethics is the study of good and bad of right and wrong, of their differences of duties and of rights and their relationship; of virtues and vices and associated traits of characters. This research paper is an attempt to provide a theoretical frame work for good governance in Nigeria from a moral stand point. “Ideas” they say “rules the world”. Taylor (1932, quoting Socrates), said: “....if knowledge operated in the political sphere, the mistake of politics will no longer occur.” Ugwueye (2004, p. 104) further asserts the nexus between politics and ethics and states thus:

Politics and ethics are not two distinct things. They are parts of one and the same thing, being different integral parts of the same. This follows from fact that man is a moral as well as physical and intellectual being. The state and her citizens are bound to secure the protection of man’s moral nature in even greater degree than it seeks the welfare of his physical and intellectual life, since the moral aspect is the most important of man’s nature.

Again Ugweye (2004, p. 104) states:

Politics is an attribute of man in society that seeks behaviour in relation to the facilities available and common to a group. Ethics or morality as the principle of human conduct is also primarily interested in the regulation of human behaviour in such a way that does not only benefits but prevents one from hurting or injuring others.

Appadorai (1975, pp. 9-10), drawing from Lord Action, explains that the great question for Politics is not to discover what Government prescribes, but what they ought or are supposed

to prescribe¹⁸. He further explained the link between ethics and politics because in every political issue, the question may be asked whether it is right or wrong. In a nutshell, politics cannot be divorced from ethics as ethics is the normative standard of human conduct. The standard with which the conduct of men in a political society is judged to be good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral. At this point, we shall attempt to clarify some key concepts used in this researched paper.

Clarification of Concepts

The State: Blackburn (1996, p. 191) defines the State as, “The political organization of a body of people for the maintenance of order within it’s territory by coercion, or more loosely, the body of people so organized or its territories.” Oguguwa (2003) see the State as, “The political aspect of society. It is a way of regulating human conduct, hence provides a framework of the social order. Appadorai (1975, p. 19) describes the state thus:

When a body of people is clearly organized for purpose of government, then, it is said to be politically organized and maybe called a body polity or state. The essence of such a society is that a group of people called the government are clothed with authority to make laws and enforce them.

Okoh (2005, p. 34) states that the “state,” as used in Political theory and Political Science, is “an association of persons permitting and orderly government, some sovereignty as juridistic personality.” Appadorai (1975, p. 45) defines a state as “a territorial society divided into Government and subjects claiming, within its allotted physical area, a supremacy over all institutions”²⁴. On the distinction between the state and Government, Appadorai again emphasized that the state includes both the Government and the governed. Government being the only machinery through which the purpose or end of the state are realized. He further states that Sovereignty is a characteristic of the state, not the government. The state can then be said to be a group of people legitimately entrusted with the care of the community within a definite territory, having the duty and responsibility to organize law and order; and the fulfillment of the general good as its final end.

Governance: *Webster’s Encyclopedia of Dictionaries* (1976) defines Government as: “Act of governing, exercise of authority, the administrative council or body; the executive power, control, rule”. It further explains governance as “giving direction, control and management.” According to Malemi (2007, p. 10), “primarily, a government is the agency, organization, institution, or machinery through which people, locality, state or country exercise political authority. Government is the means in which the sovereign power of the state is expressed and used to cater for the collective good.” it can then be inferred a priori that governance is the activities of government in exercise of its authority. Dhikru and Akinola (2019) opine that the government is accountable to the people. It has on her shoulders the burden of fulfilling its end of the social contract. Political office holders being social servants who serve society and the population, has the responsibility to ensure equality and promote fundamental human rights.

Overview of Governance in Nigeria

Power in itself is neutral and only perceived in its activity. Ogbu (2001). To know the impact of the activities of the state on the lives of the people, we have to discuss specific issues of

security and welfare of the citizens, the fight against corruption, issues of social Justice and the rule of law as our key performance index.

Security and Welfare of Citizens: Security of life and property and welfare of citizens is the cardinal objective and fundamental principle of state policy as enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution. Nnamani (2003, pp. 339-421), while interpreting the enabling law in this regard puts it thus:

The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria defines the state as a political organization at the level of the federal, state and council the fundamental objective of the state as a cooperate entity are to achieve the fullness of sovereignty, security and welfare, popular participation, orderly composition of Government.

