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SKEWED DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC SERVICE FAILURES: A DISCOURSE ON A PERSISTENT CHICANERY IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

ABDULSALAM HASSAN BELLO,
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION,
BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO
abdussalambello@yahoo.com
08065282945

ABSTRACT
Since the winning of political independence on the 1st day of October, 1960, it has become a tradition by failed republics in Nigeria to cover up their administrative failures behind the veneer of serving in a nascent democracy. Paradoxically, the political demagogues have failed to acknowledge the truism that a centenarian has indisputably come of age, by all standards. Therefore, Nigerians may no longer appreciate the scapegoating status accorded to the guiltless democracy. Through the theoretical guides of the Elite Theory, our desk study found the premeditated emasculation of democratic principles as the truest causative agent to the persistent failure of public policies in Nigeria. The paper recommends that political gladiators, the deceptive governing elite and their self-centered bureaucrats should stop accusing the democracy they deliberately disfigured for their administrative woes. Rather, they better turn over a new leaf by following the path of genuine nationalistic and patriotic service to the nation before it becomes too late. The paper suggests further, that all patriotic Nigerians should unreservedly venture into politics. Thus, upon capturing the mantle of leadership, they can redeem the mishandled democracy by emulating the Chinese bitter pills of severity upon all culprits of corruption, laundering, treachery and sabotage.

Keywords: Centenary experience, Civil Administration, Elite, Maladministration and Nascent Democracy.

INTRODUCTION
The year 1923 happened to be a significant landmark in the Nigerian political history. It was in that year the then colonial administration, for the first time, granted permission for Nigerians to contest for electoral posts. Hence, three candidates from Lagos and one from Calabar were elected to serve in the colonial governorate of Sir Hugh Clifford (Fage & Alabi, 2007). Even though, the Nigerian democratic experience is today over a hundred years old, yet it is still being referred to as a **nascent democracy**. To the greatest displeasure of the Nigerian literati, the clichés: 'a young democracy, a nascent democracy and a practicing democracy' are still frequently cited by failing Nigerian bureaucrats and their political masters in their bid to hush up their administrative fiascos. **Theaim** of this paper is to reflect on the factors responsible for the failure to thrive of the Nigerian Democracy despite it's over 100 years of existence. The first stage of the paper introduces the subject matter; the second stage explains the theoretical basis of the study; the third stage discusses its methodology; the fourth discussed the key principles of democracy alongside the major findings of the study; while, the last stage concludes the study together with recommendations for the best ways to sustain democracy and ensure effective public service delivery in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is conducted within the purview of the Elite (ET) theory. The theory is deemed relevant to this study for its focus on explaining the behaviors of role players in politicking

and policy processing. The theory facilitates our understanding on the relationships between the elite and the masses; as well as the relationships between the governing elite and the non-governing elite.

The Elite Theory

The 'elite theory was originally a liberal anti-Marxist theory that later metamorphosed into a radical left wing critique of pluralism. The theory could be deemed the *magnum opus* of two Italian sociologists Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca. Other prominent scholars frequently associated with the theory include: Robert Michels, James Burnham and C. Wright Mills.

The popularity and intellectuality of the theory followed the introduction of the modern bureaucratic system in public organizations. Hence, through bureaucracy one can rise to eminence in their chosen career. In other words, bureaucracy is a system that facilitates promotions to high administrative positions thus making one a veritable element of decision-making on organizational and governmental issues. This *modus operandi* automates the person's qualification for membership of the elite group.

The term elite refer to the group of **few** experts who exclusively manage all the vital aspects of the society; while, the masses are the **majority** whose socio-economic and political destinies are controlled by the former (the elite). The theory is known for its major assumptions which include the following that:

The masses are politically indifferent; that is why they are more preoccupied with protecting and promoting their private interests; rather than the societal interests.

The elite' hold the monopoly of social power with which they control the resources of the key socio-political and economic institutions. More importantly, the elite' use any means available to retain that power.

