

Public Choice, Politics and Politicians

Everyone seems caught up in the febrile environment thrown by the machinations of next year's election. Politicians, and unfortunately the electorate, are preoccupied with our brand of realpolitik birthed on the axes of religion, ethnicity, region. They serve as a smokescreen behind which notions of politics that should be the defining characteristics of politicians, and who should be adjudged by ability to deliver the public good, gets forgotten.

As things stand, a good number of our contemporary politicians appear to have gotten up and declared themselves to be a politician or a candidate for an elected position without having to present any clear political position that they intend to pursue or any leaning to ideological notion tied to a political party. And certainly, these modern-day politicians do not exhibit any inclination to deliver the common good. In a twist of Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum", our current politicians seem to have emerged solely on the basis of the pronouncement: "I know I am a politician therefore I am one." If such is the quintessence of politicians, then how can there ever be accountability, as the politician would only be accountable to himself as he and he alone has defined what he is. Moreover, what does this spell for a society structuring itself on democracy, let alone for the improvement of lives of citizens by delivering superior common good? It is not difficult to see that such a system of politics is incompatible with a 'civil service' given that the latter, if only by name, is meant to serve civil society.

Where the definition of politician is devoid of politics or ideals it undermines the ability to deliver the public good. And since politicians are accepted as such, reinforced by their twisted Cartesian definition, they are free to pursue their own commercial interests at the expense of public interest. The name politician is, in our current politics, simply eponymous with businessman. The political establishment differs in this regard from the business establishment only by degree. In such a situation, there is no polity, just business-as-polity.

Effort and reward are coterminous. Seeking to maximise personal reward or remuneration relative to effort, sadly, seem to have become a major national preoccupation, and is not lost on politicians. Knowing where the reward, the commonwealth and natural resources are domiciled, makes it easy for our mercantilist politicians to pursue their objective. Based on their uncontested self-definition and identification, and the general sense of entitlement, namely that such reward is due to them as politicians, corruption becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. As long as the political establishment is allowed to set its own rules, and those rules include rewarding itself with unbridled access to our commonwealth and natural

resources, the citizens should not complain or cry. Unless that is they are prevented from voting.

Two observations can be made as regards expecting politicians to deliver in the public interest, for the common good: One is causative, the other is sequential. Politicians of their own volition cannot be left alone to deliver public interest. Politicians must be compelled to deliver on behalf of the common good. In other words, the delivery of the common good must be defined as the purpose of politics before the engagement of politicians on the public stage. It follows that the sequence for delivery of the common good cannot be left to politicians to define. If it is taken as given that what is good for and desired by the people is known and properly defined *ab initio*, then the politician must come up with a list of measurable actions he or she suggests he will take to deliver what the public require. This would make for a meaningful scenario for the people to choose politicians who can deliver for the sake of the common good, meaning to improve the nation's welfare, and enhance general living conditions.

Thus, it is incumbent on the electorate to define and articulate the public or common good, politics and politicians, in that order. The self-serving definition of politicians that subsumes politics to personal interest and ignores the public interest can only warp and stunt the deepening of democracy and development, respectively.

This broaches three questions that need to be asked in the context of the current challenges Nigeria faces: What is public interest? How should it be defined? How best can it be delivered? Finding the right answers to these questions, in that order, is crucial if the political space characterised by 'misalignments' is to be sanitised and create a functioning polity. The alternative is to leave the political establishment to conduct business as usual, meaning pursuit of own business and interest.

We do not have the space here to provide anything like exhaustive answers to these questions. And can only point in the direction of where such answers might be found. In a democratic system, the first question need not be answered in terms of what is 'best for the majority' but could be answered in terms of 'providing equal opportunities for all'. The second question intimates that it is the public who must define what they feel is in the country's interest rather than abandoning this to a sub-set (current politicians). The third question brings governance through political agents and institutions into focus. The use of 'best' as an adverb points to the inclusion of other criteria such as accountability, fiduciary responsibility, sustainability, transgenerational policies, inclusive economic growth, development, etc.

Over the last 60 years, politicians have at various times had an opportunity to offer answers. In the early days after Independence, the answers often drew on Western ideologies. When these were tainted, and their validity called into question after the incursion of military into governance, ideologies were abandoned in favour of expediency and pragmatism. With the way the current democratic dispensation is shaping up, is it reasonable or justifiable to expect the contemporary politicians to sort this out on their own? How deeply is the political establishment now a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating system as to render it politically vacuous as regards the common good? If it is, who should be responsible for establishing a political system that prioritizes the 'common good' over all else? What measures are required?

