POLITICS OF IMPEACHMENT IN NIGERIA; A DISCOURSE ON CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

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Abstract
The analysis in this paper focuses on politics of impeachment in Nigeria: causes and implications for proper and sustainable democratic practices. This paper is anchored on the aftermath several impeachment cases in Nigeria since the return of civil rule in 1999. It argued that the impeachment cases were characterized by all kind of illegality and abuse. It also argued that the primary cause is simply because our politicians see politics as a means to achieve economic empowerment which should be achieved by any means humanly possible. Consequently, the result has been subversion of the democratic process and political instability in the country. This paper recommends that provision of impeachment process in Nigeria constitution should be amended to make it the last option in removing the executive from office. It also recommends that civil education should be introduced into our school curriculum where young men and women will be taught on how to imbibe the spirit of love and service to their fatherland. This of course would open the eyes of our youths to understand that politics is not a means to acquire massive wealth but an opportunity to serve the country with little or no financial benefit.

Introduction
Political liberty is to be found only where there is no abuse of power. But constant experience shows everyman invested with power is liable to abuse it and carry his authority as far as it will go. In the light of the above, a basis may be found as to the reasons why legislatures around the world have been empowered to impeach or remove erring government executives (Debi: 2004). However, in Nigeria, the situation is different as public officials are being removed on flimsy, political and legally incurrent grounds. Impeachment has become a political weapon used by political parties, the executive or the legislature against perceived opponents, especially when relationship go sour or another round of elections is approaching. Sometimes, a godfather who yields much influence in the political space may influence the impeachment of a rebellious godson.
Nigeria political parties get into power through electoral malpractice, electoral tribunals or court and through the impeachment of the incumbent. An understanding of successful and failed impeachment since 1999 have confirmed the argument that the impeachments across the land have established that political actors are bereft of proper understanding of the meaning and purpose of removing official from office. Through conscious efforts, ancient political players in Europe and America introduced impeachment as a mechanism for bringing charges against an official of the state with a view to removing the person from office if found guilty, but in Nigeria impeachment is seen as a weapon to victimize political opponents who failed to agree to the wishes of the political godfathers, (Awom 2014).

Impeachment has created a political wars between the three arms of government in Nigeria. There are instances where state governors have blatantly deployed impeachment in a most gruesome manner to remove speakers of State House of Assembly that exhibits some level of independent mindedness, which ordinarily should work to enhance good governance through the application of the doctrine of separation of powers. There are instances where the welders of the impeachment power have failed to deploy it even in the obvious cases of abuse of office. The lawmakers of every level of government are the custodians of this element of power, so their failure to deploy it when necessary have subjected it to several abuse. It is now an instrument of bazaar, a bargaining chip for ruthless aggrandizement available for high bids.

Nigerian democracy is widely believed to have been modeled after America’s but while impeachment is given utmost seriousness in the united States, it is fast becoming a common feature in this clime. Political pundits have blamed the trend on the interface and influence of the executive on the legislature. They have also blamed politicians in public offices for their disregard for the rule of law (Baiyewu 2014). Every democratic society has mechanisms that checkmate its leaders from becoming autocratic. This is consonance with the words of Lord Acton that “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. Unfortunately, this mechanism almost broke the slender body of Nigeria’s burgeoning democracy between 2005 – 2014, when the process of impeachment was grossly abused (Kehinde 2014). Unfortunately, like the application and practice of other aspects of presidential and parliamentary democracy in Nigeria, the usage of the inherent impeachment powers has become a threat to the institutions it was meant to protect.

**Literature Review and conceptual framework**

**Politics of impeachment in Nigeria**

Michael Garhort a commentator and a witness in Bill Clinton’s impeachment proceeding said “impeachment can be defined in modern and operational meaning as an inherent political process designed to expose and remedy to political crisis subject neither to judicial nor presidential veto. Impeachment connotes the practice and procedure by which political elected person are constitutionally removed from office by the legislature before the expiration of the tenure of office of such elected persons. It is the modality adopted by the legislative arm of government to bring to an end or prematurely determine the tenure of a person’s term of office before its due expiration. It is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the legislature which stands as a sword of democles over members of the legislature and executive (Ozokhome 2006).

