State Capture and the Nigerian Civil Service

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In the course of human cognitive expansion, it is discovered that the management of socio-political activities requires organized structures, and these would serve as the agencies that regulate and enhance the balance between the humans for whom they are created and the chosen individuals in charge of their management. The realization that the distribution of power across different strata assists extensively in the crystallization of ideas and philosophies of a society into a working system increases the significance of these agencies and drives humans towards its actualization within the shortest possible time. This confirms the origin of systems and institutions in every human civilization. They are the organizations established through the collective thinking of the people who dream for a better strategy of managing human complexities and their complex politics. Therefore, the created institutions are important because they essentially address different questions around human welfare, justice, civility, fairness, security, employment, and even education. Altogether, they function as a system, and because of the commonality of their objective and purpose, the breakdown of any institution out of these many immediately transfers its negative consequences on the others so much that the efforts invested in others become worthless, no matter how thorough they are.

One of the things apparent from this organizational cognizance is that biological compositions, social positions, and philosophical capacities vary from individual to individual. Thus, if humans refuse to develop such a level of organicity, it holds the potential to expose some vulnerable individuals who are either biophysically challenged, socially disabled, philosophically maladjusted, or economically infinitesimal to mostly predatory challenges that may consume them if care is not taken.

As such, systems and institutions are created to strike a balance and ensure that a respectable level of fairness is reached between and among these people. In fact, in recent times, although limited to some climes, some institutions are erected to ensure that designated institutions equally protect the lives of animals. Therefore, what remains incontestable from this development is that humans have evolved to understand how systems are significant in securing a fair society. By their nature, however, these systems are not immune to human manipulation because they are constructed by individuals of superior cognition. We cannot deny that those who found these institutions occupy a better social class than many other people, either intellectually, economically, or politically.

Since the rules of engagement and the regulatory framework that protect the sanctity of these institutions are created by people who maintain that a certain level of academic, social, or political exposure (in some cases affiliations to the government) is required to occupy the offices, they have shown, in recent developments, their capacity to be susceptible to manipulations. It is common knowledge that when a system is prone to manipulations by individuals or a group of people, it will serve parochial interests that cannot be contended, prevented, or doubted. This is because, among many other things, humans are wired to pursue their interests, and they do so without minding the corresponding social and economic effects theirs would have on others. On this basis, state capture becomes a fearful challenge because it depicts the overtaking of available social, political, and economic institutions associated with the protection of the masses for the sake of bureaucratic powers.

As a result, one might wonder why a project that would lead to state decline was initiated in the first place. There is no better way to rationalize this other than the fact that certain people in the society are interested in the limitless arrogation of power to themselves in order to maintain protracted dominance on the less powerful or, as initially highlighted in this article, the less privileged. A longer stay in dominance and power is a way to extend their significance and validate their importance, especially regarding the people's development. They would be considered the spine of the civilization they have held hostage and would remain in the public memory either for good or bad reasons.

Thus, they attribute public resources to themselves, knowing fully well that the key to societal economic domination lies in the number of funds wo which one can be linked. Institutions would, therefore, be useful only to the select few because they have fallen to the pressure of bureaucracy. It would function to satisfy the whims and caprices of the minority at the painful detriment of the common people. This means that by the time state decline has been perfected, the inferno of social stratification along the upper and lower class would have consumed the system.

In Africa, generally, and Nigeria specifically, another reason for the bastardization of institutions is the powerful people in control. African leaders are yet to evolve from the philosophy of control by all means possible or necessary to shared leadership, which has become the hallmark of good governance in contemporary times. This speaks to their refusal to accept that the world has evolved through the agency of globalization. While it is etched into the psychological domain of many of these African leaders that the best way to direct a people's step towards a predetermined trajectory is to command or control them, the unfolding global events continuously prove the impotence of force in ascertaining some public behaviour. So, for the African bureaucrats, when the organizations and institutions are seized by whatever means possible, it would enable them to carry out their uncivil intentions on the helpless majority. When this happens, therefore, clashes immediately occur, and it mostly leads to some issues, first of which is the breakdown of law. For example, the country's security institutions have been under the control of the elites, which accounts for why they deployed security operatives to intimidate young Nigerians who were demonstrating their grievances during the popular #EndSARS protest.

