



Research Paper

Leadership And Political Crises in Nigeria's Democratic Rule (1999-2019)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between the disposition and character of successive Nigerian leadership and the emergence of political crises from 1999 to 2019. The Nigerian state has been faced with several crises since her formation but there is no gainsaying the point that major crises in Nigeria, especially since 1999, in most instances have their roots in the quest for political dominance and unsavory styles of elite leadership. This work made use of quantitative data sourced and collated from various secondary sources. To explain the variables (leadership styles and their crises generation or diffusion tendencies), descriptive research design was adopted. The qualitative content analysis method was adopted. Study revealed that Nigerian leadership exhibits corrupt tendencies; there is wanton absence of exemplary leadership and lack of patriotism on the part of the ruling class; and all of these negative attributes fuel sociopolitical stagnation, discontent and ultimately leads to political crises. It was also found that the rampant cases of disregard for the rule of law by leadership promote crises in the polity. The study recommended reorientation of leadership on ethical values that would encourage patriotism, building of strong institutions rather than strong men, true federalism by devolving the enormous powers of the central government to the federating states and stipulation and enforcement of stricter penalties against proven cases of corruption by leadership.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The irony of leadership which makes it well inappropriate for any objective analyst to describe the present crop of politicians in Nigeria as leaders is the progressive decay in the society, which stifles the initiative of the citizens and greatly muffles their patriotic zeal (Ekekwe, 2011). A prominent case of leadership failure is that of resource control debate. The leadership is so mired in ineptitude that it has for so long, refused to give an ear to the agitation for resource control in the Niger Delta, until it became obvious that if nothing was done to address the injustice, the highest source of revenue that drives the economy may well close down; and in pursuit of that interest, certain quick steps were taken in the interim. It does seem that leadership intermittently goes back to sleep (Ejobowah, 2011).

Despite all the tools and resources available to the nation, evidence abound that the leadership at the critical national level is often self-serving and opportunistic. Ejobowah (2011) affirms that Nigeria is by all standards a well-endowed nation. With enormous reserve of oil and gas; and numerous solid minerals in a population of well over 170million - an asset to development; the country still groans under the burden of endemic poverty (Ejobowah, 2011). It is no wonder that the country has remained a mono-product economy, precariously relying solely on oil revenue after over sixteen (16) years of uninterrupted democratic rule and with the billions of dollars' revenue that accrued to the government; there is hardly any improvement in the quality of

lives of the citizenry (NBS, 2016). Despite these accruals, unemployment rate kept increasing, infrastructural decay remained an issue, poverty rate and indices were on the rise, human right abuses have become a norm. An overview of political and economic events since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, left little on our national horizon to cheer about, but merely re-enforced the concern being expressed by serious minded citizens and cynics alike that Nigeria is in a state of anomie and perilously on a merry-go-round. Our national disaster has been in the making and has been nourished on virtually all segments by a pedestrian leadership long enough to demonstrate the manifest failure of the state.

The primary duty of government is the protection of the lives and properties of the citizenry. In that regard also, leadership has failed, as it seemed that successive governments are in a race to break the unenviable records of the others, its own inability to stem the orgy of killings of hapless citizens. Ekekwe (2011) aptly observed that insecurity threatens to overwhelm the citizens, while the state seems to lack the strategy to check it.

In support of these discussions, Ekekwe (1986:22) noted that, 'it was in the process of incorporating the present post-colonial formation into the world economy that the state was imposed and its present class formation evolved'. Ekekwe (1986) is of the view that Nigeria's contact with the forces of Western imperialism had far-reaching impacts on the Nigerian state, the class formation, the political and social values, the patterns of accumulation and the country's location and role in the global divisions of labour and power. The implication of this is that it has led to potential crisis of governance. This, Oyovbaire (2007) noted, is evident in the seemingly unending crises of governance at the federal level, manifesting in the frosty relationship between the Executive and the Legislative arms of government; intra-Executive relations; and the sporadic crisis in the State and Local Government. The poor political leadership evident in the Nigeria State since its establishment of democratic government on May 29, 1999 may have led to what International Economic Intelligence Unit's Report in the 2008/2009 rating called "Authoritarian Democracy" (Oyovbaire 2007:17). This situation breeds anarchy, which could bring about division in the country if not nipped in the bud.

