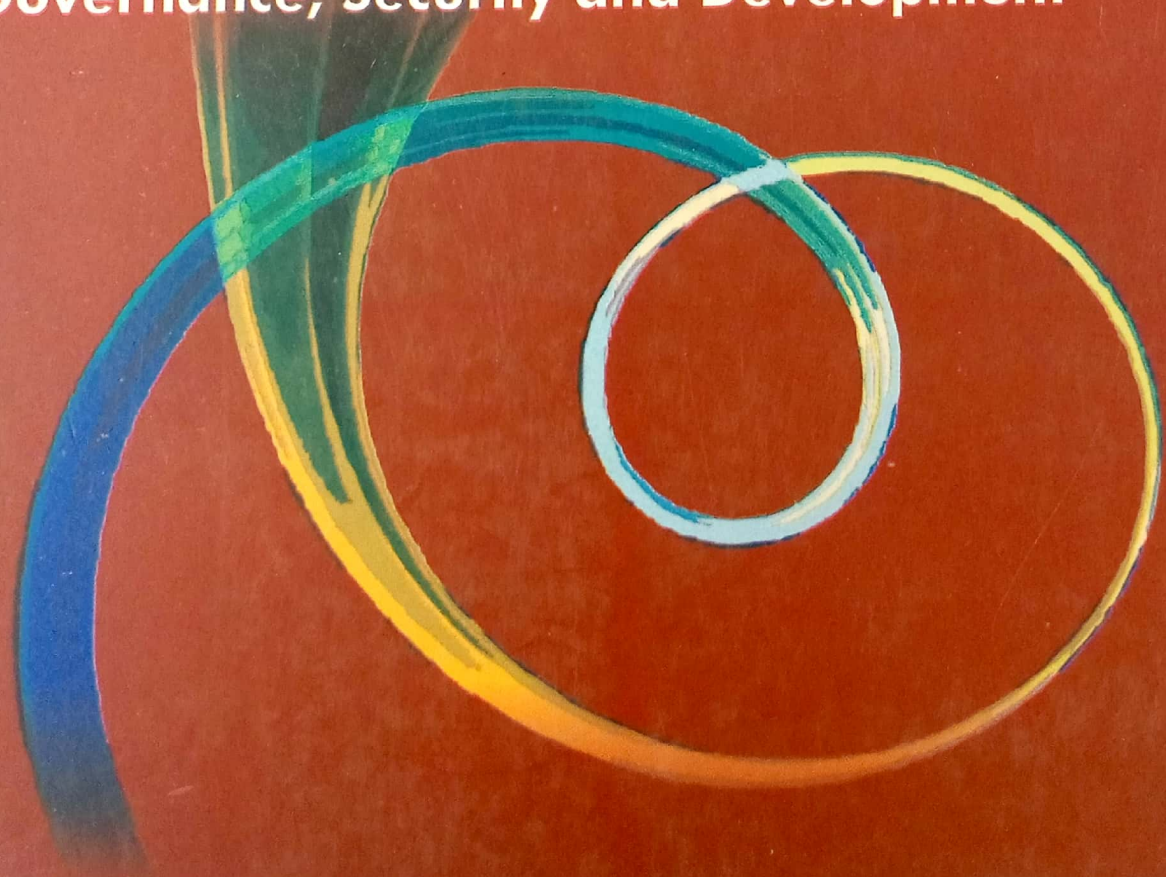


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MANAGING CHANGE: THE STRUGGLE OF GOVERNMENT TO RETAIN LEGITIMACY IN NIGERIA'S POST-MILITARY ERA

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Abstract

Nigeria with a population of over 160 million and world sixth largest oil supplier and blessed with economic potentials, but majority of the Nigerian population live in narrow circumstances due to bad governance and ranging endemic corruption. Everyone expected the return of Nigeria to democratic rule will bring the desired change but the reverse was the case. One of the prevailing problems dominating the Nigeria political landscape is how to find a non coercive basis for securing and maintaining the loyalty of the citizen to the authority of the state. This has been a source of concern to policy makers and political scientists. Using field observation method and secondary sources, this paper investigates the underpinnings of legitimacy crisis in Nigeria. It found that legitimacy crisis in Nigeria is a function of weak state performance and policy failures manifesting in the inability of the state to provide the proverbial common good for citizenry.

