



**Banditry, Terrorism and Insurgency As a Political Warfare in Nigeria: A  
Psychic Enthronement of “Might is Right” Philosophy in Nigeria.**

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**Abstract**

The destructive events playing out in Nigerian polity most recently underpin the existence of a failed nation. From the northern part of Nigeria, disturbing issues of terrorist activities and banditry are menacing human activities in the area. From the west to east and other parts of the country, records of criminal activities of kidnappers and political thuggery abound which are ceasing to be news as their occurrences are now usual. In studying this political condition and attempting to proffer remedial measures, this work identifies the psychological framework of *might is right*, as the operational mindset of both decision makers and political actors in Nigeria. Through the research method of qualitative analysis of reports, news and social reactions, the work scores this vicious psyche of *might* as the volcanic power that vibrates the Nigerian political structure, spilling out socio-political ills majorly trading in the form of banditry and terrorism. Thus, the work, submits that the remaking of Nigerians' mindset on civic co-existence can be the proximate panacea to realizing a new Nigeria.

**Key Words: Banditry, Terrorism, Insurgency, Politics and New- Nigeria**

## Introduction /Review

An objective observation on the current socio-political tide of Nigerian nation makes it non-arbitrary to say that Nigeria is a failed nation. Such avowal is not derogatorily intended, but only stems from a relational assessment of international standard of nationhood. Not just an affirmation of western paradigm, a thorough investigation on the structural conditions of being a nation exposes the Nigerian structure as not only collapsing, but regrettably seeming normal to its people. The 2019 Fragile States Index (FSI) based in Washington ranked Nigeria as the 14<sup>th</sup> out of 178, in the list of countries structurally fragile in the world and 9<sup>th</sup> in Africa ([www.globalvoices.org](http://www.globalvoices.org)) where it is preceded by countries like Somalia, South Sudan, democratic republic of Congo and few likes. To avoid bias of western stereotype, the Global Policy Forum describe a failed state as that which, “can no longer perform basic functions such as education, security, or governance, usually due to fractions violence or extreme poverty”.

The forum in their description nips two major factors namely, violence and extreme poverty, to the bud of a failed state. On the issue of violence/insecurity the rate of loss of lives and property depicts Nigerian as a failed nation. Corresponding to factual data, in the Global Peace Index 2020 (Contryeconomy.com), Nigeria ranked 147 out of 161 rated countries in the world with peaceful coexistence. Despite claims by the Federal authorities of improving the security measures, an atmosphere of insecurity has been persistent across Nigeria. Insurgency, banditry, herders and farmers clash, security forces brutality and inter-communal violence have become daily updates from the news agencies. From the reports of Human Right Watch in January 2019, the United Nations launched Nigerian Regional Refuge Response Plan (RRRP) with appeal for \$135 million to produce aid to displaced civilians. In the same January, Chinese government pledge \$5.5million to purchase military equipments to support Nigerian government in countering insurgency. As the humanitarian conditions keeps deteriorating, in August 2019, Agnes Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions visited Nigeria, and in no. 2 of her overview statement she states;

*The warning signs are flashing bright red: increased number of attacks and killings over the last five years with a few notable exception; increased criminality and spreading insecurity, widespread failure by the federal authorities to investigate and hold perpetrators to account, even for mass killings; a lack of public trust and confidence in the judicial institutions and state institutions more generally; high level of resentment and grievances within and between communities; toxic ethno-religious narratives and “extremist” ideologies-characterized by dehumanization of the “others” and denial of legitimacy of the others’ claims; a generalized break down of the rule of law, with particular acute consequences for the most*

*vulnerable and impoverished populations of Nigeria. (UN HRC, 2019).*

The above report and the raised issues were reflections on the state of violence and insecurity in Nigeria as of 2019. The story keeps on exacerbating in 2020 as the perpetrators of the criminal acts are currently being decriminalized and thus, authoritatively having the better part of the knife in Nigeria polity. In other words their might is availing them the right over everyone and everything in Nigeria.

