The Future of the Nigerian State: A View from a Democratic Stance.

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Abstract

Democracy gives citizens the opportunity to participate in government, which in turn promotes development. This paper examined democracy and the future of the Nigerian state. It observed that past governments failed in the area of development and peaceful co-existence of Nigerians due to their non-adherence to democratic values and application of the principle of true fiscal federalism. It therefore recommended that for the future of the Nigerian state to be guaranteed, government at all levels should imbibe a political democratic culture which promotes values such as popular participation of citizens in decision-making, fundamental human rights, a free press, the curbing of corruption, and above all, shunning of all anti-democratic vices in dealing with issues of the state and the application of the principle of true fiscal federalism. Without religious adherence to these ideals, then the future will be bleak for Nigeria as a nation.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, good governance, development, Nigerian state, human rights

Introduction

Civil Society and indeed the entire populace in Nigeria, have at one time or another engaged in a process of evolving a governmental system capable of sustaining good govemance and guaranteeing the future of the state. Studies have focused on democracy as a basis for good governance and peaceful co-existence of people in multicultural, religious and ethnic societies like Nigeria (King, 1988; Adejumobi, 2004; Ikelegbe, 2005). The future of Nigeria as a multicultural, religious and ethnic society with over 200 ethnic groups is more likely to be guaranteed in terms of development, if there is peaceful co-existence of the people. This can be achieved through the promotion of a political system that gives every section of the society an opportunity to participate in government. It has been posited by various commentators that democracy gives people the opportunity to participate in government. The principle of democracy, which includes popular participation of citizens in the policy process, guaranteeing of fundamental human rights and press freedom, is known as the precursor of development in every society (Adejumobi, 2004).

According to Tobi (2005:375), the concept of "democracy encompasses variables such as the organization of free elections at regular and reasonable intervals, the independence of the judiciary, press freedom, the existence of interest groups and political parties." These democratic principles are more likely to enhance people's capacity to achieve a desired change in a society. Linz and Stephen (1997:17) opine that democracy guarantees development in any society.

They argue that the basic elements of true democracy include its ability to regulate social conduct, the creation of strong political institutions, the presence of a strong civil society and pressure groups, a strong and rational bureaucracy and an economic regime with a strong private sector base, increased production and economic growth.

However, the adoption of democracy as an alternative political system for good governance in Nigeria has been fraught with challenges. Questions have been raised as regards to the type of political arrangement is best for

the country. In the political history of Nigeria, two political systems can be identified as having been operational at one point or another between 1960 and the present time, and these are democratic governance and military administration. Questions for debate can include: To what extent have military administrations in the past threatened development and the division of the corporate existence of the Nigerian state? Are there any linkages between democracy and development? How has democratic governance contributed to keeping Nigeria together as an entity?

The central view of this paper is that democracy rather than military rule would give opportunity to every section of the country to participate in government and promote development. This view is based on the fact that Nigeria is faced with the problem of distrust on the part of its citizens about their leaders. This could be attributed to the fact that during periods of military rule, policies of government were formulated surreptitiously by political leaders without input from the people, with the result being apathy, lack of support and compliance in terms of implementation of the policies. This development is attributable to lack of buy-in on the part of the people due to the style of governance in place in the past decades, based on anti-democratic values (Gberevbie & Olawuyi, 2006:29-43).

The paper is based on data obtained from secondary sources, the work is divided into five sections. Section one introduces the paper, while section two examines the theoretical linkage between democracy, good governance and development. Section three discusses democratic governance and political intolerance. Section four looks at the future of the Nigerian state, and section five provides the conclusion.

Democracy, good governance and development: A theoretical linkage

Democracy like most concepts in the social sciences lacks precise definition. However, scholars have put forward different views regarding the meaning of the concept of democracy, often in line with their particular situation and environment. Boyte (2004:114) views democracy "as a way of life...that requires far greater emphasis on citizen capacities: the habits, skills,

confidence, as well as citizens' power and authority." What Boyte's view of democracy implies is that any political system that usurps the confidence of citizens in the government due to their non-involvement in the process of policy formulation and implementation negates democratic principles. Negation of democratic ideals hinders the power of citizens and authority to participate in governance

In a democracy, the emphasis is on the people. However, the long period of military rule denied Nigerians this important benefit, which has been observed to be the very foundation for development in any society (Adejumobi, 2004). In most developing countries, citizens suffer from lack of access to the affairs of government either in terms of participation in the policy process or participation in the actual choice of policies to be implemented by the governing authority (Gberevbie & Olawuyi, 2006). For instance, in the context of Nigeria, the government deregulated the down-stream petroleum sector of the economy.