The instrument of impeachment in Nigeria as in any other democratic society is supposed to be a mechanism to checkmate elected public office holders from going outside the boundaries of their powers or from going autocratic since the return of Nigeria to civil rule in 1999, the country has had this process of impeachment grossly abused. Events of the recent times as they relate to impeachment of public officers have called to question what actually is the constitutional interpretation of the word
impeachment” and what really amount to impeachable offence (Okunade 2014). For sometimes now, 
the Nigeria political system has been experiencing several impeachment saga across the board. The 
impeachment saga, in some quarters are believed to be politically motivated by the ruling Peoples 
Democratic Party (PDP) in the state where the opposition party All Progressive Congress (APC) 
governs. Members of the All Progressives Congress APC have been pointing accusing fingers at the 
president for being the orchestrator of the impeachment plots despite his denials. According to them 
impeachment plots targeting the APC governors is well planned and just not a mere coincidence 
(Mohammed 2014). According to Nurudeen Lawal who is a social commentator, the impeachment 
plots are coming at a wrong time due to the state of nation. He said “I wonder how the president who 
is supposed to be pre-occupied with funding solutions to putting an end to the Boko haram menace is 
more concerned about political maneuverings”. The former Head of state, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari 
described the induced impeachment or threats of impeachment of the APC Governors as threat to the 
nation’s ailing democracy. The president however, reacted through his media spokesman, Reuben 
Abati by saying “It is most unfortunate that instead of working to put their house in order and resolve 
the leadership crises and internal contradictions that have plunged their party into a downward spiral, 
General Buhari and his opposition allies have resorted to blaming a blameless president for their woes” 
(Adekunle 2014). Whether the impeachments succeed or not, what is paramount according to political 
observers is that the good people of Nigeria deserve nothing but peace. With the way the politics is 
going, it can be explained that the way series of impeachments are managed would determine the 
credibility of the politics. However, political analysts argued that the lawmakers of various states should 
try and exhibit a level of independency from external political forces (Komulu 2014) in America, the 
records show that the US Congress has only initiated impeachment proceeding 64 times since 1789 and 
only 19 of those cases resulted in the completion of the impeachment process. Impeachment has been 
sparingly used in the USA because it is only used in extreme cases. This is not case in Nigeria. The 
number of times political office holders who have been removed by the legislatures across the country 
from 1999 and now is already running into hundreds. Besides the cases of Governors Chief D.Sp 
Alameiyesagh of Bayalsa, Ayo Fayose of of Ekiti, Joshua Dariye of Plateau State and rashidi Ladoja 
of Oyo and the Deputy Governors of Kebbi, Lagos, Sokoto, Cross River and Enugu, we have had many 
others (Kargbo 2014).

Impeachment has been a bad word in Nigeria since the second republic because it has never been done 
in this country for the right reasons. Although no absolute conclusion in political discuss is ever 
absolute. The authorities and persons exercising legislative powers have over the years shown utter 
disregard and contempt for the people who they are supposed to represent (Obi 2014). There is hardly 
any impeachment of a Governor that is as result of a gross misconduct in the performance of the 
functions of his office. All have been motivated by political gains. This abuse of the impeachment 
process is a direct contradiction of the restraint and maturity of the people in the use of process of 
recalling erring legislators (Mahmud, 2014).

It is worrisome that in our clime, politicians employ the instrument of impeachment to settle political 
scores. In the last few months, the country has been experiencing some elements of rascality in this 
regard (Kumololu 201). In some states, reasons that inconsequential, which could easily be amicably 
ironed out without any amicably ironed out without any noise making, have been allowed to fester to 
the point of hindering government activities while all the arms of government busy themselves hunting 
down a target. We are really worried and concerned that this sorry state of affairs would further 
endanger the business of governance and foul the system. The recklessness of the nation’s lawmakers 
who, because of their personal gain, allow themselves to play the rubber stamp role in the hands of governor, may lead to chaos if the ugly trend is not checked now. The frivolity with which the state
legislatures manufacture their own version of “gross misconduct” against the governor or deputy governor as the case may be, is a huge disservice to the Nigerian nation. We hope this madness will stop now! (Onah 2014). Impeachment is a dangerous game, it has been a bad word in Nigeria since the second republic because it has never been done in this country for the right reasons. It is on ill wind that will eventually blow nobody any good and do more of harm to our nascent democracy.