As a result of the absence of disciplined ruling elite, the quest for national development and growth is far from reality, hence, growing gap of inequality, corruption, ethnic conflicts, unhealthy ethnic competition and political intrigues, political marginalization, rising religious tension and religious insurgency, militancy and other related issues that bedevil the Nigerian state (Ijewerem, 2014). The Nigerian state has experienced the above issues of leadership styles which have created a wide disconnect between the ruling elites and the ruled thereby leading to legitimacy crisis and leadership instability.

These ugly realities have been blamed on the lack of discipline by the political class. Ndu (2016) maintained that discipline is a necessary requirement for political leaders in their bid to attain good leadership and political stability in Nigeria. Being the character of the individual person or persons, discipline has to do with the strict adherence to laid down rules, regulations, order and laws which lead to peace and development. Such an individual is described as having self-control (Ndu, 2016).

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Crises/Political Crises

In its ordinary use, crisis has been equated with an important situation; one which is violent or potentially violent. It has been referred to as both the actual or prelude to war and the averted approach. It is difficult to actually operationally define crises or differentiate crisis from non-crisis periods. There are in current literature, two approaches to a more systematic definition of crises. They are (a) the substantive and the procedural approaches (Ashby, 1966).

In the substantive approach, the concept of crises dwells on the content and context of a given situation. According to Khan (1965), the primary idea of the proponents of this approach is the implication that a particular policy, situation or problem may bring. A more procedural approach to the definition of crisis is employed by those who aim at the general theory. The definition dwells on those elements that are generic to any crisis situation irrespective of the subject or substance of the crisis (Weiner & Khan, 1962, North et al, 1968).

In the context of this work, it is considered apt to adopt the definition of crisis as given by Laura Henderson. According to Henderson (2014), the phrase "political crises" supposes the framing of a political situation or issue as an urgent, structural threat that necessitates an urgent course of action to avert the danger. Crucially, since the threat is structural, it means that the current status quo is not a sufficient way to deal with the threat. An alternative course of action is necessary.

Leadership & Crises

Blondel (1987) opined that leadership in general and political leadership in particular is an abstract concept whose meaning is socially constructed. He defines leadership as a process of human interaction in which some individuals exert, or attempt to exert a determining influence upon others or a process by which one individual consistently exerts more impact than others on the nature and direction of group activity.

According to Blondel (1987) Political leadership is a phenomenon of power; a power because it entails the ability of the one or few who are at the top to make others do a number of things, positively or negatively, that they would not do or at least might not have done. Blondel argues that leadership does not just refer to any power, but to influential power exercised on the society and that affects ostensibly the destiny of mankind.

Similarly, Edinger (1967) shares the same view as he argued that leadership is a position within a society which is defined by the ability of the incumbent to guide and structure the collective behavior patterns of some or all of its members. It is at all times relational, interpersonal, and is based upon inequality of influence between the leader as the influencing agent and the followers as the objects of his efforts to cue their behaviours so that they will conform to his personal objectives. This view of course does not actually point out the negative side of leadership as he emphasized on ability to guide and structure the collective behavior. Edinger did not tell us what the leadership will do when his wishes contradict that of collective decision. The role of influence is equally emphasized but power is missing because both have different role.

Hah and Bartol (1983) in a different view see political leadership as the mobilization and direction, by a person or persons using essentially non-coercive means, of other persons within a society to act in patterned and coherent ways that cause [or prevent] change in the authoritative allocation of values within that society. Hah and Bartol's conceptualization is indeed normative. They tell us what ought to be. In reality of life, the issue of mobilization and direction of followers or people by non-coercive means by the crop of political leaders we have, especially in African countries is not true. Political leaders of the past in both developed and developing countries did not exhibit this attribute, even in the contemporary time, some leaders still believe in the use of power that corrupt absolutely.

