The Challenges of Leadership and Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract: From the time of the nation’s independence up till now, it has seriously grappled with the challenges of poor leadership and governance or what has been popularly referred to as leadership and governance ineptitude. This has become so pronounced and brazen that it has ultimately affected the nation’s development over time. More often than not, the nation has been foisted with political leaders who lack the basic ingredients required for effective, efficient and productive political leadership which will ultimately turn the country around for good. Governance therefore has become an all comers affair where the qualified and the unqualified, the high and the low as well as the rich and the poor all jostle inordinately for political power. The paper opines that in order to solve the nation’s intractable leadership and governance challenges conclusively, the country needs a true and transparent transformational leadership structure which will drive the political and governmental system in the country for effective and efficient political leadership and governance that will ultimately usher in genuine and verifiable development in the country for the overall benefit of the entire citizenry. The paper further canvasses for an open, accountable, transparent and competitive leadership recruitment process which will give all citizens who genuinely wish to take up political positions the fair and unimpeded chance to do so without any let or hindrance since politics is generally regarded the world over as a call to serve humanity and not an opportunity for self-enrichment as many see it presently in Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership, Governance, Development, Politics, Nigeria/

Introduction
Nigeria is extravagantly rich in terms of human and material resources. So rich is the country that it is the cynosure of other nations especially her neighboring nations. Apart from crude oil which is the country’s biggest revenue earner, she is also endowed with other mineral resources that equally help to improve her economy. However, despite the rich human and material resources the nation
is endowed with; she has not developed to her full potentials. In fact Nigeria is still sadly classified as an undeveloped nation to the consternation of many of her citizens.

They keep asking why their country keeps retrogressing as the years go by. Many political analysts have come up with various theories as to why the country has remained virtually stagnant developmentally despite all the potentials for growth that she possesses. Having gained political independence fifty seven years ago, many concerned citizens had expected the country to grow beyond her current low level of political, social and economic development.

Many do not mince words in agreeing to the obvious fact that the country is bedeviled by the challenges of leadership and governance. While some other nations including those in Africa are notably doing well in terms of development as a result of good leadership and good governance in their various countries, we bemoan our poor leadership and poor governance traits which seem to have become part of our existence in Nigeria and the problems seem to defy all analysis. The more we try to analyze the situation from critical and dispassionate perspectives, the more it defies all prescribed solutions. It is therefore very obvious that the nation has grappled with the twin challenges of leadership and governance from her independence till now. This paper appraises the twin challenges of leadership and governance in Nigeria from a philosophical perspective and proffers some solutions.

Conceptual clarifications

Conceptual clarification is the act of making a concept clear and distinct. For the purpose of conceptual clarification and to limit to a very large extent the level of ambiguity which most times is the hallmark of academic research, it is pertinent to critically examine some of the concepts and terms used in this research namely leadership, political leadership, governance, good governance and philosophy.

Leadership has been defined in so many ways and as a result, it has become almost an impossibility to come up with a single definition that is acceptable to scholars of various divides. Leadership has been defined as a necessary phenomenon in political field. It is the capacity in a person or in a group of persons to inspire confidence and thereby regard for himself or themselves to guide and govern the followers. Every political activity does need a leader, without which it may not be effective or workable, though of course, leadership is also determined by situations and circumstances (Academics Dictionary of Political Science, 2006, P.170). Leadership is equally defined as the ability to lead others (Chambers 21st Century Dictionary, 2007, p.774)

Political leadership on the other hand strictly refers to leadership at the political level. Political leadership is a concept central to understanding political processes and outcomes, yet its definition is elusive. Many disciplines have contributed to the study of leadership including political theory, history, psychology and management studies. Political leadership reviews the contributions of these disciplines
Governance according to Gove (1986, p. 982) means the act or process of governing. Jimada gives a more detailed explanation of the concept of governance. According to him (2010, p. 211), without doubt, governance is a key element in the fundamental progress and development of modern nations. There are several concepts of governance but its broad definition can be summed up as the continuous exercise of political authority over a political unit and it is related to a decision that defines expectations, grant power and verify performance. In essence therefore, governance is the total exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage societal problems and affairs.

