

**POWER AND AUTHORITY IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM: A  
PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL**

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**Abstract**

*The concepts of power and authority are central in political systems and to governments. In Nigeria, these concepts are frequently used by politicians in their political discourses without an adequate understanding of their proper meaning and application. Many scholars and philosophers often use power and authority interchangeably as though they are synonymous. In fact, in Nigeria, power seems to be confused with authority. The inability to clearly and adequately understand the meaning, theoretical and practical demands of the concepts as well as their underlying differences, seems to be responsible for their improper exercise and abuses in our clime. This paper, therefore, examines the concepts of power and authority in order to establish their differences as well as their demands on those that seek to wield and exercise them. The research exposes the acquisition of power and authority, their usage in Nigeria as well as their influences on the development of the country. It highlights certain practices in the Nigerian polity that fosters the abuse of power and authority and insists that political power must be exercised within the bounds of morality otherwise it will be a deadly weapon in the hands of rulers against the ruled. In conclusion, the paper proposes that anyone in authority must show tremendous responsibility and be aware of the boundaries of their authority in order not to exceed such limits.*

**Keywords:** Authority, Development, Morality, Philosophy, Power.

**Introduction**

Power and authority are ubiquitous in human relationships; in every group of people, there are those with greater and those with less power, those who influence

and those who are influenced.<sup>1</sup> “Politics is an activity in relation to power.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, power and the exercise of authority are central to the understanding of politics and government. Power and authority are predominant concepts used broadly and loosely in daily political discourses. Politics is a power struggle. But the view that politics is about the quest and control of power is akin to the mental attitude that the winner takes all, which chronicles the mental disposition of Nigerian politicians. The point is that the more politics is about power and power alone, the less it is likely to be about principles, selflessness and development.<sup>3</sup> Catherwood’s thought in this connection is quite apropos:

The more politician wants power and power alone, the less likely he is to stand firm about what he believes to be right, the more will he concentrate on putting up a show and the less will he pledge himself to doing anything in particular<sup>4</sup>

Political power must be exercised within the bounds of morality otherwise it will be a deadly and dangerous weapon in the hands of the rulers against the ruled. According to Christian Reus-Smith, politics cannot be divorced from power, but the *homo politicus* who pursues nothing but power is as unreal a myth as the *homo economicus* who pursues nothing but gain. Political action must be based on a coordination of morality and power.<sup>5</sup>

There are several competing views about what power and authority are. Power is often treated as synonymous with “authority,” though if the two terms meant the same thing, we will need only one of the two words in our vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> However, Plato in his *Republic* indicates that the ancient generation was faced with the problems of power and authority in the state. He, therefore, set out to analyze the conditions or requirements for a just society. By doing so, he revealed

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob John Kattakayam. “Power and Knowledge: Some Reflections on Contemporary Practices.” *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 55, no. 3, (2006), 449–467. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/23620756](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23620756). Accessed 28 May 2020.

<sup>2</sup> BrainyMedia Inc. "Francis Parker Yockey Quotes." *BrainyMedia Inc*, BrainyQuote.com [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/francis\\_parker\\_yockey\\_267605](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/francis_parker_yockey_267605) Accessed 28 May 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Elechi Maraizu, “A Politico-Philosophical Survey of Politics in Nigeria and Its Implication to National Security”. *Icheke: Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, no. 2, (2016), 685.

<sup>4</sup> H.F.R. Catherwood. *The Christian Citizen*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Reus-Smith. *The Politics of International Law*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Uphoff. “Distinguishing Power, Authority & Legitimacy: Taking Max Weber at His Word by Using Resources-Exchange Analysis”, Researchgate.net, (1989), 296, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271779020\\_Distinguishing\\_Power\\_Authority\\_Legitimacy\\_Taking\\_Max\\_Weber\\_at\\_His\\_Word\\_by\\_Using\\_Resources-Exchange\\_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271779020_Distinguishing_Power_Authority_Legitimacy_Taking_Max_Weber_at_His_Word_by_Using_Resources-Exchange_Analysis) Accessed June 2, 2020.