In some odd situations, institutions can also be exploited because it naturally gives room for such possibility. There are certain institutions, for example, which condone the imposition of parochial interests at the expense of general ones. In those cases, individuals who work within the said institutions exploit this tendency for nefarious engagements. Take, as an example, the situation where a Nigerian soldier mobilizes the support of his colleagues to intimidate ordinary and helpless citizens who have "offended" him. In this hypothetical case (hypothetical to the extent that we are discussing it in the abstract sense, there are many cases of this in Nigeria), the national controlling body of the country's security architecture is unaware of this and would find no means of identifying such. When such practices continue unabated, it holds the potential to crash the system and make it answerable to only the few who "have" power.

We can postulate on the dimensions that state capture takes in Nigeria and how it has possibly affected the country's system. Let us also be reminded that if any part of the human body is malfunctioning, the dysfunctionality could be traced to the breakdown of some areas of the other parts of the body. Civil service is created alongside its rules of engagement, and its rules are the overall values that reflect what society believes about such systems. This means that the rules that have been identified as the regulatory system of institutions are created after considering the opinions of the majority. In other words, the rules guiding different organizations, institutions, and systems are developed from the interaction of the government and the people. However, it is most common for a system that is susceptible to breakdown to find individuals boycotting the fundamental rules understood as the fabric of such organizations. Ignoring these rules is a tell-tale sign that the projected negative consequences that inspired individuals to create these rules would become emboldened by the act itself.

For example, in the Federal Inland Revenue Services, an institution that generates finances for the country, moral corruption is perpetrated by establishing a conduit account where monies meant for government businesses are diverted. This is the fastest way of subverting the public institution for personal and parochial interests. In most cases, this level of misdemeanour is carried out by people at the echelon of power, who believe they can be protected by the immunity clause around most government officials. Therefore, no matter how negligible the amount of money converted into these private accounts is, they would accumulate at some point and become something massive that can crash the country's system. This is possible because finance is very central to the country's administration, and its circumvention would come with daring consequences. This does not mean that other institutions are corruption-proof. The country's justice system can be contaminated by this moral epidemic, which would come with its daring downsides in the long run. When judges, for instance, make themselves buyable by their body language, the diversion of justice to favor the powerful would ultimately lead to state decline or capture.

This results in the seizure of influence by powerful individuals in the society. The elites are one, especially if they belong to the economic class. They speak a language that is generally understood by other members of the same group and which can be acted on usually immediately.

The seizure of power by the civil servants in the judiciary would percolate the system so much that even the secretaries of a company or organizations and others who are meant to carry out clerical responsibilities would seize power in their capacity and begin to arrogate to themselves some alien policies and rights that are outside the purview of the general ones recognized by the society. In essence, state capture by the civil servants generally takes different dimensions because every organization and institution created to guide the society in organizing their engagements would exploit the power given to them for personal and provincial reasons. When this goes on, the consequences are imaginable.

One of the most blatant consequences of state capture is that the perpetration of crimes increases geometrically, regrettably without corresponding punitive actions. This is underscored by the belief that the bureaucrats of the society are bigger than the highlighted regulatory systems and would escape the wrath of the law when they contravene established norms. As we highlighted already, the perpetration of evil and expressly corrupt practices become a contagion that others attract without struggle. Other notable individuals who oversee the affairs of these organizations seek probable means by which they can manipulate the institutions they are assigned to govern. Moreover, because the very few elites have a common agenda, the protection of their class members has always taken precedence above other things. In the case of Nigeria, the National Security Adviser, under Colonel Sambo Dasuki, was allegedly involved in an arms scandal of $2 billion proportion in recent history. Instead of the procurement of arms meant for combating hostile forces in the form of terrorists or bandits, the money was diverted into personal purses without fulfilling the social responsibility it was meant to serve. The indisputable result was that the security system became weak and crimes increased astronomically.

However, the weakness of institutions is another source of declination of the social system in terms of their worth and values. For instance, when the security architecture is weakened because a substantial amount meant for the procurement of materials was converted for personal use, it becomes a problem for those providing direct services in the institution. For example, soldiers who are always at the forefront of repelling hostile forces lose their chance to control the situation as they lack the needed instruments to facilitate their confidence.

