

SOCIAL DARWINISM AND ITS IMPACT ON NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the dominance of impunity and injustice in Nigeria's political space when viewed through the philosophical and sociobiological lens of Charles Darwin's concept of "survival of the fittest". While originally rooted in evolutionary biology, Darwin's idea cut across disciplines and is often misapplied to sociopolitical realities. This paper critically reflects on how this theory, when distorted, can be used to justify the survival of corrupt elites, the systemic failure of our justice system and the marginalization of the masses. It explores the ethical contradictions in using natural selection as a metaphor for political governance. It argues that Nigeria's political trajectory reveals a form of socio-political Darwinism that encourages predatory leadership, undermines democratic values, and institutionalizes injustice at every level of our political space. The paper argues that citizens' survivalist approach should be grounded in their collective resolve to challenge authorities where necessary, through protest or by voting out bad leaders who see leadership as a game of survival of the fittest from a narrow perspective. The work concludes by proposing an alternative paradigm rooted in inclusive governance and ethical leadership, driven by institutional accountability.

Keywords: *Darwinism, Survival of the fittest, Political Environment, Leadership*

Introduction:

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous democracy, is caught in a paradoxical web – richly endowed in both human and natural resources, yet persistently plagued by poor leadership, corruption and systemic injustice. All over the world, democracy is now one of the most fashionable systems of government. The democratization project is therefore seen as the age of civilization that every society should embrace. Ogunديya avers that "Democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered",¹

¹ I. S. Ogunديya. "Democracy and Good Governance; Nigeria's Dilemma". *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 4(6). June, 2010, p.204

but the problem is that Nigerian leadership acts as if it has a “Darwinian Survival of the Fittest” mindset, in which the strongest elites amass resources that belong to all Nigerians and disregard the majority, leading to poverty and insecurity.

This metaphor, “Survival of the Fittest Mindset,” is rooted in the concept of “Social Darwinism,” which holds that the survival of the fittest explains the rise and fall of political regimes and ideologies. Though Darwin never directly applied his theory to human society, later thinkers like Herbert Spencer and other proponents of social Darwinism adopted it to sociopolitical contexts, often to defend inequality, colonialism and elitism. In most African countries, political power is increasingly seen not as a trust for service but as a domain where only the ruthless survive. Even when Nigeria claim to be practicing democracy, this is why Momoh doubted democracy. He feels democracy is hypocrisy.” he argued that if democracy means freedom, why aren’t our people free? If democracy means equity, why don’t we have justice? If democracy means equity, why don’t we have equality?. Momoh’s skeptical views about democracy hinge on how our leaders are perverting it to gain political power by all means. In Nigerian politics, we see political heavyweights vie to unseat one another. The political parties are not left out of these power-play dynamics either during their party primaries or the general elections. So, in every election cycle, for instance, politicians and their parties are always playing the political chessboard, where the ones with weak structures get crushed, and the politically fit get enthroned. In political philosophy, “fitness” here can be redefined as “institutional resilience”—the ability of a political system to maintain its structural integrity despite internal or external pressures, such as intra- or inter-party political gimmicks, because, for them, political power is a matter of survival of the fittest.

The concept of “Survival of the Fittest,” which is often attributed to Charles Darwin but coined by Herbert Spencer², aims at “describing the mechanism of natural selection where the organisms that best adjusted to their environment are the ones most likely to survive and pass on their traits”. When viewed from the lens of the Nigerian political environment, this biological theory ceases to be about physical traits. It becomes a study of political adaptability, Machiavellian maneuvering, and systemic resilience.

In Nigeria, the political environment is a complex ecosystem of ethnic and religious diversities, with an oil-dependent economy and post-colonial institutional fragility. Political “fitness” in this space is often measured not only by moral standing or policy brilliance, but also by the ability to navigate a complex environment rife with “godfatherism,” ethnic and religious block voting, and the control of coercive state instruments without due regard for the rule of law. In his inaugural address entitled “Respect for Human Dignity, Nnamdi Azikiwe, as the first African Governor General, had warned against such acts. He argued that “without respect for the rule of law permeating our political fabric, Nigeria would degenerate into a dictatorship with its twin relatives of tyranny and despotism.” And these kinds of outcomes are fueled by an acute survival-of-the-fittest mindset. This paper adopts the social contract theory as propounded by Hobbes, Locke, and other contractarians, which serves as its normative theoretical framework. This is essential for analyzing the impact of Darwinian Survival of the Fittest, in which political elites engage in a struggle for self-preservation and resource hoarding. Through this, it exposes the

² H. Spencer. *The Principles of Sociology*. (D. Appleton and Company, 1896), p. 112

danger of such actions and proposes a new moral vision for national rebirth, in which there will be economic prosperity and equality before the law for everyone.

