

ELECTION: THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE CHOICE OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This paper examined Philosophy; its value and indispensable role in governance; the problem of governance in Nigeria; and the necessity of “Philosopher Voters” electing ‘Philosopher Leaders’ (to borrow what Plato calls “Philosopher King”) as a solution to our governance problems as a nation. This study also finds that based on the essential rudiments of Philosophy, Philosopher Leaders stand to perform better in policy formulation, implementation and governance of Nigeria. This paper therefore concluded that further disregard and absence of philosophical values in the governance of Nigeria will continue to promote the existing culture of inadequacy plaguing our country's sustainable development.

Keywords: Election, Democracy, Philosophy, Leadership

Opening Remarks

Philosophy as a discipline is central in the good governance of our dear country Nigeria. By now, we should know that Philosophy instills human persons with rationality, foresight, criticality and dynamism, as well as analytic and innovative character traits necessary for quality performance. The present poor governance in Nigeria (which births all manners of social ills) is therefore not unconnected with the absence of and/or disregard for philosophy in the practice of politics and the exercise of governance.

With the enriched mental capacity provided by philosophy; fears, misconceptions, prejudices and underperformance are reduced. But the drive towards quality governance, which is vital for sustainable development is enlarged. The function of philosophy also extends to the provision of ideas that form the content of governance. Philosophy also fosters criticality and objectivity in governance and frees those in authority from the instinctive tendency to interpret everything in terms

of themselves or their interests. In these ways, leaders are enabled to solve pervading and prevailing societal problems which are intimidating obstacles to national development.

This paper therefore examines Philosophy; its value and indispensable role in governance; the problem of governance in Nigeria; and the necessity of “Philosopher Voters” electing ‘Philosopher Leaders’ (to borrow what Plato calls “Philosopher King”) as a solution to our governance problems as a nation. This study also finds that based on the essential rudiments of Philosophy, Philosopher Leaders stand to perform better in policy formulation, implementation and governance of Nigeria. This paper therefore concludes that further disregard and absence of philosophical values in the governance of Nigeria will continue to promote the existing culture of inadequacy plaguing our country's sustainable development.

The Current State of Our Union and Philosophy as our “First Aid”

We are well aware of the debilitating state of leadership that has confronted not only our democracy but also our existence as a people of diverse cultural heritage. The leadership of today is characterized by self-interest, individualism and greed. The history of Nigeria is a mixture of pain and joy. Nigeria as a nation has passed through various phases of her development in pains emanating from factors such as god-fatherism, poverty, war, violence, cultism, bribery and corruption, ritual killings, banditry etc. All these vices stunt the growth and development of any nation, resulting in lack of continuity, consistency, positive futuristic perspectives as well as commitment to agreed policies, programs and projects. The efforts of Nigerians to resist and oppose these vices are often futile. Notwithstanding, Nigerians have learnt to find solace and happiness in themselves and their survival instincts to move on. This is obvious in their industriousness and nationalistic doggedness in defending the nation's integrity expressed through their innate talents in the areas of arts and sports.

Since her independence, Nigeria has suffered severe hemorrhage from ineffective leadership which hitherto have left the country in a state of socio-economic and political comatose. While we are endowed with rich human and natural resources, we still flounder in the ocean of poverty which has eaten so deep into the fabric of our existence as a nation. Corruption, in the name of pinching and sharing our common “national cake” by sycophants and political opportunists has become the language of the average Politician. It is near impossible to find a leader who has no records of misappropriation or corruption after leaving office. This has surprisingly been part of the Nigerian history since independence. In fact, the first coup of 15th January, 1966 by Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeokwu, which ushered us into a journey of thirty-three years through a military wilderness of coups and countercoups, was staged on alleged corruption and cronyism. Accordingly, Nigerians have thought that having

lived under military dictatorship for several years, the return to democratic rule in 1999 was a preferred regime, only to land into scandalous politics of professional electoral fraud.

