

A PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN POVERTY OF GOVERNANCE AND VOTER APATHY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 after several years of military rule with great expectations. Several resources were invested in the democratic project and some of the material resources were sourced from foreign nations who assured us of the great benefits of democratic rule. The democratic dispensation came with a lot of hope and enthusiasm. It marked a new dawn as several activists and patriotic Nigerians paid great price to wrest power from the military. Political thinkers have also portrayed democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. Available statistics as well as the attitudinal response of Nigerians to what ought to be their democracy has continually declined to the point that politicians now pay people, not only to attend political rallies, but to vote as well. This paper interrogates both the poverty of governance and voter apathy in Nigeria and seeks to establish the relationship between them. It again, evaluates the implications of poor governance and voter apathy in a democracy and suggests ways to remedy the declining interest of most Nigerians in the democratic process.

Keywords: Governance, Voter Apathy, Democracy, Electorates.

Introduction

Democracy is still adjudged as the best system of government worldwide. This is because of the perceived benefits which the system can offer to the society. Theoretically, democracy promises popular participation as well as greater economic and social benefits. Ironically, Nigeria's venture into democracy has severally been truncated by military coups mostly on allegations of poor governance and increasing economic crisis.

It took determined mass action by patriotic Nigerians to force the military out of power and to restore civil rule in 1999. Many Nigerians paid the supreme price in the course of defending democracy after the annulment of the June 12 election. The return to democracy was greeted

with great enthusiasm by Nigerians and the first post military election witnessed greater voter turnout than subsequent ones.

The democratic process derives its legitimacy partly by the participation of the people. The principle of government of the people is founded on the notion that the government originated from or is by the people. The principle of one man one vote is what makes the government that of the people. It is also on this principle that the slogan 'power belongs to the people' derived its import. The aggregate mind of the citizens is articulated and measured through voting because whoever scores the highest vote represents the choice and popular will of the people.

Many reasons have been adduced for the poor state of governance in Nigeria. Some writers have blamed poor capacity as the major reason for under-performance of the states in developing countries of which Nigeria is inclusive (Clapman, 2002). The historical heritage of most African states which include history of weak political leadership, corruption, conflicts and wars is also seen by Bayart (2009) as the reason for under-performance and failure of the governments in Africa. While not completely disregarding the above, it is necessary to note that part of the wisdom every leader is expected to bring into governance is the ability to resolve or manage challenges. To this effect, every regime must be held accountable for its failure to deliver irrespective of the historical antecedents.

The Philosophical Foundation of Democratic Governance

Democracy is historically traced to the Greece city-states in Athens. Greece was then the intellectual headquarters of the world, due to the way philosophic thoughts thrived in the ancient kingdom. Ever since then, this system of government seems to have caught the fancy of the entire world. Philosophers like Plato disdained democracy. Plato observes that democracy is a fallout of the split between the rich and the poor occasioned by the covetous inclination of the oligarchs. Owing to the division of the society into the class of the rich and the poor, a continuous conflict between the two classes results in the poor killing or exiling the rich and usurping power. The victory of the poor results in democracy and everyone is given equal rights and opportunities in the democratic state. Casting of ballots or lots is also introduced as a means of selecting political leaders. One thing that Plato has against democracy as it was practiced in Athens is unlimited freedom. The last in the list of his forms of government is tyranny which he claims resulted from the excessive liberty in democracy and the resultant lawlessness. This produces the absolute ruler or rulers unrestrained by law (Plato, *The Republic*, 1997).

Cicero in his *Treatise on the Commonwealth* contends that a journey towards democracy is the first step towards ruin (Cicero, 1841). He writes that the attainment of democracy into which all nations are tending to degenerate, is characterized by the spirit of partisanship and factionalism. This factionalizes the strength of the nation and finally results in its decay. Cicero favours a state governed by laws which do not contradict the universal law that has conferred certain rights and obligations to all men. States are only to enact laws which further the laws of God who is the universal lawgiver. In the same manner all men are bound to obey the law as its disobedience must attract penalty. Cicero insists that the state belongs to the people. The people according to him are association of persons based on agreement to pursue

the common good. The state therefore is a partnership arising from man's natural possession of a social spirit. Its sole purpose is to advance the interest of its members through mutual aid and good governance. Sabine and Thorson infer three consequences from this;

First, since the state and its law is the common property of the people, its authority arises from the collective power of the people. Second, political power when rightfully and lawfully exercised really is the corporate power of the people. The magistrate who exercises it does so by virtue of his office; his warrant is the law and he is the creature of the law. Third, the state itself and its law is always subject to the law of God, or the moral or natural law – that higher rule of right which transcends human choice and human institution(Sabine, 1973).

