From Predatory to Developmental: Appraising Nigeria’s Policy Environment under Democratic Governance (1999-2015)

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Abstract
The question of transforming the Nigerian state from predatory to ‘developmental’ bothers on the relevance, potentials, and capacity of the state as agent of development and partnership in the democratisation process. This in turn provokes some questions: What kind of reforms does the Nigerian state need to make it an agent of development? How is the Nigerian state in Africa to be reconstituted to serve as a bridge between democracy and development? What kind of partnership can exist between the state and civil society in the developmental project? The paper appraises Nigeria’s policy environment as presently constituted under democratic governance. The paper argues that authoritarian characters and ethos of the colonial state, reinforced by successive military dictators have undermined the democratic credentials of the state and also weakened its capacity to promote good governance and economic developments. The apparatuses of the state, rather than being used for collective goods have been turned into instruments for advancing selfish and parochial interests of the minority ruling class. From the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business Reports’, the Nigerian state provides unfriendly environment for doing business. Regulatory and security agencies of the state have equally become repressive tools in a ‘predatory and criminal’ model. The paper appraises the policy environment under democratic governance in Nigeria since 1999. The paper is significant in that it examines the capacity of the state as presently constituted to promote democratic governance and economic development. The creation of an enabling atmosphere for promoting economic and political rights in Nigeria therefore cannot side-track the question of the re-legitimisation of the state and the enhancement of its capacity as a key partner in the developmental process.

Keywords: state, predator, democratisation, developmental, human rights

INTRODUCTION
The restoration of democratic rule to Nigeria after devastating military dictatorships that spanned over two decades, was a monumental event for many Nigerians. The military domination of the national political space had virtually left the national administrative and governance structures desecrated. Military rule, by the nature of its heavy regimentation, constant threat and the actual use of force and its excessive intrusion into both the public and private lives of citizens, suffocates civil society and promotes authoritarianism.

A direct fall-out of decades of military dictatorships in Nigeria is the entrenchment of militarism as a means of governing the society. Military rule placed a premium on violence and force. Dialogue, bargaining, and compromise – all essential elements of democracy were de-emphasised and instead, Nigerians were compelled to submit to the ‘jackboot of military command’. Militarism encompasses more than just the armed forces of a state and their activities, but implies dominant influence of military values, symbols and language on the political, social and economic affairs of the state. Having monopolised the political space for most of the nation’s existence, militarism has become pervasive that the vast majority of civil society has come to regard it either as normal or simply inevitable (Fawole, 2001: 62-63).

Unfortunately, the return of democratic governance did not automatically translate into a structural transformation of the state and its institutions to serve as agent of political and economic developments. The authoritarian ethos that pervaded the military era were transferred and retained under democratic rule making the task of demilitarisation of the national psyche central to the democratisation project in Nigeria. Militarism currently manifests in the establishment of military-constituted security outfits, disregard for the rule of law and insubordination to civil authorities, arbitrary arrest and detention of persons, elevation of violence and repression as indispensable instruments of governance, god-fatherism, human rights violation, and corruption (Adekola, 2010:1; Ogundiya, 2010 :237).
A major lasting legacy of the elongated military dictatorship in Nigeria is the weakening of institutional capacity and the destruction of autonomy of institutions of the state for selfish and personal aggrandisement. Among these institutions are the judiciary, civil service, the police, the electoral institutions and state owned enterprises. These institutions were used for patronage and clientele network through unmerited appointments, unregulated promotions, dubious and inflated contracts and absence of regulatory and disciplinary controls, lack of accountability, among others (Olukoshi, 2000:8). A direct fall-out of the erosion of institutional capacity of state’s institutions is their inability to deliver public goods to justify the huge capital allocation to them. Since returning to democratic rule, Nigerians have not been enjoying the much-desired ‘dividends of democracy’ due to non-performing of public institutions and agencies. Public services such as power supply, telephone services, water supply and fuel distribution have virtually collapsed resulting into endless hardship and suffering for the general populace. In addition, there has not been radical transformation of the agencies of the state into civil and democratic institutions as undue repression, flagrant disobedience to constitutional order, human rights violations and excessive use of force still characterise the operation of agencies like the police force, customs, immigration, armed forces and civil defence force, among others.

Statement of the Problem
A major problem facing the consolidation of democracy in Africa is the translation of the state apparatus from one that served an oppressive state to that of developmental project. This is not a question of dismantling the neo-colonial state as suggested by some analyses but involves the construction of efficient state institutions that will have the capacity to implement developmental goals (Akinrinade, 1998; Mkandawire, 1998). A developmental state will facilitate rapid process of industrialisation and democratisation, while not compromising the goal of social welfare for the people (Adejumobi, 2000). The question of transforming the Nigerian state from predatory to ‘developmental’ bothers on the relevance, potentials, and capacity of the state as agent of development and partnership in the democratisation process. This in turn provokes some questions: What kind of reforms does the Nigerian state need to make it an agent of development? How can the Nigerian state be reconstituted to serve as a bridge between democracy and development? What kind of partnership can exist between the state and civil society in the developmental project?