According to Omoregbe, both Plato and Aristotle agree that the purpose of the state is to provide man with what he needs to enable him live “the good life” and be happy. They both agree also that this is the purpose for which a government is formed. Plato does not see governance as something, which just anybody can do. It is something which requires special training and education. Governance for him is like navigation. Navigation is not something one can just call on anybody or group of people to come and do. Nor would it be reasonable to assemble a crowd of people together and ask them to pilot a ship- a crowd of people with no special training, no knowledge of navigation. The same is true of governance; it requires special training and education.

As long as people continue to see governance as something which just anybody can do, and as long as the wrong people continue to govern the states, the world will have no peace, says Plato (Omoregbe, 2007, p.19).

Good governance is one critical issue that has so much attracted the attention of scholars. Political theorists and social and political philosophers have written so much on it. The concept of good governance presents an interesting but challenging scenario. Good governance is an indeterminate term used in international development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. Governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. The term governance can apply to corporate, international, national, local government or to the interactions between other sectors of the society. The concept of good governance often emerges as a model to compare ineffective economies or political bodies with viable economics and political bodies.

The concept centers on the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in society. Because the government treated in the contemporary world as most “successful” are often liberal democratic states concentrated in Europe and the Americas, those countries’ institutions often set the standards by which to compare other states institutions when talking about
good governance. Because the term good governance can be focused on any one form of governance, aid organizations, and the authorities of developed countries often will focus the meaning of good governance to a set of requirements that conform to the organization’s agenda, making good governance imply many different things to many contexts.

Asemah and Okpanachi further highlight the meaning of good governance. According to them, “good governance includes formulating policies, improving processes, implementing actions/programmes and ensuring stakeholder involvement and participation in public affairs (Asemah and Okpanachi, 2013, p.47). Odion-Akhaine on his own part sees good governance from an enlarged perspective. According to him, “the origin of good governance goes beyond our simplistic and routinised usage, in terms of state authorities that are responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people (Odion–Akhaine, 2004, p.1). The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific while deliberating on what good governance is, stated that good governance has eight major characteristics, it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It ensures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making. It is also responsible to the society (UNESCAP, 2017

Philosophy is a curious enterprise. While other disciplines may have acceptable definitions, that is not the same with philosophy. Uzodinma Nwala, a renowned Nigerian philosopher insists that no–one definition is adequate or sufficient to express the meaning of philosophy. This is because according to him, its meaning has varied over the course of its history. Moreover, different philosophers have different views on what Philosophy is, its subject matter and method. It is not surprising that those who engage in philosophical enquiry do not agree as to the essence of that activity because by its nature, this is bound to be so (Nwala, 1997, p.1). Oladipo seems to share the same sentiment with Nwala. According to him:

The intellectual endeavour called philosophy is not easy to define. This is the case because it is difficult to identify the subject-matter of philosophy the way we can specify the concern of economics, sociology, biology and political science, for example. Also we cannot pinpoint a method as the philosophical method, the way we talk of scientific method for instance. Consequently, the issue of the nature of philosophy is always a subject of debate among philosophers (Oladipo, 2008, p.11).

According to Onigbinde, philosophy is an activity. That is something done by human beings and directed towards some goal. Like some other fields, it involves scholarship and professionalism, as well as amateur interests, and stages in between (Onigbinde., 2009, p.4). How a philosopher define philosophy depends to a large extent on what he perceives to
be the central problem of philosophy and just as there are many problems of philosophy, so there are many definitions of philosophy. Philosophy is an intellectual discipline that exercises reason and logic in an attempt to understand reality and answer fundamental questions about knowledge, life, morality and human nature.

The Nigerian State: A Historical Overview
The Nigerian state arguably came into existence in 1914 with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the then governor-general, Lord Lugard. His aim and by extension that of the colonial masters was to merge the two regions into a single colony merely for administrative convenience and improved economic fortunes for the colonial overlords. The name Nigeria is said to have been coined by Flora Shaw, a British citizen.

