

Exploring the Merits of Karl Popper's Piecemeal Social Engineering in Nigeria Africa Democratic Governance

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Abstract

In many countries across the globe, liberal democracy is preferred over and above every other systems of government such as military, oligarchy, diarchy, etc. This is so because, it relatively guarantees peace, equal opportunity, economic prosperity, freedom of choice, citizen's active participation in decision-making process, judicious management of scarce resources, accountability, as it also accommodates and harmonize conflicts of interests, freedom of speech, protects the rights of all citizen, among others. Regrettably however, reverse is the case in Africa and Nigeria in particular, in that, the system has been ravaged by poor political leadership, endemic corruption, ethno-religious conflicts, people remain refugees and internally displaced in their homelands, coupled with constants policy summersaults, endless economic nosediving, electoral frauds, violent extremism, social inequality, political and economic deprivation, etc. Thus, this paper argues that these identified challenges in Nigeria and in Africa democratic governance can be properly fixed if Karl Popper's social engineering theory which advanced for the gradual alteration of social institution without engaging in an unnecessary violence is adopted. With the philosophical tools of analysis and criticality, the study finds Karl Popper's claims as an interesting alternative approach in reforming what I shall calls the '4Ps' which have turned themselves into formidable open enemies that threatens the survival of Nigeria democracy hence the need for continuous reform and readjustment.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, Karl popper, Piecemeal Social Engineering, Open Enemies, the 4Ps

Introduction

Nigeria as a democratic state, practice a presidential system of government which was tailored after that of United States of America (USA) since inception of Second Republican in 1979. Although in the past, it experienced several military interruptions before it later returned and now settled for democracy since May 29, 1999.

As a democratic nation, Nigeria and some other African countries are faced with eliminable but avoidable political, economic, socio-ethno-religious crises and infrastructural deficits which indeed had militated against the successful operation and reaping of genuine dividends of democracy. This happens due to the roles some social organs, particularly the politicians, police, pastors and press or what I refers to as the '4ps' often play. The aggregate of which led to socioeconomic and political exclusion which invariably breeds various forms of insecurity that have bedeviled the nation of recent.

The question that spontaneously comes to mind is “how and what role does these social organs plays in democratic governance which most often rob Nigerians and other African countries the genuine dividends of democracy. In what follows, the study critically, but succinctly evaluates the roles of these social organs in Nigeria's democratic governance using the periscopic lens of karl popper's piecemeal social engineering approach.

Engaging Karl Popper's Piecemeal Social Engineering

Indeed, the word piecemeal denotes an actions done or released in a little small proportions or quantity. It can be refers to stage by stage, bit by bit or gradual approach. So piecemeal social engineering is simply a modest method of social improvement that is devoid of violence measures and approach. By the piecemeal approach, what we can learn is the alteration of one social institution at a time, and it requires the constant use of reason instead passion, emotion and violence in executing programmes. It requires that instead of approaching political challenges by trying to eradicate them all at once, piecemeal social engineering favours handling it in bits. For according to popper, “it is only in this way we can learn how to fix institution into the framework of

other institution and devise a better means to adjust them so that they will fit in well and work according to our intentions”¹. Moreso “it is only this way, one can make mistakes and learn from our mistakes without necessarily endangering the will for further future reforms”². By doing so, there is a possibility of reaching a reasonable compromise and of course achieving some reasonable improvement through democratic means. Piecemeal social engineering implies the “blueprint for single institutional reform, for instance, in adjudication and Budgeting etc, and if they go wrong, the damages may not be great and immediate readjustment may not be very difficult. It is less risky and less controversial”³. By adopting the piecemeal social engineering method, we may get over the very greatest practical difficulty of all reasonable political reform, namely, the use of reason, instead of passion and violence, in executing the programme. As there will be possibility of reaching a reasonable compromise and therefore of achieving the improvement through democratic methods⁴ Piecemeal social engineering is a social reconstruction and a continuous readjustments. Accordingly any social engineer will have to be deaf to many complaints and suppress any unreasonable objections for him to achieve his set goals. Just like Lenin will say; “you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs.”⁴ Piecemeal method advocates that changes has to be gradually and in segments though under a realistic conditions.