Opposing to the above conceptualization are some scholars who do not see leadership as a position person or persons occupy but see it as government by persuasion rather than coercion. Cartwright, (1993:89) writes that, leadership is better defined as government by persuasion rather than coercion. To him, the essence of leadership is the ability to persuade others to comply voluntarily with one's wishes. Leadership involves voluntary compliance by those over whom it is exercised. It is the ability to obtain non-coerced, voluntary compliance which enables followers to obtain goods which they share with the leader. This is more related to leadership legitimacy than leadership itself.

There is a clear distinction between leaders and office-bearers or rulers. He asserted that unfortunately, in many African countries, leadership has been described as the evil of society. This explains why some political leaders want to remain in power or acquire power by the use of force against the will of the people as it was under colonialism, rather than power by persuasion or by conviction of the people themselves. It is also interesting to see how some African national leaders have been struggling to extend their leadership on the sub-regional and regional levels. If there is an imputation that is peculiar to these definitions and explications of leadership attributes, it is, in the nature and character of leadership (whether innate or learned) McFarland (1969). A leader is one who makes things happen that would not happen otherwise. If the leader causes changes that he intended, he has exercised power, but if the leader causes changes that he did not intend or want, he has exercised influence, but not power.

Iris (2009) asserts that we have to conceive political leadership as a relationship, built on trust and responsibility. For her political leadership should run from bottom to the top in all decisions and programmes. Political leadership accommodates almost every aspect of leadership in human society and serves as non-attainable in its target or goals in most parts of the world.

Nadal (1967) noted that the concept of political leadership is closely related to that of political elite. He asserts that it is an aggregate of people with distinct characteristics: a position of high status; some degree of corporate group character as well as exclusiveness; awareness of their pre-eminent position as the consequence of some attribute which they share by right; recognition of their general superiority by the society at large.

Political Crises in Nigeria's Democracy

Instances abound in the case of Nigeria, of incapacitating political crises that often threaten the very fabrics of her statehood. Just recently, the Rivers State House of Assembly was locked in crises of leadership and loyalty, which led to brutalization of a member on the hallowed chambers of the legislative house. The House of Representatives have not been spared the ugly malaise as members engage in political disagreements that often lead to fights, physical abuses and throwing of objects at one other. Also within the period of this study, precisely in 2004 was the illegal removal of serving state governor through brazen acts of brigandage, as happened in Anambra State, illegal impeachment of governors as happened in Oyo, Ekiti and Plateau States.

One can adjudge the impeachments illegal since they have been upturned by the courts with scathing commentaries. A repugnant case was the impeachment of the deputy governor of Enugu State, Chief Onyebuchi Chukwu with the backing of the then governor, Sullivan Chime, for rearing chicken in his official apartment. There have been reports of the incitement by, and backing of the central government in many of these crises.

It has been observed that one great trigger of political crises is the self-serving interest of the elite. So it was with the political crises generated by the ambition of the then president Olusegun Obasanjo in seeking to do a third term in office after the constitutional limit of two terms of four years each.

The Senior Special Assistant on Public Affairs to President Obasanjo, Femi Fani-Kayode had on March 5, 2006, confirmed the rumour that the government planned to initiate constitutional amendments that would allow the president to go for a third term election in that year. He went on to fault the warnings of the United States Intelligence Agency and notable world leaders that the ambition of the president, if not tamed, may lead Nigeria into serious political crises and violence. This was quickly construed as self-succession and tenure elongation plan; a prelude to the enthronement of a life-presidency. It was seen as an enactment of the Ugandan Yoweri Museveni's agenda. To heighten the tension built up by the Obasanjo's self-succession plot was the then Governor Abdulkhadir Kure of Niger State who spoke on behalf of the Northern leaders. He warned that any attempt to stop the shift of power to the Northern Nigeria in 2007 would only spell unimaginable doom to the country and that may lead to break-up or polarization.

III. MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Design

Descriptive research design, which encompasses much government related researches including the collection of a wide range of socio-political indices and economic information such as household expenditure patterns, time use studies, employment and crime statistics and the like was adopted for this study. Descriptions can be concrete or abstract. A relatively concrete description might describe the ethnic mix of a community, the changing age profile of a population or the gender mix of a workplace. The phenomenon of leadership and political crises suits this kind of research design as primary data from previous studies were analysed.

