

Nigeria's Expensive Politics and Democracy: The Bane of Good Governance

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20221214>

ABSTRACT

The performance of Nigeria's democracy coupled with its styled politics and governance has raised concern over its sustainability and survivability. One area where the democratic system in Nigeria has remained shamelessly scandalous is in the area of the expensive cost of managing the democratic structures of the state and the people that run them. The view being implied in this article is that Nigeria's style of democracy with its expensive and corrupt tendencies is frustrating and inhibiting good governance. The extent of Nigeria's expensive governance and politics is manifested in wasteful spending on personnel cost of political office holders such as Ministers, commissioners, special advisers and other executive and legislative aides who in most cases get paid without performing justifiable functions and responsibilities. Similarly, security votes which are appropriated and used by federal and state governments discretionarily have become conduit pipes for draining our national wealth. The suffocating impact of the high cost of governance on our national life has made it to assume a national emergency dimension. This paper therefore emphasises the need for government across all strata to reduce the cost of politics and governance, block all revenue leakages and channel the country's wealth and resources to productive ventures so as to entrench good governance and set the country on the path of development. The paper recommends the discontinuation of appointing the ministers of state, the scrapping of security votes and the adoption of a unicameral legislature with a part-time arrangement among others as strategies for reducing the cost of governance.

Keywords: politics, democracy, expensive, good governance, cost

INTRODUCTION

Among the various systems of government, Nigeria opted for a federal system of government after practicing the parliamentary system of government for 3 years (1963-1966). This implies that governmental powers are to be distributed among the three tiers of government. Every tier of government is established with a view to providing social services that would improve the general wellbeing of the citizenry; government essentially aims at improving the living standard of the people. For every government, therefore, to achieve its objectives, it is required to adopt measures which would ensure effective revenue generation, as well as, judicious utilization of resources at its disposal. However, Nigeria's style of government cum democracy has been such that governments at all levels have not proven to aim at improving the citizens' living standard rather spending on ignominious ventures that have no direct bearing on entrenching good governance.

The costs associated with the running of government have increased dramatically over the years such that an increasingly higher proportion of public revenue is used to support and implement the primary functions of government (Adeolu and Evans, 2007). Rising government expenditure has, therefore, not translated to meaningful development as Nigeria still

ranks among world's poorest countries. Nigeria's democracy has remained not only a disappointment to the Nigerian people (who are the true custodians of the country's sovereignty), but it is becoming increasingly a burden with no benefits in sight for the masses of the country.

Hence, in recent years, everyone in and out of government seems to agree on the need to cut the cost of governance, by eliminating areas of wastages in the budget and the unexplored opportunities of entrenching prudence. One of such concerns for reduction in cost of governance was from the Speaker of House of Reps Gbajabamila, who asserted that "We have a responsibility to act with urgent determination to build the infrastructure that is required to lift millions of our fellow citizens out of poverty. We recognise that we cannot accomplish these objectives using loans and outside financing alone. Therefore, we need to impose deep cuts in the cost of governance and improve internal revenue generation and collection so that we can free up resources that can then be deployed to fund policy initiatives that will enhance the lives of our people..." Senator Rochas Okorochoa also expressed his concern for the need to cut cost. To him, the number of senators should be reduced. He suggested that there should be two senators per state and that there should not be more than three House of Representatives members from each state to drastically cut the cost of governance. Governor Kayode Fayemi also took a similar position. He even added that the country should go back to the parliamentary system of government, as it will be less expensive for the Nation (The Guardian, 2019). It is therefore confusing that highly placed government functionaries who have realised that high cost of governance deprives the country revenues that could be channeled into developmental initiatives, find it difficult to treat the issue with dispatch.

In spite of this hue and cry about expensiveness of our governance and democracy, not much has been seen to be

done by the authorities to address this unsustainable level of the cost of governance, which invariably has not reduced despite clearly identified revenue challenges. Thus something drastic needs to be done in this regard to arrest this undesirable trend. Therefore, this paper identifies the manifestations of wastages and unnecessary spending in the process of governance in Nigeria and it styled politics and democracy. The paper contends that the cost of running Nigeria must be reduced drastically and sincerely because it appears successive administration are paying lip-service to this issue of cutting the cost of governance.

