

THREAT TO DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

Okunola Muyiwa Olabode

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science
Federal University Kashere Gombe- State
Email: Okunolamuyiwa20@gmail.com

***Abstract:** Nigeria since independence has been struggling with challenges of consolidating her young democracy. In fact, the country is at crossroad on how to institutionalize democratic norms and ethos in the polity. We have had aborted democratization in the past and military guided democracy in our democratic experience. These arose from bad leadership, economic crisis, corruption, and disregard for the rule of law, impunity, and lack of credible opposition, secessionist threat and militant agitation among others. The thrust of this paper is an in-depth study on democratic consolidation in Nigeria: issues and challenges. Using retrieval data technique, the paper argued that certain factors like independent of judiciary, impartial electoral commission, corruption free institution, vibrant opposition parties to mention few are necessary ingredients for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Consolidation, Democracy, Political History and Panacea and Threat

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Okunola Muiyiwa Olabode (2016), *Threat to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 8, Number 2, Pp. 101-107.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a post-colonial creation has been facing unimaginable political-socio and economic problems since attainment of nationhood. The problems of political instability and her underdevelopment is generating tension, violence and hopelessness in the polity. Nigeria is a conglomeration of ethnic composition. In other words, Nigeria state falls into categories of nations which Thomas Hobbes labeled as "commonwealth by acquisition" (kolawole, 2007). The implication of her force union had made Nigeria to be association of divergent tribes, ethnic and different viewers in orientation. Ironically, the emergence of the 1914 amalgamation has been the contentious issue the country has endured since 1960. According to Ayua (1979:109) "these cultural, linguistic, tribal and religious differences no doubt affecting system of thought and imply the inevitable presence of dissension and disagreement within the community and this threaten the unity of the polity". It was on this view that series of panel biting are still being done as a result of imperfection that arouse from the amalgamation. However, it is very essential for African State and Nigeria in particular to take very seriously the phases of democratic consolidation, such phases which are critical to the institutionalization process of established democracy in Nigeria. Consolidation of democracy has been expressly stated

as "the process by which democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate and so habitually practiced and observed that it is very unlikely to break down" (Diamond,1988). Also, Juan and Alfred Stephan have identified three interrelated development that describe a movement towards democratic consolidation. These are:

-Behaviorally, when no significant national, social economic, political or institutional actor in the country spends significant resources attempting to achieve his objectives by creating non-democratic regime or by seceding from the state;-Attitudinally, when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs and support for anti-system alternatives is small and isolated; and-Constitutionally, when government and non-governmental forces become habituated to a resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures and institutions sanctioned by new democratic process. Juan Linz and Alfred Stephan (1966:33). Moreover, it is needless to say that the developed countries like France, Britain USA etc need to consolidate their democracy because these countries were already institutionalized. The problem with Nigerian democracy can be understood from her historical emergence as a nation as well as self inflicted problems from the political elites. Therefore, this paper will explore threats to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The work is divided into two sections. A first section deals with events in Nigeria since independence and meaning of democracy. While the second section dealt with threat to democratic consolidation, prospect for Democracy in Nigeria and the ways to achieving democratic survival in Nigeria.

Issues in Nigeria political history since independence

The political history of Nigeria has been bedeviled with political immaturity, leadership incapability, religious and ethnic intolerance among others. In fact, the various post-independence crises have made scholars to described Nigerian- state a delicate edifice that is waiting to collapse. The western regional crisis of (1962-1965) which precipitated the January 15th, 1966 coup is a testimony that all was not well with Nigeria independence. The consequential effect of the struggle between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the first Republic which incidentally collapsed the Republic laid the foundation for concurrent crises confronting the nation today The attendant consequence of military intervention of 1966, July 29 1975, December 1983, August 1985, November 1993 in Nigeria has eroded and collapsed the dream embedded in the Nigeria project at independence. Basically, post-independence Nigeria was the year of election rigging and gerrymandering which culminated in alliance between the North and the East under the leadership of Tafawa Balewa. In fact, the effect of corruption, election rigging and political thuggery in the year 1960-1966 and the resentment and disillusion that followed Balewa government from civil servant, academics etc spread to the army which eventually collapsed the regime. In another development, the lack of trust and leadership crisis between Ojukwu and Gowon which led to Nigerian civil war of (1967-1970) was a destructive and agonizing experience .The effect of the war was still vibrating especially the Igbo's who were badly affected most. The consequential effect of the war coupled with the trend of events now in the country has increase the level of distrust and suspicion among