Keywords: Government, Legitimacy, Nigeria, Military, Change

Introduction

Since the late 1980's most African countries have moved from one party or military dictatorships to multiparty democratic rule. This was the outcome of democratic pressures from within these countries, as well as of changes in the international system following the end of the cold war. With a few exceptions, democracy has taken root and gained legitimacy in Africa as the most viable form of political organisation and governance underlined by rule of law as opposed to rule by brute force. Critical to this democratic opening is the widening of the political space to include new political actors, and the use of elections to choose leaders. Nigeria is not an omission; the wave of democratic change that swept through the country was largely the product of internal and external pressures exerted on the states (Omotola, 2009). Such optimism was also predicated on the realization that, democracy stimulates development (Pel, 1999). It is against this background that many people celebrated the return of Nigeria to democratic rule in 1999 after sixteen years of military dictatorship. The country celebrated its sixteen years of democratic rule and witnessed transfer of political power from civilian to civilian government for the first time ever in the history of the Nigerian body politics since independence.

Everyone expected that the return of Nigeria to democratic rule would bring the desired change it needs for the polity. On the contrary, Nigeria is still left behind in this sphere of human development. This has made many people still hold doubts on whether development is achievable under the present democratic dispensation due to growing insecurity, poverty, corruption and unemployment to mention but a few despite growing revenue. Nigeria has a population of over 160 million and world sixth largest oil supplier and blessed with economic potentials but majority of its population are poor (Mo Ibrahim Index, 2013). These manifestations of political instability are the symptoms of basic system pathology namely a crisis of legitimacy. This problem of instability exists and persists when the political system fails to engender, maintain and sustain the belief in its constituent members and its citizenry that the regime defined as a constitutional order, is the most appropriate one for the society. The prevalence of political violence and gross instability in Nigeria therefore, is an empirical indicator of the low level of political legitimacy. Therefore legitimacy crisis is one of the most pernicious endemic and the most challenging problems confronting the Nigerian state and its leaders. It has manifested in different ways; ethnic and religious crisis, civil disobedience, political disturbances to mention just a few. This paper provides multifactor explanations for the crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria post military era and in the process synthesizes the arguments into a coherent and clear-cut academic deduction.

Theoretical Clarification

Legitimacy crisis is a multidimensional concept. It is indeed a subject of a formidable literature and an ongoing discussion. This is so because legitimacy crisis is neither culture bound nor system specific. However, its nature, dimension, character and severity differ from system to system. This underscores the multi dimensional theoretical approaches which have been adapted in the literatures. Lipset (1960) perceived legitimacy crisis as a crisis of change, that is, a change from tradition to modernity. Secondly, loss of legitimacy, according to Lipset usually occurs when a political system no longer has the capacity to provide adequate access to the political process for new social groups arising from below. In other words, transition usually involves the entry of new social groups and the displacement of some hitherto powerful groups. The entry of new social groups creates new expectations, which if not quickly and adequately responded to, could complicate the legitimacy crisis. In a somewhat different but related manner, Bensman perceives legitimacy crisis as a problem emanating from the frustration of the expectation of the governed. In his words, Bensman argues:

Modern society is characterized by rising expectations and increasing demands, for responsible leadership which in turn provide the basis for modern legitimacy. Yet leaders constrained by structural problems of jurisdiction, technical expertise and planning fail to solve the basic claims of the populace. Unable to admit "structural competence", but faced with insoluble problems, they develop techniques of political

deception that produce popular confidence. None of these techniques fully work. The result, the crisis of legitimacy is thus a natural consequence (Bensman, 1988, p.15).