Conceptual Exposition: Democracy, Politics, Good Governance Democracy

It is often advanced that there are certain difficulties involved in the definition of the concept of democracy. However, the concern here is not to dwell on that debate. Democracy is centered on peoples' participation and popular support. The people are the centre of authority and should be able to dictate major policy outcomes. Democracy is a system of government in which the supreme power is vested in the hands of the people; it is government in the hand of the majority.

Oke (2010) argues that democracy involves the opportunity for citizens to participate in decision making in the political process and repudiate arbitrariness and authoritarianism, while extolling the consent of the governed and protecting human personality and values. Democracy is a system of government that makes the people the focal point of governance (Obianyo, 2008). It has also been described as a governance process that promotes the doctrine of equalitarianism, meaning that all men are equal and there is absence of any special privilege (Laski, 1982). Democracy is known to provide and guarantee the rule of law, constitutionalism, human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and many other rights that support human

liberty (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Urim & Imhonopi, 2013).

Osaghae (1992: 41 cited in Lawan, 2014: 6) argues that all the versions of democracy share one fundamental objective; which is how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to the people. In fact, at the behest of democracy is the power of the people, which is found in their votes and the sovereign will to elect their representatives in to the executive and the parliament. Since power belongs to the people, then the governors must be responsible and accountable to the people. Democracy has played a vital role in the story of civilization, helping transform the world from power structures of monarchy, empire and conquest into popular rule, self-determination and peaceful co-existence.

Politics

The distribution of (scarce) resources is the basic element of politics. This is why Lasswell, (1936) sees politics as “who gets what, when and how?” Obviously, this question can be applied in all kinds of contexts, irrespective of whether they are commonly regarded as political ones. American political scientist, David Easton (1965: 21) sees politics as “those interactions through which values are allocated authoritatively for a society.”

Robert Dahl demarcates the political aspect, in his concise introductory text *Modern Political Analysis* (1963), as “any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule or authority”. In other words, politics is present in all situations where interactions between people are structured by differences in power, authority and control.

Good Governance

It is to the concept of good governance that we now turn our attention. However, it is pertinent to describe the concept of governance before delving into the concept of good governance. Governance is a concept that is germane and relevant to corporate organisation; regional

organisation; international organisations and institutions; among other groups and organisations across the globe. (Adegbami and Adepoju 2017: 146)

To the International Monetary Fund (IMF), governance is seen as ‘all aspects of the way a country is governed, its economic policies and regulatory framework’ (IMF, 2016). It can be inferred from the definition that governance has to do with the totality of governmental actions and activities that are geared or directed toward making and realising effective economic policies.

Good governance, on the other hand entails the process of organizing and mobilizing people and resources to achieve a common goal. It is the process of motivating and enrolling people to participate actively in dreaming dreams and seeing the vision of a possible future and then encouraging them to own the vision and use their energies, resources and contacts to work cooperatively together to realize the visions, dreams and possibilities. According to UNDP (2002) ‘good governance’ is about striving for the rule of law, transparency, equity, effectiveness/efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision in the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority. In other words, it could be seen as a process where public officers and institutions conduct public affairs, and manage public resources effectively through the above listed conditions.

The former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan sees ‘good governance’ as ‘the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development’ (Annan, cited in UN 1998). To Annan, lack of good governance will continue to promote hunger and underdevelopment. It is through good governance that impact of governmental activities can be felt, particularly in the area of economic growth and development.

Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable

and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (UN, 1998).

The Nature of Nigeria's Expensive Democracy

It is worrisome that after woeful failure of military regimes that were in power for several years in Nigeria, the return to democracy since 1999 has not produced expected results. Rather than engender peak levels of development and good governance, democratization in Nigeria seems to be synonymous with political assassinations, ethno-religious conflicts, increasing levels of abject poverty, acute youth unemployment and general economic and political decay (Ogundiya 2010). Indeed, not much has positively changed after the prolonged years of military dictatorship. A study by Nnamani (2015) covering the fourth republic observes that "the Nigerian state is still grappling with pervasive poverty, stunted economic growth, rising debt, widened inequality, deplorable infrastructure, food crisis and the growing cost of living. The democratic rule has failed to improve the living standard of average Nigerians. The country is plagued with insecurity in the forms of terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, and violent ethno-religious conflicts. In the political sphere, election fraud and gross indiscipline are pervasive."

