

LEADERSHIP AND NATION BUILDING: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper examines how Nigeria has responded to the issue of nation building since post-independence. Integration theory as proposed by Myron Weiner was adopted as the theoretical framework because it considers the all inclusive nature of a system irrespective of diversity. The study further looked deeply into the meaning of the concepts of leadership and national development, it considers contributions made by scholars especially in the comparism between Nigeria and Singapore as well as the United states of America. The findings shows that despite the fact that Nigeria and these countries have similarities in history such as being colonized by Britain, experience of war and programs for post-war reconstruction. These countries have shown that they are determined towards an effective nation building and this is reflected in their 2018 misery ranking. While Nigeria was ranked 8 in the world, these countries were ranked 123 and 105 respectively. This shows how determined leaders are in ensuring the good of the people irrespective of ethnic or political divide.

Keywords: Nation Building, leadership, integration, Nigeria, Singapore, United States, misery

Introduction

According to Wikipedia (2019) a nation can be defined as a community of people that are stable, formed on the basis of history, ethnicity, common language, territory or psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. The nation is thus seen as a birthmark. People are born as Germans, Swedes, Frenchmen or Turks, etc. People with foreign origins are considered a threat to national unity and purity and to a national culture which defines itself vis -a-vis “the other” (Karlsson, 2009) . The common ancestry is the end of history and has to be protected against everything foreign. In the case of Nigeria as a geo-polity, some Nigerians have opined that the amalgamation of Southern and Northern regions in 1914 to form Nigeria as well as the amalgamation which earlier brought some communities to be in Southern and Northern Nigeria was a mistake, fraud or political experiment which expired in 2014 (Williams, 2014). Others have provided examples of nations that have disintegrated

to build separate nations e.g. former USSR, Sudan, etc. In view of this historical challenge, the lack of consent to amalgamation, the tendency to perpetual political domination by persons from one region, economic dependency or exploitation of the resources of one region and recent separatist moves, have led to the view that there was no need for centenary celebration and there have been demands for a return to pre 1914 structure, where the over 250 ethnic communities/ kingdoms would exist independently.

Though widely used, the term 'nation-building' remains imprecise and contested. In much of the policy documentation, its meaning is assumed rather than defined (Dinnen, 2014). There is also a tendency to use the term 'nation-building' interchangeably with that of 'state-building'. Despite this, many observers would maintain that, while closely related, 'state-building' and 'nation-building' are distinct processes. 'State-building' is seen as the task of building functioning states capable of fulfilling the essential attributes of modern statehood. 'Nation-building', on the other hand, refers to more abstract process of developing a shared sense of identity or community among the various groups making up the population of a particular state. Distinguished in this way, 'state-building' focuses on the practical task of building or strengthening state institutions, while 'nation-building' is more concerned with the character of relations between citizens and their state. 'State-building' has long been a focus of international development assistance with a wide range of capacity-building programs directed at strengthening key institutions.

'Nation-building', on the other hand, has often been viewed as a more nebulous process with a limited role for external assistance.

A successful nation-building process produces a cultural projection of the nation containing a certain set of assumptions, values and beliefs which can function as the legitimizing foundation of a state structure. Nation-building according to Bogdandy, Haubler, Hanschmann and Utz (2005) is the most common form of a process of collective identity formation with a view to legitimizing public power within a given territory. It is an essentially indigenous process which often not only projects a meaningful future but also draws on existing traditions, institutions, and customs, redefining them as national characteristics in order to support the nation's claim to sovereignty and uniqueness. So far, this has happened essentially in societies with substantial elements of "social modernity". Among the elements which distinguish such societies from pre-modern ones, are: an open system of stratification allowing and encouraging social mobility, the state as an impersonal form of government, the pursuit of economic growth, and a cultural system establishing collective meaning and identity for all envisaged members of society. Before and from the inception of Nigeria as an Independent nation, it has been from one form of organized discourse to another in search of principled arrangement that would make Nigerians one united people irrespective of obvious differences (Nweke & Nwoye 2015). This seems to have eluded Nigeria, hence, the problems related to quality control, public policy implementation and nation-building.

