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### AN ASSESSMENT OF STATE AND CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY IN DEMOCRACY: A FOCUS ON THE FOURTH REPUBLIC.

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#### **Abstract**

*The state is a creation of the people through the social contract. However, the Nigerian state seems to have been hijacked by a few, who use the authority inherent to serve and protect their interests. When the leadership fails to reflect the needs and aspirations of the society, it suffers the crisis of legitimacy whereby the people no longer recognize and accept the authority of the state. The hijack of the Nigerian state has led to increased poverty, poor standard of living, insecurity, brain drain and consequentially slowed development. This research sought to explore the causes of the crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria. The research employed the quantitative research methodology, whereby a semi structured questionnaire was distributed to assess the causes and impact of the crisis of legitimacy. The research with a sample size of 100 respondents found out that crisis of legitimacy is because of bad governance. The paper concluded that the political heist by the elite few has caused the state to neglect the interest of the populace in favour of the few elite. More so, lack of accountability and transparency were the major factors that allowed for corruption to thrive; therefore the paper recommended the enshrinement of bureaucratic processes in politics to ensure adequate accountability and transparency.*

**Keyword:** Legitimacy, Democracy, Society, Development.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Man at the epicenter of social organization in history has been faced with an unending number of problems which has led man to think, rethink, strategize and re-strategize areas in which he could use in solving the problems. (Aloysius 2014). In the Hobbesian state of nature, Hobbes asserts that prior to the formation of state, man was in isolation and therefore brutish and in contestation with itself. Man could be killed and his life and property in constant threat by others. This situation made people conclude that the state was a necessity. The coming together of the people therefore begot the social contract which created the state and gave legitimacy to the state Hobbes (1689).

The state has created mechanisms to protect itself and ensure legitimacy through democratic elections and choice of representation, rule of law, and checks and balances. However, the present Nigerian state has been perversely influenced by a minority of individuals who lay siege to its democracy. This has resulted into political and administrative corruption, electoral mismanagement, social vices, and economic downturn. Since the return to democratic rule, the



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democratic scene has been dominated by these minority elites who consistently violate fundamental principles associated with a liberal democratic system, such as competitive elections, the rule of law, political freedom, and respect for human rights (Aloysius 2014).

Society is an important aspect of nation building, a bedrock of the state in which values, cultures, and actions lie upon. The foundation of democracy inculcates the idea of the collectives of the people in the city-state. The state though an overarching body survives by the people and the people by the society. The Hobbesian leviathan though all powerful, gets its power from the social contract of the people. Therefore, the people make the state powerful and in turn the state serves the people. Public trust is an important component for development but if there is poor leadership, democratic stability and consolidation will be called to question by those who also seek to benefit from the state. The unsavory role of the elite few in maintaining control over state institutions during contention for power (elections) and the misuse of political power to retain power is germane to understanding the reasons for crisis of legitimacy. The quest to amass state wealth for personal use has led to the pervasive and growing desire to maintain power.

Legitimacy in governance is the willful acceptance of state authority which is binding on all. Legitimacy is one of the most important foundations for the stability of any regime. This is because for any political system to endure and effectively carry out its functions a certain level of consent is required from the citizens (Abdulrasheed 2018). However, the crisis of legitimacy is the opposite as it refers to the usurpation of power by force or other means without the people's mandate. The crisis is therefore the rejection of the authority or the declining confidence in the political leadership of the state. The term was first introduced in 1973 by Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher. Legitimacy crisis is the administrative incapability to maintain or establish structures effective in achieving their end goals thereby resulting in a state versus society syndrome.

The state versus society syndrome beclouding the Nigerian polity reflects the history of misalignment between the state and the society. The state, according to Aristotle, Hobbes, and Plato, is a creation of society for collective protection, progress, ethics, and happiness. Though there have been various revolutions of the state role and responsibility, the objective of the state remains the same. The various progressions of society that led to the first establishment of the state is a trajectory unique to the European continent. This is a development which no African state can lay claim to as the establishment of the different African states came by contact and adaptation of the white colonialist system of government.

