Meta-Governance and the Metaphysics of Political Leadership in 21st Century Africa: A Focus on Election Administration in Nigeria

Agu, Sylvia Uche (Ph.D)

Department Of Public Administration And Local Government, University Of Nigeria, Nsukka
E-mail:uchesagu@yahoo.com

Okeke, Remi Chukwudi

Department Of Public Administration And Local Government, University Of Nigeria,Nsukka
E-mail:remiokeke@gmail.com

Idike, Adeline Nnenna

Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria,Nsukka

Abstract

This study essentially considered the relevance of governance networks in election administration in Nigerian. It was acknowledged in the study that governance involves a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule, or the new method by which society is governed. Governance networks were seen in the study as instruments of public policy-making, in which policy-processes take place. Meta-governance was accepted to be the governance of governance, a tool for steering processes in self-regulating governance networks; and also accepted to be about both facilitating and constraining policy processes. It was upheld in the study that the most critical element of network governance is coordination. But in meta-governance, the most critical requirement goes beyond coordination. In this dimension, in election administration in Nigeria for instance, the meta-governor must be a repository of national interest. And indeed, Nigeria's election administration requires a mainstream interest of governance networks. The consummation of the interests of the governance networks would be the dilution of the influence of political leadership on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). A meta-governing electoral commission is not in any way an absurdity under Nigeria's democratic evolution. However, this meta-governing electoral administrator will not be a creation of a partisan political leadership but a natural fruition of the actions of the governance networks.

Keywords: Governance, Governance Networks, Meta-governance, Metaphysics, Political Leadership, Election Administration

1. Introduction

Governance involves a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule, or the new method by which society is governed (Rhodes, 1997, cited in Kroemer, 2010:10). Kroemer (2010:10) further posits that the term 'governance' as such, composes the wider forum in which networks are located. It depicts a situation, in which the power to act is not solely vested within the state. This system is described as fragmented and complex (Kroemer, 2010:10). Resulting from this continues Kroemer (2010:10) is the realization that central government no longer stands as the sole authority by which society is governed: "central government is no longer supreme" (Rhodes, 1996:656, cited in Kroemer, 2010:10). In this sense, governance contrasts the traditional organization of the public realm, in which the state assumed political power, policy capacity, institutional capabilities and legitimacy (Pierre, 2000:2; cited in Kroemer, 2010:10). Citing Pierre (2000), Jessop (1997), Stoker (1998) an Rhodes (1996), Kroemer (2010:10) continues: the rise of governance structures does not invariably imply the loss of state power but necessitates a shift in the tasks assumed by the state and to a re-organization of how these activities are implemented; which implies an opportunity for states to enhance their capacity to project state power and achieve state objectives by mobilizing knowledge and power resources from influential nongovernmental partners or stakeholders.

Thus, a major aspect of governance is a power dependency between actors and institutions due to a collective action problem. In order to solve the collective action problem, organizations need to define a common goal and

exchange resources. As a result, individual actors and institutions need to cooperate because power cannot be used as steering tool. Hence, governance is about autonomous, self-governing networks of actors or self-organizing, inter-organizational networks.

Governance indeed refers to the essential parts of the broad cluster of institutions (Acemoglu, 2008, cited in Kabuya, 2011:2). It would include the political institutions of a society (the process of collective decision-making and the checks on politicians), state capacity (the capacity of the State to provide public goods in diverse parts of the country), and regulation of economic institutions - how the State intervenes in encouraging or discouraging economic activities by various different actors (Kabuya, 2011:2). Governance would also relate with the political leadership foundations of providing the social good of education by the State. The concerns of governance accordingly pervade a wide spectrum of society. The pleasing effects of governance are invariably needed in both developed and developing societies. Governance issues indeed continue to crisscross the broad areas of society; the economy: from industry to banking, to international trade, *etcetera.* Governance is an issue of interest in the entertainment world and also in sporting endeavors; from domestic to international sports. Governance is *ipso facto,* a fundamental issue in international relations. Thus, its desirable effects are propagated in domestic and international administration. At the domestic front, governance is critical to coordination, in election administration. Invariably also, governance interweaves with leadership. Leadership has many different meanings (Kabuya, 2011:3). Leadership in the context of this paper is perceived in terms of the power relationship that exists between leaders and followers and the developmental impact of power. From this viewpoint, leaders have power and wield it to effect change in others (Kabuya, 2011:3).