On the other part of the global determinant for a failed state which is extreme poverty, in the 2020 Global Finance ranking of the GDP based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) (Ventura, 2020), Nigeria ranked 55<sup>th</sup> with 6054 (\$), despite its overwhelming rich natural resources. In any case, the findings of the World Poverty Clock in 2018 saw Nigeria overtaking India with highest number of people living in extreme Poverty (CNN, Tue., June 26, 2018), with around half of the entire population thought to be living on less than \$1.90 a day. The economic events in Nigeria in the year 2020 in conjunction with the Covid-19 Pandemic, let Nigeria sink down deeper in poverty as the Federal government projected the contraction of the economy (GDP) by 4.4 percent (Emeka A, Babajide, K., Egwuatu, P. & Ebohm M. 2020).

From the foregoing, it is both logical and factual to state that Nigeria is a failed state, drawing from the global determinant conditions of a failed state. The dual increase in poverty rate and insecurity of lives and property found in Nigeria and escalated by governments' ineptitude to put the dire situation in control inexorably destroys the Nigerian structure of nationhood. As the government has proved incapacitated to restore the status quo of nationhood through preservation of lives and property, the divided populace has been left to struggle for the survival of the fittest, where terrorism, banditry and violent agitations have become more trading commodities for socio-political identifications and power acquisition, than diplomatic toleration. In fact in Nigeria today, dialogue and peaceful demonstrations have become the opium of the powerless.

**The Current State of the Nigerian Polity:**

It is really quite pathetic to learn that when one googles "2020 in Nigeria", the first two events recorded in Wikipedia reads as follows;

- . 3 January, 2020- 19 people are killed and homes and other buildings are burned by unidentified gunmen in Tawari, Kogi State.
- . 6 January, 2020 - Gamboru bombing: 30 killed and 35 injured in a bomb explosion in Gamboru, Borno State, apparently by Boko Haram. (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>).

When this horrible news of violence, fear and destruction of lives and property greet a nation in the early days of the year, it indicates that the polity had been in great distress. Simply put, the Nigerian political structure is unstable. For Yaghojaju and Akinola (2019), Nigerian government like many developing nations underperforms due to lack of state capacity to deal with contemporary complexities of governance. In their words, “the nature and characters of the political leadership explains the Nigerian state incapacity for effective governance”. Towards specifying the level of incapacity of Nigerian governance, they state thus; “The state has failed in three major areas; security of lives and properties, promotion of the rule of law, and the provision of visionary leadership.” It is politically obvious that these three areas play a collaborative role in either strengthening or dismantling the structure of a nation state. But the political fact remains that many other countries have issues of political leadership since no nation can claim to have a perfect system of governance. The Trump administration under the republican government is severely suffering political punches from its arch opposition, the democrats, in the United States of America. Same is obtainable in many developed nation like Japan that saw Shimzo Abe resign from office out of leadership critics. However, in all these circumstances, the security of lives and property is held sacrosanct, protected under the rule of law in these governments. Their approach to life and property is motivated by the human fact that protection of life is the right of every human and right to possession of property is a human factor. It is these fundamentals of social coexistence espoused by John Locke in his principle of representative governance, that remain the last struck that disintegrates any nation.

In Nigeria, the incapacity of the rule of law to protect the incessant killings in the guise of police brutality, inter-communal clashes, insurgency, banditry, political clashes, cultism, terrorism and many more criminal extermination of human lives, destroy the polity such that no other socio-political engagements can be deemed practicable. Relating to this state of the country, Yagboyaju & Akinola (2019) notes; “[W]ith the weakness of the Nigerian state and its ineffectiveness, it has become challenging to eradicate impoverishment, engage in infrastructural development, and stem the tides of insurgency and terrorism, which have the potency to derail the country’s moderate political development”.

