Governance Crisis in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic
An Exploration of the Roles of Politicians and Their Cronies

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Abstract

The essay examines the level of interdependency between politicians and their cronies over their gain of power and the allocation of state resources; it also identifies the rationales behind the actions of political cronies that lead politicians to continually satisfy their demands to the detriment of the national interest. The purpose is to examine the effects of the roles of politicians and their cronies on the crisis of governance in Nigeria. The essay relies on secondary data from empirical works on the subject and documentary analysis of works on governance and democracy. The data have been analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results show that there is a high level of interdependency between politicians and their cronies, such that the social relationships rooted in blood ties, race, friendship, or religion have shaped or given meaning to human identities and formed the basis of governance. The results also show that the desire for private gain motivates political cronies to make illicit demands that affect governance, while the desire to gain or retain power motivates politicians to loot the state’s treasury to appease their cronies, inevitably relegating national interest to a less important level and resulting in a crisis of governance in Nigeria. The essay concludes that the actions and roles of politicians and their cronies in placing private interests ahead of the national interest has adversely affected good governance. The essay foresees, however, that the illicit actions of politicians and their cronies could be checked by voting such politicians out of office, changing the mindset of the cronies regarding their immoderate demands, adhering to the rule of law, promoting selflessness, upholding good ethical behavior, and strengthening the Code of Conduct Bureau and other anticorruption institutions.

Keywords: Bad governance, corruption, cronies, national interest, primordial interest.

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Evidence from literature reveals that the problem of bad governance in Nigeria is commonly attributed to poor leadership and corruption.\(^1\) While corruption is the root cause of bad governance in Nigeria, it is not only the leaders in public office who engage in unscrupulousness, but also their cronies who impose illicit self-enriching demands. Not all leaders in Nigeria are corrupt or want to ignore the country’s interests in favor of dishonest gains, but too frequently they succumb to undue pressure stemming from the unending selfish interests of their cronies, specifically those related by blood ties, language, religion, party, club or association, ethnic group, or race. Pressures to meet the demands of such private interests have made most public office holders corrupt and inclined toward bad governance. Politicians’ cronies include, but are not restricted to, friends, associates, party loyalists, and godfathers (i.e., wealthy and powerful sponsors of the politicians who hold power). These groups of people seem to be closely related to politicians or public office holders. The relationship between the cronies and politicians is not unidirectional, as it can flow both ways. Politicians generally seek and receive help from cronies prior to and on their assumption of office, while the cronies often demand compensation for the work done in assisting politicians to gain power and maintain them in office.

Cronies constitute a group that, in one way or another, has been instrumental in the emergence of political office holders or politicians in political departments across the country. They often are referenced as godfathers, wealthy friends, or sponsors.\(^2\) Globally, in all political systems, it is impossible to completely divorce social relationships or cronies from politics or governance. This is because relationships rooted in blood ties and race or language have formed a potent force shaping political and economic events and have defined human identities and the basis of interaction in governance. In fact, anywhere in the world, it is almost impossible to ask politicians or their cronies to forgo their individual interests because the majority seem to be driven by private concerns. Yet, some leaders have promoted their country’s national interest over individual gain, irrespective of the amount of pressure brought to bear on them. Leaders such as the late Nelson Mandela of South Africa, José Mujica of Uruguay, and Barack Obama of the United States, although having private interests, seem to have promoted their country’s national interest over their private ones. They publicly declared their assets, made personal sacrifices,


and acted within the confines of their state’s laws and effectively used law enforcement or anticorruption agencies and institutions to see that the national interest was protected. For instance, Mandela fought tirelessly and selflessly for the independence of South Africa, making many personal sacrifices. During this process, he must have been offered personal gain to forgo the struggle for the country’s self-reliance, but he stood his ground. Today, not only his family but also the entire citizenry is reaping the benefits from his struggle. Another role model is President Mujica. In 2010, his annual declaration of personal wealth—mandatory for officials in Uruguay—was $1,800 (£1,100), the value of his 1987 Volkswagen Beetle (which was all his wealth); in 2012, he added to his declaration half of his wife’s assets—land, tractors, and a house—reaching $215,000 (£135,000). This was only about a third of the figure declared by his predecessor in office.³ Mujica sacrificed his personal comfort in the service of his people and country. The foregoing show that there still are some leaders and countries on the globe that combine the use of personal sacrifice, selflessness, law, and morality to control inordinate private gains, exemplifying that public offices are not meant to be used for self-aggrandizement; rather, they are to be deployed as instruments for the delivery of services to the public.⁴

Governance seems to be good when it endorses the promotion of the public’s well-being, elevates national interest over primordial motives, and harmoniously controls the pressure from the demands of public office holders’ cronies. In contrast, governance seems to be bad and crisis-driven when it strives only to protect the interests of a few people at the expense of the majority of a country. In Nigeria, there is a growing number of cases of bad governance because of the persistence in placing selfish interests over civic motives; this, in turn, has led to stagnation of economic growth. Corroborating this view, Phillip Dahida and Moses Akangbe aver that, despite the enormous potential for development and a huge number of resources, the Nigerian economy still is witnessing a period of stagnant economic growth, which is partly blamed on corruption and gross mismanagement of the country’s vast resources.⁵

There is a sharp difference between developed and developing democracies in terms of governance. In developed democracies such as the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, governance seems to be driven by promotion of the public good, accountability, rule of law, and competency. Leaders or public office holders in these democracies have friends, loyalists, associates, or even godfathers, but it seems that they have devised means to check the excesses of their cronies. The strict application of law, public

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⁴ Ibid.
declaration by office holders of their assets, internalized selflessness, regard for competency and meritocracy, as well as strong law enforcement and anticorruption agencies and institutions are some of the measures used to check the excesses or illicit actions of politicians’ cronies in these countries. In developing democracies such as Nigeria, however, governance is commonly driven by placing the primordial motives of politicians’ cronies above the national interest. The view of John Odeh on governance is revealing when he asserts that Nigerian society is configured to fulfill the interests of a few individual elites, ethnic groups, and friends, and not those of the populace. Leaders and politicians go to the extent of disregarding rule of law, competency, and merit in their bid to meet the interests of their cronies.

