

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Democracy and National Development: A Focus on Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is a government form based on the general consent, is seen to have become common in global nations; and that if the tenet is followed it facilitates national development. This study used the content analysis method to examine democracy in Nigeria and national development. It was found that some pre-colonial administrations in Nigeria had embraced democratic tenets before the colonial masters came; the difference, however, border on structural arrangements. It was found that the version of western democracy has not adapted the Nigerian environment, making its practice difficult and also difficult to attain national development. It was also found that the phase Nigeria democracy passed, especially, during the military regimes has not provided opportunities for development. The ethnic diversity of Nigeria and the inabilities of leadership to manage it was found to pose legislative influence on democracy and national development. It was found that the Nigerian environment lacks the absorptive capacity to accommodate liberal democracy considering the death of institutions and the skewed electoral process. It was found that the absence of effective democracy in Nigeria disarticulated the pre-colonial democratic structure, and the exclusivist approach to liberal democracy and the rule of the game, manifest in incessant agitations, militancy, insurgency, banditry, and general underdevelopment. It was also suggested that a change in leadership approach is necessary, more importantly, to allow a breath of democratic participation in policy-making for national development. It was also recommended that all forms of discrimination are addressed and that constitutionalism should be upheld.

Keywords: Democracy, national development, nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, democracy as a principle of governance is common in almost all countries of the world – both developed and developing. Globalization on cultural hybridization among



nations has accentuated democratic trends. Liberal scholarship sees democracy specifically as concerned with the "movement of civilization, and that societies are fast abandoning cultural heterogenization, hybridization, and perhaps hegemonization (Eke, 2005, pp.162; Ikegbu et al. 2009; Akpan 2004; Ogar and Ogar 2018). He argues that democratic practices are becoming universalized as both equalitarian and majoritarian rule (Eke, 2005, pp. 163).

Many scholars have reasoned that democratic principles are sine-qua-non to national development. This is perhaps after putting into consideration such democratic principles as liberty, rule of law, freedom of speech, etc. but most countries, especially in the developing countries, only sing democracy without actually practiced those principles. Although history revealed that some precolonial societies such as Igbos practiced the grace-type democracy, the majority of them in Africa were used to autocratic political organizations (Osi 2003). In Nigeria, the Emirate system of the Hausa-Fulani exemplifies this assertion. To this person and others like them, liberal democracy came to them as a forced political value. So what is now practiced in Nigeria could hardly approximate real liberal democracy- it is an inverted variance of it. (Osi, 2003). Therefore, if democracy and its hallmarks induce national development, democracy as practiced by the development, democracy as practiced by the developing countries can hardly do so unless it undergoes some improvements. This is seen in the light of the 1990s as African countries attempted to embrace the new culture and have a clean bill of political health with rights to political practical participation and pluralism.

This paper, therefore, examines democracy and national development with an emphasis on Nigeria. After the introduction, section I will explore some theoretical issues, section II will examine a brief history and features of Nigerian democracy on national development, section III will examine the effects of Nigerian democracy on national development, while section IV will prefer policy option, the last section will be summary and conclusion.

METHODOLOGY: Content analysis method will be used in the course of this study to analyze data that would come from extant literature on the area.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

A universally accepted definition of democracy has been elusive. The various definitions advanced by social scientists are relative. Although liberal scholars claim that democracy has an Athenian origin, we shall not completely subscribe to that, since as earlier mentioned, African history implicated the existence of Igbo democracy in pre-colonial times. Accepting the origin of democracy, therefore, depends on which of the ancient societies that first came into existence Igbo, Greece, or perhaps any of the ancient societies trace the existence of democracy many years.

To Eke (2005, pp. 163), democracy means population in the decision making process with its core component as political pluralism through party politics in a free, fair and periodic election to enhance freedom of choice of leaders. Ayinde (2004, pp.105) posits that democracy is characterized by such practices that guarantee representation and participation under conditions of liberty provided by the rule of law, to entrench the principles of checks and balances between various layers of government and society. Joseph (2013, pp. 36); Kanu

(2012), and Chukwu (2011), all in Eke (2005) see democracy from the prism of representation through a periodically organized free and fair election. Roskin, et al (188, pp. 66) in Eke (2005) aptly state that democracy is a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. Shively in Eze, (2015, pp. 70) views democracy as a state in which all full adult citizens vote at regular intervals to choose, from among alternative candidates, the people who will be in charge of setting the state policies.