In any case, the political development of Nigeria in 2020 is not just moderate but misfit to stand the social existence challenge of protection of life and property. The level of proliferation of arms and trading of lives with power juxtaposes the fact of state failure in upholding its fundamental constitutional duty. In politicizing ethnicity and religion, the lives of many Nigerian populace have be continually scarifies on the altar of violence. Relating to this view, the Nigerian Security Tracker (NST), a project of the Council on Foreign Relations’ Africa Program, submits;

*Violence among ethnic groups, farmers, and herdsmen  
sometimes acquires religious overtones... Government*

*soldiers kill civilians indiscriminately. Police are notorious for extrajudicial murder. (CFR, 2020).*

The first three reports of their recent survey read thus;

- August 22: Police killed three Shiite protesters in Kaduna.
- August 23: Two States Security Service Operations and twenty-one IPOB members were killed during a clash in Enugu East, Enugu
- August 24: Gunmen attacked a school, killing one and kidnapping seven students and one teacher in Chikun, Kaduna.

In their ten reported cases between August 22 and 28, 2020, it was all about killing spree of the *mightier army*. In these incidences, the political struggles for ethnic superiority backed by the power of the *sword*, are traded in the seeming silence of the government. Simmering between religious intolerance and ethnical genocide, the southern Kaduna crises has been consistently swept under the carpet through political dominance. Describing the ordeals of the state, Kolawole (2020) states;

*The Kaduna killings are, ironically, not perpetrated by only one side. There are aggressors and victims on both sides of the divided. When one side suffers more casualties than the other, there is always a desire for reprisal to 'even things up.' Life is so cheap that it seems killing competitions are being organized on a home-and-away format...The reaction after every round of riots and killings is always the same: Muslims queuing behind Muslims and Christians queuing behind Christians. The last thing anybody wants to know is what the issues are and who is at fault".*

In this finding, Kolawole indicates that the fundamental cause of these problems is “deep-seated animosity and bitterness” between ethnic divides supported by power, which also reflects in the Nigerian conundrum. Nigerian conundrum which is simply political intolerance has led to political divides, agitations, election malpractices and defiance to the rule of law, and these are summarily propagated through violent killings.

### **Trading Violence**

Since violence turned to become the political watchword, insurgency thrived. *Boko Haram* sect in Nigeria has graduated from an insurgent group to world ranked terrorist group. The Nigerian Guardian report of August 19, 2020, reported that: “Jihadists linked to the so-called Islamic State group have taken hundreds of hostages in a town in Northeast Nigeria.... Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) ‘terrorists’ late Tuesday overran Kukuwa in the Lake Chad region, seizing people who had just returned to their homes after spending nearly two years in displacement camps...” The United Nations, on Friday of the same week reported that 10.6 million out of 13 million people in the conflict-ravaged states of Borno,

Adamawa and Yobe would need humanitarian assistance this year (m.guardian.ng). These attacks have brought the prowess of Boko Haram to an enviable height for other insurgent groups, where they are reaping financial rewards from the country. In *Promise of War* published in 2nd July 2020, by Nextier SPD, a report states that “13 militant groups in the Niger Delta that has earlier accepted a ceasefire on account of the Federal Government’s amnesty programme have threatened to resume hostilities”(reliefweb.int). The worst case scenario is that they have formed a group called Coalition of Niger Delta Agitators (CNDA).

