

Prebendal Politics and Good Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A Review

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Abstract

Politics in Nigeria, is a daily basis becoming the survival of the fittest, nay do or die affair. It is common knowledge in Nigeria, in recent time, that contesting for an election and winning will require a lot of money and political clout. Most of the time, an aspiring politician will need the help of a well-heeled or well-grounded politician or a money bag to help bankroll its political campaign among others for him to be sure of success in such an endeavor. The implication of this is that, at the end of the day, such a "donor" will always want to call the shot after election, which to all intents and purposes will constitute a cog in the wheel of progress of such a political entity; in terms of provision of infrastructure in particular and dividends of democracy in general. At the end of the day, the occupant of such an office will owe his allegiance to the money bag (god-father) instead of the state. This paper therefore is an interrogation of the practice of prebendal politics on the body politics of the Nigerian state between 1999 and 2015.

Keywords: Prebendalism, Nigeria, Fourth Republic.

Introduction

Politics across the globe rests on the fulcrum of struggle and agitation for power. This assertion corroborates the position of David Easton (1965) who defined it (Politics) as the 'authoritative allocation of values', Harold Laswell's designation of it as: 'who gets what, when and how' is very apt and apposite at this juncture. Quest for power has often been riddled with conflict, in other words, power is not always acquired on a platter of gold. Little wonder, Lord Acton concluded that power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. This made some scholars such as Austin Ranney to conclude that, Politics is the management of conflict. Ideally, democracy is supposed to enhance the economy in general and the life of the people in particular; however, with democratic practice in Nigeria, the reverse is the case. The management of the public space is very central to politics. Since politics has to do with public and not a private affairs, hence a definition of politics in that specific context cannot be more apt. In the assertion of Wolin (1960:2-3) has pointed out,

'one of the essential qualities of what is political, and one that has powerfully shaped the view of political theorists about their subject-matter, is its relationship to what is "public".'

The public space therefore, has become a place of keen contest and unbridled competition for the soul of the state. Before the advent of the colonial masters in our clime, agitation for the control of empires, kingdoms and chiefdoms was rife. Since the partitioning of the Africa among the Western colonialists at the Berlin Conference of 1884/5, interest in the public space has known no limitation.

Imperialism, a form of colonialism did a lot of havoc to the continent of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. According to Amuwo (2009), the general perception of an otherwise informed public opinion is that the British programmed Nigeria to fail. This distortion took the form of 'unholy marriage' of hitherto disparate people into a nation-state. This much was well corroborated by Ojo:

The lumping together of people of diverse, ethnic, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds and orientation by the erstwhile British overlords was aimed essentially to serve the imperialistic economic interests of the British Colonial powers. The various and incompatible ethnic nationalities that were forced into the unholy union were never consulted nor their consent obtained before the infamous amalgamation of 1914 by the British authorities with the attendant consequences which had long resulted in the unwieldy union... (Ojo, 2014).

The nature of contemporary politics is what some scholars tagged as politics of prebend. According to Suberu (undated) Prebendalism is a mode of the neo-patrimonial politics that is prevalent in post-colonial Africa. The post-colonial Nigeria has witnessed a number of untoward political arrangements that were alien to the people that introduced politics to us in a formal way. With the end of colonialism, ethnicity and identity problems now began to rear their ugly faces. The political parties arrangements consequent upon the end of colonialism in Nigeria in the 60s, showed a clear lack of cohesion and unity. We had the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigerian Congress (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG). These political parties were organized along ethnic lines and this eventually became the albatross that precipitated the civil war

among other reasons. Consequent upon colonialism, the public space was not different from private realm, this much was attested to by Peter Ekeh, in his seminal work '*Colonialism and The Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Framework*'. He identified the civic and primordial realms. This theory by Ekeh vividly captured the nature and character of prebendal politics in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular. His thesis showed how people relate with the public realm with contempt and an attitude that is unbecoming, unlike their disposition to the private realm such as their different township union associations. In a prebendal state, transparency and accountability are not the other of the day. This much was corroborated by Yagboyaju (2013) when he observed that democracy is nourished by transparency and accountability. Consequent upon colonialism, African had a not-to-good attitude towards anything public. This invariably became the early stage of prebendal politics and clientelistic relationship in political relationship. Suberu contended further that:

The hallmarks of neo-patrimonial politics in African states are the extreme personalization of political power in the national head of government, the widespread use of state resources for patronage and clientelistic practices, and systematic political corruption, all of which "coexist with, and suffuse" the rational-legal institutions bequeathed to these countries by Western colonialism (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, 62).