Meanwhile, when these personnel fail to deliver maximally, the direct consequence is that they face daring security challenges and become vulnerable in the process, while the bureaucracy structure and its controllers move with suspicious impunity. It, therefore, makes sense to conclude that the gigantic postures of bureaucrats conflict with the systematic arrangements of the society and do so energetically, albeit negatively. It is to be reiterated that instances of the manipulation of office for parochial interests in this case only happen within the domain of security institutions. There is an unending list of such that are evident in the Nigerian society.

We would be quick to refer back to when the coronavirus pandemic was spreading globally at an accelerating speed. It instantly became clear that the medical infrastructures of the world needed every moral and financial support every government could muster. This understanding immediately propelled governmental institutions and structures, international organizations, and multilateral corporations to rise to the occasion of assisting the vulnerable whom they believe could fall immediately to the threat and pressure that the pandemic brought along. Their actions resulted in the widespread distribution of palliatives to people whose sources of income became the primary target of the pandemic. Cross-country assistance became the norm, and every government, even if they were unable to provide adequate financial help for the facilitation of subsidized materials, were expected to show a maximum sense of solidarity and help their people. But the case was different in Nigeria. The government, which would have been an agent of relief, became something different. Palliatives donated by international donors were hoarded, and it took the dramatic actions of the masses to uncover the truth. If this does not tell about the dangers of state capture by the bureaucrats, what else would?

How then can all these be solved? One of the projected ways through which state capture can be curbed is that the sanctity of institutions should be well-established. The establishment of the sanctity begins with introducing external bodies that would be constituted to monitor the activities of different institutions and organizations. Although there are already monitoring groups created for this particular duty; however, creating these supervisory bodies gives the possibility for the penetration of these values as they operate at predicted lines. For example, the bodies that supervise educational systems are known to their potential supervisees, giving the recipients of their actions an undue advantage of manipulating and exploiting them.

The enablement of a thorough intellectual expedition in these schools became a problem, and it short-circuited the academic system for personal reasons. Such manipulations can be prevented if the body in charge of these supervisions is unknown or rotated.

In this way, there would be an allowance for the visitation of punitive actions on individuals who use public offices for their provincial intentions or circumspect it for their monetary gain. When people contravene established norms, it is commonsensical that they face appropriate or necessary consequences, and when there are punishments for anyone who disregards general laws, it will discourage many others from taking a similar trajectory. However, Nigerians are treated based on their social class or the political networking system they belong to. Once it appears that there is no direct consequence between this action and how the society is, the corresponding and indirect consequence is that the people who are thought of as underclass seek improper means of circumventing the social regulations in a way that cannot be immediately observed. The only difference is that when they take these rules into their hands, there would be anarchy, and it definitely would crash the social system sooner or later. Moreover, when available institutions are sanitized, it would drastically reduce the influence of some bureaucratic arrangements and restore power to the appropriate sources.

Corruption in the public services is not done due to the lack of measures to control the act, but rather because of the lack of ideas in managing our systems in the contemporary world. As a result, it reiterates the argument that the abolition of suspicious behavior and attitude to government systems and engagements would substantially help to reduce how totalitarian capitalists and their bureaucratic allies have continued to carry themselves in the public memory.

Problems of Civil Service

Another downside of the Nigerian Civil Service is the brazen confrontation of civil servants against the people whose services are a primary statutory responsibility. The confrontation here is not the initiation of a brawl between them and the people literally, but the harshness with which they carry out their duties. The people are usually reduced to an inferior status where they are treated as though they are inherently worthless. This happens nearly in all the institutions where there are civil servants in the country.

Unless the individual belongs to the bureaucratic hierarchy of the social strata, it is difficult to get a civil servant to carry out an assignment without inducing them or exchanging their actions with some favour. Therefore, they are not citizen-friendly, which has widened the gap between them and the people. The breach of duty has invariably created a breach of trust, and the needed connection between them and the people suffers indescribable agony.

Nearly every civil servant considers their offices as the altar of power where they can do whatever pleases their agenda. A student who needs the help of a secretary to the Head of Department, for example, would have to cope with series of molestations and abuse before their work could be done. It is ideologically displeasing to know that Nigerian Civil servants are inefficient, and indeed, this is a problem attributable to the politics of patronage that has overtaken the Nigerian socio-political space and forcefully redirected its trajectory to what cannot be defined. Consider, for example, that someone was appointed into an office where the production of important output is necessary, not based on their intellectual or moral capacity but because they are associated with top-level political associates, how would one expect that such individual would efficiently contribute to the improvement of that sector? The sardonic effect of this on the general development of the country cannot be reiterated enough.

