

Nigeria: A Manifestation of State of Nature

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Abstracts

The state of nature defines society with no organization, sometimes having a system of governance without enacting following laws and citizens' security. Modern Nigeria reflects this state through banditry, kidnappings, and other destructive vices in form of violence, corruption, and failure of systems. The breakdown of order by the government has asked non-state actors to undertake authority, a situation that has made insecurity and distrust prominent. Corruption and misuse of resources, political/non-political special privatization and selective implementation of the laws have led to loss of public confidence. Exploitation and the struggle for survival have forced many Nigerians into informal economies. To reduce insecurity and dysfunctions, Nigeria requires implementing rules, fighting kleptocracy and renegotiating the relation of solidarity between the state and individuals in the quest for rights with delivery of duties.

Keywords: *State of Nature, Social Contract Insecurity, Nigeria, Corruption, Institutional failure*

Introduction

What is commonly referred to as the state of nature implies a sort of social status where people live and work together without societal structures to bring order into the society and oversee enforcement of laws. In light of this idea, when looking at Nigeria today one can observe several features of the modern society somewhat resembling the state of nature.

One of the more noticeable signs is violence and insecurity within societies and the world at large. There are the troubled ethnic and religious areas, Boko Haram, and bandits that are terrorizing different regions. This fight entails that while the monopoly over the legal use of force has failed to be maintained at the behest of the government, different non-state actors control this force hence might makes right. Hudson et al (2022) argue that corruption, nepotism, and the decline of public confidence in the institutions have led to the collapse of the social contract between the state and the public. Corruption and a general lack of resource management and fairness have led to anger and mistrust in the capacity of the state to defend and build the rights of a nation and the general welfare of the population (Transparency International, 2020). This system may force citizens to seek home remedies or other means like regressing to the state of nature in order to wrest power.

With scarce resource base, especially land and natural resources, competition for the latter has led to conflict. Conflict management has not been effectively practiced and addressed while resource allocation has not been fairly processed; due to this there have been conflicts between groups with each side trying to fight for their interests through the barrel of the gun or any other available means necessary in order to satisfy their needs or get what they want (International Labour Organization, 2020). On paper Nigeria is a modern nation-state and yet in the practical

sense the country allows people to return to the state of nature thereby creating conditions similar to a state of nature where there is lawlessness and uncertainty and where the social contract is broken. Solving these problems calls for support of the rule of law, fighting corruption, increasing the efficiency of governance, and changing social contract relationship between the state and citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau were the three theorists who developed different opinions about state of nature – an assumed stage of human existence prior to the formation of social relationships and societies.

Thomas Hobbes' conception of the state of nature as a "war of all against all": The state of nature according to Hobbes includes a state of war, everyone fears everybody and there is no assurance of safety. When talking about the "Leviathan" (Hobbes, 1651/1996) we can come across the idea that in the state of nature there is no government, no laws, and no social norms to control the behavior of individuals. The infamous Leviathan is Hobbes's claim that human nature can only exist if there is a common power that can compel people to obedience, otherwise the society is one continual war, every man against every man. It stems from the nature of man, who is equal to any other man and spurred on by the same desires as him, combined with the fact that resources are scarce. To Hobbes, in a condition where there is no society, the life is 'nasty, poor, solitary, brutish, and short', and this compelled the individuals to look for a society and look for a sure way of securing it through the authority of sovereign power.

John Locke's view of the state of nature as a state of perfect freedom and equality: This is in a sharp contrast to how Hobbes perceive the state of nature because contrary to his perception, Locke actually believed that it was a good thing. Locke's (1689/1988) "Two Treatises of Government" identified state of nature as a state of perfect liberty free from any subjection and in which all men are equal and only bound by the law of reason, they have the rights to life, liberty and property. As for the state of war Locke says it does not dominate the situation described the state of nature but instead is a state of peace, goodwill and mutual help. But of course the state of nature can be violated and the laws of nature can be violated and thus there can be conflict and it is only then that there is necessity for civil society and civil society can only be governed by a legitimate government and that entails the government which is chosen by the subjects.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the state of nature as a peaceful, pre-societal condition: Rousseau's idea about the state of nature as described in his 'Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men' further materializes some features dearest to Locke's perspective. In his perceived state of nature, Rousseau painted a picture of human beings living as naturally, healthy barbarians in that they had not been tamed by civilization. It's a state in which people were unmixed and required few things to be satisfied, had a harmonious relationship with the environment. Jean Jacques Rousseau especially postulated that because of the formation of societies and the institution of private property brought about conflict and inequalities and eroded virtue genes in human beings. He claimed that civilization and the relating formation of governments are the principles behind the loss of human liberty and the emergence of artificial oppressive orders and rankings.