Since violence turned to be the political watchword, banditry has become an item in the Nigerian catalogue of political events. As the North East of Nigeria is occupied with the terrors of terrorism, the Northwest and some parts of central of Nigeria are battling with the terrors of bandits. In a 2020 special report of ACAPS (an International Independent Information Provider), the crisis severity, impact, humanitarian conditions, complexity and access constraints of banditry in Nigeria is very high. The overview of the report states;

*Banditry violence has affected populations living in Nigeria’s Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina states in the northwest. About 21 million people living in these states have been exposed to insecurity from activities of bandits.... The violence has affected about 35 out of 92 local government areas in the 4 states. By March 2020, more than 210,000 people have been internally displaced. More than 350,000 refugees have crossed communal borders to Maradi in Niger Republic by the beginning of March 2020 ([www.acaps.org](http://www.acaps.org))*

In a cumulative record, as on 26/08/2020, at least 1,126 villagers have been killed and 380 people abducted by groups of unidentified armed men in Nigeria’s northwest between January and June 2020. The condition has not been better, in a nation where war is not waged.

Since violence turned to be the political watchword, cultism, inter-communal clashes and political thuggery have become systematized and gained recognizable identity in Nigeria. The menace of cultism is no longer a threat to Nigerian universities, but to communities in most eastern and western parts of Nigeria. In seeking identity and pseudo protection, many youths belong to many secret cult groups in the country perpetrating dastardly acts in the name of struggle for survival and quest for power (Babatunde, 2018). In this misguided struggles, lives and property are lost. From the 2020 report of Amnesty International, Nigeria; “At least 60 people were killed in 2019 alone in various communities of Rivers State, especially Khaba and Gokana Local Government Areas”. And in their observation, the director general Osa Ojigbo noted that; “The authorities have failed to bring those responsible for these horrific crimes to justice and have allowed a climate of impunity to fuel further violence.” Today, the Nigerian dailies may not conclude their daily reporting without recording incidents of cult

clashes. Their cult actions mutate to gang robbery, thuggery, communal clashes, drug peddling and sexual abuses. The Vanguard news of April 14, 2020, reports that hoodlums, “said to be members of robbery/cult gangs known as *Awawa Boys* and *One Million Boys*, reportedly invaded neighboring suburbs.... Subjecting residents of the areas to untold harassment and intimidation after which they carted away huge sums of money and valuables” ([www.vanguard.com](http://www.vanguard.com)). The same kind of group attacks with proliferation of arms and ammunitions are found in the activities of kidnappers in the East, marauding Fulani herdsmen and different street urchins always known as “*area boys*”; who maimed and smother lives out of fellow citizens.

In all these atrocious crimes, where is the government? In one of his quotes, Gen. Abacha stated that; “*if insurgency lasts for more than 24 hours, the government has a hand in it*”. (from Abacha’s daughter Gumsu Sani Abacha @G-Sparking, 2014). The attitudes, approaches and intervention of rule of law of the Federal Government of Nigeria toward the activities of insurgency, banditry and communal clashes of different sorts depict political arbitration. For their government, the United States of America do not negotiate with terrorists, so as to show a complete rejection of such action. In Nigeria, Boko Haram members who have committed all sorts of crimes, in a struggle that has anti-developmental orientation were given amnesty to its members who claim to have repented. In the government programme the repentant members will be reintegrated and absorbed back into the society without any legal process, while the victims are still nursing their wounds. Even with the amnesty programme, dozens of lives are lost in 2020 in the hands of dreaded but pardoned sect. While Nigerian government is complaining of difficulties in fighting the group, Chadian troops claimed to have more than 1000 Boko Haram fighters killed in Lake Chad in retaliation of the 92 soldiers of country killed by Boko Haram (Aljazeera, 09 April, 2020).

In a similar farce of governments intervention in security of lives and property, in 2019 Zamfara State Government in the leadership of their governor, Bello Metawalle, negotiated with the bandits so as to end the insecurity in the state and allow the people to go about their normal activities. (Punch, July 2019). Having toed the same line and latter said to have regretted it, the governor of Katsina State, Aminu Masari, bemoaned the fresh attack by bandits which left many dead, saying that the bandits betrayed the state government (premium times, June 3, 2020). Even in pulling out of the supposed peace agreement deal by the government, Aljazeera news of 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 reported that bandits killed 23 Nigerian soldiers in northwest. Just like the actions of the bandits, the Fulani herdsmen, cult groups, and thugs proliferate arms, kill, kidnap and maim people at their own discretion while the government covertly trade with the perpetrators in the markets of negotiation, agreements and

amnesty platforms. The question, within these states of political affairs and their endemic consequence to human survival remain; what do they make a Nigerian person?