Limitation of the Study
The major limitation of the study was the non-availability of official data on some socio-economic variables such as education enrolment rate, expansion of industries, rate of inflation, crime rate, and human right abuses, among others. While some data are provided from time to time by government agencies for statistics, their reliability is often questionable due to political interference from time to time.

The Nigerian State in Historical and Theoretical Perspectives
As an ‘entity’ brought into being by the instrumentality of foreign military force, and administered for close to a century by a combination of coercion and co-option, the colonial state did not represent the sovereignty of the people, but rather the abrogation of it (Young, 1988:32). The Nigerian state, rather than emerging as a reaction to the wish of the people, strategically evolved as a colonial instrument for the administration and organisational control of the Nigerian people. Given its primary objectives of subjugation and exploitation of the people, the ‘state’ was relying on force and violence, especially due to its monopoly of the instruments of violence for the realisation of its imperialist objectives. This argument does not dispute the fact that colonialism laid the foundation for the development of modern Nigerian state with the introduction of modern education, transportation, communication, and health-care systems. However, the state was perceived in every respect as ‘alien’, and lacking popular legitimacy, it survived primarily on the strength of force within its control.

The European nation-state model was imposed upon Africa during the past century, first through colonial rule and then through a process of decolonisation governed by a global order in which nation-state status is mandatory for becoming a recognised member of the international system (Basil, 1992). However, the fact that the post-colonial states in Africa have been formally constituted on the model of the western state is not itself evidence of the degree of their institutionalisation. In the postcolonial context, political legitimacy derives from a creatively imprecise interaction between the ‘ancestral’ norms and the logic of the ‘modern’ state. Political theorists have argued that neo-patrimonialism is a common feature of politics in the developing world, especially in Africa (Theobold 1982:548-549; Clapham, 1985). While it is true that personal relationships occur on the margins of all bureaucratic systems, they constitute the foundation and structure of political institutions in Africa. As a result, scholars of African politics have embraced the neo-patrimonial model.
Patrimonialism resulted in a continuous decline of the state’s administrative effectiveness, judicial function, and provision of public services. The capacity of the state was weakened not only by the activities of its personnel but also by informal activities carried out by small farmers, traders, and urban workers: smuggling and barter across borders of primary products, such as diamonds, coffee, gold, tea, ivory, and foodstuffs; unlicensed trade, manufacturing, services, transportation, and construction enterprises; and illegal production or theft of the means of production. All of these activities deprive the state of revenue and contribute to its decline.

Furthermore, given its penchant for forceful extraction of resources from the society without relating itself in any concrete sense to the existential realities of most of its citizens, the Nigerian state has not been able to attract normative legitimacy from the populace. The crisis of legitimacy of the state is evidenced in the inability to build hegemony and promote national unity; the failure to resolve minority issues; promote development in the rural areas; provide infrastructure and basic needs; and democratise the political landscape (Akinrinade, 1998:79).

The rentier state model is also applicable as an analytical framework to discuss the Nigerian state. The production base of the economy is weak and narrowly depends on mostly rents collected from oil, gas and other minerals while subsistence production characterised economic activities at the grassroots. The consciousness of majority Nigerian is fixed towards the state for survival hence the emergence of a rentier economy without a solid diversified production base. The current institutional framework of the economy is one in which all the federating units of the state depend on monthly allocation from the centre for their survival. The centralisation of the resources has further intensified the struggle to capture power at the centre for the control of economic resources (Omoyibo, 2009:6). The narrow production base of the economy also encouraged clientele patronage for political supports and capital accumulation. With severely underdeveloped bureaucratic capability to collect taxes- except from a small percentage of the population in the captive formal sector- rentier states have no qualms deploying an array of predatory options that widens the chasm between the state and its citizens (Chand & Moene, 1997, p. 6).

The economic crisis of the state provoked the orthodoxy paradigm of ‘rolling back’ the state and giving free reins to supposedly ‘free market forces and civil society’ in the 1980s. The state was to be cut off almost completely from the economy and all its facets were to be ‘streamlined and disciplined’ to make it functional. However, although there was a substantial restructuring of state institutions, this did not necessarily translate into appreciable growth. Indeed, some of the adverse consequences of that ‘restructuring’ included diminished access to key social services such as education, and health (which are central to human development). However, in the face of global economic crisis and contemporary security challenges, there has been a paradigm shift regarding the state’s role in sustainable development; it is now been recognised that development without an effective state is impossible (World Bank, 1997).

