

Statehood and Democracy: The Demise of Identity Politics?

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Abstract

2023 elections in Nigeria had been visualized as critical juncture in Nigerian history of democracy. With lack of functional state institutions which is detrimental to the conduct of free and fair elections without which the will of the electorates would hardly be respected, the problem is how to eradicate identity (ethnicity and religious) politics with its penchant for the use of force and fraud in the quest for political power. The paper argued that promoting heroism of integrity against identity politics will create electorates that would adhere to the principle of accountability in the exercise of their franchise, thereby enabling the emergence of viable democratic state. The objective of the paper is therefore to show that building a viable and stable state with sustainable democratic practices, besides respect for the rule of law, requires leadership with integrity. Phenomenological design and method were adopted with data sourced from physical and online libraries and lived experience, and respectively described, analysed and interpreted to underscore the actual condition of fragility of the Nigerian state and the challenges of a new democratic dispensation. The paper concluded by observing that in a state as envisaged by the paper, identity politics might still persist in other forms even when, in its ethnic and religious expressions, it has become irrelevant.

Key Words: Statehood, democracy, sovereignty, self-determination, statecraft

Introduction

According to the “failed-state” index of 2011, Nigeria was fourteenth on the list. Today, there has not been much improvement with her position as number sixteen in the fragile state index (FSI) of 2022. It is, therefore, important that studies be carried out to determine how best to lead her out of her present predicament. With so much to blame on leadership, the 2023 elections have become, in the opinion of most Nigerians, a critical juncture in the nation’s political history. The phenomenon of armed banditry which has cost Nigeria so much in terms of human and financial resources (Adegoke:2020; Aband, and Ima-Abasilsip:2017) as it ravages Nigerian states (Okoli and Ugu:2019) has been matter of grave concern as it is important to determine the ideological persuasion underpinning it beyond theft, extortion and wanton violence (GoodLuck Jonathan Foundation:2021). In Robert I. Rotberg (2002; 2013)’s indices of “failed-state,” terrorism is mentioned as groups contesting the authority of the state find in a failed or weak state safe haven for their nefarious activities. Other study (Aderonke:2015) blamed terrorism and banditry on the inability of the state to provide good governance. In light of these claims, it is imperative on the Nigeria electorate to ensure the election of tested and proven characters into leadership position so as to help build a viable democratic state. These security challenges aggravate the already deteriorated state institutions thereby contributing to the weakening of the state and the practice of democracy.

While these studies focused on symptoms of state failure, this paper defended the view that integrity and statecraft are essential to state building and authentic democratic practice. Far from preoccupying itself with the explanatory causes of Nigeria’s precarious condition as a state and the limitations of her democratic practices, it focused on how best to strengthen state and democratic practices in light of the promises which the ground breaking citizen movement – the Obidient movement – for selecting and electing the most suitable candidate in all important positions in government in the 2023 elections, held out to Nigerians. It perceived in the citizen movement, which is driven by heroism of integrity, a possible upturn in the political order as it challenges the influence of identity (ethnic and religious) politics.

The paper upheld the view that statehood is dynamic and progressive. It is phenomenological in its research design and method: it relied on documents retrieved online as wells as information sourced from libraries and lived experience. It described, analysed and interpreted the fragile state of the Nigerian nation and its democratic practices and envisaged a change in the political landscaped occasioned by the

current citizen movement for good leadership. It averred that in the aftermath of 2023 elections and the judgment of the election tribunal, victory by a person of integrity gifted with statecraft will be capable of upturning the existing political order in the direction of strong and viable state with sustainable democratic practices.

The paper is divided into five sections: First, the Introduction; Second, Theoretical Framework, which considered Robert I. Rotberg's theory of "failed-state" against the background of Bernard Bosanquet radical view of the social contract theory of the state; Third, Democracy in Nigeria, highlighted the electioneering campaign practices characterised by ethnic and religious politics and giving of inducement for votes. It principally described the emerging revolutionary outlook introduced by the "Obidient" movement that insists on what the paper called "heroism of integrity." Fourth, The Task of Nation Building, which argued that nation building requires and comports state building. State building involves the strengthening of state institutions, the promotion of rule of law and other institutions such as the economic and educational. It requires the gift of statecraft and as such leadership with character, capacity and competence.

