

Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT: *The desire of all governments to be labelled as "democratic" stems from the realization that real application of democratic tenets and principles to public governance helps the process of societal development. This realization alone propels all types of government to appropriate to itself and call its system democratic. Democracy is at the heart of growth and development. It is therefore, not unusual to argue that democracy has proved to be the perfect tools for service delivery and conflict resolution and subsequent enjoyment of the dividends of democracy. However, the present political situation in Nigeria has not given enough room for this. This paper therefore, attempt to take an overview of the various factors posing as threat to the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. Utilizing secondary data and content analysis as its method of analysis, several factors ranging from lack of respect for the constitution, abuse of electoral process, godfatherism, bad governance, politics of exclusion, insecurity, e.t.c, were identified as the major problems confronting democracy in Nigeria. Thus, the study recommended total adherence to the constitution, development of a culture of proper participation in political and governance processes, tolerance, periodic training and re-training of INEC officials, immunity from criminal cases, among others.*

Key Words: *Democracy, Sustainability, Politics, Godfatherism and Good Governance.*

Introduction

Democratization is concerned, not just with the form of government known as democracy, but more importantly with certain conditions of things, conditions such as a virile civil society, equal treatment of all citizens by the state, an ordered, stable society and above all, a society infused with the spirit of liberty, democracy, Justice and equality. (Nwabueze, 1993).

Population growth and other indices of modernization altered the practice of democracy from personal involvement in governance to delegated representation. Coleman (1986) for instance, observed that by the end of the Second World War in 1945, nearly all independent countries of the world has embraced democracy. Nigeria became part of the unfolding history on the 1st October, 1960 after series of verbal battles between elites, that is, the nationalists and the British officials. But unfortunately, the seeds of democracy were not allowed to bear fruits for too long before it was cut down as a result of military incursion into politics in 1966. In retrospect, many people now argue that the military miscalculation of 1966 is directly responsible for the stagnation or retardation noticeable in all spheres of Nigeria's life as a nation – state. (Adu & Ibitoye, 2006).

After several years of political sojourn (1983 – 1999), just when it appears that Nigeria is set to leave the political wilderness and move towards the path of honour, development and modernization, a serious source of concern is emerging: there is pervasive ignorance within the rank and file of the political class and the political leaders as they engage in conducts which are becoming increasingly antithetical to democratic conventions. According to Anifowose (1982:67) this anti-social behaviour has gained notoriety in Nigeria because of the uses to which it has been put by the Nigeria politicians in the struggle for political power, public offices and scarce economic resources. This is clearly evident in their ways of handling sensitive national issues and especially the way and manner the politicians play politics with little or no regard for the rules of the game as it was demonstrated in the last elections, notably the Osun state gubernatorial election held on the 22nd September, 2018 which was marred with electoral irregularities and malpractices.

There is no gainsaying about the fact that the present political arrangement as it is today is under a threat posed by the inordinate desire of the political actors in an attempt to maintain their political relevance. This therefore, suggests that the democratization of Nigeria will be a mirage unless concerted efforts are made to check the excesses of our political actors and reverse the trend of political ignorance in order to uphold the sanctity of the electoral processes. For the purpose of this paper, we shall begin to examine what constitute the political manipulations and self-destructive activities of our politicians and their implications for the survival of our nascent democracy which we are supposed to guide jealously. The

paper will also proffer some solutions to the issues raised.

An Insight into the Concept of Democracy

The concept of democracy was first practised in the Greek city – state in the 5th and 6th centuries B.C. The word democracy has its root in two Greek words, ‘demos’, meaning the people and ‘kratien’, meaning to rule. Thus, democracy in ancient Greek was understood as a system through which political offices were filled by a show of hands in a public assembly. (Akinlade & Ibitoye, 2003:57-58). In the words of Sartori, democracy, “is a political system in which the influence of the majority is assured by elective and competitive minorities to whom it is entrusted”. Abraham Lincoln, also defined democracy as, “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Another political scientist, Appadorai, described democracy as, “a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves”. In his view, a state may be termed a democratic one, if it provides institution or channel for the expression and, in the last analysis, the supremacy of the popular will on the basic questions of social direction and policy. (Akinlade & Ibitoye, 2004:30-31).