One could, however, approach the question the other way round, namely not from the point of view of the political establishment, but from that of the electorate who are purportedly offered a choice. In a democratic dispensation, by definition, one votes for the politician whom one feels will best represent one's own interests. The underlying assumption is that one's own interests are best promoted by the nation's interests being furthered. In other words, one votes for a 'representative' of those interests.

However, if politicians do not heed any need to represent anything other than themselves, then over and above all those whose votes do not count, it is only rational if large swathes of the electorate choose not to vote. Any vote cast merely contributes to cosmetically cover up a farce of public choice, one in which the key pretence is that the politician in question intends to 'represent' interests other than his own. Imagine the following scenario: There is a general election, and no one turns out to vote simply because the candidates in question although have declared themselves to be politicians but failed to state clearly and convincingly how they will represent the interests of those who vote for them. (Making grandiose promises that serious analysts tell you cannot ever be redeemed. It is a moot point whether a system of politics where less than 14% of the populace ever votes, and therefore 8% spells a majority, can ever be considered a democracy. Our constitution declares that the presidential candidate who wins the election is the one who scores a certain proportion of the votes - that number is in no way connected to the actual number of votes cast compared to the number of persons eligible to vote. A constitutional provision that set a minimum quorum (and one well beyond the pocket of even extremely wealthy politicians) would already start to alter the balance in favour of a real public choice.

Restructuring - Things Fall Apart or Fall into Place

The Federal government is not working, in the sense that however much effort the respective cabinet members may put in, the results are not to the benefit of the populace. Over the last five years, unemployment has soared, and is now well over 50% among young people. At the same time, the naira has crashed against the dollar, ever more of the annual budget is being consumed to service existing debts, and capital expenditure has dwindled into insignificance. Seemingly, all federal government manages to do successfully is pay the salaries of government employees – but even that is now faltering.

Recently, as if out of nowhere, came the sudden realisation the country should double its spending on education. So next year the budget for education will be doubled. No targets or KPIs have been announced. No word of to which areas of education the funding will go. No clarification on whether the budget will simply be gobbled up by an already large ministry of education – that is not responsible for rolling out universal basic education anyway. This is reminiscent of the manifesto for the first period of the present administration, which promised to double spending on health. Nothing of the sort happened.

We can infer two possible statements from this: The Federal government is fatally flawed as an institution. Now, if this is indeed the case, then this would mean a separate institution is urgently required to discharge the functions of the Federal government. Many have been clamouring for more powers to be devolved to the state governments for this reason. The logical conclusion here would be that the states must be well-oiled functioning entities in their own right in those areas in which the Federal government is currently falling short?

The inefficiencies of Federal government seemingly coincide with an inability of government to meet its unitarian purpose and support all the geopolitical regions of the country in like measure. This has sparked what for want of a better word can best be described as reverse-irridentist movements that advocate the return of ruling power to their particular region, be it a real geographical region or a fictional entity. Things are falling apart, many say. But into what would perhaps be the more apposite question...

Let us play a thought experiment for a moment and assume the following: The state governments of the day are not performing any better than the Federal government. The paltry levels of IGR and the inability of countless state governments to provide the primary healthcare and primary education that is their core mandate would seem to be evidence of this. Some who support this assumption have suggested this means that the country's system of Federal vs. state and/or Federal & state (depending on your perspective) has failed and should be replaced by a parliamentary system of government such as pertained in the early days after Independence.

In other words, in the current situation where the nation is faltering on the brink of socio-economic disaster (mass unemployment, mass poverty, GDP levels that are back on a par with those for 1980), two possible solutions have dominated public debate and discourse: The first maxim offered is that we need to restructure the balance between Federal government and state governments. The second, alternative recommendation is that we rethink the very form of political system we use.

There are good grounds for assuming fundamental problems require fundamental solutions as the latter address fundamental causes. However, to date neither camp has presented compelling evidence in favour of their case. Nor has there been consideration of whether a time of crisis is really the most appropriate time to fundamentally alter your system of government. After all, the focus should surely be, as the pandemic has shown us, on containing the crisis before we set about addressing the weaknesses of the (health) system.

So let us review the situation. Is the root problem that of the structure of government per se? If we rephrase that question it could read: Do the three arms of Federal government do what they are supposed to do? Obviously, the one or other of them does not, otherwise the country would not be in a crisis not attributable to exogeneous factors. However, and this is an important point, will that detrimental state be altered by a devolution of powers? Surely the same interests, the same or similar persons and parties will persist.

The fact that the institutions of Federal and state government manifestly malfunction may not be connected in any way to their not being fit-for-purpose, other than in the sense they do not have the right in-built checks and balances to ensure that they function correctly irrespective of what regime or group of individuals is in power. We could conclude, therefore, that what we are seeing is not the failure of the system of Federal government or, for that matter, of state government, but the failure of the persons who populate that system.

