

A SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY AND IT'S PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *After 55 years of political independence, Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenges of democratic transformation and good governance. All efforts by successive civilian governments to entrench true democracy and good governance in the country seem to have met brick walls in which for every gained step: two are lost. The generality of Nigerians had expected that the return of democratic rule to the country in 1999 will usher in a new dawn. These optimism, hope and great expectations were regrettably misplaced. The paper interrogates this state of affair and sheds light on those critical elements in the country's democratic experiment that tend to frustrate the enthronement of true democracy and good governance. Worried about the future prospects of democracy in Nigeria, the paper concludes with suggestions on the way forward towards the domestication of true democracy and good governance in the country, stressing that the time to act is now.*

Keywords: *Democracy; Federalism, Development; Challenges; and Prospects.*

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Nigeria's democratization began at independence with

the adoption of democratic institutions modeled on the British Westminster parliamentary system. Under this system, the prime minister who was the leader of the party with majority seats in the parliament was the substantive Head of government at the centre (federal) while the President was a mere ceremonial Head. From independence onwards, Nigeria has been grappling with the task of entrenching the culture of democracy in governance through its provisions in the independence constitution of 1960; and the Republican constitution of 1963. These constitutions have prescribed the British-modeled Westminster parliamentary system for the country.

After independence, the new political elite had the duty of not only institutionalizing the democratic process but for developing a political culture, which would buttress the inherited institutions from the British colonial authority. There were therefore, high hopes at independence of Nigeria emerging as a fertile and large field for the growth of democracy and good governance in Africa. However, by the end of 1965, it became obvious that the future of democracy and good governance in the country had become bleak. In January, 1966, the military aborted the new democratic experiment in a bloody coup d'état. The military ruled between 1979 and 1983; and 1987-1989. In 1979, Nigeria adopted the Presidential system of government modeled after the American system in preference to the British parliamentary system.

Nigeria, a politically arranged country, is the product of British experiment in political cloning. In fact, the British themselves only came to understand the eccentricity of the territory after the acquisition. The situation is however worse for Nigerians. For some, it was, accidental while for some others, it was involuntary and eternally traumatic. However, for all of them, it was a forced brotherhood and sisterhood which has defied as it were, all known formulas for nation building.

Thus, the political history of this 1914 geographically created entity has been dominated by efforts at fashioning a system that has the potentials to approximate the people's wishes and desires, to no avail. The attraction for federalism in Nigeria borders on its perceived integrative tendency, which makes it capable of serving heterogeneous societies. Federalism, the system which shares power in such a way that each recipient unit assumes a separate existence and commands relatively exclusive authority over some clearly specified sphere of state activity, in principle, ensures such a balance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

On the occasion of Nigeria's 57th independence anniversary, this paper aim to among other points show that it is time to put Nigerian leaders on the dissecting table to gauge their lack of depth and profundity, and their criminal negligence in sentencing Nigeria to mediocrity and retrogression. Their inability to read the signs of the times in the face of general insecurity, herdsmen menace, kidnapping and cultism, educational decline, and total and paralyzing absence of national identity, have lead precisely to a point where the unity of Nigeria must be questioned. If the country is not getting it right together, perhaps it can get it right separately. Despite their lack of method, sense and thoughtfulness, it is only the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) that has boldly questioned that unity in a manner that should compel the country to embark on total self-examination.

Since independence in 1960, the country has been faced with the problem of representational equity which ordinarily is expected to be contained by the practice of federalism. The Nigerian situation is such that the desire for organizational institutionalization and coherence under a federal governance model which is globally assumed as a potent remedy for rhythmic dislocations and disruptions is yet to be accomplished.