The elite possess intelligence, cunning or skill and some other fundamental psychological traits that give them the leverage to function as leaders; while, the masses are deemed uncaring, incompetent and unable to govern themselves. Therefore, it becomes functionally necessary to appoint a leader, from the elite' group, who will be using the aforesaid intelligence, cunning or skills to manage governmental or organizational complexities.

The elite' constitutes the highest achievers in all areas of intelligence, character, skill, capacity, etc. The governing elite' govern by means of coercion or cunning through the instrumentality of the non-governing elite (technocrats, managers, and civil-servants).

The elite' constitute the organized minority; while the masses are the unorganized majority. The organization of the elite' group which is a function of their three basic qualities (group-consciousness, coherence and conspiracy) gives them the latitude to ensure that their interests superpose all other interests in the society. Therefore, the elite' remain the principal custodians of the dominant interests, structures and values of the society. The aforementioned qualities also give them the power to perpetuate their dominion over the mass population.

For the masses, on the other hand, their unity does not occur spontaneously from within; "rather, the masses are united as a single unit only when it is integrated from outside by the elite" (Parry, 1988, p. 55). This type of unity is artificial and is only meant to help the elite achieve their private interests such as social or religious status, election or legislative victory, as well as the revolutionary overthrow of the incumbent ruling elite, etc.

Interestingly the theory, like all other theories, is believed to have some weaknesses which include the following:

That, besides the inability of the theory to adequately explain the degree of cohesion the elite possesses, the so-called group consciousness, cohesion and conspiracy may be feeble taken into cognizance the ease of displacing the reigning elite by the power-aspiring elite in many instances.

Secondly, the historical consistency of certain human attributes is never permanent. In other words, political institutions, scales of operation, degree of bureaucratization and economic structures are dynamic and they change over time.

Thirdly, even though the theory assumes that the elite exercise their supremacy within a 'system' (political party, a local community or a nation, etc), the theory fails to explain whether there are overlaps between the political, economic and social 'sub-systems' within the overall system. Furthermore, it fails to explain which sub-system commands the greatest influence. These loopholes necessarily raise doubts as to where the boundaries could be located especially between one system or sub-system and another.

Fourthly, the theory could be criticized on grounds of failing to lay down a time-frame within which its contentions could be tested. For example, we may not know how soon would a particular elite group meet its waterloo and be replaced by another.

Finally, the theory could be seen simply as a mere critique of Marxism; thus reflecting the all out efforts of the pro-bourgeois scholars to undermine its epistemological prestige by reducing its status from that of a science to a mere political ideology.

Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings identified above, the arguments forwarded by the theory remain the theoretical guides of this study. The expectation is that, the theory would ultimately facilitate our understanding of the political goings-on and the administrative maneuverings that bestow the legendary **agelessstatus** to the Nigerian Democracy.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used both primary and secondary sources of data for its analysis. The primary data was elicited through field interviews with erudite politicians and academics. While the secondary data was garnered by exploring relevant information from government documents, text books, scholarly journals and magazines, as well as the internet. Moreover, the target respondents were drawn through Purposive Sampling technique. Instrumentally, the Socratic method of data generation and processing was used in the collection and transcription of the answers obtained from the interview sessions.

THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF TRUE DEMOCRACY

This study assumes that fervent adherence to the key principles of true democracy is the secret behind the successes of democratic regimes everywhere in this world. In fact, it is the engine of development, peace and progress; while, the skewed or defective republics that fail to abide by the democratic principles are the ones obliged to pay the heavy prices of administrative malfeasance; hence paving way to increases in poverty, insecurity and hardships. The principles include the following:

Citizens Participation

Active participation of the citizen in democratic activities is one of the foremost principles of a true democracy. Participation in political activities includes, among other things, becoming

a card-carrying member of a political party, attending party meetings and campaign rallies, contesting for a political post or a party leadership position.