The standard manner of checking the activities of the individuals populating governments (politicians and civil servants – yes, they are supposed to serve) is accountability. Indeed, accountability is at the core of all democracy. In the sense that the ultimate act of being held accountable for your actions is whether you are re-elected or not. At the lower levels, there is accountability in the form of being forced to resign or, in the case of civil /public servants being dismissed. In the final analysis, President Jonathan was held accountable for the actions of his cabinet and hangers-on, and voted out of office. Whether it would not be better for the strength of the democratic fabric of Nigerian society to have people removed from office by other means in-between elections is a moot point, as is the question of whether there can be accountability in the Nigerian setting if the political parties do not present ideologies and therefore choices. If there is no clear difference in ideology, then a party or programme can hardly be held accountable for system failure (i.e., macroeconomic

management failures at present), but only an individual. However, if you dismiss that individual, the party still remains in power, deriding the idea of accountability.

In light of the above brief remarks, intended merely to question the givens in the current discourse, and address 'restructuring' differently as an issue. If we construe the allocation of national resources in the form of a budget, then the mark of efficiency would be if the budget items make a positive difference and promote the wellbeing of Nigerians. It is a logical imperative in such a view that restructuring must automatically guarantee better service delivery or there is no point in it. Put differently, those calling for restructuring must assume that today's civil service, if structured more in terms of subsidiarity, will provide better public service. Looked at this way, we can reformulate the original approach to restructuring and ask: Will resources be better used (or wasted less) if the division of responsibilities between state and Federal governments is changed more in favour of subsidiarity and less in favour of a unitarian system? This avoids the 'restructuring discourse' getting ensnared in a debate over 'state policing' vs. the NPF as the best antidote (or placebo, depending on your viewpoint) for insecurity.

Now adjudicating on efficient allocation of resources and their effective delivery (public service) is something that can only take place rationally on the basis of hard data. In other words, we need to reformulate the 'restructuring' debate even further and discuss the pros and cons of the various iterations of a new states/federation balance in terms of what the data shows. To that end we need to analyse why neither the Federal nor the state governments have delivered / have been able to deliver good primary healthcare or primary education (the constitutional obligation of both and two fields in which they explicitly interact). The data shows neither has performed with particular merit. Disease patterns, maternal and infant illnesses, illiteracy, etc. can all be cited as indicators of systemic failure.

The fiscal data is similarly disheartening. The Federal government has federal ministries and agencies devoted to health and education. All the states have education and health commissions or ministries. Yet the Federal budget allocations for the two ministries together was N 779bn in the 2019 appropriations bill from a total of N 8.9tr., meaning that health and education at the Federal level were considered worthy of only 8.75% of the national budget. Now, if we remember that capital expenditure was just under 23% of the total and extrapolate the ratio to the health and education budgets, we get N 179.17bn in capital expenditure on these two key fields. Capital expenditure on two fields critical to human wellbeing in Nigeria was exactly 2.01% of the budget.

How much the states allocated to the two cannot be ascertained in the absence of data - most of the states are notorious for not providing any financial transparency. Added to which, in some instances they can simply refer to the Federal government when it comes to

handling both primary healthcare and primary education – passing the buck as it were. This overlap of responsibilities between the Federal government, state governments and in some cases government agencies makes for a manifest lack of accountability.

Subsidiarity as practised does not work. People are made responsible for things for which other people are already responsible. The existing triumvirate of Federal/state/LGA creates a murky morass of uncertainty, where transparency is as good as impossible. It is hardly surprising that it is not in any of the players' interest to provide hard data on how budget allocations have turned into socio-economic progress. Such an unfortunate concatenation of agents merely ensures that no one can be held accountable. And here we come full circle. It follows that adjusting the dial away from the centre (federal) to the left (LGAs) or right (state governments) and claiming this would be subsidiarity is merely window-dressing. The person who is ostensibly responsible changes, yes. But does the efficiency? No. After all, merely passing responsibilities back and forth does not address the inefficiencies in the system. On the contrary: It leaves them intact. And allows Federal government in five years' time to point the figure at the state governments, pronounce "Fail!" and call – for restructuring. There are two possible reasons a system is inefficient. Firstly: It is per se inefficient. There is no data to suggest this is the case in Nigeria. Therefore, subsidiarity will generate the same results. Or the system is structurally sound, it just has to be used the way it was designed to be used. This is the case in Nigeria. Meaning: The restructuring debate should be a debate about the users of the system, not about the system.

