

POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA: CAUSES, IMPACTS AND PHILOSOPHIC SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Political instability has remained an inescapable factor in Nigerian nation. This is as it is unabatedly defies the strategies and efforts of well meaning Nigerians, and has continued to eat deep into Nigerian political space. But how and why did political instability become pronounced in Nigerian polity? This paper analytically investigates the causes and impacts of political instability in Nigeria, and proffers some philosophic solutions. The study however finds that among other factors, Nigerian political instability stems from different political understandings, interpretations and applications by different people in government. This is coupled with the inherited colonial system of governance that largely conflicts with the political belief of indigenous Nigerian ethnic groups. The paper also finds out that political instability in Nigeria results to spate of militarized polity, incessant agitations, insurgency, corruption, poor leadership and followership. The study therefore concludes that unless Nigerian society is restructured in a way that gives diverse ethnic groups and citizens a sense of belonging, the country will continue to experience dire political instability.

Key words: Causes; Impacts; Philosophic; Political Instability; Solution

Introduction

Evidently, the spate and endemic nature of political instability in Nigeria is worrisome. This is as it drives poor governance, collapse of critical sectors, unemployment, mass poverty, violent agitation, terrorism and conflict. Political instability in Nigeria has defied every leadership strategy of successive governments and well meaning Nigerians. This is as these strategies are often not in congruence with the political interpretations and understanding of diverse indigenous ethnic groups. On the other hand, the managements of Nigerian polity often create antagonistic tempos that also foul political stability. As such, political instability has become conspicuously the character of successive Nigerian political dispensation. This poor condition threatens the very existence

of Nigerian state and her citizenry. This is as it scares investors and hinders production, industry, agriculture and gainful employment.

Understanding the Concept of Political Instability

Unexplained concept is largely a misnomer obstructing understanding and knowledge, but analysis clarifies, makes explicit, creates better insight, and points out the meaning inherent in words (Chinweuba, 2020). As such, there is great need to analyze political instability which is an outstanding concept in this discourse. Political instability is a concept used to depict uncertain public affairs of a country. It as well points to the fluctuating condition of different people's powers and their exercise in a group, organization or country. Political instability is therefore the quality of unstable state of affairs in governance of a country. In this sense, political instability means a shaky, unsteady, tottering, wobbling and unsafe condition within the governance of a state. This further implies that political instability is a situation not held or fixed securely; a degeneration of political structure which is visible in precarious condition and societal upheavals. Based on this, some scholars view political instability as incidence of political upheaval or violence in the society, such as demonstrations, agitations, workers' strike, dissidence, etc (Kolstad, 2019). Thus, any uncertain or fluctuating condition in an organization or government as well as the responsive upset from the people amounts to political instability. Seen in this light, political instability depicts an unhealthy condition in a civil society replete with struggle for power, poor decision making, poor policy implementation and people's show of disapproval.

Historicizing Political Instability in Nigeria

Political instability in Nigeria began from 1914 coercive amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups into one entity. This became the seed of lasting mistrust, suspicion, apprehension and antagonism among these indigenous ethnic groups. This was exacerbated by the activities of pristine Nigerian politicians, who dissipated energy on wrestling power from the colonists, and not on managing the conflicting political interpretations and understandings of the diverse indigenous ethnic groups. In congruence with this, the Constitution drafting committee (1979) documents that these pristine politicians were pre-occupied "with power and material benefits, that political ideologies as to how a society can be governed and ruled to the advantage of all hardly entered their calculation" (p. 35). As such, the nationalists neglect to put in place the necessary socio-political institutions and structures needed to cushion the effects that often emanate from

societal transformations as well as the conflicting ethnic political doctrines. More so, the nationalists refrain from establishing a positive national orientation towards fostering unity and mutual trust among Nigerian ethnic groups.