The journey towards political independence for the Nigerian state began with the making of the 1922 constitution known as the Clifford’s Constitution. The aftermath of that constitution was the conduct of the first ever election in the new territory. The election was however based on limited franchise which restricted participation to those that earned minimum of 100 pounds annually which was very expensive for most Nigerians then. In 1946, the second constitution known as Richard’s constitution came on board. It sought among other things to promote Nigeria’s unity, to provide adequately within that desire for the diverse elements that make up the country, to provide greater participation of Africans in the determination of their own affairs. After the Richard’s constitution, there were the Macpherson and Lyttleton constitutions before the independence constitution of 1960. In 1963, when the nation attained the republican status, there was the republican constitution which eventually made way for the presidential constitution of 1979. The 1999 constitution replaced the 1979 constitution and has been in use till today though with several amendments. Apart from the constitutional evolutions, one of the major turning points in the historical evolvement of the Nigerian state was the first military coup which occurred on January 15th 1966 and terminated the regime of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Subsequently other coups took place which helped to keep the military in power until the return of the country to civil rule in 1979. This return to civil rule lasted barely four years and the military again took over power on 31st December 1983 and held on to it till they willingly handed over power to civilians in 1999. Ever since 1999, the country has practised democracy, the longest in the nation’s political history.

The Nigerian state has endured a very chequered history with lots of upheavals including the civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. The unpredictable nature of the country’s political landscape has brought untold hardship on Nigerian citizens and dealt a cruel blow on the nation’s development. Nigerians clamour for a good and prosperous nation they will be proud to call theirs.

Challenges of leadership and Governance in Nigeria
That Nigeria has lacked good leadership since the inception of the country till
date is just stating the obvious. In fact it could be an understatement. Every well informed Nigerian readily alludes to the fact that there is abject poverty of leadership and governance in the country. Achebe readily attests to this fact. According to him, the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. He further opines that there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, and the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership (Achebe, 1983, p.1).

Seteolu in his own assessment opines that the leadership question has become a recurring issue in the discourses on the Nigerian project. The governing class has been target of pillory, vilification, condemnation and disdain in view of the pervasive and persistent socio-economic and political crisis (Seteolu, 2004, p.70).

Leadership and governance instability has been one of the greatest banes of the Nigerian State. The poor governance and leadership structure of the country is exemplified in the utterly backward nature of the country. Fifty seven years after independence, the country cannot boast of the simple and basic necessities of life like good roads for free movement of people, goods and services, constant electricity supply, portable water supply, properly equipped hospitals to meet the health care needs of the citizens, good and functional railway lines, good and equitable employment opportunities for her teeming youths and so on.

In the light of the numerous leadership and governance challenges bedevilling the country, many well-meaning citizens have proffered what they think are the best possible solutions in terms of ameliorating or if possible eradicating these painful anomalies in the nation’s leadership and governance lexicon that has made life utterly harsh and unbearable for the common man in the country. The challenge of this paper therefore is to try and find out these numerous leadership and governance challenges and look out for proper solutions. This will be done in the hope that Nigerians truly deserve to have the best out of their country and therefore deserve to live the good life in it.

The Military and the Underdevelopment of the Nigerian State

The military generally consists of the Army, Navy and the Air Force. The major task of the military in any state is usually defined as the defence of the state and its citizens against external aggression or attack as well as prosecution of war against another state if the need arises. The military in many African countries had largely maintained the status quo and confined themselves to their primary responsibility of guarding their state against external aggression until they sadly veered into governance in the continent. The first recorded military incursion or coup in Africa took place in Egypt in 1952 when Muhammad Naguib overthrew Farouk who was in power then. In West Africa, the first recorded coup took place in Togo in 1963 when Etienne Eyadema and Emanuel Bodjolle overthrew the civilian government of Sylvanus
Olympio. In Nigeria, the first military coup took place on January 15, 1966 when major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu led a group of other young army officers to overthrow the government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in what has erroneously been referred to as Igbo coup. Since the nation’s independence in 1960 till date, we have had nine coups and attempted coups in the country which is among the highest in the continent.