Understanding the concept of survival of the fittest within the Nigerian socio-political context

Darwin's theory primarily explained how species adapt and survive through natural selection. However, in the political realm, particularly in societies with weak institutions, such as Nigeria, the concept is often distorted to justify authoritarianism. elite capture and systemic exclusion in Nigeria, this misapplication is vividly seen in how politicians manipulate democratic processes, rig elections, and entrench themselves in power through intimidation and violence³. The political arena becomes a jungle where only the most cunning, brutal, or well-connected can rise, while the "weak", often, the citizens are silenced or crushed. However, recent events have shown that when citizens and oppressors come together, they can fight and dethrone even the most powerful oppressors. The problem is for them to find the courage and willpower to do so as social beings who deserve to survive. The "weak" must use the strength in togetherness to fight for their survival, for therein lies their strength. "Traditional African society is said to be basically communal, with the spirit of brotherliness very much evident"⁴. This is when the strong look out for the "weak"; the strong do not believe that the weak should be crushed. But the reality on the ground is different in Nigeria; the political elites who are in charge at any given time use the advantage of their offices to suppress others, and they do everything possible to remain in charge,

³ O. E. Ojo. "Elites, Governance and the Politics of Impunity in Nigeria. 2013". *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 2013 7(5), 224.

⁴ T. P. Etta and A. F. Oti. "Humanized Epistemology: Its implication for education in Nigeria". *Journal of Integrative Humanism*, vol. 5, No. 1, October, 2015. p. 54.

even if it means killing and maiming. They want to be the only ones heard because, for them, political power and fame should be obtained by all means. The truth is, no matter. It is important to note that Darwin was influenced by the thinking of English physicist and mathematician Isaac Newton, whose system emphasized experimentation, mathematics, and logic over subjective sense experience. During Darwin's time, his evolutionary theory was an attempt to construct a similar system for the living world, a frontier not yet crossed in the biological sciences.

Understanding the concept of survival of the fittest, or fitness, within the Nigerian political landscape is a far departure from the traditional Western definition of merit or meritocracy, or one's technical capability; none of these guarantees political fitness in the Nigerian political space. Especially considering Nigeria's multi-ethnic nature. A typical Nigerian politician believes that what he needs is "survivalist intelligence" within a multiethnic post-colonial state. In the Nigerian political habitat, fitness is not measured by the ability to draft policy or position paper(s) nor to articulate macroeconomic theories; rather, it is a multifaceted ability to manoeuvre and master the harsh selection pressures either through an election or getting your name registered on an appointment list, whether rightly or wrongly. Little wonder C.S. Momoh is averse to the fact that "in the Nigerian political setting, democracy is ultimately, the tyranny of the vociferous minority over the quiet, silent majority.

Democracy is merely a system of politicking to plot or acquire and remain in power." To be 'fit' in the Nigerian context is to have the ability to engage in high-stakes negotiations; you must also have a cloud of followers and, above all, a financial war chest to win an election or sponsor your candidate(s). This is where the political godfathers normally show up. To corroborate this, Mbamara argued that the godfatherism invasion of the polity is for the nomination of political

candidates for selfish gratification. He went further to say, “It is a political slave trade or political sponsorship based on political manipulation with several evil agendas⁵.” This is to say that those who survive and climb the political ladder are individuals who have successfully adapted to the unique ecological demands of a political system that often prioritizes patronage and ethnic security over institutional efficiency, whether as a godfather or a godson. They are just about the resources they will loot and the power they will control. Which is why, in his view, Odey sees democracy in Nigeria as “government of the looter for the looters and by the looters”. Omorogbe corroborated this viewpoint when he contends that “ it is poverty, illiteracy, and corruption that hinders the success of democracy in Nigeria.”⁶ This paper also agree that it is these elements of poverty illiteracy and corruption that creates room for the survival of the fittest mentality and culture, for those who were once poor and have found their ways to the corridor of power where the have access to the common wealth of the nation will not want to leave, and will do everything to hold on to power and those who are still stuck in poverty and illiterate will accept handouts as stomach infrastructure from those in power just to survive. At the end, it is still a matter of survival of the fittest.

Factors that drive the survival of the fittest mentality in the Nigerian political space

Fundamentally, the Nigerian political battle space rests on a tripod: ethnicity, religion, and geography. To be able to win any serious election like the presidential elections or the governorship

⁵ J. Odey. *The Rape of Democracy*. (Snaap Press Ltd, 2001), p. 118.

⁶ J. I. Omoregbe. *Socio-Political Philosophy and International Relations*, Vol. 1, (Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 2007), p. 24.

election, a fit leader must be equipped with at least the adaptive trait of Dual Legitimacy, which includes the ability to be seen as a credible national leader of their ethnic or religious interest, while simultaneously appearing as a detribalized figure capable of negotiating with other competing political leaders from other ethnic nationalities. If Nigerians were to judge their leaders based on the foregoing political credentials, things should have been a lot better, but oftentimes, you hear questions like, "Where are they from?" North or south? Is he a Muslim or a Christian? Etc. meaning that, more often than not, Nigerian politics is being defined and shaped by these three elements, which ought not to be. Amid all this, there is an interesting twist. Some political leaders who have been perceived as tribal bigots have been rejected by the electorate due to their perceived tribal sentiments. Which is why Asouzu revealed that "true democracy ensures when the interests of all are so equilibrated that all units understand what it takes to preserve private interest"⁷. Asouzu's position was against politicians with exclusivist mindsets, tribal figures and so on. One such political figure seen in that light was former president Muhammadu Buhari. Most people from the southern bloc saw him as a candidate who was representing the Northern Muslim agenda, and the interests of the South and the Christians would not be accommodated in his government.