Appadorai (1968) in Ofoeze (2002) categorizes the fundamental principles of democracy to include political equality and majority rule. From these definitions of democracy, it is easy to believe the liberal scholars that democracy facilitates national development as its nature connotes. However, viewed from the Marxists prism democracy is seen as a government practice that guarantees the control of policymaking by those who control the substructure of society. To the Marxists, what the liberals see as the majority is a reflection of the few. The view of the Marxists on democracy is actually what plays out in developing nations. (Eweka, 2009).

However, to be objective, democracy and national development will correlate only if leadership continuously strife toward political and socio-economic transformation. To achieve this, there has to be flexibility and dynamism – politically, economically, and socially reflecting the realities of the clime, and immediate demands of the citizenry. With no sentiments attached to either liberal or Marxist views, democratic practices should necessarily guarantee citizenry rights of participation, descent, welfare on social and economic spheres of life. These, of course, translate to adequate provision of Medicare, infrastructure, power, good communication network system, industries, and education. (Chekerendu, 2003).

Dissent here means the right to criticize government policies on various media outlets and possibly dramatizing it through peaceful or, when necessary, violent demonstrations (Chikerendu, 2003).

National development could come through democracy when the democratic institutions are functional (Uche, 2015) policies designed by leadership "must" be participatory – none should be discriminatory. National integration must be emphasized and with the total willingness of citizenry to accept the legitimacy of leadership (Uche, 2015).

Kerbane (1989, pp.163) in Aguwa (2010, pp. 10) argues that democracy and development are mutually complementary. Democratic institutions vis--vis national development serve as persistent and connected sets of formal and informal rules that prescribe behavioral roles, order activities, and shape expectations. Eke (2005) concludes by saying that democracy constitutes a reliable vehicle for development and modernization. Development viewed from a Marxist perspective or structural functionalist perspectives readily anchor on the betterment of the lives of citizens in a political society.

NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY EXAMINED

The present features of Nigerian democracy stem from her colonial antecedent. As earlier mentioned, democracy had thrived in some pre-colonial Nigerian communities before

the colonial masters transplanted theirs. These pre-colonial democracy forms were only relative, characterized by simple structures and organizations this simplicity in structures and organizations perhaps, constitute the major difference it has with liberal democracy (Osi, 2003). To some scholars, the less complex democratic structures of the pre-colonial societies which were recklessly disarticulated by colonialism would have made development faster since they adjusted better to the environment. According to Osi (2003), the liberal democratic formula was not the appropriate panacea for the development of Nigeria considering her endogenous factors. Perhaps, there would have been some embellishments (to get it "Africanized")

Another depleting factor of Nigerian democracy is the crucial phases it passed through which negatively impact on development. These phases "are from traditional institutions to colonial forms of government, to independence; to military despotism and then military transformation into civilian governments" (Osi, 2003).

Of all these phases military intervention into Nigerian democracy posed the worst setback to both democracy and national development (Egbo, 2003). If the military had not intervened in politics, perhaps, the condition of Nigerian politics would not have been bad (Eni, 2010). Civilization or any form of development can hardly be organized around the core of militarism. During their time, the military made consulate of democratic insulations and structures in Nigeria (Aozie, 2019) constitutions were destroyed and replaced with decrees and edits at the national and state levels respectively (Ikenna, 2008). Public opinion, pressure groups, political parties, and the legislature were crushed under the despotic booths of the military. The judiciary was imputed to impotence. The long period of military interregnum in Nigeria deteriorated democracy to the detriment of national development (Egbo, 2003).