It is on record that the military has ruled Nigeria for longer period than the civilians since the country attained independence in 1960 till date. The military had held on to power for 29 years out of the 57 years the Nigerian state has so far lasted. While some may argue in favour of the frequent military intrusions into the political terrain in Nigeria especially in trying to prevent the country from disintegration, many critically-minded citizens of the country tenaciously hold the view that the military contributed in no small measure to the present massive underdevelopment, decadence and unprecedented degradation being witnessed in the country today. The long and wasted years of military rule in the country surely contributed massively to the plethora of massive social, economic and political upheavals and degradation being sadly witnessed in the country today. Many discerning Nigerians unrepentantly allude to the fact that the massive corruption being witnessed in the country today is a sad creation of the military that saw governance opportunity as an uncommon chance for shameful self-enrichment and cronyism.

Democracy evolves with time and when democracy is allowed to evolve through the learning curve, the country stands to gain socially, economically and politically. Unfortunately for the Nigerian state our democracy has not been allowed to effectively evolve and grow. The frequent military interventions in the country, some of them hopelessly needless have massively contributed to the stagnant nature of the nation’s democracy today. Ekanem buttressed this fact lucidly. According to him:

Regrettably, the military refused to give the civilians enough time to sort things out. They rolled out their tanks and usurped political power. With the military at the centre of political activities, all democratic structures were dismantled, political parties and activities banned. Also the constitution was put in abeyance. The emergence of military as political leaders saw Nigeria as an unstable polity. This is because from the youthful exuberance of Nzeogwu to the dreadful aggressive pursuit of personal interest of General Sani Abacha, Nigeria ceased to be a peaceful place. It has been one coup after the other. This political instability has adversely affected the development of the country politically. Each emerging military dictator never intended to promote true democracy (Ekanem 2010, p.13).

Professor Maduchichi Dukor seems to share the above view. According to him:

The climate of crass greed and poverty in Africa has unduly created interests for different elites in every segment of the
population including the military. As such, most military putsches in Africa and Nigeria in particular were motivated by the enhancement of the military’s corporate interests and for the purpose of self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement. Through the instrumentality of coup d’état, the armed forces have become a shortcut to power, wealth and fame. To further these ends, the army in Africa and Nigeria, in particular has in most cases constituted itself into arbitrator in political crisis and has appointed itself the protector of national interests (Dukor, 2003, p. 228).

Karo Ogbina tried to link the destruction of the status of citizenship in the country to the effect of military perpetuation in power. In his words:

One effect of the military long rule in Nigeria is the destruction of the status of citizenship; this has to do with wide hiatus between the government and the people in the system. It has its antecedents in colonialism. The colonizers trained its military (African militia) to protect the government against possible attack by the people against whose consent they were ruling and who the colonizers must force into giving obeisance. This structure (coercive arm of the executive) was handed over to the newly independent states of Africa without a programme of historical debriefing in terms of role. The result is what most African states are suffering. Today, in Nigeria, unlike in Europe, foreigners (non-subjects and aliens) enjoy better respect and privileges as expatriates in Nigeria than Nigerians who are publicly ‘flogged’, ‘frog jumped’, ‘canon foddered’, ‘beaten up’, humiliated by soldiers with impunity in their own country. (Ogbinaka, 2003, pp. 247-248)

The question some people will be asking is: How did the military under develop Nigeria? The Nigerian military contributed massively towards the country’s underdevelopment. The issue of corruption cannot be discussed in Nigeria without highlighting how the military helped to perpetuate corruption in Nigeria. We may not forget in a hurry how military rulers like Babangida and Abacha stole this country blind all in the name of military governance. It is almost inconceivable to recall that most retired generals in the country are multi-millionaires today. How did they acquire such stupendous wealth for which they are known and identified today?

Kukah minced no words in blaming the military for the numerous socio-political ills of the country. He says:

Notwithstanding the coups of 1966 and 1967 and the three year civil war, the decision of the military to stay on in power was one of the worst decisions. The military had embarked on scare mongering culture of fear that deepened the hostilities among our people and led to the distrust of politics and politicians. The military itself which has the sole monopoly of violence and had used violence to secure power widened the gap of confidence between the people and their politicians. Politics lost its glamour and politicians were projected as thieves and
criminals while the military deceived the people by presenting themselves as heroes, redeemers and patriots (Kukah, 2017, pp.13-14)

Continuing, Kukah says:

As a result of this fear, politics and politicians were diminished as the military dug their heels into power. With limited maturity and experience, lacking training and proper understanding of the texture of the country, the military turned the nation into a huge laboratory for experiment. Patriotic politicians with sound ideas and brains like Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduana of Sokoto, who laid the foundation of our nation fell by the bullets. Those who survived like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sam Ikoku, Bola Ige, Sam Mbakwe, Abubakar Rimi, Solomon Lar and a host of others were subdued through imprisonment, intimidation, trials, blackmail and even murder. Politics became unattractive to men and women of honour and increasingly, the space became a theatre for those who could swim its shark infested waters (Kukah, 2017, p.14)

Mohammed was emphatic in his assessment of the performance of the military in running the economy. According to him, the military legacy in the economy is the entrenchment of the country into a neo-colonial capitalist economy. The military contributed in plunging the economy into deeper crisis with a bad crises management strategy that was anchored on adjustment policies (Mohammed, 2010, p.584). Though the military eventually returned power back to civilians in the country on 29th May 1999, the colossal damage to the social, economic and political spheres of the country had been done by the military. Again the deliberate choice of Olusegun Obasanjo as president in 1999 by the military high command which was obvious to all discerning minds was a fatal error. Obasanjo being a retired army general was deliberately chosen over and above Dr. Alex Ekwueme, a distinguished and credible politician and a former vice president. Obasanjo was chosen not because he was a credible and tested politician but because he came from the military constituency and the army needed one of their own to rule in order to protect their narrow and chauvinistic interest in government. The critical question is: what was Obasanjo’s contribution or contributions to the development of the Nigerian state in the past that qualified him to be given a second chance to rule the country? Of course, there is no positive answer to this critical question. Of course, true to his antecedents, Obasanjo foisted on the entire nation a draconian and orchestrated autocratic rule in the name of democracy for eight years from 1999 – 2007 and to add salt to injury wanted to perpetuate himself in power through the famed third term project or agenda which was only scuttled by a group of patriotic politicians in the national assembly then.

Perhaps, it will be apt to mention that it will take the nation some years to recover from the horrendous tragedy foisted on it by the draconian and utterly rudderless and clueless administration
of another military zealot, Muhammadu Buhari who was elected president of the country in 2015. Within a space of two years of being in the saddle, Buhari’s administration has unleashed a terrible and anti-people’s policies that has made life very painful and unbearable for the citizens of this country. With the current state of affairs in the country, Nigerians may have to think twice before casting their votes for any other retired army personnel in the future especially for the exalted office of the president of the country, for as it is popularly said, experience is the best teacher. Surely, citizens of this nation have had enough of poor but draconian governance at the apex level from both Obasanjo and Buhari that they would not like to have a third of such sordid experience. If our democracy is to survive and thrive, then it must be saved from the current stranglehold the military constituency is subjecting it to. We desire a pure democracy not that with military colouration.

The political Corruption Factor
Whenever the word ‘corruption’ is mentioned in the Nigerian state, it sadly reminds millions of Nigerian citizens of their unfortunate state of being and their uncertain and precarious future in a country that ordinarily should not have any business with poverty and perennial backwardness. It has been stated severally that corruption is a universal phenomenon and therefore not peculiar to the Nigerian state though it is very prevalent here. Corruption is a pervasion. It deters human and national growth hence nations of the world make critical and concerted efforts towards its eradication or reduction.

However, in this segment of this paper, we are not discussing corruption generally but we will narrow our discourse to an aspect of corruption known as political corruption. Gyekye gives a broad definition of political corruption According to him:

Political corruption, the kind of corruption that involves the rulers and other public officials who run the affairs of a state or a political community, is a perennial problem that appears to afflict the politically organised human societies- rich or poor, developed or developing, ancient, traditional or modern-the running of whose affairs is entrusted to a group of people called public officials. But for several reasons, the phenomenon of political corruption manifests itself more often in some societies than in others, is more widespread or pervasive in some societies than in others and produces more devastating effects on some societies than on others. (Gyekye, 2003, p.394)

Gyekye goes ahead to define political corruption as the illegal, unethical and unauthorized exploitation of one’s political or official position for personal gain or advantage. (Gyekye, 2003, p, 395).

