

Trust deficit: A lingering influence affecting Nigeria policy and governance

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ABSTRACT

Trust has become a very influential barrier and deficit to the development and implementation of policies and programmes in Nigeria. Most Nigerians have become frustrated by inexistence of commitment to duty and the lack of revitalization of governance towards economic prosperity. These unfortunately has led to the inability of government and its agents to address fundamental issues that hinders consistent policy framework, thereby paving way for trust deficit in governance and administration of the state. Leadership capacity no longer exist in the system of governance in Nigeria. Understanding common values that bridge the gap between the have and the have not has become a nightmare, as the unprofessional conduct of some civil servants and political office holders have created room for lack of sincerity and confidence in the nation's public institutions. This study is set to unravel some of the mistrust or trust issues that affects the citizens as it relates to policies and programmes, and why it has become the norm in Nigeria politics and administration. The study adopted content analysis approach in order to gain an indebt understanding of the phenomenon. Two trust deficit theories were analyzed; these are institutional theory and theory-based evaluation approach. The study recommended that government should be sensitive to the plight of the people, by building and sustaining trust related issues. Policies and programmes should be adequately implemented to dis-way the people from suspicion and indifference to government pronouncement.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has had a long history of trust deficit especially as it relates to policies and programmes geared towards economic, social and political development of the country. Trust deficit have had a significant impact on national development. The decline towards public trust in governmental institutions have contributed to the lack of confidence in economic, social or political policy pronouncement by the government. These includes deteriorating environment; increased in high rate of poverty; inadequate infrastructural and trade barriers; including the spillover effect of foreign monetary policies. According to Ikelebe (2006) quoting Rourke "when administrators cannot achieve their own goals, they may be able to prevent others from achieving goals to which they are opposed". Pronouncement by the federal government had have a significant effect on the economy of Nigeria, which has affected her economic growth and development. These pronouncements had also affected trust issues with relations to governance. The lack of trust on political pronouncement with regards to promises made by political leadership of institutions have significant implications for the functioning of a democratic society and can contribute to various issues such as support for extreme political views, which have now been characterized relatively by a simplistic white and black perception of the social world.

The capacity of government bureaucracy can also determine which policy or programme can be effective and well implemented for the betterment of the people. Where ability exist, polices could be confidently enacted for implementation to avoid the instances of trust related issues. Thus, bureaucracy's vitality, leadership, discipline, skills and expertise may further make or mar implementation. The disposition of bureaucratic leadership and staff demines implementation success. People who endorsed ideological violence, share a number of underlying cognitive and emotional trait. Succinctly, positive attitudes may underline enthusiastic implantation of policies, while the contrary may mean that implementation could be resisted, thwarted and even sabotaged. This could be the reason why Oaikhena & Aligbe (2023) posits that "policy process now involves the interaction of citizens drawn from a concern of issues they believe hamper state development, as formal policy making cannot only be conducted by the legislative bodies alone". One of the theories adopted by this study was the theory-based evaluation approach, which provides a comprehensive way of assessing the effectiveness of a policy or program. It allows for an examination of the assumptions on which the program is based and provides insight into how it can be improved or expanded for better results and greater success in meeting its objectives.

Given citizens greater access to information, especially the youth, they need to make informed decisions on how to rebuild trust in a nation's leadership. According to Mbwoye, (2024) he rightly observed that "young people's engagement and participation have always been a central element in society, especially when youth-led initiatives create opportunities and benefits for growth and sustainability". It is therefore imperative for leaders to promote transparency and accountability, in other to gain public trust, strengthen commitment and integrity to government policies and programmes. Hamid & Abubakar, (2024) added that "young people and their future contributions to society are critical to the survival and wellbeing of the entire sub-Saharan African region". The failures of trust in government pronouncements on policies has create avenue for suspicion, which has led to favoritism, and corruption, these also include the negative perceptions of the economy, scandals associated with those in government as crime and criminality and financial recklessness increase in public institutions, each leading to decline public trust in government affairs.