Industry or Conducive Environment: Source of Successes of Past Generations

Our fathers' generation seem to have done exceedingly well out of Nigeria. And this is in every venture they embarked upon. For their successes, we commend them. Almost all of them did well and prospered in the same Nigeria that seems to bewilder the younger generation as they stagnate, nay, regress economically and socially. We are not unaware of what a good number of the youth must resort to just to survive.

Let us think about this for a moment: Are the youth of today not making progress because they are plain indolent as was notably said at some point? Or put differently, can we adduce our fathers' generation's successes to their industry only? There is this general tendency to be dismissive of the lack of progress of the youth. Without disparaging the efforts and industry of our fathers, we cannot dismiss the importance of a conducive environment. Some of them came out of universities and slid into jobs without much competition. Some of them rose in the military and reached the zenith without the ardour or struggle experienced today.

Some of them went into trade with minimal education, and they prospered.

Two things come to mind: opportunities were plentiful, and the environment conducive. Without a conducive environment, opportunities will not abound. The definition of a conducive environment rests on three planks: environment that makes it easy to engage in economic and business activities, stable macroeconomic conditions, and security. In the absence of conducive environment, even the most articulate economic policies and development plans will fail to attract investment. Empirical studies that examined the importance of conducive environment show strong positive correlation between conducive business environment and output and productivity[1], nexus with economic growth and poverty reduction[2], and business environment in developing countries are hostile to market-led growth.[3]

Let us look at the case of farmers then and now. A farmer then inherited land from his father, just as the ones today do from their fathers. The difference is the land has been divvied up so much that today's farmer gets a sliver of land that is barely bigger than a hectare compared to a sizeable tract of land the previous generation got. Back then, marketing boards guaranteed produce off take. This encouraged farmers. Industries were plentiful to process their produce. Infrastructure was insufficient but demand and usage were light. This minimised delays and wastage. At the end of the day, the farmer became prosperous. Direct result of effort. There is a tendency to think that today's farmer does not work hard enough and that is why he is mired in poverty. Today's farmers have deteriorated soil quality, inefficient and outdated agronomy techniques, consequences of climate change on fauna and flora, and water, insecurity, degraded and inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to capital, ineffective and insincere policies, etc., to contend with. It would be completely disingenuous to ignore, conveniently or otherwise, the import of a conducive environment.

So, we must accept that the role a conducive environment plays is not trivial. It will suffice to say that from a researcher perspective, the key questions revolve around correlation and causality. It is not merely scholarly indulgence; their finding should help in fashioning appropriate policies and responses from government to improve welfare of citizens. Coming back to the main point: if conducive environment is key to success, interest should focus on the environment itself. Who created the environment that led to the success of the previous generation? This cannot be reduced to the divine intervention alone, as we are wont to do in this part of the world. Someone or a group of people deliberately and effectively harnessed the resources that were divinely provided. The question of who is not that important. If it is acknowledged that a conducive environment is key, then the question should be: Has

sufficient attention been paid to ensuring a conducive environment for future generation? Even if the environment was not made conducive with the previous generations in mind, the point is that they benefitted from it.

This brings us to the related point of natural resources that the country has been blessed with, which unfortunately have witnessed rapacious exploitation by past and current generations. This has further fuelled graft at rates hitherto unfathomable by the previous generations. That is a conversation for a later date.

Not only have the resources been exploited without any consideration for the future or next generations but the landscape has largely been despoiled and denuded, making the environment harsher and hostile for productive enterprise. We exploit oil and gas to boost revenues to pay salaries and develop social and economic infrastructures that fail to uplift the people. Those that can afford to buy petroleum products, imported at great cost and in detriment of the people, do so with reckless abandon to fill their vehicles and generators to produce noxious effluence, which wreak havoc disproportionately on the health of poor people. Minerals and iron ores are extracted from the land leaving gorges, poisons in their wake, as remainder of our reckless predisposition. Is it any surprise that rural-urban drift continues apace with life and welfare worse in towns and cities than rural areas they fled from?

This is not a lamentation; it is a call to action. Every system needs to be moderated. Unbridled *laissez faire* approach to management of the economy, and resources, has led us to embark on a race to the bottom. As much as we celebrate hard work and success, it would be completely remiss on our part to ignore the role of a conducive environment.[4] Efforts should be on creation of a stable, vibrant, secure, and conducive environment. Nigerians are very hardworking, and they enjoy life. Only a conducive environment can make them thrive. Our fathers and forebears showed that with industry, success is guaranteed. Today's generation are industrious, perhaps even more than previous ones, yet their efforts do not move the needle. That is simply because government has not paid enough attention to the key role conducive environment plays and, has inadvertently, allowed a situation akin to that described by Harding in his treatise, *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). With inflation, unemployment, and poverty galloping out of control and making lives of Nigerians unbearable, it is imperative that government focuses on what some consider its primary duty. The creation and sustainability of a conducive environment is not just its primary responsibility, it is necessary, and it fulfils a key sufficient condition for economic growth and development. Without it, generating economic activities and creating jobs, which are key to

improving lives, banishing poverty, reducing insecurity, will remain elusive.