To overcome these political roadblocks, he needed to extend his hand of friendship across party, ethnic, and religious divides. The online Punch newspaper of July 9, 2025, reported that "In February 2013, Buhari's Congress for Progressive Change, Tinubu's ACN, Atiku's New PDP, a faction of the All Progressive Grand Alliance and the All Nigerian Peoples Party merged to form

⁷ I. I. Asouzu. *New Complementary Ontology Beyond World-Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction, and Imposition*. (Transaction Publishers, 2007), p. 37.

the APC.” The author, Ayomikunle Daramola, reported that the merger was necessitated by Buhari and other key figures, such as Atiku, to win the presidential election after about three attempts. Buhari, for instance, had garnered over 12 million votes, mainly from Northern Nigeria, in each of the presidential elections he participated in 2003, 2007, and 2011, which was not enough and also fell short of the constitutional requirements for national spread⁸. The point is that the Northern Muslims saw him as their political Messiah, and so, they voted for him massively in every election that he contested. Whereas the Southern Christian saw him as a religious bigot and an ethnic champion. So, it was difficult for him to make an inroad to the South.

Suffice to say that the merger between the North and the South, on both political and religious grounds, provided the magical way for Buhari, nay, the opposition's victory in 2015. A former Secretary to the Government of the Federation Boss Mustapha gave an insight to this in a July 9 2025 Punch publication, where he noted that, “the 2013 merger involving President Bola Tinubu’s then Action Congress of Nigeria, Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar-led New Peoples’ Democratic Party and other stakeholders contributed only 3.2 million votes to the alliance...he explained that, these votes were added to Muhammadu Buhari’s 12.2 million to secure the All Progressive Congress victory over then incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan in 2015.”

The point to note is that despite the fact that Buhari is from the Hausa/Fulani group, dominated by a Muslim population, those factors were not enough to win the presidential elections,

⁸ A. Daramola “ 2013 Merger Contributed 3.2 Million Votes to APC’s 2015 Victory- Boss Mustapha The Cable NEWS, July 9, 2025.<https://www.thecable.ng>

even though they served as a strong bargaining power for political survival. Most Nigerian Political elites use their ethnic affiliation, religion, and political-geographical strength to negotiate for power. Oftentimes, the power play can be very tense, with all the propaganda and political gimmicks, where the politically fit eventually emerge. Most elites get this position, acquire wealth, and gain power that can sustain them for a lifetime. Most of them become oppressors to their constituents. They want to remain life leaders without attracting development commensurate with what they benefit from the national pool. That's why you see a governor, who has served their term(s), will still want to anoint and install a successor, whom they can control like a puppet, and of course, this is the foundation of political godfatherism, which this work referenced earlier. This has often had a devastating effect on our politics, whether the godson does the godfather's bidding or not. If he does his bidding, which, of course, is tied to the award of contracts, several slots for political appointments, and other financial gratifications, etc.

The Rivers State case is very apt. Kareem Badmus of *THE OSUN DEFENDER* of January 26, 2024, reported that “Nine loyalists of the Minister of the Federal capital Territory, Nyesome Wike, were on Friday sworn in as Commissioners by the Rivers State Government, Siminalayi Fubara”⁹. The paper further reports that the “sworn-in commissioners had earlier resigned their appointments because of the crisis between the Governor and his predecessor.” It's interesting to note that the appointees who were loyal to their godfather (Wike) were doing his bidding rather than showing loyalty to the incumbent governor, Fubara, or to the citizens of the state, whom they

⁹ K. Badmus. “Fubara Swears In Nine Wike Loyalists As Commissioners” *OSUN DEFENDERS*. 26, Jan. 2024. <https://osundefender.com>

had sworn to serve. Ironically, these same groups plotted with their godfather (Wike) to seize power in the state until the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria declared a state of emergency, and it was approved by the National Assembly. A decision that left many Nigerian and political analysts divided in their opinion. Some support the decision, and others fault it.

The Rivers State imbroglio is a classic example of Survival of the fittest. Where the godfather, through the instruments of federal might, demonstrated to the whole nation that he was the fittest. And that's why he was able to survive the political storm and crush his political godson, who had shown political weakness. Daniel Abia captured the genesis of their fight thus "from the ticket sales to the campaign train, Wike shouldered all the responsibilities as if he was actively canvassing for a third term in office. Fubara was relegated to the underground of the political game¹⁰. He spent none of his own money. He never campaigned. Elections were contested and won (on his behalf). Trouble broke out between the two men over fear of trading off his (Wike's) structure and disagreement over the sharing formula, which triggered mutual suspicion between the two political leaders. This snowballed to the formation of the state cabinet with Wike, insisting on having all the commissioners and other key appointees nominated by him." Wike believes that anything that will make Governor Sim control the political structure of Rivers State will make him politically doomed. So for him, it's a matter of "Survival of the fittest". This is why popular opinion holds that Nigerian political elites do not really care about Nigeria's development or the welfare of

¹⁰ A. Daniel, "Wike/Fubara Feud: How the War Began," Online Vanguard, March 22, 2025. <https://www.vanguardngr.com>

its citizens. All they care about is their own political survival. That is also why Nigerian politics is characterized by patronage.