### **‘Might is Right ’: The Psychology of Nigerian Politics**

When the government who have been entrusted with the sole right of protection of lives and property is found wanting in its duties, the citizens are left to make their life choices. The way Nigeria government has identified with and cuddled with violence projects, nurses in the psyche of the people that might is right. This is the only psychological framework upon which the many actions of government, the bandits, the terrorists and many other crime mongers establish their belief principles. The human actions are prodded by the psychological disposition built by socio-cultural experience. In their psychic analysis of *Inputs-Processes-Outputs* (IPO) in human cognitive model of optimal experience, Simlesa, Guegan, and Buisine (2018), compared the *Flow* of actions from the mind with an engine that converts gasoline into motion and optimizes the capacity of the engine parts to produce speed, known as performance episode. In their IPO flow framework analysis, the model is structured thus;

- \* Inputs : (i) the skill-challenge balance  
(ii) clear proximal goals and immediate feedback
- \* Cognitive process: (i) attention  
(ii) motivation
- \* Output (i) subjective experience of absorption,  
(ii) task achievements, the fruits of invested effort,  
(iii) positive affects (pg. 236)

For brief explanation:

*Inputs reflect the resources that individuals have at their disposal for entering the process of flow.... Core processes are the mediating and/or moderating mechanisms that transform inputs into outputs.... Psychological outputs from reaching the optimal experience follow [the mentioned] three sets of outcome.*

The IPO *Flow* cognitive framework correlates, explains and interpret Nigerian political environment and the psychical operation of the Nigerian person. When the socio-political structure operates in the blatant trading of violence and power, the mind of the individual character is fraught with the feeling of struggle for might. Correlating to the framework, the *Input* here is the culture of violence and power tussle. The cognitive *processing* is struggle for might and the *outcome* ranges from criminal actions of insurgency, banditry, terrorism and other political vices. Having explained the trading of violence which is the input, let us consider its cognitive process, ‘*might is right*’.

*Might is right*' is a political maxim where right and wrong is determined by those in power. As far back as the *presocratic* era of Homer and Hesiod, this idea was addressed as “*woe to the conquered*” in one of earliest fables, “The Hawk and the Nightingale” recorded in Greek (Gibbs, 2002). Some stories in the fable which reflect on the arbitrary use of power, deserve to be recapped for in-depth understanding of the notion of might is right;

*Miserable thing, why do you cry out? One far stronger than you now holds you fast, and you must go wherever I take you and if I please I will make meal of you, or else let you go. He is a fool who tries to withstand the stronger, for he does not get the mastery and suffers pain besides his shame. (Perry 567, 137)*

This perception of and approach to power which was represented as a fable by Hesiod, thrived in the historical tussle for power and conquest as a totalitarian theory of justice (white, 1973). This theory of justice asserts that a society's view of right and wrong is determined by those in power. In other words, although people have their personal ideas of good, only those strong enough to overcome obstacles and challenges can put their ideas of good or bad into effect, as well as spreading them as a standard to the society at large. The society itself is made to accept such standard through coercive force and intimidation from a government described in Greek language as *Kratocracy* (Montague 1902) meaning “*government of the strong*”. Thus, empires, states governments in earlier political history applied the tyrannical government of the strong which was summarized in Niccollo Machiavelli's treatise, *The Prince*. *The Prince* as a political credo is summarily depicted “*as godless scheming and self interested*” struggle (Machiavelli, 1532). Thus, stating his reasons why absolute power should be the judge of human actions he opines;