It encourages trial and error approach. This means that social engineers, that is, the political actors and leaders can plan, since they have all experiences which they had gained by applying piecemeal methods that incorporates a great improvements. In effect, it permits repeated experiments and continuous readjustment. That is, in all matters, they learn by trial and error, by making mistakes, apply those lessons learnt and then improve on them. And our social world would lead at once to a workable system, but we should rather expect that many mistakes would be made but it could be eliminated only by a long and laborious process of small adjustments. Piecemeal social engineering approach, clear away some of the obstacles impeding a rational approach to the problems of social reconstruction. Hence, it is conceives as the scientific basis of politics, sometimes like a social technology that cannot be carried out without some sweeping changes, but then, it is important to note that the

“secret of scientific method is the readiness to learn from mistakes”⁵

Operationalizing the 4ps

Politicians: The term “politicians” in this study implies the political class which consists of individuals seeking elective positions or lobbying for appointment into political offices. It further includes both elected and appointed political office holders which cut across the three arms of government, namely: the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial arms, whose primary function is law-making, policy making and implementation, and adjudication, respectively. In an ideal democracy however, their individual and collective roles are to ensure the betterment and progress of every member of the society and the country at large. Therefore, the success or otherwise of a particular democratic society is to a great extent depended on the activities and behavior of the politicians.

Police: Conventionally, the police force consists of trained officers who primarily complement the role of the Executive arm of government in terms of crime prevention and detection, law enforcement as well as maintenance of peace and order in the society. “In contemporary Nigeria however, the dividing line between the typically police force and other security agencies had gradually been eroded such that the army, air force, etc are now deeply involved in activities that were traditionally attributed to the police with its consequential effects on the nation's democracy. Thus, the *Policeas* discussed in this study comprises of all the security architecture which include the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) Army, Navy, Air Force, Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) as well as other paramilitary forces that were constituted for the purpose of ensuring adequate security and protection of lives and property in the country⁶.

Press: The press as conceived in this work consists of the news industry dedicated to delivery of information to the general public. It includes the (a) print (b) broadcast (air), and (c) online media that freely publish useful information as well as educate the masses about various public policies and programs on issues that affects the people through the newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the internet.

Pastorates: The term “pastorates” is used interchangeably with pastors, clergy and other religious leaders. As conceived in this paper, it comprises of all individuals who uphold, teach or preach a particular religious beliefs, in the society. They are the clergymen and women – the imams, priests, primates, deacons, evangelist, prophets, ministers, etc. who lead others in various religious centres. However, what follows this segment of the study is the analysis of how the 4ps have willingly or subconsciously acted as open enemies of democracy in Nigeria and Africa in general.

Politicians and Politics in Nigeria

Conventionally, these are set of people who are directly concerned with politics and if they eventually secures political power,they formulates and implement policies that will ensure the continuity of the *polis* as well as enhance the welfare of the citizens. As people who steers the political affairs of a country and participate in the execution of government policies, they are saddled with the responsibility of exercising good governance and thus bring to bear the core value or purpose for the establishment and existence of the state. According to Atabor the “public interest remains the major yardstick for measuring the output of politicians towards nation building, which further implies that “politics is associated with activities or processes of governance by political actors, aimed at putting in place institutions, structures, and infrastructures targeted towards public interests and nation building⁷.” Conversely, Nigerian politicians have impacted more to the decay than progressive consolidation and improvement of democratic principles in the country. This is basically due to the fact that they are seamlessly corrupt and self-centred in many respects. This may further explain why they can go at any length to ensure that they or their “godfathers” acquire or consolidate any political power they aspired, irrespective of how much harm their action may be to the system.

This corrupt life style emerged from their misconception of democracy and leadership. They view leadership as a medium of self-enrichment rather than service to the nation. Oftentimes, they loot funds and use it to monetize the electoral process and use it to buy over the police who having been heavily induced do not only torments the electorates, but

also become a willing tool in the hands of the politicians to achieve their despicable and selfish motives which are inimical to the nation's democracy and development. It is therefore not surprising that policies are formulated and laws enacted in the country not necessarily to favour the “common man” on the street but to further enriched the political class; and when they seem unfavorable to the cabals, they turn against such policies or laws. This explains why there has been policy summersaults every now and then. Take for example, the hasty policy of naira swap or confiscation and cashless policy which took place few weeks to the 2023 general elections. Many politicians were against the policy not necessarily because it is against the masses but because they had hugely defrauded the nation and intend to utilize same in the elections, in their thinking that if the policy is allowed to stay, there will be great loss on their parts.