In Nigeria, contracts are awarded based on the efforts contributed during elections toward politicians’ ascension to power, friendship, and the monies spent to sponsor politicians, with total disregard for competency, integrity, qualifications, or merit. This has degenerated into a governance crisis in Nigeria. The crisis is exacerbated by the manipulation of election results by political cronies through electoral violence, voter intimidation, and the snatching of voting materials, all in an attempt to favor their leaders in general elections. The consequence is that, on gaining control of government, such leaders satisfy the interests of their cronies before the public interest becomes an overriding concern. In the view of Ismail Yahaya, political corruption is the result of electoral fraud, including rigged election results; the award of false contracts; illegal wealth acquisition by political office holders through financial impropriety; misuse and abuse of political or bureaucratic office; nepotism; and tribalism.

Nevertheless, few intellectual resources have been deployed to investigate the influence of the actions of cronies (e.g., politicians’ relatives, friends, party loyalists, associates, and godfathers) on bad governance in Nigeria that result from the cravings for primordial gain.

In its consideration of the crisis of governance in Nigeria, the essay is comprised of five sections. The first introduces the subject to be considered. Section two provides a brief conceptual analysis of the terms “primordial,” “corruption,” and “governance,” as well as a theoretical analysis. The third section describes the actions of political cronies that engender bad governance as well as their effects on democratic consolidation. The fourth section considers policy redress, which is followed by the essay’s conclusion.

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Conceptual Perspectives

Primordial Interest vs. National Interest
To understand what primordial interest denotes, it is important to begin with the meaning of national interest. This will go a long way in revealing the meaning of primordial interest, as the concepts are in direct opposition to one another. The national interest embraces the core values of a country that perpetually seek to promote the overall well-being and common welfare of the entire people versus the interests of the few in a country. Peter Mbah described national interest as that which covers the whole range of subjects from sovereignty, unity, and security of the state, to communal amity, economic stability, and the standards of decency and morality. He further contended that national interest includes factors such as ensuring the efficient and effective running of public services as well as the administration of justice. A completely divergent view of national interest is that of primordial interest.

Chikodiri Nwangwu and Adaeze O. Ononogbu have described primordial interest as motivated by a narrow and parochial concept of self-interest: gaining and retaining wealth, fame, and power. In the pursuit of primordial interests, procedures governing the operation of state offices are used as smokescreens behind which state resources are misappropriated. Under the confiscatory system, government officials simply seize public assets without even attempting to camouflage their behavior. This analysis identifies three striking traits of governance in Nigeria. First, there is pervasive misappropriation of “public” resources for personal or parochial gain. Second, such allocations are patterned along ethnic identities and patron-client networks. Third, the distributive arena is largely regionalized, and clientele relations are diffuse. Nwangwu and Ononogbu maintain that, if there is conflict between national and primordial interests among government decision-makers, the national interest suffers. Good governance seems to be in play in a country where national interest is central; both leaders and the citizenry work toward achieving the national interest, which is their common objective. However, when leaders and their cronies pursue primordial interests, resources reserved to serve the public interest are diverted to private use, leading to crisis-driven governance because

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resources to meet the public good become limited that could have improved the quality of life of the entire citizenry.

**Corruption**

Within the disciplinary bounds of the social sciences, the concept of corruption, like other concepts, has not been free from definitional disputes. Etymologically, corruption is derived from the Latin word “corruptus,” which means “to break.”\(^{13}\) Corruption is an encompassing word which stands not only for institutional decadence but also moral and personal decadence such as bribery, favoritism, nepotism, cheating, sexual gratification, and other unfair means adopted by any individual to extract some socially or legally prohibited favor.\(^{14}\) Transparency International (TI), the international organization that focuses on issues of public corruption, considers corruption to be the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) described corruption as the abuse of public office by a person or group of persons for private gain. In the same vein, Martin Lipset and Gabriel Lenz described corruption “as effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means—private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefit.”\(^{15}\) Because of the massive involvement of public office holders and their cronies in corruption, it has been described by Joseph Samuel Nye as “a behavior that deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private (gain)—regarding (personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gain). It is a behaviour which violates the rules against the exercise of certain types of (duties) for private (gains) regarding influence.”\(^{16}\) The word, corruption, also connotes the lowering of one’s integrity in the performance of a duty, especially in relation to the state or state-owned enterprises. It is the act of an official or member of the judiciary who unlawfully uses his or her station or position to procure some good for him- or herself or for another person, contrary to duty and the freedom of others. Corruption, like any other social deviance or crime, involves a violation of some existing order or norm. Among the numerous socio-economic and political ills and challenges that successive administrations have encountered in Nigeria’s fourth republic, corruption seems to attract the greatest attention and concern.\(^{17}\)

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of corruption in Nigeria:

The greatness single bane of [the Nigerian] society today will be tackled head-on at all levels. Corruption is incipient in all human societies and in most activities. But it must not be condoned. This is why laws are made and enforced to check corruption, so that society would survive and develop in an orderly, reasonable and predictable way. No society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become the full-blown cancer it has become in Nigeria.18

It can be inferred from Obasanjo’s observation that, although corruption exists in all political systems and human activities, it constitutes the greatest cause of bad governance in Nigeria. However, enforcement of the law can be used to check and control it.

