

DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

One of the major arguments in favour of the need for democratized society is that it is required to enhance good governance and development. Based on the analysis of available secondary data, the paper examines democracy and good governance in Nigeria. It identifies the problems that have militated against Nigeria's democratic sustainability in the past to include lack of proper democratic institutions and system. The paper concludes that for democracy to achieve its goals there is the need for the government to put in place measures to strengthen the nation's democratic institutions and intensify political education/ sensitisation amongst politicians and citizens as precursor to good governance and development in Nigeria.

Key words: Democracy, Good governance.

INTRODUCTION

At the minimum, democracy refers to a political system that guarantees opportunities for citizens to choose and replace their leaders or representatives via free and fair elections; that respects and protects socio-economic, political and cultural rights of citizens as well as guarantee acceptable level of active involvement of citizens in decision-making. In any good sense of the word, in terms of its ability to bring changes to the living conditions of citizens, it is a form of governance that holds this truth that the people are the most that matter. This implies that both civic engagement of citizens and responsiveness of the state to citizens' promptings and demands are key ingredients of democratic governance.

In 1999, democracy was re-introduced to Nigeria after several years of military dictatorship. Citizens were with high expectation at the beginning but about fifteen years after, both social thinkers and citizens are questioning the validity of claims of democratic success in the face of flawed processes and policies. Although certain level of development appear to have been made, it seems that crisis in citizens' welfare and insecurity in the country, especially in the Niger Delta, North Central and the North-Eastern regions of the country have thrown up issues of the quality of democracy where good governance, accountability and transparency count. In short, poverty, unemployment, insurgency, killings, kidnappings, intercommunity violence and general state of insecurity have gradually become the conspicuous features of Nigeria polity. It then appears that true democracy is a rear breed in Africa, especially Nigeria. In any good

sense of the word, in terms of its ability to bring changes to the living conditions of citizens, it is a form of governance that portrays that the people matter most. This implies that both civic engagement of citizens and responsiveness of the state to citizens' agitations and demands are key ingredients in any democratic setting.

This paper seeks to examine, based on direct observation and grand narratives found in literature, the lacuna in the actualization of good governance in the claimed democratic states of Nigeria. It also posits that the institutionalization and realistic intensification of the crusade against corruption remains the basis of ensuring good governance only if the anti-corruption institutions will themselves be subject to democratic governance and the oversight powers of responsible civil society.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted the historical research method to analyse the secondary data obtained from relevant books, journals, internet resources, seminar papers, magazines and newspapers relating to democracy and good governance in Nigeria. The historical research method involves investigating, recording, analyzing and interpreting events with a view to arriving at an acceptable research outcome (Osunde 1993, 33–43).

The paper is structured into six sections. Section one serves as the introduction; section two refer to the methodology, section three examines the concept of democracy and good governance; section four looks at the nexus between good governance, democracy and development; section five discusses factors militating against good governance and democracy in Nigeria; and section six concludes the paper.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Democracy

The word democracy is derived from two Greek words- '*demos*' and '*kratia*' which connote 'the people' and 'the rule', respectively. Because it is a people-centred form of government, Abraham Lincoln has defined it as the "government of the people, by the people, for the people" (Obasi 1995). According to the Webster's Encyclopedia Dictionary "democracy is a government in which the supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections" (Webster 2006). The people being referred to here are the common people or the working people. According to Hannatu Musawa (2004), democracy *vis-à-vis* good governance involves every stakeholder, particularly in the control of economic and political power in a way that inspires one's faith and commitment in the corporate reality of the nation.

In the Nigerian context, democracy is synonymous to minority rule where the minority dominates and exploits the masses and the working class. This is probably because government would seem to have subsumed the interests of the under-privileged majority in those of the few public office holders. This is a bourgeois democracy as it only grants symbolic participatory opportunities to the citizens while it serves the interest of the few public office holders. In the opinion of this author, democracy is a political contrivance which allows the mass of people to freely express their political will through a few elected representatives or individuals. This is the opposite of dictatorship, tyranny or autocracy. In an ideal setting democracy is expected to advance equality not inequality in wealth and other life supporting amenities.