Interestingly, almost six decades after independence, federalism's

minimalist promissory note to permit the people of the union, their own nationalism and self determination is highly endangered in Nigeria. This is fundamental because of the absence of the civic political culture that is germane to the workings of conceptual phrases that scaffolds a federal system such as 'existence of relatively independent centers of power', 'inter-governmental relations driven by partnership', 'local people deciding on local priorities', etc. thus fueling ceaseless agitations for restructuring.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the paper is to show that because Nigeria leaders are scared of innovations, reluctant to examine the country's deep structural problems and rejigger it, too uncultured to develop a theoretical and abstract foundation upon which to build a great country, and short-sighted to see Nigeria beyond today and tomorrow, let alone the day after tomorrow, Nigerian leaders from independence till date have lacked the depth of understanding required to grasp the deeper and more abstract things that form the building blocks of a great nation and great leader. In Nigeria, the deep that can call unto deep because both speak a metaphysical, often inaudible and incomprehensible language which only a few people can decipher. When the deep calls unto deep, the earth's creative potential is unleashed, its raging storms harnessed into life-given energy, and its hidden mysteries yield themselves in intangible, esoteric forms.

Democracy and good governance are the key terms used in the paper, which require clarification. *Democracy*: The term democracy like most concepts in social sciences lacks a precise single definition rather; it is generally a matter of intellectual supposition. There are various meanings, opinions, perceptions and definitions of the term by scholars and philosophers like Rousseau, Locke, Jefferson, Lincoln and Mills (Akindele, 1987). According to Elaigwu cited in Yio (2012), the concept of democracy is alien to Africa and needs to be domesticated to Nigeria (Africa)'s local conditions and targeted to

her peculiar problems. He went further to define democracy as: A system of government based on the acquisition of authority from the people; the institutionalization of the rule of law; the emphasis on the legitimacy of rules; the availability of choices and cherished values (including freedom); and accountability in governance. This definition brings out the principles of democracy and the core one being the residence of sovereignty with the people. As Yio (2012) had argued, from its Athenian origin, democracy is viewed as "Government by the people with full and direct participation of the people". But democracy in practice even in Athens was not inclusive in the absolute sense as it excluded women and slaves who were integral components of the Greek city states.

Huntington (1996) argued that a political system is democratic; if its most powerful collective decision makers are chosen through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote. It also implies the existence of all those civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble and organize that are necessary for political debate and the conduct of electoral campaign. Also, Cohen (1971) noted that democracy is a system of community government in which by and large the members of the community participate or may participate directly or indirectly in making decisions, which affect them. This means that democracy could be seen as any system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in the governance of the people rightly belongs to the people; that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in the equal rights; and where equitable social and economic justice are the inalienable rights of individual citizens in the society. Chafe (1994) on the other hand, opined that democracy means the involvement of the people in the running of the political, socio-economic and cultural affairs of their polity. Schumpeter cited in Ukase (2014) sees democracy as a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a competitive struggle for the votes of citizens. It is a situation in which people have

the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the men who are to rule them. Also, Sand brooks cited in Ukase (2014), captures the concept thus:

Democracy is a political system characterized by regular and free elections in which politicians organized into political parties; compete for power by right of the virtue of all adults to vote and by the guarantee of a range of political and civil rights.

Abraham Lincoln offered one of the simplest definitions of democracy as "government of the people by the people and for the people". In this wise, democracy is first and foremost people-centered. It also involves mass participation and basic individual freedom as its hallmark. Ukase (2014) stressed that democracy demands that people should be governed on the basis of their consent and mandate; freely given to establish a government which is elected, responsive and accountable to the people. In spite of the differences in conceptualization and practice, all the versions of defining democracy share one fundamental objective, which is how to govern society in such a way that power, actually belongs to the people.

The concept of good governance defies a precise single definition that commands universal acceptability. This has given rise to different meanings of the concept. The World Bank (2003) provided a simple definition of good governance and an extensive detailed analysis of its major components. Here the Bank contends that governance consists in the exercise of authority in the name of the people while good governance is doing so in ways that respect the integrity and needs of everyone within the state. Good governance, according to this conception, is said to rest on two important core values, namely: inclusiveness and accountability.

Madhav (2007) contends that good governance is tied to the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to

specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. Ozigbo (2000) cited in Okpaga (2007) opined that before one discusses good governance, it is first necessary to examine the context of the term governance. According to him, governance denotes how people are ruled and how the affairs of the state are administered and regulated. Governance refers therefore, to how the politics of a nation is carried out. Public authority is expected to play an important role in creating conducive environment to enhance development. On this premise, Ansah (2007) viewed governance as encompassing a state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making process and implementation capacity and the relationship between government officials and the public.

