

Liberalism and the Challenges of Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to attempt a critical appraisal of the pace, practice, pattern, priorities, problems and prospects of Nigerian democracy. While it remains true that Nigeria is governed by democratically elected leaders at the federal and state levels, Nigeria is yet to institutionalize democracy after a century of existence as a political entity. The paper discusses some of the impediments to the institutionalization of democracy in Nigeria after more than half a century of political independence. Some of these are the country's colonial background interspersed by vagaries engendered by deep-rooted ethnicity; complacent and spendthrift leadership. The paper obtained its data from secondary source materials and employs the historical method of data analysis simple descriptive collation and analysis of historical data. The study discovered that though, democracy in Nigeria is flawed and threatened by both internal and external factors such as corruption and external interference but this does not negate the fact that it still preferred democracy more than military dictatorship and authoritarianism. Some of the recommendation provided by this study to help solve some of encumbrances hindering the democratic consolidation of the country includes; the fact that Nigeria as a country needs a democracy capable of guaranteeing maximum practice of freedom at its peak by the citizens without any fear of oppression.

Keywords: Liberalism, Liberal-democracy, Democracy, Nigeria.

Introduction

Democracy and Nigeria are like Siamese twins; though conjoined, they are uncomfortable and under intense pressure that could result in all forms of hurt, even death. Although, democracy may not be strange to an overwhelming percentage of Nigerians; what may be strange to them is the brand of democracy that invests, first and foremost, in human and material resources for the purposes of political stability, economic viability, scientific advancement, technological breakthrough, educational development and life-enhancing social services. Given the general optimism that Nigeria was going to be the bastion of democracy in Africa following her independence from Britain in 1960, one should normally expect that by now democracy should be deeply rooted and institutionalized in the country. Unfortunately, Nigeria, as far as the practice and delivery of dividends of liberal democracy is concerned, is yet a cripple that can barely stand let alone walk or run. This paper asserts that Nigerian democracy has series of factors that threatens its progress among this may include the paradoxical nature of African politics (wherein elections are contested and won based on the prevailing challenges of the

people, political parties are also on their own devoid of all forms political ideologies, primordial loyalties in place of national loyalties, government of the day represents and defends the interest of the few powerful while the interest of the majority is submerged, politicization of the mass media among several others). This paper however, concludes that while the practice of liberal-democracy in Nigeria may not be up to expectation, all hope is not lost as the desire for the practice of true democracy amongst Nigerians remains high.

Conceptual Clarifications

The word "liberal" emerged from "liberalism". Hence, Liberalism is a political philosophy or worldview founded on ideas of liberty, which is especially stressed in classical liberalism and equality which is more evident in social liberalism, (Locke, 1689). Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but generally they support ideas such as freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free trade, and private property, free and fair elections, civil rights. It is therefore pertinent to not at this juncture that there exists different liberal-democratic

theorists and virtually all can agree in their endorsement of representative democracy where representatives are chosen in accord with formal procedures combined with state protection of political and civil liberties and a private sphere free of state interference.

State

It will be completely out of place to do away with the concept of state in the study of politics. As we all know social science is discipline of many answers where any concept does not submit itself to any form of acceptable definition and the concept of state is not an exception in this case. The state is the most powerful of all social institutions. It has become one of the important factors in our social life today. Different scholars have defined state differently according to their individual view point. We must note that scholars from two major ideological paradigms have attempted to give a befitting definition to the term stated. Thus, both Liberal and Marxian scholars have neither agreed on a universal definition of the concept of State. Among the definition offered include:

Liberal theorizing on the State, as a concept, contends that the State is a political organization of human society that comprises organized attributes of contemporary institutions like the legislature, executive and judiciary, with respective roles. These are governmental institutions that make and enforce laws that are binding upon the people within a defined geographical territory. Liberal scholarship therefore sees the State as an institution for orderly progress of the society and an embodiment of justice for all, not just for a few Bourgeois class (Locke 1689). Classical Marxist? View of the State therefore shows that it is an institution with established apparatuses purposely and directly meant to defend and maintain a class domination and class exploitation. Thus, the control of the State apparatuses by the ruling elites is for, and in the whole interest of the bourgeoisie (Abbass, 1990; Shaapera, 2009&Abbas, 2010).