The policy was introduced without consultation with the people or their elected representatives. It brought about a hike in the price of Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS) by almost 250 percent from the initial price of 26 naira per litre before the introduction of the policy (Gberevbie and Arowosegbe, 2006:10-23). Lack of mechanisms for consultation with the people before the formulation of the given policy brought about a series of nationwide strikes and work stoppages for a period of eight days (Gberevbie & Arowosegbe, 2006). The difference between democracy and authoritarianism is summed up in the words of Nyong'o thus, "democracy is about the governing gaining control over their governors; authoritarianism (on the other hand), is about the governors solidifying control over those they govern" (Nyong'o, 2004:1-17).

To Badru (2005:77-101), democracy represents, first and foremost, an increase in citizens' political equality and equity in terms of their popular participation in the society. He argues that democracy is a system of government that enables both the leaders and the citizens to be conscious

of what is required, and accomplish it for the betterment of that society in terms of political, social and economic development.

A democratic society could be termed a predictable society in terms of what to expect from its leaders on the one hand, and the citizens on the other. Democracy therefore, can be seen as a system of government that gives the populace the opportunity to question government decisions either directly or through their elected representatives.

In emphasizing the unique role democracy plays in enhancing citizens' participation in government, the place of the civil society cannot be ignored. Civil society serves as a catalyst in facilitating democratic government in any nation. Nkwachukwu (2004:41-51) reports a strong relationship between civil society, democracy and good governance. Ikelegbe (2005:242-270) refers to civil society "as a context where citizen organizations relate and interact with the state."

It is the interaction between the civil society and the state that helps to modify the actions or inactions of government towards the formulation and implementation of policies for the enhancement of the living standards of the people.

The foregoing clearly shows that there are basic features of democracy that are universal irrespective of where it operates. These features include: equality of voters and their votes, majority rule. Universal adult suffrage, fundamental human rights, press freedom, and mechanisms that permit the largest part of the population to influence major policies of government through the elected representatives of the people (Gberevbie, 2005:38-51).

Work by various scholars such as Ihonvbere (1999); Boyte (2004); Guseh & Oritsejafor (2005:121-137) point to the fact that there is a relationship between democracy, good governance and development. However, there is no empirical evidence to support the claim that a country that operates a 'democratic system' automatically enjoys development. In other words, it is possible for a country to claim to be 'democratic' (by virtue of the fact that its leaders are 'elected' by the people) yet its citizens still experience traits of bad governance and underdevelopment. While good governance may

not necessarily be the exclusive preserve of a 'democratic government,' it is however a pre-requisite for development to take place in any society.

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has posited that without good governance, without the rule of law, predictable administration, legitimate power and responsive regulation, no amount of funding of charity will set developing nations on the path of prosperity (cited in Adejumobi, 2004:11). Good governance is therefore, a *sine qua non* of development. Ogunjobi (2004:9) argues that: "Good governance seeks to create a capable and effective state as well as an enabling environment in which the public and private sectors play their respective roles in a mutually reinforcing manner towards poverty reduction, sustainable growth and development".

On his part. Im (2005) contends that the condition for good governance depends on the presence and consolidation of democratic characteristics. What this implies is that the more democratic a society is, the more likely that society would experience good governance.

Kofi Annan further argues that "good governance is vital for the protection of rights of citizens and the advancement of economic and social development"(cited in Kim, Halligan, Cho, Oh & Eikenbeny, 2005:646-654). While emphasizing the link between good governance and development, Zouheir M'Dhaffar, the Tunisian Minister of Civil Services and Administrative Development, affirmed that "good governance, efficient and effective public administration, are necessary conditions to achieve sustainable development" (Kim et al, 2005).

Studies have also shown that there is a link between good governance, accountability, transparency, and sustainable democracy. To Egwu (2003:90), accountability is the requirement, which seeks to make public officials responsible for their actions and render account for their stewardship either to the general public or the constituency they seek to represent. According to Best (2005), "transparency carries with it a powerful array of moral and political associations including honesty and openness" (cited in Kim et al, 2005). Unfortunately, political leaders in the last couple of decades in Nigeria operated as if they were a law unto themselves. These

leaders were neither accountable nor transparent in their handling of public resources. The effect of this development on the political system was that the people entered into a serious struggle to assume political leadership through military officers and politicians at all costs through military coups and election rigging (Egwu, 2003; Gberevbie & Olawuyi, 2006).