An empirical analyst, Friedrichs noted that legitimacy crisis- "exists on the basis of (at least in the Western democracies) polls of public attitudes reflecting a precipitous decline in confidence in societal leadership, increasing manifestations of illegal, antisocial and repressive behaviour of policies and the demonstrable structural failures of the state to respond to fundamental human needs" (Friedrichs, 1980). Therefore legitimacy crisis according to Friedrichs may be seen as having a perceptual, behavioural and a structural dimension. The perceptual dimension is critical in terms of the manifest existence of a legitimacy crisis; the behavioural dimension is primarily considered to be a consequence and the structural dimension as a source (or a cause) both may be regarded as partial symptoms or indicators of such a crisis. Though a complex reaction can occur among the different dimensions of the legitimacy crisis, the behavioural dimension, reaching a certain level, brings the legitimacy crisis to its ultimate climax (Fredrichs, 1980). Pye focuses his explanations on the sources of legitimacy crisis. He attributed legitimacy crisis to: excessive and institutionalized competition for power; the conflicting or inadequate bases of claiming authority in the society; inappropriate socialization for the people and dysfunctional feelings about authority; and unacceptable readings of history by the national leaders or faulty predictions of future developments (ideological illegitimacy). To Pye (1974) "in a genuine legitimacy crisis the challenge is to the basic constitutional dimensions of the system and to the most generalised claims of leadership of those in authority. The elite theorists presented another interesting explanation that legitimacy crisis is the crisis of the elite. When power is exercised by excluding more and more of the elite, those who are entitled to the possibility of rulership, power depreciates in value and degenerates into violence and is ultimately transformed into terror. The circulation of power (which is built on the possibility of reversibility of power) disappears from the political agenda (Pye, 1974). This assertion was broadened into a thesis by Field *et al.* (1979) thus: "where elites shared a consensus as to ultimate political values and where they were unified in their willingness not to pursue partisan interest beyond the point at which the stability of institutions was endangered, regimes enjoyed substantial legitimacy". Elites view power as personalized and dependent on the support of organised coercive forces.

Underlying this association of legitimacy with elite consensus and unity is the idea that the operation of all relatively stable, peaceful and legitimate regimes is in fundamental respects. To Ekeh this appears to be the political reality in Africa. Ekeh aptly concludes that, "whatever power elite or ruling class we started with in Africa, at the close of decolonization have been slimmed down by the sheer weight of violence in Africa and are now scattered and lack the attribute of power elite or ruling class". It is vital to note, however, that elite crisis cannot be equated with legitimacy crisis, albeit elite crisis can undermine the legitimacy of the ruling elite and oftentimes degenerate into legitimacy crisis. This can occur when the disgruntled

elites attract the sympathy of the majority of the governed. Therefore, elite crisis could be seen as a source, symptom and or a consequence of legitimacy crisis, for in a sense all crises raise questions about legitimacy (Ekeh, 1985).

In Nigeria's context, while the impact of capitalism could not be ruled out, the legitimacy of government and political class depends on mode of power acquisition, ethnic identity and solidarity, as we note in the next section of the paper and so greatly on performance and leadership capabilities. In this context; the endemic crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria is a function of state incapacitation and policy failures.

Legitimacy and Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Democracy and Governance in Africa, generally as Diamond (2008, 137) rightly observed are in a state of transition, or some will say suspension". The democratization process in Africa has many forms, and the course, trajectory and outcomes have been mixed. In the last two decades in which re-democratization began, the overall picture is that there has been only marginal progress on governance in Africa; however this overall picture masks sharp disparities among African countries. In some countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Tanzania progress has been visible with the conduct of credible elections, alternation of power among political parties, expansion of the political and civil space with better observance of human rights and the rule of law, flourishing media and modest economic progress (Lindberg, 2009). Regrettably, many countries are neck-deep in a crisis of transition, in which there is large scale election rigging, the trend toward a one party state, marked inter-ethnic electoral conflicts and political violence, the concentration and personalization of power, and a new phenomenon of political dynasty in which leaders stage-manage power transfer to their children – all constituting ominous signs of a downward political slope in Africa's recent democratization effort (Lindberg, 2009). There is a huge gap between the demand and the supply of democracy and good governance in many African countries while the people yearn for and prefer democratic governance as the most viable alternative for constructing a decent society and assuring a better future, the supply of it by the political elite is very limited, incongruent with the expectations of the people. As Zuem (2009, p. 588) rightly noted "clearly people's expectations are not being matched by the reality of governance". The frustration and cynicism that accompany this have provoked thoughts as to whether the "Second liberation" in Africa is foundering and democracy is on the retreat. But the nature of the political transition that would facilitate this change remained an issue of contention among Nigerians and Nigerian scholars.