Rather, these pristine politicians were bent on divisive policies and actions that fostered lasting political instability. Such actions include the formation and control of political parties and governance based on ethnic lines. Thus, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) dominated by Igbo was formed and controlled by the Eastern region and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) dominated by Hausa-Fulani was formed and controlled by the Northern region and Sir Ahmadu Bello. The Action Group (AG) dominated by the Yoruba was formed and controlled by the Western region and Chief Obafemi Awolowo. These, indeed formed the trajectory of political parties in Nigeria as well as instability. (Emeka - Isife, 2020, 267).

Since "no party was able to win a simple majority of the 312 seats in the federal legislature to enable it form a government", the coalition of NCNC and NPC in December 12, 1959 general elections solidified political instability in Nigeria (Ikejiani-Clerk, 1989, p. 245). This is as it ridicules the AG party which was left on the opposition, and displays political and structural imbalance, ethnic domination and hegemony as well as despotism in the polity. The retaliatory actions of the opposition AG party however charged the polity with great instability and bedeviled the first republic. These actions are glaring in the "the Western crises of 1962, the Nigerian census controversy of 1962 and 1963, the Federal election crises of 1964 and the Western Nigerian election crises of 1965" (Ojiako, 1981, pp. 3-4).

In addition to these, the incursion of the military in Nigerian politics also strengthened political instability in the country. This is based on their coups and counter coups as well as implementation of draconian pronouncements, edicts and decrees. For instance, the promulgation of Decree No. 33 of the Military Ruling Council (MRC) under General Aguiyi Ironsi abolished all the political, ethnic and cultural associations that had served as the platform for the aggregation of popular opinions (Ajayi, 2013). The Decree No. 34 of May 24, 1966 similarly abolished regional governments and solidified the unitary structure. These in all ramifications severed the remaining stable trajectory in Nigerian politics and fostered instability. With these came the Nigerian-Biafran civil war

that lasted from 1967 to 1970 and which infused more acrimony and instability in Nigerian polity.

Consequently, post civil war Nigerian political space has been laden with various kinds of instability. This instability became pronounced as subsequent regimes create more imbalance, marginalization, discrimination, etc in the political system. More so, subsequent political dispensations and processes became entangled with ethnic politics, egoistic aggrandizement, ethnic hegemony and militarized governance. And so, the so-called triumph of democracy in Nigeria is actually a continuation of military juntas (Onikan in Onuh, 2001; Kukah, 2009). This is as Nigerian democracy has turned to oligarchy. These oligarchs are now the cabals who in alliance with the military and their cronies alternate themselves in government posts for their personal gain. The dire effect of this predatory state is visible in the austerity measures, clueless policies, incompetence, negligence of democratic principles, unemployment, inflation and mass poverty which persistently mount tension and instability in Nigerian polity, making the future of the country uncertain.

Causes of Political Instability in Nigeria

With different managements from different political and cultural backgrounds, Nigerian political system is unstable from time to time. For these managements often execute different interpretations, understandings and applications of political doctrines imbibed from diverse cultural backgrounds. In this way, these managements often create antagonistic tempos that foul political stability. This stability is truncated further by political gestures from these individuals within the management as each try to actualize his political and cultural demands or expectations.

Besides, the Nigerian inherited colonial pattern of governance also ruptures the stability of the country (Emeka - Isife, 2020). This heritage made post independence Nigeria a continuation of colonial governance. As such, the major change was the replacement of expatriates with indigenous politicians. And these replacements were even manipulated and imposed on the people paving way for subsequent culture of imposing political candidates on the masses (Achebe, 2012). Based on these, post independence Nigeria is characterized by political manipulations, maneuver, coercion and imposition of political candidates on the people.