This paper assumes that participation in politics at gladiatorial level is significantly increasing; unlike at spectator level which is rapidly decreasing. The reason for the increase in politicking at gladiatorial level may be attributed to the indisputable reality that politics is today the quickest way to richness and reverence (Ogunbiyi, 2022). On the other hand, the reason for the decrease at spectator level is because Nigerians are now getting fed up with government and the people who represent them in government (Obaseki, 2022). In other words, people are fed up with the bad faiths and manners of politicians hence the dreadful hemorrhages of voter turn outs on election days. However, on the question of people's participation in policy process, one can confidently say, there is certainly nothing to show! This is because the major stakeholders are usually not adequately contacted before making vital decisions pertaining to them. In other words, politicians merely run public affairs as dictated by their whims and caprices.

Equality

In a true democracy, all citizens are treated equally without any form of discrimination on all grounds. The citizens are also given equal opportunity to either vote or be voted for as long as they have the requisite qualifications.

As clearly stated in section 15 (1) of the 1999 Constitution, the motto of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress. Accordingly, section 15 (2) states: that national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited. Moreover, besides free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the Federation; the Constitution guarantees full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation (Section 15 (3 a, b). Paradoxically, what Nigerians are witnessing are mere contrarieties in almost all the aforementioned provisions. The questions of unity and faith are mere political gimmicks because Nigerians have never left the world in doubt of their dual loyalties or their hankering to secede from the federal arrangement. In fact, the struggle to secede has been a recurring phenomenon since the 60^{s}.

Political Tolerance

In a true democracy, all eligible citizens have the rights to vote for candidates of their choice. Likewise, they can support any political party without persecution or prosecution. In other words, citizens can form political parties and canvass for support of their parties and programs. Likewise, all shades of opinions, including those coming from opposition groups, are tolerated, debated upon and accepted if found useful.

Moreover, another principal aspect of political tolerance is accepting genuine defeats in democratic elections. Perhaps one of the beauties of a true democracy is the ever readiness to accept the will of the people especially during elections. It is indubitably natural that there must be winners and losers in all elections. The victors are often the ones deemed the most competent to run the government hence the reason for their victory. Ironically, the losers sometimes refuse to accept the verdict of the voters under the pretense of election riggings and other lousy excuses. The refusal to accept the results of a freely and fairly conducted election is a truncation and disfigurement of true democracy; the consequences of which could result in chaos and violence.

Verily, this paper assumes that Nigeria has recorded a significant improvement on many aspects of political tolerance. For instance, in most parts of Nigeria, including remote rural areas, all eligible Nigerians enjoy the freedom of membership of any political party of their choice. However, although in their bid to demoralize electorates in electoral wards that are predominantly of the opposition groups, the also-ran politicians, on many occasions, hire thugs to destabilize the serenity of the electoral process. The Nigerian electoral law adjudicates on all such cases reported in good time. Likewise, even though it is becoming a tradition that most vanquished contestants hardly accept defeats, the Nigerian electoral act manages such disputes up to the level of Supreme Court verdict on cases pertaining to the offices of Governors or the president. Most interestingly, the vitality of the freedom of expression in Nigeria is comparable to many civilized nations; hence both the individuals and the media outlets enjoy unbridled freedom of voicing out their opinions on all governmental actions and inactions. In fact, many opposition groups have been granted licenses to own and operate private media organizations through which they critique the programs and policies of government.

Accountability and transparency

A truly democratic government is always responsive, responsible and accountable to the people that voted it into power. In other word, since the wishes and aspirations of the people outweigh the whims and caprices of both elected and appointed officials, all governmental decisions must therefore be in line with the collective needs and demands of the people. Instrumentally, both the general public and the media are guaranteed unlimited access to vital information on all administrative and political goings-on. More precisely, an accountable and transparent government is the one that explains the reasons for her actions and inactions.