Again, political patronage is anchored on political structures. Political elites use every avenue, ranging from financial inducements to contract awards and political appointments, to build and sustain their political structure, which amounts to political control over their political domain. Some political leaders bring in their godsons, who emerge as anointed candidates. The phenomenon of anointed candidates is a very common practice in the Nigerian political space. Politicians single handedly pick a candidate for elections and provides all the necessary logistics and support Rabi'u Garba of Nasarawa Eye, maintained that, "anointment of candidates by all measurement is antidemocratic, which all so called godfathers must avoid, it is unthinkable and tantamount to disrespect and disregard for the electorate conscience for any incumbent political office holder to singlehandedly pick and present to the citizenry an anointed candidate" political godfathers choose this partway because of what they stand to gain including covering up for their financial impropriety. To corroborate this view, an online source, *THE TRUMPET NIGERIA*, reports that, "Anointment of successors is also attributed to the attempt on the part of the incumbent to cover the atrocities they committed while in office".¹¹ The case of Kogi State comes to mind. The Movement for the Emancipation of Kogi State (MEKSTA) has accused Governor Usman Ododo of corruption and complacency during the Yahaya Bello administration. "The group alleged

¹¹ *Trumpet Nigeria*, "2023; The politics of Anointing Successors" January 29, 2025 <https://thetrumpet.ng>

that Ododo emerged as Bello's preferred successor in the 2023 election with the intent of safeguarding his controversial actions and concealing the mismanagement of funds"¹².

Generally, if a politician fails to secure their home base, they are viewed as political weaklings and are quickly crushed by rival politicians with competing interests. So, political fitness or survival in the Darwinian sense entails having the crooked ability to maneuver the political space by any means, whether legitimate or illegitimate; it does not matter. What matters is to remain politically relevant. However, if we must consider the idea of political survival of the fittest in an ideal sense, we should look for people with proven integrity and overwhelming credentials in public service, grounded in accountability, vision, and the national interest. Rather than people of parochial interest and ethnic champions.

Another pillar of political fitness is Financial Resourcefulness, which serves as the energy source or lifeblood of any political movement or activity. In the Nigerian political ecosystem, where poverty is widespread and state institutions are weak, stomach infrastructure becomes a critical factor for survival. A political leader's fitness for or survival depends on his ability to generate, store, and distribute money, food, and other meager benefits to his supporters. This Day Newspaper, in an online publication by Akinsanmi Gboyega, wrote that "the National Leader of The All Progressives Congress (APC), Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, said the bullion vans seen at his Bourdillion residence on Friday were not loaded with ballot papers as widely reported but with money belonging to him".

¹² B. Olabimtan. "Pressure group ask Ododo to Resign Over Ties To Yahaya Bello, Says He's A Mere Puppet. *THE CABLE* Feb.7, 2026. <https://www.thecable.ng>

In February 2019, viral pictures on social media showed two bullion vans being driven into Bola Tinubu's Bourdillon residence in Lagos on the eve of the presidential election, as many people looked on just outside. This is not merely about personal wealth; it is about the accumulation of common wealth and resources from the state and private sectors to feed a massive network of dependents for personal gain. When confronted with questions about the money and the bullion vans, Tinubu said he does not work for the government and that if he has his money, he can spend it the way he chooses. According to him, "I am on my own, and I am committed to my party. So, even if I have money to spend on my premises, what is your headache?" Truth be told, if Tinubu were just an ordinary Nigerian or in the opposition party, he would have been arrested or invited for questioning, or if Nigeria were a country where institutions work, he should have had questions to answer, but because in Nigeria the laws are "meant to regulate only the ordinary citizens", the fittest are above the law. In the traditional Darwinian sense, fitness is about adaptation. In Nigerian politics, this has historically manifested in three distinct ways – Ethnic, geographical alliance and financial resilience, as this paper has discussed. These three major factors give some political leaders a political adaptive advantage over others.

Hybrid political elites and core political elites are in a quest for political survival

The transition of Nigerian leadership from military to civilian rule represents a political metamorphosis, akin to an organism moving from an aquatic to a terrestrial environment. In the military era, which spanned nearly three decades, their survival in office was determined by their position within a rigid, command-oriented hierarchy and by their ability to monopolize the state's coercive instruments. The selection pressures of that setup rewarded absolute discipline, tactical ruthlessness, and the ability to maintain the internal loyalty of the officer Corps. However, the

dawn of the Fourth Republic in 1999 marked a massive “ecological shift,” demanding that the khaki men either mutate to survive the new democratic habitat or face total institutional extinction.

The primary challenge during this transition was the emergence of a “Hybrid Species” of leaders. These were the military generals who recognized that, while the environment had shifted from a "Command" ecosystem to a "Negotiation" ecosystem, they could leverage their vestigial traits—financial reserves, national networks, and strategic discipline—to dominate the new civilian space. The election of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 was a landmark event in Nigeria's evolution. By shedding the uniform and adopting the "agbada," these leaders signaled a phenotypic change to satisfy global selection pressure for democracy, while retaining the genotype of centralized authority. That’s why in Nigeria, the other two tiers of government (states and local governments) are not as powerful as the federal government.