In a conference proceeding, former chairperson of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Farida Waziri, indicates the forms in which corruption manifests itself in Nigeria. She reveals that corruption takes many forms in Nigeria, although it is perceived differently from one geographical location to another. The following behaviors indicate or serve as red flags for corruption: embezzlement; conflict of interest; the award of contracts by public office holders to cronies and personally held companies; bribery; fraud; political corruption (e.g., nepotism or favoritism, ethnicity, rigged elections, misappropriation and conversion of public funds for personal gain); bureaucratic corruption; extortion; manipulation of procurement processes (e.g., by over-inflation of contracts, leaking tender information to friends and relations, and so on); and corporate corruption (e.g., diversion and misappropriation of funds through manipulation or falsification of financial records). The stories of Cadbury Nigeria Plc. and Vaswani Brothers locally, and Enron and Anderson and Anderson internationally, are succinct examples, and, in some cases, include payment for favorable judicial decisions. Those actions fall within the category of judicial corruption.19 Given the foregoing, it could be argued that corruption in Nigeria, whichever way one looks at it, apart from the points noted, is further amplified and encouraged by greed and materialism, cultural and moral decay, poor law enforcement regarding the prosecution of corrupt persons, and the lack of political will to punish corrupt persons or selective justice in the handling of corruption cases. All these can be grouped under the rubric of the absence of sanctions for deviant and unlawful actions.

18 Ibid.
Governance

In a related manner, “governance” is used today in many different senses, just like the concepts of national versus primordial interest and corruption that were analyzed above. According to Dele Olowu, A. Hyden Williams, and Kayode Soremekun, “governance” can be understood as:

A term to describe regime types, or the nature of the relationships between state and society; as a set of norms to appraise governmental systems and prescribe appropriate or acceptable practice of the manner in which power is utilized.20

In recent times, governance also is used as a synonym for democracy. In this sense, it is used to denote whether a society is democratic in nature.21 For example, a democratic society is one “which possesses a wide variety of state and society institutions which interact with one another to ensure that state institutions are efficient, responsive, accountable, and transparent bounded by the rule of law.”22 If the foregoing view of governance is applied to the process of democratization, it means this process can be depicted as “the movement from the dominance of state-society relations by one institution (usually the executive branch), “monocracy,” to a polycentric-structured society.23 This is important because there is a large number of cases of corruption, suppression of national interest for private motives, and illicit actions of political cronies, including manipulation of elections results, electoral violence, and unending quest for private benefits, especially in the fourth republic, that have come to define what governance is in Nigeria. Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou averred that, at the height of the absurdity in its operations and the exploitative acts of its own officials, the state in Africa was rapidly being “criminalized,” while its officials were merely involved in the politics of the belly. In other words, the rapid increase in negative practices such as the privatization of public institutions, maintenance of private armies, and interaction of national operators with global criminal networks were all signs that the African state itself was becoming a “vehicle for organized criminal activity.”24

Ruth Collier contended that most of the views in the foregoing analysis are different from traditional opinion, which essentially links governance to the activities of “specific occupants of public office who are in a position to make

20 Yagboyaju, The State and Governance Crisis in Nigeria.
21 Ibid.
23 Yagboyaju, The State and Governance Crisis in Nigeria.
binding decisions at any given time." Governance in this sense presupposes that the totality of what public officials do or may refuse to do is for the improvement of the general well-being of the people. In the light of this, it is not surprising that governance often is a conflict between the ideal and the facts on the ground.

Bad governance is characterized by the lack of accountability; widespread corruption and rent-seeking; arbitrary policy making; avoidable bureaucratic bottlenecks; inequitable and unenforced legal systems; abuse of executive power; and apathetic, disinterested civil society that is distanced from public life. In contrast, good governance features transparent, predictable, open, and enlightened policy making, a bureaucracy imbued with professional ethos acting to further the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, respect for human beings and their individual rights, and a strong, engaged civil society that participates in public affairs.

In summary, the various analyses presented above should be sufficient to draw attention to the importance of the state in contemporary African politics. Indeed, back in the early 1980s, there was a profound agreement among analysts regarding the importance of the state in Africa “as the focus for the institutionalization of central power... .” Incidentally, the opinion on centrality of the state in Africa is also at the core of the debate that has alternately depicted the post-colonial state as “weak and powerful,” “repressive and feeble,” “fragile and absolutist,” “dependent and autonomous,” or “expanding and collapsing.” All of these, in our opinion, are the bedrock of the perennial governance crisis confronting Nigeria and other parts of the African continent. Although some elements of these challenges exist in every system across the globe, there is evidence of safety mechanisms that prevent such from fatally injuring developed and advanced democracies. The effects and consequences of all these variables can be better understood in our subsequent discussions, especially in the section addressing the effects of bad governance on democratic consolidation. This view is in line with that of the Right Honorable Hilary Benn, a former British Secretary of State for International Development, who contends that “corruption is both a cause and a consequence of poor and outright bad governance.”

Having analytically pursued, although in a synoptic fashion, what

26 Yagboyaju, *The State and Governance Crisis in Nigeria*.
28 Ibid.
29 Yagboyaju, *The State and Governance Crisis in Nigeria*.
Taiwan Journal of Democracy, Volume 13, No. 2

constitutes primordial versus national motives, corruption, and governance, we found it appropriate to examine theories that explain how the actions of political cronies have inclined toward bad governance and how such actions can be checked. This constitutes the core of the discussion in the next section of the essay.