Marx Weber gives the rather most popular definition; he defines the state as “the human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force”. Laski (1919) defines state as "a territorial society

divided into Government and subjects claiming with its allotted physical area of supremacy over all other institutions. Bluntschil (1894), asserts that; "the state is a combination or association of men in the form of Government and governed, on a definite territory, united together into a moral organized masculine personality, more shortly person of definite territory.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

In other to critically disengage the intellectual tentacles hovering around the challenges of liberal democracy in Nigeria, this paper has found the elite theory suitable in analyzing the pressing issues relating to Nigerian liberal democratic practices. It is therefore an incontrovertible fact of human history that this theory was popularized by the following proponent who may include: Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), etc. In this theory, elites are presumed as the few powerful people in the society who upholds and wield a lot of influence in the political, economic, and social realms. According to Okereke (2003) argued that “in all societies from societies that very meaningful developed and have barely attained the dawning of civilization down to the most advanced and powerful societies-two classes of people appear-a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class ,always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class ,is directed and controlled by the first ,in a manner that is now more or less legal ,now more or less arbitrary and violent”

Thus, one can easily attest to the fact that the central argument of this theory is that in every society there is always a small portion of the population which takes the major decision in the society. As those decisions have political implications, the elite exercise considerable political influence. Clearly, elite theory describes a government that operates in an undemocratic fashion. Relating the elitist theory to this paper is for some facts that Nigeria is divided along segmental elite lines. However, how this decision is taking side by side the tenets of liberal democracy and its practice in Nigeria is the major concern of the paper. The various principles of liberal-democratic theory highlighted above would be carefully x-rayed in

the light of the Nigerian state. The principles include; government by the consent of the governed, individual liberty, civic equality, and more importantly, private sphere free of state intervention (Locke, 1689).

Government by the Consent of the Governed

This principle is a basic fundamental pillar of the concept of democracy. It can also be termed as representative government which stems from the conduct of free and fair elections competitive elections. Government by consent can only be achieved through the conduct of elections. Elections play important part of representative democracy. Individuals and groups have to compete in an open contest for the peoples votes. When this is done fairly and creditably, the wishes of the people would easily prevail. Nigeria since her independence as a political entity has experienced several types/forms of government; that is, government by the consent of the governed and the government without the consent of the governed, i.e. civilian and military government and regimes.

All the military regimes that we have had in Nigeria have all come into power without the propel approval from the governed/electorates. Hence, it has failed/fall-short of this principle of liberal-democracy. In total, Nigeria experienced her first military intervention in politics on January 15, 1966 and since then there has been four other successful coups, 2 abortive coups, one attempted coup and 3 alleged coups all by different military government at different times in history. However, the government by the consent of the governed which must come from the conduct of a free, fair and competitive elections, has also been slightly dysfunctional due to the fact that elections conducted in Nigeria have to a large extent been far from been free and fair and competitive. Elections serve as one of the major instrument for selecting political officeholders. It serves as means of ensuring accountability and mobilization of the citizens for political participation.

Yet, elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by malpractices such as: election rigging, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes, political intimidation and assassination prior to during and after elections. Elections are critical aspects of democratic framework for governing

modern political societies. They serve as instruments of political choice, mobilization and accountability. In the context of liberal democracy in the world, elections are to facilitate the smooth transition from one civilian administration to the other and help in legitimizing sitting governments. Since her return top civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian experience with general elections has shown that the political elite have not truly come to terms with the referents of elections for democratic sustenance. More often than not, the elite has failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics has failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which prioritizes politics of tolerance, conflict and consensus, bargaining and compromise. They see elections as warfare, characterized by gangsterism and political disorder. Political parties which organize for elections are also, like armband of men and women going to war, where there must be victors and the vanquished. Elections in Nigeria have become warfare where it is a sin to lose, (Vanguard New 2015).