**Politics of impeachment in Nigeria: a historical perspective**

The impeachment of Alhaji Balarabe Musa as the second republic governor of Kaduna State herald the gale of impeachments in the country. The Governor who was a member of the opposition party, Peoples redemption Party (PRP) had a stormy relationship with the then Kaduna State House of Assembly dominated by the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). He was accused of committing acts of gross misconduct and was subsequently removed on June 23, 1981 (Leke Baiyewu, 2014, Kayode ketefe 2014)

**Impeachment in (4th) Fourth Republic**

Between 1999 – 2003 no Governor was impeached though at least a Deputy Governor from a south Eastern State of Abia State was impeached. The situation skyrocketed between the year 2003 and 2007 five governors were impeached in a period that has been described as “period of impeachment gala” in the nation political lexicon. The era began with the impeachment of DSP Alamieyesigha, then Governor of Bayelsa State. The process was commenced on November 23, 2005 as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) sent a report to the State House of Assembly that the governor was corrupt and has assets valued over N1.7 billion. He was eventually removed on December 9, 2005 by 17 of 24 law makers in the State House of Assembly that could not be said to form a quorum of the two third majority as provided by the law (Kayode 2014).

Senator Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja of Oyo State followed suit on January 2006 in a very controversial circumstance. (Ozekhome 2006, Kargbo 2014). To observers, the removal of Rashidi Ladoja as Governor of Oyo State was most comical. It was brazenly inactive connivance of the federal might and in connection to Obasanjo’s third term agenda which Ladoja, an ally of then embattled Vice President Atiku Abubakar opposed. while the law required 20 legislators to carry out the impeachment, 18 law makers met over the recommendations of a panel of inquiry and impeached the governor. The December 7, 2006 reinstatement of Ladoja by the Supreme Court reaffirmed the general notion that he was impeached through hooliganism and political rascality (Awom 2014).

Joshua Dariye the then Governor of Plateau state was impeached on November, 13 2006 in manner dispicting the disregard for the rule of law, which hallmarked that era, a five man House of Assembly with support of the federal government carried out the impeachment. After a series of appeals he was reinstated as governor in May before the end of his tenure (Olumide 2014, Awom 2014).

Ayo Fayose, with allegations of financial misconduct and murder leveled against him, the then Ekiti State Governor Ayodele Fayose found himself fighting both seen and unseen enemies in a bitter political war that turned comic at a stage, Fayose a former ally of Obasanjo fell out with the former president, making Obasanjo to deploy the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, EFCC against him. The removal of Fayose and his deputy, Mrs. Biodun Olujimi on October 6, 2006 heralded the drama while the assumption of office by the state speaker, Friday Aderemi, made the crisis more hilarious (Oni 2013, layi 2007).

However, the failure to heed to instruction of the presidency to impeach only Fayose and spare the deputy, Olujimi, Obasanjo declared that there was a break down of law and order in the state and declared a state of emergency, and appointed Brig. Gen. Adetunji Olurin (rtd) as the sole administrator of the state on Oct. 19 200 (Kumolu 2014, Olumide 2014).
Peter Obi
When the then Anambra state governor Mr. Peter Obi, hosted the then President Obasanjo during a state visit, hardly did he know that Obasanjo came to predict his (Obi) exist from office.
In his usual pontifical manner, the former president had told Obi to forget re-election in 2007 if he did not join PDP because he (Obasanjo) would not support a non PDP member. And true to Obasanjo’s postulations, a day after the visit, Obi was impeached on November 2, 2006 after seven months in office.
Although Obi was eventually returned to office by the judiciary who declared the processes of the impeachment as unconstitutional (Kumolu, 2014, Awom 2014, Baiyewu 2014).

Nyako Musa, a retired Vice Admiral and former Chief of Naval Staff, had defected from the Peoples Democratic Party in 2013 on which platform he was elected a governor, to the opposition. All Progressive Congress. Also, he had written a damning memo to the Northern Governors Forum, in which he raised strong allegations bordering on genocide against president Goodluck Jonathan. Again, Nyako’s relationship with the Adamawa State House of Assembly turned sour over the handling of party affairs, leading to protracted crisis between the state executive and the legislature (Baiyewu 2014, okunade 2014, Mohammed 2014).

However, the State Assembly had attributed Nyako’s impeachment to maladministration and financial recklessness dating back to 2007. He was eventually impeached on 15 July 2014 (Agbamuche 2014). After the 2011 election, controversial impeachments cases were recorded in Taraba, Kogi and Bayelsa states in 2012 alone. For instance, the Taraba State House of Assembly on October 4, 2012 in Jalingo removed the deputy Governor, Mr. Sani Abubakar. Also, on October 16, 2012, the Kogi state House of Assembly impeached the speaker, Abdullahi Bello, and 10 principal officers in the chamber after a running battle between the lawmakers (Ozekhome 2008).