According to Northouse (2012), leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leadership can be conceptualized as the process of motivating and mobilizing the people politically to achieve particular ends. In the Nigerian context, political leadership entails all those who occupy political leadership positions, such as President, Vice President, Governors and their Deputies, Ministers, Commissioners, Political Party Executives members, members of the legislature at all levels, civil servants and a host of others who occupy top political offices. Beyond that, the list also includes not only political office holders but those personalities behind the scene who are very active in politics. They sometimes influence those who get or elected appointed into political positions and attempt to control their (political appointees) activities while in office. A leader is a person who is able to modify the course of events. On the other hand, Kellerman (2004) maintains that a leader chooses a particular course of action and then in some ways gets others to go along or more subtly the leader encourages the led to choose the way that the group will follow. In their contributions Heifetz (1994) and Tucker (1995) posit that leadership should be able to: (i) Interprets problems (ii) Prescribe ends and means to solve them (iii) Propagate personal visions as solutions or, at least responses to problems (iv) mobilize followers to implement those solutions or responses.

From the late 1800s to about 1930, leadership theories were focused on control and centralization of power. The “Great

Man” theory, which opines that leaders are born and not made, supported the existence of some mysterious qualities vested in select individuals and frequently passed between generations. This model became obsolete in the 1930s and 1940s as “trait” theories appeared that attempted to identify specific traits qualifying an individual for leadership. Stogdill (1974) identified six trait groupings associated with leadership, including capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, status, and situation, but concluded that these traits did not sufficiently explain leadership: “A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits.” The late 1940s brought more psychoanalytical theories that explored why individuals are motivated to lead, or to follow a particular leader, with an increased focus on the role of groups and organizations. Investigators in the 1960s emphasized how people are influenced toward shared goals. “Exchange theories” looked at understanding the social exchanges between individuals and the group, including rewards, status, and esteem. Situational leadership theory proposed that the social situation and subordinates’ characteristics influence the leader characteristics necessary to be successful. House (1971) identified four important behaviors attributed to the leader—directive (task-oriented), achievement-oriented, supportive, and participative—and two situational variables: the subordinate’s personal characteristics and any environmental demands, such as the organization’s rules and procedures.

Since the 1980s, the leadership literature has become overwhelming in size and scope,

often recycling concepts such as the “Great Man” “social” and “organizational behavior” thinking, but with a twist toward “influence,” “transformational,” “servant,” and “collaborative” structures. Leaders have become more responsible to their followers, with a more spiritual or value- or principle-based relationship between leaders and followers. “Vision” was introduced as a new leadership characteristic, and “managing the dream” or “vision” has become the responsibility of the leader. Today, functional leadership is seen not as a permanent position but, rather, as a temporary service role, with individuals moving in and out of leadership responsibility as situations change. An individual can play both leadership and follower roles simultaneously, based on circumstances, their interest, and their expertise. While there is widespread agreement that both leadership and management skills are necessary to effect change, there is an element of confusion in the literature about where one starts and the other ends.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored on integration theory as propounded by Myron Weiner. Integration is referred to the process of having culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit. This definition presupposes that there is in existence an ethnically-pluralist society in which each group is characterized by its own language or other self-conscious cultural qualities. This territorial integration implies that the territory must be in existence under the control of one state and one government, like the Nigerian State and that the authority

of the central government must be firmly established over all the country’s territories. Weiner, (1965) identified five types of integration and they are National integration, territorial, value, elite-mass and integrative behavior. According to Weiner, national integration refers specifically to the problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which overshadows or eliminates-subordinate parochial loyalties.

Leadership and Nation Building in Nigeria

The history of Nigeria is both fascinating and a significant object lesson when it comes to the “politics of precarious balancing” in a society of irrepressible pluralism and hostile sub-cultures. It is actually a nation constantly threatened not by those who have nothing to lose, but ironically, by the incoherent national political elites who have everything to lose (Obiozor, 2018). Despite the fact that Nigeria is assessed as being powerful in its African and global scope, at the domestic level the country is assessed as being insecure and unstable. Therefore, we must recognize and accept the fact that no matter how uncomfortable that the tensions and crises constantly present in Nigeria arise not from imaginary but real issues which the national leadership must address urgently. Some of the specific qualities and attributes that contribute to effective leadership are; clear sense of vision, mission and objectives, charisma and the ability to motivate others in a way that favours compliance, dedication and devotion to the fulfillment of the vision and the mission. According to Chinua Achebe in his book – *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he said “Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or

inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership". He further concluded that "in spite of all conventional opinion, Nigeria has been less fortunate in its leadership", and placed the blame on the "seminal absence of intellectual rigor in the political thought of our founding fathers" (Achebe, 1984).

