

ELECTION AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

M.M. Adagbabiri, U.C. Okolie

Delta State University Abiraka, Nigeria
Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria,
Edo State Branch, Benin City, Nigeria
Email: Ugookolie3@gmail.com, adagbabirimoses@gmail.com

***Abstract:** The paper analyzed the recurring election crisis under liberal democratic system in Nigeria. One of the major instruments of selecting political representatives who govern the people is election. Credible periodic elections are the crucial factor in the survival of any political system and the conduct of free and fair election is the beauty of a democratic structure. This is because it makes electoral activities meaningful and the interest of the electorates represented. But in Nigeria especially in this fourth republic. Elections have become a tool for promoting the interest of the aristocrat rather than the electorates. The philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept under the carpet making the Nigerian elections to lose faith in the electoral process and the government. The paper with the use of structure agency theory, argued that elections in which "the winner takes all" is unsuitable for a plural society like Nigeria. Adoption of the liberal democratic system to suit the country's cultural values and peculiarities should lay the basis for people centered development strategies that will empower them to be active participants in policy making and implementation, under a political climate characterized by the rule of law and constitutionalism. Unless these categorical steps are taken, the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance will continued to be corroded.*

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INTRODUCTION

A democratic system is one where rulers are held accountable to the ruled by means of a variety of political arrangement. Such arrangements include but are necessarily conterminous with, competitive multi-party elections held at

regular intervals (Oronsaye, 1995). Elections are critical aspects of the democratic framework for governing modern political societies. They serve as instrument of political choice, mobilization and accountability.

In the context of liberal democracy that has become the most popular form of democracy in a unipolar world, elections are to facilitate the smooth transition from one civilian administration to the other and help in legitimizing setting governments (Ighodalo, 2012). Analytically, the 2003 and 2007 general elections were adjudged to be worst elections in the history of fourth republic. This is because the elections were characterized by; massive rigging, monetization factors, assassination, political thuggery, sentiments, corrupt practices of electoral officers, judicial injustice, deliberated disfranchisement of the populace, discountenancing of the election's vote, outright disregard for the rule of law, political intimidation, ballot box snatching and stuffing and other forms of election malpractices. What the above implies is that the legitimacy of liberal democracy as the best form of governance has been corroded.

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria threatens the very existence of the Nigerian state. The congress for progressive change (CPC) has come out openly to reject the results of the presidential elections which it alleged its candidate, retired General Buhari won. While, the case was in court, political jobbers and miscreants seized the opportunity to create a state of insecurity in the country through the spate of bombing and communal violence in the country creates avenues for aggrieved groups to revive their hitherto latent agitations for all manner of things, the most violent of them being the spate of bombing by the Boko Haram sect (Ighodale, 2012).

Also, the 2015 general elections were characterized by; ineffective and inefficient card readers, under aged electorates, voters register used at polling units not numbered, thus, permitting arbitrary addition of names to the register, dressing up party agents in police uniforms to immediate opponents at polling and collation centers, use of looted public money to bribe voters and other forms of election malpractices. The political elite see elections as warfare, characterized by gangsterism and political disorder. The political parties which organize for elections are also, like armband of men and

women going for war, where there must be victors and vanquished. Elections have become warfare, where it is a sin to lose. This dominant pattern of elections and electioneering threatened to tear the nation apart and put its tenuous peace at great risks (Ighodalo, 2012). It is against this background that this paper analyzed election and liberal democracy in Nigeria's fourth republic: Issues and challenges they elicit and the way forward.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Elections are means of selecting those to represent the people in different public positions with the polity. Election "provides citizens with influence over policy making" (Powell, 2000). Elections could be retificatory in the sense that they aim at giving a sitting government some appearances of popularity and mobilize the people for popular participations in development (Ighodalo, 2012). But under liberal democracy, elections play wider role such as: instruments of accountability, mobilization of the people, promotion of legitimacy, among other functions. Competitive political elections are vital to the survival of the liberal variant of democracy. Therefore, democracy depends on parties to survive, since the structure of elections right from citizens participation to candidates' presentation of competing programmes is done by political parties. It is on this note that political parties occupy a special place in the democratic equation. This democratic method of arriving at acceptable political leader's is succinctly captured by Schumpeter (1990) articulation of this arrangement as the:

Institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions. It is a method by which the individual acquires the power to participate in decisions by means of competitive struggle for the peoples vote.