Nigeria is supposedly a democratic nation, and as such, election holds the *prima facie* feature of her democracy. This suggests that minimum requirement to sustain democracy will be the people's preference to choose their leader in a regular, free and fair election. According to Larry Diamond, this is possible:

when they are administered by a neutral authority; when the electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud; when the police, military and courts treat competing candidates and parties impartially; when contenders all have access to the public media; when electoral districts and rules do not grossly handicap the opposition; . . . when the secret of the ballot is protected; when virtually all adults can vote; when procedures for organizing and counting the votes are widely known; and when there are transparent and impartial procedures for resolving election complaints and disputes.¹

It is evident that this requirement as stated by Diamond, has not been met by the Nigerian electoral system. Nigerian elections, over the decades have consistently been confronted with ineffective administration at all stages and levels (before, during and after), resulting in discredited outcomes. Realistically, we are experiencing a dysfunctional electoral system caused by incidence of electoral fraud which inadvertently produce maladministration and stunted development.² More so, almost all the post-election reports in Nigeria revealed that electoral fraud has been internalized and institutionalized in the electoral process, hence the epileptic political development in the country.³ This institutionalized culture of electoral fraud appears to be a willful and deliberate destruction or at best, frustration, of so-called democratic principles. This unfortunate cultural practice has been the cause of our collective downfall as a nation since Independence.

In Nigeria, to access political power through elections is a fierce battle and its process is often gory. There is hardly any election in Nigeria that is devoid of loss of lives, and pitiable enough, the gullible youths and their families are often the victims of these horrible circumstances while the politicians smile their way to their elected offices. While this is our pathetic reality, Nigerians are yet to reconsider their choice of

¹ Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008), 25

² Bariledum observes this reality as worrisome, since democracy and development are linked to each other, in Kia Bariledum et al., "The Political Ecology Of Election In Nigeria And The Fragility Of Democratic Sustainability" *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* 4, No.3, (2016), 9

³ Ibid.

leaders when it comes to election. We, therefore, will try to x-ray the electoral system in this keynote and show how philosophy plays a vital role in the choice of leadership.

As such, governance trajectory in Nigeria is dislocated from philosophical thoughts and principles.

The consequences of these have been tyranny, political instability, poverty, harsh economic conditions, hunger, militancy, agitation and terrorism. Thus, the ideal Africa that once teemed with tribes that built empires and stable socio-political institutions acknowledged globally, is now backward in governance and development based on global standard. And so, this study tends to expose the theoretical and practical relevance of philosophy in governance, as well as the need for Nigeria and indeed all other African nations to cue into the global political trend where Philosophy and 'Philosopher Leaders' are given central places in governance in order to ensure sustainable development.

The State of Leadership in Nigeria

While the concept of leadership may be universal, it can also be very contextual, as such, it has numerous perceptions and conceptions. Nonetheless, in Webster dictionary, the word “lead”, means “to guide on a way.” So, “leader” is defined as “a person who leads and has commanding authority or influence”⁴. Based on the above definitions, Kemal Surji understands leadership as a method whereby an individual influences a team to achieve a common goal. Leadership is not only influence but also does not exist without influence. For the sake of this paper the definition of leadership offered by Myles Munroe, shall be employed. Leadership according to Munroe is defined as the capacity to influence others through inspiration, motivated by passion, generated by vision, produced by conviction, ignited by a purpose⁵. Placing side by side the above definition of leadership offered by Myles Munroe, and the state of leadership in Nigeria, one can see that the two are at cross-purpose with each other. While the definition pinpoints the area of passion generated by vision, the Nigerian leaders seem to represent a classic example of the absence of vision that Munroe talks about; a situation Ogbenika sees as a by-product of derailing from the ethical values that held African societies (Nigeria in particular) together due to colonialism.⁶ Accordingly, Chinua Achebe describes the trouble of Nigeria as nothing other than leadership. In his book “The Trouble with Nigeria” he asserts that

⁴ Kemal Surji, "Understanding Leadership and Factors that Influence Leaders' Effectiveness." *European Journal of Business and Management*, (2015), 155

⁵ Myles Munroe was quoted by Ogbenika in Gregory Ebalu Ogbenika, *African Philosophy And The Quest For Development In Africa* (Benin City: Mindex Publishing Co. Ltd, 2020), 102

⁶ Ibid.

the “The trouble is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership”⁷. This supposition has been pragmatically displayed in the way our leaders have led this country since independence. A prominent example was the case of Sheik Nuhu Khalid, the Chief Imam of Apo Legislative Quarters central mosque in Abuja, who was relieved of his duty for simply criticizing the President for his failure as a leader to protect the lives of Nigerians being killed on a daily basis by the heartless bandits and Boko Haram terrorists. The only response from those affected by his lamentation was to technically dismiss him on the premise that his comments could incite violence. What a system! There is no more protection of the voice for the voiceless. This is the sad state of leadership in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Electoral System

Nigeria is home to one fourth of all black Africans and has the largest population on the continent. A nation with large numbers of exceedingly educated geniuses from the pre-colonial era till now; look at how intelligently our heroic nationalists carefully won our independence from the colonialists with a spirit of unity and nationality, a spirit that is undoubtedly lacking now⁸ even in the history of our elections. Nigeria's development has been characterized by the absence of continuity, consistency and commitment to agreed policies, programs and absence of long-term perspectives.⁹ Take for instance, the vision 2020, a long-term plan that was meant to elevate Nigeria from the place of a developing country to a developed country, which ended just like many sweet dreams that never came to pass.