Leadership and nation-building have consistently been Nigeria's most constant priority agenda before and since independence fifty-eight years ago. Unfortunately, in spite of all good intentions and spirited efforts of the nation's leaders since 1960, these twin problems have remained a national dilemma. Throughout Nigeria's history, sub-national or ethnic nationalism has dominated and sabotaged all meaningful discussions and debates about national integration and nation-building. In fact, no generation of leaders, military or civilian, has been able to create an atmosphere of credibility to ensure Nigeria's claim to a political future as a nation. None was able to evolve a unifying national ideology that was embraced either by fellow political elites or by the entire Nigerian populace. Recently, some Nigerian political leaders have said that "Nigerian unity is not negotiable". This is an irony because these leaders have forgotten, or have failed to learn, the lessons of history. Nigerian unity is definitely negotiable and must be re-negotiated for it to stand or survive the test of time. The reality over the years remains that in spite of the best efforts of all our leaders past or present, Nigerian unity is not guaranteed. It is simply, at best, an aspiration and not yet an achievement. Hence, the statement that Nigerian unity is

"not negotiable" is simply a historical fallacy (Obiozor, 2018). If we are to redeem our country, we must begin to face reality, stop the syndrome of self-deception and self-delusion about Nigerian historical exceptionality, Today, if the truth must be told, our diversity has turned into disorder, and our democracy into an invitation to incremental anarchy. For Nigerian unity and nation-building to succeed the leaders need to borrow a leaf from or emulate the experiences of countries that did not ignore the element of pluralism in their respective countries and societies. Nationalism, including ethnic nationalism, is not about to disappear in the world generally, and certainly not in Nigeria, no matter how much we want to wish it away. It is still a potent force and all its advocates feel they have a strong case and believe that history is on their side.

Factors Responsible For Nation-Building

Pie and Kasper, (2003) have identified three critical variables responsible for nation-building. These include:- The internal characteristics of states, Convergence of geopolitical interests and Commitment to economic development by the political elite group. The Internal Characteristics of States is one of the most critical factors that virtually defines the success of other variables. Ethnically fragmented states will have more difficulty in nation-building than a more ethnically cohesive one. The defining factor among the ethnic groups may not necessarily be heterogeneity or homogeneity; though the fragmentation and cohesion may be implicated on the either respectively. Ethnically fragmented states suffer high degree of ethnic fissures, inequalities, and in

most cases religious animosities. These factors are inherently resistant to political and national cohesion which breeds nation-building. This is why nation-building in states like Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, among others with varying degrees of fragmented and heterogeneous ethnic groups has been very difficult unlike those of Japan, Germany, Israel among others with a more homogeneous and cohesive ethnic arrangement (Pie and Kasper, 2003).

Building a nation if there is convergence of geopolitical interests is not too difficult. Geopolitical interests here must not be international or intercontinental. It can be domestic among the different ethnic groups that make up the nation-state. Nation-building of one state must not be a security threat to other state(s) especially within the international arena. For instance, building a nation in Iraq, must not be a security threat to the United States, Kuwait, or the rest of the states in the international system. So it is with nation-building in Iran, Syria, Libya, Russia, Israel, United States and the United Kingdom, among others. Domestically, nation-building must be all encompassing; embodying a varying degree of convergence of interests among the ethnic groups. Once any group feels isolated in the process, separatist movement becomes inevitable (Onuoha & Ugwueze, 2014)..

The political elite group that controls the machineries of the state must be able to launch a self-sustaining economic development process that de-emphasizes greater reliance on external help for economic recovery. It is only when the political leadership of a country has evolved a self-sustaining economic development strategies that foreign aid would make

meaning. While we agree that there is no uniform pattern of nation-building, what remains incontestable to us is the conviction that these three factors must be properly harnessed before nation-building becomes possible.