Karl Popper addressed one of the key fears of Cicero. Cicero had noted that the journey into democracy is journey towards ruin. Popper notes that the choice of democracy is not because of its goodness, rather it is on account of the evilness of dictatorship. Whatever shortcomings that are found in democracy, cannot be compared to the devastating effect of dictatorship.

It is apparent that the foundation of democracy is the people, and their power exercised through the ballot. The ballot is one way that the corporate power of the people is expressed to shape governance and direct the course of a democratic society. The consciousness that power belongs to the people is what keeps political office holders in check. And the consciousness on the part of the population that power belongs to them is what delivers a democratic system from dictatorship. At any point the people are dislocated from the process of governance, the system loses its essence.

Jeremy Bentham argues that the principle of utility should form the basic core value of political governance. In the realm of political action and social policy, government action as well as policies is to be evaluated on the basis of the proportion or percentage of the population that derived happiness from such a policy. The basic thrust of governance should be to ensure happiness for the greatest number of the residents of the state or community. Therefore, any policy action in which pain outweighs happiness is a bad policy. The rating of a government by the people actually follows the utility principle. This determines their attachment and interest in the political process. In all democracies, governments are voted out when the rating of performance of the government is considered low by the electorate.

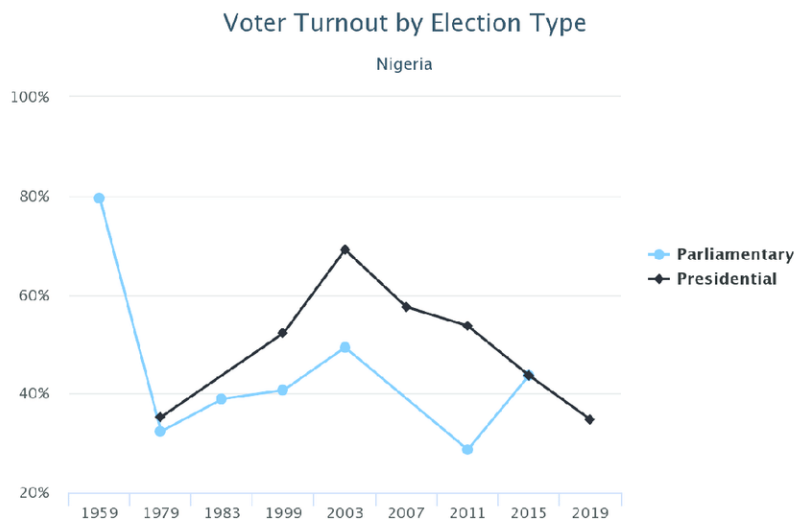
Voter Apathy

Voter apathy is first and foremost a psychological and emotional detachment from the electoral process. It usually manifests in the electorates being disenchanted with the electoral process which results in shunning the polls during elections. Voter apathy results from general political apathy or disinterestedness in politics and political discourse. It is a form of defeatism in which the people surrender their political rights in frustration. Voter apathy is often measured by the percentage of total numbers of voters who cast their ballots in relation to total registered voters. In Nigeria, voter apathy has progressively been on the increase since 1999. Voter apathy can arise as a result of poor public enlightenment, low political education

and poor voter mobilization. It can also arise as a quiet protest against the system by the electorate as a demonstration of perceived lack of confidence in the electoral process.

Several scholars have offered explanations for voter apathy in Nigeria. Some have attributed the apathy to poor voter political education and illiteracy (Oni E. O., cited by Ibeogu et.al (2019)). While this could be accepted as an explanation in the sixties and seventies, the same cannot suffice today as the reason for the apathy. We need to dig deeper into our political culture for a reasonable explanation.

It is important to observe that the military especially Ibrahim Babangida took Nigerians through an endless road of transition which climaxed in the annulment of the June 12 election before he stepped aside. Though Babangida kept cancelling and readjusting the transition timetable under the guise of midwifing a perfect baby, many saw his actions as a pointer to a hidden agenda. The poor voter turn-out even during the period was rooted in perceived insincerity of the military and the militaristic way in which the elections were conducted. A look at the table below indicates, that voter turnout peaked in 2003 and began to decline steadily to its lowest point in 2019.