his belief that power resides in the society. In this modern age, where democracy has gained traction, enormous attention has been paid to the acquisition and use of power, bearing in mind Lord Acton's assertion that "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely".<sup>7</sup> The gravity of this assertion is manifest in most third world countries, especially Nigeria. There is no doubt that the dynamics of power and authority is quite intriguing. Its exercise is a very precarious thing. In the hands of a wise person, they are a saving grace; in the hands of a fool, they are a source of stress and tension. Anyone who clearly understands the anatomy of power and authority will know that part of their essence includes service and the protection of individual rights and freedom in such a way that whoever is seeking power and the exercise of authority must have all that is required to exercise it properly and meaningfully.<sup>8</sup> It is not just a matter of personal disposition; one must also possess the required aptitude and personal ability when objectively assessed with competing interests.

The history of political leadership in Nigeria is replete with corruption, political turbulence and abuse of power and authority. Ironically, most political office-holders in the country tend to disregard the constitution that bestows on them the authority to exercise power as well as the fact that in a democratic system of government, sovereignty lies in the people. Political power must be conferred by the people. The people need to decide who rules or governs them and under what conditions. Hence, legitimacy confers authority and consent on the people to elect their leaders.

### **Power and Authority: A Conceptual Discourse**

The term 'power' corresponds to the Latin word *potestas*, which is derived from the Latin verb *posse*, meaning *to be able*. The word 'power' also corresponds to the French word *pouvoir*, which is a derivative of the old French infinitive *podir*, meaning *to be able*. The concept of power is notorious for its ambiguity in meaning. Most people have a visceral understanding of what power is but they find it somewhat difficult to express it. In this paper, power will be examined within the context of politics. From the socio-political perspective, power is seen as the ability to influence or control the behaviour of others, the political control of a country, exercised by its government or leader.<sup>9</sup> R.H. Tawney defines power

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<sup>7</sup> Lord Acton. *Essays on Freedom and Power*. (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1887), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Izu Marcel Onyeocha. *Power and Authority in Our Culture*. (Owerri: Chimavin Production Nig., 2005), 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Ogbujah, Columbus. *Power and Good Governance: Observations from Nigeria*, Researchgate.net, 2015, 3,

as the “capacity of an individual, or a group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner which he desires”.<sup>10</sup> The British Political Philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, conceives power in terms of everyone agreeing to forgo his or her rights and conferring all power and strength upon one person. The modern state has taken giant strides away from the Hobbesian state of nature, given the existence of a structured government. Those who conceive power like Hobbes tend to think that power in their hands means the abolition of the rights of other people. The existence of government implies that there are groups of persons granted the authority to exercise power by influencing or controlling the actions of others. For Machiavelli, to dominate and control the state, a prince must be cunning like the fox, to recognize traps set by the wolves, and beastly like the lion, to ward off direct attacks.<sup>11</sup> What this implies is that power can be expressed subtly or through coercive force. Therefore, power is either manifest or structural. Power is manifest when it is expressed through the use of physical force and structural when it is expressed in discourse. Over the last few years, attention has been paid to structural forms of power as much as it is paid the manifest forms. This is done in cognizance of the fact that although structural power is faceless it is nevertheless far-reaching. Michael Foucault emerges as the prime proponent of structural power.<sup>12</sup> Structural power is subliminal, abstruse and expelled in ideologies and perceptions that legitimize the existing status quo. The dual expressions of power can be better explained using an analogy of colonization/globalization. During colonization, the global north applied brute force to control and influence the global south. However, in this era of globalization, the global south is being controlled and influenced through subtler means, which is conveyed in the laws made by the so-called international bodies. The methods are different but the aim is still achieved.

It is our considered view that power confers authority and authority is derived from power. This means that there cannot be authority without power. The

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275226663\\_Power\\_and\\_Good\\_Governance\\_Observations\\_from\\_Nigeria](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275226663_Power_and_Good_Governance_Observations_from_Nigeria). Accessed June 2, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Power Mohita N., “Meaning, Exertion and Elite Theory of Power.”