Some argue that a smooth transition to civil rule will speedily assure the enthronement of democracy as long as adequate institutional design is crafted for the new system (Olagunju, Jinadu and Oyovbaire, 1993; Osaghae, 1999; Ujomu, 2004; Oke, 2005). Others contend that given the depth of the decay and destruction of the political infrastructure and democratic culture of society, entrenched dominant interests will not likely give way easily, and the process of transition to democracy

and good governance will be in two phases: first when civilian rule is consummated with the conduct of elections and second when democratic culture reigns (Adejumobi 1995). Current evidence suggests that there is a long and tortuous route to achieving democracy and good governance in Nigeria, and the process of democratic consolidation will be a long haul. Indeed, Diamond (2008) avers that in real terms there is no democracy at all in Nigeria. For Adigun Agbaje (2004), Nigeria is a mere showcase of "electoralism" a caricature of electoral democracy on what some others refer to as "electoral authoritarian regime" (Lindberg, 2009, p. 86).

Nigeria's 1999 transition to civilian government was a product of long, turbulent period of military rule and failed democratic experiments. At the time of the political handover, many Nigerians expressed hopes for a democracy dividend that would expand political liberties, improve the performance of government, encourage accountability among leaders, and revive the ailing economy. After the initial euphoria in the wake of the Abacha dictatorship, a great sense of realism has set in among much of the public. The anticipated benefits of democracy have been slow to emerge, and the new dispensation has failed to fulfil the expectation of many Nigerians. Analysts, commentators and average citizens express deep concerns about political violence, corruption, ineffective government unresponsive leaders and economic deprivation.

The question one would ask himself at this juncture is whether governance in Nigeria has improved beyond that which existed in the military era or is Nigeria merely practicing civilian rule. According to Igbuzor, in the *Leadership* of Sunday June 21, 2009, 'we had no democracy for ten years but civilian rule. According to him, there is a difference between democratic governance and civilian rule. He maintains that:

There is the perception of ten years of civilian rule. As at May 29, 1999 there was a high level of expectations and enthusiasm that greeted our returning to civilian rule. But those wishes were clearly dashed by the end of Obasanjo's regime and they have remained unfulfilled in the last two years of this administration (*Leadership Newspaper*, 2009).

Another tenet of democracy is a credible electoral process. In Nigeria, the opposite is the case. There was a time in the life of this nation (Nigeria) from independence to the end of the First Republic when we talk about patrons/clients and the benefits accruing from it constituted an important basis for political mobilization. Such concepts cited above according to Nyityo (2009) have disappeared from the political lexicon. Thus, "we now talk about godfatherism without godsons. The godfathers have long stopped producing God fearing offspring. Rather, they produce political thugs with all kinds of menacing campaigns and on election days to snatch ballot boxes from law abiding citizens" (Nyityo, 2009).