These contrasting opinions of the state of nature describe the different philosophies from these thinkers and their beliefs about human nature, the place of the government, and the purpose of civil society. Hobbes saw people as inherently evil and downplayed the overall potential for a society to be cooperative, so it required a strong central authority to enforce order on the people; Locke and Rousseau, on the other hand, saw people as inherently good but disagreed on how societal progress influenced society's cooperative nature.

Characteristics of the State of Nature

Absence of Government, Laws, and Institutional Authority

The state of nature can thus be more or less described as an anarchistic state because of the lack of governance, formal rules, and norms. In philosophical parlance, especially within the arena of Social Contract Theory, the state of nature is a hypothetical construct which endeavors to describe the beginning of societal and governmental form. This is so especially given that the state has no networks for the regulation of rules or even for the reporting of complaints, frustrations and resolutions (Henderson, 2000). Thomas Hobbes, one of the foremost philosophers discussing the state of nature, asserts that in such a condition, there is "no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: Thus no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation and use of commodity that maybe brought by Sea; no commodious building; no puts and instruments to move & remove things that require much strength; no knowledge of the face of the Earth; no reckoning of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and to worse all, everlasting fear, and or danger of sideline death. There are no governing authority to ensure that people are performing their responsibilities out of order instead of their passion and results in anarchy.

Lack of a Common Power to Keep Individuals in Awe

The people of that society are found lacking a power that be constantly kept them in awe. Moreover, there is no collective force of society to set and enforce one's laws and to keep them in check with the use of force. Hobbes remains clear on this when he describes this state as one where every man has his right in everything, a state that leads to war. Which means that without a shared authority, there is no one to stop aggressive actions and unlawful actions. The fear and reverence that an established authority commands are crucial for maintaining societal order and preventing anarchy. Hobbes (1651) notes, "During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called WARRE; and such a WARRE, as is of every man, against every man." The absence of this power leads to a perpetual state of war, where security and stability are non-existent.

State of Constant Fear, Danger, and Insecurity

Hobbes' state of nature is depicted by attributes of war, violence, and contending for survival among individuals. This can be attributed to the fact that there isn't much protective structures put in place as women are always in a vulnerable position and are likely to experience conflict and violence. In such a tipoff existence people remain tense and apprehensive, constantly watching out to be inflicted by violence from other people. Lack of legal or moral justice increases the chances that the actions to be taken are unpredictable which hampers the chances of building trust. Citing Hobbes (1651), the life in the state of nature is termed as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.' Given this, the paramount purity of fear serves to discard any foundation for social cohesion and human achievement, entailing people in an unrelenting cycle of survival and suspicion.

Pursuit of Self-Preservation and Acquisition by Any Means Necessary

In the State of Nature, man's life is immediately recognized as his property, making self-preservation a primary objective for everyone. Again, people's behavior is unregulated in the absence of rules or moral principles; everyone utilizes force to survive and acquire resources. This is sometimes accomplished through proactive and assertive efforts aimed at mitigating potential dangers while also identifying ways and means to capitalize on current possibilities. John Locke, another renowned philosopher who wrote about the state of nature, had a less pessimistic outlook than Hobbes. Locke (1690) proposed that, while people are equally free and equal in the state of nature, they must enter into a civil state to protect their property and lives. According to Locke (1690), there is this concept of personhood in which everyone has a claim over their own body and no other person has rights to it apart from the owner, therefore the labor of the body and the work of our hands are rightly ours. This contributes to the establishment of the acquisition and self-preservation trends that are inherent in human nature, implying that in order to avoid a never-ending state of violence, humans had to form societies.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN NIGERIAN SOCIETY AND THE STATE OF NATURE

Oppression by the Ruling Class

In this regard, present day Nigeria and the experiences of the people concretely embody the state of nature mainly by the bearing of the class that holds power. Coercive action and in particular the use of state instruments to 'suppress dissent and opposition is one of the most noticeable ones. For instance, the Nigerian leaders have often utilized personnel from the military and the police to suppress demonstrations and eliminate dissent. A clear example is the blind crackdown on the #EndSARS protests in October 2020 where the Nigerian Army through use of force dissolved peaceful protesters who wanted the police Special Anti-Robbery Squad, better known as SARS, disbanded because of alleged human rights abuses. Other human rights organizations included Amnesty International where allegations of extra-judicial killings and arbitrary arrests and detention during before and during the protests were well-documented (Aniche & Iwuoha, 2023).