The picture of Nigeria's democracy is full of ironies and menacing paradoxes. Fat and well-fed political appointees and elected public officials in their bulletproof chauffeured cars, living in bulletproof houses and sleeping on bulletproof beds, with their team of well-paid and obese security personnel, drive around menacingly in siren-blaring government-owned expensive automobiles on aging and potholed roads past slums and squalid streets where many Nigerians call their

homes, sometimes stopping to give some political and soapbox speeches, promising to deliver more democracy dividends to the people. This scenario summarizes the state of democratic politics in Nigeria and throws up questions about its survivability and continuity.

Ajayi and Ojo (2014) recapitulate the nature of Nigeria's expensive democracy as thus:

- a spendthrift system in which the country's brand of democracy spends so much to accomplish so little;
- a brand of democracy that reveres officialdom, invests and secures the power holders while disparaging the people who are the true bearers of political legitimacy, and
- a brand of democracy that is plagued by a "hydra-headed and pathological corruption" reducing the impact any apparent good policy could have had on the polity

It should be noted that democracy in its purest form is not as expensive as is the case with Nigeria. Corruption and wastages are however the twin amplifiers of the extravagance nature of our democratic politics and the high cost of governance. The primitive process of accumulation exhibited by political office holders brings about rising cost of governance been experienced in the country. This scenario makes it apparent that there is serious system decay in Nigeria, whereby so much is being wasted on unproductive ventures, that if care is not taken, the system will collapse.

Expensive Cost of Governance: The Bane of Good Governance

The high cost of governance in terms of the high expenditure profile on the legislative and executive stakeholders has robbed citizens of the resources needed for welfare services, economic and infrastructural development (Ajayi, 2012). The little that the people would have benefited as good governance has been curtailed over the years by the rapacious life-style of the ruling elite who plunder the common wealth

of the country. Good governance, which would have at least provided genuine atmosphere for the people to enjoy the benefits of the nation's enormous resources, because of the manifest features of good governance which allows for participation, accountability, equitability, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and the rule of law, is eventually derailed because of the profligacy of successive governments.

Expensive electioneering process is one of the manifestations that attest to the expensive nature of our party politics and political process. Although, it is not that all over the world elections are cheap but the way the political class goes about it in Nigeria is desperate, usurious and even violent. Not only do incumbents and those who have access to the economic resources of the state dip their hands into the common vault to sponsor their preferred candidates, but they also ensure that such candidates are compelled to do their bidding when they achieve electoral success. Rather than serve the people who purportedly elected these officials into government, the political godsons serve the interests and needs of their godfathers before the interests of the masses. This has led to the rise of political godfatherism with all its ills and desperation in Nigerian politics. (Urim and Imhonopi, 2016)

To contest for an elective position, one will have to spend a fortune to purchase the form for the primary election of the political party which runs in to millions of naira. The unnecessary high cost of nomination forms by political parties in Nigeria speaks loudly to the fact that representation is not democratised. This implies that representation and political office is assumed to be exclusively for the higher bidder, not necessarily those who are competent and have the wherewithal to represent and serve the people. No doubt, politics is financially-intensive. Nonetheless, exorbitant fees on nomination forms clearly signify a huge disconnect from selfless service to the people. This trend has assumed a worrisome dimension

and if not checked could further undermine the nation's fragile democracy. This exorbitant nomination and expression of interest fees has only succeeded in promoting exclusivity, encouraging godfatherism, corruption and making a mockery of Nigeria's effort at deepening democracy (Business Day, 2021). Apart from being a waste, another perspective to note is that charging huge sum of money to purchase party nomination forms contributes to more corrupt practices in the country. Eventually, when these aspirants have access to power, it is just logical that they would want to get back the huge sum of money spent on nomination and expression of interest forms, campaigns, printing and displaying colourful posters, renting crowds and so on. Obviously, this is a contributory factor to the increasing level of corruption in the country.