Voter Turnout Data for Nigeria (1959-2019). Source: IDEA Voter Turnout Database, 2019 <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voterturnout> (Accessed on 6 March 2022)

Poor Governance

The social contract is based on some fundamental understanding. It is a mutual giving up of our individual liberties in order to secure mutual security and protection for each other. A man is only giving up his right to harm others on the condition that other men do likewise. But these natural rights must be mutually surrendered under the custodian of an authority who can enforce the terms of this mutual surrender. This is because “covenants without the sword are but words and of no strength to secure a man at all; the state under this covenant received power by trust on the condition that the rights given up will be collectively protected. If I give up my right to rob others, it is on the condition that no one robs me. If I give up my right to rule myself, it is on the condition that those who rule me must rule me well. When

people feel they are not ruled well, they feel alienated and betrayed by the sovereign to whom they entrusted much confidence. Trust is very crucial in any human endeavor that involves more than one individual. Heyman (2014) cited by Dhikru & Adeoye highlights the logic behind the historical Bill of Rights and insists that those who drafted the Bill of Rights were not insistent that government might do too little but that it might engage in so much responsibility. Governance and democracy is evaluated based on the principle of utilitarianism. In sum, Dhikru and Adeoye perceive governance as a power structure with its own hierarchical categories, incorporating the economic, social, cultural tensions within the society, and thus spreading out an inherent dynamism which absorbs the ebbs and flows of pressures towards ensuring peaceful and effective solutions to existential problems confronting the society and its people. Governance is about problem solving and government is rated based on the degree to which it solves the existential problems of the people.

The relationship that exists between the Nigerian government and its people is already damaged, broken and destroyed. Trust is quite scarce or non-existent. This is because good governance has eluded the Nigerian society for quite a long time. Good governance brings about trust while poor governance breeds lack of trust and non-participation in election otherwise known as voter apathy. Thus, the implication of poor governance in a democratic system is that people would not trust the government, and when people don't trust the government, their participation in election and other governmental activities would be very minimal if not entirely absent.

Factors that Engender Voter Apathy in Nigeria

Flawed Democracy

It appears the Nigerian democracy midwived by the military was designed to fail. In the course of the military authored transition programme, Ibrahim Babangida had said in a speech delivered at the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies that 'we have not chosen and have not sought to choose those who would succeed us. We have only decided on those who would not' (Momoh& Adejumobi, 1999). It is on record that all the military officers who presided over the transition to democracy were included in the assertion made by the military president. He seems to be stating the position of the military hierarchy. Again, since the military knew those they will never hand over to, it presupposes that the outcome of the election was predetermined irrespective of who the electorates had interest in. The system already was skewed to elect the candidates of the military. A system designed in this way cannot be said to be democratic. Little wonder most of the persons elected as political leaders in 1999 were either retired military officers or civilians who closely worked with the military. Momoh and Adejumobi (1999) raised crucial issues regarding the crisis of Democracy during the transition period. First, they noted that since the military is a regimented institution, the military cannot teach civil society and politicians the values of democracy. The implication therefore, is that since a student grows up to be like his teacher, part of the crises we witness today were learnt from those who taught us democracy. This is how we learnt to turn a winner into a loser, either by announcing a result which never emanated from the polling booth or get a court to declare a loser the winner. We are living witnesses of how the Association for Better Nigerian got a judgment in the night to enable the military annul the popular June, 12 elections. From 1999 to date, there have been persons who became elected through the courts to the bewilderment of the electorates who knew whom they voted for. These technical

loopholes which were planted in the constitution and electoral act by the military and ruling class are booby traps continually denigrating democracy in the hearts of the electorates. Any correct constitution and electoral act, must recognize that power belongs to the people through their votes; the vote is the expression of their collective will and must be guarded by the electoral act and the judicial system.

Rather than deepen democracy, the military militarized the political space, thereby frustrated decent persons and genuine democrats out of the political space. Ushie, (2005) notes that the way politics is played in Nigerian impacts negatively on electoral participation. The violent nature, which results in many killings, maiming and destruction, is scary to an average citizen. Most times, all these atrocities go on unchallenged as the security agencies will only be on top of the situation rather than arresting it. I have often wondered why elections in Nigeria are treated as a near war situation with the military playing the biggest role of ensuring security during elections. Democratic elections are civil in nature and the military ought to remain in their barracks to exercise their rights to vote. The military in Nigeria is yet to subordinate itself to civil authority and presence of the military everywhere during elections is sufficient reason for voters to stay away.