So, to ensure accountable and transparent governance, each parliamentarian is expected to have a functional office in their constituency as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. The essence is that the parliamentarian would be a people person who is abreast to the demands and fears of the electorates. Likewise, the office will be the medium for briefing the people and seeking for their opinions on all bills brought to the house. The opinion unanimously agreed upon remains their position on the floor of the Assembly. Unfortunately, the rule of the game is not strictly followed in most occasions. In fact, even where the legislature manages to open the constituency office it, in most cases, only operates when elections are at the door step. In fact, some legislators are never seen again after election victory until the wake of fresh elections. Consequently, the wishes and aspirations of the people are usually jettisoned in favor of personal interests. Worst still, many political leaders are gradually becoming more interested in implementing programs that make them richer and cheaply more popular; hence the reason why “rural areas are usually grossly neglected as far as development projects and infrastructure are concerned” (Mammud, 2019, p.445).

Regular, Free and Fair Elections

Periodic, free and fair elections are amongst the rudiments of a true democracy. The essence of holding regular elections is to rule out all tendencies for dictatorial regimes or a President for life. Free election, on its part, means citizens are guaranteed their fundamental rights of choosing their leaders and peacefully removing them without fear of all kinds; while a fair election is a least costly and corrupt-free election. It is an election that opens the window of opportunity so widely for all candidates of merit to contest for any political posts regardless of wealth or material possessions. It is an election that is devoid of all obstacles to all categories of contenders of political posts.

This paper assumes that elections in Nigeria are to a significant extent regular and free. But, the question of fairness is indisputably absent. The reason is that, the political demagogues have managed to substantially monetize the whole democratic process in such a way that only a super rich can have the backing of political godfathers to contest for any exalted political office (Lamidi, 2017). The case, this paper assumes, could be an exception where the political elite want to capitalize on the exceptional popularity of the candidate to achieve their self-centered ambitions. In such cases they sponsor the candidate as they did to President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015.

Zero tolerance on abuses of Power

In a true democracy, both elected and appointed public officials are prevented from abusing powers entrusted in them. That means, all vices including misconducts, corruption, laundering, etc are severely and decisively dealt with. Furthermore, the prohibitions from abuse of powers apply to all government officials of all ranks.

In Nigeria, the anti-graft agencies such as the EFCC & ICPC are now the busiest government departments whose activities command the topmost schedules of the media outlets. The stories of bizarre corruption cases are aired on media platforms on virtually daily basis. For instance, even though Nigeria no longer has a functional air carrier, yet, a significant number of politicians, from both the legislative and executive arms, now own their private jets. What is more worrying is that no matter the magnitude of thievery, the culprit is canonized upon defection to the ruling party. In fact, on many occasions, such corrupt officials are conferred with prestigious titles by our traditional authorities (Jiddere, 2017).

Respects for Fundamental Human Rights

In all true democracies the citizens are accorded certain fundamental rights that distinguish them from lower animals. In other words, the rights justify the worth and dignity of the human person. Thus, besides the freedoms to life, to privacy, to expression, to association, to peaceful assembly and to all forms of discrimination; the unbridled access to quality education and good medical services are among the fundamental rights accorded all.

Paradoxically, the galaxy of Almajiris (street beggars) that roam about the nook and cranny of major cities, particularly in the Northern Region, looking for food to eat suggest that certain fundamental rights are not enjoyed by some Nigerians (Bello, 2017). Likewise, the strike action that is gradually becoming a ritual in the Nigerian Public Sectors is another justification that certain constitutional rights are not respected in the country.

Exercising sufficient checks and balances

In a true democracy the three arms of government (legislature, executive, and judiciary) check the excesses of one another in order to "protect citizens' rights and keep the state from becoming a dictatorship in order to maintain good governance" (Ezeodili*et al*, 2023, p.3). Hence, the representative assemblies have some measure of control over the executive branch and vice versa; while, the judiciary is free and independent of the other branches of government.

This paper assumes that the so-called checks and balances are merely to a very limited extent. What is evidently clear is that the Executive is now the most powerful among the three organs of government. The executives, particularly the state governors, are the ones who control not only the other two arms but even the reigning political parties.

Adherence to the Rule of Law

A true democracy is completely devoid of untouchables. In other words no one, no matter their position or social status is above the law. The law of the land is supreme, thus all litigants are treated equally and fairly before the law courts. Each citizen is expected to abide by the provisions of the constitution and is liable to punishment upon violating any of the provisions.