Thus, Northouse (2004), also cited in Kabuya, (2011:3), views leadership as the focus of group processes and an instrument of good achievement in helping group members achieve their goals and meet their needs. Hence, meta-governance is fundamentally a governance issue and invariably, a leadership engagement. Its leadership assumptions imply a notion of cometence the negation of which may lead the meta-governor to some contradictions. In their extremities, these contradictions begin to translate to metaphysical realities. Indeed, it is the notion of competence that legitimates the meta-governor's capacity for coordination. Therefore, in 21st century Nigeria, the giant of Africa, has the attempt at meta-governance by the electoral commission , made meta-governance, a metaphysical matter? In the Nigerian situation how has political leadership impacted on governance networks and invariably, on meta-governance, in election administration? These are the central research questions of this paper.

2. A Review of Meta-governance Literature

Meta-governance has concisely been seen as the 'governance of governance', or the 'regulation of self-regulation' (Jessop, 2004, cited in, Zonneveld,et al, 2012:4). The purpose of meta-governance is to create some form of coordination, coherence and integration in the fragmented structures of network governance without completely undermining the autonomy, engagement and self-regulation in governance networks (Sørensen, 2006). The concept of meta-governance therefore, provides an analytical tool to further analyze processes of network governance (Zonneveld,et al, 2012:4). In an otherwise insightful contribution, Zonneveld,et al (2012:4) opine that it is the aim to influence decision making processes in governance networks, that is referred to as meta-governance. Thus, by positing that meta-governance refers to an "aim", Zonneveld, et al (2012:4), have added an ambivalent dimension to the conceptualization of meta-governance. Zonneveld, et al (2012:5) however further emphasizes that in more operational terms; meta-governance translates in the imposing of, for example, deadlines, procedures, guidance or other influencing conditions on the network governance process. Instruments related to meta-governance include contracts, result management, management by (political) objectives, and financial frameworks (Sehested, 2009; cited in Zonneveld, et al (2012:5). Network governance therewith takes place in an institutional context determined by higher tier governmental bodies casting a shadow of hierarchy (Zonneveld, et al, 2012:5). Sørensen (2006, 101-103, also cited in Zonneveld, et al, 2012:5) in more general terms, identifies four distinct ways in which meta-governance may be exercised. They are:

1. *Hands-off framing of self-governance*, which is shaping of the political, financial and organizational context within which self-governance takes place. This form of meta-governance can be characterized as hands-off because the meta-governor is not in direct contact with the self-governing actors. 2. *Hands-off storytelling*. This type of meta-governance is exercised by shaping interests through the formation of the meanings and identities that constitute the self-governing actors. Meta-governance through storytelling represents a forceful means to influence self-governing actors and thus to promote unitary strategies to problem solving. 3. *Hands-on support and facilitation*, which is obtained through offering support and facilitation to self-governing actors. This form of meta-governance is hands-on in the sense that the supportive and facilitating meta-governor interacts directly with the self-governing actors. 4. *Hands-on participation*. This means the participation of the meta-governor in processes of self-governance. Hence, a meta-governor can seek to

obtain influence on the outcome of self-governance through direct participation. To do so, however, the meta-governor must give up any authoritative position and participate according to the specific self-constituted rules of the game that exists in a given self-governing environment (Sørensen, 2006, pp. 101-103). On the basis of the discussion above continues Sørensen (2006:103), we may conclude that sovereign rule is being replaced by alternative forms of governing. It is not based on detailed top-down control but on a plurality of indirect ways of influencing and or coordinating the actions of self-governing bodies (Sørensen, 2006:103, cited in Zonneveld, et al 2012:5). Further citing Sørensen (2006:100) Jessop (2002), Klijn & Edelenbos(2007) and Sehested (2009:248), Zonneveld, et al, 2012:5/6) thus summarize meta-governance as a way of enhancing coordinated governance in a fragmented political system based on a high degree of autonomy for a plurality of self-governing networks and institutions, an indirect form of governing that is exercised by influencing various processes of self-governance and therefore, an indirect means of performing 'regulation of self-regulation', both at the macro level of societal governance and at the micro level of network management. Zonneveld, et al (2012:6) finally submits that Meta-governance is intrinsically linked to network governance, which it aims to coordinate.

3. Meta-governance and Network Governance: The Nexus

Network governance, posits Dedeurwaerdere (2005:2) has been extensively studied in the literature. It can be characterized by an attempt to take into account the increasing importance of NGOs, the private sector, scientific networks and international institutions in the performance of various functions of governance. From a functional point of view, the aim of network governance is to create a synergy between different competences and sources of knowledge in order to deal with complex and interlinked problems. In this functional perspective, governance is accomplished through decentralized networks of private and public actors associated to international, national and regional institutions (Dedeurwaerdere, 2005:2). Governance networks are instruments of public policy-making in which policy-processes take place. The inherent feature of governance networks is the involvement of public actors. They are thus embedded within the wider context of policymaking and policy processes. Policy-making in turn is the result of interaction between various actors from both the public and private realm. With innumerable definitions towards governance networks at hand, it proves useful to strip the concepts down and to examine these main characteristics, which recur in the academic literature (Bressers & O'Toole, 1998, Klijn, 1997; cited in Kroemer (2010:11).