In Nigeria, the position of our leaders is succinctly explained by Gana, in the *Daily Trust* October 28, 2008 thus: our leaders have no ideas, there is no creativity

and when there is no knowledge, the people perish. Acute leadership atrophy had ensured that those occupying leadership positions in the country remain blighted in their approaches to governance. The narrow and self interest of the few that accessed political offices, mostly through fraudulent, violent and culled means has successfully replaced the interest of the people for which they yearned and long for democracy. The Nigerian political class from councillors to chairmen to legislators at all levels and even the executive class are so obsessed with power and primitive accumulation and all other things have been relegated to the background. Most politicians are now preoccupied with building mansions in their villages in their local government headquarters, in their state capitals and ultimately at Abuja when salaries sometimes remain unpaid, not to think of development. Their mentality is to acquire as many awards as possible even when they do not merit them. In this wise, democracy had come to lose its flavour and meaning amongst Nigerians. While the sybaritic interests of those in government have grown to unmanageable proportion the basic needs of the people have been neglected and treated with total disdain (Igbokwe, 2009). For instance, it is assumed that with democracy, people would be free to choose their leaders and representatives and hold them accountable for the overall objective of fast tracking development and improving the general living conditions of the masses. This expectation is not misplaced considering that Nigeria has abundant human and natural resources. However, the reality on ground has shown that this expectation is yet to be realized (Okafor, 2011). It is hardly surprising that the various attempts at democratization have failed abysmally. The reason for the continued failure is not far to seek. One basic problem has remained unsolved right from the drafting of the first constitution in 1922. This is the problem of integration (Onoriose 2006). This problem appears to have bifurcated and continues to multiply in different trajectories with the effect that the plethora of problems associated with disunity continues to manifest as insurmountable impediments to a true democracy.

In his analysis of the inability of democracy in Nigeria to bring about expected level of development, Agagu (2004) stated that: the failure of democracy to engender development is therefore inextricably tied up to the nature of the Nigerian state whose origin and initial goal was not to pay any serious attention to the problems of the subjects but to exploit people and their resources. In other words, it has never been inclusive *ab initio*. This was later reinforced by the nature of political elites that emerged and whose goal was self-serving at the detriment of the masses and even the state. The elite did not see any reason to change the focus of the state, since the dictative nature of the state, as it were, at independence was also appropriate for them to serve their own purpose. The type of democracy operating in Nigeria inhibits or hinders developmental efforts. No wonder, Ake (1996) remarked that we have pursued development with a confusion of purposes and interests and with policies full of ambiguities and contradictions. It is not that we could not find suitable notions of developments or ways to apply them to our experience. What appears as damaging evidence for Nigeria's democracy is the failure of democracy to meet the material aspirations of the Nigerian people alongside evidence of tension in the polity among the different levels and branches of government as well as the various

constituent elements of the Nigerian federation. Of these concerns, the most critical is the popular expectation that democracy would overcome poverty, deprivation and want and above all create democratic citizens. Good governance has for many years been elusive in Nigeria's political terrains because of the fact that this worthy aspect of culture, tradition and norms, political vestiges has been abandoned. Rather despotic and corrupt leaders mostly in uniform, have always found their ways into the polity as leaders (Richard, 1987).