The paper envisaged that with appropriate strategic decisions, if the will of the people is respected, the incoming helmsman of Nigerian affairs, in the aftermath of the 2023 elections and judgment of the tribunal, would be able to create a stable and viable state with functional democracy. Fifth, the Conclusion, which averred that with persistence on "heroism of integrity" it is possible to mitigate the impact of identity politics, as appeal to religious and ethnic affiliation would give way to more national based quality of leadership; thus opening a window of opportunity for a new and healthy polity that would make the construction of a stable state and sustainable democracy possible. In such as state, identity politics might still persist in other forms even when, in its ethnic and religious expressions, it has become irrelevant.

Theoretical Framework

Bernard Bosanquet (2001[1889]) observed that classical theory of the state appeared to be undermined in three directions, namely that it is held to be too narrow and rigid, too negative and too intellectualist. The idea that the state is an association or group larger than the family and "acknowledging no power superior to itself" (p.18) is in real political experience not the case. This fact, in a way, would account for criticisms levelled against Robert I. Rotberg's idea of a "failed-state." What is common, to all the commonwealth, as Bosanquet observed, is the factor of political consciousness.

In Nigeria, the sense of national consciousness is making wave among the youths that have found in genuine intention of the flag bearer of Labour Party (LP) a rallying point in the struggle to save the nation from total collapse. With the striking tone of a revolutionary, Mr Peter Obi, besides the persuasion of his exemplary life, rejected all forms of self-servicing political ambition that exploits the poor through inducement to achieve popularity and followership in order to win political office only to destroy the state.

The nature of the relationship between the state and the individual is not a matter of means to an end: the conception of the individual and the society is correlative and as such there is no question of inferior and superior. Otherwise, would "each" be means to the welfare of "all" or "all" be means to the welfare of "each"? As Bosanquet rightly put it, "There are not two opposable sets of contents concerned in the matter at all; but a single web of content which in its totality is society and in its differentiations the individuals" (p.120). It means that the ultimate end of the state as of the individual is that of the realization of the best life.

It is therefore, considered an interference on the part of the state to introduce anything that impairs the freedom of the individual. As it were, it is in the unique contribution of the individual to the universal that lies the proper individuality of the individual. The problem is then not that of interference, as in the use of force by the state, but the manner of interference in relation to the reason of the existence of the state. Force remains part of the distinctive attribute of the state as overriding authority. However, not being in *pari materia* with the maximization of the individual's life, it is considered an inadequate means to an end vis-à-vis its *modus operandi* and the end in virtue of which it claims to represent the real will (p.124).

Robert I. Rotberg (2002) has noted that "nation-states fail because they can no longer deliver positive political goods to their people" (p.85). Failure of state entails loss of legitimacy of government and of the nation-state itself. A failed state is accommodative to infamous non-state actors such as terrorists, warlords and bandits. Little wonder, Nigeria which is on the verge of collapse as a state has been associated with Boko Haram and herdsmen bandits. The experience of armed agitations, terrorism, banditry and kidnapping has been growing in leaps and bounds since the past decade in Nigeria. The near-failure of the Nigerian state has been attributed to the inherent contradictions in the 1999 constitution which provided lee-way for bad governance, failure of state institutions and corruption in government. George Anokwure and Edmund Obomanu (2017) have argued that the constitution has adverse implications for democracy in Nigeria. Contradictions, they explained, are rife in the constitution that appears virtually blind to the social and political realities of the nation. Babs Onabanjo, a columnist for the Guardian Nigeria News (2021) argued that the constitution has created "failed state" and as such should be expunged forthwith.

According to Rotberg separatism and violent factional contestation of state power, agitation, protests and discontent directed against the state are symptomatic of failure of the state. In a word, failure of state is marked by insecurity, that is, failure of the state to guarantee reciprocal respect of the system of rights by the members of the society. The inability of the state to deploy its ultimate resource, force, for the maintenance of rights leads to arbitrariness which opens vistas of abuses by non-state actors who renege on rule of law. Going by Rotberg's standard, Nigeria might be termed as weak or fragile state rather than failed state given that violence

directed against the state, though has some enduring character, does not lead to demand of shared power between the state and the terrorists. It is therefore a case of inefficiency on the part of the state that accounts for terrorism and banditry rather than the demand to contest the state power. In most cases, the expression of violence is directed against the population for financial ends, as in the case of kidnapping, or resource control as in the case of Boko Haram and killer herders.