the people. The lack of thrust has indeed reduced the level of cohesiveness among Nigerians. Similarly, politics and electoral instability and our immediate reactions to the outcome of the contest say much of the fragility of our democratic system. Our lack of democratic ethos among our political class has remained part of the problem Nigeria is contending with. The 1964, 1979, 1999, 2003 and 2011 are reference point, where losers have displayed lack of courage to accept the outcome of election result. Today, there a lot of crisis ranging from religious crisis, ethnic nationalism, resource control, unemployment, Niger/Delta problem and Boko-Haram crises among others are challenges threatening the country fledgling democracy. However, it is no longer news that Nigeria is an amalgamation of various tribes, ethnic and religious differences as the people were cohabit as the situation demand. Therefore, "the land mass known Nigeria today existed as a number of independent and sometimes hostile national states with linguistic and cultural differences" Obasanjo (1980:1). It was this aftermath of this that chief Obafemi Awolowo once refers to Nigeria as "a mere geographical expression which lack the ingredients of nationhood" (Awolowo, 1947). The colonial administration sowed and fostered the seed of discord among the regions that secured independence. The various constitutional reviews from 1922-1954 to address some of these fundamental challenges and to ensure united Nigeria was a mere cosmetic exercise. Basically, the colonial master failed in their desire to foster nationhood for Nigerian.

In a nutshell, two fundamental factors critical to understanding the challenges of Nigeria democracy can be view from historical perspective and the military intervention in our polity. It is on this premise that Kolawole (2007) argued that "it is easy to draw parallels between the strategy of governance and survival of both the colonial and military rulers". This situation also explain the position of Mahmood Madan (2002-288) that "post - independence governments in Africa were more interested in decentralization rather than democratization". Therefore, all effort aimed at consolidating Nigeria democracy from 1960-1966, 1979-1983, 1999-2003, 2007-2011 and 2015 to date have been difficult because of the inherent contradictions in our political system. The leaders are more interested in 'entrenching political rule rather than entrenching democratization' kolawole (1997). Although, genuine democratization process began in 1999 but the challenges are still far from over as the country is currently facing the problems of institutionalizing democratic norms and ethos in our polity.

Conceptualizing Democracy

The term democracy is literarily means rule by the people. Also scholars have expressed various meaning to democracy in different dimensions. According to (Macpherson, 1973), he defined democracy as a representative parliament, the separation of power, rule of law, Civil rights and other desirables. While (Plamenatz, 1973) conceptualized Democracy as a popular sovereignty, majority rule, protection of minorities, Constitutional liberties and Peoples participation in decision making at every level and egalitarianism (Plamenatz, 1973). However, democracy symbolizes the supremacy of the many over the few through the mechanism of the state. This conception of majority rule

is what distinguishes democracy from other types of government where few people dominate the majority. Democracy is an antidote to human development and denial of it would hinder development. It needs be reiterated that Nigerian state of underdevelopment arose from her abandonment of democracy in her early nationhood. Democracy provide for periodic elections, fundamental human rights to vote and be voted for. Therefore, it allows people to partake in the affairs of their government.

Variants of Democracy

We have some variants of democracy like centrifugal, centripetal, consociation and depoliticized democracy but three are noticeable. The is **Centripetal democracy** which always brings stability, unity among contending parties because of the belief in mutual and consensus among parties and elites in solving political dispute. American democracy is best suitable for this theory. Second is **Consociation democracy**. This type of democracy shared multiparty system and acknowledges the differences in parties, religious and ethnic affiliations. It is not worthy to say that the diversity has brought a unity rather than division that often characterize African politics. The Dutch democratic system typifies this type of democracy. The third one is **Centrifugal** democracy. This type of political system brings to instability as such, it is always difficult to agree to build consensus on issues that affect governance. This is as a result of various divergent opinion and views among the various contending parties. Italian democracy and Nigeria in the first republic fall within this model.