The electoral law itself was fraught with loopholes which allow politicians who manipulate election results to go scot free. For instance, several elections have been nullified by courts of law on the ground that the election result that brought them to power were forged or doctored. But when such results were nullified, one expected that the culprits should be prosecuted for perverting the will of the electorates. Politicians who commit such crimes are allowed to walk away free without any sanctions. Sometimes, these vote riggings take place in the presence of the electorates, giving them the impression that votes do not count. As result of this, they decide to stay at home on election Day.

All the intrigues to frustrate genuine electoral reform is because the politicians do not want anything that will make it impossible for them to manipulate the results of elections. This is the reason for the opposition to electronic transmission of results. They want to retain the old order which allows space for the content of the result sheet to be changed several times between the polling booth and the final collation Centre. This is why some notable politicians have kicked against the introduction of Electronic Transmission of election results and electronic voting. The transmission of election results electronically would surely mitigate rigging and result manipulations.

Marginalization

Ideally, democracy is supposed to bring about good governance. Unfortunately, in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, democracy has not yielded its idealistic aims as alleged cases of marginalization of some sections of the nation abound. This is accentuated by the president's infamous speech that he doesn't need to bother about the 5% that didn't vote for him but will rather concern himself with the 97% that voted him. Such a declaration from an elected president in a democratic system does not only sound discriminatory but also quite unfortunate as those who didn't vote for him were visited with discrimination and marginalization.

Marginalization is a process of pushing a particular group or groups of people to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity or place in it. The present government has driven and relegated some sections of this nation to a secondary position and made them feel as if they are less important than those who hold power in the society. It is this relegation to the secondary position and the feeling of being less important or unwanted that has spurred on agitations from several quarters especially from the Southern part of the country to secede from the Nigerian Federation. The Igbo of Nigeria for example, claim to have witnessed the harshest form of discrimination and marginalization in the history of Nigeria. They are grossly underrepresented in nearly all top government positions and thoroughly neglected by federal authorities. It is for this reason that Nwankwo (2000) insists that marginalization has become an Igbo bedmate. The unfortunate issue is that, when a section of the country feels marginalized rightly or wrongly, they lose interest in politics as well as the voting process. This explains the high level of voter apathy among the Igbo's.

Lack of Accountability and Transparency

Transparency serves to achieve accountability. Without transparency and accountability, trust will be lacking between a government and those whom it governs. For this reason, democratic governments focus on accountability and transparency as methods to ensure that the public understands what's going on in the system. Lack of transparency and accountability is an implication of poor governance. Governments in the African democratic system are fond of refusing to listen to the voice of those they govern as well as refuse to take accountability for their actions. The EndSARS saga in Nigeria is as a result of poor governance and police brutality.

Thus poor governance by implication brings about lack of accountability and transparency. And when the government is not transparent and accountable to the people, this will lead to voter apathy or disinterestedness in electoral processes. Hence when leaders no longer care about the opinions of the people in respect of decision making and other policies that affect their lives, there is a breakdown of cordial relationship between the people and the government. Besides, adequate transparency and accountability are critical for ensuring that resource wealth is managed for the benefit of the whole population (Carsten, 2005). Thus, just as transparency and accountability are important elements of good governance, so is their absence or lack is an indication of poor governance.

Corruption

Corruption is a complex phenomenon that affects all countries in various ways including the so called developed countries of the world. However, the level, nature and forms of corruption in Africa and particularly in Nigeria is such that it affects all levels of government and even the governed. One of the characteristics of poor governance is corruption. Corruption within the political system of any nation leads to poor governance as the political leaders place their personal benefits over and above the governed. Corruption is the biggest problem facing African countries. Corruptions occur in different forms and can happen when political leaders misuse their offices for their personal gain; when the law enforcement agencies are paid off or are influenced by a person to avoid prosecution or justice. This monster called corruption has not spared even the judiciary which ought to be the last hope of the common man.

One factor that has aided corruption in Nigeria is immunity from prosecution granted to certain public office holders. This immunity was a direct inclusion of the contents of Decree No. 9 of 1990 in the constitution. It grants the president and governors immunity from criminal liability while in office. The constitution equally endowed the president and other political office holders with so much power. For instance, the national Assembly has powers to fix its own salary and emoluments. The executive powers of the president and governors puts them in the pedestal of sole administrators of national and state resources.

