

Nigeria: Failed State and the State of the Nation

Michael Jude Denis
Center for Peace and Security Studies
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
mikelodudu@gmail.com

DOI: 10.56201/jpslr.v9.no1.2023.pg1.9

Abstract

Every failed or collapsed state in the world has a history. Such history is often laden with indices of practices abhorred in other progressive and relatively peaceful states. Nigeria has become infamous for her retarded growth when placed side by side with other developing countries. The reasons for these are not in the blues rather are seen in the day to day activities of an average Nigerian not to mention the seeming institutionalization of decadence in the political structure and polity. This article is anchored on the elite theory so as to plausibly explain this precarious situation. The methodology employed is mainly the analysis of secondary data from journals, literature and documentaries, while also carrying out relevant empirical review. Findings revealed that Nigeria as an entity has experienced in good measure and at a very high rate the characteristics of a failed state some of which include lack of adequate security, corruption, human rights violation, lack of development, weak governance, poor administration, enduring social tensions, violent conflicts, ruins or memories of a civil war, lack of respect for rule of law and loss of legitimacy. The study recommends among others that there should be National Action Plan to guide development strategies, reformation of electoral laws, respect for rule of law, public participation in decision making and a fiscal federalism.

Keywords: Failed State, Elite, Nigeria, Nation

Introduction

A progressive or successful society is characterized by basic human rights, freedom for self-determination, security, social welfare and some sense of liveliness (Dudouet, 2011; Melko, 1972). There is a certain level of stability, growth and development that is expected of a state that has been in existence for over five decades. However, the case with Nigeria is a sad story as it has witnessed so many years of retrogression. In the midst of its rich natural and human resources, Nigeria has unfortunately not measured up with other industrialized societies who came into existence either during or after its independence. To this end, despite its huge resources, Nigeria remains majorly a consumer and not a producer (Ladan, 2013). The UNDP (2011) Human Development Report on Nigeria's income, life expectancy and education highlights the country as being backward in human development globally.

The paralysis of this political entity called Nigeria came in stages. Nigeria was created as a political entity in 1914. Prior to this, its traditional society was blessed with great empires and beautiful kingdoms with independent social systems and institutions. Some of these successful kingdoms that were later merged include city-states like the Kanem–Borno empire, the Sokoto Caliphate, Ife, Benin, the Oyo Empire, city states of the Niger Delta and civilizations like those of Aro or the Igbo Ukwu and Nok (Falola et. al.,1999 in Denis, 2020). Nigeria therefore became the most populous African country numbering about 170 million people presently with different cultures, languages, religion and orientation. Geographically, it spans about 920, 000km square. All these made into one nation is truly an ethnic mosaic but featuring an awkward contraption (Denis, 2020).

The pre-colonial Nigeria was a great people, but the colonial era provided that strong foundation on which the failure of Nigeria as a nation is now orchestrated. Scholars such as Nnoli (1978) and Okeke (2017) have observed that ethnic divide is actually a major bane of Nigeria’s failure.

However, this study is not aimed at concluding that Nigeria is a failed state, but only presents hypotheses for further investigations that may or may not lead to the affirmative, based on highlighted indices of failed states globally. Hence the aim of this work is to explain what a failed state is, delineate the root causes of state failure, show the characteristics of a failed state and also make necessary recommendations for possible mitigation and recovery of Nigeria as the case may be.

Conceptual Framework

Crisis Research Center (2012) understand a failed state as a state that has become incapacitated towards the exercise of its basic functions of sustainable development and security thereby leading to territorial vulnerability. The United States Fragile States Strategy (2005) defines a failed or failing state as that which the government does not provide essential services, has a weakened or lost legitimacy and has no effective control over its territory. OECD (2013) defines it as a state that lacks the will or capacity to provide security, human rights protection and development, coupled with weak governance, poor administration, enduring social tensions, complex humanitarian emergency, violent conflict, and ruins or memories of a civil war. The World Bank (n.d) Fragile States Index mentions the characteristics of a failed State to include poor governance , conflicts, poor security, corruption, tensed societal relations, lack of respect for rule of law and loss of legitimacy.

Conversely, failed states are distinguished from strong states, in essence, because strong states,

exist mainly to deliver public goods, i.e. security, education, healthcare, and political and economic protection. These strong states control their territories to the maximum possible level and deliver to their people a complete range of political goods. Strong states also perform well when assessed under such indicators as GDP per capita, economic competition, and social pacification. With regard to this understanding of what a state should be, a strong state can be classified as that which offers high

levels of security from political and criminal violence, ensures political freedom and civil liberties, and creates environments that are conducive to the growth of economic opportunity (Rotberg 2002 in Underhill, 2014).