Threats to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The process of strengthening democracy in Nigeria is restrained by many factors. One of the major threats is the military. Scholars and Opinion have argued that military rule is an aberration. They are anti-democracy and always find it very difficult to relinquish power whenever they are in government. Similarly, substantial parts of Nigeria political history had been aborted transition and annulments of popular elections to self succession plan which has been used to keep the political class at bay. And where they are committed or sincere to transits to civilians like it had happened in 1999, people usually cast doubt to its credibility and long term stability. Another limitation is lack of credible opposition. The lack of strong alternatives force that can pressurize government in power to work with democratic ideals and people's welfare is one of the banes of Nigerian democracy. Presently, the Nigerian democracy lacks credible opposition voice to wake-up and re-awaking the current administration to rise up to the current challenges facing the country. Elsewhere in neighboring Africa Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe regime of (ZANU-PF) is no longer popular, yet the democratic space remain without credible opposition. The effect of which has grounded the country's economy. The need for strong civil society is another prerequisite for democratic consolidation. The country's democracy needs strong virile civil society that can work with at the same call the government to order to avoid monopolization of the political space. Another pitfall to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is alleged monopolization and domination of political echelons both in administrative and sub-system by particular section of the country. Specifically,

the trend where the head of the Military, Civil Service, the Police, Custom and excise, University Commission Board of Parastatals ,etc are dominated by particular section of the country remain a major threat to democratic stability in Nigeria. Leadership problem; the country has been so unfortunate to have credible and leader with political will and courage to meet the yearnings of the people. Nigerian leaders are known to be corrupt, insensitive and found for other social vices. For democracy to grow and consolidated the country needs visionary and selfless leadership. Another threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is corruption. The level of corruption in our polity has reached its peak. The cankerworm has permeated every facet of our lives. Today highly placed and influential people including our nation's judiciary are being accused of corruption. In spite of the establishment of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to confront the menace, the social vice is still spreading like a wild fire. The fact is that democracy cannot thrive in a country where corruption has been institutionalized. Finally, poverty remains another threat. Nigerians are currently facing economic crises which have indeed worsened the poverty level of Nigerians. The country's domestic and foreign debt is growing steadily and unemployment, underemployment, insecurity, hunger, crime and violence are the lots of Nigerians. With prices of goods and services skyrocketing every day, people seem to have lost hope in the present democratic governance. The failure to accept electoral defeat by the political class is serious challenge to democratization process. Our politician and their supporters are found of causing crises whenever outcome of election result does not favor them. Politicians must learn how to accept defeat as electoral support is variable factor to electoral victory and its being determine by good governance.

Panacea for Democratic Survival in Nigeria

In order for democracy to strengthen in our polity, our political class need re-orientation and political lesson to enable the realized that person elected for four years is not for life. Our youth who supports these politicians also need political education to avoid constituting nuisance to the system whenever the candidate they supported lost. Second is independence of judiciary. It is the last home of common man and it must be made to be free from executive manipulation. Another way forward is the need to de-emphasis money supremacy over competence. Our political system has been monetized and the effect of this is celebrations of incompetence and mediocrity in high places. It should be discouraged as this money bag system is not allowed in developed countries. Press freedom. The strong and viable press is an antidote to strong democracy in any society. It must be strong, objective and free from caprices of the government. It must always awaken the government and put government on its track when deviating from its goal. Lastly, the fight against corruption must be intensify. Political corruption and other social vices must be discouraged by way of establishing electoral tribunal that would give stiff penalty for offenders.

Prospect of Democracy in Nigeria

One can expressed optimism that that Democracy has come to stay in Nigeria. This optimism is based on some factors. One is that the military which is prone to hijack the democratic structures and institutions as a result of bad governance and looting of public treasury by civilians have now embraced democratic ideals. Two, Military intervention in politics has affected the ethics and integrity of the military coupled with Es spirit de corps and professionalism that has gradually diminish. As a result of these, the military would not intervene in politics again for any self destructive move. In another development, people have begun to see military rule as aberration. Apart from this, democracy has become the only credential for membership into global interrelationship and the only legitimate form of government in the world. Thus, any country that failed to democratize will remain a pariah Nation. In fact, international organizations like UNO, African Body AU and Commonwealth association always demonstrate their hatred for military rule. Consequently, democracy has come to stay in Nigeria in spite of the enormous challenges facing it since return to democratic rule in 1999.

Conclusion

Democracy is sinequanon to development. In fact, it's situation where political actors and institution of state are oiled in democratic values, norms and ethos Kolawole (2007). Moreover, interlink between the civil rule and democracy is the democratization process which must be successful if democratic values and norms must be institutionalized. This paper posits threats and panacea to democratic survival in Nigeria. Optimism is also expressed for the success and stable democratization in Nigeria. Therefore, all efforts must be geared towards consolidating the gains of democratic practice since 1999.

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Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2016.

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