Be that as it may, the Nigerian state has lost its mandate, as the societal benefits from the institution to the people has overtime reduced. Despite the abundance of resources, the Nigerian society continues to wallow in abject poverty, underdevelopment, social stagnation, criminalities etc. The state is supposed to lead the society out of prospect to prosperity, and from grass to grace but Nigeria has remained in prospect due to leadership problem. The race for governance has become a race for selfish political gains thereby furthering the difference between the state and the society.



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### **Problem statement**

Democracy, which is supposed to be the government of the people by the people and for the people has been bastardized and crippled to mean the government for the elite few, serving the interests of the elites. The trials and tribulations faced by the state impedes the development of the society. The institutions of the state are being used to reflect the interests of the elites instead of the electorate. With this situation, citizenry withdrawal and misalignment between the state and the citizens are being accentuated. This therefore impedes development, as the society which is supposed to fuel the state development are against it. When the will of the people is not reflected by the state and its institutions, the misalignment between the state and the society becomes fragile and antagonistic. Several studies (Nevitte and Kanji, 2002, Bruce, 2006) have shown that states that lack legitimacy are likely to devote more resources to maintaining their rule and less to effective governance which reduces support and makes them vulnerable to overthrow or collapse. On the other hand, states with a high degree of legitimacy are not only likely to enjoy widespread support but also have the freedom to implement a wide range of policies.

The democratic principles which include good governance, rule of law, participation, political tolerance, transparency, multi-party system, control over the abuse of power, human rights, free and fair elections, etc. have not been effectively placed in Nigeria politics. Since the return to democratic governance on May 29, 1999, widespread corruption in the state institutions has continued to threaten democracy and development in Nigeria. The abuse of public offices, electoral malpractice, administrative and political corruption, illegal use of public properties for personal gains, employment of political thugs to cause mayhem, lack of rule of law, perversion of justice, and sabotaging development are all elements perpetrated by the few in government. All these factors are known by the citizens who see this and therefore withdraw support, antagonize the state, and create mediums in the state which could be used to advance their personal interests. Since the interests of the citizens are not appropriated, the citizens create means for themselves to promote and safeguard their interests.

Objectively, in the world index ranking in governance, Nigeria ranks low with a score of 25/100 with a corruption ranking of 146 in 2019 and 149 in 2020 respectively amongst the 180-study countries. In the areas of stability in politics, rule of law, accountability, transparency, and policy stability, Nigeria ranks low on these indexes (WGI 2021). Elections which are supposed to reflect the people's will, reflects only the elite choice. This therefore leads to crisis of legitimacy, as the state begins to face a much broader challenge when internal problems begin to emerge. Imperatively, the research seeks to assess the impact of the crisis of legitimacy on the development of the state.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Conceptual clarification**

##### **Good governance**

Governance is the bane of the political state that drives society. This refers to uses of the state seat of power to steer society into development. Governance is simply the application of state power



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and authority. According to the World Bank, governance could be referred to as the leadership exercise of management of a nation's wealth of resources for development. Good governance, however, refers to the use of the resources by the leaders and the institutions for development. Good governance is therefore subdivided into three phases namely (World Bank 2010)

- i. The nature of political administration
- ii. The policy formulation and implementation
- iii. Active discharge of constitutional functions.

Governance is the political procedures whereby the people and the state work together for the benefit of all, to exercise their rights and obligations, reconcile their differences and cooperate to produce public goods and services. The state was created to accentuate the good life on behalf of all, therefore the ability to use the state to promote the good life of the citizens is what governance is all about. The state lies at the epicenter of the wheel directing society and the people for the collective good of all which includes, protection, social amenities, infrastructure, communal living, equality, right to life etc. Governance therefore is the various actions and inactions of the state through its institutional framework within which socio-economic development is pursued.

Governance is leadership backed by constitutional power and authority, where the state and its institutions work in cognizance for the benefits of the citizens through policy formulation, execution, feedback, and active state interventions. However, not all governance is classified the same, as some are classified as good while some are classified as bad. Good governance, therefore, is the application and use of state power for the benefit of the state and the society. It involves the efficiency and effective use of state power to steer development. It inculcates good leadership, democracy, development etc. while bad governance is the abuse of state power for the reflection of selfish desires of the few in the state. It inculcates corruption, abuse of power, embezzlement, maladministration etc.