Yourarticlelibrary.com, n.d. <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/essay/power-meaning-exertion-and-elite-theory-of-power/24319>. Accessed June 14, 2020

<sup>11</sup> [Cary Nederman](#), "Niccolò Machiavelli", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/machiavelli/> Accessed June 14, 2020

<sup>12</sup> Verena Erlenbusch. *From Sovereignty to War: Foucault's Analytic of Power, E-International Relations*, 2015, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/12/from-sovereignty-to-war-foucaults-analytic-of-power/>

term 'authority' is often associated with power and as such mostly used interchangeably with power in daily political discourse. However, there is a fine line between power and authority. Max Weber, a famous sociologist, viewed authority as legitimate power as he stated: Power (Macht) is a generalized phenomenon, while authority (Herrschaft) relates more specifically to institutionalize command.<sup>13</sup> Authority is the capacity to make legitimate choices on behalf of a group. This choice itself must be in accord with moral principles if the directive is to be a genuine law with moral force. The choices of the authority specify what those directed by the law ought to choose to do as cooperative members of the group.<sup>14</sup> This means that authority is the influence a political actor has on a group of persons, which is usually backed by the laws of the state. Idorenyin Esikot and Emmanuel Archibong made the difference between power and authority more glaring by asserting that everybody has the power or ability to issue a command, but not everyone is authorized or entitled to have his commands carried out.<sup>15</sup> The dynamics of power and authority is that whosoever must be conferred with power and earned authority must ensure that he has all that it takes to exercise them properly and meaningfully. The fact is that while power is conferred on an individual, authority, on the other hand, is earned. Therefore, the use of power, like a bulldozer to destroy people, no doubt constitutes danger to human life and national development.

### **Power and Authority: A Contrastive Review**

Many philosophers, politicians, political theorists and writers often use power and authority interchangeably as though both terms are synonymous. In fact, in Nigeria power is confused with authority. The inability to clearly and distinctively understand both the theoretical and practical or operational demands of the concepts as well as their underlying differences seem to be responsible for their improper exercise in our clime. Common sense would dictate how difficult it would be for one to genuinely and meaningfully practice what he does not concretely know or understand. There exists a difference between power and authority. When power is confused and employed to mean authority, it is an abuse of power, which results in despotism. "Authority mistaken for power is nothing

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<sup>13</sup> Marx Weber. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (ed G Roth and C Wittich), (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Onyeocha, *Power and Authority in Our Culture*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Idorenyin Francis Esikot and Emmanuel Iniobong Archibong, "The Exercise of Power in Nigeria's Democracy: A Moral Examination." *Public Policy and Administration Research*, vol.3, no.9, 2013, 45, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/PPAR/article/view/7750/7992>. Accessed June 2, 2020.

but authoritarianism... , a situation where one person inordinately inflicts another with his or her coercive will.”<sup>16</sup> Lord Acton (1834-1902) puts it thus:

Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when the exercise influence and not authority; still more when they superadd the tendency of the certainty of corruption of authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. That is the point at which the negation of Catholicism and the negation of Liberalism meet and keep high festival, and the end learns to justify the means.<sup>17</sup>

One major difference, according to Onyeocha, is that genuine authority is spiritual, while power is in the physical order. Authority moves and inspires from within, while power jolts and compels from without. Every situation of conflict arises when authority is misconstrued as power. Power generates and thrives on conflict even though it never cherishes opposition.<sup>18</sup>

Authority can be earned or conferred. It commands respect bespeaks order. Where it is operational, power is de-emphasised. It is never bought, sold or hassled over for it is beyond price and cannot be reckoned in terms of silver and gold. It could be exercised even in one’s absence ... and is at its best when it builds up in another. Power, on the other hand, could be bought, sold and grabbed. When this happens, it can become like a weapon in the hands of its wielder. It begins to thrive in inverse proportion to the waning of authority.<sup>19</sup>