Governance can therefore, be good or bad depending on whether or not it has the basic ingredients of what makes a system acceptable to the generality of the people. The ingredients of good governance include freedom, accountability, and participation (Sen, 1990). The basic features of good governance include the conduct of an inclusive management wherein all the critical stakeholders are allowed to have a say in the decision-making process. Accordingly, good governance is the process through which a state's affairs are managed effectively in the areas of public accountability, financial accountability, administrative and political accountability, responsiveness and transparency, all of which must show in the interest of the governed and the leaders.

It, thus, means that good governance thrives in a democratic setting; hence to achieve good governance, there must be a democratic system in place. By this, it means where there is no democracy there cannot be good governance, which explains why democracy as a system of government commands such popular appeal among the countries of the world today. Although, the concept of good governance lacks any precise single definition that commands universal acceptability, there is little disagreement over its defining

elements, which include accountability, transparency, predictability, the rule of law, and participation.

Significance of the Study

The significant of this paper is to show that it has been 57 years of tumultuous political, social and economic events. It has also been 57 years of abject leadership incompetence: of leaders who unable to inspire themselves cannot inspire their nation. It will be a mistake to continue to assume that democracy or one man, one vote can produce the right leader any more than monarchy or feudalism could. But if Nigerians can subject their leaders to proper scrutiny, they will discover that they need to consciously move away from electing provincials, ascetics, and religionists.

Democracy and good governance are the most successful political ideas of the 21st century. Democracy lets people speak their minds and shape their own and their children's future. Many people in different parts of the world are prepared to risk so much for these ideas, which is a testimony to their enduring global appeal. The idea of democracy became popular in Nigeria following the rise of nationalist movements to demand for the country's independence from British colonial rule. This paved way for the introduction of political parties to enable Nigerians contest for elective positions. For instance, in 1922 Governor Clifford introduced elective principle in respect of the three legislative seats in Lagos and one in Calabar. This was followed by the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) by Herbert Macaulay in 1923. The development continued with more political parties coming on board and in 1960, Nigeria gained independence under a democratically elected government.

Democracy in Nigeria has come a long way in the past two and half decades with four transitional elections and as many as over 10 million registered voters (Aremu, 2014). On May, 29th 1999 the country restored civil democratic rule after a protracted military rule that lasted for more than three decades. Since then, the democratic system including the structures meant to consolidate it have

experienced some stress mainly due to the hang-over effect of the prolonged military rule whose common denominator was the lack of democracy, accountability and good governance. The abuse of these time-honoured principles of governance was legendary and its negative impact on Nigerian's politics is better imagined than stated. Thus, after two and half decades of a return to democratic rule in Nigeria, the country is not anywhere near the realization of the ideals of good governance, which is the natural accomplishment of democratic rule.

In Nigeria, the exhilaration generated by widespread dehumanizing poverty and under development; insecurity; corruption; mass illiteracy; unemployment; amongst others has created mixed feelings about the desirability or otherwise of democracy. Democracy in Nigeria is going through difficult times as viable democratic institutions such as credible electoral system; independent judiciary, rule of law, etc are yet to take root in the country in the face of such flaws like massive corruption in every facet of the nation's public life. These flaws in the system have become worryingly visible giving rise to disillusion with politics. The ability of the democratic system to transform the lives of the people is dependent on its provision of adequate mechanisms for the smooth conduct of elections that culminate in the transfer of power from one regime to another.

This is an area, which Nigeria is still not performing to expectations. The lack of credible election has resulted in the erosion of political legitimacy on the part of public office holders. For instance, the 2003 and 2007 elections in the country were marred by brazen electoral frauds. Where democracy is devoid of credible elections, good governance is negated and the sovereignty of the people is relegated to the background if not completely denied. The result is that majority of the people would become subservient to the whims and caprices of the political actors who are shielded from any legal action by the immunity clause; hence they conduct themselves based on their proclivities. Even with the noticeable improvement in the