Theoretical Analysis

In this section, two theories are discussed to explain the nexus between actions of political cronies and bad governance. It is imperative to note that the actions of political cronies are exhibited most often in their undue demands to promote their selfish interests at the expense of the state’s duty to safeguard national interests. Such corruption also is manifested in the rigging of elections in favor of particular leaders or politicians in return for rewards (lucrative appointments, contracts, money, and other selfish paybacks). All these, in no small dimension, aggravate bad governance in Nigeria, because such actions persistently drive public office holders to loot the state’s treasury in a bid to satisfy their cronies. The following theories explain more about the effects of the actions of political cronies on bad governance in Nigeria.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory explains the socially rewarding relationships between and among members of a society. The focal point of this theory is the principle of “give and take” (reciprocity). This theory holds that the relationship between the giver and the taker is not always one way, rather it can flow in many ways. The theory states, however, that many of the directions adversely affect governance. When one actor receives something, that actor is expected to give something in return. In Nigeria, this relationship is commonly expressed as “You chop, I chop.” The theory maintains that the drive for exchange is based on egoism, with the calculation of gain, loss, and reward for the group or individual as the case may be. It also helps to explain the effect of the actions of political cronies on bad governance in Nigeria. “Give and take” literally means that if one actor gains power or control of the government through the sponsorship of a wealthy and strong political godfather, the politician or public office holder (godson) is expected to return a gain or benefit to his godfather in acknowledgement of the position or public office he occupies. Politicians in Nigeria maintain political thugs or hoodlums, whom they use to manipulate election results to their favor and to carry out other illegal actions. In return, these thugs are rewarded with access to the state treasury and they are continually retained and sustained with state funds. The political cronies make illicit demands on the politicians, placing them under pressure to loot public funds for the benefit of this set of Nigerians. Corruption in Nigeria usually involves people who are in positions of power and authority and always are in relationships with people or groups who demand favor or compensation for
services rendered. In the same manner, government officials, bureaucrats, and elected officials usually connive with contractors who are mainly their friends, godfathers, members of the same ethnic group, party members, or associates to defraud the government of large sums of money through kickbacks as well as bogus and inflated contracts. The consequence is bad governance.

Social exchange theory reveals, however, that the primordial interests or corruption manifested in the actions of politicians’ cronies can be checked using social instruments such as enlightenment of the masses about the hideous consequences of corruption, locally and internationally, and education concerning why it is unnecessary to elect and idolize leaders who are corrupt. The theory contends that the populace should take part in recreating their own history, bearing in mind that nation building is a tortuous but rewarding exercise. Relationships between politicians and their cronies are not always harmonious. There have been many instances in which there was a breakdown of trust and exchange between politicians and their cronies owing to unreasonable demands and/or the desire of politicians to create a new set of cronies and/or new channels of patrons and clients. Examples include Lamidi Adedibu (crony/godfather) versus Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja (politician/governor) in Oyo State, Nigeria, and Emmanuel Nnamdi Uba (crony/sponsor) versus Chris Nwabueze Ngige (politician/governor) in Anambra State, Nigeria. Detailed explanations are given in the case studies presented.

Neopatrimonialism Theory
The theory of neopatrimonialism maintains that there is a strong interdependence between the clients (political cronies) and the patrons (politicians or public office holders) in that the patron depends on the support and efforts of his clients to stay in power. This theory combines Max Weber’s concepts of patrimonial and rational-legal domination. Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle argued that the term “neopatrimonialism” denotes the simultaneous operation of the two Weberian ideal-types of patrimonial and rational-legal domination.31 Weber, however, defined patrimonialism as a process whereby the patron in a certain social and political order bestows gifts from personal resources to followers to secure their loyalty and support. Clients, in turn, obtain material benefits and protection.32 The theory holds that resources are distributed through direct transfer in the form of disbursement of cash, gifts, and favors by politicians to their constituents. This theory regards the government or the politicians as a transfer pump: the government collects resources and distributes them to its supporters. These transfers benefit only particular groups who are connected to the politicians through patronage

networks, at the cost of the rest of the constituents.

Neopartimonialism theory is based on three basic structures, namely the “ins,” the “outs,” and the government/public office holders. Clark Gibson and Barak Hoffman maintain that there is a strong interdependence between the “ins” and the public office holders. They argue that the government derives its support by providing patronage to the “ins” (clients, cronies, and so on), and funds this by taxing the “outs.” While the politicians’ cronies constitute the “ins,” the general public constitutes the “outs.” This literally means that the politicians spend tax payers’ (the “outs’s”) monies to provide patronage for their cronies (the “ins”).

The use of resources in a neopatrimonial state seems to be influenced primarily by personal relationships or ethnic or tribal loyalties. In such cases, the distribution can take the form of personal favors, such as the appointment of relatives or people from the ruler’s ethnic or tribal group to important government positions. It is important to note that this phenomenon is predominant not only in Nigeria but also in a number of African states. African leaders tend to deploy the patron-client model of neopatrimonialism to prolong their stay in power, which inevitably degenerates into a governance crisis. Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes argued that most political regimes in Africa are unconsolidated hybrid systems, and that all regimes have been considered, at one point or another, patrimonial or neopatrimonial by academics. Bratton and Van de Walle also claimed that neopatrimonial practices are a characteristic not just of African regimes, but rather “the core feature of post-colonial politics in Africa.”