Börzel (1998:254) accordingly defines networks as a set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature, linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue these shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals. Reinicke and Deng (2000), cited in Dedeurwaerdere (2005:2) highlight that a typical network (if there is such a thing) combines the voluntary energy and legitimacy of the civil society sector with the financial muscle and interest of business and the enforcement and the rule-making powers, coordination and capacity-building skills of states and international organizations.

Dedeurwaerdere (2005:2) however contends that from a theoretical point of view, the concept of network governance is characterized by a profound ambiguity. Citing Schout and Jordan (2003:9), Dedeurwaerdere (2005:2), contends that the concept of network governance can be distinguished between two models of network governance: one that focuses on networks as self-organizing systems and one involving active steering. This ambiguity of the concept of network governance raises several questions: to what extent are networks self-organizing? Under what conditions the iterative process of institution building can lead to effective governance systems? And when and to which extent is there a need for institutional regulation of self-regulation? (Dedeurwaerdere 2005:2). Meta-governance is the attempt to sort out the occasioning ambiguity. Thus, according to Sørensen & Torfing (2005:202), cited in Kroemer (2010:19), meta-governance is the endeavor to regulate self-regulating policy networks by shaping the conditions under which they operate. It involves the attempts of politicians, administrators or other governance networks to construct, structure and influence the game-like interaction within particular policy networks. In this study, meta-governance is a tool for steering processes in self-regulating governance networks; it is about both facilitating and constraining policy processes (Kroemer, 2010:19).

4. A Political Leadership Scorecard in 21st Century Africa

According to Igwe (2010:11), Africa's leadership in contemporary times defaults the hopes and legacies of the founding fathers of Africanism. For instance, continues Igwe (2010:11), pristine Africa harbored no thieves and criminals in leadership positions but events have now changed and very unfortunately for the worse. Indeed, within a Nigerian

context, Azikiwe (1978:173) suggests that in spite of their heterogeneous languages and cultures, the ancestors of today's Africans bequeathed to their successors, legacies of political, social, economic, legal, philosophical and religious ideologies, which had sustained and enabled the African progenitors to survive. Thus, they had no thieves and criminals in political leadership positions. Igwe (2010:11) further argues that hitherto, the bells jingled Africans' Pan Africanist sentiments on two notes: firstly, that the character of Africa's unique heritage shelved it away from being in any way a primitive version of developed countries and secondly, that colonialism and neo- colonialism which followed, were unacceptable impediments to Africa's economic and political emancipation. Abonyi (2010:25) have singled out politics of self-perpetuation, internecine conflicts and corruption as factors that have held Africa hostage and brought about socio-economic and political woes on the continent. The political leadership question is central to each of these factors.

Asobie (2008:2) posits that Africa's leaders are preoccupied with winning and retaining power; they are enamored with "taking charge", being in control and then using the power to serve them selves and deal with their enemies. In these circumstances, the human and material resource endowment of African states has been subject to bogus and naïve optimism with the demise of bona fide colonialism. An optimism hoisted on the fortuitous dialectics of the modernizing ingenuity of a neo-liberal political economy (Ifesinachi, 2011:1). In the mean time, the strategic relevance of political leadership in the neo-liberal political economy is outside the consideration. Hence, citing Foreign Policy and the Fund for Peace (2005:2), Ifesinachi (2011:2) highlights that states that have manifested failed states' tendencies are mostly found in Africa and these states include: Congo DR, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Chad, Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Egypt, Kenya and Nigeria. Africa's most populous country and the dominant state of Western Africa; Nigeria, highlights Cavanaugh (2013:1) has 174 million people and is the world's seventh most populous country. Election administration is critical to the enthronement of the level of political culture that would save the world's seventh most populous country from failed states suppositions. In the 21st century, political leadership in Africa and in Nigeria in particular, being the most populous country in Africa, must embrace the challenge of making leadership look less like rocket science.

5. Election Administration in Nigeria

Election administration is the process of planning, organizing, managing and conducting free and fair elections that are acceptable to all the stakeholders (Okoye, 2011:47). It is accordingly, a way of ensuring consistency in the way elections are planned and managed. The end points of election administration are free and fair elections. Hence, election administration is a peculiarity of emergent democracies. People in advanced countries simply take for granted this dimension of elections (Okoye, 2011:47). One of the characteristics of advanced countries is the relatively high level of administrative competence, and that is probably the reason that political scientists, who study comparative democracies, have given so little attention to the conduct of elections. Most of the services that advanced countries provide their citizens are much complex than registering voters or conducting elections. Indeed in most industrial and a few developing countries, people learn the results of elections from television projections not from vote counts. Few citizens in advanced countries even know the rules and procedures for counting, announcing and certifying the results, because they take it for granted that it will be honest and impartial(Okoye, 2011:45/46). It is a different scenario in emergent democracies. Consequently, election administration is a cardinal political problem in Nigeria.