Seeley (2007) defines democracy as a “government in which everyone has a share”. To Amuwo (2015) democracy is nothing if it is delinked from the notion of social progress and economic equality. It is the latter that supplies sinews and substance to the unsatisfactory minimalist agenda of electoral democracy.

Essentially, the term democracy within this context will be described as a form of government organized in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation and majority rule. Thus, it can be said that any system that lacks any of the four interrelated characteristics of democracy stated above is not fit to be christened a democratic state.

Major Challenges to Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria

The democratization process anywhere in the world is never helped by muzzling of individual or groups and preventing the exercise of fundamental human rights of self-expression and association. This fact aptly described the situation in which Nigeria found herself recently. The individual, political parties and government (local, state and federal) are all guilty. Unwittingly, the politicians are conniving with the political parties and governments at various levels to muzzle up individual voices of opposition thereby effectively limiting the enjoyment of constitutional right to expression and association. For example, the muzzling of aggrieved voices during Ngige/Uba imbroglio and the inability of people to seek judicial redress against the state governors. Their unwholesome activities of inflicting both physical and emotional injuries and traumatising of the people who voted them into power are no longer hidden things and this is undemocratic. Given this situation, these parties can be regarded as enemies of democracy. The parties have in various ways used their power and influence to thwart the elementary tenets of democracy. They have not only abused the electoral processes, they have equally succeeded in making all the talks about politics look and sound like a cultic engagement. It is against this background that some people are of the opinion that politics is a dirty game meant for indecent people.

Another worrisome aspect is the lack of respect for the constitution which is supposed to be the guiding principle for those charged with the responsibility of steering the affairs of this nation. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, recognizes the three arms of government at all levels with each deriving its power from the constitution and independent of one another. It is therefore surprising to see the executive turning the national assembly to a ‘rubber stamp’ institution while the national assembly tries to rubbish the basic provisions of the constitution which empower the state legislatures with inherent checks and balances to intervene in the affairs of electoral processes of the local governments in their respective states. It is a known fact that one of the primary functions of the national assembly is to make laws that will impact positively and directly on the citizenry that voted the lawmakers in as their representatives in whom the ultimate power lies. But the Nigerian legislature as it is today, cannot be said to be performing this sacred and constitutionally assigned function in the true sense of it.

Primary election among the political parties’ members seeking political offices is also an important aspect to be considered in this discussion. In an ideal situation, political parties should have an established mechanism and methods for choosing their candidates for any election. There are supposed to be some irreducible standards which the parties must insist on. But these are wantonly compromised and thrown overboard. In other words, intra – party level of democracy has been jettisoned. In Nigeria today, personality, individual integrity, good records, job performance do not matter. What matter are your money, connection and most important, your association with the group of people called the “kingmakers”. That is, the secret caucus of the party. Otherwise, even when you win the primary election, your name can still be

changed at the Independent National Electoral Commission's office or victory given to another candidate. Thus, in the view of Ajayi (2004:25), power behind the throne called Godfatherism or Kingmakerism in politics, has dealt severe blow to democracy and people's hope.