Another feature of Nigerian democracy which is detrimental to national development is the inability of western democracy to penetrate the psyche of the heterogeneous citizenry spread. The ethnic groups of Nigeria are strange to each other, making national integration elusive. But liberal democracy hardly thrives where moves are not made toward the transformation of the behavioural and attitudinal orientation of citizenry (Ibekwe, 2009). Rather than seek ways to achieve this ideal, democracy in Nigeria ever than before, is characterized by ethnic politicization, polarization, and dichotomy (Osi, 2003).

Uga (2000, pp. 59 -63) has argued that democracy is not a potted plant, which can be transplanted into any soil and grown without work. That implies that Nigeria democracy must be natured before it entrenches, to warrant any form of development. Ejiofor in Eke (2005, p.176) unequivocally defended this position, that the premise of the social condition of democracy in developing depends on the enabling capacity of these societies to harbor the tenets of democracy as a necessary first – steps to development. **Another scholar calls it "the absorptive capacity of communities toward Democracy"** (osinachi, 2009). Eke (2005) further argues that Nigeria belongs to the poorest of poor nations and implanting a system as expensive as democracy, therefore, requires gradual and steady moral political suasion in the implementation.

For democracy to engender national development, there must be a sincere effort at institutionalizing democracy which leads to turning the economy around, redressing our battered educational system; mending our traumatized psyche, replacing current disillusionment

among our people with a healthy skepticism; ensuring the rapid expansion of our technological bases, tracking the current unacceptable and intolerable level of poverty; transforming our rural areas into centers of production; and cementing unity rather than fanning the embers of disunity in our country (Osinachi, 2009).

Furthermore, the electoral process in Nigeria is applauding. 70 percent of the electorates are still disenfranchised mainly as a result of illiteracy. Rigging reduces the chances of choice of leadership. All forms of intimidation are deployed to win votes endangering the lives of the electorates (Ekpe, 2003). 65 percent of the leaders are ringed into office. This is perhaps, why they remain irresponsible and unresponsive to the yearnings of the citizenry while on power (Ekpe 2003). Amana (2005) notes that Nigeria's democratic prostitution through ringing and other associated ill of the society is wholesome. To him, the worst experience of ringing is the covert and even overt manipulation of the liberty of individuals through the imposition of restrictions and ban of selected political office seekers.

Another feature of Nigerian democracy is the dubious and undemocratic disposition of political gladiators. Their attitudes go contrary to democracy and national development. It is this class that intensified the polarization of the ethnic groups in Nigeria. Most of them sponsored military entry into politics, due to their selfish interests. Their inability to protect and defend their national unity, and restore law accentuated militarism. The carelessness of civilians made people perceive the military as an enabling institution for the country's development, which of course became a mirage. From 1999 till date, the parties on the saddle have not indicated any commitment to democracy and national development. Daily newsreel with cases of hate speeches, corruption, the formation of parallel organizations, agitations against marginalization, secession bid, etc. (Ogbulafor, 2008; Ikegbu et al. 2013). The Economy remains dependent while the unemployment rate is catastrophic. Religious bigotry and ethnicity manifest in obnoxious and stringent manipulation of the political system. Manipulations to favor ethno religious ends inform the sordid spate of political violence – at the entire points of the compass in Nigeria.

Democracy in Nigeria is characterized by a lack of tolerance and compromise, and this promotes the militarization of politics. The most political crisis experienced in Nigeria is the consequences of political intolerance, which most times became an open invitation to military take over. (Egbo, 2003) mention will be made here of the 1962/63 census crisis, 1964 electoral crisis, 1965 western region crisis, and a plethora of assassinations and intimidations across the country in recent times. To Olonyi, (2000, pp. 115-125), political intolerance and its attendant crisis in Nigeria promoted Isolation, deprivation, subjugation, stagnation, and general negation of the fundamental principles of democracy which forestalls national development. Iroh (2005, pp. 33) adds that the crisis in Nigerian politics warranted by intolerance not only negatively affects democracy but also brings about geopolitical prejudice, bitterness, malice, viciousness, acrimony, division, vendetta, vengefulness, and witch-hunting, all of which combine to militate against national development. In the main, the centrifugal forces threatening our national existence are direct results of political intolerance characterizing Nigerian politics.