In addition, when there is a consistent decline in political trust, it leads to loss of confidence in the democratic system. It is necessary to say that trust deficit in political and economic pronouncements destroys healthy democratic society, which contributes to policy failures. Building trust from the public is a challenging task for Nigerian leaders as they often undermine trust in individual and the offices they occupy. This could be the reason why Carpon, Gillespie, Rolfe and Smith (2015) assert that "policy makers should consider the disparities in risk and trust perceptions between the public and influential stakeholders, placing greater emphasis on risk communication and the uncertainties of risk assessment in the areas of higher concern". The consequences of trust deficit can be significant and far reaching, affecting various contexts such as democratic values, economic advancement, mistrust of institutions and social cohesion. The objectives of this study amongst others, is to examine trust deficit which has become a lingering influence affecting Nigeria policy and governance.

2 | MISTRUST AMONG CITIZENS TOWARDS GOVERNANCE

Mistrust is a norm that means a lack of confidence or distrust, it applies to doubt the truth or effectiveness of something or someone, which could also easily lead to lack of faith in leadership, suspicion and polarization, thereby also raising the question of integrity and respect. According to Agaba, Seniye & Olaiya (2024), quoting Holthaus, 2018, they agreed that "...by implication international agencies would meet human needs, aided by knowledge and

expertise; which invariably would attract the loyalty of the populations stimulate this participation, and expand the area of integration". According to McDermott, 'the 2019 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, observed that "trust deficit" as a barrier to economic growth, digital innovation and social cohesion, with trust being described as "the ultimate human currency" (McDermott, 2019). As a result, a large and growing trust gap has emanated between segments of national societies in Nigeria with those on higher incomes and with others on higher levels of education being consistently more likely to trust governmental institutions.

Since all human relations are based on trust, the mobilization of voters through the distribution of food items like rice, seasonings and funds is a reflection of mistrust in governance as there is the inclination that voters would vote for a candidate through this process, as it is obvious that the culture in place in Nigerian, rewards incompetent leadership over reformist leaders with the capabilities to solve teething problems associated with a nation's systemic poverty issues and underdevelopment. It is also worthy of note that, unintended consequences are also associated with the practice of motivating and encouraging people to be irrational and ignorant with their votes. This has led to failure of democratic governance and abuse of office when eventually such individual comes to power or occupy the position of authority. Concrete abilities and strategies with good humor are required to deal effectively with political and socio-economic issues that could prevent mistrust amongst the people, as such political, socio and economic power should be deployed based on expertise and knowledge. According to Okoa and Iwara (2021), 'the failure of governance in Nigeria manifests in the declining capacity of political leaders to recognize systemic risks such as election fraud, terrorist attacks, herder-farmer conflict, armed banditry, and police brutality and put in place the necessary measures to navigate these challenges".

The growth of mistrust most especially in the nation's political space has become a matter of growing concern for economic, political and social development in Nigeria. It has unfortunately become a barrier to the growth of a nation's economy, social cohesion and digital innovation, with trust being described as "the ultimate human currency". Politicians have risen in large numbers right from the federal, state and local government levels in Nigeria making desperate efforts to remain in office even before another election. This has been seen as symptomatic leading to the rise of mistrust in institutional leaders, as well as, concerns about the nation's growing social inequality and a perceived decline in economic, social and political life and opportunities. According to Watts (2003) "social and political development refer to the processes through which individuals and societies acquire the knowledge, skills, and capacity to engage in political and social systems, leading to social change and activism". Invariably, the political power system of a society involves the development of institutions, attitudes, and values. This development is vital for human development and the creation of a just society. Mistrust among citizens towards governance is a significant issue that can lead to a lack of faith in leadership and government institutions. This lack of trust has been steadily eroding since the late 1960s, correlated with various historical events and political developments. This could be the reason why Oaikhena (2022), observed that "in countries where certain groups are discriminated against, not only are they less able to contribute to the development of the economy, but also this leads to the buildup of ghettos, shanties, and vulnerable communities".