Challenges of Legitimate Governance in Nigerian's Post Military Era

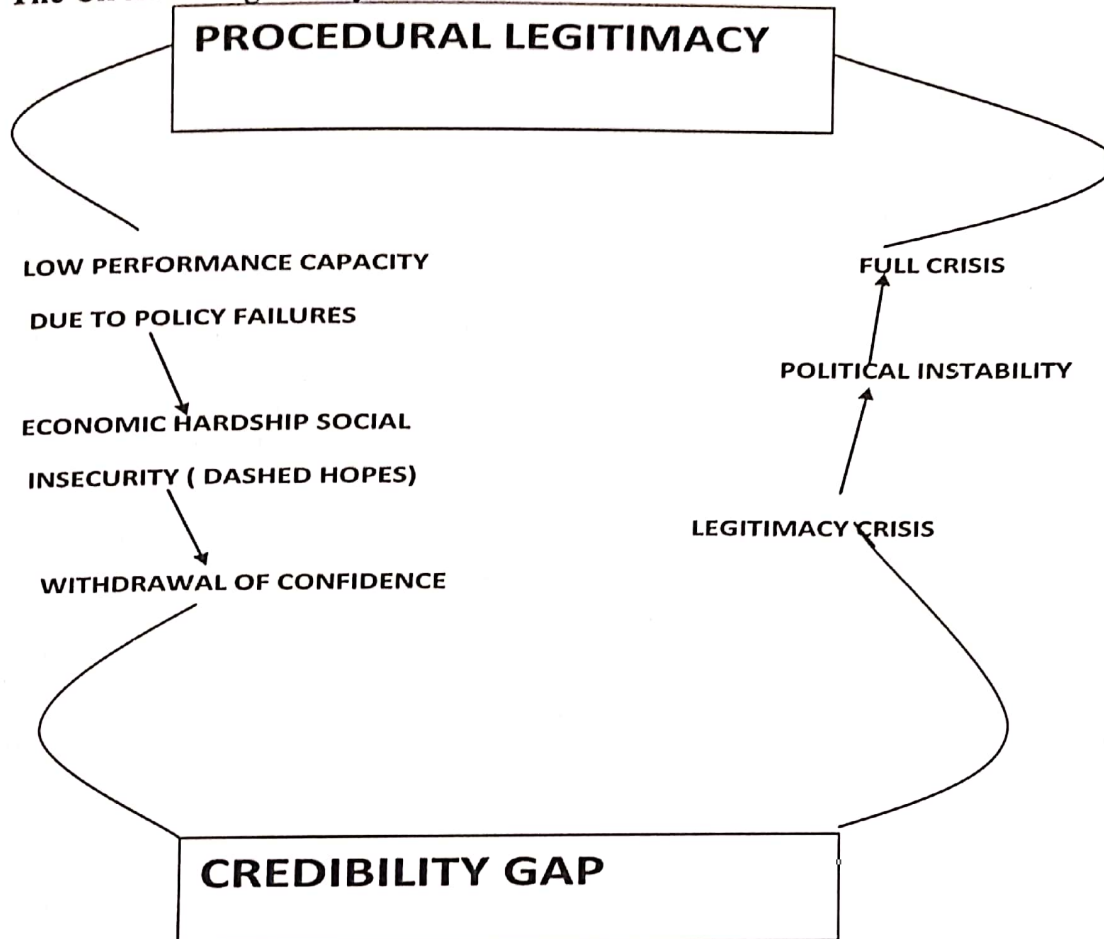
Since 1999 Nigerian political leadership have been suffering from certain legitimacy problems which stems from the nature of its authority, composing of ethnicity, religion, regional, intelligibility, and visibility. This acts as the locus classics of decision making. In essence, political leaders face numerous dilemmas in trying to secure acceptance, support and political allegiance. The challenge has been how to construct governmental systems that will satisfy the desire of the states' constituent and fragmented ethnic groups to have some measure of authority. What socio-economic policies or political programmes could be implemented to ensure a considerable level of support desired and required for political stability, generates high level of political trust and affection from the entire citizenry? Despite the efforts of successive administrations, the crises of legitimacy remain acute, endemic and seemingly intractable. Fundamentally, Suberu (1988, p.1180) forcefully argues;

A fundamental feature of the contemporary Nigeria psyche is the deep and profound distrust for government. The dream of responsive and popular government in Nigeria has collapsed in the face of repeated abortion and frustration of popular aspiration by consecutive Nigerian governments, very few Nigerians believe that government can act for the public good.

However, this perception has not been limited to the academic circles but has been conveyed to, and sometimes adopted by power holders themselves. Ayida (1990) laments that "the question that worries some of us today is whether or not Nigeria can survive the crisis of confidence, if not one of national identity, arising from the recurring crisis of management and leadership by example". Asika (1994, p.232) at a more general level makes a similar observation. He insists that: "The problem of legitimacy is the central problem of our time; it is the national question...all other questions are secondary and arise because of the problem of legitimacy". In Richard's (1983) contention, the prebendal behaviour inevitably contributes to a serious crisis in the legitimacy and effectiveness of governmental authorities in Nigeria. Few scholars are likely to dispute Richard Joseph linking of legitimacy crisis in Nigeria to the prebendalisation of state power and the struggle over the distribution of resources, widely known in Nigeria as "national cake". In a somewhat related but different manner Ekeh (1985) associated the poverty of

legitimacy in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) to the poverty of the moral linkages binding state operations with societal injunctions.