Assessing the Capacity of the Nigerian State for Economic Development and Democratic Governance

With the returning to democratic governance in Nigeria, the creation of an enabling atmosphere for promoting economic and political rights cannot side-track the question of the re-legitimisation of the state and the enhancement of its capacity as a key partner in the developmental process. The current crisis of neoliberalism as manifested in the global economic crises as well as the resurgence of terrorism on a global scale has marked a decisive return of confidence in the centrality of state in economic and political developments. The twenty-first century is thus witnessing a resurgence of confidence in a new type of ‘developmental and interventionist state’.

In the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business Reports’, African countries are among the most unfriendly environment for doing business (World Bank, 2013-2014 Reports). The 2015 ‘World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Report’ ranked Nigeria 170 out of 189 countries on the ease of doing business in the national environment (World Bank, 2015). The 2015 ranking of 170th position was slightly better compared to the 175th position obtained by Nigeria in the 2014 ranking. The 2015 Report analysed regulations that apply to businesses during their life cycle. Among the factors considered were: start-up procedures and operations; trading and transactions across borders; paying taxes and resolving insolvency; enforcing contracts; labour market regulations; and obtaining credits

Similarly, pervasive human rights (economic, social and political) violations that cast a dark shadow over ‘democratic credentials’ litter Nigerian landscape since returning to democracy in 1999. Regulatory and security agencies of the state have equally become repressive tools in a ‘predatory and criminal’ model.
On the economic front, there is almost total state lock down in the face of perennial fuel scarcity and the attendant hardships of Nigerians coupled with epileptic power supply and irregular payment of salaries by many states. The non-passing of the national budgets almost midway into each financial year has also paralysed activities of the government reducing them to performing only basic functions. Successive economic reforms under different governments have not been sufficient to reverse years of economic decline, deteriorating capacity, weakened institutions and inadequate infrastructure investment while the current plunge in oil prices, stock market decline and the global economic crisis have accentuated the situation (Oteh, 2009).

Democratic rule being celebrated has not radically changed the character of the Nigerian state. Democracy is no more than hollow rituals of periodic electoral exercise that only returns power to recycled political class and their cronies. However, in all honesty, the democratic norms of liberty to vote, express views and compete for positions enshrined in the constitution are largely appropriated by the dominant class that has the resources and backing of the neo-colonial state to form political associations and the chance to stand for elections. Party formation, elections, and other democratic rights enshrined in the constitution simply legitimised the rule of the dominant ruling class. Electoral contest in Nigeria is partly symbolic to create an illusion of a valid democratic process but actually the dominant class decides who rules, as it controls, and owns the political parties.

The current democratic experience in Nigeria has also thrown up critical and complex issues of constitutional control and reform of security structures in the country. While the armed forces and other security agencies have been politically discredited, they nevertheless continue to command more than sufficient power to assert their autonomy of both government and society, and also have capacity to undermine elected governments. The deteriorating state of insecurity suggests that civil security agencies are ill-equipped to execute their mandate of protecting society, thereby making government excessively relying on the armed forces. In the face of violent ethno-religious agitations, insurgency, electoral violence, economic sabotage and illegal arms trafficking, armed forces have maintained high profile in maintaining security under successive civilian governments since 1999.

The heavy reliance on the army by a democratic government for the maintenance of peace has raised doubts about subordination of military to civil authority. The potent danger here is that even though the military has disengaged and returned to the barracks, would a civil society whose psyche has been so thoroughly traumatised by militarism be readily capable of operating democratic norms? And would the army remain impartial onlookers as the democratic dispensation passes through the inevitable teething stages? Therefore, restructuring of Nigerian security agencies is urgently required to enhance both professionalism and civil control and accountability.

**Building the Capacity of the Nigerian State for Democracy and Development**

The on-going democratisation project should incorporate the revitalisation of public institutions, which had been weakened under successive military dictatorships and civilian mismanagement. Revelations coming out of different probe panels are scandalously revealing how public agencies and institutions have been used for serving personal and selfish interest of few individuals in the society. Public institutions are the agencies that transform state’s policy into realities; hence their effectiveness would determine to a large extent, the transformation of lives and the delivering of the popularly desired ‘dividends of democracy’. Adequate staffing with competent staff through a competitive and transparent process is the mandatory step of restoring public confidence on public institutions. Additional institutional reforms required are adequate funding, openness and transparency in management, due process in award of contracts and regular regulatory control and auditing by impartial agencies.

While a wholesale dismantling of the state may not be feasible, there is no doubt that there is need for urgent restructuring of state structures. The present composition that arrogates excess power to the centre (federal arm) at the expense of other federating units is illogical and highly susceptible to manipulations especially where the government at the centre is not in control at the state and local units. The Nigerian federation requires a urgent return to true federalism where equal powers are shared among the federating units. The critical apparatuses of the state like the police, immigration, customs, state security service and the armed forces are controlled by the federal arm and in some cases, have been used to achieve personal and selfish interests of the government at the centre.