Good Governance

Governance, like any other political concept, has been subjected to varied definitions and explanations. In the opinion of P.O. Dozie (1999), governance is regarded as the totality of processes entitled in the exercise and management of the collective will of a people under a defined authority or constitution. It has also been seen to imply the exercise of power by a person or a group of persons for the benefit of the populace. AlabaOgunsanwo(2000) appear to agree with this definition when he argued that “good governance is also responsible and responsive government since the welfare of the people ought to be the main purpose of the state and those who govern on its behalf”.

In other words, good governance, therefore, has to do with those activities of the public office holders such as policy-making and implementation which ensure diligence, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and efficient service delivery to enhance the quality of life of the governed. As a matter of fact, it is not the process but the result of governance.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

Various studies have shown that there is a nexus between democracy, good governance and development in a country (Igbuzor 2005; Kim *et al.* 2005; Gberevbie2009 . According to Im (2005), “the conditions for good governance depend on the presence and consolidation of democratic characteristics.” Igbuzor (2005, 79) sees good governance as entails the respect for and protection of human rights, abiding by the rule of law and running an open and transparent government.” Emphasizing the importance of good governance for development, ZouheirM’Dhaffar posits that “good governance, efficient and effective public administration are necessary conditions to achieve sustainable development” (cited in Kim *et al.* 2005, 646–654). On his part, Kofi Annan, observes that “good governance is vital for the protection of rights of citizens and the advancement of economic and social development” (cited in Kim *et al.* 2005, 646–654).

Based on empirical evidence, sustainable development is yet to be achieved in Nigeria because of the challenges of good governance. The Federal Government of Nigeria observed recently in its transformation agenda that: Nigeria’s inability to decisively tackle most development challenges such as poverty, unemployment, security and deplorable state of infrastructure has been largely attributed to bad governance in all its ramifications. These include political governance, economic governance, corporate governance and effectiveness of institutions (Federal Government of Nigeria Transformation Agenda (FGNTA) 2011–2015, 6–25).

The foregoing clearly shows that good governance and not just governance is a key to a nation’s quest for sustainable development. And this is more likely to be achieved through a democratic system where people have the opportunity to freely participate in the election of their political leaders without hindrance. According to Mimiko(2007, 303–316), “democracy provides a platform for good governance, and promotes systematic stability as long as there is an outlet to legitimately access power by the political contenders through the people’s vote at elections.” In this regard, Kim *et al.* (2005, 646–654) posit that “the institutionalization of participation by all people is a cornerstone of good governance.”While some scholars believe that democracy is good because it has the

ability to facilitate good governance for development, others went even further to argue that democracy is meaningless without economic and social rights (Abiola and Olaopa2006, 25–34; Ojo 2006, 1–24). In this regard, the former Nigerian Federal Minister of Information, Professor Jerry Gana posits that: You know the mentality of our people. If democracy does not produce clean water, if democracy does not produce good roads, transform agriculture, cultivate industrial development, sanitize society, give us power supply, democracy will lose credibility and they may say, 'Na democracy we go chop' (cited in Ojo 2006, 1-24). The forgoing shows that even on the part of the people, there is a nexus between democracy, good governance and development.

However, for democracy to successfully provide platforms for good governance and development, democratic institutions are put in place as mechanisms to legitimately enthrone political leaders through the conduct of elections in a democratic society. McGill (1995, 63–80), sees “institution as an instrument for action.” Styhre (2001, 1–12), argues that institutions are reflections of the socio-political values that surround them. In the same vein, Farmbry and Harper (2005, 678–686) see institutions “as action-driven entities that have a vital role in reflecting and responding to the environment in which they are situated.”