[1] E. Bah and L. Fang, 2015, Impact of the Business Environment on Output and Productivity, African Development Bank.

[2] Ncube et al, 2021, The Links between Business Environment, Economic Growth and Social Equity: A Study of African Countries, Journal of African Studies 2021, Vol. 22 No. 1, 61-84.

[3] Xu, L.C., 2010, The Effects on Business Environment on Development: Surveying New Firm Level Evidence, World Bank.

[4] DFID, 2008, Growth: Building Jobs and Prosperity in Developing Countries

Demise of the Social Contract - Covid-19, Fridays For Future, and the EndSARS Protest

The COVID-19 Pandemic

One lesson that nations the world over have had to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic is that certain parts of their populations are more vulnerable than others. The ageing societies typical of the Global North have had to devote much effort to shielding their senior citizens and those with underlying health conditions from possible contact with the virus. The science seems to suggest that the under-60s have less of a chance of succumbing to the disease. The same pattern has been in evidence in the Global South in countries such as Nigeria, where the death toll has been particularly pronounced among the country's elders. Among many governments specifically in the Global North much of the effort to contain the spread of the virus has gone into protecting the elder citizens by expecting or compelling younger citizens to temporarily forgo some of their civil rights (e.g., freedom of movement, employment, pursuit of enterprise, etc.).

What the virus has, in other words, brought back into the limelight is the degree to which government and/or the social fabric relies on what the political philosophers called the "social contract". Individuals give up specific rights/liberties and allow the government to choose for them in exchange for 'benefits', e.g. protection of their other rights. In the classic construction, the individuals accord the government the right to rule over them through law.

John Rawls in his famous “Theory of Justice” argued as follows: If we all put ourselves in what he calls the “original position” (where we are shrouded in what he terms a “veil of ignorance” and cannot therefore know whether we personally might not gain more or less from a specific right) then there is no notion of privilege and to protect yourself you have to protect everyone else.

In that light, we would choose the following concept of justice for our society: We would all have equal rights to basic liberties in line with a similar system of liberty for all and, more importantly for the discussion here, all social and economic inequalities would be structured such that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. Now, if one group consciously disadvantages itself in order to advantage the other group, it would only be ‘just’ for this to be based on a horizontal trade-off. In other words, the latter group would need to ‘repay the favour’.

If we look at the COVID-19 pandemic, what it illustrates is the importance to construe the social contract for a ‘just’ society’ for ourselves not in terms of a horizontal structure, but a vertical one. This is innate in the “veil of ignorance” Rawls postulates, as theoretically speaking we don’t know our age and are forced to argue and act on behalf of the weakest amongst us because, randomly chosen, it might be us. The vertical social contract is one agreed between different generations. Such a social contract already exists covertly as the underpinning for most pension systems. I pay into a state pension system now from which I will benefit at a time when the next generation is working to pay the taxes that keep that pension system afloat. It likewise exists within families in rural communities where the parents have a sufficient number of children if only for the sole reason that they need to ensure there are enough people who will take care of them once they are physically incapacitated and no longer able to work.

The question in the COVID-19 context is whether governments take the vertical social contract into account when expecting the younger generation to give up going to school or sports, or leisure time pursuits in order to protect the generation of the elderly. If they did, then there would be more discussion of the anticipated trade-off that will be forthcoming.

Fridays For Future

This notion of a vertical contract that runs ‘downwards’ as it is transgenerational is structurally similar to the arguments put forward by the “Fridays For Future” (3F) movement. Personified by the person of Greta Thunberg, 3F is a campaign by school pupils and young

people insisting that the future that is endangered by a 'business as usual' approach that does not try and stop global warming/climate change is 'their' future. In other words, it does not belong to those who reap the main benefits from the "business as usual" approach now, namely, the older generation. If we go back to Rawls' notion of a contract underpinning justice, then 3F is saying if we put ourselves in the position of those young people, and we have to if society is just, then we, too, would do our utmost to prevent climate change. For them, further along the ineluctable path of Time's Arrow, climate change may be a matter of life and death unless we alter our habits of exploiting natural resources now.