Nigeria Vs Singapore

Considering the fact that that Nigeria got her independence in 1960, became a republic in 1963, we shall also compare her progress with that of Singapore that also became a republic in the early 1960s. In terms of poverty reduction, Singapore has not been releasing its poverty statistics since independence but with such outstanding per capita income; high life expectancy and high literacy levels, and unemployment at 1.8%, the number of Singaporeans living below poverty line is expected to be extremely miniscule (Umezulike,2016). In 2012, one in thirty Singaporeans was a millionaire, and this was expected to reach one in twenty by 2017. Singapore's successive governments have been sustaining various welfare programs in health and education. 26 Such programs would have thoroughly reduced poverty level to the barest minimum. On the other hand, 15% of the Nigerian population were living below poverty line in. This percentage shockingly increased to 43% in 1990, because of Nigeria's economic recession in the 80s. This subsequently increased to 70% by 1999 because of slow economic growth, autarkic policies, economic mismanagement, high debt to GDP ratio from the early 80s economic downturn, and widespread corruption. Nigeria's population living below poverty line currently stands at 33.1% (one third of the population). This means that there are

more poor Nigerians currently than there were at the country's independence. However, this reduction by more than half from 70% was because of sustained economic growth and political stability in the 2000s. Life expectancy in Nigeria increased from 37.18 years in 1960 to 47 years in 1990 and 53 years as at 2013. This shows that Nigeria is currently having deep challenges in the health sector. This is in contrast to Singapore where life expectancy was 65 years in 1960, 74 years in 1990 and 82 years (80 for males and 85 for females) in 2014. Singapore is the 4th in the world in terms of high life expectancy. Just around half of the Nigerian population have access to untainted water and appropriate sanitation, unlike in Singapore where almost the whole population have access to these. Nigerians are also amongst the most travelled in the world for medical tourism because of lack of extensive medical equipments, and lack of medical practitioners for grave health issues and brain drain. With this statistics we can see that we are really far from nation building in Nigeria because we must build the people before we build the nation (Umezulike, 2016).

Nigeria vs America

Nigeria also has a lot to learn from America having passed through similar experiences. Both countries were colonized by Britain. However, while the US fought and won her independence, Nigeria secured its own devoid of bloodshed. Civil war was fought in America between the North and the South (April 12, 1861-May 9, 1865) and so it was with Nigeria and Biafra (July 6, 1967-January 10, 1970). Very important outcome of the civil wars (Nigeria and United States

alike) was the reconstruction era. The US holds two meanings for the term Reconstruction era: the first covers the complete history of the entire country from 1865 to 1877 following the civil war; the second sense focuses on the transformation of the Southern United States from 1863 to 1877, as directed by the Congress, with the reconstruction of state and society (Onuoha & Ugwueze, 2014). Consequently, from 1863 to 1865, Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson took moderate positions designed to bringing the south back to normal as quickly as possible. The period of reconstruction in the United States led to radical policy changes that ended up enfranchising the freedmen (former slaves) and removing the former confederates (who were seen to be the cause of the war) from power. The removal of the barriers that hitherto isolated some elements mostly from the south led to migration of missionaries, teachers, politicians and businessmen from the north to the south for massive infrastructural development (wikipedia, 2014).

This process led to proper integration of the American citizens (both those from the north and south) into a unified nation-state. Other factors of isolation and disenfranchisement especially against the blacks were achieved much later in the 20th century; the result of which is evident in the ascension of a black man to the position of US President in the person of Barrack Obama. This remains a genuine reconstruction agenda characteristic of the US nation-building which laid the foundation for US development. It is also imperative to note that upon founding the American nation, the founding fathers

moved to re-write American history by upturning all that were British and assuming a separate American identity which is today celebrated all over the world.