Although democracy promotes good governance, the fact remains that good governance is actually a function of viable leadership. According to Gberevbie (2004:224-231), no meaning fial development can take place in any society without viable leadership. Gowon (2006:17- 18) refers to viable leadership "as opportunity, situation or location that inspires, enables and empowers the individual to exercise control, vision, direction and solution to complex or particular situations." He further posits that, "if governance is hinged on performance, performance should reflect the quality of leadership. Good leadership is more likely to sustain good governance...Good leadership therefore is *sine qua non for effective governance."* Since democracy is all about popular participation of citizens in government, democratic governance therefore abhors personalization of power.

According to Gowon (2006:15-25),

Good governance cannot exist where there is extensive personalization of power, denial of fundamental human rights, widespread corruption, prevalence of un-elected structures and disrespect for the rule of law. A nation that is characterized by widespread personalization of power and corrupt public officials is not likely to experience development. And the citizens of an underdeveloped society are more likely to suffer deprivation of basic necessities of life than those of a developed society. Todaro (1985:108) sees development as a multidimensional process involving the re-organization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system, which involves the improvement of income and output; radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs. Development therefore is a process that entails growth.

Growth is more likely to be attained in an environment where democratic norms characterized by good governance exist. In a study by Guseh and Oritsejafor (2005) on political and economic reforms in South Afirica and Ghana, it was found that growth in the size of government and political freedom appear to affect economic growth.

The study reports that economic growth requires conditions of political freedom in which there is mass participation in the decision-making process. Incidentally, it is a democratic system that encourages mass participation in government in any society.

Democratic governance and political intolerance: 1960 -1966

The Nigerian state came into existence in 1914 after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by Lord Lugard. The country was under colonial rule till October 1960, when it attained Independence. The country adopted the British parliamentary democracy as its system of governance, with three unequal regional structures - North, East and West. The North, which was clearly favoured, was accorded half of the total number of seats in the National Assembly. The unequal demarcation of the regions in practical terms meant that any candidate from the North who aspired to become the Prime-Minister (with full executive powers), could actually win without the need to campaign for votes in the South. All they needed do was to try and win all the available seats from the Northern region in the National Assembly, and that would be sufficient for them to lead the entire country. This was the case between 1954 when the country adopted the federal constitution and 1966 when the military took over power from the elected government of Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa (Northern), in a military coup.

The Northern People's Congress (NPC) became the dominant party in the North. It won virtually all-political seats contested for in the Northern region into the National Assembly. This scenario introduced sectionalism on Nigeria's political landscape - a system that has continued to this day. The Action Group (AG) represented the West and won a majority of seats

in that region for the National Assembly. The AG's leader was Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who became the official opposition leader. While the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) that initially started as a truly national party, ended up representing the East and won a majority of seats in the region into the National Assembly. The NCNC's leader was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe from the East. The year 1964 saw a new region -the Mid-western – being created as a result of restructuring of the Western region. Meanwhile, the North still remained one indivisible region with its unfair majority of seats in the National Assembly (Asia, 2000).

The general elections that took place in 1959 prior to Nigeria's Independence a year later (1960), showed that while the NCNC/NEPU party had national spread of voters, the NPC - the party that dominated politics in the North – did not win even a single seat for the National Assembly from any other part of the country, yet its leader emerged as the Prime Minister. This goes to support the argument that the unequal creation of regions by the colonial rulers placed the south at a disadvantage. This development enhanced power domination of the north over the south for decades, a situation that continued until 29* May 1999, when Chief Olusegim Obasanjo, a southerner from the West assumed political leadership.

Although Nigeria became a democracy at Independence, the system did not achieve its desired result of good governance. The government at independence became increasingly anti-opposition. Leaders of the opposition AG party were arrested, tried under a heavily influenced judicial system, convicted and sent to jail. Perceived political opponents of the state would be treated as common criminals. Abuse of power and assassinations became a common occurrence; democratic norms became alien to the Nigerian government (Asia, 2000:19).

The rigging of votes that took place in the 1964/65 general elections in the West further brought bitterness in the minds of the people against the government and its activities. Commenting on the level of irregularities that took place during that election in the West, Esua (1965) posits that "unless

immediate steps are taken to effect necessary changes in the electoral laws...we may as well say farewell to parliamentary democracy and the rule of law in Nigeria" (cited in Akinsanya, 2005:73).