This makes it easy for government officials to illicitly divert government revenue or fund into their private accounts. It is worthy to note here that corruption can lead to poor governance just as poor governance can encourage or entrench corruption in the system. It is because of corruption and other factors of poor governance that Nigeria is presently ranked 2nd most corrupt country in West Africa (CPI, 2020), while the 2021 U.S. News and World Report ranks Nigeria 1st among the top ten most corrupt nations of the world.

No doubt, corruption has posed a great challenge to governance and development in the whole of Africa and more so in Nigeria. This is because there have not been any sincere attempts or measures taken to curb corruption. Hence, as it is allowed to fester, it erodes the capacity of the state to effectively deliver services to the people. Undoubtedly, good governance is an illusion in a nation where corruption is both persistent and endemic. Hence, the implication of poor governance in a democratic system is high level of corruption at all levels. In other words, unless there are sincere and serious measures taken by the government and the governed, corruption would continue to derail the political and economic train of Nigeria so much that Nigeria's economy and political system would become a joke and a global laughing stock.

Poverty

Wide-spread poverty is a consequent of poor governance in Africa, and poor governance led to the ranking or categorization of Nigeria among the 19 poorest, unhappiest, unhealthiest, and most dangerous nations in the world (The Punch, 2016). This is quite tragic as, in spite of the abundant resources both natural and human of which Nigeria is blessed with, the nation is now regarded or referred to as "crippled giant" (Osaghae, 2011). This is because since the return of democratic governance or system in Nigeria in 1999, Nigerians are yet to witness significant dividends of democracy. Instead, she has been wallowing and sinking deeply and consistently into the quicksand of political, religious, economic and ethnic crisis.

According to Yakubu (2020), the arguments that democracy is a machinery for economic, peace, and stability of development have been disproved in Nigeria. Yakubu is quite right because for over 20 years of democracy in Nigeria, poverty has been a major issue in a democratic government that is expected to improve the lives of the governed. It is on record that 39.1% of Nigeria's population lives below poverty line of US\$1.90 a day. It is also on record that Nigeria has the largest population of people living in extreme poverty – 86.9 million out of 200 million Nigerians are said to be living in extreme poverty (World Wide Poverty, 2021). Out of that number, 64% is found in rural areas while 14% is found in urban areas. In other words, poverty is generally very intense in the rural areas in Nigeria more than in urban centers, with poor or no social and infrastructural amenities.

The implication of poor governance is poverty and there is no way Nigeria and Nigeria people can come out of poverty if Nigeria continues to experience poor governance.

Human Rights Abuse

Democracy is a system of government in which the fundamental rights of every citizen is best recognized and protected. This is because it is presumed that democracy brings about good governance. But this too has been disproved, as cases of poor governance under democratic system abound in Africa and in Nigeria. All over Africa and Nigeria in particular, poor governance has led to flagrant abuses of human rights. Since independence, the Nigerian state has not fared any better in the protection of the fundamental human rights of the Nigerian citizens. Nigerians have rather been visited with wanton abuses and violations of their inalienable rights with impunity. During the regimes of former Major Generals Ibrahim Babangida and San Sani Abacha, the level of human rights violations or abuses was so high that there was a general outcry from the masses against the regime. The human right abuses of Babangida and Abacha's regime were perpetrated by the government through their agents such as the State Security Services (SSS), the Navy, the Army, the Police force, the Customs, Special Security agencies as is the case in Nigeria presently. In fact, during Babangida and Abacha's regime, all the government agencies in Nigeria collaborated with the military leaders to unleash war against human rights in Nigeria. There was no freedom of speech and of the press. News Paper firms were shut down, bunt, and silenced. People including Human Rights Activists were unlawfully arrested, detained and jailed without trials.

It is quite unfortunate that more than 20 years of Nigeria's return to civil rule, that nothing much has changed from when she was under the military rule. There is an increase in human rights abuses as peoples' integrity and dignity are no longer respected and protected in Nigeria. The human rights abuses in Nigeria are so grave that the citizens are denied their freedom to express their dissatisfaction with the harsh political situations in the country. The brutal suppression of the EndSARS protest is a clear manifestation of the governments' intolerance of dissenting views and opinions. There is presently flagrant widespread disregard for human rights and due processes within the Nigeria Police Force and other government agencies. People are killed by the police, the army, the customs, the Road Safety Corps on the streets, during arrest, at road blocks and in police cells or detentions (Amnesty Reports, 2021). Yet, we are under a democratic system. The implication is that as long as there is poor governance in Nigeria, the fundamental human rights of the Nigerian people will continue to be trampled upon, abused and violated all the more.