Also, the restriction of civil and political rights is evident in Nigeria which has led to the restriction of free speech and assembly of the people among other forms of freedoms. This however, has been something that the government has used to limit freedom of speech and the media. Some laws such as the Cybercrime Act of 2015 has been considered to be used as legal tools on repression with which government identifies journalists and other critics of their policies. This act gives the police and other related authorities and agencies the powers to arrest and detain people under the guise of committing cybercrimes, which in real sense persecute anyone with dissident voice (Human Rights Report 2019).

Restriction of civil liberties is also apparent as there are many cases of extra-judicial killings and arbitrary detentions. In Human Rights Watch report (2021) it was identified that security forces regularly commit act of presenting local residents with security threats customary arrests, unlawful detentions, and extra-judicial killing especially in the northeast which the military is fighting Boko Haram and south east where IPOB is demanding for secession by deploying military bully called "Operation Python Dance". Such actions perpetrate a condition of fear and

insecurity amongst the populace, as seen in Hobbes Leviathan where life is held in the imminent dread of violent death.

Unequal Application of Laws

The failure also to uphold the tenets of the rule of law with reference to the Nigerian situation hence underlines the same analogy with state of nature situation. Human rights abuse, corruption, and impunity of the few well-connected and the elite are very much entrenched. Criminals in high rank such as the political personality and the business tycoons mostly get away with the heinous atrocities they commit. For instance, while there are allegations of corruption against that the former minister for petroleum resources Diezani Alison-Madueke, prosecution has stagnated despite concrete proofs of money embezzlement (Glamour, 2023). This immunity contributes to the loss of people's confidence since they believe that the law only relates to some citizen.

On the other hand, the weak, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the minorities fall on hard times and are discriminated against. The current justice system is partial, it hounds mostly the poor or persons of low income for petty crimes while the rich and the influential rig the system to serve their own interests. Newspapers have reported instances in which persons suspected of lesser crimes remain detained before trial for years because they cannot afford to hire an attorney or pay a bond (Premium Times, 2018). Such discrimination is tantamount to a condition in which Hobbes described in his explanations of State of Nature.

The current judicial standards have also been eroded to offer protection to the wealthy, making it difficult for the poor to find justice. It is for this reason that most people choose to result into Jungle Justice after being sure of the outcome especially when the parties involved are influential people since, most often than not, the cases are either postponed or dropped. International shores, such as the Corruption Perception Index, have regularly placed Nigeria at a low level due to rampant corruption in its institutions (Transparency International, 2020). This erodes the principles of the rule of law and augments the executive branch's immunity to legal repercussions, reinforcing class division.

Capitalist Exploitation of the Masses

Exploitation of the mass is another aspect that was evident in the Nigerian society which is similar the state of the nature. Selfish corporate motives for profit making through inflating prices of basic necessities are evident resulting in increased poverty and unemployment. For example, when the COVID-19 infections were on the rampage, we saw various items like hand sanitizers, face masks, and foodstuffs being sold at exorbitant prices a process that is dubbed as the price gouging. Lenders and other firms exploited the situation to extract hefty revenues while ignoring groups needing immediate support (Premium Times, 2020). This behavior conforms to the state of nature thesis where Primacy of Economic Survival entails that survival comes first at the expense of everything making it okay to exploit other businesses.

This exploitation is aggravated by the lack of regulation of this sector, as well as the lack of consumer protection. Inadequate enforcement is still a major issue plaguing regulatory bodies in Nigeria due to inadequacies or sheer incompetence and/or lack of political will. This translates to a market situation whereby consumer rights are trampled on by business entities without accountability. For instance, the electricity sector is an area that attests to the fact that guarantee

to a cost-effective price and steady supply is items that are still lacking strong and watertight regulation despite the high rates and unreliable supply typically encountered by consumers (Vanguard, 2024). Some of these injustices are as follows leaves the consumer completely vulnerable to the exploitative activities of some companies, just like the state of nature.