On the contrary to the US post-war reconstruction, the 3Rs – reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation – characteristic of Nigeria’s post-war reintegration agenda was by no means a match. The entire process in Nigeria appeared dubious and deceitful. Firstly, all properties belonging to Biafrans especially the Igbos outside the Biafran territory were revoked; secondly, all Biafrans who hitherto had money in the banks were ordered to be given 20 Pounds irrespective of the amount he/she had in the banks before the war, and thirdly, there was no genuine effort to integrate the Biafrans into the mainstream

Nigerian political process since the end of the war despite the 3Rs and the aphorism of „No Victor, No Vanquished“ policy (Onuoha & Ugwueze, 2014).

However, while America has continued to learn from its past mistakes and has also continued to work relentlessly to avert a possible reoccurrence, Nigeria has learnt nothing. This seems to be why separatist groups like the Boko Haram sect, Odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), IPOB; among others, have continued to threaten the unity and corporate existence of the country and thereby making the task of nation-building difficult.

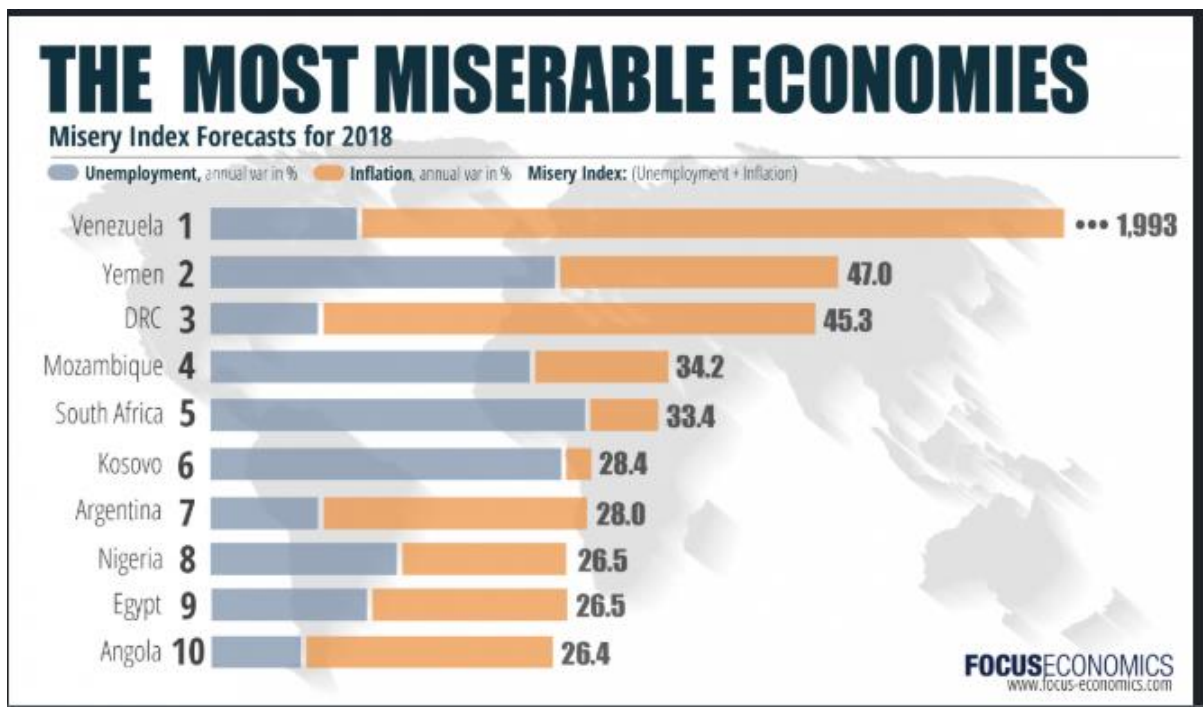


Fig. 1. Misery index
Focus-economy (2019)

Fig. 1 shows that in 2018, Nigeria had a misery index of 26.5 and with this, Nigeria was ranked the ninth in the world with the highest misery rate. Compared to Singapore

and America (in tables 2 & 3 below) that went through similar history, it shows that there has been a significant challenge in our diversity rather than advantage.