Election is central to the effective functioning of modern representative democracy. Since direct democracy has become almost impossible to practice on account of the large population in every modern political society, electing or selecting political leader through periodic elections has become the norm. This particularly so under liberal-democracy, under liberal-democracy, elections play wider roles such as instruments of accountability, mobilization of the people, and promotion of legitimacy. All these principles/features listed above have been noticeably absent in Nigeria, thereby making void the feature of government by the consent of the governed through the conduct of elections under the general umbrella of liberal-democratic theory. Looking at all the present happenings that are currently beclouding the 2015 general elections, it seems evidently clear that the 2015 general elections would actually have all the trappings of a “liberal-undemocratic” theory that previously surfaced during the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections in Nigeria, (Vanguard New 2015)

Individual Liberty

One of the holding principles/pillars of both

liberalism and liberal-democratic theory is liberty, which is encapsulated in sub-principle such as; civil rights, freedom of press, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, speech, association, etc., i.e. Fundamental Human Rights (John, 1863). All these are needed in a society where the principle of democracy is widely pronounced and held in high esteem. Going by the fact that Nigeria as experienced both sides of the coin of governance, i.e, military and civilian rule. It is imperative to note that there exist different levels of individual liberty. Military regimes in the country are normally known for the suspension of constitution and these constitutions contain the fundamental Human Rights in which the principle of liberty is embedded.

This made the principle of individual liberty to be totally absent in Nigeria during this period. Furthermore, the promulgation of decree No 2 of 1975 also during the military regime is an instance whereby the principle of individual liberty was totally absent. The promulgation of the decree No 2 (1975) granted the state the full rights to arrest detain and prosecute anybody who opposed it policies and government, without giving such an individual the opportunity to stand for trial and appeal before the court of law. In partial contrast, democratic dispensations in Nigeria have not fared any better. Though, civilian/democratic regimes are not known for suspension of constitution, hence the FHRs remain intact. Yet, notwithstanding the principle of liberty still remains seriously threatened.

Different democratic regimes have limited the liberties of citizens of the country in various ways; the freedom of press which is part of the principle of individual liberty has been greatly inhibited and constrained. The Nigerian media only broadcast news items which the government gives it permission to do. Also, despite the promulgation of the freedom of Information bill in 2007, information still has been limited and not free and available to the Nigerian public for scrutiny. Cases of pressmen been suspended and arrested for performing their rightful duties and obligations have also been the order of the day in Nigeria. All these and many other more does not speak well of a country that is widely acclaimed to be practicing liberal-democratic theory.

Civic Equality

According to Mills (1863), one of the leading advocates of liberal-democracy 'the pure idea of democracy' is "government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented", which requires proportional representation so a minority is not denied government representatives, hence he was justly classified as an egalitarian. He insisted not only on political equality, but also social and economic equality. Hence, it can be pointed out here that Mills' principle of civic equality was based on proportional representation, so as to avoid the denial of minority government representatives. Nigeria is a country of extraordinary diversity and extraordinary complexities, these complexities are a reflection of the avalanche of ethnic groups co-habiting the territory and intricacies of interaction among them. Hence, there are over 450 ethnic groups in the country (Yishan, 2011). The avalanche of the ethnicities that are present in the country had made the issue of equality and proportional representation a very difficult task to achieve, despite every attempt by the federal government to achieve a considerable amount of civic equality in every sector of the country. Different measures have been adopted by the federal government of Nigeria to ensure the required level of equality and proportional representation, some of these include; federal character principle and resource allocation, amongst others, (Yishan, 2011)

The federal character principle was a policy that was entrenched in the 1979 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria to cater for the diversity in the country. The principle state thus "the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional. Groups in that government or any of its agencies" according to the designators of this principle, it is described as a distinctive desire to give every citizen a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversity and multiplicities of ethnicities present in the country. Nigeria has over the years experienced

various inter-ethnic rivalries between groups, hence, there was the need and importance to make a provision that would prevent against the domination of the government and its various agencies by a single ethnic group, that is, ensure equality on all levels. However, a twist to the attempt to ensure equality in the country through the entrenchment of this principle has been met by different forms of opposition either directly or indirectly. Some of the critics of this principle have argued that the principle aims at disregarding the major principle of merit in the various appointments into the civil service, military, Police force etc therefore they believed that instead of the principle promoting the idea of equality which it was created for, it otherwise promotes inequality in the country (Yishan, 2011)