In fact, if we look at 3F from the vantage point of the COVID-19 pandemic we could imagine a scenario in which the two opposing ends of the age spectrum rebalance the otherwise respectively skewed social contract. The elder sections of the population who have been advantaged by the lockdowns are in many countries the section of the electorate least predisposed to vote for the 'radical' changes necessary to at least reduce the impact of climate change - I write 'reduce' as with each month that passes so climate change becomes a one-way street of irreversible planetary damage, or so the scientists insist.

Now, the main 3F groups are precisely those swathes of the population that have most had to change their behavioural patterns during lockdowns - no parties, no hanging out, no football, no new job entry opportunities, in part no exams, and thus, no qualification, no immediate social or economic future, etc. The trade-off would logically seem to be that coming out of lockdown for the second wave will be 'payback' time: In return for the one singular natural resource of their lives having been protected, the older generation will vote to protect the natural resources (nature, the globe) to enable the young generation to have the prospects of enjoying that singular resource much later in time.

#EndSARS and the intergenerational social contract

Now there is an obvious parallel I would suggest between the 3F movement and the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria. The 3F member fears a future that is uninhabitable; the #EndSARS member fears a future where she or he may be abducted or even murdered for no reason. Over and above that, both are the victims of a failed social contract.

Let us look at the basic statistics in the Nigerian case, ten years ago, according to the report Nigeria: The Next Generation published by the British Council, the statistical split in the population was as follows:

“Today, over 40% of Nigerians are under fifteen, while 3% are over retirement age. That means there is only slightly more than one adult of working age available to take care of each dependent in the population, a ratio that worsened after independence and is now barely higher than it was in 1960.”

Since we are discussing those who can participate in a hypothetical ‘vertical social contract’, let us only consider those members of the population who are past the age of majority and, therefore, can register to vote. In the 2019 presidential elections there were potentially 84,004,084 persons registered to vote. Of that number, more than 15 million were first-time voters. Indeed, young voters formed a majority, as more than half of the registered voters – 51.11 percent – were aged between 18 and 35. Assuming a birth rate of 2.5 percent, that percentage will have risen further. By the same token, the 36-50-year-olds (the age bracket traditionally regarded as the most productive in the economy) accounted for only 29.97 percent of the votes. In other words, only 18.92 percent of the electorate were aged over 50 years.

It is an indisputable fact that among the young people, there are pronounced differences in interests/outlook now visible between those in the geographical South of the country, and those in the Middle Belt and North. Those in the South have tended to go out on the street in protest, those in the North have not. Some pundits suggested this was because the SARS force was not seen negatively in the North. The argument would seem specious as young people in the North encounter insecurity that is more dramatic than in the South and the percentage of them unemployed or underemployed is worse. One might therefore conjecture that the difference can be attributed to socio-psychological reasons. Young people in the North, it should be recollected, voted overwhelmingly for President Buhari in the 2015 election and to a lesser degree in 2019, presumably placing their hopes in his promises for change. It is only logical that they are now psychologically unable to accept that his government may have failed them, even if their lived reality says it has. Instead, they are forced inwardly to deny the fact; the alternative would be to admit their hopes and faith was misplaced. Such disillusionment would be strongly to the detriment of their short-term psychological balance. While in the long run such an acceptance of reality and rejection of denial is a good thing for the maturation of the mind, the consequences of such an inner loss for socio-political stability are potentially awful.

In terms of the thought exercise on the vertical social contract being undertaken here, those differences are of no import and we shall simply subsume both groups of young people under the category of the #EndSARS age-group. In economic terms, as regards the over 50-year-

olds we can assume that it is the section of the current population which benefited (if any large swath of the population did) from the sale of Nigerian natural resources (oil) in the past. In the absence of efficient national infrastructure and functional health and education systems having been put in place using that revenue, the #EndSARS age group is not benefiting materially from the oil money, although that revenue is a national asset and, therefore, likewise owned by them. Indeed, in terms of the figures for unemployment and underemployment, they are suffering more than any other age group in the workforce. So over and above the fact that both 3F and #EndSARS have made masterful use of the social media, there is a true structural parallel between the 3F group and the #EndSARS group - both face uncertain futures owing to the way natural resources have been exploited by a prior generation. And in both cases governments have tried to ignore the two groups' respective demands or denounce them as misguided or unrealistic.