The above quotation brought to the fore, the very nature of Prebendalism in Nigeria. With prebendal politics in place and well entrenched in the psyche of the people, strengthening democracy therefore becomes a herculean task. In any political entity or regime, where your region becomes a criterion of resource allocation or where that determines what you get from the government, then prebendal politics is engrained in such a polity. The adoption of the zoning principle, especially in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is emblematic of Prebendalism (Oke, 2011). All these are geared towards getting their own share of the *national cake*. This of course began, sometime around 1978, with the introduction of the Federal Character Principle.

According to Oluchukwu (2010) cited in Ugwuani and Nwodi, the word Prebendalism is said to have been first used by Richard Joseph, Director of the Program of African Studies at the North Western University, in the United State of America (USA) (Ugwuani and Nwokedi (2015). Joseph developed his thought on prebendal politics from the works of Karl Marx on the feudal systems in Europe and China (Albert, 2005). He conceived of prebend as constituting an office of the state which an individual procures either through a formal process or as a sort of reward for loyal service to a feudal lord (Albert, 2005: 83). What to be dispensed therefore include: political positions, employment opportunities funds for developmental purposes, educational opportunities among others. What Richard Joseph referred to as prebendal politics was christened "amoral familism" by Banfield. According to Banfield cited in Osaghae (1995):

In a society of amoral familists, no one will further the interest of the group or community except as it is to his private advantage to do so. In other words, the hope of material gain in the short run will be the only motive for concern with public affairs (Banfield, 1967:83-84).

How affairs are conducted in the polity have so much influence to wield on democratic practices itself. The moment a military regime is shoved aside and democracy is embraced, efforts at consolidation should be the next item on the government's agenda. This must cut across all facets of the administration. From political party formation, judiciary, legislative business, conduct of election, political appointments to the actual governance, democracy must be deepened and it must also be seen to be deepened. This much informed the assertion of Yagboyaju (2012:54) that the relationship between democratic rule and political parties can be likened to that of the umbilical cord and the foetus. This is significant because, party formation and elections form the gateway to democratic process. In a related article, Yagboyaju equally submitted that democratic consolidation should connote the practice and sustenance of democracy (Yagboyaju: 2013).

Democratic practice or consolidation has therefore become problematic in Nigeria due largely to this prebendal culture of Nigerian politicians. Ojo (2014) citing Richard Joseph (1987) argued that democratic politics and prebendal politics are two sides of the same coin in Nigeria. When Richard Joseph made this analysis (1987), it was as a result of the fall out of the ethnic politics that characterized the second republic (1979-1983) politics of Nigeria. Prebendalism using the window of ethnicity necessitated the introduction of the Federal Character Principle in 1978 under Olusegun Obasanjo, agitation for resource control, the Zoning arrangement in Nigeria are all fall outs of ethnic prebendal culture and nature of Nigerian politics. This culture of greed has bred pervasive and endemic corruption within the polity.

Corruption and mis-governance have both been the bane of Nigeria's development. According to Yagboyaju (2011) Nigeria's fourth republic which has witnessed four general elections (1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011) including the 2015 general election which was conducted after that seminal paper, according to him, is yet to show profound evidence of a growing democracy. In his opinion, all of these are symptomatic of state capture

and social closure. According to the World Bank, cited in Yagboyaju (2011), it stands for:

The actions of individuals, group, or firms both in public and private sectors to influence the formation of laws, regulations, decrees and other government policies to their own advantage as a result of the illicit and not and non-transparent provision of private benefits to public officials.

This cancerous prebendal politics to say the least in the fourth republic, has eaten deep into the fabric of the entire polity. This has affected the polity to the extent that, differentiating between the public and the private realm has become completely difficult.

Conceptual Clarification

The following concepts will be explicated in the course of this study.

Prebendalism: This word originates from the Catholic society. The word 'pretend', from the Catholic setting, implies the right of member of a chapter to his or her share in the revenue of the cathedral. From this therefore Prebendalism implies political system where elected officials and government workers feel they have a right to a share of government revenue and use them to benefit their supporters, co-religionists and members of their ethnic group.

Clientelism: This is also often referred to as Patron-client relation ties. It is a veritable tool or medium for advancing prebendal politics. According to Scott (1972) it is dyadic in nature. This is a fundamental characteristic of a neo-patrimonial state. This is a network through which the patrons gives supports, positions and services to his client in exchange for political and material support.