Disregard for the Rule of Law

Rule of law is indeed one of the attractions of democracy. The rule of law implies a functional legal framework that helps to ensure settlement of conflicts between the state and the individuals on the one hand and among individuals or groups on the other. It also helps to ensure respect for property rights and contracts, while preventing the government and influential individuals from acting capriciously (Adamolekun, 2016).

In Nigeria, lack of judicial independence and its associated ills, a recipe for miss-governance and maladministration, particularly by the executive arm of the government has become more pronounced such that in 2019, Omoyele Sowore, a Nigeria Journalist and activist was arrested

during his trial before a court of law, by some security operatives identified as men of the Department of State Security Services (DSSS). This and many other similar cases are instances of the degrading system of democracy and a clear indication of poor governance.

Several instances also abound where regard for the rule of law, human rights, the constitution and the judiciary were threatened by the same people who were supposed to uphold them. The present government has little or no regards for the law, court decisions and fundamental human rights. And when the people in authority begin to operate or act outside the jurisdiction or scope of their powers, it is certainly an indication of poor governance which by implication means that the rule of law will no longer be regarded or at best, will be applied only to the masses who have no one to speak or fight for them.

Thus disregard for rule of law is an implication of poor governance and it has become so pronounced in the present administration such that the Socio-economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has urged president Buhari to “use the sixth anniversary of his government in power as an opportunity to halt Nigeria’s backsliding from constitutional and international obligations, reverse a steady deterioration of the rule of law and persistent breach of human rights, including the rights to a corruption free-society, and to life and security of Nigerians.” SERAP noted among other things, the persistent failure of this present government to obey decisions of the Nigerian courts; failure to combat corruption and push for transparency and the failure to protect Nigerian’s right to life and property.

Poor governance or bad governance is one of the major limitations of the doctrine of the rule of law, and disregard for rules of law is an implication of poor governance. This is because in any democratic system where the rule of law is disregarded, it is because of the failure of the existing government. In other words, poor governance would lead to government officials taking laws into their hands and becoming above the law.

Lack of Security of Life and Property

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 3, stated that everyone has a right to life, liberty and security. Also in article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the right to human life is clearly enshrined as it states “human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.” The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria equally has it in section 33, that “every person has a right to life and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria”.

In spite of the above provisions, Nigerians and the Nigerian nation have continued unabated to witness cases of full-blown human rights violations and abuses. Today, human beings are massacred while properties wasted on daily basis with impunity and recklessness. Thousands of innocent Nigerians have been violently killed across the country between 2015 and 2021. In parts of the north – Borno, Southern Kaduna, and Plateau States, Boko Haram terrorists have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent souls, while other terrorists parading or masquerading as Fulani herdsmen have unleashed untold havoc and catastrophe in not only the places aforementioned, but also in parts of Middle Belt, Southeast, Southsouth and

Southwest regions of the nation. In different parts of the country, beginning from Southern Kaduna, the Middle Belt to Southeast, South-south, and Southwestern parts of the country, lives and properties are wasted on daily basis in the full view of the government and its security agents.

To ask what is responsible for insecurity of life and properties in Nigeria is to ask a question whose answer is quite obvious and already known. It is believed that life and properties are better preserved and protected in a democratic government. Unfortunately, the Nigerian experience has challenged that view, because rather than enthroning good governance, democracy has continued to witness series of chronic poor governance in Nigeria. Therefore, poor governance brings about insecurity of lives and properties among others. This means that as long as Nigeria continues to experience poor governance, insecurity of life and properties will continue to be among the major characteristics of the Nigerian nation. In the midst of present security challenges, voter participation in future elections are bound to be low. The recent local government election in Enugu, was a clear pointer to what may happen in 2023. Unknown gunmen as they are often described by security agencies, stormed polling units, shot sporadically, burnt the election materials, vehicles and killed and injured several persons. The irony is that they moved from one community to another inflicting this mayhem unchallenged.

In addition to insecurity of life and properties, Nigeria still experiences other forms of insecurities such as economic insecurity, food insecurity, health insecurity and environmental insecurity. Economic insecurity is the anxiety produced by the possible exposure to adverse economic events and by the anticipation of the difficulty to recover from them (Kopasker, 2018). Hence economic insecurity describes the risks of economic loss faced by workers and households as they encounter the unpredicted events of social life (Bruce Western, Deirde Bloome, Benjamin Sosnaud and Laura Tach, 2012).

