POLITICAL BANDITRY IN THE NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY: ITS EFFECTS TOWARDS NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The art of nation building involves a lot of processes in the life of any nation, these processes normally start from independence to the building of political stability in any country. These processes include formation and building of strong institutions and pillars of democracy. It is believed that the problem of Nigeria in the art of nation building is the problem of leadership, but it goes beyond leadership because there are causes of that bad leadership. One will immediately ask, does it mean, that Nigeria as a nation lacks citizens who can lead the country properly? The problem of Nigerian democracy ranges from different aspects of her pillars or institutions of democracy being inefficiently built and managed by the Nigerian government since the creation of Nigeria as a nation. These inefficiencies metamorphosed into different kinds of problem which is bedeviling Nigeria as a nation as of today. Hence, no single leader in any administration can single-handedly revert the bad situation of governance in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, examines the negative roles that political banditry has played and still playing in Nigerian nation-building toward sustainable democracy. This paper adopted the philosophical approach to study and analyze the contemporary challenges and consequences which political banditry has pushed Nigerian democracy into. This research argued and suggested that without meaningful reforms in all areas of Nigeria's political institutions and the upholding of hard work, political banditry will continue to be a scourge on Nigerian democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Political banditry more than any factor has played much negative roles in the formation and building of politics in African continent as a whole, the worst of it all is that it is profit driven in African continent. That is why in African countries we have sit-tight presidents and life presidents running the affairs of the country even from sick bed. According to Onyekwere, Egenuka and Daka (2023) no less than seven African leaders have been in power for more than ten years which is against the constitution of the nations concerned. Yoweri Museveni of Uganda has been in power for 37 years, Teodoro Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea for 44 years, Paul Biya of Cameroon for 48 years, Dennis Nguesso of Republic of Congo for 38 years, Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea for 30 years, Paul Kagame of Rwanda for 23 years and Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti for 24 years, cumulatively, which means they have been in power for 244 years. This sit-tight mentality cum poor governance in effect with other factors render most African countries to military target, and this has given rise to coups upon coups in most African countries in the recent times.

Yeboua (2023) reported that between January 2020 and August 2023 there were five attempted and nine successful coups, the latest being the military takeover in Niger July 2023 and Gabon August 2023. And nearly 20% of African countries have experienced coups since 2013. And these coups and counter coups have its external and internal causes, but more on internal causes or factors which has its foundation in political banditry. Country like Nigeria is not left out in this ugly situation of political banditry, hence most political analysts and scientists in Nigeria will always conclude that the situation in Nigeria is like the nation sitting on the time bomb waiting for its explosion unless something urgent is done to avert the looming and ugly situation. Nigeria as a nation has undergone many coups in her political life as a nation which most times were triggered off by many political banditries taking place in Nigeria. Of course, its bad effects have ruined and have continued to ruin the art of nation building in Nigerian, judging from the recent or last presidential election that took place in February 25th 2023 which ended up in court and upset many Nigerian youths and was marked by many illegal activities.

Nigeria in the art of nation building has undergone many crises from political, economic, social, security and all sorts of challenges arising particularly from political banditry which gave birth to other anomalies including bad leadership since independence as Achebe (1983) categorically puts it boldly that the problem of Nigeria is the problem of leadership. But when viewed properly, one will see that

the root of bad leadership comes from political banditry that has been the order of the day in the Nigerian political system which gave rise to bad leadership since her political independence. With bad leadership no country can grow to be strong in any of its institutions that have weak pillars of democracy, hence Nigeria has been raided with all kinds of crises due to poor and weak institutions in her democratic system. Nnonyelu and Nnabugwu (2009) assert that the combined failure of leadership and governance in Nigeria was made worse by political banditry as was noted above by other scholars. Hence, the dreams and expectations of largest black people in the world are being truncated, dwarfed, and held hostage by bad leadership and political banditry. This ugly situation accounts for wide spreading of corruption in all institutions of government, budget padding by different arms of government, high rate of brain drains in Nigeria to other countries of the world, election malpractices, insecurities in different forms in all parts of the country, high rate of inflation and tribal/ethnic crises and so on.