The performance and measurement of democracy no longer stand differently from good governance. The connection between both concepts and in short, success in the practice of democracy lies strongly in the understanding that democracy, understood as good governance carries with it the capacity for improving society and welfare of its citizens. This thinking is appreciable if we reflect on how every country in Africa today claims to be democratic or at least practicing democracy with increasing outcomes of poverty and decadence in the political and socio-economic health of citizens. Addressing this question in practical governance and in ways that match reality with theory must begin with theseeming indeterminate nature of the concept of democracy which appears to have remained essentially insurmountable. For scholars, its definition defies consensus, especially in relation to its operation (Akindele&Ajila, 1992: 85-86; Akindele&Obiyan, 1996: 84). Hence, Olowu (1995) posited that democracy as a "concept of governance has become all things to all men". This explains why politicians in different countries of Africa would label every political system a democracy to suit their predilections. It has been a case of gross abuse and misinterpretation of the concept. Strangely, during the days of military regime under General Ibrahim Babangida, one heard of “military democracy.” In the 1980s scholars simply linked democratic politics with development without any insistence or inclusion of the aspect of good governance. Notwithstanding the spurious claims by several African states to the status of being democratic, Akindele (2002) proved the linkage between democracy and governance. He further contended that "it was analytically discovered that, practically, political animals, all over the world and, particularly in Nigeria attach serious importance to democracy as a mechanism of political governance" (Akindele, 2002: 185). Apparently, this is the missing link in the case of African countries like Nigeria.

FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA.

Good governance is the missing link in the case of Nigeria's democracy. In short, Nigeria is faced with the following challenges:

1. Rigging of elections

2. Lack of effective participation of citizens in the political process
3. Poor management of elections
4. Culture of impunity
5. Political violence
6. Guided nature of democracy
7. Lack of independent election management institutions
8. Lack of neutrality of external and internal monitors
9. Insecurity - terrorism
10. Ineffectiveness of the Nigerian Police force
11. Weakness of political parties
12. Lack of credible opposition to challenge incumbent political party
13. Corruption and lack of accountability
14. Overbearing influence of the executive over other organs of government.

Simply, and logically too, it is the question of why democracy is rare in Nigeria. It is clear that democracy in Nigeria, even if one limits it to the period between 1999 and now yields the traditional gap between what is expected in terms of socio-economic and economic benefits to citizens and what is in reality. The above diagnoses fits neatly into the common arguments of democracy and good governance issues already found in literature. The area of emphasis in discussing the missing link in Nigeria's democracy can be subsumed under welfare and succession.

Welfare

The issue of welfare of citizens, of course points to the idea of good governance. Good governance in Africa and especially in Nigeria has been rare, but, conceptually it is directly connected to social, political and economic progress and outcome. Democracy in Nigeria clearly neglects the welfare of citizens. Nothing else best explains this situation than the issues of governance. Essentially, politicians have conducted themselves in manners that are devoid of accountability, transparency and responsiveness. Apparently, only good governance can assure citizens of equal access to opportunities that guarantee citizens self-actualization. This absence of welfare, for which politicians have at best become rhetorical about, is a deficit in Nigeria's democracy (Okeke-Uzodike and Allen, 2005). If democracy promises accountability, it is only logical that such accountability will translate into good governance.

Both institutional designs and behavioural elements account for this. The later, here, will help to answer questions on how politicians are constitutive of failed democracies with regards to the improvement of the welfare of citizens. Current politicians appear to be *predators* that have hindered responsibilities of democracies towards citizens (Sindzingre, 2006). This is making many doubt the ability of liberal democracy to improve the living conditions of citizens (Drury, Kriekhaaus & Lusztig, 2006). From the experiences of countries with oil deposits, apparently, the source of revenue and funding of the state in democracies affect the quality of governance, and in turn, performance of democracy. Where the state depends on the tax payers' money, accountability is more easily demanded by citizens. This of course can translate into good governance capable of improving the living conditions of citizens. Rent seeking states that depend for revenue and funding of the state, unearned money, on natural resources such as oil, have more tendencies to be reckless with public funds. Citizens also lack the courage and will to

demand accountability from the government in such states (Jega, 2003:53; Gilbert, 2010: 115).