Worst still, post independence Nigeria still run “ready-made state disposing enormous power but with few virile institutions that could check the abuse of these powers” (Akinola, 1994, p. 27). This is coupled with the fact that the inherited colonial socio-political system does not largely conform with the existent pattern of life among most indigenous Nigerian tribes and cultures. As such, there has been constant conflict within the government circle in the verge to make this inherited political system functional among the indigenous Nigerian people. However, victims of this inherited socio-political system does all it takes to redirect governance in accordance with their pattern of life. And in expression of their grievances, there have been consistent upheavals visible in demonstrations, riots, thwarting of political processes, etc. Indeed, the Nigerian inherited colonial pattern of governance is one of the bases of the mutual suspicion against government policies till date. In reference to these, Olusoji (2012) documents that;

there was no way in which the neo-colonial social formation inherited by Nigeria with its conditions of dislodgement, confusion, dependence, foreign domination, alienation of the people from the state, an unproductive and dependent dominant class and structural disabilities could have been stable or united following political independence on 1st October 1960 (p. 195).

The great impact of colonial heritage in Nigeria also includes the militarized political culture, manifested in the political behavior of Nigerian governments. With this, governance has become coercive orders, combat rather than dialogue, disregard for rule of law and violation of human other political principles. This is exacerbated by the dominance of ex-military men in politics (Etim & Ukpere, 2012, pp. 285-292). These have been the bedrock of political instability in Nigeria.

Another source of political instability is the unhealed wounds of the civil war. Successive Nigerian governments have continued to marginalize the Igbo nation making them feel insure in the country (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017). In fact, the Igbo is within the Nigerian circle treated with every conceivable marginalization and discrimination. Achebe (2012) testifies to this reality, revealing that “Nigerians would probably achieve consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo” (p.74). This attitude divides the Nigerian state leading to various kinds of agitations and secession movements such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), to mention but a few. The activities of

these movements have heated the Nigerian political space causing an unquenchable amount of political instability. Consequently, the international community now views Nigeria as one of the unsafe country in the world for investment and human existence.

Political instability in Nigeria is as well caused by the Niger-Delta paradox (Nweke, 2013). This paradox consists in the fact that Niger Delta crude oil is the mainstay of Nigerian economy. Yet, the Niger Deltans are largely unemployed, impoverished, isolated and deprived of basic infrastructures after more than fifty years of oil exploration. This is again coupled with the fact that their environment has been degraded due to oil spillage and gas flaring. This poor condition has given rise to consistent youth restiveness, kidnapping, militancy and agitation for resource control, making Nigerian polity more unstable (Nmah, 2009; Okoye, 2009).

In addition, *Boko Haram* insurgency is another source of political instability in Nigeria. This is as this group fights for an Islamic state where there will be strict interpretation of Islamic law within Nigerian territory. This is too as many government officials from northern part of Nigeria explicitly and implicitly support the activities of this insurgent group. These officials in one way or the other sabotage Government political plans to the benefit of this group. This attitude however gives credence to Eckstein (1973) congruence theory which holds that political instability in a polity is a function of the degree to which the authority patterns of governmental and segmental units are congruent with one another and consonant within themselves. On the other hand, the *Boko Haram* insurgents attack government facilities, churches and markets, kidnap and rape the citizenry. In fact, the attacks of *Boko Haram* insurgents in the North East Nigeria have reduced that zone to a shadow of itself. With these, everything is affected; the politics and economy, security personnel that has been overstretched as well the existence of the common people in that region. This, in many ways weakens the political system and activities leading to constant political instability.

Also among the causes of political instability in Nigeria is poor governance. This is governance replete with sentiments, "incoherent and non inclusive policies, government lip-service and corruption, tribal and party consciousness" (Chinweuba, 2019, p. 101). Indeed, "the irrationality of most political authorities and aspirants of governance" in Nigeria is also glaring in the desperation of the

ruling parties and incumbent authorities to capture, exercise and retain power by hook or crook, absolute control of public institutions, neglect of quality education, other arms of government and rule of law, spate of leadership apathy and mass killing of innocent citizens” (ibid).