The imbalance in the political configuration, disparity in population, and the 'winner-takes-all' syndrome further intensified the ethnic rivalry between majority ethnic groups and the less populated regions/smaller ethnic groups. Democratic governance bequeathed to Nigerians at Independence quickly degenerated into an ethnic contraption. According to Asia (2000:25): "Federal leaders fought viciously for greater representation at the center for their regions of origin in order to increase their shares of the 'national cake' ... a politician had to satisfy his community by bringing home 'something' in the form of economic projects and be prepared to make generous contributions in the form of donations to his communities' social causes or economic development".

Democratic values such as free press, human rights, political neutrality of the judiciary and mass participation in government, were all thrown into the political waste bin by the governing authority (Akinsanya, 2005). Looking at the political situation in Nigeria between 1960 and 1966, it would be accurate to state that the government of the 'first republic' collapsed because it failed to imbibe democratic values.

As Gowon (2006:15) rightly posits a "government that manipulates its way to power cannot be legitimate as it rides on a false mandate. Expecting such a government to filter down dividends of democracy would consequently, be a pipe dream."

Democratic governance: 1979 -1983

On October 1979, the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to the elected government of Alhaji Shagari. When the new government came to power, there were high hopes because of the opportunity of democratic governance. Five duly registered parties contested the elections that brought the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to power; the parties were: NPN with Alhaji Shehu Shagari from the North as

its presidential candidate; Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) with Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri from the North as its presidential candidate; People's Redemption Party (PRP) with Mallam Aminu Kano from the North as its presidential candidate; Nigeria People's Party (NPP) with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe fi-om the East as its presidential candidate; and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) with Chief Obafemi Awolowo from the West as its presidential candidate.

At that point the country operated under a 19-state federal structure. The formation of parties during the 'second republic' was not different from what happened in the country during the 'first republic'. Parties were structured formally along ethnic lines. The NPN was an off-shoot of the old NPC, the UPN took its roots fiom the AG, and the PRP was a reincarnation of NEPU. The NPP took afier the NCNC, and the GNPP was modeled along the path of Borno Youth Movement (Ikelegbe, 1988; and King, 1988). In the area of electoral malpractice, there were similarities between what happened in the 1964/65 and the 1983 general elections. Both were characterized by massive electoral fraud, intolerance of opposition, winner-takes-all mentality of the ruling class and the use of thugs and other forms of violence to intimidate opposition (Ikelegbe, 1988).

Similarly, the high level of corruption in government points to the fact that the politicians of the 'second republic' had not learnt anything from the sad events that terminated the 'first republic'. According to Asia (2000:55): "Wealthy businessmen flocked around the National Party in power to derive maximum economic benefits from it. Influential party supporters had to be taken care of in cash o kind...this sort of corruption has been eating at the Nigerian politics since its amalgamation as a nation. It was rampant in the first republic.

The successive military regimes saw it; in the second republic it was flagrantly institutionalized".

Above is the bleak picture of the nature of the Nigerian state when the military took over power from the government of Alhaji Shagari in 1983. While it could be concluded that a military regime is by definition, anti-

development in any society, it is also correct to state that an 'elected government' that fails to imbibe democratic values on issues of the state is also anti-development.

Fourth Republic: 1999 - 2006

On 29 May 1999, the military government of General Abubakar handed over power to the elected government of Chief Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Under this dispensation, political party formation assumed a more national outlook than was the case in the previous republics. The government of General Abubakar registered three parties. These were: PDP, Alliance for Democracy (AD), and All People's Party (APP). However, the three registered parties merged to present two presidential candidates for the election. While Chief Obasanjo contested the presidential election under the PDP ticket.

Chief Olu Falae contested the election under the joint ticket of AD and APP. In the 2003 elections however, the APP changed its name to All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP). The two presidential candidates that contested the 1999 elections were both Yorubas from the West. This development was a deliberate arrangement by all political parties to assuage the Yorubas who felt aggrieved by the annulment of the victory of their kinsman. Chief M.K.O. Abiola in the 1993 presidential elections by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida (Akinsanya, 2005).

In 2003, more parties were registered to participate in that year's general elections. At the time, the country had over 50 political parties. The increase in the number of parties could be attributed to the liberalization of the process of party registration under the 1999 Constitution. However, the attitudes of Nigerians and government officials towards political issues as they relate to political thuggery and assassination, electoral fraud and corruption did not change from what they used to be in the past. For instance, between January 1999 and August 2006, a total of 34 prominent Nigerians - aspirants to various political offices, ranging from local

government chairmanship to gubernatorial candidates died through unresolved political assassinations (Igbafe & Offiong, 2007:9-17).