Self-Determinism

This is a very crucial principle of liberal-democracy theory. It emphasizes the significant sector of economic, associational, and communicative activity that is largely autonomous from government control, that is, it can also be termed or referred to as a system of capitalism. The Nigerian state is pursuing the economic policies aimed at formation of the market environment, private business, and improvement of investment climate in the state. Three problematic factors have been identified for doing business in Nigeria; access to financing, inadequate supply of infrastructure and corruption, infrastructure that constrains development. Hence, it can be agreed that what actually operates in Nigeria is pseudo-capitalism, which means capitalism that pretends to be what it is really not. Notwithstanding, the government has taken some steps in attempt to be less involved in the economic and other related affairs of the state, therefore undertaking different policies meant to achieve this, some of which include, privatization and deregulation of various sectors of the economy, Yishan, 2011

The federal government of Nigeria through its privatization policies has been able to less interfering in the power sector of the country. The federal government was able to successfully privatize the power sector of the country, that is, the Power Holding Company of Nigeria was successfully handed over to foreign

private investors to take over its management and ownership. However, this is not without having some elements of government stake in the investment. It was reported that some of these foreign companies that hold ownership of this business acted as frontrunners for government politicians who are actually the real owners of this business. Therefore, the earlier claim of Nigeria operating a pseudo-capitalist economy is rightly justified. State has continued to inherit public policies for national development from the International Capitalist system and thus continues to deny its citizens the right to basic amenities of life for socio-economic development. Liberal-democracy in Nigeria is anti-people, anti-intellectual and anti-development. It has zero tolerances for criticism. Additionally, there is de-industrialization and de-democratization, Yishan, 2011.

Liberal democracy in Nigeria has witnessed and still witnessing the cult of mediocrity. Our leaders, from Federal to the Local levels have failed to deliver the dividends of democratic governance to the Nigerians because they themselves do not possess the credentials of good leaders, nor do they seem to have due governance. A good number of them are ill-prepared or un-prepared for the challenges thrust on them by the electorate. Nigeria was and is still ruled by political sycophantic lieutenants who are only concerned about their pockets alone. Such mediocre leaders lack the spiritual and political stamina to confront the socio-political upheavals that assail their people, (Machungo, 2001). Mediocre leaders also thrive on cheap popularity as a means of hiding their lack of definable ideology or agenda. They do not bear criticisms with equality; rather, they resort to witch-hunting and mudslinging to mask their ineptitude. The result of hoisting a mediocre leader in power is nothing but inefficiency, a decline in national productivity and under-development. It can also lead to social unrests (Machungo, 2001).

Significance of Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy is like a bizarre fruit that matures slowly and spoils easily. The main reason is a failure to fully understand its benefits. Its defense is usually carried out in sentimental or even on conservative terms:

Others died for democracy, so it is our duty to defend it. Some people, for example, cannot understand why same-sex unions must be a part of the institution of marriage. "What difference does it make if they stay as they are?" they might argue. What they're overlooking, though, is the cornerstone of equality: that you cannot have citizens of different categories. Such bigotry used to be based on color, then it was based on ethnic or linguistic identity, and now it has turned to sexual orientation. When the rights of minorities are defended, meanwhile, the tone also tends to be saccharine; suggesting that the equality they are entitled to is something that should be granted to them. Such "charitable" sentiment, however, does not make for proper social policy and emotion is no way to determine people's rights – it is too fickle and can shift in any small or big crisis Oko, (2008). It is no longer new that several works has been done concerning the challenges of liberal democracy in Nigeria but you will agree with me that little has cited the importance of liberal democracy in Nigeria. However this work has made attempt to point out some of the importance of liberal democracy to a nation,

- i. Universal healthcare, so that if anyone gets sick, or involved in an accident, they will get the best possible care to ensure their return to a fruitful life without each individual having to go bankrupt to pay for it. That also means that if an individual wants access to procedures that are elective rather than health related, they still pay for those themselves.
- ii. Universal education, so that every individual from pre-school through university or trade school can get the best possible education at no or very low cost. The result of this is a better educated and more productive workforce that adds value to the total economy and everyone's lives.
- iii. Constant and substantial investment in economic infrastructure, meaning roads, airports, bridges, ports, electric distribution and supply. This means that companies can be more productive and more competitive on the global market, and build a better economy for all citizens.
- iv. Support for equal rights before the law of

all citizens, regardless of cultural or sexual differences. This benefits everyone in the country as each individual can rise to their best possible productivity in life.