It is instructive to note that under liberal democracy words like "Competitive struggle" tend to be emphasized more than consensual approach to politics (Ighodalo, 2012). Thus, central to the survival of this democratic method is the imperative of playing by the rule of the game. It is the conformity with this state imperative that allows for uninterrupted transfer of power from one administration to another. Once a sitting government knows that it can

be voted out of power within the framework of periodic elections, it strive to pursue the socio-economic and political interests of the electorates (Ighodalo, 2012) who may switch allegiance to opposition parties if such government fails to meet their expectations. Thus, legitimacy is seen as "the capacity of the political system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society" (Lipset, 1963) is central to the survival of liberal democracy.

A people develop attachment to and belief in the prevailing political system because they trust in its ability to meet their short and long term needs. It is therefore, necessary for electorates to elect their leaders because of the following reasons: it ensures that the leaders owe allegiance to the people and therefore run responsible government; it reduces the chances of tyrants coming to power and leaders becoming fascist; it makes for political stability; it makes a government democratic, but these cannot be possible were the Independent National Electoral Commission has been characterized with lack of security of tenure, inadequate funding, lack of adequate autonomy, most of the officials of the commission are bias and corrupt and the judiciary has been staying aloof in complementing Nigeria democratic process. What the above implies is that the legitimacy of liberal democracy as the best form of governances has been corroded. Thus, the core ideas and ingredients defining liberal democracy are participation and accountability; that the people determine who govern them, and that those who govern give account of their stewardship through periodic election which is one of the most important mechanisms for the realization of the objectives of democratization. It is also important to note that, elections are not only meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the governors through a regular consent, but also to provide a fertile ground for democracy to thrive (Ogundiya and Baba, 2007). At this point, it is necessary to give an insight into the concept of liberal democracy. Democracy is a concept that is not amenable to definition unanimity, more so as there exist several versions of it. Common among the versions are the Athenian classical democracy, Marxist – Leninist democracy, Liberal democracy and lately, Radical democratic conception to mention but few, for the sake of this paper however, we are concerned with liberal democracy otherwise known as representative democracy.

Democracy, in the liberal perspective, is government by popular representation; a form of government in which the supreme power is retained by the people, but is indirectly exercised through a system of representation and delegated authority periodically renewed: a constitutional representative government (Salawu and Hassan, 2011). The liberal theory of democracy is said to be common among capitalist and peripheral capitalist nations. This notion of democracy emerged when capitalism became the dominant mode of production in Europe and North America supported the philosophical writing of John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Montesquieu and other liberal writers whose theories advocate private liberty, natural right, social justice, majority rule and private property (Oddih, 2007). Among the major features of a liberal democracy is equality of individuals before the law; acceptance of capitalism; free, fair and periodic elections based on universal franchise; freedom, liberty and universal suffrage enjoyed by the party, system; rule of law; pressure groups; separation of powers and checks and balances.

The central idea of the liberal bourgeois theory of democracy is how to design a political system which encourages individual participation and enhances moral development of the citizens. Liberal democracies usually have universal suffrage, granting all adult citizens the right to vote regardless of race, gender, or property ownership. Liberal democracy may take various constitutional forms: it may be a federal republic, as the United States, Brazil, India and Germany, or a constitutional monarchy such as the United Kingdom, Japan, or Spain. It may also be a presidential or a parliamentary system (Kwasau 2013).

This theory is justified due to the fact that it can help examine analytically the issues and challenges of democratic consolidation in the Nigeria's fourth Republic as it designs the systematic structure through which a democratic political system can effectively function (Morton, 2004). Liberal theory of democracy is an interesting theory in this work. Its value lies in the fact that it exposes and explains the expectation of any political system, especially as it emphasizes the conduct of credible elections which is one of the factors responsible for consolidation democracy.

Critique

Ogundiya (2010) argues that democracy is adopted to suit the desire of foreign donors and advance capitalist democracies. The problem here is that liberal democracy does not evolve, as it was in the west, the African Societies. The arguments here is that there is a serious need to "domesticate" western liberal democracies in order to enhance its benefits in Africa. Therefore, Nigeria and the rest of African according to Gyekye (1997) as cited in Ogundiya (2010), has argued. "Find ingenious ways and means of hammering the autochthonous democratic element as well as elements inherited from alien sources into an acceptable and viable democratic form in the setting of the modern world" (Gyekye, 1997).