Nature & Sources of Data

Qualitative data derived from already print and electronic materials were used. In other words, only secondary data were sourced and used.

This work depended on the huge body of existing literature dwelling on the Nigerian leadership question, resultant political crises especially those of the National Assembly between 1999 and 2019; the circumstances that led to some questionable impeachment of state governors and particularly the removal of a sitting state governor and the roles of leadership in such imbroglios.

Method of Data Analysis

The qualitative content analysis method was considered most suitable for this study and so, was adopted. Qualitative analysis is the analysis dwells on synthesizing and describing non numerical information. Qualitative analysis is basically content analysis. The method identifies and interprets data already found in other documents and information sources. It is a technique for making inferences and in this case, the researcher objectively and systematically identified some basic characteristics of the data collected.

This method of analysis is primarily dependent on the integrative and analytical skills of the researcher.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Lack of Exemplary Leadership promotes political crises: According to Achebe (1983) the "Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership". The challenge of personal example is in the thought of Achebe of great importance but unfortunately it has not been so. Okolo (1994) agrees with Achebe that Nigeria has a problem with leadership and insists that there can be no serious change in the country unless it occurs in the leadership. For him, if people see their political leaders as little more than robbers of the state, what prevents them from developing the same instinct in their lives? The burden of translating dreams of true progress and independence to reality lies on the Nigerian leaders. This is development, he holds.

Political crisis has a relationship with bad governance and leadership failure: Ndukwe, Jonathan and Abraham (2018) observed that several attempts at explaining the relationship between leadership and political crisis have generated perspectives such as the effects of good or bad leadership on the political system. Leadership promotes political crisis if it manifests in corrupt practices, greed, inordinate ambition, quest for excessive control of political power and many others. Bad leadership has been understood to reflect a general

tendency of a public institution not being able 'to manage public affairs and public resources'. Bad leadership becomes more pronounced when a state or government fails to meet the needs of the society even though it makes use of the best of all the resources at their disposal. The issue of bad governance has weakened governance institutions that have resulted to economic stalemate, political apprehensions or crisis and breakdown of social peace and stability. Most political crisis within the regions of Africa has a relationship with bad governance and leadership failure (Ndukwe, Jonathan and Abraham, 2018).

Corrupt leadership engenders socio-political and economic stagnation, thus breeding discontent and crises: Transparency International consistently rates the levels of corruption in Nigeria among the highest in the world. Pervasive corruption appears to permeate many levels of the Nigerian society (Eti, Ogaji, & Probert, 2006).

Despite her enormous economic potentials, poverty is widespread in Nigeria. It has been argued that political crises usually derive their impetus from poverty of the youths who are often the foot-soldiers for crises. The World Population Data Sheet (2005) shows that, 91% of the Nigeria's population lived below 2 Dollars per day. In a later research, USAID (2006) reported that close to 60% of the Nigerians live in extreme poverty. In 2014, World Bank Director for Nigeria, Marie-Nelly said, 100 million Nigerians were living in poverty. In the same year, the Bank's President, Dr. Kim rated the country among the world's extremely poor countries (CFR, 2014). The poverty rating for Nigeria came to a climax in 2018, when she was declared the poverty capital of the whole world! CNN, through her reporter, Bukola Adebayo, reported on June 26, 2018 that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians, or around half of the country's population, thought to be living on less than \$1.90 a day. The findings, based on a projection by the World Poverty Clock and compiled by Brookings Institute, show that more than 643 million people across the world live in extreme poverty, with Africans accounting for about two-thirds of the total number.

This indicates the inability of successive Nigeria's leadership to mobilize its resources and transform these resources into a meaningful output for the benefit of the citizens. Research suggests that unemployed youths are disproportionately more likely to be perpetrators, as well as victims of political crises and violent situations (Ajaegbu, 2012). The growing gap between the rich and poor affects the society through increased crises in the polity.

Olomjobi (2015) contends that leadership failure in Nigeria, particularly in the North East and South South of the country are responsible of the advent of the Boko Haram terrorist group and militancy respectively, and political crises across the divide.