Rotberg mentioned disharmony between communities as one of the indices of state-failure. The Nigerian situation has not deteriorated to inter-ethnic rivalries. While in the political and administrative spheres, ethnicity and religion might affect the way power is shared and offices assigned, there is, at the level of social interaction, no inimical relationship among the people. Most renegades who fuel violence do so in their name and not in the name of the community or religious group. These recalcitrant individuals prey on the citizens without distinction on the basis of religion or ethnic affiliation: the Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, Muslim and Christians are virtually co-victims of banditry and terrorism in Nigeria. The boundary of the Nigerian state is not contested by any given group nor her authority over resources in question.

Terrorism and banditry in Nigeria are cases of opportunism on the part of criminal elements who exploit the internal contradictions of the systems to ferment trouble for personal interest. It is for the same reason that a few criminal member of the ruling class convert public goods to private use, thus incredibly enriching themselves while the mass of the people suffer penury and misery. What is certain is that this deplorable condition is manmade. As Rotberg put it, "Leadership decisions and leadership failures have destroyed states and continue to weaken the fragile polities that operate on the cusp of failure" (p.93).

In the hierarchy of political goods, security is critical. It could be considered the condition of possibility of other goods such as "dispute settlement, the rule of law, political participation, education and health care" (Moritz: 2013, 1). According to Moritz, the benchmark on which generally a state is measured, is "the Western nation-state with its three core functions: representation, security, and the concern for welfare of its population" (p.1). Charles Call in Moritz, J (2013) has subdivided the concept of state failure into 'security,' 'legitimacy,' and 'capacity' gaps. But Stein Sundstol Eriksen (2011) has argued that the ideal of modern state should not be used to evaluate every failed state in terms of the nature and processes that lead to tagging them strong or weak states. The idea of state, he opined, should be treated as a category of practice and not as a category of analysis. It means that post-colonial states formation could then be analysed by focusing on the inter-relationship between the idea of the state and actual state practice, and on the ways that states have become linked to domestic society on the one hand and their relations with the external world on the other (abstract).

With the absence of effective state institutions as one of the key impediments to growth in the developing world countries,

Nigeria inclusive, there is need to refocus on capacity and good governance. It is in this regard that statecraft is identified in this paper as a *decideratum* in the securing of Nigerian state and democracy in the aftermath of 2023 elections. The project of statehood and democracy in Nigeria is that of strengthening rather than revival.

Robert I. Rotberg made it clear that "strengthening weak states against failure is far easier than reviving them after they have definitively failed or collapsed" (2002:94). His view that writing of constitution should precede elections is in tandem with the position of NINAS which in the face of crisis of nationhood in Nigeria insists on liquidation of the 1999 constitution before the elections (Nweje:2021; *Vanguard News*:18 Aug. 2021; *The Guardian*:13 Jan.2022). Igboke C. Shedrack (2020) argued that with Nigeria's insistence on elections, it is the aftermath of the elections that is important for the strengthening and survival of the nation.

The vexing issues of marginalization of the Igbos (Mustapha:2015, 9-11), devolution of power and restructuring (Jimoh:2016; Alli:2021; Umoru:2022), fiscal federalism and secularity of the constitution (Pam:2017) which underlie the fragility of the state and democratic practices could only, in the circumstance, be handled constitutionally. This is for the simple reason that, state ideology (rule and authority) determines, to a large extent, "why the state (such as Nigeria) behaves the way it does in governance, politics, law-making or policy formulations and implementations, etc" (Shaapera, S.A., September edition:15). Considering the view of Eriksen in respect of the evaluation of a state as failed or weak, it is the position of this paper that a new consideration has to be made in respect of theories of the origin, nature and purpose of the state when it applies to modern colonial states like Nigeria.