Historically, there existed some sort of electoral process before the arrival of the colonialists. While it can be argued that our colonial encounter contributed a lot in constructing our ideology of elections and electoral processes even though they claim to have associated with us and not to have assimilated us, it is very difficult to say in a single paper whether this encounter fostered our development or not. Nonetheless, one thing is certain: that the tactic of divide and rule which was employed by the British before independence, primarily between the predominantly Muslim north and the largely Christian south, has hitherto left a lasting impact on numerous electoral decisions in the country even till now. Besides, the nature and quality of Nigerian elections since 1954, has largely been influenced and controlled by the interplay of religion and ethnicity, or at least political affiliation and

⁷ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1983), 24

⁸ Mathew Hassan Kukah, *Whistling in the Dark; Selected Interviews During the Abacha Era* (Enugu: fourth Dimension Publishers 1996), 23

⁹ Maigamu Gaya, *National Rebirth and Transformation of Nigeria* (Kaduna: Virtual Insignia 2015), 1

manipulations which has left us struggling in the ocean of poor leadership. A lot of these problems have been related to the inability of Nigerians to make informed use of their voter's card without prejudice and bias at the polls. As a matter of fact, their rights have been hijacked by the aforementioned factors.

Although elections are now more regular in Nigeria, the quality of these elections has become a matter of major concern to both the electorate and the observers. From 2003 to 2019, elections were particularly marked by dissatisfaction from candidates, voters and observers. This dissatisfaction (especially with the 2019 general elections) is reflected in the numerous litigations brought before the election tribunals and courts as well as the number of election results that were nullified. There were also reports of late arrival of election officials and materials, snatching of ballot boxes from election officials and stuffing of the boxes with invalid ballot papers, allegations of collusion between election officials and politicians to alter election results and subvert popular mandate, as well as the poor turnout of Nigerians in some part of the country. In fact, the 2019 elections have been described by many as the one with the lowest level of credibility in Nigeria's history.¹⁰ Many of the flaws that characterized the 2019 general elections were encountered in previous elections.

As the 2023 general elections draw nearer, the 2010 electoral bill just got amended to permit electronic transmission of election results which has been an issue in Nigeria's elections for some time now. The opponents of this measure have cited, among other issues, the poor state of our infrastructure and the ability of hackers and fraudsters to manipulate results when they are transmitted electronically. We can only hope that ballot boxes won't go missing online!

Partisanship, Politicking and Choice of Candidate

Bishop Kukah was invited to deliver a keynote address at the Tribune 70th anniversary symposium in Lagos sometime in 2019 where he grieved over the fact that political parties in Nigeria lacked the right ideology to contribute meaningfully to the growth of democracy, as they all serve as mere platforms for politicians to seek power. What makes democracy beautiful for Kukah is that political Parties can be platforms for managing diversity. Moreover, a party should serve as a platform for men and women of diverse ethnicities, faiths and backgrounds to come together and pursue a common set of goals, common goals that will ensure not only growth but development, employment, good working conditions, good and affordable education, decent medical facilities and services just to mention a few in our country home.¹¹

¹⁰ INEC, *"the Official Report on the 2019 General Elections"* (Abuja: Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019), 24

¹¹ Mathew Kukah, "What We Call Parties in Nigeria Can't Meet the Standard of Real Parties" *The Tribune* January 29, 2019, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.thecable.ng/kukah-what-we-call-parties-in-nigeria-cant-meet-the-standard-of-real-parties>

It is disheartening, the reality of elections in Nigeria as political parties usually come first rather than the quality of candidates contesting for political office. In most cases only candidates who are willing to comply with outlined party principles (principles that mostly promote the selfish interest of the political party in question) usually make it to the polls. We often see situations where one who though his parents are from a particular community, was born and brought up abroad and had his education there, but for reasons of political affiliation, is appointed to represent a community/constituency whose plight, needs, customs, and traditions, he is totally alien to. What else do you expect from such a one other than to fulfill his/her family or party's interest which is often at odds with the demands of the community?