A state is bound to fail if it fails to remarkably or effectively carry out each the above listed tasks. On a whole, the perception of what a failed state is not static. Underhill (2014) observes that before the September 11 incident a failed state was measured by the level of humanitarian emergency, however, after the incident it was understood from the point of view of terrorism.

Gros (1996) identifies five types of states namely, anarchic states, phantom or mirage states, anaemic states, captured states and aborted states. Holsti (1997) further categorizes these as weak states because they all share the characteristics of state weakness defined in terms of the erosion or absence of legitimacy. According to Underhill (2014) the existence of weak and failed states became very conspicuous after the cold war. He explains that when a state is incapable of exercising its duties it begins to degenerate along the lines of failure of whereby gaining the status of a weak state. However, Holsti (1997) opines that of the different kinds of weak states, not all have ended up as failed states in terms of a total collapse. Rotberg (2002) understands weak states as those governments that are unable to provide the basic needs of its citizens and where the government have experienced a considerable number of armed conflicts to the extent of failing to provide necessary security both within and at its borders. Weak states are also known to suffer economic constraints, vulnerability to natural disasters, ethnoreligious tensions and conflicts (Underhill, 2014).

Remote Causes of State Failure

According to OECD (2008), the major factor in the causes of state failure is the decisions and actions of political leaders. However, there could be other political, historical, physical or geographical factors. Citing the cases of Pakistan , Afghanistan, Sierra Leone in 1991, DRC in 1996 and other African countries, Underhill (2014) agrees that the failure of leaders is the most responsible root cause of state failure and a second most potent factor is the historical factors which explains the process of state formation .

Table 1: Different causes of State failure.

	Historical Legacy	Legacy of Colonization	of Historical antecedents : Political		
--	-------------------	------------------------	---------------------------------------	--	--

Historical			Violence, Civil war, dictatorship, revolution, occupation		
Social/ Cultural	Culture of Violence	Cultural Conflicts	Religion: Severe divides between groups within a given territory	Cultural disruptions	Divergent social conditions And Nationalistic Struggles for autonomy
Political/ State	Structural inequalities	Favourable geography and porous borders	Types of regime and declining state authority	Divergent political conditions /Focus and internal political divides	US foreign Policy/interference, lack of institutional capacity, weak government, lack of rule of law and inability to control territory and/or monopoly of use of violence.
Economic	Rapid Urbanization	Socioeconomic disruptions	Divergent economic conditions	Weak economy	Poverty and dislocation accompanying modernization

Source: Underhill (2014).

Basic Characteristics of a failed State

It is pertinent to ask what about the line of demarcation between failed states and weak states. On assumption, the conditions that may be considered leading to a weak state may not be so much different from those of failed states except that they are more intensified in the later. Underhill (2014) posits three basic elements of failed states. The first deals with the issues of inability to protect its territories and borders. The next is the loss of legitimacy which is manifested in the internal collapse of law and order; an evidence that there is no effective or transparent governance. Lastly, a weak state is known on the basis of failure to fulfill its basic functions. The first and most basic function of a state is security. The second is said to be development. Hence, where the state loses control over its territories, borders within tensions and conflicts that interfere in everyday life there is bound to be a proportionate failure in service delivery such as healthcare, education and security itself. The consequences of this become glaring in an

indiscreet political and economic disenfranchisement of the people. In summary, “three of the main ways that allow us to understand whether a state is heading towards failure are to look at how it functions in the areas of security, politics, and economics”(Underhill, 2014).

The State of the Nation

Having understood what a failed state is in principle, it is pertinent to place the state of the nation side by side with these factors of state failure. Nigeria is underdeveloped because of the many problems which have caused its backwardness. Such problems include hunger, poverty, disease, unemployment, injustice, insecurity, exploitation, ethnic bigotry and their likes. There is continuous and massive degradation of the system and institutions meant to uphold values in the state. Given this precarious situation the world now rates Nigeria in terms of misappropriation, corruption, moral profligacy, kidnapping, massacre, terrorism, insurgency, humanitarian emergency et cetera. The avalanche of these ills presupposes failure in the Nigerian polity and leadership structure. In fact, most state failure markers in the opinion of Rotberg (2002) are associated with the entity Nigeria, namely, rise in criminal and political violence, rising ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural hostilities, civil war, use of terror against own citizens, weak institutions, a deteriorated or insufficient infrastructure, inability to collect taxes without undue coercion, a collapsed health system, rising levels of infant mortality and declining life expectancy, declining levels of GDP per capita, widespread preference for non national currencies, basic food shortages leading to starvation, questionable legitimacy.