The entrenchment of ‘true federalism’ may reduce the problem of ethnic and regional parochialisms. Federalism no doubt, allows for the plurality of viewpoints, and enshrines the principle of equality among the different federated nationalities in the
nation-state. Federalisation of the Nigerian polity would need to include the following: (a) a full democratisation of the political institutions; (b) subordination of the military to the authority of the elected civilians as an antidote to military coups; (c) adoption of fiscal federalism through a review of the revenue allocation formula in order to make more resources available to the states and local governments; (d) increasing allocation of resources to the mineral producing communities as compensatory for environmental damages inflicted as a result of exploratory activities, and (e) a drastic reduction in the powers and responsibilities of the federal government to reduce the over-centralisation of politics, and the undue concentration of resources at the centre (Amuwo et al. 1998: 177-179).

Another area the government still needs to frontally address is electoral fraud which poses a major challenge to democracy in Nigeria and by extension, a threat to Nigeria’s security. Successive elections since the return of democratic governance have been characterised by massive fraud and attendant violence, destruction of properties and human displacement. It is not surprising therefore to witness massive security force to monitor and maintain peace during elections, in contravention of normal democratic norms. While successive civilian administrations have acknowledged the massive electoral fraud that desecrates democracy and weakens its capacity as an instrument for mobilisation of national, human and material resources for development; there has not been evidently demonstrated political will to carry out needed electoral reforms in Nigeria.

In addition, the democratic restructuring of the security agencies should be a continuous process. This entails government, civil society and security agencies to forge closer relations among one another in order to demystify and bring security agencies under civil and constitutional control. This will require continuous training, value reorientation, enhancement of professionalism, proper discipline and commensurate remuneration of members of security services to enhance their efficiency and discourage them from becoming willing tools to destabilise the state.

In a democratic entity, a cardinal principle is that the rule of law as stipulated by constitutional provisions should be held sacred. The current practices where governments willfully disregard court injunctions are antithetical to democratic norms. There should strict adherence to the principle of separation of power without the executive usurping the powers of the legislative and judiciary arms through undue interference to preserve the sanctity of democratic governance. The principle of equality before the law should be strictly enforced without biases. The currently provision of immunity to some sections of political office holders should be urgently reviewed as this has been abused for personal benefits.

Finally, there is urgent need for rehabilitation of critical infrastructure to provide enabling environment for economic development. The abysmal decay in the state of public roads, irregular power supply, perennial fuel scarcity among others make the cost of doing business in Nigeria cumbersome and expensive compared to other developing countries. Related to this is the consolidation of peace and harmony as harbinger of development. Efforts should be made to enhance personal, property and business security through peaceful resolution of ethno-religion differences. A peaceful business environment is a necessity to attract foreign investors and to promote a positive image of the country to global community.

CONCLUSION

The paper has undertaken an appraisal of Nigeria’s policy environment to assess the capacity of the state as presently constituted to promote democratic governance and economic development. The analysis has revealed that the authoritarian characters and ethos of the colonial state, reinforced by successive military dictators have undermined the democratic credentials of the state and also weakened its capacity to promote good governance and economic developments. The apparatuses of the state, rather than being used for collective goods have been turned into instruments for advancing selfish and parochial interests of the minority ruling class. Thus the creation of an enabling atmosphere for promoting economic and political rights in Nigeria cannot side-track the question of the re-legitimisation of the state and the enhancement of its capacity as a key partner in the developmental process.

Rehabilitation of the state and enhancement of its functional capacity would demand elevation of the rule of law and constitutional provisions, adherence to true federalism and principles of separation of powers in democratic governance, restructuring of security agencies to ensure civil control, revitalisation of public institutions to ensure their capacity for service delivery, and rehabilitation of critical infrastructure. As demonstrated in Nigeria, the weakness of civil institutions like the judiciary, the press, parliament, the police, and civil rights groups contributed largely to the resurgence of ethno-regional conflicts in the immediate, post-transitional period. There is therefore a need to
strengthen these institutions by respecting their autonomy, devoid of state interference.

The major threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the disastrous economic situation that already contributed to the de-legitimisation of previous governments. Successive democratic governments since 1999 are faced with the daunting tasks of consolidating democratic institutions and undertaking urgent economic reforms simultaneously. The immediate economic agenda is stabilisation to reduce massive deficits, mobilisation of aid; including debt rescheduling, and initial steps to counter deteriorating living standards and physical infrastructure. As economic recovery will take time, improving basic service delivery- affordable health care, access to good water, job creation, and qualitative education, can clearly demonstrate the increased responsiveness and effectiveness of government. Without showing some progress, emerging democracies are unlikely to consolidate power for long, possibly opening the way for renewed authoritarian rule or even the collapse of the state.

REFERENCES


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