In the case of the #EndSARS group, the exclusion of the one (majority) group by a minority elder age-group is replicated in the political space. In this domain, to take one example, the "political over-50s" in the geopolitical North, namely the Northern governors, seek to constrain the freedoms of the under-25s: in this instance: their freedom of expression in the social media and their freedom of assembly based on communication through the social media. As with the economy, here, too, the situation is skewed against the younger generation. In other words, in terms of political economy, Nigeria's 'vertical social contract' has apparently failed completely. Governance has ignored the intergenerational matrices

If we construe politicians as representatives of the electorates, then the majority being represented is the #EndSARS generation. In such a situation, is it not strange that protest was required before the politicians decided to 'seek a dialogue' with the #EndSARS generation? They were, after all, supposed to have been representing them and, therefore, to be cognizant of the interests of that majority from the first day they entered into office. Indeed, in light of the above contractarian definition of justice, surely it is payback time for the younger generation in Nigeria. At present, in this context political leadership would seem unable to realize that it is emphatically jeopardizing the social contract by not devoting all its efforts to supporting that majority of the population. It hardly bears stating that in the absence of a social contract there is rarely social peace.

Corruption - Same As It Ever Was?

Nigeria is in the news again. Not for anything remotely positive or suggestive of a nation

going through rebirth but for corruption and financial crimes. When going through news regarding Nigeria and Nigerians on any medium, one is bombarded with reports on cybercrime, misappropriation, and looting of public funds by the very individuals who are meant to safeguard them. As the nation was coming to terms with the shocking allegations of graft leveled against the head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), it was only for its senses to be assaulted yet again by mind-boggling revelations of corruption made by the erstwhile head of the Niger Delta Development Commission. The supervising minister of the commission, perhaps having been implicated in the rapacious looting of public funds in the agency under his charge or wanting to distract attention or show how they have democratised looting, lifted the lid with the claim that beneficiaries of the wanton looting of NDDC were mainly NASS members. Without a doubt, the crimes get more brazen within each news cycle, which leads one to invariably conclude that corruption and financial crimes are much more deeply entrenched in the public place than one might suspect.

Take the ongoing scandal of the Acting Chairman of EFFC who was hauled before a committee set up to investigate allegations of corrupt practices, detained and suspended for alleged looting of public funds - recovered as looted funds in the first instance. This allegation shocked the public due to the sheer audacity and irreverence of the head of the agency that is meant to fight corruption, secure, and return looted funds to the treasury. Much of this outrage stems from the fact that the current administration came into office with a hard stance on corruption. Indeed, the fight against corruption was an integral part of its campaign to address the ills plaguing the country including stemming insecurity and reviving the economy. There was resonance with the electorate as factors attributable to corruption had combined to slow down economic activities and retard gains made in socio-economic development.

As things stand, Nigeria has lost more than its fair share to looting, Chatham House estimates that US\$582 billion has been stolen from Nigeria in the decades since its independence in 1960, which translates into approximately 19 times the current national budget. This is not taking funds lost through other illicit means into consideration. Imagine what Nigeria would have been in terms of development if those resources were at its disposal to address mammoth problems in education, health, infrastructure provision and so on. Due to decades of theft alongside mismanagement and other challenges, the Nigerian economy is in very bad shape, the country should not have to continue contending with theft and crime that make it difficult to attract foreign investment, to create jobs and prosperity, and get millions of people out of poverty.

Corruption and its attendant consequences are incredibly corrosive, the impact on the polity, on social mores, on socio-economic development are pernicious and far reaching, likewise its impact on international relations, international trade and commerce, and diplomacy.

Given the economic challenges they are having to contend with, Nigerians must at this juncture pause and ask difficult questions: questions that may throw up responses that are uncomfortable and unpalatable. Why has tackling this pervasive phenomenon, which every administration has sought to achieve, not had any impact? If anything, it seems to be getting worse. Does this mean the country is going about it the wrong way? What is the right way? Why is Nigeria not as effective and successful in tackling this crime as its peer countries? Or is Nigeria as 'fantastically corrupt' as suggested by a former UK prime minister?

For Nigeria to make progress, it must delve into the problems and understand the nature, issues and challenges that need to be tackled beyond chasing a few people and recovering looted funds only for the looted funds to be re-looted again, a paradox of unparalleled proportions. A recent report by PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2017) estimates that corruption could cost the Nigerian economy 37% of its GDP by 2030. Urgent reform of the anti-corruption landscape is therefore imperative. Nigeria has a multiplicity of agencies (Nigeria Financial Intelligence Agency (NFIA), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and the more widely known EFCC), legislation, regulations and so on and so forth to suggest unambiguous resolve to fighting corruption. Unlike the other anti-corruption agencies, the EFCC possesses the most extensive collaborative mandate: firstly, the composition of the EFCC Board is wider than the others and comprises representatives of about 16 law enforcement agencies with a strategic mandate to combat economic and financial crimes. Secondly, unlike others - with the exception of the ICPC - it is understood that EFCC is the only agency that is statutorily mandated to liaise with others, hence more bureaucratic overlap requiring competence and integrity provide more room for the likely internal corruption going on now. Also worthy of note is the jurisdictional overlap between the powers of the anti-corruption agencies particularly between EFCC, the Special Fraud Unit and the Financial Malpractice Unit of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), and overlapping jurisdiction amongst the EFCC, NPF, ICPC and CCB in respect of public-sector corrupt crimes. This overlap of functions cause abuse of legal process and lack of direction within the agencies.