Similarly on June 3, 2012, the speaker of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, Mr. Friday Benson was impeached by 16 of the 24 member Assembly three months after he assumed office. The same Assembly had on June 24, 2010 impeached the Deputy Governor, Peremobowe, Ebebi in what many described as the aftermath of the supremacy battle between the Governor Timipre Sylva and his deputy Ebebi was sacked after a seven man panel headed by Mr. Donald danwigwe, found him guilty of nine out of 10 charges of “gross misconduct” leveled against him (Olumide 2014, Ugwuanyi 2011, Oni 2013).

Another Ironic drama played out on August 2, 2010, when the House of Assembly in Abia State impeached the Deputy Governor, Mr. Chris Akomas; three days after he announced his resignation from office. Akomas had described his purported removal as medicine after death”. He claimed to have resigned on July 30, 2010. He said the lawmakers only exhibited legislative recklessness and disregard for the rule of law” (Baiyewu 2014).

The one that is similar to Nollywood drama, was the impeachment of Enugu State deputy Governor Sunday Onyebuchi on 26 August, 2014. The Deputy Governor was accused of operating a commercial poultry at his official residence and of flouting the orders of the state Governor Sullivan Chime, but many say both allegations do not qualify as impeachment offences (Ihuoma 2014) The impeached deputy Governor insisted that the allegations against him were diversionary claiming that his offence was his interest in Enugu East Senatorial position which, according to him, has been reserved for the Chief of Staff, government House, Mrs. Ifeoma Nwobodo (Edike 2014, Uzodinma 2014, Ihuoma 2014)

Causes of politics of impeachment in Nigeria:
It is worrisome that in Nigeria, politicians employ the instrument of impeachment to settle political scores. In the last four months the country has been experiencing some elements of rascality in this
In some states reasons that are inconsequential, which could easily be amicably ironed out without any noise making, have been allowed to fester to the point of hindering government activities while the arms of government busy themselves hunting down a target (Adekunle 2014). In Nigeria democratic experiment, the impeachment is being used as sledge hammer by politician who are able to sway legislative houses, mobilize lawmakers to impeach governors, deputies and even leadership of the legislative houses who they believe are enemy to achieving their political ambition. Political God fathers usually mobilize the legislature to impeach governors who refused to dance to their tune. What happened in Anambra state is a good example, where Chris Uba the political godfather of former Anambra State governor Christ Ngige mobilized the state house of Assembly to impeach the governor on the account that the governor refused to share the state resources as agreed before the election (Ngige 2004).

A good numbers of deputy governors were impeached just because they nursed the ambition of becoming the next governors. The most popular cases was the purported impeachment of the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar by obasanjo controlled national Assembly; it would be recalled that Atiku Abunakar wanted to contest the office of president while his boss former president Obasanjo wanted a third term in office. Atiku was suspended from Peoples Democratic Party and consequently asked to vacate office. It took the judgement of the supreme court of Nigeria to save Atiku from being disgraced out of office (Olumide 2005). The recent impeachment of former governor of Adamawa state, Nyako was brought to light when he defected from PDP to All progressive Congress APC. The hasty impeachment of Governor Murtala Nyako of Adamawa state, who was a maddening critic of the Goodluck Jonathan presidency, has thrown up more confusing question in the Nigeria political environment. Nigerians know that the Goodluck Jonathan presidency is believed to be covertly manipulating the impeachment processes for malevolent political ends. (Awon 2014, Onah 2014, Obi 2014). The observers opine that in order to guarantee a second term, the president’s strategists estimate that a few APC states, especially those previously under PDP control will have to be reclaimed before the next general elections (Musa 2014).

The constitution has stated that a Governor of a state may be removed on grounds of gross misconduct, it has failed to properly define what gross misconduct implies and has indirectly empowered unruly members of Houses of Assembly to tag any administrative mistake or seeming derogation of the use of power into gross misconduct. This, respectfully, robes the house of Assembly powerfully in determining what constitutes gross misconduct. Therefore, any form of activity can be garbed as an impeachable offence in the eyes of the members of the House of Assembly as far as our laws are concerned. This position will only serve the ends of politicians who seek personal vendettas against governors or their deputies. It was primarily used during the Obasanjo years to punish erring governors or deputies who decided with good conscience to withdraw support for the third term bid (Deji 2014, Nwabueze, 2007).