Accountability in neopatrimonial regimes operates in two principal ways: formal democratic mechanisms (such as elections, rule of law, access to information, and so on) and informal pressures. Clients or constituents have the option to vote the rulers out of power if they fail to deliver on their campaign promises. It has been found that if the “bargain” between a leader and his follower is carried through, it is expected that the recipient will continue to support him. This theory is very relevant to the explanation of the effects of cronies’ actions on bad governance in Nigeria. Applying neopatrimonial theory to the governance crisis in Nigeria, the patrons are the politicians or public office holders, while the clients are their cronies. The patrons in Nigeria, and Africa as whole, naturally have the desire and intention to remain in power

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35 Bratton and Van de Walle, “Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa.”
indefinitely. Therefore, they deploy the means necessary to resist opposition, usually by compensating the efforts of their cronies who had worked for their success at the polls. To show how desperate African leaders can be to stay in power indefinitely, Bratton and Van de Walle explained how neopatrimonialism remained a viable tool that African leaders used to overstay in their positions of power. The third-term saga of President Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria, which was frustrated by lawmakers in the National Assembly, was a case in point.36

**Effects of the Actions of Political Cronies on Bad Governance in Nigeria**

It is obvious that Nigeria faces a sustainable development crisis located at the nexus of governance and the undue influence of cronies’ actions in looting public funds for private interest. To tackle this crisis, first it is necessary to properly diagnose the actions of cronies that aggravate crisis-driven governance and then to confront them collectively. In trying to trace the problem of bad governance and corruption, Anselm Odinkalu observed:

A major source of difficulty is the fact that the transition from intrusive, atomized communities to the anonymous society built on the Westphalian model of the nation-state took place all over the continent without creating mechanisms to infuse or enforce these richly rooted African values in governance or its institutions and processes. Thus we have evolved a bifurcated system of public ethics that appears to subvert our community values at their point of contact with the post-colonial African State and, in so doing, denudes the State of both relevance to the people and the will to protect their best interests. This is not a cultural problem, however. Rather it is a problem of institution and state-building.37

A critical look at the views of Odinkalu suggests that bad governance and corruption in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, were more commonly seen after colonialism. This is partly because there were no mechanisms to inculcate African values and ethics or morals into governance and post-colonial institutions, thereby making the people prone to all forms of corrupt practices.

In explaining the effects of cronies’ actions on bad governance, three cases will be examined. These include bad governance resulting from pervasive misappropriation of state resources for individual gain, resource allocation

36 Ibid.
based on ethnic identities, and regionalized distributive arenas.

**Bad Governance Resulting from Pervasive Misappropriation of the State’s Resources for Cronies**

Nigeria is endowed with abundant resources that no doubt could propel the country into sustainable development, but the actions of a small number of people who happen to be loyalists, friends, blood relations, and sponsors of politicians continually hinder the country’s advancement. Odinkalu corroborated this assessment when he said that inside and outside Nigeria, the question must be: “How has a country so richly endowed blown the opportunities for itself and its generations yet unborn so spectacularly?” To address this question, cases of political cronies’ actions leading to the misappropriation of public resources for private gain are illuminated below.

**Case 1: The Actions of Godfathers and Godsons (Politicians) Leading to Governance Crises in Anambra and Oyo States in the Fourth Republic**

Social exchange theory holds that governance crisis or bad governance is inevitable when the actions of actors, including those of politicians’ cronies, are based on the “give and take” syndrome. Cases to buttress this view are those of the godfathers and their sponsored politicians in Nigeria’s Anambra and Oyo States. In Anambra, Chief Chris Uba was the godfather who sponsored Chris Ngige, who won the 2003 gubernatorial election. Uba provided the cash and means by which Ngige, his godson, gained the governorship; Ngige owed the powerful gubernatorial position to the money spent by his godfather. The theory of social exchange to a large extent explains this case. The relationship between Uba and Ngige later turned sour and led to a governance crisis in the state. It is important to note that the theory of social exchange holds that such a relationship is not one-directional or only positive, but also can be negative. Indeed, both positive and negative relationships can cause governance crisis. This means that there could be a breakdown in a relationship on either side, especially the godson (politician) could fail to fulfill an agreement. Anambra State experienced a turbulent period which almost led to the collapse of governance when Ngige refused to give Uba the chance to appoint commissioners and to repay him the money he claimed he had spent on making Ngige the governor of the state. The crisis became uncontrollable when the sitting governor, Ngige, was abducted by Uba using the Nigerian police. Odimegwu Onwumere contends that:

> A self-confessed godfather, Uba employed thugs and Nigerian police to abduct his godson, Chris Ngige, who was the elected governor of Anambra State. Ngige’s sin was his

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38 Ibid.
refusal to allow Uba to nominate all political appointees, take
the largest share of state’s allocation, and instantly pay him a
sum of N2.5 billion; the claimed cost of installing Ngige as
governor.39

It can be deduced that Uba paid all the money needed for the ascension of
Ngige to the post of governor of Anambra State, having calculated the benefits
and gains he stood to receive in return for sponsoring Ngige. He had calculated
that he would be given the opportunity to appoint commissioners and receive
the lion’s share of the state’s monthly allocation from the federation account,
but this calculation did not see the light of day because the governor refused to
fulfill Uba’s expectations. This led to a crisis in the state, because the governor
was abducted for some days and this adversely affected governance, such that
lives were lost and properties were burned to ashes. For a long time, governance
in Anambra was suspended. Adeoye Akinola recounted that the state became
a war zone, innocent lives were lost, houses were set ablaze, and Anambra
became ungovernable for weeks. It was not a case of disagreement, but of the
desperate godfather, Uba, and his “troops” destroying everything within their
reach when it became clear that his investment had gone down the drain. The
only solution the federal government proffered was the threat to declare a state
of emergency in Anambra.40