As long as the Rule of Law is strictly adhered to, Nigerians would not have found themselves in the sorry state they are languishing in. The penchant to break laws or to subvert legislation is easily identifiable in virtually all government departments. For instance, the bizarre repudiation of the verdict of the Nigerian Supreme Court over the question of the continuation of the use of old Naira notes by the Central Bank of Nigeria under the erstwhile Buhari regime substantially bared the subservience of the Nigerian Judiciary. Instrumentally, the setting aside of the Nigerian Constitution by the Supreme Court itself to pave way for Ahmad Lawan (the then President of the Senate) to contest, once again, for the seat of a Senator, without first undergoing primary election as stipulated by the Constitution, is another clear justification that **subversion of the Rule of Law** is now a firmly entrenched institution in Nigeria. To cap it all, even the coercive instruments of the state (Police/Army) do not seem to be strictly obeying traffic regulations thus setting a bad precedent for younger Nigerians.

Operating Multi-Party System

Even though the one party system is the preferred system in socialist democracies, the neo-liberalist democracies opt for multi-party system. The arch rationale behind the multi-party system is to avoid the emergence of a despot or a dictator. Other advantages accruable from multi-party system include giving the citizens ample opportunity to elect the candidates deemed most suitable on all elective posts. The government itself benefits from different shades of opinion on all vital national issues in such a way that the best alternative courses of action could be chosen while making governmental decisions.

Paradoxically, the essence of operating the multi-party system in Nigeria is defeated. Part of the reason is that even though the Nigerian political history has not hitherto recorded the emergence of a dictator or a despot, the question of electing the most suitable candidates because of the existence of many parties is counterfactual. The election of a right candidate especially for higher executive posts is sheer luck. Part of the reason is that the political elite have unpatriotically dogmatized politicking such that the attribute of merit no longer counts during elections; rather, money, religion, ethnicity, sectionalism, and other parochial interests constitute the preferred winning instruments for elective posts.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS:

Going by our analyses as interpreted above, the study discovers:

That, Nigerians may be in a very tight corner today because they have made a grave mistake of entrusting the management of the political destiny of the nation in the hands of unpatriotic, incompetent, irresponsible ethnic chauvinists. This unfortunate situation informs the reason for the perpetual failure of public policies and programs in the country.

That, the seizure of power from the firmly entrenched egocentric political managers may not be easy because they have already grown evil wings through primitive accumulations; hence the reason they managed to intensively monetize politics in such a way that merit

alone cannot be the requisite for victory in democratic elections. Consequently, public treasury plundering is, by all honesty, most likely to continue since wealth cornucopia is now deemed the only viable conveyor belt to political fortunes. Unfortunately, this informs the reason for the gross abuse of patronage where each political appointee from local government councilor to a federal minister focuses attention and energy on how to amass wealth so that they can have the means to contest in subsequent elections. Another obvious repercussion of the aforementioned imbroglio is that; the intensive commercialization of politics has triggered the coming-to-stay of the devilish 'sit tight' mentality by many political leaders. This is more evident where very old and weary politicians are now reluctant to retire from active politicking because of the obvious bankability of the political industry.

The political monsters are now religiously determined to protract their relevance in politics by clearing way for their children, friends and soft touches to become the legatees of the political status, prestige and loot they amassed. By so doing, the living hell scenario of Nigerians is most likely to continue.

The legislature is most likely to be the strongest organ of government in the near future because the 'politics-for-life-syndrome' is now inducing the affluent Ex-Governors to find safe harbors in the Legislative Houses.