As I stand here to make this presentation, memories of the episode that took place in Lagos state shortly before the 2019 general elections keep displaying on the screen of my eyes. Tinubu, who had handed Ambode the governorship ticket three years earlier, decided that the governor would not be flying the APC's flag in the general election. Instead, the party's ticket would be given to a former commissioner, Babajide Sanwo-Olu. Tinubu's reason was that Ambode who arguably was a better governor to Lagosians, had deviated from a 'master plan, a party plan' that according to him, would have ensured that Lagos State remained on the path of development¹². On another stage in the country in the recently concluded elections of Anambra state, Prof Charles Soludo, the winner of that election said something that caught my attention: "The ultimate winner is Anambra people: we are all winners. I hereby extend my hand of fellowship to all of you. I need all of you to succeed. Politics aside, we are all brothers. Let's come together for the "Project Anambra"¹³. For Soludo, the ultimate winner is not his political party, not his local government but the entire citizens of the state for which he has agreed to be a leader. If only he will truly do away with party agenda as he claims and focus on the agenda of the people of the state, he will be meeting up with the standards Bishop Kukah stated in that keynote address in Lagos.

Philosophy and The Choice of Leadership

As a nation, Nigeria has experienced varying pathetic political dispensations as revealed above. It is true that the human person is a political animal but it is also true that politics, especially as it is being practiced in Nigeria, cannot grow or even develop without the aid of philosophy. Our politicians need at least a little dose of philosophy in order to truly transcend the animalistic level of politics. Ewuagwu

¹² Akin Irede, "Nigeria: How Ambode's Removal Dealt a Blow to Tinubu's Direct Primary Dream" The Africa Report, January 26, 2022, accessed April 2, 2022 <https://www.theafricareport.com/170181/nigeria-how-ambodes-removal-dealt-a-blow-to-tinubus-direct-primary-dream/>

¹³ Wale Odunsi, "Anambra Election: Full Text of Soludo's Victory Speech" Daily Post, November 10, 2021, accessed April 2, 2022 <https://dailypost.ng/2021/11/10/anambra-election-full-text-of-soludos-victory-speech/>

affirmed that “In the political sphere, a dose of philosophy, especially, is necessary to enable us to appreciate our political heritage”.¹⁴ The fact that ideas rule the world points to the practical role philosophy plays or should play in Nigerian politics. It takes a respectable dose of philosophy for one to understand and evaluate the essential needs of one's people.

In the contemporary Nigerian society, vices of corruption, indiscipline, misappropriation of public funds, superiority complex, greed, sentimentalism, tribalism, sectionalism and unhealthy competition are evident in our political leaders. These vices have resulted in marginalization, crises, deprivation, economic, political, judicial, technological, infrastructural, educational and social decadence, which are all the results of missing principles of philosophy. This is the rationale on which Plato in his socio-political philosophy, proposes the “Philosopher King” in that the knowledge of philosophy is a necessity for any political leader. Leadership is a very sensitive endeavor that requires wisdom. This wisdom entails the knowledge of the principles of philosophy and their application as tools or techniques to one's life and leadership.

The point here is that it is time for Nigerians to wake-up and realize the fact that not everyone can be a leader and just being 'learned' is not enough criteria. Unfortunately, one of the fundamental problems of making choice of effective leaders in Nigeria is founded on the constitutional provision of the 1999 Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as amended. Take for example, on the qualification for election for membership of the House of Assembly, the Constitution in section 106 posits as one of the criteria that one must have 'been educated up to at least the school certificate level or its equivalent'. The same also applies to the office of the president as espoused in section 131 of the Constitution.¹⁵

Obviously, to lead a vast, civilized and pluralistic society like Nigeria and champion her affairs as president too much for an individual with just a school certificate. Additionally, common sense would reveal the fact that just having a certificate in a particular field of endeavor (especially those ones distanced from politics) is not a sufficient criterion to qualify one to be voted into a political office. Take for example, someone studied food science technology or animal science and all of a sudden, such a person is being voted for as the president of Nigeria. The possibility is obvious that such a person will be devoid of basic political ideologies and the ability to come to terms with the yearnings of the people.

¹⁴Stephen Essien and Nelson Ukwamedua, *Philosophy, Logic and Human Existence*. (Abuja: Veritas University Press, 2018), 222

¹⁵The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, As Amended (Lagos, Nigeria: Federal Government Press), Section 106 and 131.