- v. Support for safety in food, medicine, workplace safety, product safety, and ensures that citizens will have the best possible chance to have a happy, successful, and full life for themselves and their family.
- vi. Liberal democracy is like a bizarre fruit that matures slowly and spoils easily. The main reason is a failure to fully understand its benefits. Its defense is usually carried out in sentimental or even on conservative terms: Others died for democracy, so it is our duty to defend it, Oko, (2008).

Challenges of Liberal Democracy Practices in Nigeria

Among the multiplicity of the challenges that have confronted democratic governance in Nigeria since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the following would be considered more worrisome; electoral irregularities and malpractices, inter-and intra-ethnic rivalries, religious crises and insecurity, poverty, inadequate and weak democratic institutions and institutionalized corruption.

Ethnic Cleavages and Security Crisis

Inter-and intra-ethnic rivalries, religious crisis and insecurity also constitute potent challenges to democratic governance in Nigeria. Reading through the works of Best (2001), Duru & Ogbonnaya (2010) Adewale (2009) and Duruji (2010) one sees these issues fairly handled and exhaustively treated. According to Duruji (2010), the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999 opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethnic demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule.

The expression of these demands have resulted in the emergence of ethno-nationalist insurgencies such as the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the Niger Delta region, the renewed demand for Biafra spearheaded by the Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the increasing notoriety of the

Odua People's Congress (OPC) in the South-West. This has also resulted in incessant ethnic clashes in the Middle Belt region and other parts of the country such as the Ijaw-Itshekiri ethnic clashes in 2009. There have also been frequent inter-religious clashes and sharia-instigated riots in the Northern part of Nigeria as well as the emergence of the Boko Haram Islamic Jihadists with well-known preferences in religious belief and social practices (Eso, 2011). Intra-ethnic cleavages as witnessed in the horrors of Ife/Modakeke and Aguleri/Umuleri fratricidal wars in the South-West and South-East regions respectively have also been the order of the day.

These inter and intra-ethnic rivalries and religious crises not only result in the loss of human and material resources that cannot be quantified in monetary terms which occasion untold economic hardship, they most fundamentally breed state of anarchy that threaten the unity and corporate existence of the Nigerian state; leaving those who act on behalf of the state with magnitude of national issues to contend with. In 2008 alone, it was estimated that Nigeria lost over three trillion naira as a result of militancy in the Niger Delta. The Boko-Haram insurgency in the North has at the last count left over 16,000 policemen, soldiers and civilians, including politicians dead (UNCIRF, 2012; Nigerian Crime News, 2012). This has resulted in Nigeria being considered as unsafe country for foreign direct investments. Furthermore, given that these inter-religious and socio-cultural crises occur outside of the confines of the law, they challenge and weaken democratic institutional mechanisms that are meant to check them and threaten the consolidation and survival of democratic governance in Nigeria (Duruji, 2010)

Poverty

Poverty is another factor that constitutes grave challenge to democratic governance in Nigeria. Unarguably, Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and material resources. This notwithstanding, the nation ranks among the world's poorest. According to UNDP (2009:27), in Nigeria, hunger exhibits its ugly face in most homes where the average citizen contends with a life of abject poverty. Thus, the common man is "alienated from himself as he lacks the

wherewithal to afford the basic necessities of life such as education, medical facilities, and so forth". Expectedly, life expectancy is low compared with those of the developed nations of the world" (Olu-olu, 2008:1; see also UNDP National Human Development Reports for Nigeria, 2011).