In the light of the above doom conditions, this write-up will discuss the challenges bedeviling the country Nigeria and at the same time proffer or propose practical solutions on how to move Nigeria forward in order to create new, better and prosperous Nigeria where foreign investors will be eager to invest, and Nigeria will be safe for world sports events as it was in her earlier days after independence.

Concept Meaning of Political Banditry
Ordinarily, banditry is a generic term that refers to any form of outlaw or crime, banditry can be applied to mean outlaws who alone or in groups commit armed crimes or the practice of plundering in gangs or form of criminality by an individual or a group of people. It can also refer to a type of organized crimes like kidnapping, armed robbery, murder rape, exploitation of environmental resources, power tussles, intimidation and so on (Akinyetun, 2023). Banditry most times according to Singelmann (2009) is a form of reaction by people to alien authorities, injustices, and major social up-heavals but this is more of social banditry than ordinary banditry. This implies that causes of banditry can be from social, political, economic point of view and so on, but it is mostly a reaction against something in the human society. The term banditry also implies a disregard for legal and ethical boundaries, with political actors behaving more like lawless citizens than state representatives. These individuals usually abuse the authority to enrich themselves, maintain power, or suppress opposition, often at the expense of the general population or the democratic process. So, a bandit on the other hand is unwanted individual or group of people who is against a legal system or legally instituted society/community with laws binding the co-existence of individuals in that society. From the above idea, Jonga (2012) remarks that a bandit is one who uses violence in any form like murder, robbery, extortion, destruction of properties, kidnapping, and so on to cause mayhem or disorder in the ordered community.

From the above meanings, therefore banditry refers to many crimes which can be classified into many types. Such classification according to Ifiokobong (2023) can be based on the intentions of the concerned bandits, and the place where the banditry is being carried out and how the banditry is being carried out by the bandits. So, the types of banditry can be ascertained by putting at least three factors in considerations which comprises the intension, the place and how of the banditry is committed. Hence banditry can be classified into many types based on its nature like rural banditry, urban banditry, maritime banditry, social banditry, organized banditry, stationary banditry, mercenary banditry, political banditry which is the focus of this write-up. In Nigeria, this banditry can be identified in the form of farmers-herders banditry in the Northern part of Nigeria, unknown gun-men banditry in the Southern part of Nigeria. Generally, banditry poses many problems from insecurity to political, economic and environmental to all sorts of problem. Hence, a cursory look around the geographical location of Nigeria showed this banditry going on daily basis.

From the above meanings, political banditry can be understood as a means of using force or violence or unlawful means to seek or get into any political power or use of the same unlawful means to perpetuate power for any reason which is against the will of the people being governed. Nnonyelu and Nnabugwu (2009) reiterated the same view that:

> Political banditry refers to the use of violence in prosecuting political
> agenda. It includes political thuggery, rape, murder, robbery arson,

> kidnapping, intimidation, harassment, assault, violation of the electoral processes, etc; all aimed at gaining economic or political advantage. It refers also to plunderous acts by a band of marauders. (p. 153).

Political banditry can also be referred to as political violence against the people or against the politicians either by the people or by the politicians against each other for self-interest. This political banditry extends to destruction, manipulation, and hijack of political structures by the ruling class, party or godfathers for their own interests. Ballot snatching, all forms of vote buying, all forms of result forgery, certificate forgery, rigging of elections from the polling units to bribing of officials responsible for credible elections are all forms of political banditry. Some scholars also argued that political banditry can also refer to the exploitation of political power or influence for personal gain, often through illicit or corrupt means. It involves individuals or groups within a political system using their positions as politicians to engage in criminal activities such as bribery, extortion, embezzlement, and manipulation of public resources for their benefit.