Democracy in Nigeria

Zbigniew Brzezinski in his "Introductory Note" in Michel Crozier, S. P. Huntington and J. Watanuki (1975) - a report on their study on the governability of democracy carried out under the aegis of the Trilateral Commission - noted that the report affirmed that democracy is viable. He further observed that they insisted, however, that "democracies can work provided their publics truly understand the nature of the democratic system, and particularly if they are sensitive to the subtle interrelationship between liberty and responsibility." At the time of the report, a certain palpable air of pessimism pervaded the industrialized world of America, Europe and Japan. There were fears and anxiety with regard to possible "disintegration of civil order, the breakdown of social discipline, the debility of leaders, and the alienation of citizens" (p.2).

Like America, Europe and Japan in the 1970s, Nigeria, since the fourth republic, has been going through crisis of democracy that requires the restoration of people's confidence in politics. The role of civil society group in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria has been hampered by its contradictory relationship with the state. However, religious groups have, of recent, intensified their involvement in public

enlightenment program, such as canvassing for voters' registration and collection of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) as well as creating platforms, in the form of town hall meetings, to engage the politicians with the electorates in conversation. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has always had a place for interested independent observers during elections. The publication of the Electoral Act, 2022 is considered a landmark political decision in favour of democracy.

What is, however, spectacular about the 2023 elections is that many Nigerian youths rallied round the presidential candidate of the Labour Party in order to bring him to power to build a new Nigeria. The commitment of these youths, with respect to their time and personal resources in ensuring that the electorate buy into the idea of exercising their political right to vote during the elections was unprecedented. This phenomenon is described below in terms of emergence of new electorates and seed of revolutionary politics.

(a) Emergence of New Electorates

On the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of Nigeria as a Republic, a new wave of political consciousness has begun to impart on the political scene. In the era of independence, it was the political elites who, driven by the need to emancipate the people against colonial rule, had worked tirelessly to grant the people of Nigeria sovereignty and self-determination by engaging in constitutional developments that gave rise to the nation's independence in 1st October, 1960 to become a republic in 1963. With the failure of the republic occasioned by bloody military coup that eventuated in genocidal war that lasted for three years, the attempt to forge political consciousness that would make for national cohesion and viable statehood has been sabotaged by poverty of leadership, unsustainable constitutional reforms and profligacy in governance.

From independence, through the first, second and third republics, the political elites in Nigeria have been controlling the direction of political awareness. It was often marked by concern for party control and influence on the people. Party formation was generally based on ethnic lines such that those vying for political offices often resorted to politicisation of ethnic and tribal identity to win support of the electorates. Defamation and calumny were quite trendy in campaign speeches and jingles were prepared to ridicule opponents. The Nigerian Peoples' Party (NPP) and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) during the second republic were particularly known for this obnoxious practice. Violence and thuggery were rampant and continued into the election arena. It is here that the 2010, 2014 and 2019 elections were outstanding. It was all about power politics without consideration for the rule of law.

The preparations for 2023 elections showed unusual commitment to voters' enlightenment on the part of the electorates. There was significant shift from elite politics to the people. The struggle is no longer between elites, though there are still residues of the old order, but between the people (electorates) and the elites. The youths who have, until

recently served as guinea pigs in the violent drama of ballot box snatching and thuggery during election campaigns are saying no to violence. Their commitment is to ensure that power goes to persons of proven integrity and competence as they insist on building a new Nigeria.

The result is that, it is the youths that are engaged in political enlightenment. They champion campaign for registration of voters and collection of voters' cards as well as use of modern means for monitoring the voting process. Now and again one finds on social media talk about software developed to help in monitoring the elections. Non-governmental bodies, like the Church, have shown greater interest in enlightening the electorate and empowering them through voter registration exercise. The Catholic Church has gone as far as sponsoring registration centres in order to encourage the people to get their voter's cards.

Some pastors have taken extreme measures such as barring the faithful from reception of communion or attendance to Masses or church services should one fail to obtain one's voter's card. Some medical practitioners have coerced people to get their cards by insisting that their clients should provide voter's card while coming to their clinics to receive medical attention. The Catholic Church has continued to carry out enlightenment programs as well as interactive sessions for the electorates to meet with those vying for political offices. These efforts are channelled towards creating political consciousness that would permit accountability in governance.