The craziness for re-election bid and power of incumbency cannot be ignored. It is clearly stated in section 137(1) (b) of the 1999 constitution that all elected political office holders or representatives are to spend three years in the case of local government while others are to spend four years only in their various offices. In addition, they equally have the rights to seek for a second term in their different offices. But it is important to state that they must be ready to abide by the laid down rules and regulations as stipulated by the electoral law. That is to say, as many that wish to contest including the incumbent(s) must be allowed to participate in a free and fair contest with equal opportunities. The idea of barring certain people should be discouraged. But instead, the ultimate tragedy has been an attempt to undermine democratic processes. The popular slogan is 'NO VACANCY' from the camps of those loyal to various state governments and the president and this has done much damage to political parties cohesion and further escalates tension in the polity since 'God-fathers' have taken over the ideal roles of political parties. (Adu & Ibitoye, 2006)

Furthermore, political godfatherism has become a plague in the body of politics of Nigeria. There is an emerging trend in Nigeria which dictates that an intending contestant must have and depend on a godfather with requisite wealth and power to get him/her into elective office. Political godfatherism has become a dominant feature characterising contemporary Nigerian politics. Their role as a political phenomenon has impacted negative virtues on the body politics of the country which are now potential threat to our nascent democracy. Democracy as practised in elsewhere thrive on an environment of peace and tranquility, popular participation, fundamental human rights, the rule of law, free and fair and open competitive elections. However, the activities of these political actors have denied the citizens from electing their preferred candidates as their leaders. This is detrimental to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. Apart from being antithetical to democratic consolidation, godfatherism is an evil building block for corruption, retrogression, under-development, mediocrity and backwardness. [Avidime & Enojo, 2016]

No country or nation can bear the cost of poor governance as it hampers the effective delivery of public goods and services for the benefit of mankind. There is no doubt about the fact that there is a link between democratic and accountable government [otherwise and popularly known as good governance] and the ability to achieve and sustained political, economic and social development. Ndulo (2006) argues that good governance entails first and foremost a government that lives up to its responsibilities by ensuring effective delivery of public goods and services, the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice. Good governance is therefore, an essential precondition for sustainable democracy. Poor governance stifles and impedes development. In a country where there is corruption, poor control of public funds, lack of accountability and transparency, abuses of human rights, among other things, development inevitably suffers. This is exactly the situation in which Nigeria finds herself today.

Candidly speaking, the histories of other peoples and indeed Nigeria have shown that where democracy becomes exclusive rather than promoting inclusive of all sectors, instability and tension become pervasive and this portends serious harm to our society as it often impedes participatory democracy and scare away domestic resources and foreign investments which could have increased development related activities. The net effect of democratic exclusion is the encouragement of subversive instincts and the promotion of restiveness and instability. The agitations of the independence movements against the colonial masters together with the various revolts of students, women, traders and professional bodies were direct evidence of peoples' displeasure with democratic exclusion under the colonial master. The National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Civil Liberty Organisation [CLO] and Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), were all classical examples of peoples' protest against politics of exclusion during the military "democracies" in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2006).

The manifestation of money politics in Nigerian politics without any form of effective control on spending by the candidates and political parties before and during elections is disheartening. Although, the relationship between politics and money is very powerful but modern democracies have exposed and therefore warned against its implications on democratic virtues. The role of money in any political arrangement cannot be overemphasised however, its abuse in Nigerian polity is indeed amazing. Omipidan (2018) opined that starting from 2003 civilian to civilian transition programme, money has played dominant role in canvassing for votes especially in the gubernatorial elections of Ondo, Ekiti and Osun states held in 2018 with the popular slogan "Diboki o se be", meaning "vote and collect money to cook soup". The presence of vote buying in a democratic state poses a serious threat to democracy itself as it interferes with the ability to rely on a popular vote as a measure of people's support for potential government policies.