The political banditry when viewed holistically portrays in part a kind of Machiavelli's tenets of politics who was a political philosopher of the early renaissance and a product of a particular period in the history of Italy. "The Prince" written by Machiavelli (1975) believed that politics is for the interest of the seeker and so the ruler must strive by all means fair or foul to acquire and retain power and for this reason, the statesman or the prince must once in power should destroy all the political rivalries or opponents by any means. Many scholars or observers have attributed Machiavellian principles to be already operational in the Nigerian political space where the end justifies the means. Concerning the above view, Ejeziem (2006) remarks that:

> Machiavelli's socio-political ideologies will immediately show his separation of politics from morality. His advent into politics changed a lot in politics. It brought war and immorality into politics. The original marriage or union of politics and morality was disrupted and bastardized. He divorced morality from politics and wedded it with deceit and violence…a look at Nigeria, nay Africa, shows Machiavellism in vogue. Dictatorship, autocracy, authoritarianism, tyranny, sit-tight, etc are all we see. All means hook and crook, fair and foul are used to acquire power and keep it. Morality, so to speak, has no place in our politics. (pp. 70-71).

The above citation of course explained briefly the political atmosphere being bastardized by Nigerian politicians with Machiavelli's principles, yet pretending to be keeping or obeying the constitution of Nigeria or practice democratic system of government. In conclusion, political banditry is rife in Nigeria and it has generated many consequences which is ravaging the entire Nigerian political system. Political banditry in Nigeria is currently undermining the rule of law, eroding public trust in government institutions, and distorting the functioning of democratic systems. It has led to systemic corruption, economic inefficiency, social injustice, padding of national budget and political instability. Efforts to combat political banditry typically will involve strengthening accountability mechanisms, promoting transparency, and fostering a culture of integrity within political institutions which is far from being realized in Nigeria.

Political Banditry in Nigerian Democratic Political System and Its Consequences
Nigeria as a nation has never has it easy in her long years of practicing democracy as a system of government since her independence in 1960. On this, Siollum (2009) commented that the decade between 1966 and 1976 was the most politically explosive decade of Nigerian history during which it almost disintegrated, and Nigerian governments mastered the art of taking their country to the edge of an abyss and pulling back at last moment. Her problem as a country just like other African nations in the continent of Africa started with the forceful division or partition of African nations by the Europeans. Forsyth (1977) explained that the Germany Chancellor Bismarck who was initially lukewarm to the idea of West African colonies with regard to its partition called for Berlin conference. The result of this was the Berlin Act, which provided that any European country which could show that

it had a predominant interest in any African region would be accepted as the administrative power in that region, hence they divided the African countries without any member of African nations being in that meeting.

This led to foundation of what is going on in the African nations today in terms of military interference in the governing of the people, sit-tight presidents, corruption in different areas of African nations, undeveloped economy, inflation, hardship and migration syndrome and so on. This equally brought disunity and all kinds of ethnic and regional wars. Even most scholars commented that through all the years of the pre-colonial period, that Nigeria was never united, and during the sixty years of colonialism and the sixty-three months of the First Republic only a thin veneer hid the basic disunity inherent in the Nigeria nation. The disunity and ethnic crises were laid by British government in the bid to be in control of the Nigerian nation. Forsyth (1977 explained the above situation thus:

> By 30 May 1967, when Biafra seceded, not only was Nigeria neither happy nor harmonious, but it had for the five previous years stumbled from crisis to crisis, and had three times already come to the verge of disintegration. In each case, although the immediate spark had been political, the fundamental cause had been the tribal hostility embedded in this enormous and artificial nation. For Nigeria had never been more than an amalgam of peoples welded together in the interests and for the benefit of European power. (p. 13).

The differences in religious, social, historical, educational and political gap continued to get wider between the South and North, that within few years of independence, Nigeria with a federal structure was broken down in disorder and was finally overthrown by two military coups as of that time and a civil war. This of course, started crippling the nation anticipated to be solidly built-in firm foundation of economic and political stability. Hence this portrays an illusion in building a formidable or stable nation.