Theoretical Framework

This discourse applies the elite theory which has its roots in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858 -1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Robert Michels (1876-1936) and Max Weber (1864-1920) (Higley, 2010). Elite theory assumes that elite behaviour has a casual relationship with general patterns of state-society relations (Lopez, 2013). It stresses on the personal attributes of leaders and the institutional framework of society. Contemporary elite theory defines elites as actors controlling resources, occupying key positions and relating through power networks (Yamokoski & Dubrow, 2008). This is closely related to the Marxian conception of the ruling class who own the means of production (Lopez, 2013) and also to the Weberian idea of power which is the ability to implement one’s will against those of others (Weber, 2005).

There is no consensus definition of the term “elitism”. Higley and Pakulski (2012), explain it as a practice of rule by a few, selected number of persons or group who possess or control socio-economic and political powers. According to Albert (2005) in Okeke (2017), political elitism is characterized by hierarchy and inequality, the later being a direct consequence of the former since by social stratification the elites occupy positions superior to those of the majority. Political elitism projects the interest of the few at the expense of the majority. Motivated by greed and pejorative tendencies, the elites are skillful at persuading, cajoling, coercing, mobilizing and attracting huge amount of followership. These elites in their quest for prestige and in their greed forego their call to sacrifice, dedication and commitment to nation building which are necessary in the effectiveness of their roles as leaders (Achebe, 1983).

The elite theory accordingly argues that elites power depend on their internal union which forms a strong minority amidst disorganized and scattered masses. These elites take decisions that favour them rather than the desires, needs and wishes of the people/masses. The elites also control and influence the masses according to their party lines which validate the elites rule. When one elite leaves he is replaced by another and he gradually loses his vigour, no longer becomes effective and loses his power. From this it is assumed that the few elites make themselves superior to the other masses that depend on the capacity of the elites to lead them (Ibietan & Segun, 2012).

The elites that govern Nigeria as a result of the privilege and power they derive from their office are not just organized but form a formidable team who are against the underprivileged masses that are disorganized due to the demands on them or survival, sustenance and providing for the necessities of life (Ibietan & Segun, 2012). According to Madunagu (2005), the government also uses their divide and rule system to inhibit these masses from getting qualitative education, shelter, basic infrastructure and other basic amenities and this leaves the masses agitating against unseen enemies. The elites do not also use these funds they loot for the benefits of the Nigerian masses. These exploitations are assumed to be embedded under societal practices.

These elites live in luxury while the poor masses live in lack. This takes us back to Kinnan et al (2011) who said that a nation or state can be said to fail as a result of a broken contract between the government and citizens. This allows us to believe that every failed state started by converting the state powers to their own benefits rather than to the masses. Hence, where there is no legality or legitimacy in governance and policy outcomes, the state of anarchy and failure is instituted.

Conclusion and Recommendations

State failure does not mean that everything has gone completely bad. State failure refers to instances where less than a complete collapse occurs (Doornbos, 2001). It can only become worse if a state reaches the level of collapsing. While examining the supposition of failure, it is only evident that Nigeria is has not reached the point of collapse. A collapsed state is distinct from a failed state. Failed states are characterized by many or the same characteristics as collapsed state but in a 'milder' form (Rotberg, 2002). According to Underhill (2014) a fully collapsed state is the most extreme version of a failed state and is a rare phenomenon; their political, social, and economic institutions are said to collapse internally, though they may still be recognized by the international body. Such States must have experienced a total destruction of government institutions and has degenerated into a state of anarchy.

To put it vividly, Nigeria has not yet experienced a total vacuum of governance in any form. However, the following recommendations must be taken into consideration to avoid a further degeneration of the state, while working towards becoming a strong State:

- ❖ Development of a National Action Plan which will act as a road map to guide development strategies.
- ❖ Reformation of electoral laws to ensure free and fair electoral processes

- ❖ The different government institutions should be wary of enforced taxation with few services rendered in return. For instance the services rendered by Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) and upgrading/renewing of vehicle worthiness for dilapidated roads.
- ❖ There should be avoidance of violent or structural suppression of ethnic and religious identity
- ❖ Our state's distant and unrepresentative elites should call to consciousness the plights of the people they are called to serve and primarily attend to the people at the grassroots.
- ❖ The citizens should learn to keep their expectations of the government alive while working effectively in their different structures that make up the polity to rid the State of corruption.
- ❖ The state of the environment is critical to a strong State. Both the state and non-state actors must develop a culture of environmental consciousness. With a working national environmental policy the multinational companies should be made to take responsibility of their activities, in order not to cause environmental degradation.
- ❖ To ensure fiscal federalism, which will enable the various regions of the country control their resources and share fairly to the central government
- ❖ There is need to educate the hearts of both young and old, especially on the need to keep peace and restrain from crime and corruption, because most of the violent conflicts are caused as a result of lack of consideration for the wellbeing of the 'others'.
- ❖ What is needed to ensure sustainable development is global cooperation (Aydodan, 2015). This calls for transnational environmental security policies, removal of inequality in wealth distribution, industrialized societies being at the service of less developed ones in terms of manufacturing and less tendencies of exploiting the developing countries by the developed ones.