Plato's idea of the ideal state in his political philosophy specifies the criteria for both incumbent and aspiring Nigerian political leaders. Of the three categories of hierarchy in the state, the guardians (rulers), which in our contemporary world can be referred to as the political leaders, carry out the major and most sensitive functions of coordinating and organizing the other two classes of people in the state (the auxiliaries and the artisans). In other words, in the mind of Plato, political leaders are entrusted with the most sensitive responsibilities of the state. Thus, Plato strongly recommends that the rulers (political leaders) be groomed in the knowledge of philosophy. This is an indisputable requirement considering their respective sensitive functions at the federal, state, and local government levels of government in Nigeria. Therefore, applying the political philosophy of Plato, a political leader or anybody who aspires to become one in Nigeria should be well groomed in philosophy.

While it is possible to make a constitutional amendment concerning the criteria which qualifies one for any given political office as suggested above, this alone is not enough to actualize effective leadership in Nigeria. The notion of the “Philosopher Voter” also needs to be on the discourse. By this, I mean the choice power of the voting Nigerian citizens must also be critically reviewed and reconstructed. Over the years, the will power of the people in choosing the right (effective) leaders has been hijacked by the various prejudices discussed earlier such as ethnic and religious sentiments among others; which become the basis on which the people cast their votes. Philosophy plays such an essential role in deconstructing the minds of such people from this mentality which has beclouded their power of choice and rendered them but tools of manipulation in the hands of these politicians. Philosophy is also able to reconstruct an objective mindset in the autonomous will of the people so that by simply employing their rational faculty, they can grasp who their true leaders are and choose (elect) them accordingly. Hence, only ‘Philosopher Voters’ can elect ‘Philosopher leaders’ Another important reason for electing Philosopher Leaders is to heal our nation along the lines of ethnic divide. Nigeria is a place where the Hausa person feels at home only with a fellow Hausa person. The same thing is applicable to other ethnic groups. There is a kind of natural animosity of one ethnic group towards another and this is often reflected in our elections. Yet, our knowledge of substance and accidents in metaphysics has shown that every human person shares one substance -the humanity of the human person. The humanness of the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Atyap, Ikulu, Kagoro or Ijaw is not lesser or higher than the humanness of the Fulani, Tiv, Idoma, Esan or Egede as the case may be. We all share one humanity. The fact that one is an Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa is simply accidental to the being of the individual person. In this regard, philosophy will certainly help Nigerians to make decisive, rational and unbiased choice of their leaders such that only the qualified and philosophically oriented person can take the baton of

leadership in our country, while at the same time fostering objectivity of judgment on the side of the electoral commission.

Conclusion

Our discourse thus far has demonstrated that philosophy is a paramount discipline that will liberate our nation from conditions that deny us good governance, productivity, sustainable development and quality life. No doubt, philosophy provides the necessary reforms that defeat the challenges of governance. Furthermore, philosophy is a veritable tool for moral and intellectual enrichment of the human persons who drive governance. It therefore means that any governance lacking genuine philosophy is bound to fail as is presently the case in our dear country Nigeria. Moreover, since Philosophy is the mother of all disciplines, no agents of nation building and sustainable development such as the Scientists, Lawyers, Engineers, Historians, Lecturers, Doctors, Educationists, Politicians, Business tycoons, Industrialists, etc. can have an orderly and result oriented work or governance without passing through rigorous philosophical training. In fact, it is easier to say that to be orderly and result oriented is to be philosophical. Here then lies my argument for the Nigerian electorate to elect “Philosopher Leaders”. Here also lies the centrality of Plato's directive for Philosophers to become Kings or for Kings to become Philosophers for the growth of our dear nation and the stability of human societies.

Proposed Topics for further conversations:

1. The role of traditional institution in the election of leaders in Nigeria- as seeming tools for state manipulation. Their appointment should be strictly left to the people without government interference.
2. The need for electing technocrats and entrepreneurs into political offices.
3. The need to vote for persons of integrity not for parties of interest.
4. The need for lawmakers (National Assembly/Senators) to live with and in their constituencies during term of service rather than stay in Abuja. This should be the first condition for the acceptance of candidates.

I will end this discussion by quoting Alfred Adler who correlated desire, aspiration and ability for questing for leadership when he said; “Men of genius are admired, men of wealth are envied, men of power are feared; but only men of character are trusted.”

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