The executive arm of government is the main culprit in incurring excessive costs in governance. This applies to all the tiers of government. The exorbitant and extravagant budgetary allocation for the president's and vice president's health tourism, the size of the presidential fleet of jets among others, are manifestations of the expensive posture of the executive as an arm of government. The use of irritating convoys of official vehicles by the President, governors and other officials and their wives is common and pervasive.

The wastage and extravagant nature of the executive is also demonstrated in their penchant for appointing bogus and redundant ministers, commissioners, special advisers, special assistants and senior special assistants. In a developing economy like Nigeria, the current number of ministers is outrageous. Assuming each minister would have five aides, it means there would be over 215 aides for the 44 ministers. Actually, in some cases some ministers have more than five aides. In fact, some of them have up to six or seven personal assistants or aides, who in some cases hardly perform any task or responsibility for the ministers. There is no reason for appointing ministers

of state, because it is a duplication of functions since there are permanent secretaries and a number of directors in these ministries that could perform some if not all of the functions assigned to the junior ministers. Again, as observed by Lawan (2014) "it only serves to provide opportunity for the head of government to dispense patronage and compensate as a form of political settlement." This is why it is imperative to separate 'politicking' from the burden of governance. There should be other ways of settling and compensating those that helped in winning elections but definitely that should not be from our common wealth nor should it be borne by the citizens. Even if there could be ministers of state, they should only be appointed for highly complex and large ministries like education; agriculture and rural development; works and probably trade and investment. The same wastages are also prevalent at the state level of government. Most of the states have an average of 17 and 29 commissioners and a coterie of Special Advisers, Special Assistants and Senior Special Assistants. As stated by Lawan (2014), "the huge amount spent in maintaining this outrageous coterie of political jobbers demonstrates government apparent misplacement of priorities in the midst of the ravaging poverty confronting the country. At the end, huge resources are expended in the maintenance of these ministers, commissioners, their aides, special assistants as well as convoys of vehicles, to the detriment of the development of socio-economic infrastructures."

Related to the above is the conspicuous cost of maintaining the over bloated numbers of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) there by raising the general cost of governance in the country. The body language of the Nigerian people must have been well read by the Chairman the Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC), Lt. Gen. Theophilus Danjuma (rtd) who in 2011 raised the alarm about the high cost of governance and the bloated federal

bureaucracy of over 400 ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) from which huge amount is expended without commensurate results to show. Consequently, the PAC advised the Jonathan administration to work towards reducing the number of MDAs in the country since some of these MDAs were a duplication of the functions of the others (ThisDay, 2011). This outrageous numbers of the MDAs have resulted in the bizarre neglect of the development of the vast majority of Nigerians. There are about 426 department and agencies in the country. Therefore, each ministry has an average of 15 departments and agencies. This colossal amount according to Lawan (2014) "is spent on agencies and departments that are in most cases moribund and dysfunctional," and in certain instances, only duplicate the functions of some ministries and departments within a particular ministry.

In 2013, Alhaji Ahmed Al-Gazali, the then chairman of the Federal Civil Service Commission also warned of the hazards of retaining this subsisting structure of the MDAs. He described the parastatals as giant drain pipes through which the country's scarce resources pour away in thick floods. He sees the parastatals as "centres of inefficiency, corruption and duplication of mandates and functions of other government organs" (Eme and Ven, 2013). This egregious numbers of MDAs which leads to increasing cost of governance need to be reversed to safeguard not only the present financial health of Nigeria but to preserve its posterity.

There is also lack of proper planning, continuity and consistency in the governance process which often leads to needless abandonment of governmental projects especially as it relates to infrastructure development of the country. This situation often provides avenues for leakages, wastages and brazen corruption where political office holders exploit it to their selfish interest. It has become a habit for top political office holders to approve funds for a project, but divert the said funds

for personal gains after work has begun on site. It is not news that politicians use projects as an excuse to plunder the country's treasury and waste taxpayers money. A survey carried out by the Chartered Institute of Project Management of Nigeria gave a shocking revelation on the number of abandoned projects scattered across the country. What was most shocking in the report as observed by Sebastiane (2019), was that the abandoned projects with regards to the structures already on ground amount to over N12 trillion. This is a major cause for concern because the amount is more than double of the country's total budgetary allocation for a year. Why has such a huge amount of money been wasted when the country wallows in under-development and poverty? There is no denying that if that amount was used judiciously, the country will be in a better state.