"Liberal Democracy" does not respect the absolute majority rule (except when electing representatives). The liberty of majority rule is restricted by the constitution or precedent decided by previous generations. Also, the real power is actually held by a relatively a small representative.

The argument goes thus, "liberal Democracy" is merely a decoration over an oligarchy is a system of government by a small group of all-powerful persons. It is also government by a few who rule for their own selfish interest. In the context of this paper, Oligareh is defined as government by a minority of the society, a minority that is not necessarily distinguished by aristocratic title or privilege. According to Robert Michaels who discovered the "Iron Law of Oligarchy", any society where there is organization, there must be oligarchy i.e. a group of people who dominate and manipulate what happens in the society as well as shares and controls the power. This argument is still forceful today in our society.

More so, some Marxists socialists and leftwing Anarchists, argues that, Liberal democracy is an integral part of the capitalist system. Therefore, it is a class-based and not democratic or participatory. The cost of political campaigning in representative democracies favours the rich (Morton, 2004).

Modern democracy has also been criticized by non-democratic socialists as an honest force used to keep the masses from realizing that there will be irrelevant in the political process (Ighodalo, 2012). Liberal democracy

notwithstanding the criticisms averred by critique is but and large significant in this work. Although other theories such as Marxists theory, Athenian classical theory, political economy theory and lately, Radical theory of democracy respectively, have been used to analyze democracy, none is sufficient to examine democratic consolidation better than the liberal theory used in this study. Notwithstanding, democratic discussion is often embroiled in controversies, over which ideally is true democracy, given scholars' divergence of views on the concept and practice of democracy.

The Nexus of Election and Democracy

Election is central to the effective functioning of modern representative democracy (Ighodalo, 2012). Since direct democracy has become almost impossible to practice on account of the large population in every modern political society, electing or selecting political leaders through periodic elections has become the norm. This is particularly so under liberal democracy (Ighodalo, 2012). As Schumpeter (1942) put it "democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them". Since everybody cannot make such decisions at any given point in time they have to select those to represent them at federal, states and local government councils.

An extended version of this argument on liberal democracy and election is put forward by Sandbrook in (Adejumobi, 2000) "political system characterized by regular and free election in which politicians organize into parties, compete to form the government by right of virtually all adult citizens to vote and by guarantee of a range of familiar political and civil rights". It means that there is an organic link between democracy and election (Ighodalo, 2012). For this linkage to be productive, it has to meet certain essential conditions. These include: the people have to be empowered to make political choice without hindrance, and the political atmosphere free from threat, intimidation and manipulation. Also, the practice of choosing political leaders should cohere with the cultural values of the people which should safeguard the exercise. In other words, elections must be compatible with democracy that is being practiced in a given country. For elections to make meaning to a democratic exercise carried out periodically. (Iyayi, 2005) Contend that:

Elections are a complex set of activities carried with different variables that act and feed the other...

It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance. Elections are not necessarily about election day activities although it forms an important component. It encompasses activities before, during and after elections... it includes the liberation or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of elections.

From the foregoing, it is clear that there are constitutive and regulative mechanisms and precepts of elections which should be taken in its entirety for there to be credible elections and democracy in a given political surrounding. According to Adejumo (2000), these constitutive and regulatory aspects include: "the establishment of a competent, relatively autonomous and non-partisan electoral body to administer the conduct of elections, the existence of an impartial press and a non-partisan police force".

Also, the process of elections should "involve the rules, procedures and activities relating to the conduct of elections" (Ibid). For Ighodalo (2012), these constitutive and regulatory rules should limit the struggle for power and facilitate healthy electoral competition.

Electoral And Liberal Democracy In Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Issue And Challenges

Just like the situation in the country generally, the past seventeen years of democracy in Nigeria is a mixture of good and the bad. Whichever way it is viewed, majority of the people feel that the period is better than several years of military rule. However democracy is adopted to suit the desire of foreign donors and advanced capitalist democracies. The problem here is that liberal democracy does not evolve, as it was in the west, with the African societies. The argument here is that there is a serious need to "domesticate" western liberal democracies in order to enhance its benefits in Africa (Ogundiya, 2010). Nigeria's democracy has remained grossly unstable since the return

to this popular form of governance in 1999. The political terrain has been home with lots of challenges precipitating against the genuine realization of the system. In fact the impediments to the nations unending desire for a true democracy seen to assume a more perilous proportion by the day (Kwasau, 2013). These challenges are:

The Absence of True Federalism

Lack of true federal structure in Nigeria is a stumbling block to the nation's ongoing democratic enterprise. The federal government is very overbearing as it controls about 80% of the country's resources leaving state and local governments at its mercy. Where regions, states or geographical zones have power to control their resources and to have access to the necessary funds for community development programmes, democracy thrives. In fact, it is only true federalism that can guarantee fairness and justice in the society. More importantly, it enables each locality to progress according to the aspiration of the people (Kwasau, 2013). A durable and enforceable people's constitution protects the people and determines socio-political activities in a society. As noted in the philosophy of Aristotle "we can decide the identity of a state only by examining the form (and contents) of its constitution". In Nigeria, we lack the reality of such a federal constitution and true federal state (Awuudu, 2012).

Abject Poverty

Poverty is a principal cause of political, social and economic conflict in the country. Poverty is antithetical to the principles and core values of democracy. Poverty in the midst of plenty creates disaffection among the populace and leads them towards violent behavior (Ighodala, 2012). A society of beggars, parasites and bandits cannot be democratic (Ake, 1996). This constrains the ability of the people to make independent choices and participate actively in a democratic process. One can safely argue that poverty is hindrance to democratic consolidation since economic chaos can topple democratic institutions. Poverty reduces the people's self-esteem and ability to extract accountability from those they elect. Democracy may mean little to a people that are hungry, poverty stricken, unemployed and illiterate. Vote can only be meaningful in the hands of those who knew their meaning and relevance. Environmental and other abuses are going on in the midst of

poverty, thereby depriving the people of access to life sustaining resources (Ayeni, 2010).

Corruption

Another great impedent to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the phenomenon of corruption which has been dominating the political scene of the country. Corruption is the cause and consequence of poverty in the society, it has stunted the delivery of the dividends of democracy and make civilian rule fragile. Corruption is a pernicious phenomenon that plagues all sectors of public and private life in Africa (Ighodalo, 2012).

According to Ogundiya (2010), events in Nigeria since 1999 has shown that the tidal waves of reversal have been contending with Nigeria's democratic project. Consequently, democracy remains grossly unstable and the future seems to be every bleak because of rampant bureaucratic and political corruption. Corruption has reached a high crescendo such that an average Nigerian now possibly associates democracy with it. The consequences of political corruption are potently manifest. Cyclical crisis of legitimacy, fragile party structure, institutional decay, chronic economic problem and unemployment and above all general democratic volatility.

Under the fourth republic in Nigeria, corruption has continued unabated. At the federal, state and local government levels there have been avalanche of accusations, allegations and claims of financial misappropriation running to billions of naira. These are monies meant for all round development at these levels of government which have found their way into private bank accounts and homes of public officeholders (Ighodalo, 2012). In a similar vein, Obayelu (2007) identifies it as "efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefits". Such sets of criminality by public officers create enough social insecurity in the land that can be capitalized on by other tendencies to destabilize the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria.

Multiple Elector Challenges

In Nigeria especially in this fourth republic, elections have become a tool for promoting the interest of the aristocrat rather than the electorates. The

philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept the carpet making the Nigerian electorates to lose faith in the electoral process and the government.

Analytically, the 2003 and 2007 general elections were adjudged to be worst elections in the history of fourth republic. This is because the elections were characterized by; massive rigging, monetization factors, assassination, political thuggery, sentiments, corrupt practices of electoral officers, judicial injustice, deliberate disfranchisement of the populace, discountenancing of the electorate's vote, outright disregard for the rule of law etc. what the above implies is that the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance has been corroded.

The incumbency factor

In political parlance, incumbency refers to holders of political office who enjoy certain privileges (such as wider media coverage and security) which are not available to other contestants in the electoral contest. These privileges create some electoral margin for the incumbent running for re-election leading to an incumbency abuse factor. In Nigeria, this factor promotes appointment of corrupt and or compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of the electoral tribunals to protest stolen mandates, use of state security forces and apparatus to intimidate opposition parties, denial of access to state owned media house etc. to ensure they regain or elongate their tenure against popular will (Jaja and Aumona, 2011).