That political corruption is the bane of the Nigerian state is not in doubt. There is an overwhelming consensus among critically-minded Nigerians that political corruption has dealt and has continued to deal a cruel blow to the nation’s quest for social, economic and political development. However, it can be arguably stated that political corruption has been on the rise since the return of democratic rule in 1999.
Political corruption has greatly slowed down social development, reduced economic development and has almost made nonsense of our quest for political progress over the years leaving the country and millions of her citizens highly pauperized and traumatized. Many Nigerian politicians venture into politics solely for the purpose of self-enrichment or else how does one explain the massive looting that has systematically been going on in the country since the return to democratic rule in 1999 till date. It will be belabouring the obvious to state that the country’s democracy has deliberately produce millionaires among the political class while leaving millions of Nigerian citizens poor and impoverished. Democracy which it is supposed to bring about development for the nation and improved living conditions for the generality of the citizens has unfortunately brought retardation, retrogression, poverty, penury and under development. It is indeed a national disgrace and inglorious calamity.

Perhaps there is no other form of political corruption that is worse than that perpetrated by the current administration under Muhammadu Buhari when the government jerked up the price of fuel from N86.50 to N145.00 on May 11, 2016 with a promise to cushion the effects of the increment by implementing welfare policies and programmes for the masses and review of the wages for the working class. One year after that horrendous and heartless increment, there is nothing coming forth from the government quarters in terms of palliatives promised and negotiations for the review of the minimum wages in the country drags on albeit endlessly. Workers groan under the harsh and ominous economic challenges as the free fall of the Naira, the nation’s currency reduces painfully their purchasing power on daily basis thus making their lives perpetually miserable and sad. Despite all these show of shame and the gradual reduction in the life worth of Nigerian citizens, the government tells the impoverished and poverty stricken citizens’ almost on daily basis that it is fighting corruption. What a contradiction! It is the belief of many critically minded Nigerians that this present government have deliberately impoverished millions of Nigerians through very poor, uncoordinated and hazardous economic policies.

While millions of Nigerians groan on a daily basis as a result of unbridled poverty occasioned by the nosedive of the nation’s economy due to poor economic policies of the present administration, all they get in reaction from the administration is the assurances from the regime that things will improve. Now the question is: what critical economic measures has this administration put in place to ensure that the economy of the country turns around for good so that millions of Nigerians who are literally starving on daily basis can have a new lease of life? For sure, the economy of nations does not thrive and grow based on goodwill and promises that are devoid of any critical rationality. It is sad to recall that the nation have a large retinue of qualified and proven economic technocrats who can be assembled to churn out credible economic policies to save the nation’s economy from its
current state of comatose so that Nigerians can heave a sigh of relief and live a new life. Why this has not been done up till now beats the imagination of many Nigerian citizens.

**Poor Leadership Recruitment Process**

Leadership recruitment process can simply be defined as the process through which political leaders emerge in the polity. A flawed leadership recruitment process will surely lead to the emergence of political leaders who are ill-equipped for leadership and governance. Kukah shares this view wholly. According to him:

Too many people from the top to bottom are coming into public life with no preparation and no pedigree or evidence of exposure and success in any other form of endeavour beyond the patronage of politics. Too many people are therefore in office but not in power. With too many key actors with limited capacity, ability and exposure, we see that our public officers are soon weighed down by raw power, leading to manufacturing of election results, tinkering with the processes and wanting to stay in power for too long. (Kukah, 2014)

To bring the point home, it is a political tragedy to know that many elected political office holders both past and present have never held any public office in their lives prior to their election. The question then is: where do they get the requisite knowledge for leadership since experience is said to be the best teacher. Such neophytes are left entirely at the mercy of career civil servants who readily cash in on their inexperience to massively manipulate the system to their utmost advantage and to the great disadvantage of the nation. It is to the advantage of politicians who wish to contest elections that they start from the lower rung of the ladder, learn the ropes and eventually climb to the top. This will surely make room for effective and effectual political leadership at various levels of the political process instead of what is presently obtainable in the polity which is almost chaotic to say the least.