More importantly, the continuity of poverty as a tool for survival for companies can be evidenced in Nigeria. Powerful businesses rely on cogs that are very cheap, keeping the population, especially the working class, oppressed and poor. This is a feature observed particularly in various industries like farming and informal cross-border trading where workers receive low wages, have no access to social protection, or are subjected to unfair terminations (International Labour Organization, 2020). It is in this fashion that labor is exploited to the level of brutality which is evident when people compete for existence inherent in the state of nature.

Also, in the oil and gas sector, especially the petrol industry, Nigerians have long been subjected to the exploitation of oil companies. These companies have consistently increased the prices of petrol, often citing external factors, while pocketing large profits and denying consumers access to affordable fuel (Vanguard, 2023). Similarly, the banking sector in Nigeria has been notorious for imposing multiple charges on customers, including maintenance fees, withdrawal charges, and other hidden costs, despite the lack of commensurate services provided (The Punch, 2022). These practices leave the consumer completely vulnerable to the exploitative activities of these companies, just like the state of nature. These series of exploitative behavior aligns to the state of nature thesis where Primacy of Economic Survival entails that survival comes first at the expense of everything making it okay to exploit other businesses.

Failing State Institutions

Nigeria's inability to provide consistent and reliable electricity is a glaring example of failing state institutions. Despite being Africa's largest oil producer, the country struggles with a chronic electricity shortage. According to a report by Ohajianya et al, (2014), many Nigerians experience daily blackouts, forcing households and businesses to rely on expensive and polluting diesel generators. This inadequacy hampers economic development and significantly lowers the quality of life. The power sector's failure stems from systemic issues, including inadequate infrastructure, poor maintenance, and corruption, which prevent the effective delivery of essential services.

The extraction of fees from citizens without corresponding service delivery is another significant issue. In many urban areas, residents are billed for utilities such as water and electricity that they seldom receive. A report by Udo (2020) highlighted widespread discontent among Nigerians who pay exorbitant electricity bills despite experiencing frequent power outages. The water sector faces similar challenges, with many communities lacking access to clean water while still being charged by the government. This practice reflects a deeper issue of systemic corruption and mismanagement within state institutions, where funds collected are often misappropriated, leaving citizens without the services they pay for.

Systemic corruption and mismanagement within utilities are pervasive, exacerbating service delivery failures. The misallocation of funds and resources intended for infrastructure development often leads to incomplete or substandard projects. For instance, the Babatunde et al, (2023) reported on numerous cases of inflated contracts and kickbacks in the electricity sector, where funds meant for upgrading power infrastructure were siphoned off by corrupt officials. This

entrenched corruption not only deprives citizens of essential services but also erodes trust in public institutions, creating a cycle of inefficiency and disillusionment.

Breakdown of Law and Order

Police brutality and human rights abuses in Nigeria have been on the rise and documented cases including The #EndSARS protest in 2020 raised worldwide awareness of the systemic manhandling by the Nigeria police Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit. Similar to Nwokike et al, (2023), several previous reports pointed out that SARS operatives were involved in extrajudicial killings, torture, and unlawful detention. This is confirmed by the publications of Asadu, (2020) that stated that “We uncovered 82 cases of torture, execution by SARS operatives”. These abuses have not only denied thousands of Nigerians their rights and their deserved freedoms but have also demonstrated the lack of consequence that Nigerian security forces face.

In particular, such absence of accountability regarding security forces adds to the escalation of the lawlessness processes. Rarely does a police officer face any form of prosecution notwithstanding the countless reports of brutality that have been reported. A Human Rights Watch report (2021) pointed out that despite the disbandment of SARS, similar patterns of abuse were observed with other teams that faced no punishment for reckless behavior among its officers. This results in a culture of Impunity where security forces are given an indifferent license to take laws into their hands without any consequence thus compounding the already diminishing trust that the public has in Law enforcement agencies.