As the Fourth Republic matured, the selective pressures shifted again, moving away from "security-based fitness" toward "electoral fitness." In the military habitat, a leader’s survival was threatened by the "Coup d'état"—a sudden, violent internal predation. In the civilian sphere, the threats became "Election" and "Judicial Scrutiny." This required a significant expansion of the political organism’s "sensory organs." Leaders had to develop the ability to read public sentiment, manage diverse political interest groups, and navigate the complexities of the National Assembly. This should be the way to go. Those who failed to adapt—those who tried to govern a democracy with a purely military mindset — should be rejected by the legislative immunity of the state, which may result in impeachment or the inability to pass critical laws or policies, such as the national budget. Sadly, the current situation in Nigeria is seriously compromised by both the legislature and the executive. The current situation in Nigeria is such that one can say the legislature is no longer

independent. Their independence is only theoretical, not practical. They have been compromised, and they can approve almost anything the executive sends them. The executive, in a bid to demonstrate their political fitness, uses government institutions such as the EFCC, ICPC, and even the Code of Conduct Bureau to coerce some lawmakers who may want to oppose it.

In 2015, the then Senate President of Nigeria, Abubakar Bukola Saraki, was arraigned before the Code of Conduct Tribunal on several charges related to allegations of false asset declaration and other financial graft while serving as Governor of Kwara State. The count 1, of the charge states that “DR. OLUBUKOLA ABUBAKAR SARAHI whilst being the executive Governor of Kwara State, on or about 16th of September, 2003, did make a false declaration in the asset declaration form for Public Officers, on assumption of office as governor of Kwara State by making an anticipatory assets declaration in that you claimed to have owned and acquired NO.15A and 15B McDONALD, IKOYI LAGOS...in the year 2000, while the said property was in actual fact sold by the implementation committee on federal government landed properties in year 2006 to your company.”¹³ Concerning this case, it is not a question of whether Saraki was guilty or not. It was a battle for political survival. Saraki's problems began when he and some of his colleagues in the Senate colluded with opposition lawmakers in the House to secure his election as Senate president. This was against the wishes of the ruling APC's leadership, which wanted Senator Ahmed Lawal to emerge as the Senate President.

¹³ *PROSHARE*, “The Charge Against Senator Bukola Saraki at the Code of Conduct Tribunal, BUSINESS /FRAUD AND SCANDAL” Tuesday, September 22, 2015. Charge No; CCT/ABT/01/1b <https://www.proshare.co>.

Again, this was during the regime of Muhammadu Buhari, another hybrid leader. Constitutionally, even though the law does not empower the executive to suppress the other arms of government, the executive manipulates the instruments of state available to them for personal gain. They position themselves to be politically fit in the survivalist equation. They always try to manipulate the other arms of government. Most lawmakers perceived as working against the executive's interests are sometimes denied their party's nomination tickets when they may wish to seek reelection. The judiciary is not left out of this executive suppression either. In the judiciary, the executive branch appoints judges. They also cater to their well-being. The courts are built by the executives, and the judiciary depends on the executive for support to run the courts. This makes both the legislature and the judiciary vulnerable to the executive. Since executives have the power to crush any opposition, leveraging the benefits of their office, including control over state resources and institutions such as the police, the EFCC, and the ICPC. The Buhari government, for instance, used the EFCC to crush and oust Justice Walter Onnoghen, the then Chief Justice of the Federation, when the Administration felt it needed to bring in someone who would do its bidding.

Implications of the survivalist mentality on Governance and Development

Nigeria's post-independence political history is marked by a succession of military dictatorships, corrupt democratic regimes, electoral fraud, and judicial compromises. These developments have nurtured a culture in which wrongdoing is rarely punished, and public office is viewed as a license for personal enrichment¹⁴. This culture of impunity is not accidental; it is

¹⁴ C. Achebe. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Fourth Dimension, 1983. Pp 1

structurally protected by elite networks, weak institutions, and a politicized security apparatus¹⁵. Politicians implicated in corruption scandals, human rights abuses, and even murder frequently go unpunished or are recycled into new administrations.

Corruption is idolized while incorruptible minds are resented and hated with passion. And in describing the level of corruption in Nigeria by the elite class, a former Federal finance minister of Nigeria, Chief Olu Falae, in an *ARISE TV* interview in June 2022, described Nigeria thus: “Nigeria is like a beautiful bride, everyone rapes her and abandons her”. Olu Falae’s description portrays the extent of corruption, especially in the corridors of power. The Nigerian society has replaced meritocracy with mediocrity. Nigeria celebrates mediocrity and the political gangsters. Those who loot the national treasure are awarded national honors and religious blessings from religious leaders. While the Nigerian productive force is commonly starved like church rats. It’s a society of social and political Darwinism; it is also a society with a Tsunami of self-distrust and self-destruction.

For example, the selective prosecution of corruption under the guise of anti-graft agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) illustrates how justice is often weaponized against opponents while shielding allies (Human Rights Watch 18). Most Nigerians believe that the anti-graft agencies play politics rather than pursue the cases brought before them. In an article entitled "ICPC and EFCC: Instruments of Selective Justice in Nigeria." Ajagun S. O. wrote that, “the All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP) alleged that General Mohammed Marwa was

¹⁵ I. S. Ogundia. “Democracy and Good Governance; Nigeria Dilemma” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 4(6). June, 2010, p.204.

arrested by the EFCC because he showed interest in contesting the presidential race with President Olusegun Obasanjo who was nursing the ambition for the third term(tenure) of office” Ajagun, also alleged that, the arrest of one time Minister Alhaji Bashir Dalhatu, which people took as a vendetta against him because he was an in-law of former head of state General Sani Abacha, while some politicians also reported that they were arrested and detained because they refused to support Obasanjo Third term Bid.” This case was a matter of survival of the fittest between then president Obasanjo and the masses, and it also reveals that when “weak” those who have less political advantage agree to come together they can defeat any oppressor through their resolve. Just like the third term bid was rejected.