In essence, the gross inefficiency of the Nigerian civil servants has influenced the economic and moral despoliation of the country that we have today. Nigeria imports virtually all their domestic and public needs to build a suspicious consumption culture that amazes the world itself, not because there are no agencies that produce several of what they consume but because they have rendered these agencies so ineffective that the production of basic goods remains a national discomfort. Meanwhile, the civil service sector remains a fat cow that milk dries the country's financial resources.

Beyond the inefficiency of the Nigerian civil servants is the fact of absence of notable development. Anyone who understands the bewilderment of inefficiency in the country would have no problem connecting the lack of developmental projects that have become almost synonymous with civil servants. Countries with functional institutions do so because they ride on the shoulders of their institutions, headed and managed through reasonable policies that spell out their objectives and make available the necessary human and financial resources required to achieve them.

Even though the body constitutes a devouring group that gulps the country's monies in amazing quantity, they have had little to show for it in the recent years spanning from their independence to now.

Would one be surprised that although Nigeria does not refine its crude oil in the country, the NNPC continues to consume monies and allocations from the federal pocket without showing for it? This is an institute with all kinds of workers in their corporation who are allocated fat salaries from the federal government's coffers every month. There are no publicly known researches conducted or collaborations with international organizations in similar lines that can bring about the revolution of the sector, yet they gulp down fat allocations. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Nigerian civil servants divert resources meant for public use into their personal pockets. They have perfected this act to the point that it is difficult for checkmating institutions to nip their activities in the bud. They have grown so powerful and big, and they have artfully mastered the act of siphoning, cornering, and diverting the resources that will benefit the whole society to their own purses.

In fact, it is terrifying that when the government is headed by bureaucrats of the same ideological persuasion, albeit morally questionable ones, they use their offices to borrow monies that would be diverted to themselves, award projects that have no physical manifestations to their cronies, embark on projects they have no intention of completing before the expiration of their tenure, and commit other surprising atrocities. All of these are a burden on the collective survival of the people because the public is helpless in the process as they have no reliable representatives who would do their own share of stealing for them. And this is why it is perpetually difficult to find individuals who want to serve in the Nigerian public institutions with fair minds. Their eventual activities point to the fact that they have all been awaiting the opportunity to loot the state dry.

One of the projected solutions here is that, for civil servants to be rid of these highlighted immoralities, there must be fear and a sincere set of political representatives in the corridor of power who would not be overcome by their parochial ambition. This would happen when the ubiquitous association of social regard, honor, and accolades for politicians are reduced as a social culture in Nigeria. It is a common experience in Nigeria that politicians, despite their dwindling moral principles and the scandalous involvement linked to them, are always held in high regard whenever they appear in public engagement.

In social gatherings, they are invited primarily to lavish money in parties of no national significance. They are not criticized for flouting established rules and regulations known to everyone, and they have an army of defendants who argue and rationalize everything they do, even when it is apparent that their actions contrast common sense. So, we must have politicians that see beyond the ephemeral celebrative aphrodisiac surrounding the seat of political offices and who prioritize the welfare of the common people against being discourteously provincial. This would help to bring about the restoration of justice and the establishment of solid values at the helm of powers.

Reduction of patrimonialism in the political system will bring about a fresh rediscovery of our civil servants, especially in relation to their service delivery and efficiency. Nigeria is challenged by the evolved practice of patrimonialism in Nigeria, as they have transformed it from the handing of power to individuals with whom they share familial connections to those with whom they share ethnic identity. This level of patrimonialism has infested the Nigerian civil service with undeserving lots who have nothing to contribute to the public, and individuals whose corresponding interests are to recruit people of similar culture, religious, social, and ethnic identities to the public offices. Indisputably, this would come with daring consequences on the general outlook of the country. However, if there is a way to prevent this from happening in the public sector, it would also reduce how civil servants invite rounds of condemnable engagements to the sector. Although patrimonial leaders may not understand the negative consequences of their actions, implementing a good system would force them to see the connection between their short-sightedness and the arrogance to continue in the wrong direction.