Understandably, every democratic nation vouches for economic stability and most importantly for security and the wellbeing of the people but, the Nigeria political class have neglected this important role. Forinstance, Workers in Nigeria today are just like “caged birds” singing from morning till night, crying for help while those that caged them laugh and seems to derive joy from their cries.

In a similar vein, independent and impartial judicial system are some of the essential ingredients of a democratic government. It is therefore, the primary function of the judiciary to ensure justice for the people. The courts plays a huge role in deciding the fate of parties in dispute. It also punishes people for committing crimes. It is their duty also, to interpret laws and protect the constitution. The failure of the Nigerian judiciary to carry out their roles effectively and efficiently impact negatively to thenation's governance and security. However, the Nigerian judiciary does not maintain this principle. Laws are only applied to the inferiors leading to injustice. The political class had cheaply pocketed the judiciary and rides freely over the principle of constitutionalism. And there is no way leadership will be effective in a system where there is perceived absence of justice.

Again, it can also be established that the Nigerian judges are corrupt in

administering justice. Even the court that is said to be the “last hope of the common man” has now become the “instrument of the rich.” The judges take bribes and prevent the truth from being told and justice murdered. They decides cases in recognition of personality and this serves as hindrance to the successful operation and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. However, by applying piecemeal social engineering method in this area, implies that constitutional reforms is urgently required in order to mandatorily accommodate the interests and the feelings of all citizens and to teach politicians to observe those unwritten laws whose sanctions lies only in the universal feeling of what is right. It is my conviction also that by applying popper's piecemeal reform system to the social life of our politicians, nothing short of a complete eradication of the offending social system is needed if we wish to bring decency into our democratic governance.

Police and Policing in Nigeria

In a civilized or developed society, the police force as earlier noted is a body of trained officers distinct from other security bodies such as the land army, navy and the air force. They are responsible for prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders and the protection of lives and property. But the Nigerian Police job is sadly strange as, instead of preventing, detecting and arresting criminals, they rather protect them. The police officers today even take bribe from criminals and thereby endangering the lives of the citizens. They turn around to brutalize the citizens and charge falsely against the innocent citizen in other to extort money from them. The brutality alone is capable of jeopardizing democratic governance.

In addition, the Nigeria police today also take part in election rigging leading to the emergence of morally debased, moral nihilists, and incompetent persons into government. The high ranking Police officers usually receive bribes from top politicians in order to compromise the electoral conduct. Take for instance, the recently conducted election in Adamawa State between Aisha Binani and Ahmad Fintiri where a highly placed Police officer accompanied the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) of the State to announce fake results while the collation of results was still ongoing. Piecemeal social engineering approach here requires

the small scale gradual alteration and readjustment of the behavior of our security agencies such that they work and function according our intentions without risking or endangering their collective moral responsibilities and that of the citizens.

Pastorates and Politics in Nigeria

It is pertinent to say that about 85% of the masses in Nigeria today depend on their respective religious dogmas as a guide to morality. People act in accordance with what is preached, prophesized and encouraged by their religious leaders.

In Nigeria today, most of the so-called religious leaders, including the atheists have become tribalistic, materialistic and deceptive in their spiritual and moral obligations. They no longer preach salvation but instead focus in meeting their egoistic interests and that of the political class. Often times, they collect huge sums of money from the politicians in order to speak good of them which will in turn translate in fetching them votes during the elections. This way, the morality of the Church is been lost. In fact, what is preached by priests, imams, etc. today is sentimental and bias politics.

Most importantly some remarks from the clergies are even capable of causing havoc to the society resulting to leadership crises. The piecemeal method will therefore subject every common opinion of the religious leaders to critical evaluation and by so doing, attempt to determine what actually the truth using reason and non-violence approach is. The piecemeal engineer will accordingly adopt the method of searching for, and fighting against, the greatest evil of the society. And he will also search for and fight for the society's ultimate good. This is achieved through a small scale gradual processes.