Another strategy that the political heavyweight uses to manipulate the system in Nigeria is the judiciary. Judicial compromise often becomes an accessory to this Darwinian contest, offering legal cover for the survival of the politically fit. Political gladiators used to manipulate the judges and jury with financial inducements and other material benefits. In Nigeria's crawling democracy, the incidence of court injunctions and counter injunctions is common. “The politically strong politicians” use the court, which is supposed to be the arm of justice, to suppress and even crush the “politically weak”. In such a context, governance is reduced to competition between predators rather than a platform for serving the public good. Safe to say, therefore, that Nigeria’s political space functions like a Hobbesian state of nature, where life is “nasty, solitary, brutish, and short” for the weak, and power is maintained by those who can best wield violence, money, and influence. In this setting, the “fittest” are not those who possess moral rectitude or philosophical wisdom, but those who are most adapted at exploring the system. From the beginning of independence to the post-military democratic era, the pattern has been clear: elections are contested not on the basis of

ideas but on control of state apparatuses. The manipulation of electoral commissions, jettisoning innovative approaches, deployment of thugs, and vast financial inducements. Justice under this condition is a tool in the hands of the powerful. They can navigate the system and often manipulate it to their advantage. In this way, impunity thrives because the survival of the political class depends not on lawfulness, but on the ability of the elite class or the strong to rise above the law, even though the Nigerian constitution, in principle, preaches “EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW” for everyone, which is not in practice within the Nigerian political space. Unlike the natural world, where balance is often restored through environmental constraints, Nigeria's political system lacks effective checks and balances. The absence of institutional discipline allows political predators to perpetuate their dominance unchecked¹⁶. This reflects a regressive evolution in which governance devolves into instinctual survival rather than rational, ethical leadership.

More worrisome is the fact that this political predation is normalized in Nigeria and even glamorized. Citizens increasingly normalize the logic of "winner takes all" politics, contributing to widespread apathy, voter suppression, and civil disobedience. Young Nigerians, rather than aspiring to moral excellence, are often drawn to "get rich quick or die trying" syndrome, further entrenching the Darwinian cycle of survival based not on virtue but on vice¹⁷. Applying Darwin's theory to politics undermines the human capacity for empathy, justice, cooperation, and moral responsibility. Governance, unlike biological evolution, ought to be guided by values and vision. When "survival of the fittest" becomes the guiding philosophy of a nation, it results in the erosion

¹⁶ C. Ake. *Democracy and Development in Africa*. (Brookings Institution Press, 1996), p. 11.

¹⁷ C. Achebe. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1983), p.7.

of social trust, the collapse of institutions, and the dehumanization of politics¹⁸. In Nigeria, the ethical contradiction is stark: a democracy should, by definition, serve the interests of the people, yet the prevailing political culture sacrifices the people for the perpetuation of a few political elites¹⁹.

This contradiction manifests in policies that enrich the elite while impoverishing the masses, for instance, security systems tend to protect politicians but neglect citizens, and laws are rigorously applied to the poor but waived for the powerful²⁰. Such a system can only reproduce cycles of injustice unless disrupted by a new moral and political consciousness. The implications of Darwinian survivalist mentality for governance and development in Nigeria's democracy are profound, as it reveals a fundamental mismatch between the character required to win the political struggle and the competence required to manage a developing nation like Nigeria. The Nigerian political elites have become so specialized in the art of power acquisition by all means, whether to grab it or steal it, that the idea of leadership has effectively been replaced in the functional requirements of governance by power-grabbing. This has led to a state of systemic dysfunction where Nigerian political leaders are exceptionally fit for survival but functionally stunted for

¹⁸ I. S. Ogundiya. "Corruption: The Bane of Democratic Stability in Nigeria." *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 2, No. 4, 2010, p.233.

¹⁹ C. Darwin. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 41.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch. *Everyone's in on the Game: Corruption and Human Rights Abuses by the Nigerian Police Force*. Human Rights Watch, 2010. <https://www.hrw.org>

development. They may be experts in winning elections, but lack what it takes to run a government and bring genuine development to the people.

The first major implication is what this paper describes as the "Institutionalization of Short-Termism." In a Darwinian environment that is characterized by high instability and frequent predatory threats from rivals, the political organism prioritizes immediate survival over long-term sustainability. For a Nigerian leader, the political "lifespan" is often perceived as precarious, leading to a "grab-and-go" mentality. Whereas, development requires long-term gestation periods—building power plants, reforming education, or diversifying the economy takes decades. However, the selective pressures of the Nigerian system reward "Stomach Infrastructure"—the immediate, visible distribution of cash or food items that ensures survival in the next electoral cycle. The average Nigerian politician is not particularly keen on developing the state, nor is he genuinely concerned about citizens' welfare. That's why they believe in stomach infrastructure. During festive seasons or election cycles, they share rice and clothing like T-shirts and caps; they don't care to build good roads, schools, hospitals, or electricity. Their focus is on winning the next elections, and when they do, they detach themselves from voters and return to romancing them in the next elections. They loot the treasury dry for their own gains. They collect loan after loan from international partners and mortgage the country's future. Consequently, long-term developmental capital is often compromised in favor of short-term benefits. This is opposed to the dream of some of Nigeria's founding fathers.