### **Concept of democracy:**

Democracy is the system of government that ensues popular participations, accountability, and representations. To Abraham Lincoln, democracy is simply the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The system of democracy cuts across the participation and involvement of the people in the socio-political, economic issues of the state.

Principles of democracy

- i. Transparency
- ii. Rule of law
- iii. Accountability
- iv. Periodic elections
- v. Fundamental human rights
- vi. Economic freedoms
- vii. Representation
- viii. Good governance
- ix. Responsive
- x. Equality



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### **Legitimacy**

To Aristotle, legitimacy is all about stability of the state and its institutions. He went further by stating that the legitimacy of the state relies on the constitutional use of the state and the willful acceptance of the state by the people. Furthermore, political stability is therefore the reward of legitimacy. The state is created solely to serve society but the misalignment in the society is creating a paradigm of distrust, resentment, rebellion and pessimism between the state and the society. As the state has been noted by the society not to serve the interest of the people but the state has been privately run, a prebendal organization where rule of law doesn't apply to the individuals in governance but to the people only. Rousseau in the social contracts insists that government legitimacy is dependent upon the "general will" of its members. The will of the people has to be the central function of the state. A society where the state and society are misaligned is a situation where the growth becomes bimodal and the state and society act against each other (Omodia & Aliu, 2013).

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **The legitimacy theory**

The legitimacy theory can be traced to the studies of Dowling and Pfeffer in 1975 about failing democracy. Legitimacy theory of state is a sociological concept that focuses on the relationship between state and the people. It suggests that state seeks to maintain a "social license to operate" by conforming to societal norms, values, and expectations. Legitimacy theory assumes that the state and its institutions require legitimacy to gain support and resources from their stakeholders, such as customers, employees, investors, regulators, and the public. According to this theory, a state strives to portray itself as socially responsible and to align its activities with societal norms and expectations. The state engages in activities and adopt practices that are deemed legitimate by their stakeholders to maintain or enhance their legitimacy officials (Omotola, 2008; Omudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010; Aniekwe & Kushie, 2011).

Overall, the legitimacy theory highlights the importance of national perception and alignment with societal values and expectations and here the Nigerian political class and the citizens have faltered in misalignment. The theory emphasizes the idea that in Nigeria, the political class needs to demonstrate their social legitimacy to foster positive relationships with their stakeholders and secure their continued support. For society to trust the state, the state and its institutions must be ready to act as representatives of the people. In Nigeria, the state versus society misalignment is a snapshot of the dichotomy between the state institutions laden with corruption and political fee interest which negates the society's interests, and which does not reflect the society.

### **Methodology**

The research design is a survey design that entails distribution of questionnaire to respondents in order to garner their view on the subject matter. Primary data was used through a structured questionnaire, which was delivered physically to the respondents and their response was analysed using SPSS.

## Results and discussion

Below are the Tables gotten from the analysis of the questionnaire.

**Table 1: Academic Qualification**

Academic qualification	Frequency	Percentage
primary education	3	2%
Secondary education	32	37%
Tertiary education	47	53%
Others	7	8%
Total	89	100%

Source: researcher's survey 2023

This table represents the academic qualification of the respondent.

**Table 2: Occupation of Respondent**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
civil servant	14	16%
self employed	23	28%
Student	36	39%
Others	16	18%
Total	89	100%

Source: researcher's survey 2023

This table represents the occupation of the respondents.