Apparently the welfare effects of undemocratic democracies have been negative on citizens. Indeed, one of the expectations of many Nigerians when elected political leaders emerged in 1999 in sixteen years after military dictatorship was the improvement of their already worsening economic and social conditions. Personal economic circumstances of unemployment, shortage of food, public safety, lack of clean water, inadequate health care, poor income level, and more, were on the sky high and negative on citizens (Lewis, Bratton & Alemika, 2001). Sixteen years today, many are wondering how the governments have addressed basic national and personal economic problems in the country with poverty still very much prevalent. Incidentally, performance of politicians within the period is being questioned over their role in improving the welfare of citizens, and poor performance of democracy linked to their predatory disposition. There is no allusion in these arguments that present civil regime has achieved nothing, but the facts remain that populist programs are still lacking.

Succession

Orderly process of succession in liberal democracies is usually expected since democracy itself is accorded high regards for its supposed capacity for peaceful resolution of conflicts. This calls for credible good electoral governance. By electoral governance, we refer to the general manner in which those saddled with the management of elections discharge their responsibilities at the three levels of rulemaking, rule application and rule adjudication (Mozaffar, 2002). These three levels of electoral governance are fundamental to democracy and constitute important aspects of elections, with large-scale implications for their outcomes. Indeed, elections are considered important aspects of democracy. This is not only because of their role in determining succession but as a basis for legitimacy and ensuring accountability and good governance from political parties that form the government (Allen, 2005). Unfortunately, Nigeria, as with many other countries in Africa has had sad experiences and stories of badly managed elections with outcomes that have made nonsense of democracy.

The use of election as an instrument of succession in Nigeria has always been fraught with litanies of woes. Defeating an incumbent government is a tall dream, for instance it only occurred in the last presidential election at the Federal level in Nigeria's democratic experience since independence. In the current Fourth Republic for example, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) has practically won all the presidential elections conducted so far. In fact, shortly before the presidential elections in 2007, the then president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo declared the election as a do or die affair. Of course, notwithstanding the condemnations that trailed the conduct of the elections, it was predictably won by the PDP candidate, late Alhaji Umaru Musa Yaradua, Obasanjo's immediate successor. But the recent democratic testimony is that the incumbent president Muhamadu Buhari defeated his immediate predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan in a relatively free and fair election; and the succession was relatively smooth. In deed this is a plus to Nigeria democracy.

Lack of good electoral governance almost withered all vestiges of popular sovereignty in the political system. Both the 2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria were virtually characterized by situations that confirmed the notion of lack of autonomy for the

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the thirty-six states Independent Electoral Commission. Traditional notions of liberal democracy exalt the role of elections in democracies but Nigerian politicians have continued to behave in ways that convey notions of irrelevance of voters in the process. This condition became worsened by the virtual absence of voters from the polling booths for fear of intimidation and violence during elections. Although rigging during elections begins from the pre-election periods of formulation of rules to the conduct of the elections, it extends to the post-election adjudication process and management.

Liberal democracy as a system of limiting the power of the state against the citizens makes sense when democratic governance implies citizens' participation in the political system beyond voting to regular consultations in matters of public policy and decision making. The Nigerian experience is full of regrets, as the mass of qualified adult citizens neither gets involved in voting nor is consulted on major policy issues. The 2003 and 2007 elections in Nigeria were widely condemned for their level of electoral irregularities. There were numbers of electoral irregularity in many states of the federation, yet the election management body endorsed the outcomes of those elections.