In his ideology for Nigeria, Zik, had maintained that Nigerians should "train our offspring to be knowledgeable and acquire skills to adjust themselves and earn an honest living in the

struggle for survival of the fittest”²¹. He believes that the education that would make Nigeria a viable state is the education of the head, hand and heart that should be emphasized. This is to purge the mentality of laziness and thuggery. This is so because, in a system where the criteria for political fitness include the ability to mobilize violence, deploy vast financial resources, and manipulate people using ethnic sentiments, individuals with high technocratic competence and ethical integrity are often left out of the political gene pool. These reformer species lack the defensive mechanisms, such as thuggery or deep-seated patronage networks, to survive political competition.

As a result, the leadership cadre becomes dominated by a Survivalist Elite who are masters of the political game but lack the technical know-how to process complex economic data or implement intricate social policies that can benefit everybody. For Plato, the question of who should rule the state entails asking: who should be the captain of a ship? He said the person who is qualified to rule the state should be the one who has been fully educated “Not everyone can be the captain of a ship, not everyone can control a ship. Only those who have undergone specialized navigation training can serve as ship captains and direct a ship. Only those who have undergone special training and education in philosophy can rule a state.” When this does not happen, it creates a Governance Deficit where the state's organs, like the various ministries, departments, and agencies, become vestigial, existing in name but lacking the vital force to deliver public goods

Towards a New Political Evolutionary

²¹ N. Azikiwe. *Zik, Selection from Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe*. (Cambridge University, 1961), p. 179.

If Nigeria must transcend this culture of impunity, it must reject the Darwinian metaphor of “survival of the fittest” in governance and adopt a humanistic political philosophy. Rethinking the Darwinian political ethos means leadership is not about domination but service, not about eliminating rivals but about empowering all citizens. This entails strengthening institutions, ensuring judicial independence, protecting press freedom, and holding leaders accountable irrespective of status²². Education will play a crucial role in reshaping the political mindsets of both the leaders and the led. Civic education must emphasize ethical leadership, the constitution must be respected, and active citizenship in governance should be encouraged. Religious and cultural institutions must also challenge the celebration of impunity and instead promote integrity and transparency. Above all, the citizens must awaken to their agency, recognizing that democracy only thrives when citizens demand justice and reject the normalization of political predation.

Darwin’s theory does not end with brute survival; it includes adaptation. Therefore, there is hope for a political evolution in which fitness is redefined not by impunity but by integrity; not by dominance but by service for all²³. Philosophy teaches that human societies are capable of moral progress. From Socrates’ challenge to unjust power, when the sophist believed that “injustice pays and that might was right,” to Kant’s idea of duty and human dignity, to Frantz Fanon’s cry for the decolonization of the African mind, philosophical insight offers tools for resistance and transformation at every level.

²² E. O. Ojo. "Elites, Governance and the Politics of Impunity in Nigeria." *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 7(5) 2013, p. 224.

²³ C. Darwin. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. London: John Murray, 1859, p. 116.

Therefore, for Nigeria to move beyond this Darwinian abyss, the following philosophical reorientations are necessary: We must rethink leadership; Fitness must be equated with competencies, compassion and moral clarity. A revitalization of civic virtue: Citizens must be educated to see themselves as co-architects of justice, not mere clients of political benefactors. The intellectual or political power to dominate and survive as a single or isolated species should be channeled toward exploring options that benefit a greater number for the greater good. A rebirth of institutions: Strong institutions must replace strongmen, just like a former president of the United States, Barack Obama, said, “Africa needs strong institutions and not strong men”, and the rule of law must be resurrected as the guiding principle of governance. He believes that only Africans can end corruption in their countries.

This paper established that, in the Nigerian political space, Darwinian survivalist mentality does not usually manifest as a formal academic theory but rather as a lived political reality. The idea is that power belongs to whoever has the most might, whether financial, tribal, regional, or through control of the state security apparatus. Politics in Nigeria is a zero-sum game, where the winner takes it all, and the losers suffer their losses. Most Nigerian political leaders don't see leadership as service but as a trophy won through political combat, where the winner assumes this entitlement mentality and feels entitled to the spoils of office. This mindset legitimizes corruption, as the leader views state resources as prey caught during the political hunt. That's why some members of a political party will protest and oppose an appointment to a position within another political party. The protest in 2023 in Cross River State over President Tinubu's appointment of an opposition member to the NDDC Board is a good example. The *PUNCH* newspaper of August 31, 2023, reports that, scores of demonstrators took to the streets of Abuja

on Thursday to protest president Bola Tinubu's appointment of a member of the Peoples Democratic Party, Asu Okang, as the Commissioner Representing Cross River State on the Board of the Niger Delta Commission²⁴. "chanting solidarity songs and displaying several banners that read, Asu Okang not an APC member, Cross River an APC State, not PDP." This kind of mindset does not promote growth and development because those who may be best suited to serve may not get the opportunity to serve because they are not of the same party as the government in power.