To cap it all, Nigerians are most likely to keep on wallowing in abject poverty and despair in as much as the current crop of leaders remains at the helm of affairs. The reason is that most of them are incompetent, uncommitted, unpatriotic and unflinchingly self-centered.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS:

The central contention of this study suggests that the pretext that public policies are failing in Nigeria because the country is operating under a nascent democracy is implausible. The reason is that Nigerian democratic experience began since 1923, exactly 101 years now. Thus, what is closer to truth is that, the practice of democracy is deliberately mistreated by the political scoundrels who happen to be at the helm of affairs for quite long. It is indisputable, for instance, that the type of democracy being practiced under the current dispensation is neither based on any political ideology, nor adhering to the key principles of true democracy; hence, the reason for the apparent administrative irresponsibility and consequently public service failures Nigerians are witnessing. The reigning parties at all levels of government appear more attractive to politicians because they are seen as the safest means for self-enrichment. This is more evident taken into cognizance the frequency of carpet crossings of key political players from one political party to another; especially at the wake of election seasons. The worst part of the whole scenario is that, party loyalists are usually reluctant to demythologize the rationale behind such deeds; talk less of making any move to change the *modus vivendi*. Furthermore, Nigerians are today living witnesses to the gross destruction of youthful energies. Thus, instead of developing the youths to become useful citizens Nigeria will be proud of; our politicians are destroying their futures. The youth are being used as party vanguards, henchmen of political demagogues, as well as election-rigging instruments. The main implications of this development comprise promoting criminality, drug abuse and emasculation of democracy thus further darkening Nigeria's socio-economic cum political futures. The reason is that, the youths being spoiled are indisputably the leaders of tomorrow; or more precisely, the managers of Nigeria's political future. What is more disheartening is that, the proliferation of people who turn millionaires overnight as a result of political accidents is further corrupting the minds of the Nigerian youths, distorting their future and the future of the country as well. The failure of Nigeria to

diversify her economy and to provide adequate and low-cost energy for her domestic industries has paved-way for the rule of scarcity in the labor market; hence the multiplication of job-seekers who may end up getting nothing less than joining the **bandwagon**. Moreover, patronage and spoilage systems are grossly abused by the politicians in their scramble for all appointment opportunities that become available. With brutal frankness, meritocracy is being deliberately jettisoned in favor of mediocrity. That is why, politicians now flagrantly buy up all available appointment offers to hand out to party stalwarts. Unfortunately, the politicians do not mind whether the recipients of such appointments have the requisite qualifications and or expertise to handle the jobs being offered to them. The worst part of the saga is that there is, hitherto, no effective legislation to halt the imbroglio.

The findings and concluding reflections discussed above justify the worth of the captainship of the **Elite Theory** to this study. Hence, as Abdullahi (2015) argues, the political elite lacks the administrative competence to move the country forward via democratic means; "instead, it is creating a plutocracy that is hindering the process of humane societal development in Nigeria (12)". Or as Umar (2015) asserts, that the *modus operandi* characterizing the extant Nigerian political system is obviously antithetical to the one "that would add quality to democratic and hence accountable governance (73-74)".

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the triumphs of justice over injustice, competence over incompetence, selflessness over selfishness and consequently the enjoyment of affluence, peace, prosperity and descent living; Nigerians must join hands to establish a sustainable democracy via mass pressure, fearless and dedicated press, as well as vibrant and incorruptible civil society as Weizel (2009) rightly suggested. Perhaps, the best way to do that is to embark on collective repudiation of all monetary inducements during elections. Undoubtedly, in such instances the elite will fully respect the principles of democracy and opt for the right democratic and administrative practices.

The paper suggests that the dream of good governance is a practical impossibility until competent, patriotic and well-wishing Nigerians venture actively into politics. Eventually, the proliferation of good people in politics will pave way for the emergence of the right caliber of leaders that Nigerians have been aspiring for quite long.

Again, the paper recommends institutionalizing the legendary 'carrot-and-stick formulae' in dealing with the Nigerian Politicians and Bureaucrats. In this way, Nigerians should ensure the longevity of all patriotic, dedicated and altruistic politicians at the helm of affairs, as it obtains in the civilized nations. Likewise, the honest and industrious bureaucrats who have rendered selfless service to the nation should be acknowledged, revered and prestigiously rewarded; whereas, the bad ones should be condemned and ruthlessly dealt with.

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