The mismanagement, misapplication and misappropriation of the vast oil wealth and resources as exemplified by the oil wind fall between 2009 and 2014, and the unabated abuse of public offices by public officials have resulted to various degrees of crises. The isolation and abandonment of the people which manifests in the lack of basic social amenities and developmental infrastructures across the Nigerian state prompted the rise various aggrieved groups such as IPOB, Niger Delta Force, Niger Delta Avengers, Middle Belt Front, etc. (Harrison, 2000).

Leadership in Nigeria at various levels of governance has failed to address the nagging socio-political, and economic inequality in the nation's polity, and in some cases, abet them; thus fuelling political crises. The politics of imbalance in the nation's political, social, economic and co-operate governance in the management, sharing, and allocation of the nation's common wealth constitute and promote to a very large extent, the lingering state of ethnic cleavages and consequent political crises in the Nigerian state (Osaretin, 2019).

Leadership disregard for rule of law stimulates crises: There has been a constant and utter lack of rule of law on the part of the government and the governed. The penchant to disregard the laws and the attendant corruption amongst the ruling class has assumed the dimension of a notable style of leadership. The most urgent issues in Nigeria today are the lack of management of the public trust, corruption, government instability, and the maintenance of decaying simple amenities and infrastructures in the nation. The issue of the upsurge of corruption is endemic and potential. Years of plutocratic repressive dictators and military rule, coupled with widespread corruption, have resulted in large-scale neglect and deterioration of public services. According to Kew (2006)

... the giant was brought to its knees by 20 years of brutal and corrupt military rule, which left a legacy of executive dominance and a political corruption in the hands of Nigeria's so-called "godfathers"—powerful political bosses sitting atop vast patronage networks who view the government primarily through the lens of their own personal enrichment. (p. 73)

Nigerian leadership lacks patriotism: Okwueze (2000) believes strongly that leadership is a sacrifice and for service but it is not so in the Nigerian society today. For him, Nigerian leaders of today are those who expect the led to serve them and make sacrifices to enable them remain comfortable. He continues to see Nigeria as a society where the President would rather pay millions of Naira to procure a new presidential jet than repair dilapidated roads that have become death traps for the led. For him, it is a society where the legislature prefers to be paid N5million as furniture allowance rather than insist on the provision of shelter of any kind for the led. The led are told to be patient and make sacrifices to enable the leader travel in the comfort of the world's latest presidential jets. He noted that this is a society where a Governor refuses to give his people drinkable water only because he is amassing wealth for his campaign for a second tenure in office. The legislature likes to be settled rather than have certain social amenities located amongst the people he represents.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Stricter Penalty for Corrupt Practices: As already noted, a major reason for the desperation for political power is the fact that it is a certain avenue for quick wealth, mostly through corruption. To this end, the state should be stricter with the issue of corruption. The cost of corruption should be made to far out-weight its benefits. This would serve as a great disincentive for those going into politics with the intent to loot public funds.

Reorientation of leadership on ethics and building of strong institutions rather than strong men:The reinvention of ethical values of governance and strategic initiative towards enthroning strong institution that would promote good governance political crises, devoid of corruption, sit tight leadership style, instability, incompetence, lack of accountability, political bickering leading to the installment of maladministration and mismanagement of public resources.

True federalism/power devolution:To stem the tide of scramble for power and poor influence of federating units, Nigeria just has to adopt true federalism, where the states of the federation will enjoy high degree of autonomy. The present federal-unitarism should cease to exist and there should be no imperial power at the centre, which uses its powers in the most reckless and irresponsible. The federal government of Nigeria is arguably the strongest in the world in terms of overconcentration of power at the centre. The federal government controls all the security apparatus. This should be reviewed. States should be more autonomous so as to reduce the powers at the centre, with the attendant tensions. This will stop the constant bullying and harassment of the citizens and coercing of the states to act in line with the dictates of the federal government. **Make political office an extension of civil service and less attractive:** If most political positions are made part-time and the civil service scale in remuneration of political office holders is applied across board, there will be drastic reduction in political crises fuelled by the selfish interest of the political class to acquire and retain at all cost. It is also recommended that other avenues of social, political and economic relevance other than politics be created.

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