Democracy Consolidation: Democratic consolidation connotes established stability in civilian governance. According to Ouyang (undated) it denotes a deliberate process by which democracy is so broadly and profoundly legitimized among its citizens and that is very unlikely to break down. Democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework and adherence to the democratic rules of the game (Ogundiya, 2009). Gunther, Diamandurus and Puhle (1995) contended that the democratization process has three phases: The fall of the authorization, consolidation and enduring democracy. In the same vein, Yagboyaju therefore concluded that the democratic consolidation connotes a consistent and sustained practice of democratic principles Yagboyaju (2013)

Fourth Republic: The Fourth Republic in this study implies the period between 1999 till date.

Neo-Patrimonialism: This term was introduced by Eisensdadt in 1973. This can be defined as a polity where the chief executive maintains authority through personal patronage, rather than through ideology or law (Amunsden, 1999).

Ethnicity: According to Nnoli (1978) cited in Iwara (2008) entails a social phenomenon associated with the communal competition among members of different groups.

Prebendalism: A prebend is an allowance to which clergy are entitled to e.g. tithes. Richard Joseph derived this concept from this and theorized that that Nigerian officials have a sense of entitlement to state revenue even if this entail the use of criminal means to access it.

Nigeria's Six Geo-Political Zones

For ease of rotational presidency, Nigeria has been divided into six zones. The zones are displayed hereunder.

1. North Central States: Kogi, Nigeri, Benue, Kwara, Plateau, Nassarawa and the Federal Capital Territory
2. North-Eastern States: Taraba, Borno, Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe
3. North-Western States: Kaduna, Kebbi, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kano, Jigawa, and Katsina state.
4. South –Eastern States: Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Anambra state.
- 5 South-Southern States: Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Edo, Rivers and Delta state.
6. South-Western States: Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo and Ekiti state.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The followings will be reviewed under the literature review: Nigerian in historical perspective, this will cover from the period of colonialism up till the year of independence, , patron-client syndrome in Nigeria, Nigeria under the military and Nigeria under different republics (this will cover the four republics). The following theories will be used in the explication of the study. These include: Extractive corruption theory, Theory of Two Publics by Peter Eke and Soft State Thesis of Gurnal Myrdal will be used to analyze and explicate the work. The Theory of the Two Publics helps to analyse the two publics that emerged consequent upon the end of colonialism. He tagged one the primordial public, while the second is the civil public. The primordial public is moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm, while on the other hand, the civic public is based on civil structures: the military, the civil service, the police among others (Ekeh, 1975). The relevance of the theory to this study is brought to bold relief when Ekeh submitted that the privatization of the public realm that is

the 'sublimation of politics in which what is traditionally private swallows up the public realm' (Ekeh, 1975). In other words, the line dividing the public and the private realm is so blurred that the public office holder put their hands into the public till, government property being appropriated with impunity among others. This theory will bring to sharper focus, the architecture of patron-client relations that have stifled societal and community efforts at development.

In 1968 Myrdal, first coined the term 'soft states' to refer to development issues in post independent South Asia. He characterized Asian States as soft because of the general societal indiscipline in South Asia compared with Europe. Myrdal (1968) averred that soft state is characteristic of the social reality, meaning that national government require extraordinarily little of their citizens. The central kernel of his thesis was that the low level of social discipline is one of the most fundamental differences between South Asian countries and at the beginning of their industrialization. From the perspective of this theory, African States and in this instance, Nigeria is portrayed as been indiscipline and very soft, hence the privatization of public property by the members of the political class.

Patron-Client Relations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria can be said to be a period, when patron-client relations got to its peak. Below is the analyses of how the different geo-political zones have been afflicted with prebendal politics.

SOUTH-WEST

Few cases can be recalled in Nigeria's fourth republic to explain the patron-client nature of politics in Nigeria. The garrison nature of politics practiced by the late Adedibu is a case in point. Much of his political misdemeanor and malfeasance border on corruption, lack of respect for constituted authority and in the main, prebendal politics with clientelism as its instrument of operation. Njoku (2010) reckoned that this style and philosophy of politics popularly known as Amala politics as well as his alleged state support and protection gave rise to his political excesses arbitrariness and lawlessness in Ibadan and Oyo State in general.