*One can say this in general of men: they are ungrateful, disloyal, insincere and deceitful, timid of danger and avid of profit: love is a bond of obligation which these miserable creatures break whenever it suits them to do so; but fear holds them fast by a dread of punishment that never passes. (Prince CW, 62).*

This approach to understanding human reactions stands as the basic assumption upon which Machiavelli proposed to the Princes, the government of absolute power, where the will of the Prince must be the general will. The proposal of absolute power was, in Machiavelli's view, not only meant for the Prince, but stands as a practical standard of acquisition of fortune in human activities. Thus, he opines that, “it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because *Fortuna* is a woman and it is necessary, in order to keep her under, to beat and maul her.... therefore always like a woman, she is the friend of young men, because they are less cautious, more spirited, and with boldness to master her” (92)

It is the spirit of personal power justification that left man struggling for survival of the fittest in the state of nature. Where the extent of might determines the extent of right, the law of nature which provides for the protection of life remains the only available right in the state of nature. In describing the state of nature, Hobbes states that there is: “*no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violence death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.... The condition of man.... Is a condition of war of everyone against everyone*” (Hobbes, 1651). Thus, when might determines justice, survival of the fittest ensues, leaving no room for social existence.

Just as earlier noted in the introduction, in a keen observation, the tumultuous events in Nigeria substantiate Hobbes' view on the absence of society where life of men is poor, nasty, brutish and short. The average Nigerian person sees violence as more result-oriented in achieving desired aims, leading to insurgency, banditry, terrorism and criminal vices. Thus, individuals develop the mental framework of *might* as the weighing balance of judging right and wrong actions. The government of Nigeria feeds and complements this mental framework by trading and negotiating with agents whose destructive capacity takes more life than others. And then, the structure of social existence within the country is nonetheless a failed state. Lamenting on this deplorable structure of the country, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo on 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 said;

*I do not appreciate that you all feel sad and embarrassed as most of us feel as Nigerians with the situation we find ourselves in. Today, Nigeria is fast drifting to a failed and badly divided state; economically our country is becoming a basket case and poverty capital of the world, and socially, we are firming up as unwholesome and insecure country (Premium Times).*