Much has been made about political interference being the bane of the EFCC. It stands to reason that since politicians constitute the bulk of people prosecuted, they will try and unduly influence the office of the Attorney General which oversees the EFCC and other anti-corruption agencies. After all, the Minister for Justice who is appointed by the President is also

the head of public prosecution. It would possibly make a lot of sense for the country to therefore carve the Office of the Attorney General of the Federation, and its attendant responsibilities for public prosecution, from the Ministry of Justice. A standalone office, similar to the Office of the Auditor General, would be independent, minimising direct political interference. Otherwise the anti-corruption fight looks set to remain a pipe dream.

Another major challenge is that there is no protocol for efficient administration of confiscated assets. This is strange as it can be easily rectified with the passage of the 'Proceeds of Crime' bill into law.

Other capacity deficiencies have been identified as obstacles to the efficiency of the EFCC, such as lack of technical capacity of staff in terms of training and expertise that enables crime detection and the conduct of credible and forensic investigations; and operational incapacity which is supposedly due to insufficient funding. Some of these shortcomings have apparently made it difficult for international counterparts to interact with the EFCC.

Ultimately, these challenges give rise to a rather muddled and weak system which clearly does not work. The question this begs is how can Nigeria get rid of corruption? A close look at peer countries show that corruption is indeed not peculiar to Nigeria as so many other countries battle with it, albeit in varying and higher degrees of success. A 2018 World Bank study showed that in countries such as Sierra Leone and Paraguay the poor pay as much as 13 percent and 12.6 percent respectively of their income in bribes.

Developing countries are not entirely left to their devices in the fight against corruption. The World Bank acknowledged that corruption is a major threat in the realization of sustainable development goals and it routinely gives support to developing countries combating corruption, it assists member developing countries via e-procurement, forensic and biometric support. In 2015, Guinea, for the first time since the country's independence, documented all employed civil servants with the assistance of the World Bank by implementing a biometric identification system to conduct a census of civil servants to eliminate fictitious and fraudulent positions and potentially save more than US\$1.7 million through the discontinuation of salary payments. This has by no means entirely solved the corruption problem, but it is certainly a step in the right direction. Perhaps it's time for Nigeria to start thinking in terms of simple solutions such as how the Bank Verification Number, which is already in place, could be given relevance alongside other solutions. Also to be utilized is the National Identification Number scheme which essentially aims to capture every Nigerian on a master database, because how does one embark on such a task if people are not

documented and as such cannot be easily traced when solving these crimes.

For effective tackling of the corruption problem, a concerted effort led by a combination of the government, the private sector, civil society organizations and the very populace is imperative. Often, corruption to the average Nigerian is understood in terms of theft or misappropriation of public funds by those who are at the helm of affairs. However, corruption comes in different forms and if this pervasive phenomenon is to be tackled, these forms should be understood and distinguished. As stated earlier, corruption seems deeply entrenched in the society, looking at more common-place and as such seemingly acceptable forms of corruption such as the police officer who expects you to pay for your right of way, establishments producing and selling counterfeit drugs, government agencies who rather than practice meritocracy reserve top paying jobs for children of the elite, it is clear that stamping out corruption is not solely an issue of 'political will'. Rather, it requires all stakeholders working in synergy because this problem quite simply exacerbates the gaping inequalities amongst the populace which lead to resentment and distrust of authority, which in turn lead to violence, instability and a general breakdown of social order. Maintaining the status quo is not an option to be considered as the situation is clearly degenerating, urgent reform is imperative. The constitution and all legislation setting up these agencies must be amended to address modes of appointment, structural issues within the agencies, institutional overlaps, accountability, and so on.

Moreover, given that financial crimes have evolved, it is key that we adopt up-to-date technologies to capture, prevent, detect, and deter corrupt practices. It is an indictment on the country that most of the high-profile fraud cases that have been brought to light have been conducted by international investigative agencies. From the much celebrated case of James Ibori, a one time governor, to the case of a former Minister of Petroleum Resources, even the more recent case of the fraudster apprehended by the Dubai authorities - each instance involved the use of high-tech tracking and forensic tools.

To effectively and sustainably fight corruption the country needs to focus on building strong institutions with proper structures in place, cultivating public trust and credible leadership. Nigeria can certainly turn the corner on this endemic phenomenon, but it must start by understanding it in its entirety.

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