According to Okoye, (2011:10), a historical survey of elections in Nigeria showed a number of common characteristics which include the following:

(a) Elections have been particularly characterized by massive frauds, the intimidation and even assassination of political opponents, the brazen subversion of the sovereignty of the vote and general controversy.

(b) While there has been continuity in violence and warfare, there has been lack of continuity in the political organizations through which both violence and warfare have been conducted.

(c) What is striking about this pattern of lack of continuity in the political platforms used by members of the political class to compete for power is not simply that the names of the platforms keep changing; it is rather that there is simply no pattern to the way in which members of the political class change their political allegiance.

(d) The sudden shifts and turns in political commitments and orientations have meant that the parties have not been defined by ideological positions that set them apart from each other.

(e) The political class resort to ethnicity as the primary credential for qualifying for the stake to power; thereby not only reinforcing primordial divisions but also as a result of this fact, the emergence of national consciousness and national identity in the practice of politics.

(f) A common denominator of elections and electoral parties is the increasing materialization of politics. With each succeeding election, the financial stakes are raised to such a level that only those who have previously

exercised state power or worked in close collaboration with the state in the process of the primitive accumulation of capital are able to back their political claims.

The foregoing fully explains that the cooperation of the political class is critical to effective election administration. The common characteristics of Nigerian elections as highlighted above, results into the disputation of every single election result in Nigeria.

6. The Metaphysics of Political Leadership: The Electoral Commission as Meta-Governor in Nigeria

Usually in Nigeria, the electoral commission is the body charged with the management of elections. The history of electoral commissions in Nigeria can be traced to the period before independence, when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct the 1959 elections. The current commission called Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) came into being in 1998 (Okoye, 2011). It is not very certain, why "independent" is prefixed to the name of the commission as the commission directly reports to the Presidency in Nigeria, which practically exposes the commission to immense political manipulations, in the light of the characteristics of elections in Nigeria, outlined above. Consequent to these same characteristics that critically border on political corruption, election administration in Nigeria, under the electoral commissions, generates a wide spectrum of interests.

Usually in recent times in Nigeria, the following are easily identifiable entities and persons that show keen governance interest in Nigerian elections: Nigerian political parties, other nation-states as represented by their foreign missions and embassies, international donor organizations, local and international non-governmental organizations, the Nigerian Police, the Nigerian Army and very many other Nigerian security outfits, University Vice-Chancellors who were used as returning officers in Nigeria's 2011 general elections and have accordingly been accorded recognition as important personalities in Nigeria's election administration; the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) whose members (and non-members) are usually enlisted as election administrators in Nigeria. According to Okoye (2011:46), in the United States, it is the counties that conduct the elections and are supervised by each state. In neither the United States nor Great Britain does there exist a central office for conducting national elections and the local institutions responsible for administering elections are not independent of government; they are offices in the government. This makes election administration, a normal aspect of public administration. In the Nigerian environment on the other hand, election administration requires the full complement of the Army, the Police, the State Security Service and other paramilitary agencies. Hence, election administration in Nigeria is a war-like affair. Thus, it is symptomatic of a failure of political leadership in Nigeria, that election administration is a war-like affair.

Political leadership in Nigeria and generally in Africa, perceive electoral victories as ends. The electoral commission is independent in nomenclature but part of the system that sees electoral victory as end. Invariably, the INEC in Nigeria coordinates a wide spectrum of interests which includes that of the government in power that must be announced as the winner of the latest round of elections. It is the incidence of coordinating this wide spectrum of interests that turns Nigeria's electoral commission, into a curious meta-governing body; into meta-governance that rather appears like metaphysics - confronting the nature and structure of reality (Marshall, 1998:411). It is the political class, invariably political leadership that has created this position of turning an otherwise normal process of public administration, into rocket science and metaphysics.

7. Conclusion

Essentially, network governance demands the realization of governance through the coordination of actors, decision-making processes, and stakeholder motivations in collective decisions (Seddon and Chan, 2012:117)**.** Thus, the most critical element of network governance is coordination. In meta-governance, the most critical element goes beyond coordination. In election administration in Nigeria for instance, a meta-governor must be a repository of national interest. And indeed, Nigeria's election administration requires a mainstream interest of governance networks. The consummation of the interests of the governance networks would be the dilution of the influence of political leadership on the electoral commission. A meta-governing electoral commission is not in any way an absurdity under Nigeria's democratic evolution. However, this meta-governing electoral administrator will not be a creation of a partisan political leadership but a natural fruition of the actions of the governance networks.

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