One of the most debated issues about the expensive nature of politics and governance in Nigeria is plausibly the amount being spent on running the country's bicameral legislature especially at the federal level. The subject matter is made more controversial by the secrecy surrounding how their funds are spent and most especially, the remuneration of the lawmakers. Nigerians were in 2010 alarmed by the then Governor of Central Bank, Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, when he claimed -and he should know better- that the National Assembly was gulping 25% of the federal budgetary expenditure, trimming down the amount available for the badly needed capital investments (Saturday Sun, 2010). Hence Nigeria's democracy as observed by Ajayi and Ojo (2014) is a "democracy of waste", which invests in the comfort and security of elected officials rather than in the mass majority of citizens. Commenting on the sleazy pay allocated by the National Assembly to its members, Umosen (2015) described it as implying that Nigeria is under a siege and that it is a "development suggesting of a farce, featuring over-pampered children bristling

in anticipation of prized toys for a festive season." In fact, as Mailafia (2010) admits, not only are Nigerian legislators at the federal level among the highest paid in the world, a typical Nigerian senator also earns more than the President of the United States of America.

The situation is made more complex by the provision of unnecessary aides for the NASS members. In a National Assembly of 109 senators and 360 House of Representatives, the National Assembly Act provides that each lawmaker, excluding principal officers, is entitled to a minimum of five aides, including one senior legislative aide, two legislative aides, a personal assistant and a secretary. These aides are apart from those who work in the constituency offices of the legislators. The President of the Senate is entitled to 45 aides; his deputy, 30, and 20 each for all principal officers. The Speaker of the House of Representatives is entitled to 35 assistants; Deputy Speaker, 15 and 10 each for the six principal officers. All of these aides are paid from the coffers of the National Assembly. There was a report of a lawmaker who went out of his way to appoint 118 constituency aides (Premium Times, 2020). Consequently, huge sums of money are budgeted for these legislative aides for doing nothing or eventually, the money ends up in the bank accounts of the legislators. This number is very high for aides, who in most cases are either made redundant or hardly perform any serious legislative functions for the members in the NASS. Therefore, the bicameral nature of our legislature needs to be critically examined. Given our current economic circumstances, can the country afford to continue with this arrangement when some developing countries have modified imported parliamentary structures to suit their peculiar circumstances?

Security vote is another area that has remained a minting machine and a conduit pipe for draining the country's resources to the detriment of the citizenry and infrastructure development. Over the years,

whatever that has been heard about the real amount being appropriated to state governors as security vote has remained a guess work. Not many Nigerians know about security vote. According to Wikipedia, "Security vote is a monthly allowance that is allocated to the 36 states within the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the sole purpose of funding security services within such states. The monthly fund runs into billions of naira and vary based on the level of security required by the individual state." Security votes are opaque corruption-prone security funding mechanisms widely used by Nigerian officials. They are budgeted separately from planned security expenditures to -in theory- tackle anything security related. In practice, however they have become 'opaque discretionary accounts.' (Mathew, 2018) Security vote is just an easy and attractive route for stealing public funds; it is an avenue imaginarily created for the purpose of siphoning the revenues and resources of the federation and the states. It is a veritable platform for abuse of public trust and escalation of poverty. This is because the money that should ordinarily be available for socio-economic development is appropriated as security votes and used discretionarily. The intrigue is that this humongous amount allocated to security votes for both governors and the presidency has always been shredded in secrecy. Governors hardly disclose the amount, and the anti-graft agency seems to overlook that direction when probing past governors. (Mathew, 2018)