The Nigerian Government seem to have failed in the above regard.

Akinola (p. 46-51) holds that without security, other socio economic goals are unattainable. Shenu argues thus linking security to other key performance indicator:

No nation can enjoy lasting peace if her citizens live in abject poverty particularly if that nation is acknowledged as having the ability and substantial means to provide development and guarantee a good standard of living. Unfortunately, that is the tale of Nigeria. It is a tale of poor governance, insecurity and poverty in the midst of plenty.

Here he has traced insecurity in Nigeria to poverty and mismanagement of the nation's resources by the government a view corroborated by Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). The then Minister of Defence, Major-Gen. Bashir Magashi (Rtd) (2024), in his state of the nation address states thus:

Make no mistake about it, our nation is bleeding now, it is bleeding because of the self-interest and other primordial considerations underlying decisions, which quite a number of our elite, political, ethnic and religious, make so. Such elites are quick to attribute blames to groups other than theirs. The whole idea is to exploit the social division for their political gains and it is because of this divisiveness that Nigeria lacks a national consensus or common comprehensive understanding and the interpretation of what national security is.

He itemized some of the security challenges threatening the very foundation of The Nigerian State and her cooperate existence as, Boko Haram, farmers/herders clashes, IPOB and other political associations that are springing up with different agenda and concerns. In his view, all these can encourage groups to seek violence as a legitimate alternative. He further opined that there is an emergence of a narrow vision of national identity and vision which threatens our country's prospects of social cohesion and he submits thus:

This is why we are seeing the rise of self-help syndrome, often endorsed by states and local elites seeking violence as a legitimate alternative. They rise in vigilantism and identity based militia, who claim to be working for the political and ethno-religious emancipation of their people, aka results resources control, secession and regional self-determination, define potent threats to national security.

Armed banditry, cattle rustling, mass killings, kidnappings especially mass abduction for ransom, is the order of the day. There is obvious incapacity of the government to protect lives and property of her citizens, which the political leadership swore on oath to guarantee. There may be no silver bullets to stop violent crimes and criminality but the government has a moral duty to protect lives and property of her citizens. The Nigerian State must intervene to put an end to the spate of deadly attacks by Islamist militant groups, separatist movements like IPOB and some other ethnic militia. To those taking arms against the state, dialogue is the best option. And for those killing fellow citizens, kidnapping abduction cattle rustling and other form of crime and criminality; human life is sacred, there is no justification to take the life of any human being; it is evil and morally not permissible. To harm or injure a fellow citizen in a criminal form, is inhuman treatment degrading his/her personhood.

Insecurity in Nigeria may not vanish by the number of boots we have on the ground or how many Apache helicopters or fighter jets we import but how well the political leadership manages the perception of political marginalization and the problem of social justice/inequality, which is the root cause of social political polarization and violent crimes and criminalities. There should be a battle to win the heart and mind of the people; putting in place a supportive social-political system, the best system to ensure the security and welfare of the citizens.

The Leadership Question: We cannot treat the leadership question in Nigeria without discussing the leadership recruitment and electoral process. Democracy is simply defined as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. It is not just that simplistic, it is about the credibility of the electoral process. The pertinent question here is, how free and fair are elections in Nigeria? Are they credible and transparent as commonly claimed? Do the votes of the electorates count? Do the election results reflect the wishes and aspirations of the people? These and other questions need to be answered. Erhagbe (2003, p. 33) clearly points out the relevance of elections in a genuine democracy and stressed the fact that the fundamental assumption of democracy is that the governed should have a say in the selection of those who will govern them. The citizens are called up periodically to choose from amongst themselves who they will entrust their destinies. When the process is compromised as is seen in Nigeria, the election ceases to be free, fair and credible. The essence of democracy which is the right of the people to choose their leaders is abridged by the activities of political godfathers who impose candidates and manipulate the electoral process in favour of their surrogates. Those with capacity to deliver are not elected. This rubs off on the quality of leadership and alienates the people from the government.