Press and democracy in Nigeria

No doubt, the press is the vehicle of democracy. It is supposed to be the trumpet that heralds the beauty of democracy and condemn its enemies without any prejudice whatsoever. Thus, the press plays significant roles in democratic governance and some of these roles includes information dissemination, education and enlightenment as well as acting as a

watchdog of the society, especially to the government in power etc. As information disseminators, they are expected to inform the public on issues of national importance whilst helping people to arm themselves with sufficient facts on which to base rational judgments and select course of actions.

Prospects and Challenges of Piecemeal Social Engineering

Karl Popper had remarked that “the reconstruction of society is a big undertaking which must cause considerable inconvenience to many, and for a considerable span of time. Accordingly, the utopian engineer will have to be deaf to many complaints; in fact, it will be part of his business to suppress unreasonable objections” This principle if applied in democracy and governance will rather uproot and destroy healthy views that would have contributed to reforming the society. Besides, it will instead encourage and nurture a totalitarian system of government which the suppressed voices will accordingly revolt against without excluding any violent means that the piecemeal method initially condemned. Therefore the piecemeal meal social engineering method in disguise, is a sanctuary of violent extremism.

It is believed however that popper's social engineering method is a social reconstruction approach that has the potential of addressing the urgent needs of the people, as it is not based on the complicated blueprint only known to the few experts. Although, Popper did not prescribe a uniform piecemeal approach. This therefore allows each democratic society to determine how to tailor it in order to suit its peculiar situations and circumstances. Karl popper no doubt wrote extensively on the viability and the practicability of piecemeal social engineering yet he did not outline any realistic method for its application. The details involved in applying it in concrete terms were not drafted hence the onus therefore lies on those who wish to adopt it to work out the details of its application within their various local communities. One may argue that popper maybe avoiding falling into the same trap that people like marx fell into by advancing utopian blueprint. According to E,V Ezeugwu, “since piecemeal social engineering is a scientific social programme, it is left in the hands of each social engineer to operate it based on peculiarities and situations within his own community”⁸. Unarguably, popper's piecemeal

approach remains a realistic guide which if well applied will result in genuine social reform and progress.

In fact, there are many challenges confronting the society but the piecemeal engineer do not claim to have the capacity to handle all at the same time. He understands the need to proceed gradually, assessing the impacts as well as the unintended consequences of the reform hence this approach becomes crucial, because if a social reconstruction goes wrong, its negative impact creates room for people to suffer than it intended to help. This explains why piecemeal social approach does not engage in complex and holistic reforms at once.

It is the position of popper that the piecemeal social engineer will, “accordingly, adopt the method of searching for, and fighting against the most urgent evils of society rather than searching for, and fighting for its ultimate good”⁹ It can be seen from this, that the piecemeal approach is not all about seeking for the ultimate solution on how to reform and eliminate all evils in the society. Its major focus at each point is the most urgent evils of society. This however raises the challenge on how the evil can be measured or scaled in order to arrive at the comparative index of the ones that are most urgent. Popper could be imagine to answering that it could be decided through democratic process

The application of piecemeal social engineering therefore entails the adoption of rationalism while avoiding the violent means as part of the social and democratic culture. This however shift emphasis from ethnic consciousness to a healthy cross-fertilization of ideas that promotes peaceful reform and national growth devoid of human suffering.

Conclusion

The deplorable legacies left behind by the aforementioned social organs in African democracy and governance are that of corruption, twisted truth and selfish-interests. But then, the only profitable solution to these endemic phenomenon is the enthronement of blueprint for single institutional reform. Although this may cause a considerable inconvenience to many at some point but it is the only realistic approach that requires effective leadership that can adequately suppress any

unreasonable objections without revolutionizing the whole society.

The piecemeal method of social reconstruction project believe that there is no policy that is error free hence it make nuances for trial and error, making mistakes, but this could be eliminated by the process of small scale gradual adjustment. Indeed, it is a better alternative to authoritarianism and fascism as it has the capacity to engender political culture of openness and self- assessment. While not acknowledging that this paper provides a final verdict on piecemeal social engineering, it should be seen as a starting point for further consideration.

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