The foregoing scenario is similar to the case in Oyo State, where the self-
acclaimed godfather, the late Lamidi Adedibu, masterminded the impeachment
of his godson, Ladoja, for refusing to allow him to appoint commissioners,
share in the state’s monthly allocation of resources, and take the state monetary
allocation meant to tackle security issues. This led to a continual governance
crisis. For instance, it gave rise to hostility between the governor and his deputy,
Alao Akala, who succeeded the governor after the latter’s ouster by Adedibu.
This enmity continued between the governor and his deputy, even when the
court quashed the impeachment and returned Ladoja to the governorship,
resulting in government paralysis. It is important to note from the two
mentioned cases that governance crisis is inevitable when politicians and their
sponsors fall apart over issues relating to political appointments, a formula for
sharing the state’s treasury, or control of some of the state apparatus. In the
long run, such disagreements affect good governance, as the people come to
doubt the integrity of those holding public office. Adeoye Akinola observed
that godfatherism at its climax in Anambra and Oyo States sparked people’s
fear that Nigeria’s hard-earned democracy would be truncated.41

Political Science and International Relations* 3, no. 6 (2009): 268-272.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
Even if the relationships between politicians and their cronies were one-directional, that is, if the godsons fulfilled agreements or promises, it still would amount to a governance crisis in a given state. This is because the money meant for the people of the state would be spent on the demands of the godfathers, and this, in return, would adversely affect the rule of law, accountability, and the provision of services to the people. Rule of law is thwarted when godsons abandon relevant laws guiding their roles as governor when granting the demands of their godfathers or when the politicians fail to account for the state’s resources. A relationship is not one-directional if a godson fails to grant the requests of his godfather and the godfather, in return, takes the law into his own hands and abducts a sitting governor, influences the impeachment of a governor, or deploys police to fight against the godson. This very trend became a threat to Nigeria’s democratic consolidation, as bad governance was the outgrowth of the misappropriation of the country’s resources. In the long run, this affected the living conditions of Nigeria’s citizens.

Case 2: The Use of Cronies to Rig Election Results for the Emergence of Politicians in General Elections

In the fourth republic, specifically in the 2003, 2007, and 2011 general elections, many politicians, including incumbent office-holders, squandered the state’s treasury on maintaining political thugs and party loyalists across the country. In light of the doctrines of social exchange and neopatrimonialism which are predicated on the “give and take” syndrome and view that interdependence between cronies and politicians is not always one-directional, a breakdown can occur in the relationship between politicians and their cronies. When this happens, a crisis in governance is inevitable. It can be inferred that the cronies, in exchange for choice political appointments, will give their time and energy to snatching ballot boxes, intimidating voters, and wantonly killing political opponents to achieve their godson’s success at the polls. This, in itself, constitutes a crisis in governance, because when the politicians ascend to power they tend to loot public funds to satisfy their cronies’ demands. If there is a breakdown in a relationship, for instance, a politician fails to fulfill his promises or meet agreed terms, especially regarding power sharing, crises often are precipitated by the cronies or godfathers, resulting in paralysis of governance.

As previously mentioned, most politicians, specifically incumbents during elections, recruit thugs and squander the state’s resources on them in an attempt to return to office, especially the office of president, governor, or local government chairman. The tendency is to give the thugs whatever they demand, as the hold on power is maintained through the illegal actions of their cronies. In discussing electoral violence, Yagboyaju provided examples of political assassinations. Chief Layi Balogun, one time a presidential aspirant, was killed in 2000 while preparing to make submissions before the Oputa Panel regarding human rights abuse. Chief Funsho Williams and Dr. Ayo Daramola, both of the
People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in Lagos and Ekiti States, respectively, also were assassinated.\(^{42}\) There was electoral violence caused by cronies in the 2007 general elections as well. For instance, in Kano, the actions of cronies led to the burning of the Panshekara police post in the Kumbotso Local Government Area and the killing of the divisional police officer (DPO), his wife, and eleven others in an effort to delay the announcement of the state governorship election results. Electoral violence and political assassinations are more commonly associated with lower levels of government in Nigeria than with the central government. In the 2015 general elections, there were many cases involving the incumbent governors’ misappropriation of the state’s treasury for the benefit of party loyalists, friends, and other cronies in their bids for re-election. This led to electoral violence in states such as Kaduna, Rivers, Abia, Imo, and Akwa-Ibom, although some of these states’ governors eventually lost their seats. Further examples include states such as Bauchi and others in northern Nigeria. Additional cases are those of militants in the Niger-Delta area as well as insurgents in northeast Nigeria, who have used guns given to them by politicians to kidnap staff for ransom, vandalize oil installations, and terrorize people. All this has earned Nigeria a bad name in the international community and led to a massive waste of the country’s resources. For instance, Emmanuel Ojo has attributed Boko-Haram insurgents to the actions of political cronies in the northeast.\(^{43}\) These cronies were used, then dumped, by the very politicians who gave them the guns to manipulate elections results. Some of these cronies felt deprived and abandoned. In turn, this seems to have propelled them to join the antistate organization, Boko-Haram. The case demonstrates that social exchange theory is not one-directional, but of two or more directions, leading to inevitable crisis in governance. The Boko-Haram insurgency in the northeast, militancy in the Niger-Delta, and ethnic militias elsewhere have been caused partly by the breakdown in the relationships between politicians and their cronies, who often have turned around to use small arms and light weapons given to them to rig elections to then fight against the politicians and state institutions.

