

The Cycle of Legitimacy Crisis in Nigeria: A Theoretical Exploration

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ABSTRACT One of the prevailing problems dominating the Nigerian political landscape is how to find a non-coercive basis for securing and maintaining the loyalty of the citizens to the authority of the state. This has been the source of the country's seemingly insoluble political instability. Electoral democracy has failed to enhance and confer political legitimacy on governments and the arrogation of power by the military has aggravated rather than alleviate the problem. Even the incessant constitutional changes have failed since legitimacy cannot be constitutionally engineered. In fact, the crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria has become persistent, endemic and cyclical. This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of the legitimacy crisis in Nigeria. It also examines the major explanations for legitimacy crisis in Nigeria and contends that legitimacy crisis in Nigeria is a function of weak state performance and policy failures, manifesting in the inability of the state to provide the proverbial common good. The paper in its modest contribution argues that the preference for democracy by Nigerians does not automatically confer political legitimacy on civilian/democratically elected governments. It then provides a vicious cycle of the crisis of legitimacy in Nigeria and point out the existing gap in researches on legitimacy crisis in Nigeria.