The military interference in the Nigeria political arena again, wrecked a lot of havoc to the political stability and good governance in the Nigeria nation building. This is why one has to look at the pertinent question asked by Siollum (2009) on how apolitical professional army with less than fifty indigenous officers at independence in 1960 became politicized and overthrew its country's government less than six years later? Siollum answered among other things that "…the politicians' unwise meddling in army affairs, and the government's use of the army to solve political crises created by it…was partially successful, it also radicalized some of the officers that took part in those operations" (p. 27). Military coup and counter coup are one of the most abominable factors that destroyed Nigeria nation and even continued to do so because the foundational members of political parties after the last military coup came back either as president, governors or ministers. Siollum (2009) then observed that: #

> This has also caused Nigeria to be greatly misunderstood and misrepresented overseas, especially in the area of the Nigerian military's pivotal interference in the politics and governance of Nigeria. Nigerians are aware that their military ruled them for 30 out of the country's first 40 years after independence. Yet there is little situational awareness of how the military became so politically powerful. Even though ostensibly democratic today, Nigeria is still dominated by the same military cabal that over four decades sporadically overthrew democratically elected governments, fought the Biafran civil war and imposed an economic blockage that caused famine and a million deaths, recklessly squandered the country's political evolution. (p. 27).

Another pillar in the Nigerian democracy which has been manipulated by politicians and political parties in the form of political banditry is the process of electing the leaders of Nigerian nation. This process being conducted by different bodies of officers in charge of electioneering has not done a good job since Nigerian independence. It has been war, intimidation, ballot snatching, killing of political opponents, thuggery, rigging by party in power. Forsyth (1977) even alluded that the pre-independence 1959 election was marred with intimidation where the candidates from Southern region were

intimidated in the Northern region of the country during the campaigns for various elections. This has continued in subsequent elections even till last presidential election held in 25ᵗʰ February 2023. That was why Odey (2003) captured one of his books "This Madness called Election 2003".

Nigerian has not gotten it right as far as election is concerned, according to Agbese (2012) the 1993 June 12 election which local and international observers adjudged to be freest and fairest in the Nigerian's political history was cancelled by the then military president in the person of Ibrahim Babangida on June 23, when the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) went to court in Abuja to stop the commission from announcing the results and declaring the winner. On the ground that National Election Commission (NEC) defied a subsisting court order restraining it from conducting the election. The recently concluded 2023 presidential election showed it all again that nothing has changed with regard to the electoral process in Nigeria, it all ended in woes as citizens were not happy with the outcomes and court order flying from all political parties that participated in the election against each other. This of course gave credence to notion of Mbaebie (2009) that the order of democratic elections in Nigeria have continued to prove worst in quality in a retrogressive pattern. Each step towards an embrace to true process of democracy has been consistently and systematically frustrated by the political class through massive electoral frauds with notorious syndrome of "go to court." This factor heavily negates the stability of nation building in Nigeria because good and quality leaders cannot be elected for purpose of good governance.

Political banditry has led to all sorts of crises in Nigeria, from ethnic to religious crisis, herders and farmers clashes, agitation in southern part of the country. In fact, it is normal to have crisis or clashes in the Nigerian political history because the citizens have been made to believe that it is normal to be in one crisis from time to time. From the time of handover by British government to Nigerian government, a kind of major and minor region was created in the mind of Nigerian citizens, and this has formed a kind of ruling class consciousness among these regions. Hence there is always crisis based on ethnicity, religious line. Most times the political parties have been divided along the regional or ethnic bases, hence Nnoli (1980) stated that:

> By 1953 the major political parties in the country, the NCNC, AG, and NPC had become associated with the three major ethnic groups, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, and the three regions of the country, East, West and North respectively…. In the process, these regionalists succeeded in creating the false impression that the various political parties were the champions of the interests of various ethnic groups. And that struggles of these parties for political dominance in the country represented the struggles of the various ethnic groups for political ascendency in the society. (p. 158).