**Case 3: Compensation of Cronies by Appointment to a Caretaker Committee at the Local Government Level**

In the context of the social exchange and neopatrimonial theories, most state governments tend to compensate those who support them in the polls with an appointment to a caretaker committee. The appointment is extended mostly to political cronies who have given support to the state’s government at the polls. Cases in states such as Osun, Anambra, Imo, and others buttress this view. Most of these states have abandoned constitutional provisions that

\(^{42}\) Yagboyaju, *The State and Governance Crisis in Nigeria*.

stipulate local government elections for caretaker committees. Instead, a state government appoints party loyalists and cronies as caretakers to oversee the local governments. It is the contention of this essay that this invariably jettisons accountability and adequate service provision at the local government level. Samuel Agunyai, Isaac Odeyemi, and Wakili Olawoyin documented in their work that most of the state governments in Nigeria openly have refused to conduct local government elections; instead, their leaders have resorted to the use of caretaker committees which consist mainly of their party loyalists and sometimes members of their ethnic groups who have given something in exchange for the profitable positions they occupy. Owing to this scenario, there has been little or no popular participation in politics and governance at the grassroots level. If public participation is essential to good governance, how can there be good governance when the people are not allowed to elect their representatives? The actions of an appointed caretaker committee are not to promote good governance, as the members work only to satisfy the governor who has given them their positions and not to fulfill the needs of the general populace.

Resource Allocation Based on Ethnic Identity

Often politicians or public office holders give preferential treatment to their ethnic groups through appointive positions or the allocation of resources, with the aim to secure a massive number of votes during a general election. The social exchange and neopatrimonialism theories explain that cronies who are from the same ethnic group as a leader or politician frequently receive government attention, appointive positions, and other influential posts, regardless of their competency or qualifications, at the expense of more qualified citizens. This is because they have given their support to the politicians, who, in return, compensate them with lucrative political appointments. For instance, the first appointments made by President Buhari were criticized largely because they favored northern rather than southern citizens. Specifically, the Igbo ethnic group openly criticized Buhari’s first appointments to the posts of Secretary to the Federal Government, Special Advisers, and other notable positions. The Buhari-led central government, however, refuted the claims and gave reasons why the appointments were made, noting that there still were other positions to be filled. Another example was in the Ekiti State under the administration of Governor Fayemi, where many problems affected governance owing to a controversy over the location of the newly created Federal University in the governor’s home town.

Regionalized Distributive Arenas

In Nigeria, regions (state or geopolitical) form the basis of sharing resources. This brings to light the Federal Character Principle, introduced in 1979. This principle was introduced to give order to the distribution of privileges and benefits among the primordial components of the Nigerian state at all levels, in such a way that no group, ethnic or otherwise, would have predominant or exclusive access to the opportunities and benefits inherent in the exercise of state power. Today, this principle seems to be promoting ethnicity rather than addressing the problems of ethnic identity. According to Bala Usman, the principle of federal character has deepened the reach of ethnicity and extended its ravages. In effect, federal character has deepened the problem it was devised to tackle. The foregoing cases show that resources in Nigeria seem to be distributed on the basis of regionalized motives, not on the basis of national interests. It has become a situation in which states or geopolitical regions perpetually strive to have a share in the country resources, using whatever means possible. This appears to be the genesis of bad governance in Nigeria, because when a country’s resources are allocated based on state or geopolitical regions rather than national considerations, it elevates mediocrity above competency, qualifications, and merit. Tunde Akindele et al., note that when resources of a country are distributed based on regional areas, national loyalty and consciousness are destroyed. It discourages the emergence of national elites, reducing loyalty and commitment to the Nigerian nation. The spirit of unity and sense of one Nigerian nation shown by people such as Obafemi Awolowo, Aminu Kano, Joseph Tarka, Okoi Arikpo, Anthony Enahoro, and others have diminished seriously over time, leading to fragmentation of loyalties, elitism, and regional allegiances, and resulting in poor governance.

Policy Redress for Bad Governance in Nigeria

In the opinion of this essay, it is necessary to deploy the control mechanisms found in the theory of neopatrimonialism. Election, one of the control mechanisms, can be used to vote against politicians who squander the state’s resources for the benefit of their cronies. During the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, the incumbent president was voted out of office because there were

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
too many cases of placing cronies’ interests over those of the nation. In some states such as Bauchi, Jigawa, Kaduna, and others, incumbent governors have been removed from office through a vote. The point being that, following the theory of neopatrimonialism, Nigerians can rely on elections to vote out of office leaders who have looted public funds for selfish interests. This will serve as deterrence to other politicians who may want to raid the state’s treasury for the benefit of their cronies.

Also, neopatrimonialism supports rule of law as one of the control mechanisms that can check the excesses of politicians and their cronies. The presence and application of sanctions can reduce the tendency to become involved in mismanagement of public funds to satisfy politicians’ and cronies’ cravings and demands to amass wealth. In this regard, the independence of the judiciary is central to the rule of law in Nigeria. The need for corruption-free lawyers and judges to address the corrupt practices of politicians and their cronies cannot be over-emphasized. In a media chat on Channels Television, President Buhari stated openly that the judiciary in Nigeria is a major obstacle to corruption. In short, the judiciary has a role in ensuring good governance in Nigeria by strictly upholding the law without fear or favor.