**Table 3**

The government serves the interest of the elite political class over state interest					
		Frequency	Percent%	Valid Percent%	Cumulative Percent%
Valid	strongly agree	25	28.1	28.1	28.1
	Agree	37	41.6	41.6	69.7

	Undefined	18	20.2	20.2	89.9
	Disagree	5	5.6	5.6	95.5
	strongly disagree	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Source: researcher's survey 2023

Table 4

Elite profiteering rather utilitarianism clouds government policy					
		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent%	Cumulative Percent%
Valid	strongly agree	21	23.6	23.6	23.6
	Agree	41	46.1	46.1	69.7
	Undecided	20	22.5	22.5	92.1
	Disagree	6	6.7	6.7	98.9
	strongly disagree	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Source: researcher's survey 2023

Table 5

Political distrust is as a result of historical trend of corruptions					
		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent%	Cumulative Percent%
Valid	strongly agree	19	21.3	21.3	21.3
	Agree	34	38.2	38.2	59.6
	Undecided	35	39.3	39.3	98.9

	Disagree	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Source: researcher's survey 2023

Table 6

Accountability and transparency are important for bridging political and citizens trust					
		Frequency	Percent%	Valid Percent%	Cumulative Percent%
Valid	strongly agree	25	28.1	28.1	28.1
	Agree	37	41.6	41.6	69.7
	Undefined	18	20.2	20.2	89.9
	Disagree	5	5.6	5.6	95.5
	strongly disagree	4	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Source: researcher's survey 2023

Table 7

Elections reflects the choice of majority of the citizens					
		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent%	Cumulative Percent%
Valid	strongly agree	19	21.3	21.3	21.3
	Agree	4	4.2	4.2	68.5
	undecided	24	27.0	27.0	95.5
	Disagree	42	47.5	49.5	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Source: researcher's survey 2023

Table 8

The economic and social condition of the country is because of political leadership					
		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent%	Cumulative Percent%
Valid	strongly agree	22	24.7	24.7	24.7
	Agree	37	41.6	41.6	66.3
	undecided	25	28.1	28.1	94.4
	disagree	5	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	89	100.0	100.0	

Source: researcher's survey

## Discussion

The research seeks to identify the causes of crisis of legitimacy and indicators of crisis of legitimacy was therefore tested with a semi structured questionnaire. The research distributed 100 copies of the questionnaire in which 89 was successfully retrieved, the questionnaire was able to discover salient points. The first questions of the government serving the interest of the people eschewed those citizens perceptions of the government towards serving their interest is low in which only 41% agreed, this shows that majority of citizens believes that the policy of government are not in the populace best interest. Corruption, distrust, and syphoning of funds being the agenda. The second questions which showed that majority of the respondents agrees that elite profiteering is the agenda of the government rather than the principles of utilitarianism with 46% agreeing.

The questionnaire went further by asking if ignorance is the reasons for political distrust and pessimism and the respondents responded both ways showing that some citizens are clouded with ignorance and lack of understanding of governmental ways and some arguing against that the government are the major causes of the pessimism. A trend of corruption, embezzlements, racketeering etc. has made the citizens pessimistic towards the government. Lastly, majority of the respondents (41%) agreed that the economic and social condition of the country is because of political leadership. Political leaders are the drivers of the state. The performances, developmental paradigm depends on leadership, governance, and administration.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The democracy of Nigeria is still a flawed and very fragile one. The lack of accountability in government, corruption, widening gap between the haves and the have nots, are fundamental issues causing the withdrawal of the society from the state. The government needs the legitimacy of the people to function well, but since the state do not reflect the people, then little can be done. The



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underdevelopment of the country despite its prospect, resources and strategic location is simply a reflection of bad leadership. The state needs a leader who will reflect the people and steer the country from prospect to prosperity. Nigeria political environment is a unique and ambiguous environment characterized with violence, vices, self-interest, ethnicity and religion.

Therefore, in order to solve the menace of crisis of legitimacy, it is only the people that can effectively carry that out. Politics is a dirty game and an enterprise for the political class who will do everything possible to ensure they retain power, protect their enterprises and interest. Therefore, the people must come together to effectively showcase the power of franchise by first resisting bribery and vote selling, ignorance, political propaganda, violence and be used to distort election. Lack of accountability and transparency is the major factor that allows for corruption to thrive, the enshrinement of bureaucratic processes in politics to ensure adequate accountability and transparency should be established and enshrined in the constitution.

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