Power inflicts and afflicts pain and humiliation when it is used wrongly. Therefore, authority has the role to act as check and balance over power to ensure that an authority being exercised does not slide inordinately into brutality and despotism. Onyeocha captures it thus:

Power and authority are like the bulldozer and its operator. The one thrives in demolition and dissipation while the other thrives in calm concentration. If the operator has the skill and the relevant license, he could move as much earth as required using the bulldozer. If he lacks the necessary skills, his use of the machine constitutes a danger to lives and property. He might run people over,

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<sup>16</sup> Onyeocha, *Power and Authority in Our Culture*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in George Seldes. *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton, The Great Thoughts*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 316.

<sup>18</sup> Onyeocha, *Power and Authority in Our Culture*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Onyeocha, *Power and Authority in Our Culture*, 18.

push down electric and telephone poles, dig up the water mains, disrupting and destroying the life of the community.<sup>20</sup>

### **Separation of Power and Instances of Abuse of Power in Nigeria**

Separation of power is one of the characteristics of the modern state. The principle of separation of power, as it is known today, was propounded by Baron de Montesquieu. According to him:

If it is to provide its citizens with the greatest possible liberty, a government must have certain features. First, since "constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it ... it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power". This is achieved through the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of government. If different persons or bodies exercise these powers, then each can check the others if they try to abuse their powers. But if one person or body holds several or all of these powers, then nothing prevents that person or body from acting tyrannically; and the people will have no confidence in their own security.<sup>21</sup>

In this respect, the legislative arm is to make law; the executive is to implement the law, while the judiciary is charged with the interpretation and adjudication of the law. The basis of this principle is hinged on Lord Acton's assertion that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The principle of separation of power does not only mitigate power abuse, but it also ensures the proper organization of government. It also facilitates harmonious interaction between the three arms of government with each arm serving as a check on the others. There is, however, a brittle balance to be maintained such that, in the process of checking the excesses of a particular arm, one arm does not commandeer the powers and functions of the other. Separation of power was included in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a fundamental principle of governance. However, in Nigeria, the principle of the separation of power has been bridged or abused in many instances. It is either our politicians fail to grasp the principle of separation of power or they outrightly choose to ignore it. There are instances where the power of a particular arm of government in Nigeria is neutralized or outrightly usurped. The permanent closure of Courts in Rivers State by the former Governor of Rivers State, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, during his tenure is a case in

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<sup>20</sup> Onyeocha, *Power and Authority in Our Culture*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Hilary Bok, "Baron de Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/montesquieu/> 2018.

point in the neutralization of the powers of the judiciary. If the court premises is locked, how then can the judiciary exercise power? The current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari has also, on many instances, disregarded judicial pronouncements or delay compliance with court orders. Examples include court orders obtained by the human rights lawyer and Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Femi Falana, ordering the release of Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, and his wife, Zeenah.<sup>22</sup> Another case was the continuous detention of the 'revolution now' activist, Mr Omoyele Sowore. It was a show of shame and plain contempt of court when a video showing Mr Sowore being pulled by officials of the State Security Service (SSS) in court and his rearrest went viral on social media. The interpretation and adjudication of the law is the duty of the judiciary, while the executive is charged with its implementation. When the executive arm of government flouts court orders and judicial pronouncements that are not in their favour, they neutralize the power of the judiciary.

The balance on the separation of power in Nigeria was stretched to its elasticity when President Buhari suspended the then chief justice of Nigeria, Walter Onnoghen, from his duties on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2019, weeks before elections. In order to maintain the delicacy of checks and balances of the principle of separation of power, Nigeria's constitution recommends the consent of the third arm of the government, at the instance where one arm seeks to exercise power over the other. The President did not seek the consent of the legislature before ousting the then chief justice. We consider the President's action as unlawful and an infringement on the powers and independence of the judiciary. The Presidency received several criticisms for this, especially from the European Union, United Kingdom and the United States. The British High Commission also expressed serious concerns over the suspension by asserting that "it risks affecting both domestic and international perceptions on the credibility of the forthcoming elections."<sup>23</sup> Given that former chief Justice Walter Onnoghen was sacked hours before swearing in members of the election tribunal, the act was viewed by so many Nigerians as politically motivated. It is important to note here that this was the first time that Nigeria's head of state had sacked a chief justice since 1975