The Million march by youth in support of the call for a new Nigeria driven by the slogan "Take Back Naija," is a unique development in the evolution of political consciousness in Nigeria. It is no longer question of "where one comes from", it is rather about being a rallying point for national renewal. Even religious sentiment that has been whipped up by some clerics (Ariemu:2023) appear to pale into insignificance as heroism of integrity imposes new criteria, namely, accountability, competence, character, capacity and national outlook. The tremendous followership which the flag bearer of Labour Party enjoys derives from the conviction of the mass of electorates on the integrity of his person. The Obidient movement has made integrity heroic. The question of where one comes from (north, south) is jettisoned and the idea of affiliation to a particular religious group is considered irrelevant. Although, at first some clerics and opportunist politicians had wanted to fan the ember of religious and ethnic politics in order to edge out their perceived political enemies, the reality on ground shows that such rhetoric have become redundant and unpersuasive.

The critical question is to find a unifier whose integrity defies all stigmatization. Nigerians have woken up to endorsement of political leadership based on the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is believed that a man of integrity is more likely to make good decisions, treat others with a sense of respect and dignity and to be successful. Indeed, a person of integrity is considered reliable because his antecedents show him as accountable and just.

If corruption is to be fought, then the way campaign and voting are carried out have to be altered. The tradition of sharing money and items for inducement of voters has come to be challenged. The slogan is “We don’t give shishi,” – that is, not even a farthing would be given as inducement. No corruption of the electorate. This radical outlook was immediately bought by many a Nigerian, despite the disparaging of the idea by those who interpreted it as a sign of stinginess. It is said that it is the unwillingness of the LP flag bearer to give money for votes that led to his non-acceptance as the presidential candidate of People’s Democratic Party (PDP) of Nigeria.

But this radical ethical approach which the “Obidient” movement adopted was soon mitigated by the moral ambiguity of some clerics and money sharing elites who began to tell the people to accept the inducement provided they vote according to their conscience. But what is voting according to their conscience? The person who receives money and votes the candidate who gave her money, is certainly following her conscience. Her conscience tells her that she has accepted an inducement as a sign of support for the giver. This is the case of a “good” conscience. But there are many other kinds of conscience. The dubious conscious might collect the money and vote someone else. The fact is that, if she had told the giver that she would not vote after collecting the money, the money would never have exchanged hands in the first place. So, it is issue of breach of trust. Those who have no qualms in contradicting themselves confuse moral courage with temerity. In their rhetoric, they claim that the money which the political money bags are sharing belongs to the people and therefore, there is nothing wrong with collecting what is their own and voting the candidate of their choice. In this way, the moral revolution which was already accompanying the movement was played down.

The federal government in its decision to redesign the Naira and to ensure that the old notes (N1000, N500 and N200) go out of circulation by 10 February has directly or indirectly bought into the “No shishi” policy of LP presidential candidate. But the decision has revealed the culture of predation that the elites have created in the nation: banks and their agents are making it difficult for the people to have the money by extorting financial gains from the situation of artificial scarcity created by themselves. While the decision to alter the colour of some of the Naira notes might obstruct vote buying which is the cheapest means of influence on the people by the corrupt politicians, the extension of the date for the withdrawal of the old notes from circulation might be opportune for politicians to put their houses in order. As at 9 February, 2023 the issue of dead line for removing the old notes from circulation was still contentious (Komolafe, et al: 2023).

Nevertheless, with vote buying, to some extent, put on hold, what is left of politicians without integrity is peddling fake news. Allegations (Ndujihe: 2022) and counter allegations (ThisDayLive: 2023) over fake news about presidential

candidates of the different parties have been observed. But these are last ditch effort of drowning inglorious politicians to distract attention.