References

Achebe, C. (1983). *The trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

- Aydogan, H. (2015). Environmental scarcity and global security: The assessment of environment related conflicts in Bangladesh, Senegal-Mauritania, Philippines and El Salvador. *European Scientific Journal*, Vol.11, No.8, 1-10.
- Crisis Research Centre (2012). Department for International Development at London School of Economics and Political Science. Retrieved from <http://www.crisisstates.com> on 17 August 2022.
- Denis, M. J. (2020). Political elitism and ethnic violence in Nigeria since independence. *Journal of Liberal Arts and Humanities*, 1(4),154-160.
- Doornbos, M. (2001). Good governance: The rise and decline of a policy metaphor? *Journal of Development Studies*. Vol. 37(6), 93-108.
- Dudouet, V. (2011). Nonstate armed groups and the politics of postwar security governance. In M. Civic and Miklaucic (eds.) *Monopoly of force: The Nexus of DDR and SSR*. National Defence University Press.
- Falola, T. A., Mahadi, M., Uhomoihi & Anyanwu, U. (1999). *History of Nigeria: Nigeria Before 1800 AD*. Ikeja: Longman.
- Higley, J. (2010). Elite theory and elites. In K. T. Leicht, J. C. Jenkins (eds) *Handbook of Politics. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*. New York: Springer.
- Higley, J. & Pakulski, J. (2012). *Elites, elitism and elite theory: Unending confusion?* Madrid: World Congress of the International Political Science Association.
- Holsti, K. J. (1997). *Political sources of humanitarian emergencies*. Finland: UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER)
- Ibieton J. & Segun J. (2012). *Leadership and the failed state status of Nigeria*. Vol. 5, no 1, 2013, Pp 49 – 69.
- Kinnan C. J., Gordon D. B., DeLong M. D., Jaquish D. W. & McAllum R.S. (2011). *Failed state 2030, Nigeria – A case study*. Center for Strategy and Technology, Air War College, Occasional Paper No.67.
- Ladan, M. T. (2013) *Conflict and its impact on national development: With particular reference to northern Nigeria*. A paper presented at a 2-day Northern Peace Summit at Centre for Crisis Prevention and Peace Advocacy. Arewa House, Kaduna.
- Lopez, M. (2013). “Elite theory”, *Sociopedia.isa*, DOI: 10.1177/20568460131112.
- Madunagu, E. (2005). Marxists on resource control. Retrieved from www.nigerdeltacongress.com/marticle/marxists on 23rd August 2022.

- Melko, M. (1972). The qualities of peaceful societies. *Peace Research*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 5-8.
- Nnoli, O. (1978). *Ethnic politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension publishers.
- OECD (2008). Organisation for economic cooperation and economic development concepts and dilemmas of state building in fragile situations: from fragility to resilience, *OECD/DAC Discussion Paper Series*,
- OECD (2013). OECD Fragile states. Retrieved from www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/FragileStates on 17th August 2022.
- World Bank (n.d). Fragile states index. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/ida/themeconflict.html>
- Okeke, R. C. (2017). Elitism, local governance and development in Nigeria. *Specialty Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol, 2 (3): 62-72.
- Rotberg R. I. (2002). The new nature of nation and state failures. *Washington Quarterly*, XXV.
- Underhill, N. (2014). *Countering global terrorism and insurgency: Calculating the risk of state failure in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq*. UK: Palgrave Macmillian.
- UNDP (2011). Sustainability and equity: A better future for All. *Human Development R Report*. Retrieved from www.undp.org on 6th September 2022.
- USAID Fragile States Strategy (2005). The fragile states strategy. Retrieved from http://usaid.gov/policy/2005_fragile_states_strategy.pdf. on 13th August 2022.
- Weber, M. (2005 [1922]). *Economia Sociedad*. Mexico DF: Fondo de Cultura Economica.
- Yamokoski, A. and Dubrow, J. K. (2008). How do elites define influence? Personality and respect as sources of social power. *Sociological Focus*, 41(4):319-36.