Contributing to the flawed electoral process is the huge role of money in Nigerian politics. Dukor (2003, p. 33), quoting Francis Mac Donald Comford in the editorial of *Theory and Politics of Godfatherism* states thus: "so long as power is valued as the means to wealth, the helm of the ship will be grasped by man of business whose Bible is her profit and loss account"³⁵. In Nigeria, politics is seen as business hence the "do or die" syndrome. There is no decency or morality in the political system. The Machiavelli "*Prince*" is now the Bible of Nigerian politics and "the end" to them, "justifies the means". With the huge expenses in the purchase forms for party primaries, election campaigns and "vote buying", politicians tend to dip their hands into the public till to recoup their "investments" after elections have been won and lost. This rubs off on governance and service delivery. When spending of money or vote buying becomes the rule and decency is thrown overboard as in vote manipulation and electoral violence, professionals and men of impeccable character and

good conscience, who don't have the financial muscle, are unable to compete favourably with others. This does not create a level playing field. It is a trait of social inequality.

Corruption

Closely knitted with the flawed electoral process in our analysis of leadership failure in Nigeria is the issue of corruption. Corruption is the unethical/immoral use of power to do dishonest things in return for monetary gains or to get an advantage. Lord Bryce aptly surmised that behaviour likely to be regarded as corruption may be more prominent in developing countries (Nigeria inclusive). He opines that it is the case because of great inequality in the distribution of wealth, conflict between changing moral codes, the weakness of social and governmental enforcement agencies and the absence of a strong sense of national community. Corruption has been institutionalized in Nigeria to the extent that it has become a way of life; it has assumed a monumental dimension especially in the executive and legislative arm of government which is under the control of the political class.

Ogueiofor (2001, p. 30) states that, in Africa Nigeria inclusive, corruption is endemically entrenched. He rightly points out that this is because the common man expects his brother and kinsman who attains a high office to uplift him and the rest of the family with the wealth acquired from the position. Money made from holding a political office is seen as everybody's money and part of the "national cake", a largesse which must go round as "empowerment". He will be a hero if he becomes rich and spreads the largesse; taunted as a weakling, spendthrift or a villain if he comes out poor or not as rich as expected-or is not seen to have doled out the political largesse. Mazrui (2004, p. 89) vividly captures the situation in his coinage of "The quest for Aristocratic effects". In his view, the main reason for endemic corruption in Africa, Nigeria inclusive is the conformity with the principle of reciprocity which impose enormous financial obligation far beyond the reach of the legitimate earning of the typical African official. Ikhuorobe (1996, p. 123) emphasizing the views of Peter Ekeh argues that corruption stems directly from the amorality of the civic public and the legitimization of the desire to seize largesse from the civic public. He further stressed Ekeh's thesis that in this clime, one's citizenship of the civic public is viewed in terms of economic benefits without a corresponding duty to give back.

The Rule of Law

Another parameter through which we can measure the performance of The Nigerian State and The Government is the issue of the rule of law. The term "rule of law is derived from the French phrase "La principe de legality" (the principle of legality) which refers to government based on the principle of legality. In a broader sense, rule of law means, law is supreme above every individual. According to Dicey (p. 202), the doctrine connotes

The absolute supremacy or predominance of regular law as to the influence of arbitrary power, and excludes the existence of arbitrariness or prerogative or even of wide discretional authority on the part of the government, (men) are ruled by law alone. A man may with us be punished for a breach of the law, but can be punished for nothing else.

The second aspect of Dicey's classification of the rule of law is equality before the law, or equal subjection of classes to the ordinary law of the land as administered by the court. This aspect of the rule of law is aptly captured by Melemi (2010, p. 10) (*supra*) in the following

passage of the judgment of Oputa JSC., as he then was in the case of *The Governor of Lagos vs Ojukwu*:

The law is a respecter of no persons, principalities, government or powers and the courts stand between the citizens and the government, or powers and the court stand between the citizens and the government, it is alive to see that the state or government is bound by the law and respects the law.

The third aspect of Dicey's conception of the rule of law is the supremacy of the constitution. It is worthy of note that the scope and meaning of the rule of law has been expanded beyond its original classic meaning. In the views of (Sagay 1996) it covers all the following:

- i. The supremacy of the law over all persons and authorities in a state
- ii. Independence of the judiciary
- iii. Supremacy of the constitution
- iv. The right to personal liberty
- v. Observation of democratic values and practices, including The freedom of speech, thought, association, freedom of press and regular free, fair elections as basis for assuming power.