(b) Seed of Revolutionary Politics

The major attraction which the LP flag bearer offers to Nigerians, including his detractors, is what could be identified as heroism of integrity. Nothing is so awe inspiring, in a corrupt society, as integrity of life. The Presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Mr Peter Obi has, since his public declaration of interest in vying for the position of president of the federal republic of Nigeria, made a number of public speeches in which, among other things, he gave account of his stewardship as a public servant. His personal accounts and testimonies of those who have been close to him give credence to his personality as a man of integrity. Many electorates, full of admiration for him have endorsed his way of life as what is needed to save Nigeria from socio-economic stupor.

In his speeches, the LP flag bearer had a constant refrain, “You can go and verify.” The statement, “You can go and verify,” very much resonates with the slogan, “take back Naija” to give the impression of revolutionary stance. He therefore stands out as a symbol for challenging the existing order represented by Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Peoples Congress (APC) regimes. Little wonder crowd of followers identifying with him preferred to call themselves the “Obidients.” Sweeping across the social media as a movement for a new Nigeria, many admirable citizens have keyed into “Obi movement” driven by a man of outstanding integrity. But the moral appeal of his personality and life will only translate into a cultural revolution when his admirers begin to adopt his way of life.

The great achievement of this movement lies in making integrity the supreme criterion for choice of people into leadership position. In this way, the traditional ethnic and religious affiliations that have influenced the choice of candidates paled into insignificance. It is therefore, no longer a question of south or north, but that of unifier which integrity of his life epitomizes. This is a revolution in gem. But the path to revolution is chequered for which it is not easily taken. Are the “Obidients” willing to work hard enough to flush out the members of the old order at the polling booth through their voter’s card? After the initial zest for inaugurating a new political order, what is happening so far is that they are taking to selective changes: change the president but retain the senators and assembly men, or Governors, state assembly men and chairmen who might be drawn from either PDP, APC or any other strong contestant. There are, however, some factors that might account for this loss of revolutionary élan. First, the inability of the Obidients or protagonists of the new order, to muster revolutionary force that will bring about the collapse of the structures put in place by the current regime. Second, the inherent weakness that is typified in their moral ambivalence.

The mantra, “No shishi” which coupled with “Go and verify” gave impetus to a hope for a new order, but it does not appear that these ideas were tenaciously held onto. The result is that, rather than complete rejection of money exchanging hands, they resorted to rhetoric: “collect the money and vote according to your conscience.” But inducement for elections is a form of political landslide; accept it, and you are trapped. The Obidients may have lost revolutionary lustre but the seed of revolution remains in heroism of integrity. How it is worked out in reality, would depend on how, on winning in the election, the LP flag bearer engages in state-building and democracy.

The Task of Nation Building

Mr Peter Obi, from all intent and purpose, stands out as a unifier and a man of character that Nigeria needs most in this period of her history of crisis of statehood and democracy. Well-meaning individuals and groups have attested to his “credibility, integrity, competence, and national outlook” (www.flashpointnews.com 3 Feb. 2023). In paragraph 6, no. v of the *Communiqué* issued by the Southern and Middle Belt Forum (SMBLF) on 2nd February, 2023, it was stated clearly that the Presidential Candidate of the LP “represents the Nigerian conscience, moral probity, generational hope, and redemption epiphany, among others” (www.flashpointnews.com). Different print and online media reporters (Olorok: 2 Feb. 2023; Ukaibe: 2Feb. 2023) underscored the high light on the SMBLF meeting by drawing attention to the endorsement of Peter Obi and his running mate, Senator Datti Baba-Ahmed, by the forum as the “THE ANSWER” to the problem of unity and progress of Nigeria.

In her history of over half a century as a republic, Nigeria has strove for national unity which appears to continue to elude her because of lack of consensual agreement by its diverse ethnic nationalities. It is her integration crisis, poverty of nation building, that translates into fragile statehood and failing political democracy. Onifade and Imhonopi (2013) observed that

the integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifest in the minority questions, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics, indigene-settler dialectic, resource control, youth restiveness and militancy and the clamour for a (sovereign) national conference or conversation about the terms of the nation’s continual unification.” (<https://www.researchgate.net>3079...>).