In addition, there is need to reorient and educate the entire citizenry, public office holders, and politicians on the necessity for attitudinal change and the safeguard of the national interest, strong ethical values and morals, and respect for merit and nonpartisanship when it comes to resource allocation, appointments, wealth distribution, and political benefits. To eschew the unending crave for private interests exhibited in the actions of political cronies, everyone must be engaged in the fight, as it will affect friends, associates, and blood relations. As Waziri cautioned,

The war against corruption like terrorism is a special kind of war. It admits of no conventional methods. It is a war against human selfishness and greed. It is a war against rapid and senseless primitive capital accumulation. It is a war against decadence of mind, ethics and morals. Because of these special characteristics of the war, it requires a strong and uncompromising political will. It must be approached holistically. Casual and superficial approaches will not work. Rhetoric must match concrete action. Like all wars on salvation and restoration, friends will be hurt; families and associates will equally be hurt. And above all, politics have no place in the war.49

Also, politicians or public office holders must understand that they

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49 Waziri, Corruption and Governance Challenge in Nigeria.
occupy public office to serve the people and not their cohorts alone. Instead of looting the state’s treasury for their cronies, they should empower them with the requisite skills and knowledge that will make them employable, and apply adequate sanctions as a disincentive for committing electoral crimes and violence. Such efforts will reduce the tendencies to patronize politicians all the time. It is also important that politicians understand that squandering the state’s funds on their cronies will not end poverty among them. Poverty can be reduced by creating small-scale businesses that can engage the cronies of politicians. In turn, this will reduce political thuggery.

Furthermore, political cronies must understand that their interests should not supersede the national interest. This means that politicians should grant the requests of their cronies only within the confines of the law. This will increase the accountability of office-holders to the public and save them from the pressures of having to loot the public treasury to satisfy their cronies.

Again, politicians’ practice of declaring their personal assets would decrease the tendency to loot state funds. It would reveal the financial status of politicians and, in turn, inform their cronies of their actual financial strength, as cronies generally believe that their principals are “very rich.” The current president and vice president have set good examples by publicly declaring their assets. If other leaders at both the state and local levels followed their transparency, it would go a long way toward changing the governance situation in Nigeria.

Leadership by example can be helpful in addressing the problems caused by political cronies in Nigeria. Countries (e.g., the United States, Canada, Uruguay under Mujica, South Africa under Mandela, Hong Kong, Singapore, and others) that have achieved good governance have leaders who rule by example in positions of power or public office. Curbing the actions of political cronies regarding their primordial sentiments requires strong political will as well as the determination to govern without fear or favor. This requires a talented leader with strong character. Nigerian leaders must borrow a leaf from leaders such as Mujica, Mandela, Obama, and even some of Nigeria’s deceased leaders who continually strove for unity, promotion of national interests, and one Nigeria—leaders such as Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Anthony Enahoro, Aminu Kano, and others. These leaders were selfless and nationalized in their thinking. It is suggested that if Nigeria’s leaders emulated the qualities and attitudes of the aforementioned, the country would move toward good governance.

Lastly, Nigerians must show the ability to conduct credible elections without conspiring with fraudulent individuals and institutions to pervert the people’s will. Nigeria’s problem with bad governance is closely related to the collective inability to count votes accurately and honestly during elections, disputed census figures, and skewed processes of distributing the common wealth. Anselm Odinkalu reveals that three processes are essential to the effective functioning of a country: legitimating public power (elections); quantifying the
country’s demographics (census); and estimating and distributing the common wealth (public accounts, including revenues and appropriations). These three interrelated processes—elections, demographics, and public accounts—rely on the basic skills and the honest numeration policies of institutions. Regarding elections, this involves the counting of votes and the conferment of a mandate, usually on the persons with the greatest number of counted votes. In a census, the people are counted, which, in turn, helps to determine the bases for the allocation of representation, social services, revenue, and sundry public goods. In the management of public accounts, the aim is to quantify the size of the common wealth, so as to know precisely the pool of resources that elected officials with a legitimate mandate can distribute for the benefit of those who have been counted in the census. Nigeria’s multiple crises of governance continue because these processes are nonexistent, and primordial sentiments manifested in corrupt practices endure because, whenever there is a census, both the process and the institutions that are created to manage it are compromised. That is why census figures in Nigeria are problematic, and, consequently, why no meaningful planning can be done, resulting in a state that does not work. A critical look at the foregoing suggests that good governance would be enhanced if Nigerians collectively denounced ineptitude, corruption, and bad governance in public institutions, including in the Election Management Body (INEC), the National Population Commission (NPC), and other institutions that are supposed to guard against corruption. These institutions should be accorded necessary support for honest counting of votes that will produce good and honest leaders, accurate and reliable population figures, and the efficient allocation of resources to meet the public good. These suggestions should be reflected in new policies to combat bad governance.

Conclusion

The analyses and review in this essay have attempted to place in perspective the concept of good governance and the various challenges posed to it by the illicit actions of political cronies, which result in primordial motives for personal rewards that supersede the national interest in a country such as Nigeria. In the process, the essay has shown that, although all persons have the tendency toward greed, the actions and pressures of cronies on politicians have resulted in the mismanagement of public funds and bad governance in Nigeria. However, normatively, institutional reform through the creation of small-scale businesses; the education of cronies; leaders’ leading by example; legitimate empowerment of cronies through new policies; disciplined habits and strong ethical behavior on the part of both politicians and cronies; and removal of

50 Odinkalu, “Corruption and Governance in Africa.”
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
corrupt politicians from public office through elections would reduce the tendency to loot the state’s resources for the benefit of cronies.

The essay also contended that good governance as observed in developed democracies has been difficult, if not impossible, to attain in Nigeria. This is partly due to the lack of politicians’ accountability to the people, the inability of people to access information, widespread corruption, poor governmental policies that cannot tackle poverty effectively, youth unemployment, an abnormally wide gap between the rich and the poor, and greed, all of which have militated against the spirit of promoting the national interest.

Finally, as alluded to in the body of the essay, new policies presently being implemented, including the Treasury Single Account (TSA), may help substantially in monitoring all funds in the government’s ministries, departments, and agencies, with the aim to oversee the movement of government money in all government offices. This will help to check against the squandering of the state’s treasury on political cronies as well as on other illicit ventures that seem to supress the national interest in favor of private gain.