The Circle of Legitimacy Crisis



Source: Author's creation

Fig 1. Legitimacy Crisis of a Democratic Administration

Figure 1 presents legitimacy crisis of the government, it looks at the outset of ruler ship in Nigeria, whether a government is procedurally legitimate. However, the state exists to serve a purpose and its continuing existence is justified not only by how it came into being but by what it does .This is defined in terms of the ability of the state to provide the proverbial common good. Students of politics will agree with Locke, Plato and others that a state compels obedience when the citizens perceive it to be representing their interest and pursuing their common good. It is only when people are able to relate to the state as their own that they are most likely to obey it. The question of the individual relating himself/herself to the state is not simply one of identity but an acceptance by the individual that the state is capable of pursuing his/her good (Osaghae 1994, p.4).

The role of the state is ultimately and intimately the achievement of goals for the society. Therefore state collapse when they are incapable of achieving economic social and political goals. In this sense, the pitfall of various successive

administration in Nigeria have been, not only because the principles of governmental legitimacy have yet to be fully espoused or understood due to an inchoate sense of nation-hood, colonial experience or ethnic composition as many authors would want us to believe, but because the state did not respond to citizens needs and demands. In one word capable states do not necessarily require democracy. However administrations must be able to receive process and satisfy at least some citizens' demand for responsiveness; representation and development need to expend considerable resources on coercive activities to remain in power. The latter has been the situation. Accordingly, "the capacity of a government to perform is a measure of its effectiveness" (Lipset 1960:82). In the case of Nigeria the following proposition may be true: That constant economic and social development leads to prolonged effectiveness (Lipset 1960) and that prolonged effectiveness lends legitimacy to a government.

The central argument is that poor capacity of the state has been the bane of governmental legitimacy in Nigeria. Nonetheless, Almond and Powell (cited in Odetola 1978, p. 6) argue that government effectiveness could lead to instability and a decline in the political capacity of the state. This is so because it is not impossible for effectiveness of the state to further generate areas that becomes increasingly politicized. This is true in a system where government is the chief source of supply of goods. Importantly, for any government to claim legitimacy it must exhibit both effectiveness and authority. Authority will derive from the government's ability to institute systematic regulation of demands by a combination of persuasion, manipulation and coercion. No government can survive without a mixture of the three. Ethnicity is another potent but rather inadequate explanation. However ethnicity is the bane of political stability in Nigeria, it is not improper to see it as a consequence of poor performance capacity of the Nigerian state and its ruling clique. Nigeria is becoming a failed state. Over the years, state actions and policies have promoted or perpetuated economic, social and political inequalities among various groups in the federation. The failure engenders a sense of frustration by citizens regarding the future and fortune in the political order. Thus, the tendency for ethnicity to degenerate into group conflict is high when members are disenchanted with the deep feelings of economic peripheralization and political alienation. In this calamitous situation, the individual withdraws and then transfers his/her loyalty or allegiance to his/her ethnic group where he/she could enjoy considerable level of sympathy. This marked the evolution and proliferations of micro ethnic associations in all nooks and cranny of Nigeria. The increasing frustration and alienation of these groups, all contributed to increasing the atmosphere of violence and insecurity. As a result of this perceived and real peripheralization, these groups (ethnic or religious) transfer their aggressions to the state, the incumbent political head within the political system. This is the crux of the prevalent ethnic crisis in Nigeria, which over the years has had a contagious and devastating effect on the legitimacy of the state, as well as that of the incumbent political head. Therefore, it is a fact that the incapacitation of the state reduces the level of citizens' morale and trust in the leadership. At a more detrimental level, the corporate existence of the Nigerian state is threatened.