These ethnic wars or struggles to dominate others breed today in Nigerian democratic system a kind of nepotism and corruption among the ruling class, there by sacrificing competence on the basis of ethnicity. Various past administrations have been accused of this gross nepotism in the sharing of the ministerial jobs, selecting of ministers and heads of government parastatals, the situation grossly draws Nigeria backwards from all spheres of her life and make nation building inevitable to keep falling down. This also causes agitations in various parts of the country, some leading to secession, and each region comes with its religion which it tries to impose on the other ethnic religious groups of the country most times through forceful proselytization. Commenting on the sad situation of corruption in Nigeria in the late sixties, the Biafran War-Lord Ojukwu (1969) said:

> Nigeria was indeed a very wicked and corrupt country in spite of the glorious image given her in the European press. We know why Nigeria was given that image. It was her reward for serving the economic and political interests of her European masters…. Nigerian justice was a farce; her elections, her census. Her politics—her everything --- was corrupt. Qualification, merit and experience were discounted in public service. In

one area of Nigeria, for instance, they preferred to turn a nurse who had worked for five years into a doctor rather than employ a qualified doctor from another part of Nigeria; barely literate clerks were made Permanent Secretaries; a university Vice-Chancellor was sacked because he belonged to the wrong tribe. Bribery, corruption and nepotism were so wide spread that people began to wonder openly whether any country in the world could compare with Nigeria in corruption and abuse of power. All the modern institutions – the Legislature, the Civil Service, the Army the Police, the Judiciary, the Universities, the Trade Unions, and the organs of mass information were devalued and made the tools of corrupt political power. (pp. 20-21).

The political banditry as can be recalled in Nigeria has many dimensions, as an organized banditry, it has led to the capture of judiciary, Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and security operatives by the political class or political party in power. This amounts to non-free and fair elections, judiciary process being compromised and security operatives aiding in electoral malpractices and suppression of voters. This capture of the above structures of government certainly results to godfatherism which fore-stalls political development in the country. God-father syndrome has been in vogue in Nigerian political space even as of today. They contribute negatively to the growth and development of the states involved. Nnonyelu and Nnabugwu (2009) pointed out that the god-fathers names the people to be in the key positions in the cabinet, control the House of Representative/Assembly, select its principal officers, and decide the type of largesse that will be given to them on the monthly basis as the case may be. Recently the budget padding in 2024 budget, rocking the national assembly of Nigeria is a good example of consequence of political banditry affecting the nation building. With this, nation building will be impossible to be achieved.

The Way Forward Towards Eradicating the Political Banditry in Nigerian Democracy
The process or the art of nation building is not a day or one time procedure process, but continuous process which entails honesty and re-building or re-writing the wrongs made in the previous years by the political class in the bid to achieve their personal interest while in political power. From re-building the past mistakes, future will be assured and goals for development for the country will be set in motion. This will certainly avert some ugly stories like mass school kidnapping that took place in March 7th 2024 by bandits who kidnapped about 287 pupils at public schools in Kuriga in Chikun local government area of Kaduna state. In line with this thought pattern, the restructuring most Nigerians are clamoring for will be understood. This of course entails removing or total amendment of the 1999 constitution which some regarded as forced constitution or military constitution. Onyesoh (2017) unequivocally pointed out that:

> Nigeria needs to be drastically restructured for it to survive, but that cannot be meaningfully done under the present 1999 Constitution, howsoever amended. Intendment of the extant Constitution is enslavement of the over 379 Nigerian ethnic nationalities, therefore the Constitution and its evil design must, first of all, be cast aside. It is not going to be easy because the oligarchy that designed Nigeria's failed structure, and who are benefiting from its failure, are still very much in charge, along with their alliance parties. (pp. 390-391).