According to Transparency International the world leading non-governmental anti-corruption organization, Nigeria allocates an estimated N241.2 billion (about \$670 million) to security votes annually. The international governance and rights watchdog decried Nigeria's annual allocation to security votes, saying that it is more than the Nigerian Army's annual budget, 70 percent more than the Nigerian Police Force annual budget, and far higher than the United States of America and United Kingdom's security assistance to

Nigeria (Business Day, 2021). However, despite the increasing allocations to security votes, insecurity is getting worse and governors are crying for help, an ugly situation that is daily raising questions on the need for security votes when those who manage the funds cannot deploy it in providing security for, at least, themselves and their families. The sad reality is that the funds would have aided developmental projects if they were rightly deployed than going into the private pockets of the governors, who draw from it at will, and without giving details of their expenditure, or accounting for the remaining, if any (Mathew, 2018). Hence there is the need for stopping and scrapping of the so-called security votes.

CONCLUSION

It is a consensus of all stakeholders from academicians, politicians, technocrats, business tycoons and even the ordinary citizens that the cost of running Nigeria's politics and democracy is too expensive thereby depriving the citizens the opportunity of enjoying the dividends of democracy and good governance.

It requires no great knowledge of economics to work out why the country's growth remains arrested. A huge chunk of the country's income is expended on giving political office holders far-fetched lifestyles and running gargantuan bureaucracies at all levels. By paying the highest set of salaries to its elected/political officials, Nigeria does not promote the principle of government as service and sacrifice, and hence is one that is bound to promote both "sit-tightism" and rank corruption when elections come around (Aluko, 2010). There is obviously something wrong in a democracy where public offices become the easiest means to acquire wealth.

This paper reviewed the expensive nature of Nigeria's politics and democratic practice in the process of governance in the country. It is concluded that corruption and wastages are the major amplifiers of the cost of governance in Nigeria's style of democracy.

So much is being wasted on unproductive ventures. The country's expensive but invidious and offensive democratic project has resulted in a situation where the country is rather under-developing instead of making any progress thereby creating many problems and leading to different forms of agitations including social movements and protests.

Recommendations

That Nigeria runs an expensive democratic system is not difficult to see considering that democratic politics favours the rich and that the political space is dominated by political jobbers, entrepreneurs and investors whose sole venture into politics is to improve or increase their financial assets. There is the need for the country to consider reducing the number of members of the National Assembly by having only one House, to reduce membership and thus cut high costs of maintaining them. The core principles of equality of states and population can be fittingly incorporated in a formula that would determine the composition of the emergent unicameral national legislature from the constituent parts. By doing this, significant costs can be saved. This could also be accompanied by a reasonable reduction in the remuneration of the legislators at all levels. The reported recklessness in spending on unnecessary new vehicles at the National Assembly is a provocation for the heinous increase in the cost of governance.

The constitution should be amended to change the mode of legislation in the National Assembly to a part-time job. Legislation based on part-time arrangement means that legislators can only earn sitting allowances and not salaries. In addition, they will not be entitled to such benefits as car loans, severance and pension allowances, thereby conserving the public treasury for other that can benefit the entire populace (Ajayi, 2012). This arrangement will not only reduce cost of governance but also make politics less attractive.

It is also recommends that the number of ministers should be reduced and appointment of ministers of state should be discontinued for the good and prosperity of the nation. Hence, section 147 of the 1999 Constitution should be reviewed, because it provides that the President shall appoint at least one minister from each state, which is too large given the number of states in Nigeria (Lawan, 2014). At the state level, a uniform number of commissioners, special advisers, special assistants and other aides should be determined by the constitution.

The appropriation of security votes should also be discontinued. It is no longer desirable and it has never been desirable because there is a budget for defense every year, which runs into billions of naira and that, should be enough to take care of the military, police and our paramilitary agencies.

Furthermore, unconstitutional expenditures such as constituency allowances and sponsoring of Holy pilgrimages by government should henceforth be outlawed. This unconstitutional spending creates room for corruption and wasteful expenditures in the process of governance in Nigeria.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Jibrin Mohammed Rabba, Abdullahi Abdulkadir. Nigeria's expensive politics and democracy: the bane of good governance. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2022; 9(12): 135-145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20221214>