Factors such as polarization, ineffective communication, and perceived lack of transparency can contribute to this mistrust. As observed by Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), trust in government institutions influenced other factors such as, responsiveness, integrity, and transparency. The book "Mistrust" by Ethan Zuckerman (2021) provides insights into the prevalence of mistrust in civic life and its impact on society. Addressing this issue requires efforts to enhance transparency, improve communication, and strengthen the integrity of government institutions to rebuild trust among citizens. As Brennan (2020) rightly observed, "the political system in Nigeria is dominated by individuals who gain power through nepotism rather than competence, influence voters with food rather than vision, and consolidate power through intimidation or by incentivizing constituents with material gifts which they frame as "empowerment" to keep them subservient and loyal political followers. By implication, the failure of governance in Nigeria is arguably the result of incompetent leadership'. According to Oaikhena (2011) "the failure of some leaders has been traced to the style they adopted, as they tend to ignore the participation of others in the day-to-day running and decision making of the organization".

3 | GROWING POLITICAL POLARIZATION THROUGH INCOMPETENT LEADERSHIP

Political polarization has hampered the growth of governance leading to incompetent leadership in the country. Political development is linked to economic growth and its relationship to social change, including the study of social systems, traditional and transitional societies. Leadership in Nigeria

has lost principles in governing the people. Governing the people involves running a social system through the process of interaction, mediation, crisis management, and decision making among actors, who are involved in a collective problem sharing and solving, that culminates into the creation, reformation and reinforcement/reproduction of social norms. More so, governance incorporates far more than simply trust in the government and institutions of government, be it political leaders or elected representatives. These could be the reason why Oaikhena (2016) observed that "it has been established universally that good governance begins with the establishment of quality relationship between the political and bureaucratic leaders".

Ikelegbe (2006), posits that "politics permeates and often times dominate the activities of government and non-governmental actors and groups at every stage of the policy process". He added that policy making is dominated and activated by the social political sub-process of conflict, power relations and influence. Our system in Nigeria works by turning leaders' greed to advantages, in the process, it encourages people to act selfishly. While the material progress accomplished by the system is undeniable, it has done nothing to stimulate people to become better human beings. Actually, it has done quite the opposite. The whole system is rededicated on the assumption that human nature cannot be changed, consequently few people in our society believe politicians can really improve themselves, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Studies have shown that there is no control of elected officials, by the people especially when they are sworn into office, as their control is limited, as it has been established that people rarely control and participate in their government. The control of representatives in government is much more significant than a mere statement from the people, as the fact remains that the system is a democratic one. According to Phirtskhalashvili, and Gavtadze, (2024) they observed that "since the realization of citizens' rights and freedoms takes place more at the level of local self-governments, this necessitates the existence of the development-oriented local self-governments, active involvement in their activities based on cooperation from citizens, business circles or non-governmental organizations". This new function of government posed a very important problem for the society, however. Oaikhena and Aligbe (2023), noted that "it might therefore, become necessary to adduced that policy makers are faced with economic or technological problems to process policies in the open".

Against these backdrops, the researchers sought to know, how far should the government go in involving itself in the economic, political, and social affairs of the people? When is the line dividing a legitimate government action from government oppression of citizens? They suggested a simple straight forward formula: that government purpose is to increase individual liberty to its maximum, hence government has the right to act only when its action will definitely increase the freedom and trust of the people. The propensity to polarize the society in the area of trust deficit brings about difference among the peoples physical or mental abilities, and capabilities. Regardless of these differences amongst the people, no individual is more human than the next, and each individual contributes to the societal development. Consequently, each individual has a right of equality in political and legal treatment in the hands of state institutions. To deny such right or treatment could be an abuse of the human rights to which, each person or individual has equal claim. The researchers opined that, the comfort or happiness of an individual which easily leads to trust in governance is the ultimate goal of the society, thus bringing about responsible leadership. As rightly observed by the study, good and effective leadership, discourages polarization, and promote human equality. This is based on human competition among individuals, rewarding those who function best in a system. Individuals should be treated equally, unrestricted as long as they do not violate any laws. Procedures laid down must be followed by the leadership this makes a government democratic, and dedicated to the principles of rule of law in a country.