Food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it (Otaha, 2013). This implies access to enough food for an active and healthy life to members of a household at all times. But how can this be when, presently over 9 million people in Nigeria are facing a crisis or worse levels of food insecurity as increased violence and forced displacement continue to affect the humanitarian situation in the North, Middle Belt, Southeast, South-South and Southwest. With the deterioration of food security and an increased risk of famine in various parts of the country, the economic future of Nigeria and Nigerian peoples is quite deplorable and very grim.

Although there has been a high level of food insecurity in Nigeria over the past four decades as a result of neglect in food production when oil became the major export product (Otaha, 2013), this situation is now made worse by the continuous activities of Boko Haram terrorists, kidnappers, Fulani herdsmen terrorists as well as bandits who go around unchecked kidnapping and murdering innocent. Health insecurity on the other hand refers to the inability to secure adequate healthcare today and the risk of being unable to do so in the future as well as impoverishing healthcare expenditure (Gama, 2015). A greater percentage of the Nigerian population doesn't have access to healthcare services. The cost of accessing healthcare services is now beyond the reach of most Nigerians. Consequently, mortality rate

is on the increase in the country as many people die due to inability to secure adequate healthcare as a result of government's ineptitude – an index of poor governance.

Finally, environmental security is the relative public safety from environmental dangers caused by natural or human processes due to ignorance, accidents, mismanagement or design and originating within or across national borders. Environmental insecurity refers to the absence, deficit, or lack of environmental security. The harmful calamity caused by environmental hazards such as climate change, flooding, global warming, ozone layer depletion, air/water pollution and deforestation in the different regions of Nigeria constitute serious security threat. In most regions of the country especially the tropical rainforest – fighting gully sites, seasonal flooding, oil spillage, water and air pollution, and deforestation; desertification in the northern region as well as illicit and unarticulated refuse dumps and industrial wastes challenge the security of lives and properties in Nigeria. Unfortunately, not even the promulgation of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) Act in 1988 has helped matters as both the Federal government and the weak institutional capacity of the State institutions responsible for environmental management and protection account for the challenge of environmental insecurity (Ikenna, 2019).

Poor Economic Growth

It is widely known that Nigeria's economic potential is seriously constrained by many structural issues including inadequate infrastructure, tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, obstacles to investment, lack of confidence in currency evaluation and limited foreign exchange capacity (USAID, 2021). All these were made possible by poor governance. In 2020, Nigeria's economy entered a recession that has never been heard of in the history of Nigeria since independence. This was attributed to the fall in crude oil prices on account of falling global demand and measures targeted towards fighting the spread of COVID-19.

The current Nigeria's recession has led to high rate of unemployment as thousands of our graduates are on the streets roaming hopelessly without jobs; lower wages and incomes as the federal and state governments are not even willing to pay the so-called 'minimum wage'; and lost opportunities as education, private capital investments and economic opportunities both private and public suffer greatly in the downturn. And one may ask, what is the cause of poor economic growth in Nigeria? The answer is none but poor governance. The implication therefore, is that unless poor governance is replaced with good governance in Nigeria, Nigeria's economy will continue to nose-dive into irreversible recession that may lead to series of unimagined hardships, chaos, anarchy and doom.

Generally, poor governance in Nigeria brings about voter apathy. For a nation to experience good governance, citizens' participation in electoral processes is not only necessary but also a sine-qua-non for sustaining democracy. Unfortunately, the conduct of electoral processes and governance in Nigeria since 1999 rather than inspire confidence in the citizens, evokes political and voter apathy instead. Most Nigerians are now scared, discouraged and kept away from politics and elections by antidemocratic norms and culture ranging from electoral fraud, political violence, human rights abuse or violations, corruption, religious bigotry and tribal sentiments. Consequently, rather than majority rule, there is minority rule in Nigeria as only a mere 35% of registered voters voted in the past election. Out of this 35%, electoral

malpractices still abound as fake voters' cards, impersonation of voters, under-aged voters etc, were alleged to have been witnessed during the elections. Voter apathy which is an offshoot of poor governance is a threat to the consolidation or sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. Governance in Nigeria has been and still is characterized by deceit and false promises made by politicians at campaigns and rallies but remain adamantly, recklessly and deliberately unfulfilled several years after elections or throughout their tenure in government.

Evaluating the Nexus between Poor Governance and Voter Apathy

It is necessary to examine the relationship between poor governance and voter apathy. Our position in this paper is that voter apathy did not just emerge in Nigeria. Again we also insist that it is not a product of illiteracy or poor voter education as has often been alleged. It is on record that the first post -independence election witnessed high voter turn-out. Since higher voter turn-out was recorded in the sixties when literacy was low, it then implies that Nigerians are not generally apolitical.