**The Challenge of Ethnicism**

Ethnicism can simply be defined as consciousness of or emphasis on ethnic identity or culture. Ethnicism has been a major factor in universal politics and political engagement. While some nations have been able to manage it critically for their overall political development, others sadly have not been fortunate in managing the diversity that come along with ethnicism. Nigeria as a country has been among the countries that have not been able to manage its ethnic challenges effectively and efficiently. Major political decisions are usually taken based on ethnic leanings. Nwaorgu captures this view succinctly. According to him:

The political entity called Nigeria is a federal union which came to be as a consequence of British colonial policy. The respective nations or linguistic groups that constitute it were not consulted before they were grouped together. For this reason, these nations do believe that this nation is dispensable. This is coupled with the fact that they are always suspicious of one another. The tendency for any ethnic group to support or be against a course, policy, etc in the country is
always determined from the angle of whether it is favourable or unfavourable to her own corporate existence. As a consequence, no course has ever been supported at the same time by all the ethnic groups uniformly. It is usually a situation where the largest ethnic groups will say that this particular course is in the interest of the Nigerian state or condemn an act as inimical to the continued corporate existence of the polity of Nigeria. The loyalty of Nigerians especially those who masquerade as leaders with exception of a few, does not transcend their ethnic groups when the chips are down. (Nwaorgu 2003, p.122)

Arguing on ethnic pluralism, Dukor opines that:

Ethnic pluralism is a major factor in African politics. The process of nation building in African states has not been easy because of the diversity of ethnicities in the respective states. Historically speaking, ethnic pluralism has contributed more in negative terms to nation building. The ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversities among the people of African states created diversities of interests, opinions and political leanings as well as endemic and epidemic rivalries. Nigeria makes interesting and exciting example of a nation-state with multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural groupings. Apart from the major ethnic nationalities like Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo, there are over one hundred other ethnic groups in Nigeria. In other West African states like the Republic of Benin, the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia and so on, there are also diversities of ethnic languages, dialects, and cultures. The peculiar character of African states have not augured well for the political development and nation building in Africa (Dukor, 2003, P. 187)

Ethnicism has done and has continued to do a colossal damage to the Nigerian state both in social, economic and political spheres. A situation where merit and meritocracy is thrown overboard in favour of one’s place of birth and the language one speaks remain a sore point in any nation’s quest for even development. The issue of ethnicism and religious bigotry has been exalted beyond compare especially in the present political and democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Appointment into major positions in the country has been shamelessly and brazenly skewed to favour a particular geographical and ethnic region to the utter consternation of other zones thus even reducing to nothingness the so called federal character principle that is even enshrined in the country’s constitution. Perhaps, the presidency now becomes an uncommon opportunity for people whom the president hails from their ethnic nationality to corner all the juicy appointments and opportunities in the country as a matter of false inheritance.

Politicians: the Bane of Nigeria’s Democracy

Understanding what democracy is and its cardinal role in the development of nations is phenomenal towards national development. Now the million dollar question is: have Nigerian politicians understood the real and critical meaning of democracy and the roles expected of them in the democratic project?
Democracy does not operate in the air. It is a system of government that operates in political climes and politicians are key players in any given democracy.

The question then is how has democracy impacted on the lives of Nigerians? How has Nigerian politicians and political parties affected the Nigerian political space? Again, another major question is: what dividends of democracy have been delivered to the Nigerian masses that perpetually yearn and thirst for good governance? In order to situate these questions within proper and appropriate framework, the role of politicians will be called to question. It is the overwhelming view of discerning Nigerians that politicians in Nigeria have performed below average. Mbaegbu seems to capture this view succinctly: He opines that:

To enthrone a stable, viable and enviable democratic culture in Nigeria, five factors should be given immediate attention, namely: ethnicity, tribalism, electoral malpractices, ignorance or illiteracy and poverty. These evils are inimical to democracy in Nigeria. On the contrary, but on the positive side, good economy, mass society and mass education serve as vital elements upon which sound democracy can be fostered. To a large extent, Nigeria is still lacking in these areas with their attendant consequences. (Mbaegbu, 2008, p.65)