### **Re-fixing the Nigerian Person for a New Nigeria**

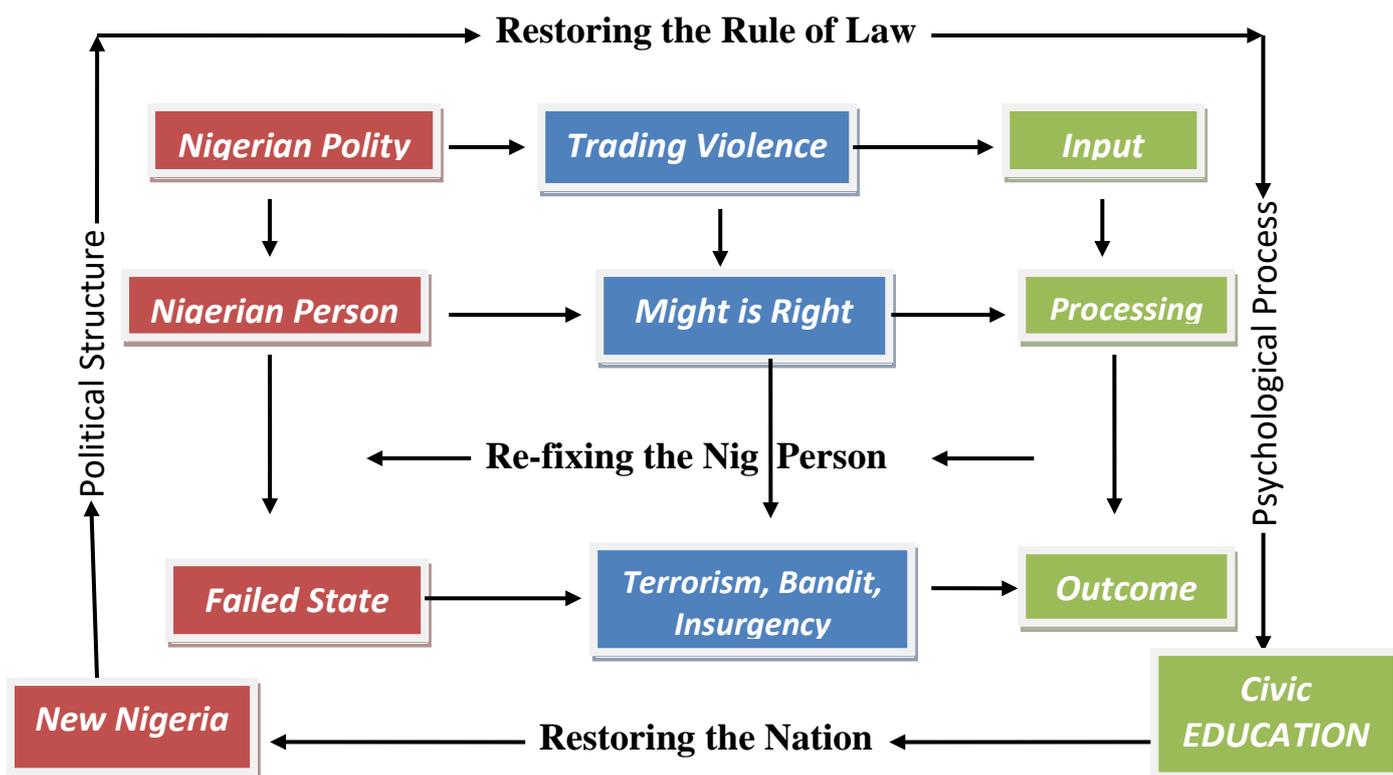
The IPO cognitive flow model is very apt in describing the conditions of Nigerians towards Nigerian failed state. In the same vein it serves as a better model in re-fixing the Nigerian person for a new Nigeria. The *input-process-outcome* is similar to computer ‘*garbage in garbage out*’ system, but the cognitive ability to discern, adapt and readapt differs education from programming, respectively. In re-fixing the psyche of a Nigerian person, the fearful state of violence informs that power is not right, but education is power. It is in the power of education that man learns that humanity can transcend the state of nature through the establishment of a society. It is towards buttressing the need for human establishment of a society that John Locke’s famous political version of social contract may never be outlawed; “*wherever therefore any number of men are so united into one society, as to quit everyone his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there only is a political, or civil society*” (Locke, 1821, 89).

As the wills of the people are organized in a representative government through the “*Rule of law*” it becomes sacrosanct to psychologically *input* the faith and confidence on the rule of law in the Nigerian person through the power of civic education and implementation of the provisions of the law. In the cognitive processing of the laws, the Nigerian person absorbs the precepts and becomes convinced and motivated that the law is for him and for all. And then, produces actions that are civil oriented and cooperative as outcome of *civic IPO* cognitive flow. When the *civic* psychic framework replaces the *might* and becomes operational for every Nigerian person, both those in government and the led harkens to, ‘*Nigerians’ call obey, to serve our father land*”

**Conclusion**

For Nigeria to remain as a country, the people must revisit the conditions of their co-existence through dialogue. This action must be imminent through rational and sincere collaboration of the three arms of government, both at the federal and state levels. The dialogue must seek to interrogate the Nigerian law, consolidate it, and garb it with patriotic character rather than tribalistic and nepotic inducements. Hence, none is above the hammer of law, as the law takes its course. The terrorist, the bandits, the cultists and every other crime peddler must face the power of the law. For the fact that when one law is thwarted, the others follow suit; it is therefore, only in the interest of fairness that the law determines right or wrong for both might and low. And only then, can we possibly restore the Nigerian failed state.

**Diagrammatic Representation of the Study**



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