4 | REGAINING TRUST FROM THE PUBLIC TO AVOIDING CONFLICT

Trust deficit concept is the lack of trust between individuals, groups, or institutions, which can lead to different forms of disputes or conflict and that could easily lead to social restiveness. Deficit in the area of trust can occur or manifest in different forms, including low trust, a neutral state without trust or mistrust and distrust (Bertsou, 2019). According to Citrin & Stoker 'this lack of trust can be attributed to various factors such as public- and private-sector corruption, poisonous public rhetoric, governments' inability to provide essential security and human services, breakdowns in the rule of law, rising economic inequality, and perceptions that neither individual voices nor votes matter' (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). This has led to civil strife or conflict recently in Kenya, were the people have demonstrated against the government for insensitivity and greed, by increasing taxes on goods. According to Umenzu, Ibebunjo & Oaikhena (2024) they assert that "conflict has been historically known to be unavoidable, taken various forms and dimensions in Africa societies. They added that negative or positive impact

can come from misunderstanding stemming from family feud, market brawls, skirmishes, boundary disputes, and assaults". Several strategies had been put in place to regain the people's trust in governance. Up till this time in our nation's polity, we have seen inconsistency in most government policies which unexpectedly found significant fluctuation. Rafkin (2020) observed that "inconsistent messages may suggest that the governments private information is inaccurate, undermining its credibility". These has been a significant shift and constant worry by the people to believe that government policies are geared towards the elevation of the people. It must however, be noted that the people lack sources other than what they are told or made to believe through media propaganda. Despite the propaganda change, trust in the attitude of leaders is still being eroded. Stuart and Christopher (2010) argued that "the magnitude of public support matters; government responsiveness is proportional to the magnitude of public preferences for change". However, some may pretend to believe what they hear and see, but they have no influence on public opinion.

Nigerians believe that the media have much less influence on the three branches of government. Some rightly or wrongly create the media with great deal of influence over government institutions. Media propaganda has been a common tool for political actors to influence public perception and opinion (Suemo, Eneh, and Kusagh, 2024). This could also be the reason why Idehen and Oaikhena (2021) averred that "the political leadership maintains its control and influence over the instrument of power through the hierarchical nature of state strategy". Meanwhile, government officials increase in knowledge gap in a variety of situations does not mean, however that the gap will always increase, especially with regards to trust. There are conditions that may lead to a decrease in trust gaps and to greater equalization of knowledge within a social system. One of these conditions is the existence of increasingly intense level of social conflict, particularly that associated with regaining trust from the people, which touch back concerns of different groups among the populations. Regaining trust is a means of avoiding trust deficit, that could result in generation and disseminating variable in coalescing the concern of participating groups to acquire knowledge. When there is no trust from the government to the people, conflict could be increased, that would amount to increase disharmony. When this happens conflict, suspicion and strife is bound to happen. leads to clarification of trust values of the people in the system and to a sharpening of each groups position in the country. Effective group positions in social controversies like trust issues, include proper articulation of the release of the issues to the interest of all groups in the country. Van de Wall, and Six (2013) observed that, "citizens must trust their government officials who have the public interest in mind; and citizens must trust each other to abide by the democratically agreed laws".