More so, people in successive Nigerian governments use their political offices to advance their egoistic interests and needs, those of their families, tribes and loyalists. As such, “it is extremely difficult to get a government policy in Nigeria that is strictly objective and for collective interest” (ibid). Worst still, governance in Nigeria is mostly managed by corrupt despotic mediocre and touts. Their activities often trigger political instability and they at times trigger the same situation consciously for their personal advantage and those of their cronies. These mediocre and touts do not genuinely emerge from the will of the people at the polls, but from the Nigerian culture of electoral rigging and manipulations (ibid). As such, Nigeria is globally viewed as a country, where absurdities and poor governance take precedence and political instability remains unabated.

Impact of Political Instability in Nigeria

Investment flourishes in stable and conducive polity. Thus, no person, organization and investment flourish in a society with political instability. The magnitude of political instability in Nigeria therefore scares foreign and local investors. As such, many businesses have become defunct, and many multinational companies have departed the shores of Nigeria (Chinweuba, 2020). In this way, political instability undermines revenue generation and income of Nigerian government leading to national bankruptcy. Along this line, political instability in Nigeria has been part of the bedrock of increasing poverty and hunger in the country. This is as it direly affects the market economy leading to market failure and inflation. In fact, political instability poses great hindrance to free, fair and efficient market (Abasifreke & Ikanke, 2019). And there has been tremendous reduction in agriculture, employment, production, availability of goods and services.

On the other hand, the prevalent political instability in Nigeria has weakened the confidence of the masses on government and governance. It again weakens the credibility and integrity of Nigerian government and her citizenry among the international communities. These direly affect Nigerian socio-economic development.

Nevertheless, political instability truncates Nigerian politics and governance. It avails soft landings for political criminals and corrupt elements who cash into the poor situation for their selfish aggrandizement. It also scares tourists. These would have brought with them “favourable ideas, financial exchange, goods and services that will enhance Nigerian socio-political and economic development” (Chinweuba, 2020, p. 33). Thus, the flourishing Nigerian tourist sites like Obudu cattle ranch, Yankari Game Reserve, Oguta lake, Ikegosi springs, Gurara falls, Mambilla plateau, Presidential Hotels, recreation parks, etc are fast becoming history due to prevalent political instability in the country.

However, political instability in Nigeria is the catalyst behind the unabated collapse of critical infrastructures and sectors. This is as it has made those in government unable to pay full attention to these infrastructures and sectors like roads, basic amenities, health system, etc. The result has been low life expectancy and massive migration of Nigerians to other countries. Political instability has indeed weakened successive Nigerian governments paving way for menace of robbers, bandits, kidnappers, herdsmen and terrorists to remain adequately unchecked. Along this lane, there has been spate of low and high level corruption, as well as epileptic socio-economic development in the country.

Curbing Political Instability in Nigeria

For stability to prevail in Nigeria; there is need to restructure the country. Restructuring here

is the reorganization or rearrangement of the constitutional, operational, structural, fiscal, functional, attitudinal, resource management and the other national question concerns of the ethnic nationalities that constitute Nigeria for the purpose of making Nigeria to be more efficient, more acceptable, more productive and above all more equiatable (Olu-Adeyemilanre, 2018, pp.40-52)..

Nwodo (2017) agrees to this, postulating that

restructuring of Nigeria into smaller and Independent Federating units and the devolution of powers to these federating units to control exclusively their human capital development, mineral resources agriculture, and power (Albeit with obligation to contribute to the Federal Government) is the only way to salvage our fledging economy (p. 10).

Truly, restructuring will add efficiency and effectiveness to the political structure, “enhance economic diversification, strong exchange rates and growth of national income” (Chinweuba, 2019, p. 134). It will also enhance public opinion and citizens’ participation in governance, and avail diverse ethnic groups and organizations a sense of belonging. The imperative of restructuring the country however, rests on the fact that the existing unitary system of governance in Nigeria fails to deliver public good. It also fails to protect human life and property. Worst still, it fosters political instability and predatory governance. Indeed, the need for quick restructuring of Nigerian state also predicates on the need to reduce “ethnic bigotry, rivalry, cultural conflict, religious conflict, class struggle, politico-economic mismanagement, corruption and conflict of interest among politicians which constantly heat the polity”, and results to political instability (Ibid, p. 138).