From Lagos State in the south west, where Asiwaju Bola Hammed Tinubu calls the shot and dictate the political barometer of the state, to Oyo State within the same South-west of Nigeria the inability of a good working patron-client relations between the Late Lamidi Adedibu and his godson, Senator Rasheed Ladoja to turn the state's treasure into a prebend caused the bad blood between the duo that got Ladoja ousted out of power. The Oyo god-father, Lamidi Adedibu, wanted to nominate 80% of Ladoja's commissioners and special advisers, this indeed became the point of friction between the patron and his client. It was this squabble between the duo that consumed Ladoja, the governor through impeachment (Okafor, 2004:14) cited in Edigin.

NORTH-CENTRAL

In Kwara State, where the Olusola Saraki held sway and straddle the political land space like a colossus, the state has been completely captured. Despite his demise, his son, Bukola Saraki has stepped in his shoes. Between Dr. Bukola Saraki and his protégé, Mohammed Lawal, Kwara's state governor then between May, 1999 and September, 2003. Edigin (2010) observed that, Lawal's refusal to reciprocate Saraki's gesture of bankrolling his elections. Saraki therefore, swore that, second term was not sure for Lawal. Edigin further quoted Saraki as saying that: "I am keeping the second term with me, Lawal's conduct will determine whether he will get it or not"

SOUTH-EAST

In 1999, Chimaroke Nnamani, a medical doctor was brought by Chief Jim Nwobodo in Enugu State. Nnamani had neither the financial muscle nor the political influence clout to win the election, but with the support of his patron, he was able to with election. When they fell apart, the state became a theatre of war. The same South-East also witnessed the trouble between former governor Mbadinuju and his patron, Chief Emeka Ofor. The face-off between the duo, affected the state. In that, salaries were unpaid for some time and schools remain shut for almost one academic session.

SOUTH-SOUTH

In the South-South region, the election of Lucky Igbinedion was the handiwork of the combine efforts of Chief Tony Anenih, Dr.S.O. Ogbemudia and Chief Osawaru Igbinedion, the governor's father. The trio played the role of patron between 1999 and 2003. Between 2003 and 2009 however, there was a balkanization and polarization that dichotomized Chief Lucky Igbinedion and the two other patrons (Edigin, 2010: 183). This misunderstanding and division caused a schism with polity of Edo State which eventually resulted in assassination, arson, suspensions, acts of brigandage, and duplication of party officials at wards, local governments, and state levels. The fourth republic can at best be described as a throw-back into political barbarism, despite concerted efforts at getting our nascent democracy well grounded. In recent times, under President Mohammed Buhari's administration, the startling discovery of how the Nigerian treasury has been looted has further lent credence to

the thesis of Peter Eke's Two Public. The state has completely been captured and the resources of the state has therefore been appropriated in the most barbaric of manners. Due to this primitive accumulation, Lafenwa concluded that, there had not been remarkable progress in the country since the advent of democracy in 1999 (This Day, June 2, 2012). On the same analytical plane, Gberevbie and Lafenwa submitted that one of the major problems confronting the corporate existence of Nigeria is indeed the use of state offices as prebends (instruments) for wealth and gains for individuals and their ethnic groups (Gberevbie and Lafenwa, 2007).

NORTH-WEST

Kano presents a good case of patron-client relationship that went bad. This was between the former governor, Engr. Rabbiu Kwakwanso and Danjuma goje. Goje was a deputy to Kwakwanso during the former's tenure as the governor of the state. However, no sooner the latter assumed duty as the substantive governor than things went awry between the two of them. This led to primitive politics of name calling and politics of hate which eventually affected good governance in the state.

NORTH-EAST

In North-East, Senator Alli modu Sheriff was a political god-father or patron to Alhaji Mala Kachalla who became the ANPP governor of the state in 1999. According to Isa (2006:14) cited in Edigin (2010: 182), he made sure his re-election was an impossibility. This caused a lot of bad blood particularly between the executive and legislature of the state. By 2003, Alli Modu Sherriff decided to test the political waters himself by defeating Mala Kachalla to clinch the governorship seat.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at prebendal politics, nay politics of seeing state resources as personal or private property that the holder of office or his cronies can appropriate at will. The paper observed that, aside from corruption, prebendal policies has become an albatross to the Nigerian state. It also observed that, relatively unknown politicians can hardly be elected without the support of some money-bags and this has robbed the nation of quality service by deserving leaders. It also observed that, elections have become do or die affairs particularly in the fourth republic because of the spoils of office and the huge financial outlays of the patrons.

The paper therefore suggests the introduction of individual candidacy in electoral process, which is not an extant practice in Nigeria for now. The paper therefore concludes that should politics of patron-client continues, our fledgling democracy will only be in motion without movement.

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