As it were, state building is an integral element of nation building. It is therefore difficult to envisage political sovereignty, in its contemporary form, without state building, rule of law and democracy. Democracy is a mechanism for national integration and reinforcement of political sovereignty, and true sovereignty requires economic sovereignty. Nigeria, through policy formulations and institutional reforms (Asaju & Egberi:2015; Folarin et al:2014) has made earnest attempts to achieve national integration, however, the internal contradictions in the 1999

constitution appears to have marred decades of efforts to build a viable and stable nation.

The failure of leaders to hearken to the yearnings of Nigerians as expressed in the 2014 national conference has drifted the nation to the edge of the precipice as it wobbles between being classed as “failed-state” and fragile state. Even in the midst of heightened insecurity that threatened the lives of the ordinary citizens, the fruits of the simultaneous public hearing in all centres on Wednesday 26th and Thursday 27th May, 2021 were not given considerable attention by the government. The establishment of state police which featured in the list after the analysis of the 250 memoranda was stalled (Umoru: 2022; Aborisade: 2022), yet growth in banditry has been blamed on spatio-temporal governance deficits and under-policing (Okoli and Ugwu: 2019). Nation building in this time of crisis of statehood demands urgent and speedy response to issues bothering on the very purpose of the state, namely, security and peace.

Two possible scenarios present themselves in the aftermath of 2023 elections. First, should the presidential candidate from one of the parties of the prevailing order win, then there would likely be experience of disgruntlement, frustration, alienation, apathy and mistrust on the part of the population. Whether this feeling would engender revolutionary impulse is not quite easy to say in a nation of beleaguered sentiment. But it might, in the short term, stall the growth of democracy and undermine the project of strengthening and consolidation of the state that is most urgently needed today. The second, should the LP flag bearer win, there will be euphoria of victory which might come with daunting challenges. The most pressing of the challenges might be that of the capacity for national decision.

In a weak democratic system, as Nigeria, where consensus is reached through lobbying by way of “money exchanging hands,” rather than political debate that is open to rational decision, minority government might have to face the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in a governing coalition. It is therefore, a fortiori, that the LP strives hard to ensure majority representation in the Senate and the National Assembly. But the realization of Nigerian dream which LP flag bearer represents hangs on 2023 elections as critical juncture in Nigerian politics, Victor Hugo is identified with saying that, “Stronger than all the armies is an idea whose time has come.”

Like in the American civil right (Civil Rights Act), which was earlier vehemently opposed by Congress, only to be endorsed by the same Congress simply because its time had come, so would good willed Nigerians with other party affiliations support bills and policies that would promote democratic citizenship – equal opportunity in access to power, education and employment, security of life and properties, and freedom and respect for human dignity and life – because the time had come. Premising the explanation and prediction of political change that would come with the LP on institutional or ideational approach (emphasis on order and structure, making it difficult to explain important episodes of political change) would be failing to take accurate account of the factors that

have contributed to the impressive arrival of the party on the political stage in the last few months.

In governance, the incoming helmsman of Nigeria would have to make it evident that decision makers handle the affairs of the society – be it politics, socio-cultural, economic, environment or defence – in a most judicious manner. It means ensuring that the process of decision leads to robust policies that prioritize the wellbeing of the citizens. Equality and rule of law will have to be palpably felt in the affairs of the state as against the self-serving and opportunistic tendencies of the, up till now, prevailing order. In line with the demand of altruism which is characteristic of statecraft, it has to be felt in practice that people are truly represented in government as their interest is shown to be the priority of the state. When public interest takes pride of place in government decisions and policies, then governance becomes productive of democratic dividends.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that the actual political situation in which Nigeria is in, what according to failed-state index, could be described as fragile or weak could be remedied with new leadership style which the new political outlook ushered in by the Obidient movement promises. The insistence on “heroism of integrity” is impacting on political consciousness of most Nigerians and might with time overcome the prevailing politicisation of ethnic and religious affiliation that is characterized by bullying, violence and vote buying. In the event of the overcoming, a more national based quality of leadership that foster nation building through enduring ethical and valued based democratic practices will be established. The paper averred that in the event of the leading figure of Obidient Movement getting a favourable judgment to be at the helm of Nigerian affairs following the post elections tribunal, his deployment of state-craftmanship for nation building will eventuate in the construction of a stable and viable state with functional democratic system.

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