It is rather the way and manner that the democratic process has been handled and the failed expectation of the dividends of democracy that resulted in disillusionment on the part of the masses. This drove the people away from the polling stations, thereby creating opportunity for politicians and their thugs to thump print for everyone. The withdrawal of the citizens from taking active part in the voting process works in favour of corrupt politicians. It provides them the opportunity to buy votes, and this ensures that only the super-rich remains in politics. This also increases the propensity to loot public treasury so as to have enough money to keep buying voters during elections. So, since the people have lost interest in who wins the election, it is now easy to hire them for a certain fee to come and vote for a candidate. Just as you hire labourers for a day job, so are voters hired in Nigeria. This also explains why the leaders are not in a hurry to eradicate poverty or provide employment for the mass of unemployed youths. It is cheaper and easier to buy the votes of the poor than that of the rich, who in most cases do not come out to vote. Poor governance therefore, serves the political interest of the ruling class as this is the only way the masses will remain apolitical.

On the other hand, political and voter apathy reinforce poor governance. It allows the government and its agents go unchallenged in all they do. One powerful way to challenge a bad government is through the ballot box. It is the fear of being voted out that keeps a government on its toes to deliver on its campaign promises. Therefore, the more a nation sinks into voter apathy the more poverty of governance it harvests. This is because people who show apathy during elections will not demand for accountability and this phenomenon places the politicians on top of the game to perpetually institutionalize misrule as a political culture. The tragedy of the situation is that people are lured into participating in elections at the first instance based on the understanding that power belongs to them, and that the government will defend their interests, only to be frustrated out of the relationship. It is like a marriage relationship in which vows of love were exchanged and after marriage, and one of the parties intentionally decides to frustrate the other person out of the relationship.

Recall the enthusiasm and sacrifice of Nigerians, prior to 1999 to restore democracy. People made supreme sacrifice with their lives while many went to prison. Mass of Nigerians came out boldly to protest against the military and their rule. But it is now evident that not much

changed and power still went back to ex-military Head of State and after eight years he transferred power to a civilian president. Just as the country was settling down to expand the democratic space and lay the foundation for genuine democratic rule, another ex-military Head of State came back to power and has been ferociously reversing the democratic gains. All these have contributed to the high apathy demonstrated by the average Nigerian voter.

It is necessary to counsel the Nigerian voter that the right approach is not to stand aloof. This approach will not bring any positive change. People need to understand that democracy is a progressive and dynamic process shaped by the masses themselves through continuous struggle. It is not a finished product displayed for sale on the counter. It is a process that grows through conjectures and refutations in the words of Karl Popper. It is the voters that must push and insist on any change. It is a constant vigilance on the part of the voters that sustain democracy and prevent it from being hijacked. Democracy works only in countries where the citizens demonstrate a high level of critical consciousness and are ready to pay the necessary price to defend it.

Finally, there is need to amend the electoral act to take into cognizance, the issue of voter turnout. There should be a provision stipulating the minimum voter participation in an election before it could be assumed to be valid. A situation where less than thirty percent of registered voters could elect a representative is tantamount to dictatorship of the minority.

Conclusion

Political and voter apathy is a dangerous trend in a democratic society. It is a sign of a failed democracy. One cannot reasonably regard a system as democratic, when more than fifty percent of the electorates decline to participate. When this is the case, it implies that the minority is exerting rule over the majority, and the only way the minority can do this is through authoritarian means.

The present democratic dispensation in Nigeria was hard won and it will be unfortunate if it derails. We believe that all men of good conscience must stand up to save this democracy. This can only be done when the masses rise up to the responsibility of reshaping the course of democracy in Nigeria through their votes. There is need to educate the Nigerian public on the power vested in them through their votes. Staying away from politics and voting is the easiest way to entrench the rule of corrupt politicians who have made it a business to milk the Nigerian state. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, it has been looting galore for a few sit tight politicians who have no other visible means of livelihood apart from what they scoop from the corridors of power.

Again, it is necessary to address all the shortcomings which led to the disenchantment of the electorates. We are currently witnessing the gradual death of democracy in West Africa as manifest in the resurgence of military coups in the region. We therefore insist that the Nigerian masses must rise up to defend their hard earned democracy by exercising their franchise as major stakeholders in the electoral process, the poor performance of political leaders notwithstanding.

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