However, a basic strategy to deal with trust issues is to engage groups or the people in the larger public, which may have previously seen the issues as a distant fray over "somebody else problem". To prevent conflict and regain the people's trust in governance there are some key modalities or indicators which include active listening, information sharing through transparency process, feedback mechanism, awareness in cultural diversity, team building activities and commitment. Understanding roots conflict and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration are vital. Forgiveness plays crucial roles in rebuilding trust and reducing conflict, as it aids empathetic listening. One approach is to focus on building trust through effective institutional performance (Braithwaite, 2008). Institutions that are effective in delivering real benefits to citizens can help to build trust over the years. This can be achieved through day-to-day execution and a commitment to providing value to citizens (Braithwaite, 2008). Another approach is to address the root causes of trust deficit, such as corruption and inequality. Citrin & Stoker, (2018), noted that this can involve implementing policies that promote transparency and accountability, as well as addressing economic and social inequalities that can contribute to mistrust. In addition, they added that fostering a culture of dialogue and inclusivity can help to build trust and manage conflict. This can involve creating spaces for citizens to engage with institutions and policymakers and promoting a culture of respect and empathy. The management of trust deficit and conflict requires a nuanced understanding of the complexities of trust in its various forms, as building trust through institutional performance and fostering a cultural dialogue inclusivity. By taking these steps, it is possible to build trust and manage conflict in a way that promotes social cohesion and stability.

5 | FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Two theories were adopted in this study by the researchers. Both theories are trust deficit theories. These are:

5.1 | Institutional trust theory

This theory brought to light the importance of trust in governance and institutions alike, at various levels, like the society, organizations, and individual. It promotes the interconnectedness of trust across different levels and how they influence and impact each other. Institutional theory was

propounded by John Mayer and Brian Rowan in 1970. It was meant to explore further, how organizations fit with, are related to, and work shaped by their societal, state, national and global environments, and then provide for a more integrated and regular society and social institutions. These could be the reason why Stehr (2018) while quoting Max (1939-1941) observed that "Marxist theory of society have assigned decisive importance to the (cultural) focus or means of production for societal development since man's understanding of nature and is mastery over it by virtues of its presence as a social body appear as the great foundation-store of production as not wealth", so that general knowledge becomes a direct force of production". In the mid-20th century institutionalist like Karl Polanyi argued that social institutions and norms produce an integrated economy. He believed that relatively stable prices in the economy are not set primarily by random acts of exchange, but rather by price-setting organizations that coordinate and normalize exchanges (1957). This institutional perspective highlights the roles of institutions like banks, national governmental agencies, and other similar institutions. Another way to frame Polanyi's point is that non-institutionalist theories understand pricing to emerge from buyers and sellers who exchange goods for money. Both buyers and sellers seek to maximize their self-interest. Presumably, these exchanges have a tendency towards regularity.

5.2 | Theory-based evaluation approaches

Theory-based evaluation approaches was propounded by Weiss in 1997. It became popular in recent times increasingly. The theory viewed differently several ways of assessing the various performance related to programs and interventions associated with governance, as it also provides insights into why certain outcomes occurs. The theory-based evaluation approach is structured in such a way that it provides a clearer understanding of programs or policies of government, which includes hypotheses formulation about why and how policies and programs are implemented to derive desired results. This approach helps to identify programs or policies that are not effective in the society, and thereafter suggests how these could be improved upon, so that meaningful changes can be made in the society and relevant areas. It is important to state that programs or policies are the context of intervention in order to identify key components and possible areas for improvement. These measures create opportunities for robust and comprehensive understanding of the programs or policies, which enables stakeholders to be successful. Invariably, approaches like this helps in the administration programs and policies that effectively evaluate trust deficit in a nation. More so, emphasizes is laid on the development and understanding of what is going on within the society with regards to trust issues in governance, as elaborately discussed in this study. This approach has also become beneficial in gaining in-depth knowledge on the effectiveness of a programs or policies associated with trust as it helps in the production of successful results. The relevance of this study as broadly highlighted brings to the understanding of the advantages of theory-based evaluation that recognizing its utility for determining how well a program is achieving its goals. As decision-making processes are guided by this theory. It also entails evaluation which provides framework for understanding what works and what needs improvement. Additionally, theory-based evaluation provides an opportunity to consider the above subject matter on trust related issues in the governance of the people. By so doing, it helps to provide information towards the development of a policy and increase its overall success in achieving its goals and objectives.