It is unfortunate that this state of affair is not applicable in Nigeria. The rule of law is only observed in breaches. The government is not tolerant of the views of its opponents and critics. Plurality of voices is the beauty of democracy. The law enforcement agents who are an apparatus of The State, especially the Police do not respect the fundamental human right of individuals as enshrined in the constitution and the African Charter on Human and People's rights (also known as the Banjul Charter) which Nigeria is a signatory. There are uncountable cases of detention without trial, extra judicious killings, torture and harassment of citizens; against the rule of law and fundamental human rights of individuals. This led to The End SARS protest, in 2020. A protest against Police brutality and bad governance.

There is no clear cut separation of powers. With the intension to practice political surrogacy, The executive has continued to meddle into the affairs of the legislature to determine the leadership structure. Same is applicable to the States and Local Governments. This leads to political instability. Another case of executive interference in the affairs of the Legislature is the DSS invasion of the National Assembly on 7th August 2018 at the behest of the Presidency. The executive has continued to infringe on the Independence of the judiciary. A case in point is the unlawful sack of the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Water Onoghen by the President of The Federal Republic of Nigeria on 2nd February 2019, based on unsubstantiated allegations of corruption. There are cases of judges being accused of corrupt practices, bowing to external influences especially from the executive arm of government, cases of frivolous court injunctions, different rulings from courts of co-ordinate jurisdictions especially in political cases. The judiciary cannot be said to have passed the integrity test, going by the normative ethical status of universality or logical consistency. There are cases of judges being accused of corrupt practices. These actions are against the rule of law. Again, elections are not free, fair and credible. These are all symptoms of a failed state

Agbese (2003, p. 1) surmises that poor leadership has stifled the nations enormous economic and political potentials. Buttressing this point, Ukhun (2004) argues, that despite

the abundant human and material resources, an inept and corrupt national leadership has left a legacy of economic profligacy, acute poverty and unemployment, political instability, infrastructural decay, and a sense of despair. Ukhun (2004) further submits that it is not only corruption that is plaguing the Nigerian political leadership. He itemized arrogance, brutality etc which is flagrantly displayed with grandiloquence, as character traits that denigrates the body polity and good governance. He postulated a sanitization and purge of this social malaise for the interest of the common good. Leadership failure is prevalent in every strata of governance of the Nigeria state and not limited to the Federal level.

Recommendations

To arrest this ugly trend, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift in governance and the management of the resources of the Nigerian State. There is a need to fight corruption, which has become institutionalized, head-on. Anti-corruption agencies and those responsible for fighting crime and criminality should intensify their efforts. The extant laws should be enforced, and where necessary, new legislation should be enacted. Civic education should be encouraged, where moral virtues are taught and extolled. Politics without principles and ethics is a mere façade, and democracy without a democratic culture is pseudo-democracy. The political class and the citizenry should de-emphasize and shun money politics, as the adverse effects far outweigh its benefits.

There should be a reward system for hard work and honesty. Offenders in corruption cases should be swiftly tried, and if found guilty, punished accordingly. Nigerians as a people should change their value system. The worship of money has eroded our core African values of truth and honesty. We should replace self-interest with social progress. Those in government and political leadership should see citizens as subjects to be cared for, rather than objects of exploitation. At all times, we should act to promote the dignity of the human person. If we follow ethical principles of harmony, where each and every one understands their rights and duties and acts accordingly, we will build a just, harmonious, and egalitarian society, in line with the principles and ideology of African communalism.

A governance model that is people-centric, in line with African philosophical and political ideologies embedded in the conceptual frameworks of *Omoluabi*, *Ujama*, and *Ubuntu*, should be adopted. All must be united in pursuit of the common good (*summum bonum*) and the supreme good (*supremum bonum*). Leaders and political office holders in Nigeria should separate public interests from private interests, recognizing that the security and well-being of the citizenry is of supreme importance. As a nation, we should all be united in the pursuit of the common good, which is the supreme good.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the failure of governance in Nigeria has manifested in widespread insecurity, corruption, and poverty. However, with targeted reforms, the country can overcome these challenges. A focus on improving leadership, strengthening institutions, and ensuring accountability will be critical in moving Nigeria forward. Governance must become people-centred, with the welfare of the citizens at the forefront of all governmental decisions. Only through these changes can Nigeria realise its full potential as a prosperous and stable state.

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