Considering the statistics of the impeachment of political office holders since coming into force of the 1999 constitution, it is glaringly clear that Deputy Governors have been the highest casualties. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The office of the Deputy Governor is an attachment to that of the Governor. Even though the 1999 constitution of Nigeria recognizes it, there are no clear-cut statutory role for the occupant, he is merely put in office through the goodwill of his benevolent boss the Governor and when the Governor is tired, he may find a way to ease the Deputy out of office. No matter the Deputy Governors disposition, he or she is essentially a weak patron in Government house. Section 186, 1999 constitution provides for this office but does not give any power at all to the office. And that is why Deputy Governors can easily be impeached with little or no prove of gross misconduct. It is therefore permissible within the context of right of personal opinion to hold the view that the aggregate
ulterior motives of the members of State Houses of Assembly rather than the drive to safeguard the constitution was the motivation behind the impeachment proceedings against the Governors and the Deputy Governors. There is hardly any impeachment of the Governors or deputy Governors that is as result of a gross misconduct in performance of the functions of their office. All have been motivated by political gains.

**Politics of impeachment: Implications for democratic consolidation**

Impeachment is like a man with a broken leg, even when treated with the world best doctors can never work well. Of course an impeached Governor or deputy Governor would not fold his arms and allow the government that impeached him to sleep well. The impeached man or woman and their loyalists would do anything humanly and politically possible to destabilize the government. Obasanjo government spent 60 percent of Nigerian revenue in court contesting the validity of his sponsored impeachment of governors. The money that should be used to provide greatest happiness for the greatest number of people was used to bribe state House of Assembly members, lawyers and judges. The All Progressive Congress (APC) claimed that each member of the Adamawa State House of Assembly was given $300,000 to sack Nyaka. This is a mere allegation but history has proved that impeachment in Nigeria is financially induced (Mohammed 2014).

No democracy can survive if the money meant for development is used to bribe selfish and greedy politicians. When the Ekiti state governor Fayose was impeached, people were calling for the return of military regime, this does not argue well for democracy (Itse Saga 2010). The danger of the frequent deployment of impeachment is in its willful politicization by the actors. We are really worried and concerned that this sorry state of affairs would further endanger the business of governance and foul the system. Our politicians employ sponsored impeachment to unjustly remove political opponents from office, this has whittles down the values and principles of democracy. It portends doom for its proper practice as it negates some of its basic principles. The result has therefore been subversion of the democratic process rather than its consolidation (Ogundiya 2007, Agbude, 2013).

**Policy recommendations**

The ultimate question that should be asked is, is there any way out of this calamity? Or can we make our politicians have a rethink and obey the rules of the game? For sure, the crisis surrounding the process of impeachment in Nigeria could fuel greater instability in a country already notoriously unstable. To ensure this crisis does not consume the country’s democracy, we highlighted the following possible solutions.

The issue of godfatherism cannot be totally eradicated in Africa as a whole and Nigeria, to be specific but there should be a limit to what they can and cannot do. They should not be all powerful dictators who enthrone and dethrone at will. As a matter of fact, where it can be proved that a godfather has unduly influenced the removal of a political office holder whether by offering of cash or making a promise of financial reward, such a godfather should be prosecuted for treason and by doing so, it will serve as deterrent to some of the corrupt godfathers who enthrone and dethrone political office holders at their whims and caprices. It is high time we started seeing godfatherism as an evil and not as a virtue. Secondly, under the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, impeachment offence is categorized as gross violation or breach of provision of this constitution or a misconduct of such nature as in the opinion of the National Assembly (or state House of Assembly) amounts to gross misconduct. This interpretation leaves much to be desired. It is highly subjective, this is because the legislature is given wider and blanket to determine or interpret what a gross misconduct is. It is therefore suggested that there should be an amendment to the provision of S. 188(II) and S. 143 (II) 1999 constitution in such a way that
constitutes gross misconduct will be specific though not to be too narrow as specified by Supreme Court of Nigeria. Thirdly it has been noticed that many of them go into politics not to serve the masses but to enlarge their private pockets. To them, politics is a business venture and not an avenue to serve the electorate who elects them into office. It is therefore suggested that civil education should be introduced into our school curriculum at both primary and secondary school levels, where young men and women will be taught on how to imbibe the spirit of love and service to their father land. Fourthly, the remuneration, allowances and other financial benefits attached to political offices should be reduced to barest minimal, this of course would make political offices less attractive so that nobody would like to spend his hard earned money to sponsor impeachment of anyone.

**Conclusion**

From the foregoing, we conclude as follows:

- That Nigerian politicians employ the instrument of impeachment to settle political scores.
- That Nigerian constitution is porous in interpretation of what amount to impeachable offences.
- That Nigerian politicians are only interested on how to grab the political power with any means humanly possible for selfish interest.
- That Nigerian politicians see political office as a means to earn a living and not for service to the people.
- The 1999 constitution of Nigeria gave the legislature the power to remove the executive at their own wish.

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