freedom of speech and respect for the rule of law, the effort of the government in establishing a peaceful democratic society has been bedeviled with problems. Some of these problems are systemic and therefore, have much to do with the way the institutions of democracy are used for expediency. Others are attitudinal and hence, the result of the failure of the Nigerian state and the political elite to change their attitude of "business-as-usual" with zero impact; and cultivate a new mindset that conforms with democratic principles. Thus, Nigerians are not only disenchanted and disillusioned with the way and manner the government is toying with the public affairs but also lost hope in the leadership of the country at all levels of government. As Achebe (2004) decried the situation, "I am disappointed with Nigeria... Nigeria is a country that doesn't work". In a true democracy, the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government. Nigeria operates a nominal democracy in which it maintained the outward appearance of democracy through elections but without the rights and institutions that are equally important aspects of a functioning democratic system. Indeed, democracy and good governance are the bases for legitimacy, social mobilization and development because of their responsiveness to the yearnings and aspirations of the poor majority of the population. Good governance translates into the provision of basic infrastructures, access to medical and health-care services, educational, industrial, and agricultural development of the society, and above all, the institutionalization of the rule of law.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria has always operated federalism in an awkward manner and this has made frictions and clashes inevitable while at the same time, hampering nation building. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate made Nigeria a multi- ethnic and multi lingual country. The point must be made that what is today referred to as Nigeria was not a question of a country that was originally unitary, being broken into federating units, but of formerly totally independent kingdoms, empires, nations and autonomous

communities being brought together, and ending up in a federal union. In line with this historical evolution of Nigerian federalism, it should be noted that, the choice of federalism as the preferred system of government for Nigeria was not accidental.

The fact is that the founding fathers took cognizance of the situation of the State as development progressed and opted for a system of government that would neutralize the political threats and accommodate the divergent interest of the various ethnocultural and minority groups. This desire which eventually found expression in the federal system of government as a diversity management technique is still struggling hard to accomplish anticipated goals.

Going by the reality of the times and using K.C Where's criteria (stated above), the question arise on whether or not, the governance model Nigeria has practiced since independence conforms to the basic tenets of federalism. The answer to the above is in the negative for the following reasons:

- Indeed there has been more than two constitutionally recognized levels of governments in Nigeria however, the constitutional division of powers among the levels of governments is flawed.
- In Nigeria, the tiers of government are not co-ordinate and independent.
- The tiers of government in Nigeria are not financially independent. In fact, fiscal relationship among the tiers of Government in Nigeria has never been fair. The 36 States go to the central government to collect monthly allocation from the federation account whereas, it is States that should pay 'taxes/royalties' to the federal Government. Under the 1999 constitutional arrangement, the powers of the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission as provided under the Third Schedule Part 1 N-item 32 (b & c) as follows: (b) Review from time to time, the revenue allocation formulae and principles in operation to ensure conformity with changing

realities; (c) provided that any revenue formula which has been accepted by an ACT of the National Assembly shall remain in force for a period of not less than five years from the date of commencement of the Act; has been flagrantly disregarded.

- There is indeed a Supreme Court of the 'independent judiciary' but the extent to which the Judiciary is independent in Nigeria of 2017 calls for serious concern.
- Constitution amendment has always been an issue in Nigeria and the control of the process has always been skewed in favor of the central legislature.

Except for the brief period of the First Republic, Federalism has never been practiced in its ideal form in our clime. At independence, the largely autonomous regions possessed the residual powers in the federation and functioned almost independently.

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

The quest for democracy and good governance has been a major pre-occupation of the Nigerian state since her independence in 1960. This aspiration has remained elusive due to many challenges, which have continued to undermine the democratization process in the country. These challenges include failure of leadership; corruption; Boko Haram insurgency; insincerity of purpose; lack of political will; lack of proper vision by the political leadership; lack of accountability in governance; amongst others.

Failure of Leadership: Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, the country has not had the opportunity of being governed by a willing and ready leader but those that can at best be described as "accidental leaders". These are leaders whom the mantle of leadership fell on them by default not minding their capacity, experience and in most cases, they were neither prepared nor expectant of such huge responsibility. This has been one of the reasons for the country's failures resulting from visionless policies. Thus, the 2015 election offers Nigerians a good opportunity to vote wisely for a leader who

out of personal conviction and preparedness is offering his or herself to serve rather than someone who will get there before beginning to plan. This underscores the fact that most of our developmental challenges are rooted in lack of sound, visionary and result-oriented leadership.