All the major pitfalls that are majorly prevalent in Nigeria’s body politic including ethnicism, electoral malpractices, political corruption and electoral violence are not perpetrated by the ordinary man on the street. They are crimes against the state and humanity committed knowingly by desperate politicians in order to either acquire power or to retain it. It will therefore not be out of place to say that the politicians in Nigeria are the bane of the nation’s democracy. The ugly face of Nigerian politics will not change until Nigerian politicians begin to see politics from its proper perspective which is a veritable avenue and lofty platform to serve humanity selflessly expecting little or nothing in return. The current situation whereby politics is seen as an avenue for making quick money at the expense of service delivery must be jettisoned with dispatch. It is inimical to our collective quest and desire to enthrone genuine and enduring democratic culture in the Nigerian state. Any politician who is not dedicated to service is an enemy of democracy and by extension the Nigerian state and must not be allowed into the nation’s democratic space by any means.

**Poor Followership: Another Bane of Nigeria’s Democracy**

While it is an obviously accepted and an agreed truism that poor leadership is one of the banes of Nigeria’s democracy, many Nigerian citizens have not given a thought as to the incalculable harm that poor followership has done to this country’s democracy. In order to take the country’s democracy to the next level, the key issue of critical followership must be taken very seriously. Nigerians must begin to ask questions about how they are being governed both at the federal, state and local government levels. There is every need to hold the
political leaders accountable to the people. This will obviously make politicians holding elective and appointive positions to sit up and do the needful by being responsive to the high demands of their exalted offices. The electorate in the country must wake up from their perpetual and perennial slumber and rise up and demand for good governance from politicians in power. It is not enough for the masses to cry about poor governance. We must rise up and demand that Nigerian politicians should see power as a trust which must be exercised with utmost care and caution. Those who sit on the fence are enemies of the nation’s democracy.

**Conclusion**

Leadership according to Elaigwu presupposes followership. It presupposes a group of people who, from among themselves, have produced a leader, or from among whom a leader has emerged (Elaigwu, 2011, p.49). Governance on the other hand entails the art of managing human beings and resources geared towards human development. In concluding this paper, it must be stated albeit clearly that the challenges of leadership and governance in the Nigerian state are not insurmountable, they are not cast on stone neither are they rocket science.

Towards enthroning a genuine democracy in Nigeria, there is the dire need for politicians who are the major stakeholders in the democratic project to have a rethink about the nature and essence of politics. Nigeria is indeed a complex country and this factual fact is acknowledged by Dike who stated that the challenge of leading a society effectively is enormous, especially leading in a complex, social and political environment such as Nigeria (Dike, 2009, p.2). However, Democracy has worked in other climes and there is no absolute reason why it cannot work here in Nigeria.

The politicians must ensure that the tenets of democracy which include freedom of the generality of the people, governance by the people which is usually expressed in the popular maxim ‘power belongs to the people’, transparency and accountability, respect for the opinion of the generality of the people, right to dissent and effective opposition among others must at all times be held as being eternal and sacrosanct. Power all over the world is regarded as a trust which must be respected at all times by the ruling class. One way to do this is to serve the people diligently while holding political positions knowing full well that power actually belongs to the people. Apart from that, power is ephemeral and transient and it is the positive achievements one makes while in power that will be remembered long after one leaves office. Politicians who disrespect the masses in the conduct of governmental business do not comprehend the actual and proper workings of democracy and must be shown the exit door by being voted out of office during elections. Politicians should be held accountable to their electoral promises upon coming to power and those of them who cannot deliver on their promises should be forced to resign. Azeez echoes this sentiment. According to him:

> Whereas the ethical responsibility of leadership and the moral code embedded in the constitution
leaders swore to uphold should imply that their mandate is that they have to deliver on development, welfare and the provision of basic needs, the mandate stands to be subverted as long as the primary concern of the elected representatives is the looting of the public treasury and suppression of political enemies, both real and imagined. (Azeez, 2006, p. 222)

In the final analysis, Nigerians deserve a better deal in terms of quality of leadership and governance and should get nothing less than good governance which has become a given in many nations democracies. It is therefore high time Nigerian politicians woke up and did the needful towards moving the Nigerian state forward through active and transformational leadership that has selflessness and critical delivery at its beck and call. Anything short of this will be totally unacceptable.

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