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<sup>22</sup> Kolawole Olaniyan. "Buhari is ignoring Nigerian Judges- we must not let him get away with it". *Vanguard Newspaper*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/11/buhari-is-ignoring-nigerian-judges-we-must-not-let-him-get-away-with-it/> 2019. Accessed June 2, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> The BBC. 'Nigerian Chief Justice's Suspension Raises International Concerns.' BBC NEWS. [HTTPS://WWW.BBC.COM/NEWS/WORLD-AFRICA-47015698](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47015698) Accessed 29 May 2020

when the country was under military rule.<sup>24</sup> For a country that has undergone military rule for decades and experienced the ills of the concentration of the powers of the three arms of government in one body or individual, one would expect Nigeria to do better. This is sadly not the case. The failure of Nigerian leaders to uphold the principle of separation of power and respect the independence of other arms of government, especially the judiciary, has given impetus to the seeds of tyranny been sown in Nigeria.

### **Power and Authority in the Nigerian Political System**

The exercise of power and authority is at the heart of political discourses, particularly on democratic governance in Nigeria. The democratic system of government is commended over other systems of government because of its appealing feature of residing sovereignty in the people. Legitimacy is a fundamental element in the exercise of authority by the government. Illegitimacy divorces politics and the political society from the people and sets it as a counterforce against them and their true interests. The beauty of politics is the people's participation since political leaders need the people to exercise political authority. The absence of the people's participation is a contradiction to ascension to political power and exercise of authority because political power or leadership brings about the spirit of contract and or obligation between one who wields power and authority and the people.<sup>25</sup> This means that it behoves the populace to choose those that will wield the authority to exercise power. Hence, power and authority in a democratic government are confined and coated with legitimacy. The political history of Nigeria since independence in 1960 has been a chequered one, especially in the wielding and exercise of power and authority. It will be cumbersome to narrate the intricacies and manoeuvrings that characterized the history of Nigerian politics and democracy. The task here is to critically examine power and authority and the implication of their abuse on the polity. Available records of past political events in Nigeria suggest that the reins of power have unfortunately resided with individuals that have placed their interests or those of their ethnic groups and family members over those of the Nigerian state. Abuse of power has been a common denominator in both military and civilian rule. The military usurped power from civilians in the guise of ridding the state of corruption, but, instead, fostered corruption. Disregard for human rights was at the

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<sup>24</sup> The Economist. 'Nigeria's president sacks the chief justice weeks before an election.' *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/02/02/nigerias-president-sacks-the-chief-justice-weeks-before-an-election>

<sup>25</sup> Maraizu, "A Politico-Philosophical Survey of Politics in Nigeria and Its Implication to National Security", 685.

highest point during the military regime as much as it is even now. Indeed, the political leaders have succeeded in making abuse of power and authority look normal in the country.

Political discourse of Nigeria's political leadership without recourse to the colonial era is fragmentary. It is safe to say that a discourse on the Nigerian State would not be possible if the colonizers had not merged independent regions to form Nigeria. The colonial masters governed through indirect rule, with the intent of furthering their cause. Eventually, when the struggle for independence heightened, the British made sure structures were put in place to ensure their interests were covered even after independence was granted. There are allegations against them, especially the overestimation of the number of citizens in the Northern part of Nigeria in the census carried out in the years leading to independence.<sup>26</sup> The result of that census was that the population of people in the northern part of Nigeria is much more than the rest of the country put together. At a glimpse, this does not mean much, but a critical look, however, uncovers its implication for revenue allocation and the election of political leaders. It is against this backdrop that the famous Nigerian literary icon, Chinua Achebe, in his book *There was a Country*, declared that "democracy in Nigeria was dead on arrival."<sup>27</sup> The colonial masters, although merged the southern and northern protectorates, they made sure Nigerians were still divided along religious and ethnic lines. This divide has continued to broaden over the years. Religion and ethnicity in Nigeria are dragged into areas in which they ordinarily are inconsequential. In seeking admission into the university, in seeking employment and also in vying for political offices in Nigeria, religion and ethnicity, rather than competence, are put into serious consideration. This absurdity tagged 'Federal Character' is even enshrined in the constitution. The implication of this on the political system is grave. Chinua Achebe highlighted the negative impact this practice has on the Nigerian political system when he succinctly states:

Nations enshrine mediocrity as their modus operandi, and create the fertile ground for the rise of tyrants and other base elements of the society, by silently assenting to the dismantling of systems of excellence because they do not immediately benefit one specific ethnic, racial, political, or specific-interest group. That, in my humble opinion, is where Nigeria finds itself today!<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Femi Aribisala. "Nigeria: Is Britain Nigeria's Evil Stepmother?" AllAfrica.com, 2018, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201806260224.html>. Accessed June 14, 2020

<sup>27</sup> Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2012), 236.

<sup>28</sup> Achebe, *There was a Country*. 236.

Sincerely, one cannot expect much from a nation that chooses its leaders and personnel based on their religious and ethnic affiliations rather than their competence. Is it then surprising that most of the political leaders that have led Nigeria since independence have come from the northern part of the country, which happens to be the region with the lowest percentage in education?<sup>29</sup> In order to make the mantra ‘born to rule’ on the lips of an average northern Nigerian a reality, the educational requirements for holding political positions in Nigeria was brought down to the barest minimum. It is paradoxical that a country that graduates thousands from the universities every year, and have produced some of the world’s revered intellectuals; the educational requirement for holding the highest political office in the country is a school certificate or its equivalent.

There is no doubt that the office of the President of Nigeria is a very powerful one. The President of Nigeria is also the Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. The Police are also centrally controlled as police officers and even Commissioners of Police in each state are answerable to the Inspector General of Police, who is appointed by the President and answerable to him. Hence, at his disposal is ‘physical power’ (brute force). In addition to this, the Nigerian President possesses economic power due to the unhindered access he has to the country’s coffers. The flawed federalism practised in Nigeria has also given impetus to the overbearing economic powers of the Nigerian President. Present-day Nigeria is heavily dependent on oil revenue, which is controlled by the federal government and allocated monthly to the three tiers of government. This is, however, not the case in the United States of America, the country whence Nigeria adopted her system of government. The abuse of power in Nigeria is inevitable! Not only is power abused by political office holders, but the police officer who is sworn to protect lives and property has instead brutalized the people. Police brutality is a vice that is wide-spread in Nigeria. There are uncountable instances involving police officers that have shot and killed civilians unjustly. There is a case of a police officer who shot a taxi driver for not giving him the “unconstitutional but mandatory fifty Naira” bribe paid at checkpoints. Presently, there is a case of a girl of six that was shot and killed by an officer of the Nigerian Police. They use the power in their barrel not for the protection of the populace but to the promotion of personal interests or those of their paymasters. During elections, the police and the army are granted so much power. The presence of the police during an election is justifiable but how do we justify the presence of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ben Nanaghan. “Northern Leaders: Face Education, Not Presidency.” pmnewsnigeria.com, 2013, <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2013/08/05/northern-leaders-face-education-not-presidency/> Accessed June 14, 2020

military. The question is what business does the army have with an election that is purely a civilian activity? The reality is that the police and the army are used by politicians, especially at the federal level, to brutalize individuals that are against their re-election. The police and the army are reduced to thugs in uniform during elections in Nigeria. They participate in rigging and protecting the civilian agents of their paymasters. Power is like a drug that should be taken with a prescription, else one becomes addicted. The police and army have tasted raw and unencumbered power, now it is difficult to get them back under control.