The issue of leadership accounts for the problem of Nigeria since independence more than all other speculative and assumed problems often adduced by scholars. Most Nigerian leaders have shown lack of commitment for true nationhood and allowed personal ambitions and ethnic, regional as well as religious persuasions to override national considerations. As Chimee (2009) noted, the three major strands that account for leadership failure in Nigeria are lack of ideology; ethnicity; and corruption. In all the activities of the country's political elites in leadership positions, the three variables played considerable role.

Nigeria, today, runs a democratic system of government that is expected to promote democratic values of public accountability; transparency; good conscience; fiscal discipline; due process; amongst others. However, there is lack of credible leadership to enforce these characteristics of democracy and good governance. This is the tragedy of the Nigerian nation, which explains its crawling posture at 55 years of political independence.

Corruption: Another serious challenge to democracy and good governance in Nigeria is the entrenched corruption in all facets of national life. According to Joseph (2001) cited in Osimiri (2009), corruption has resulted in catastrophic governance in Nigeria. In view of the deleterious effect of endemic corruption on governance, various governments in the country have embarked on anti-corruption campaigns. For instance, the Obasanjo administration established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to champion the war against corruption. As Osimiri (2009) noted, the Commission gained such level of notoriety in the country that it

is often said that the fear of EFCC is the beginning of wisdom.

Thus, an over view of democracy and good governance in Nigeria with regards to transparency, inclusiveness, and the fight against corruption tend to paint a faint picture of some improvement but the records have much to be desired. While the EFCC, especially, under the Obasanjo administration received much commendation from within and outside Nigeria, it has been selective in focus and alleged to have been occasionally used as an instrument of silencing political opponents.

Electoral system: It has been pointed out that in the political arena, even though elections are gradually becoming part of the political culture in Nigeria, they are typically manipulated and hijacked by "money bags" and incumbents, who deploy all state's apparatus of power and resources to ensure their re-election. Thus, elections in Nigeria are largely nothing but a charade to perpetuate the reign of the perfidious. Free and fair elections confer legitimacy on the electoral process. The wide spread electoral malpractices, which often characterize elections in Nigeria are inimical to the consolidation of democracy and good governance. In 2011, the outcome of the general elections in Nigeria was followed by the eruption of violence and wanton destruction of lives and property for alleged election fraud. If people are to have faith in democracy, the most cardinal point is that they must be assured that their votes count in determining who will govern; and in getting rid of a government that has failed them.

Rise of Insurgency: Boko Haram has become a disaster of unimaginable proportion. The terrorist activities of the group has retarded socio-economic and political development of the country, especially in the north eastern region, hence it poses a major challenge to democracy and good governance. Since insurgency is inimical to democracy and good governance, the only way to remedy the situation is to fight it to a stand-still. Thus, mustering the

political will to pursue a full frontal attack on Boko Haram is no longer an option, it is the most desirable course of action. Many Nigerians are unable to come to terms with, why a so-called Africa's best army has been unable to bring to an end this horrendous situation. However, the military approach must be backed by a political solution, which will address the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment of northern Nigeria.

Impunity: This is a threat to democracy, which is not measured by the existence of democratic structures but by the promotion of rule of law. Thus, in Nigeria's quest for democracy and good governance, the impunity clause must be expunged from the constitution, in order to domesticate the equality of every Nigerian before the law. These challenges are antithetical to the achievement of democratic culture and good governance. They are no doubt, immense and daunting but not insurmountable, once there is the political will to resolve and overcome them for the enthronement of democracy and good governance in the country.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the synchrony between democracy and good governance in Nigeria and the challenges and prospects of visionary political leadership. The analysis suggests that while the country is not oblivious of the crucial importance of democracy and good governance in fast-tracking its development and progress, there are challenges, which tend to undermine their actualization. The paper has therefore, recommended measures to address these challenges in order to enhance the prospects of deepening democracy and good governance in the country; stressing that the time to act is now.

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