Drawing a comparison in the incidence of poverty between Nigeria and India, Nda-Isiah (2012:56) submitted that; Between then and today (1962 and 2012), India has been able to lift 400 million people out of poverty, just as democracy has also flourished in that country... In the corresponding period, however, 100 million Nigerians out of a population of 167 million have slipped into poverty. Statistically, about 10 million Nigerians are in absolute poverty, which literally means they cannot afford the basic necessities of life. From the foregoing, it can be asserted that life generally in Nigeria is threatened by absolute and abject poverty. These realities are much more obvious in rural areas. Undoubtedly, this has undermined and challenged the legitimacy and integrity of government and the functionality of not just the democratic process but also of the Nigerian state. For instance, scholars have argued that the recent security challenges that have been confronting the country (Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency) are caused by high level of poverty in the country (Awoyemi, 2012; Harrington, 2012). These security situations as pointed out earlier breed state of anarchy that threaten the secularity, unity and corporate existence of the Nigerian state upon which its democratic process is anchored.

Electoral Malpractices

One of the cardinal tenets of participatory democracy is orderly change of government through credible, free, fair and periodic elections. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, change of government has been orderly while elections have been periodic. Between 1999 and 2011 three different civilian regimes have emerged and there have been three successive transitions from one civilian regime to another (Obasanjo Regime, 1999 – 2007; Yar'Adua/Jonathan Regime, 2007 – 2011; Jonathan Regime, 2011 till date). The same has been replicated in the legislature. Since 1999,

the country has successfully passed through three Legislative Houses both at the State and Federal Government levels via: 1999-2003; 2003-2007; 2007-2011.

However, the credibility, freeness and fairness of the elections that brought about this process have been the subject of thorny debates in contemporary national discourse (Omodia, 2009:1, 2; Tinubu 2009). Elections in the Fourth Republic have been characterized by monumental irregularities and malpractices which magnitude increases with every election. Institutions of the state such as the police, the military, and even the electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) collude to manipulate the electoral process in favor of certain candidates. Thus, situations where individuals have won elections from prison custody as in the case of Senator Omisore of Osun State and Governor Ahamefuna Orji of Abia State, contrary to the provisions of the Electoral Act, have been witnessed. In some other cases, INEC has conducted elections in states where the tenures of sitting Governors were still subsisting as in the case of Governor Peter Obi against Andy Uba of Anambra State in 2007 (Tinubu, 2009).

In every periodic election, local and international observers have been unanimous in their reports that the elections generally fall below internationally accepted standards. For instance, the 1999 elections that brought Olusegun Obasanjo to power were said to have been marred by such widespread fraud that observers from the US based Carter Centre concluded that "it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the Presidential elections" (Carter Center and National Democratic Institute, 1999). In 2003, the general elections were widely seen as a test of Nigeria's progress towards more open and accountable governance after four years of civilian rule under Obasanjo. However, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) described the 2003 elections thus:

While the voters waited and persevered in the polling stations to cast their votes, the political class and the political parties had different ideas. The voters wanted their votes to determine the winner of the elections, while the political class wanted to corrupt the process and rig their way into elective office...on the whole

the result can be said to marginally reflect the choice and will of the Nigerian people (TMG 2003: cited in Adejumobi & Agbaje, 2006:39). In the same light, Nigerian's 2007 general elections were widely regarded as a crucial barometer of the federal governments' commitment to the notion of democratic consolidation, but according to Human Rights Watch; the polls marked a dramatic step backwards, even when measured against the dismal standard set by the 2003 election. Electoral officials alongside the very government agencies charged with ensuring the credibility of the polls were accused of reducing the elections to a violent and fraud ridden farce (Human Rights Watch, 2007:27).

Indeed, the view "that the history of election administration in Nigeria is a history of electoral fraud and violence" (Ajayi, 2007) is widespread. Also scholars have observed that this poor electoral system in Nigeria breeds persistent crises of legitimacy in governance. Omodia (2009: 38) is one of such scholars. According to him; In Nigeria, just like most of the countries in Africa, elections especially its freeness and fairness constitute the central factor in ensuring democratic survival. This is because the lack of free and fair elections often tends to threaten the democratic process as a result of legitimacy question. This factor, no doubt has characterized the democratic experiment of the Nigerian Fourth Republic in that there have been persistent crises of legitimacy in governance arising from poor electoral system. Apart from being one of the cardinal tenets of democratic process, free, fair and credible elections are central to the consolidation and sustenance of democracy. It defines the degree of freedom exercised by the people in selecting who represent them in government. But this has not been the case in Nigeria as the system is manipulated in favor of certain individuals and political parties. This history of problematic and controversial election administration threatens the consolidation of democracy.