Table 1. 2018 Misery Index

2018 Rank	Country	2018 Misery Index (projected)	2016 Misery Index (actual)	2016 Rank (actual)
1	Venezuela	1993.0	1518.6	1
2	Yemen	47.0	21.2	17
3	DR Congo	45.3	19.2	22
4	Mozambique	34.2	41.8	3
5	South Africa	33.4	33.1	5
6	Kosovo	28.4	27.8	7
7	Argentina	28.0	49.6	2
8	Nigeria	26.5	29.1	6
9	Egypt	26.5	26.4	9
10	Angola	25.4	39.0	4
11	Haiti	24.7	27.0	8

Here we see the order of misery as Venezuela tops the rank of misery while Nigeria is ranked the ninth position and Anagola 10th.

Table 2. 2018 Misery Index

122	Japan	3.6	3.0	123
123	Singapore	3.4	1.5	125
124	Qatar	3.3	3.0	122
125	Brunei	3.0	6.2	100

Table two also reveals that Singapore was ranked 123rd in 2018 which is very far compared to both United states and Nigeria

Table 3. 2018 Misery Index

103	New Zealand	6.6	5.7	107
104	China	6.3	6.0	103
105	United States	6.2	6.2	101
106	Ecuador	6.1	7.1	89

Here, we see the United States was ranked 105th in 2018 misery index globally.

With this, there are so many questions Nigerian leaders should ask themselves, ‘what have we been doing that we are not doing right?’ do we continue to do the same thing repeatedly and expect a different result?.

Conclusion

Drawing from the work of Onuoha & Ugwueze, (2014), first, it is imperative to note that to build is a very critical and time consuming project because accurate measurement must be involved. However, to destroy is very easy because no established pattern is required. This is also applicable in the case of nation-building. Building a nation requires that the every one must have an idea of the type of nation we desire for ourselves and work towards having it actualized. Just like the services of many actors are involved in building a house, the architect to draw the plan, the surveyor to take measurement, the brick layers to lay the blocks, the carpenters to fix the wooden works and do the roofing, and a host of others; so also it is in nation-building. Cartographers are required to draw the map and define the boundaries of the nation, economists are required to draw the economic plans that lay the foundation of the nation, lawyers are required to defend the sovereignty of the nation, and political scientists are needed to offer leadership that

can lead to proper execution of the project of nation-building.

Secondly, this leadership role of the behavioural scientists is one of the most critical aspects of human management that gives credence to nation-building and development; the reason being that it defines both the structure and architectural designs of the type of nation to be built. This by implication is a master role that harnesses all other roles required in having a just society. For this reason therefore, behavioural sciences becomes a master science discipline and they are required to possess master knowledge of human problems both those relating to pure science and humanities as well as social relationships, and therefore use their administrative ingenuities to reconcile the contradictions arising from the antagonisms inherent therefrom. Leaders are groomed from family through the classroom and then to the larger society, and at the first step of packaging, the individual must exhibit qualities of a leader. Packaging is a very important aspect of leadership which must eschew all forms of braggadocio. He must exhibit more of the qualities of a fox than a lion. By implication therefore, he must be very cunning and not talk too much but when he does, it is very weighty.

According to Nweke, & Nwoye, (2015), there is a need to change the attitude of Nigerians through education. This is because there is little or no spirit of patriotism in Nigeria. Government has failed almost woefully in her responsibilities to the citizens of Nigeria: lack of basic infrastructures, health care services, employment opportunities, etc. “An average Nigerian ambition to climb to the top in the public sector is neither motivated by patriotism nor the wish to render an honest service to humanity.” Again, due to regional proclivity, Nigerians cannot rise in unison to demonstrate against a seating government when it is failing in her duties. Why? It is because people from the region(s) of the ruling government will see it as a ploy to undermine the government of their brother or sister, hence, would rather protest against such demonstration. Lack of oneness! This stems from the fact that Nigerians have not in the background of common understanding agreed to live together as a people of one nation through resolution of basic differences; hence, the unpatriotic attitude of Nigerians. Lastly, educational policies lack practical relevance to realities on ground in Nigeria. The curriculum in Nigerian schools, does it still have history of Nigeria as a country to teach Nigerian pupils and students? Is there a country that has no history, no matter how bad it is? That is why there is need for practical discourse in Nigeria to streamline issues for common agreement tailored from Habermas’s Discourse Ethics. There can be no meaningful way out in terms of policy implementation in a polarized country.

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