Ultimately, the rationale for any civilian administration continuing to govern is the success which attends its efforts at improving the general living conditions of the people. In essence, ethnicity is a manifestation of the weak performance capacity of the state which is a consequence of policy failures. This is further compounded by the recycling of the Nigerian political elites. The Nigerian political elites are oscillating rather than circulating. Since independence, political offices have been oscillating between and among the same set of "milito-civillian" and bureaucratic elites or their children as we have seen in the unfolding events in the Fourth Republic. The consequence for state/leadership legitimacy is that the average Nigeria finds it difficult to repose confidence in the same sets of political office holders (their children) who have failed more than once and unrepentant in their ways. At each turn of every new administration in Nigeria, promises are made and hopes are raised. In all these, hopes have been dashed, promises violated and expectations dimmed by blatant state failure arising from insincerity of leaders, corruption and mismanagement of state resources.

The failure of the Nigerian state under the democratic and military regimes frustrates people's hopes and expectations which invariably lead to the withdrawal of their trust from the state, or the leadership. For instance, the performance of a democratic regime rests on four basic elements (Lewis and Bratton 2000). The first is procedural fairness. The paramount question here is not just the fairness of the electoral process. The question is the system structural to ensure that issues are resolved in a regular predictable way that access to decisional arena is open and equal? The second is accountability. Are rulers accountable to the governed via a process that allows wide and effective participation? The third is efficiency is the government set up to accomplish society's ends without undue waste of resources? And lastly, distributive fairness, that is are the advantages and costs allocated by the system distributed equally? Accountability and responsiveness is the linkage process that relates the government to the citizenry in a democracy, while effectiveness ensures a regular consent that facilitates the citizen's self actualization drive. In short the above questions must be answered in the affirmative for a democratic regime to be assessed as being capable.

At this point, the diagram show how a credibility gap develops. And in the absence of credibility, the legitimacy of the system is at risk. Eventually the stability of the political order is jeopardized. This is the point at which the delicate balance between coercion and persuasion is disrupted, and the governmental repression apparatus becomes more active. Police harassment and intimidation and arrest of either real or perceived political contenders including radical scholars, journalists and labour leaders etc characterize this stage. From the diagram and discussions so far, the following generalizations could be made:

- 1) In the Nigerian case, where government meets the needs and expectations of the people both the incumbent administration and the state enjoys considerable level of legitimacy, however when the government falls short of citizen's expectations, the legitimacy of the incumbent political head and that of the state is threatened.

- 2) Without efficiency and high state performance capacity, legitimacy cannot be sustained, and without legitimacy there can be no political stability.

To recap this paper, the weak performance capacity of the Nigerian state and its inability to provide the proverbial "common good", account for the crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria. In the developed democracies of the West, much less is generally expected of the state than is the case in Nigeria, which is a typical example of a developing country. Therefore, there is need to develop a theory of legitimacy which relies less on procedure but more on the efficiency of the system and performance capability of the leader. What lessons does this have for any administration?

Conclusion

It will surprise one that the fundamental ingredient of legitimacy is the satisfaction of the people's basic human needs: food, shelter, welfare and prospects for security. Where these needs are met, the atmosphere is one of relative peace and quiet. Where they are denied with levity, the outcome is one of conflict and social disorder. Poverty breeds enmity, resentment, dejection and violence. How a free tongue without stomach is weak and political obligation in the absence of social, economic and political security is unreal. Therefore, for the current democratic experiment to be stable and durable socio-economic development must occupy a priority position on the agenda of the ruling government and this must also ensure or translate into human centred development.

This definitely hinders not only the legitimacy of democracy as the most preferred system of government but also the moral right of the political leaders to command obedience and indivisible loyalty from the entire citizenry. Nigerians therefore, demands more than electoral fairness but also responsive and humane government. With legitimacy, the business of governance is less tasking. Legitimacy is *sine qua non* for democratic stability. Though the crisis of legitimacy has been visible in the past sixteen years of civil rule, the level of instability it has generated has not produced governmental instability not because democratic culture is developing but because Nigerians could not see any benefit in military rule either.

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