Weak Democratic Institutions

The weakness of the democratic institutions in Nigeria is another challenge to democratic governance. By democratic institutions, we refer to the Executive, Judiciary, the Legislature

and electoral agencies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In principle, each of these institutions is constitutionally empowered to maintain a certain degree of independence and autonomy while serving as checks on each other. In practice however, the tendency for the Executive to dominate employing all manner of advantages on its side including the control of budgetary allocations, remains a formidable reality. This dominance and over-bearing characteristics of the Executive is located in the pattern and practice of dictatorship in Nigeria especially during the military era.

Bankole (2009) has asserted that decades of military dictatorship has had the effect of eroding constitutional federalism, the erosion of the culture of rule of law, the enthronement of a culture of arbitrariness and impunity resulting in high levels of corruption. This legacy has fundamentally impacted on the power relations between the Executive and the other democratic institutions. The consequence of this has been the existence of subdued judiciary, weak oversight power of the legislature and the dumbness of the electoral bodies in both tiers of the federal structure (the State and Federal levels). Assessing the independence and autonomy of INEC and the Judiciary in the Fourth Republic, Omodia (2009:38) has observed that events in this democratic dispensation have shown that the electoral body is not independent of the party in power.

This according to him has been defined in relation to the manner in which the electoral body has conducted elections in the way that advantaged the party in power while the Judiciary has “served as a tool for creating political topsy-turvy that undermined the democratic process”. Duruji (2010:102) has also observed that the judiciary has been unable to sustain the democratic process in Nigeria by failing to convict anybody through the judicial process for the several cases of arson and killing that have characterized inter- and intra-ethnic clashes while the legislative institution has proven incapable of interfering decisively in the management of ethno-religious and security crises in Nigeria. According to Best (200:75), the Nigeria Police is an instrument of the state for the maintenance of law and order. Yet, it has repeatedly proved to be incompetent with

respect to handling both simple and major internal conflicts, be they religious, ethnic, communal, etc. while the state has failed to prosecute and punish people under the law.

This weakness of state institutions, impact negatively on democratic practices and also threatens the consolidation of democratic governance in Nigeria. As Makinda (2004:20) has observed, “democracy is only possible if the structures, processes and institutions through which the people will be expected to be addressed accommodate their interests, values and aspirations. Constitutional democracy continues to falter not only because of the conduct of leaders but also because of inefficient, ineffective and deteriorating public institutions”. 3.5 Institutionalized Corruption That political and institutionalized corruption constitutes one of the greatest challenges and threats to democratic governance in Nigeria since the First Republic has long been established as evident in Joseph (1991), among other scholarly works..

What is worrisome is the magnitude and degree of its manifestation in the Fourth Republic. The incidence of corruption in Nigeria reached a crescendo in 2004 when a German-based international non-governmental organization, Transparency International (TI) in its 2004 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) report, projected Nigeria as the 2nd most corrupt country in the world (132nd out of 133 countries surveyed) (Akinyemi, 2008: 22). The Transparency International's CPI is the world's most credible measure of domestic and public sector corruption. According to the Index, every single public institution in Nigeria is corrupt and has failed to appreciate fully the obligation upon them to do something concrete about corruption. In 2008, Nigeria sank deeper into the CPI ranking and has since maintained a consistent low rating.