In this restructuring, two models have been canvassed. The conservative model aimed at shedding off some of the executive powers of the federal government to the state and local governments (El Rufai, 2017). These are the powers that have to do with mining license, construction of federal roads and regulation of investment in critical sections of the economy like power. The next is the progressive model revolving on fundamental devolution of power to the states as federating units. This latter model will imply a lean federal government with executive power for external defense, customs, immigration, foreign relations and a federal Legislature and Judiciary to make and interpret laws in these executive areas.

When Nigeria is eventually restructured, there is need to engage the intellectuals towards developing indigenous functional and progressive socio-political ideology that cut across the political belief of diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. This is because the present political instability anchors mainly on the fact that the inherited colonial political systems conflict with indigenous political belief of many Nigerian tribes. An indigenous political system/ideology that consists of common positive denominators of political understanding/belief of diverse Nigerian tribes will therefore minimize political instability in the country.

To follow restructuring of Nigerian state is value re-orientation and value oriented civic education. This is because, part of the problems bedeviling Nigerian state is misplacement of values and adherence to negative values. This condition was promoted by colonial administrations through involvement of

never-do-well and mediocre as warrant chiefs and administrators to the repudiations of the values of integrity, good reputation, merit and patriotism. Most indigenous leaders also sowed the negative value of nepotism, tribalism, favouritism, indignity and unpatriotism through their actions within the Nigerian state. The new generation seems to have copied these negative values hence political instability has persisted in the entire country. This calls for value re-orientation towards achieving human responsibility, responsiveness and stable Nigeria society (Ajibola & Audu, 2014).

Along this lane, a great concern should be given to the review of the Nigerian educational system to conform to the demand of the labour market and fostering of Nigerian economy. The emphasis should therefore shift from paper qualification to functional or pragmatic education (Okoli & Okoli, 2014). The government should indeed create a road map on how to grow the economy through small acquisition and vocational education. For, in the 21st century, knowledge has taken over as the greatest factor of production, rendering to a secondary position the traditional factors of production (land, labour and capital). Thus, economic structures and systems are now under rapid continuous change in consonance with the rapid turnover of knowledge. In other words, the economies that do well in this new global order are those that will succeed at creating knowledge based advantage.

To minimize political instability in Nigeria still, there is also need for independent law enforcement agencies, investigative journalism, strong and effective judicial system. This would be possible when laws are amended to strengthen these institutions for a better Nigeria. Along this line, the new Nigerian leaders need to recline to pragmatic ideologies and institutions that represent the interest of the greater number of the citizenry. The socio-political and economic systems of restructured Nigeria should be built on such ideologies (Ademola, 2014). In the restructured condition, the Nigerian public must begin to encourage leaders whose integrity and patriotism has been outstanding. These must be leaders with strong political will and enough sagacity to enhance the stability and sustainable development of the country. In addition, Nigerian government should urgently address the grievances of various agitating groups; encourage youth empowerment, growth of agriculture and industry in order to reduce the rate of unemployment. This will also boost national income, reduce political instability and Nigerian dependence on foreign countries.

Conclusion

Political instability prevails in Nigeria mostly because of poor leadership. Most of these leaders are truly deficient in integrity and patriotism, morally bankrupt and primordially sentimental. In addition to these, the activities of most Nigerian leaders are not devoid of personal and tribal interests. Some of them even induce confusion in order to achieve their parochial egoistic aim. Hence, Nigerian political system and governance lack internal coordination that guarantees stability in a polity. As such, political instability has been the order of the day in the country. And unless the people at the helm of affairs overhaul their poor mentality and channel their actions to patriotic direction, political instability will finally collapse the Nigerian state. But to strengthen Nigerian politics would require a set of patriotic leaders who would see the need to restructure the country, formulate and implement indigenous ideology that reflect the political understanding of diverse Nigerian ethnic groups.

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