When putting together this kind of theory, it is important to consider the motivations behind the data collection process. This will help inform the type of methodology and structure of the evaluation that should be employed. The researchers observed that by identifying the reasons for collecting data and evaluating programs, it will enable a more effective theory-based evaluation approach. Additionally, it is important to determine what type of theories are most applicable to the evaluation at hand. This will ensure that the evaluation is structured in a way that accurately reflects the theoretical concepts being tested, as it relates to trust and confidence building. This enables the evaluator to draw valid and reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of the program or policy as it relates to eliminating trust issues in our society.

6 | SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Nigerians are evident in various sectors, impacting the relationship between the government and citizens, as well as other governmental agencies or institutions. Trust deficit is particularly pronounced in Nigeria's economic landscape due to cases of fiscal mismanagement, lack of confidence in public institutions, and the inability to identify a clear economic growth policy. This lack of trust extends to most elected political and media leaders, with only about 24% of Nigerians expressing trust in the government. For instance, the researchers noted that, the Nigerian Police Force, face a significant trust deficit with the public, leading to challenges in maintaining public safety and cooperation. The study further revealed amongst others that trust deficit in Nigeria has far-reaching implications, affecting societal progress, political

stability, economic development, and overall cohesion. It distorts and hampers efforts to address critical issues like corruption, insecurity, poverty, and effective governance. In addition, trust deficit in Nigeria significantly impacts the economy by hindering investment, economic growth, and fiscal stability. The lack of trust in digital alternatives and public institutions/agencies deters investors, limiting the country's ability to attract investment and drive economic progress. The researchers pointed out that mistrust also affects the capacity of government to implement effective economic policies, as the masses struggle to identify a clear economic growth strategy due to the prevailing trust deficit. The consequences of this trust deficit are profound, with foreign direct investment remaining low, businesses facing challenges in accessing credit, and innovation being stifled due to fear of exploitation. Additionally, the lack of trust in governance exacerbates economic and political inequality, hinders the growth of small and medium-scale sized enterprises that could contribute significantly to job creation. One significant example is the country's heavy reliance on cash transactions, with over 90% of payments being made in cash, which reflects a lack of trust in digital alternatives. This reliance on cash is symptomatic of the broader mistrust in financial systems and digital solutions, hindering economic progress. Moreover, cases of fiscal mismanagement have led to high levels of trust deficit and a lack of confidence in public institutions, further exacerbating Nigeria's economic challenges. The inability of most Nigerians to identify a clear economic growth policy in spite government pronouncements, is linked to trust deficit, affecting the government's ability to implement effective economic strategies, even under the current dispensation of President Ahmed Tinubu. The lack of trust stifles innovation, impedes investment, and hampers economic development in Nigeria and Africa in general.

7 | RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Trust should be built as this is very crucial for creating a business-friendly environment that attracts investors, fosters innovation, and ensures shared prosperity for all.
- ii. Addressing trust deficit is essential for unlocking Nigeria's economic potential and fostering sustainable growth.
- iii. It is imperative to improve accountability and transparency in governance. This will aid in enhancing professionalism, and proper orientation in the various governmental agencies.
- iv. Trust should be built around decision-making processes which should be based on factual evidence rather than influenced by ethnic, tribalism and religious affiliation.
- v. Leaders should be held accountable when trust is breached in governance, as sections should be meted out to trust defaulters, regardless of position or influence.
- vi. Positive relationship should be built between citizens and institutions, enhancing accountability, transparency, and ultimately improving the overall well-being of society. As the institutional theory emphasizes the roles of organizations and social backgrounds is to explain regularity in pricing and built desired confidence and trust of the people.

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