There is therefore the emergence of police brutality and lack of accountability between police and their departments which in the long run leads to loss of public confidence in the police agencies. The public has now developed a realization that instead of law enforcement agents protecting them, they are the ones posing a danger to the citizens and their liberties. A report by The Conversation (2022) noted that there is enormous community-police mistrust across Nigeria, and increasing numbers of Nigerians simply take the law into their own hands using extra-judicial means they deem more efficient than reliance on police services. This breakdown in trust has negative consequences with regard to the societal expectations where the rule of law is frequently undermined hence making it hard to uphold order and gain security in the society.

The Struggle for Survival

Due to the inadequate performance of state institutions, many Nigerians are left to take care of themselves. People and communities are seeking alternative means of survival due to the government's inability to provide security and essential services. In the healthcare field, for example, the lack of sufficient public facilities has led many Nigerians to seek alternative options such as traditional healers, private clinics, or self-medication. According to a Soares et al, (2021) article, the absence of reliable healthcare compels individuals to seek out expensive or subpar alternatives, further worsening public health issues.

Informal economies and grassroots initiatives arise as a response to the government's limited capacity to assist its citizens. Street vending, small-scale farming, and artisanal mining have become indispensable to our daily lives. According to the International Labour Organization (2020), a significant majority of Nigeria's workforce is employed in the unorganized sector. While providing a means of livelihood, these informal economies often operate outside of legal frameworks, leading to unjust labor practices and insufficient social protection. In addition, Vanguard (2024), observed that there has been a rise in self-help initiatives such as neighborhood

vigilante organizations. These groups aim to provide protection in areas where the state's security presence is limited or non-existent.

The outcome of these errors has led to a significant erosion of trust in the government's ability to protect the well-being of its citizens and safeguard their rights. Citizens perceive the government as lacking the capability or motivation to fulfill its responsibilities. A report by Transparency International (2020) highlighted the widespread lack of trust in the government, with the public perceiving government agencies as corrupt and inefficient. Diminished civic engagement and a decline in social unity are indicators of this erosion of trust, as people cease to rely on the government for solutions.

Conclusion

The conditions in Nigeria that I mentioned as characteristic of state of nature indicate that the Nigerian state needs to return to its basic foundations to reverse its state failure. This regular failure points to systemic contradictions: institutional failure is evident in the chronic inability of the government to deliver minimal services, corruption and mismanagement. The inability of a police officer to be held accountable for their actions is an indication that law and order has broken down profoundly eroding the public's confidence in the security forces. Moreover, as individuals try to survive within a weak state support of social needs, those have to turn to informal sectors and perform self-help mechanism, thus contributing to further social rupture.

Therefore, for the re-establishment of order and confidence, there is a need to engage in some fundamental reforms of the institutions. This requires enforcing strict compliance with the laws and regulations by various authorities, increasing regulations, and establishing reforms in public sector bodies. Furthermore, increasing the capability of the law enforcement agencies to act based on current and legality is crucial for restoring law and order and regaining the citizens' trust. Since the social contract between the state and the citizens is broken, its rebuilding entails showing real care about citizens' rights, and no arbitrary violations can be made while simultaneously ensuring that social necessities are met without fail. Such efforts are indispensable if the Nigerian society is to be move closer towards a more just, stable, and prosperous society.

Recommendations

1. Institutional Reforms: Nigeria requires fundamental changes; the government needs to adopt anti-corrupt measures to eliminate questionable practices in institutions. Most important endeavours include creation of decentralized anti-corruption agencies, enhancing the accountability frameworks, and increasing the observation ability of the services offered by the public sectors.

2. Strengthening Law Enforcement: Policing and other state security agencies have to be reformed to increase their accountability, professional standards and respect for human rights. External and internal control should be enhanced; Training programs should be conducted periodically; Communal policing measures should be adopted.

3. Economic Empowerment: The government needs to increase expenditures in infrastructure of all kinds, including communication systems, roads, railways, water supply, electricity, etc.; basic and higher education for all citizens; public health services; and rural development to reduce the pressure on informal economies and poverty. Policies that support the development of SMEs can be a key to sustainable economic growth through consistent provision that includes; budgetary,

monetary and support that guarantees continues and reliable power supply and affordable credit provisions.

4. Public Engagement and Trust-Building: Another essential feature of the state's public policy is to nevertheless engage with civil society and local communities for trust reconstruction. These include clear and open communication strategies, effective mechanisms that involve citizens in policy making, and ensuring the needs and collective aspirations of the citizens are reflected by government activities to revive the social contract between the state and citizens.

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