A shift towards a new political culture for Nigeria is necessary for political leaders to redirect the political consciousness of both the electorate and the political elites. If the current political environment rewards predatory behavior, resource capture, and ethnic chauvinism, the only way to produce a different crop of leaders is to change the consciousness of the people so that those specific traits become maladaptive, making it impossible for political nuisances to survive. This requires moving away from the "Natural Selection" of the jungle, politicians operate with an exclusivist and narrow mindset, where might and a financial war chest make right, towards a system that rewards integrity and accountability, where the citizenry and all institutional frameworks consciously act as the breeders of a new, more capable political species. Again, political leaders must realize that the power placed in their hands is meant to be used to protect lives and property and to administer the state fairly for the benefit of all citizens. Again, to have a Nigeria of our dreams, survival of the fittest should be about the leader with the best ideas and the ability to translate those ideas into tangible results for his people. A leader who is visionary, pragmatic and selfless, Survival of the fittest should be about the technocrat who knows his job,

²⁴ A. Folorunsho-Francis. "NDDC; Cross River APC Group Protests Commissioner's Appointment in Abuja" *PUNCH* August 31, 2023. <https://punchng.com>

does it well, and gets the opportunity to serve again and again. Survival of the fittest culture should be about a Nigeria that rewards hard work, it should be about a culture that frowns at thuggery and political violence. But in Nigeria, such powers have been misapplied for other ends.

For a new generation of leadership to thrive, civil society organizations must rise up to educate the electorate. They must discourage them from tying their survival instinct to immediate gratification, because as long as the voter's survival instinct is tied to Stomach Infrastructure, they will continue to choose the "Highest Giver" rather than the "Best Performer." In an election, the electorate must be made to understand that getting a loaf of bread today is like mortgaging their collective survival, tantamount to micro-fitness. What is required of them is to begin selecting for integrity and competence, which is tantamount to macro fitness on the part of the electorate. Democracy, if well understood, is a system that sets out basic principles by which a government can be judged as good or bad. Such basic principles include those of justice, equity, freedom, liberty, accountability, openness and transparency in government." The point is the citizens must be united in their approach and confront the leaders to ensure that the rule of law is being respected, they may organize peaceful protest where necessary, for this is also a survival of the fittest strategy for their strength lies in their mass mobilization the misapplication of "survival of the fittest" for personal gain in Nigeria's political culture must be dismantled and replaced by a philosophy of inclusive governance and moral accountability²⁵. Only then can Nigeria evolve, not through the brutality of natural selection, but through the collective will to build a just and humane society.

²⁵ I. S. Ogundiya. "Corruption: The Bane of Democratic Stability in Nigeria." *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2010, p.233.

“Traditional African society is said to be basically communal, with the spirit of brotherliness very much evident²⁶. This is when the “strong looked out for the “weak”. The strong do not believe that the weak should be eliminated. But today the narrative is different. The strong believe that the weak should be eliminated. This is why the political elite, who can be regarded as the strong in society, loot the nation at the expense of the poor and weak. They can afford to go overseas for medical tourism, while the healthcare facilities are in a deplorable state. They can afford to fly and attend to their businesses while our roads remain dilapidated, and a death trap for the poor. They can afford to send their kids to the best schools abroad, while the children of the masses attend public schools that lack the basic amenities for teaching and learning. The truth is, if we are to evaluate this condition, those who see themselves as strong are not actually strong or powerful in the real sense, there are weak mentally, they lack wisdom, or at best their wisdom can be regarded as negative wisdom, they fail to realize that, as humans true strength or might lies in the number of people you are able to raise, and not suppress, the number of weak that are able to survive by your strength and not in the number of people that are eliminated by your strength. Africa’s strength lies in togetherness and brotherhood. That’s the true spirit of an African. Within this framework, Olatunji and Nyerere write that, “in typical African society, an individual is considered rich or poor depending on the overall richness of the community. This is to say that both the strong and the weak need to maintain the right kind of relationship.

²⁶ P. T. Etta and A. F. Oti. “Humanized Epistemology: Its implication for education in Nigeria,” *Journal of Integrative Humanism*, vol. 5, no. 1, October, 2015, p. 56.

The oppressor or strong must understand that he cannot exist alone; he needs others to realize his authentic existence. Take the political elites in Nigeria, for example. They may have the opportunity to steal from the public treasury and become stupendously rich, but even with their ill-gotten riches, there are things they can't do for themselves. For example, they need drivers, plumbers, gardeners, cooks, maids, etc., to perform some manual jobs for them. That's why, in his theory of the state, Plato advised everyone to perform the duties for which they are best suited. So, if the strong succeed in eliminating the weak, how can they now do those things that "the weak" do for them? To resolve this, Edward Ezedike employed Complementarism as a practical philosophy and a solution to the new culture of individualism in contemporary Africa. He sees individualism as "a doctrine that emphasizes self-interest and which sees individuals. For political actors without these traits, political extinction is a risk, forcing the political class to either embrace these new good governance traits or be eliminated from the political ecosystem entirely.

Conclusion

If the "Survival of the Fittest" continues to reward corruption and ethnic chauvinism, the Nigerian state itself faces the risk of "evolutionary dead-end" or collapse. The ultimate implication is that political leadership must evolve from **survival-at-all-costs** to **service-at-all-costs** to ensure the survival of the collective organism known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Citizens must not stand idle and watch political elites manipulate them and the system as they wish. They must put on their thinking caps and resist the temptation to go against each other to the benefit of the political strong elites, because without the compromise of the "politically weak citizens", the political elites cannot contemplate "survival of the fittest".

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