The struggle for leadership of any level of government has become more competitive. This is more

evident in the developing nations when all efforts to outwit the political opponents through morally and legally acceptable means become unrealizable. In an attempt to achieve their inordinate political ambitions, politicians do hire or recruit thugs and miscreants in order to gain and retain political power. This act of insecurity or lawlessness when left unchecked often leads to cases of abduction, maiming, killing, looting as well as other uncivilised behaviours. (Akinlade & Ibitoye, 2004). A preponderance of views in political literature also asserts that there exist a correlation between political violence and democratic sustainability in Nigeria. Aurell (2005) as cited in Avidime & Enojo (2016) observed that violence is the greatest threat to democracy in developing countries. For example, the 1964 general election crisis in Nigeria and the Western region's electoral crisis of 1965 contributed immensely to the collapse of parliamentary democracy in Nigeria. Insecurity often create a sense of fear among the electorates and sometimes limit the political space. The apparent outcome is low turn-out of votes (political apathy) and the withdrawal of honest, sincere and credible individuals from the political scene. Perhaps, this explains why we now have mediocre as political leaders.

The last but not the least is the leadership intolerance. The unguided utterances and reckless display of naked power by the politicians especially those in power have become a major source of concern in the Nigeria polity. Akinlade & Ibitoye (2004:78-79) were of the opinion that the fervour, enthusiasm and commitment with which the civil society pursued the task of enthroning democracy on the 29th May, 1999, are beginning to wane drastically in the face of attack launched by the government, unguided political statements, anti-masses programmes etc. For example, increase in the price of petroleum products, repressive activities of the security operatives resulting to callous killing of notable politicians in the polity such as Chief Bola Ige, Chief Dikibo, Andrew Agom, Funsho Williams, among others. This climate of state repressive attitude negates the democratic demands of the majority versus minority relations. It is succinctly put by Laski (1976) as thus;

“Minority strictly adhere to the decision of majority,
but such minority acceptance depends upon majority
forbearance or else there would be disconsensus
and disconsensus in national polity is in civil strife”.

Implications

The implications of those problems earlier identified and discussed in this paper are many and should be promptly addressed otherwise it could lead to social chaos, further polarization between the society and the state or outright rebellion. The implications are:

- It is capable of causing disaffection among the members of the political parties.
- It can lead to breakdown of law and order. Anambra State is a good example where a sitting governor (Chris Ngige) was abducted in 2003.
- It can lead to loss of lives and property.
- It can lead to further disintegration of Nigeria as an entity.
- It can lead to political instability.
- Lastly, it can lead to violent change of government.

Major political actors have not helped matters in this country. Their statements and actions have done much damage than good to the initial problems they met on ground. For example, the face – off between Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Otunba Adeniyi Adebayo, Chief Segun Osoba and Ayo Fayose of Ekiti state typifies the point being made above.

Besides, deliberate misinformation packaged to mislead the party/parties members and other members of the society have been fabricated and disseminated with negative telling effects. For example, Orji Uzor Kalu and Late Chief Tony Anenih, former Chairman, Board of Trustee for the Peoples' Democratic Party, over alleged threat to life and the lingering crisis between the National Chairman of All Progressive Congress (APC), Comrade Adams Osiohomhole and Governor Godwin Obaseki in the APC controlled Edo State House of Assembly over who become the speaker.

Based on the above assertion, the polity needs to be sanitized once and for all with all sense of patriotism and nationalism since we do not have any other place to claim.

Conclusion

The process of transforming an actual situation into a desired state of affairs, usually assumed to be somewhat qualitatively superior, often lead to conflict situation. This means then, that the process of transformation often generates conflict. It is the ability to manage such conflict wherever it occurs that determines to a great extent the success of such society which in this case is Nigeria. According to Awolowo

(1981) "The actual and conscientious pursuit of democracy depends on the right type of leadership and on a vigilant, enlightened and irrepressible public". This is why it is contingent for us to be more responsive to the substance of democracy and it is our joint responsibilities to see that this country is made a better place to live. Therefore, the issue at hand demands for collective efforts of all Nigerians.

Recommendations

For democracy to germinate well and mature to fruition, we need a drastic reorientation and change of direction. Nigerians must begin to cultivate a new political culture, a culture of proper participation in political and governance processes. More and more, Nigerians must become increasingly active in the nation's economic and socio-political life. We must begin to pay more than mere attention to all the political manoeuvrings and conspiracies responsible for the present political and economic disorder.