Also, winner-takes all politics that defines the liberal democratic model, carries with it electoral crisis. It is a system where the winner at election takes all and the loser is vanquished. Since everybody want to be the mainstream of the subsisting politics, elections become a "do or die" affair. In this context, managers of the electoral processes cannot be above board because pressure, from the system is too enormous for anyone to play be the rule (Ighodalo, 2012). The 2015 general elections have shown tolerance, the learning process can yield many dividends. This has huge implication for civil society that should drive the economy.

Ethno-Religious Factor

This remains one of the forces that have contributed greatly to socio-political instability in the country. The latest sectarian turbulence in the country and the clamor for the presidency by the varied ethnic groups indicate that the society is still balkanized by tribal and religious sentiment (Victor, 2002). Each ethnic nationality in Nigeria has its own faith, interest, culture, language and level of aspiration and these forces seem to affect the economic fate of each group. In addition, they make the creation of a common identity problematic, thereby exacerbating the difficulty in attaining a true democracy in the society. A survey of political scenario in Nigeria since independence will show the extent to which ethnic loyalty has affected the nation's dream to have democratic governance. Ethnic nationalism has had a lot of negative consequences for the nation's movement towards democratization to the extent that it remains an enduring threat to institutionalization of democracy in Nigeria.

Among its resultant negative consequences as observed by Babangida (2002), are wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestments of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relations among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another. Currently, Nigeria lacks the necessary democratic values, social security and distributive justice hence, the rampant social unrest in the polity.

Disjointed Information

Mass media as watchdog of the public interest is very crucial to democratic consolidation. The media is democratically seen as vanguard for holding governments accountable and guarding against the abuse of power. This can be done by raising countervailing structures of surveillance to monitor government activities and stem an inherent disposition toward excess. But in Nigeria especially in this fourth republic, there are constraints on press media resulting in suppression of information, provision of disjointed and half-hazard information and thereby limiting the capacity of individual to

develop a reservoir of political knowledge assist them in controlling authoritarian rule and participating in political activities. Our media has been subsumed into the elite structure "the big man" syndrome or "upper body structure". This is actively inimical to the survival and deepening of democracy (Awuudu, 2012).

Political Leadership

According to Achebe (1984), the problem with Nigeria has been described simply as that of leadership. Postindependence political leadership has been everything but not productive. They have been distributive rather than productive in orientation, wasteful and corrupt in political and economic management. Given the character that are threats to human security. This is not unrelated to the schism in the ranks of the political elite who lack the hegemony and discipline to engender socio-economic and political stability (Ighodalo, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Since independence, the country has been in search on democracy that works. What this entail should be the concern of all y: peace loving Nigerians. Democracy is a contested concept. It is not given. Countries should find ways of making it meaningful to their peculiar circumstances. The way forward is to find out ways of adapting liberal democracy to the country's pluralism. This may require the pursuit of some kind of consociation arrangement that will allow for the sharing of power among competing groups and political interests in the country. The winner takes all majoritarian system is not healthy for a deeply divided country like Nigeria. Social disintegration could well be the most acute danger facing democracies, undermining the human rights and civil liberties on which democracy stands. The first major step toward resolving endemic problem of electoral conflicts and crises within Nigerian state, we have argued, is to enthrone genuine democracy based on the people cultural values which contain what has been described as the universal ideals of democracy.

Also, such system will demand enthroning of a new political culture of tolerance; politicians should learn to play by the rule of the game of politics rather than make it a "do or die" affair. A new political culture of tolerance

and accommodation, bargaining and compromise, conflict and consensus should be embraced by stakeholders in the political system: the practice of destroying the system every time politicians fail to achieve their goals is not healthy for the future of democracy and the corporate existence of the country. Once the country is able to get its politics right, the economy will certainly be on its way to recovery and growth.

Furthermore, there should be institutionalization of electoral reforms. It is refreshing to note that the government is moving along this line. It is a step in the right direction. The electoral body should be made up of men of integrity and high moral standing. Where these standards are compromised, those found culpable should be removed from office and persecuted. Funding of and autonomy for the electoral commission are critical issues which should be addressed space should continually be expanded to give the people more opportunities to participate in the democratization process going on in the country. Different interest groups should be brought into the political equation in the country, to enable them contribute their own quota to the Nigerian project. The judiciary is also a critical organ in the sustenance of democracy and maintenance of law and order in the country. Judiciary should dispense justice without fear or favour. Once this is realized, it will empower the people to bring to bear on the polity their innate potentials for development in various spheres of life and the frustration they presently experienced will be a thing of the past.

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