From a score of 2.7 to 2.5 in 2009, and 2.4 in 2010 which it maintained in 2011, Nigeria has been ranked as the 3rd most corrupt country in Sub-Saharan Africa and 143rd out of 183 countries surveyed around the world in 2011 (Transparency International, 2011). It is reported by Transparency International that the level of corruption and other related crimes in Nigeria attract between \$4 million and \$8 million loss on daily basis and a loss of about

\$70.58 million to the national economy annually, and that the country has lost more than \$380 billion to graft since independence in 1960. According to the report, nepotism, bribery and patronage are so deeply engrained in the daily life of Nigerians that even existing anticorruption laws have little or no impact (Yishan, 2011). It has been argued that the war against corruption has been difficult to win because the act is perpetrated by policy makers themselves (Olu-Olu, 2006; 2008). A clear indicator to this fact is the US\$ 620, 000 oil subsidy bribery scandals rocking the Nigerian National Assembly and the Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources. This has thrown up public frustration in Nigeria. The 2011 Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) shows that the public frustration is well founded.

This frustration notwithstanding, corruption has become an ineradicable part of the culture in Nigeria and continues to threaten both constitutional democracy and the nation. According to Oko (2008:60), nothing enfeebles democracy more than corruption. It distorts governance, provides perverse incentives for dysfunctional behaviour, and ultimately diminishes the quality of life by diverting funds for social services into private pockets. And like the national economy of the country, democratic governance in Nigeria has not been immune to the damages of corruption. Senator Barack Obama perceptively observed during his 2006 visit to Kenya that; Corruption erodes the state from the inside out, sickening the justice system until there is no justice to be found, poisoning the police forces until their presence becomes a source of insecurity rather than a source of security (Obama, 2006).

Conclusion

From the analysis so far presented, democracy in Nigeria is flawed, problematic and threatened by internal and external variables. However, this does not negate the fact that it is preferred more than military dictatorship and authoritarianism. This preference for democracy is predicated upon the fact that it has, despite its shortcomings, afforded within the period under consideration, opportunity for the Nigerian populace to participate in the governance of their state. This is evident in the following

examples; the formation of political parties which has provided the platform for Nigerians to come together to articulate and espouse political ideas and seek political offices. This provided the opportunity of participating in the selection of their leaders and representatives; the institutionalization of the legislative arms of government both at the state and national levels with its constitutional oversight function of the Executive. This has created room for checks and balances for the system. The implication of the foregoing is that its challenges and shortcomings notwithstanding, democratic governance has provided Nigerians the opportunity to contribute to political and national development of their state. This was not the case in the military system of government that lasted for than fifteen years. Implicitly therefore, democratic governance possesses the prospects of good governance.

Recommendations

To curtail the observed challenges that democratic governance is faced with in Nigeria and to fully realize the prospects of democracy, the following policy options are hereby recommended;

- i. Deepening of Democratic Principles
Democracy generally is characterized by definite and defined principles. These include, adherence to the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights and the protection of life and property. For the prospects of democratic governance to be realized, these principles of democracy, must not just be imbibed, they must be deepened.
- ii. Strengthening of Democratic Institutions
The weakness and inadequacy of democratic institutions is the greatest challenge facing democratic governance in Nigeria. State institutions cannot ensure the security of life and property of Nigerian citizens; they are weak to ensure the credibility of the electoral process; they cannot sanction perpetrators of violence nor does the legal framework hold corrupt private individuals and public officials accountable for their actions. Consequently, the electoral process is vulnerable and is easily manipulated;

corruption undermines public confidence in the democratic process while insecurity looms large. This therefore calls for the creation and maintenance of institutions that will uphold transparency and the rule of law. This can be done through vast structural and attitudinal readjustments of the public institutions and public office holders so that they will curtail corruption, insecurity and executive interference and indifference to public goods (Oko, 2008: 35).

- iii. Nigeria needs a democracy capable of guaranteeing maximum practice of freedom at its peak by the citizens without any fear of oppression, not only that, but also addressing the overwhelming material poverty of the people.
- iv. We need the type of democracy which promotes the equality of all the socio-linguistic groups irrespective of their sizes. Democracy must be viewed as a vital element of the humanitarian process. In this case, the way in which we should account to each other to express our human needs and thus achieve the full realization of the human task in the interest of our liberal democracy and the people is crucial.
- v. We also need a democracy that ensures the practice of true capitalism; where the private sphere is free from state interference, and not a pseudo-capitalist kind of system that is prevalent and common.

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