Another problem beclouding Nigerian democracy is corruption and institutional decay. The political parties, mass media judiciary, and legislature are all immense in corruption. Most

embarrassing is the level of corruption bestriding the judiciary the supposedly last hope of the common man. The national assembly was lambasted by Obasanjo as unarmed bandits; arguing further that the constituency allowances they do receive are a huge fraud and corruption. The strike action in 2018 by the (ASSV) was partly informed by the so much money spent on the individual benefits of members of national assembly while the education sector suffers neglect. Rather than make pro-active, development-oriented laws, members of the National Assembly are busy milking the state dry. Okaya (2015), Hamid and Aikhanu (2015) observe that Nigeria judiciary and other democratic institutions, as most systems, are biased, corrupt, and ill-positioned for the transparent discharge of democratic demands as umpires. While delaying the state of affairs, they concluded that corruption is on the endemic problem of the Nigerian democracy.

Therefore, although democracy was transplanted to Nigeria, the environment was not made absorptive enough to accommodate it. The way it is further handled by leaders does not make it good enough to engender national development.

EFFECT ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Politically, socially and economically, Nigerian national development has been Emasculated as a result of a lack of effective democracy. The transplanted democratic ideology, master-minded by erstwhile colonialists, disarticulated pre-colonial democratic structures that were not only endogenous to Nigerians but also adapted to the anthropological dictates and social conditions of the environment (Ogbulafor, 2018). It eventually became an epidemic when Nigerian political gladiators failed to either extricate and exonerate Nigerian politics from the cultural mix or completely imbibe the tenets of the hybrid (Ofoeze, 2002, Amadikwa, 2007).

Today, Nigeria's democracy does not exude the expected democratic flavor needed to ginger national development. This is simply because, by birth and inclination the behavioral orientation of Nigerians – mainly leadership – is asymmetrically opposed to them. (Ngele, 2006). As earlier pointed out, in the collective lives of Nigerians, ethnicity, religious bigotry, greed, all of which are anti-democratic and anti-development are unfortunately entrenched. Socially, democracy and national development can hardly thrive in the presence of ethnoreligious strife and sentiment. Discrimination of any type, suspicion, and hatred among groups have made national integration and national development elusive (Obinna, 2009) unity among ethnic groups in Nigeria would have enhanced effective and easy mobilization of their competitive advantages for national development, unfortunately, this is absent. In the main, political intolerance and exclusivist approach to the rule of the game, has manifested in incessant agitations, militancy, insurgency, and banditry all of which are anti-thetical to national integration, democracy and national development (Uba, 2009).

Economically, Nigeria is dependent – it is also a mono-cultural and consumptive economy (Udoh, 2017). Political instability resulting from a dysfunctional economy and insecurity has reduced foreign investment. So also are institutional decay and complete inundation of the social, legal and general business environment. Unsteady power supply and high crime wave all hold Nigeria economy stagnant. Lack of industrialization, inability to



diversify, and under-developed rural segments, have combined to undermine economic development (Bassey, 2016).

POLICY OPTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

For democracy to achieve national development, the tenets of democracy must be embraced (Bassey & Udoudom, 2018). In embracing liberal democracy, the Nigerian environment must first and foremost, be put into consideration. If adopting western democracy is impassible, then Nigeria still has enough opportunity to revisit the democratic structures and institutions of pre-colonial times, or perhaps, draw from both democracy values to attain a hybrid that should reflect the peculiarities of the citizenry and environment.

Secondly, there has to be a collective action toward national integration. All forms of ethno-religious sentiment and discrimination must be sincerely addressed. Federalism as a system of government should be practiced amidst an effective constitution from and the rule of law. All democratic institutions must be made to be functional intent on achieving national development.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that democracy had existed in some parts of Nigeria at pre-colonial times and that the forceful transplantation of its liberal variance has not adequately adapted to the Nigerian environment which is the major problem in Nigeria today. We also argued that despite this shortcoming, leadership has not been able to either embrace this new value or draw from both sides to come up with a hybrid that will properly ginger national development. It was advised that it is only through a collective effort that democracy and national integration could be achieved for national development.

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