There is no doubt about the fact that democracy remains the best form of government where rights and interests of every citizen are expected to be guaranteed and protected. This can only be done through a wide spread habit of tolerance, political maturity and compromise among the members of political community at all times irrespective of their party affiliation(s) and political ideologies.

Both the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) have some important roles to play since they are the umpires. They should not allow themselves to be used by the party in power because posterity will not forgive them for doing so. For them to act as impartial judges, they should be independent and there must be adequate preparation for election(s) such as prompt screening of candidates, exhibition of voters' register, display of voters' guide, accreditation on the day of election and after the election, correct results should be announced without any delay. And more importantly, there is need for periodic training and re-training for the staff in order to keep them abreast with current ways of handling election matters.

For the success of democracy in this country, certain qualities must be encouraged to be displayed by the political class such as intelligent understanding of public affairs, independent judgement, unselfish devotion to public interest and individual character. These qualities have made the United States of America the envy and pattern of modern democracies. In addition, the public office should be less attractive in terms of remuneration that the public office holders will benefit. This will definitely help to reduce the fierce and desperate struggle or battle to attain political position across the country.

The government should also discourage anarchists, troublemakers, bigots, vagabonds and evildoers in the corridors of power. The president, Inspector-General of Police, state security service and all other security services are to checkmate and/or call all political buccaneers to order if Nigeria is to progress. Our politicians should also watch their utterances and let positive actions and good performance be their high point of achievements to the visible well-being of the populace since the use of power is to create happiness, jobs and prosperity, among others.

The immunity from criminal prosecution granted special officers of the state in the 1999 constitution such as President, Vice-President, Governors and their deputies, etc., should be reviewed with some modifications. Section 308 of the 1999 constitution prohibit the institution of civil or criminal proceeding, even issuance of a witness summons against the President, Governor, and their deputies throughout their tenure of office. The immunity from criminal prosecution granted these state officers are capable of being abused in a manner that could endanger the nation and its democratic system of government. It is observe that under the current provision of section 308 of the constitution, an officer to whom the section applied can with impunity abuse this constitutional provision. This will put the administration of justice into disrepute and make the country a laughing stock in the comity of nations.

The immunity granted under section 308 should be limited to civil suit while immunity from criminal prosecution including arrest for felonies be removed in order to preserve our democratic values. For example, Chief Benjamin Elue, the deputy governor of Delta State was arrested and interrogated by the police for allegedly being in possession of a cache of arms during the gubernatorial election held on 19th April, 2004, he could not be prosecuted due to the cover given to him by section 308 of the constitution. However, if we are to wait for four or eight years before prosecution as the case may be, it may be influenced – manipulation of evidence leading to perversion of justice and this may be dangerous for the nation.

The most important remedy for an ailing democracy is to prescribe more democratic virtues. The actors and activists must learn how to build consensus, how to engage more in dialogue, how to keep on discussing until a compromise is reached and how to involve more persons in a decision – making.

The various political parties, individual and groups must rise to the challenges of successful democracy by ensuring that the roles expected of parties are fully understood and performed. Screening and

fielding of popular candidates as well as the roles of opposition must be fully played by political parties. Clearly, the time has come for us to call for the re-establishment of the defunct Center for Democratic Studies where politicians can be brushed up and made to see the inter-connection between their actions, decisions and survival of democracy.

Others include, strict adherence to the constitution, respect for the rule of law, respect for the fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary and respect to all democratic norms/values. Democratic skills are learnt and not inherited. It would therefore, be important for all principal actors/politicians to appreciate and use the democratic tools in solving political problems. The reliance on 'Godfatherism', the imposition of candidates on parties, the use of money and/or violence for electoral victory, the appeal to brutal force instead of superior arguments and the use of obscene languages or comical arrogance of the servants (government appointees) in the presence of the masters (electorates) should be totally discouraged.

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