The christening of Nigerian politicians as gladiators was not done arbitrarily. The word gladiator was accorded them because of their speeches, actions and inactions during elections. Their abuse of power makes it very difficult for the average Nigerian that is not a ‘gladiator’ to break even and win political offices contested for.<sup>30</sup> It is, hence, safe to say that to acquire political power in Nigeria you need power. In a video that went viral on social media, Adams Oshiomole, the former National Chairman of the All Progressive Congress (APC), publicly said that “I think that for democracy to flourish, only people who can accept the pain of rigging, **sorry**, defeat, should participate in an election.”<sup>31</sup> This might be an honest mistake or an important insight into the intricacies of the Nigerian political system from an insider.

### **Implication of the Abuse of Power and Authority in the Nigerian State**

In Nigeria, there are doubts as to whether the votes of the people actually count. An election is the hallmark of a democratic system. What then becomes of a democratic system whose electioneering process is bastardized? Plato declared that ‘until the world is ruled by philosopher-kings the world will know no peace.’<sup>32</sup> Plato was not just speaking of individuals that studied philosophy in the university; he was rather speaking of individuals with a critical mindset and the capacity to resolve the complex issues of the state. Can we categorically state that the political office holders in Nigeria have met this requirement? The answer is sadly not in the affirmative. The implication of this abuse of power in the Nigerian state is distrust of the government by the populace. When the feeling of distrust is bred in the mind of the populace, the ripple effect is a revolt. Nigeria has had a couple of them. The Biafran and Ogoni movements are cases in point. These movements and more

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<sup>30</sup> Tomiloba OlaniyiQuadri. “The Concept of Political Gladiator within the Nigerian Political System”, Afribary.com, 2018, <https://afribary.com/works/the-concept-of-political-gladiator-within-the-nigerian-political-system>. Accessed June 14, 2020

<sup>31</sup> The Cable. “Trending Video: ‘Pain of rigging’ — Oshiomhole’s gaffe on Osun rerun.” The Cable. <https://www.thecable.ng/trending-video-pain-rigging-oshiomholes-gaffe-osun-rerun>. Accessed 2 June 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Plato. *The Republic*. (Harmondsworth: Penguins Press, 1955), 282.

recent ones are sprouting due to the inadequacies of the Nigerian political system. Although a revolution is sometimes necessary for societal change, no nation yearns for it because it tends to disrupt the day to day operations in a country. The Nigerian state is one of those whose growth and development has been retarded by recurring eruptions of revolution. Improper exercise of power and authority has serious consequences on good governance and national development. It leads to economic and political marginalization, tension and conflict that breeds insecurity and lack of development in the country.

### **Conclusion**

Anyone that really understands the full meaning and implication of power and authority, especially in the anatomy of political leadership in Nigeria, will not quickly jump into it. It will be appropriate for such a person to clearly understand the demands of power and authority. Power and authority must be exercised by those in the best rational position to make sound decisions, right judgments and good choices for others. He/she must not be autocratic, authoritative, vindictive and tribal. Authority is primarily exercised through leadership and both are supposed to bring excitement and honour to the one who wields them as well as to those who are subject to it. Authorities must listen to those whose actions they direct, while those subject to authority should truly submit to it since power and authority come from God. The moral basis of any genuine exercise of authority is that anyone in authority must use his position to attain the common good of the people and not to subjugate or kill them. By so doing, he/she will command the obedience and loyalty that will therefore freely flow from the subjects. This is the only way a leader can morally justify his authority. Obedience and loyalty are simply the submissions to the moral claim of authority because the genuine exercise of power and authority goes with genuine loyalty and obedience from the people. Among numerous qualities a person who seeks power and authority must wield include that he/she must be qualified, be informed, be aware of the demands of the very position he/she seeks; must be one that can foster community spirit and protect the rights of the people. Such a person must be sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the people and must be experienced, courageous and integrous. A leader wielding authority must be approachable, show tremendous responsibility and be aware of the boundaries of his/her authority in order not to exceed the limits of their authority. If we understand these postulations, then it will be a clear indication that we have truly understood the anatomy and implication of power and authority as well as what it demands from leaders, especially in the Nigerian political system.

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