However, it is worthy of mention that the performance of INEC in the 2015 elections was a lot better than in the four previous national elections (1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011) in this political dispensation. This gives some glimmer of hope that the credibility of elections in Nigeria would appreciate in the future elections.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have argued that democracy and good governance are virtually intertwined. It therefore implies that if it is so understood and practiced there will be marked differences in current claims of democracy in Nigeria where basic principles of democracy are absent. Both the process and outcome of democracy in Nigeria are negative on citizens' welfare on who is the essence of democracy. The answer lies in good governance, which involves assumption of equal responsibilities for both the ruled and the ruler. To improve the structure of power relations in favour of citizens, political consciousness and action in forms of civil society oversight over the political process and procedure in democratic institutions need to be dynamic. It needs networking organically in ways that can constitute a source of insecurity for twisted politicians who have depended on fraud as a means of securing and staying in power. Negative outcomes of democracy such as poverty, unemployment, post-election violence, and insecurity in Africa due to bad governance requires the institutionalization of development oriented practices for change in the continent.

Democracy as catalyst for good governance and development in any nation is very germane and makes for continuous reforms in the electoral process in Nigeria imperative. To abort the challenges of the inability of democratic institutions in Nigeria like INEC, legislature, executive, judiciary and the police to enhance democratic sustainability, it is important to make INEC genuinely independent body through the amendment of the relevant sections as it affects the appointments of key officers such as the Chair person, National Commissioners and the Resident Commissioners for the 36 States of the Federation. Rather than give the President of the Federation the powers to appoint INEC officials, the appointments could be carried out based on merit – proven capacity by the

National Judicial Council of Nigeria (NJCN), the same body that appoints, promotes and disciplines judges.

The point is that once political parties are represented in INEC, the fear of domination would have been solved. Regarding funding, it could be charged to the consolidated account of the Federation so that the executive arm of government would not capitalize on funding to influence INEC to the detriment of other political parties. Also, the legislature as a body has a role to play in the area of constitutional amendment by subjecting any amendment to the constitution to a referendum to give everyone in the country the opportunity to contribute to the final outcome of the amended portions. This development would prevent a political party in government from using its majority in the national assembly to amend any portion of the constitution to benefit its agenda rather than the general will of the people.

In addition, the executive arm of government could help to entrench democratic norms in the country by desisting from the use of government agencies as instrument of oppression of the opposition.

Furthermore, as the last hope of the common man in a democracy, the judiciary could be monitored in its assignments, particularly as it relates to electoral matters. The Nigerian National Judicial Council as headed by the Chief Justice of the Nigerian Federation could, from time to time, organize training in ethics of the judicial profession to members of the judiciary for proper conduct and performance of their assignments, if democracy is to achieve its goals of good governance and development. Judges found guilty of misconduct could be severely punished to serve as deterrent to others.

In the same vein, the police could be given continuous adequate training to enable them realize that the institution they belong to is a defender of the peoples' right in a democracy, proper facilitator of the democratic process, and not necessarily of the government in power and avoidance of the temptation of being used as instrument of oppression against the people. In addition, there is the need to intensify political education amongst politicians and the citizens. This is because no one is born a democrat. People imbibe democratic norms through training and regular practice of democratic ideals. This could be achieved by setting up an Institute for Democratic Studies to train politicians nationwide about the ethos of democratic culture. On the other hand, existing agency of government known as the National Orientation Agency in collaboration with INEC could put measures in place to educate the citizens through the mass media about the appropriate culture of democratic norms required of them and the benefits derivable from democratic governance in a society as basis for democratic sustainability and good governance.

The emphasis on transition from military to civilian regimes is commendable but not sufficient a measure for external pressure on African countries to democratize. While the pace of democratization cannot take a hard and fast posture, basic principles of respect for the rule of law, credible free and fair elections and the implementation of policies geared towards the practical qualitative improvement of citizens' welfare by political elite should also receive adequate monitoring and review.

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