Nigeria tried the National Conference in 2014 with about 492 delegates that represented a cross section of Nigerians including professional bodies towards having new constitution but it was never implemented neither by President Goodluck Jonathan nor President Muhammed Buhari. A review of recommendations from the National Conference should be done and implemented for better Nigeria.
There is urgent need to implement the recommendations of the European Union Observation Mission (EUOM) which helped to monitor the last 25th February 2023 general election in Nigeria. Election in Nigeria has been a kind of fun affair because most time preparations are very poor, in terms of training the ad-hoc staff for any election, transporting of sensitive and non-sensitive materials in various

locations, worst of it all is non punishment of electoral offenders. The European Union Election Observation Mission recommended the establishment of a robust operational framework for the independence, integrity, and efficiency of electoral administration through an inclusive and publicly accountable mechanism for selecting candidates for the posts of INEC commissioners, and Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) based on clear criteria for evaluating of merits, qualifications, and verified non-partisanship (EUOEM, 2023).This of course has been the problem of Nigeria where the staff of INEC remain servants to the ruling party or president who appointed them to the detriment of Nigerian citizens. Without these, election in Nigeria will always be fraud and good leaders can never be elected and political banditry will continue to mar the efforts towards the arts of national building in Nigeria.

The art of nation building involves security of people and properties from every point of view. Secured environment is always the wish of the citizens and it promotes peace and development in any country. The 40% of migration of Nigerian citizens to other countries of the world stem from insecurity in the country from ethnic to religious crisis, and some ethnic groups feel dominated and marginalized by others, even in African countries these crises continue to erupt simultaneously. Okafor (1997) reported that the year 1994 was a year of disasters and ethnic plague in Africa and Nigeria:

> In Rwanda, east of Africa, the ethnic conflicts between the Tutsis and Hutus were climaxed by the gruesome massacre of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. At the West Coast of Africa, Liberia was being ravaged by an internecine war. Nigeria, on the other hand, was at the brink of civil war following renewed crisis on the annulled June 12 presidential election results. In the northern fringes of Ghana, bloody ethnic confrontation had erupted leaving many people dead. Northward, Somalia was bleeding as the two rival factions engaged themselves in bloody combats. In Sudan, too, military operations were mobilized against secessionist groups, killing many and rendering others homeless. Thus the ill-wind of ethno-religious conflicts blew across Africa leaving in its trail unprecedented human, economic, social, and ecological disasters. (p. vi).

The above external and internal crises found in Nigeria and in the continent of Africa ought to be eliminated by all means by leaders in power in the art of nation building. This ensures peace in the land and it facilitates development and attraction of foreign investors and international competitions like world cup of different categories both male and female, world summits, and so on.

The different agitations in the country going on all the time, some leading to secession and some causing civil unrest, kidnappings and killings can be averted by the shifting presidential power to different six geo-political zones we have in Nigeria, with each zone having five-year single presidential bid. If this rotational presidency is maintained among the six geo-political zones, these secessions and civil unrests will be drastically reduced. Again, the institutionalization of a power-sharing arrangement at which all ethnic groups are represented in the three levels of government within the national framework will help to accelerate the level of ethnic harmony and develop a system of trust in the governance of the country (Abubakar, 1997). This will eradicate the easy of politicians indulging in political banditry in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The art of nation building is a huge task, being undertaking daily by the citizens of any country, Nigeria as a nation has been built on faulty foundation and needs to be rebuilt by demolishing some faulty parts of the building called Nigeria and painstakingly come up with good building with good foundation. Political banditry is one of the most democratic evils of democracy which undermines its stability in the art of nation building. This factor of political banditry is a big factor which needs to be eradicated for good governance in Nigeria and development of Nigerian nation to take its pride of place among the African countries. The task of nation building involves among other things putting into consideration building and maintaining the tangible and intangible assets which are being neglected in a nation building.

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