In addition, a good ntmiber of decisions of government were taken without input from the citizens, which democratic governance demands (Gberevbie & Olawuyi, 2006). While it is true that the democratic government of Chief Obasanjo succeeded in paying the country's foreign debt and in 2006 recorded an all-time high of US$ 33 billion in Nigeria's foreign reserves, it is equally true that within the same period poverty increased amongst Nigerians to levels higher than in the previous republics (Adesina, 2006).

It is clear that poverty rate, which was put at 42.7 percent in 1992, rose to an all-time high of 54.4 percent in 2004. This development could be attributed to corruption. According to U.S. State Department, 'corruption in Nigeria is massive, widespread and pervasive.' This assertion is based on the fact that out of 179 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception index in 2006, Nigeria ranked 147 in terms of highly corrupt nations (Ploch, 2008).

A study on corruption and cost of governance in Nigeria by Orhero (2007:364) found that the federal, state and local government has lost huge amounts of money through fraudulent acts in the ministries such as over-invoicing, contract inflation and payment of salary to 'ghost' workers. Through these corrupt vices, funds that would have been earmarked for developmental programmes were diverted to private bank accounts by corrupt public officials. It was the need to eradicate corruption in Nigeria that led to the establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) by the Obasanjo's government.

Future of the Nigerian State

A Nigerian state capable of guaranteeing development and peaceful co-existence of citizens is more likely to be realized only through a reform agenda that will promote the practice of the fiscal federalism and a

democratic political culture. Presently, these values, together with accountability, transparency and tolerance are conspicuous by their absence; yet they need to be fully entrenched in the country's political system. The fiscal federalism should be put in place to guarantee

Political stability amongst the federating units. Fiscal federalism enables each federating unit to receive revenue according to its contribution in terms of revenue generation to the federation account. Furthermore, it enables "federating units to operate and enjoy a substantial degree of

Autonomy of one another and of the central government in fiscal and general monetary and economic matters" (Mimiko, 2007). The application of the fiscal federalism is more likely to assuage the agitation of the 'marginalized' section of the country in terms of revenue allocation. Current agitation among the federating units particularly oil producing states, is based on 'marginalization' in revenue allocation from the federation account. Nigerian federal system provides oil producing states with a 13 percent share of oil revenue (this is against a demand for a 50 percent share by the concerned states.) This revenue is meant to compensate for the long years of environmental degradation arising from oil exploration and gas flaring (Ploch, 2008).

Less agitation by the federating units would result in relative stability, which is necessary for development and peaceful co-existence of citizens. Also, a democratic political culture promotes political stability. Almond and Verba (1963:476) posit that a "democratic political culture is a pattern of political attitudes that foster democratic stability, which in some way 'fits' the democratic political system." Therefore a political system that lacks a democratic culture is likely to decay and thus not promote development and peaceful co-existence of citizens in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. For the future of the Nigerian state to be guaranteed, a number of critical pre-requisites will need to be met.

Firstly, there should be a deliberate effort on the part of the government to implement the principle of true fiscal federalism. The principle is capable promoting stability for development.

Secondly, there should be a sincere effort on the part of the government to increase citizens' participation in the political process through electoral reforms that should replace the winner-takes-all syndrome of the elites with proportional representation, which allows for equitable sharing of elective and political appointive offices on the basis of percentage of votes won at elections. This system is likely to reduce tension and bring about stability during and after elections.

Thirdly, the government should put in place appropriate mechanism capable of enlightening the individuals and groups to respect the views, opinions and religious beliefs of others as a basis for peaceful co-existence of Nigerians irrespective of where they reside.

Fourthly, there should be a deliberate effort by the government and its officials to imbibe democratic values such as the promotion of a free press, human rights, freedom of association, religious tolerance and fight against corruption.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the relationship between democracy, good governance and the future of the Nigerian state. There is no doubting that democracy is better placed to promote good governance than authoritarianism. Good governance in turn brings about development.

The paper has argued that previous governments failed in the area of development and peaceful co-existence of Nigerians because they did not imbibe democratic values in dealing with issues of the state, and failed to adopt the principle of true fiscal federalism. Since democracy and good governance are catalysts for development, it therefore follows that, for the future of the Nigerian state to be guaranteed, the government should imbibe democratic values devoid of political thuggery and assassinations, emphasize collective citizens participation in decision making, free press, fundamental human rights, an unbiased judiciary, the rule of law, the curbing of corruption, and avoidance of all antidemocratic vices in the

handling of state issues and application of the principle of true fiscal federalism.

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