



DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Over years democracy is practiced in Nigeria right from colonial period (first republic) up to the present time. Therefore, this paper is an in-depth analysis of how democracy is practiced in Nigerian society. It leads to the extrication between the elected office holders and the electorates as factor of non-realization of norms and values of the concept (democracy). Moreover, this breach is as a result of interpretation and perception of democracy as one of the ways of governance in the country. The paper also portrays that the practice of politics in the present-day condition in Nigeria is defined in such a way that it does not manifest its true objectives. For effective realization and actualization of true democratic values and principles, the paper argues for adaptation of traditional conception of politics in which attention of the general interest and social order will be considered as something very paramount to the practice of politics.

Key Words: Democracy, National Development, Nigeria, Social Order, Challenges and Prospects.

Introduction

Democracy in Nigeria as observed and experienced since returning to the civilian rule (fourth republic 1999-date) urges for the reflection on whether the concept is truly a political ideology that is suitable for Nigerian environment. In the olden days, democracy as the system of governance gives people freedom of expression, promoted their welfare and meeting their demands. However, what modern democracy offers Nigerians today is noting rather than religious bigotry, ethnicity, corruption and insecurity. In addition, all the above factors serve as a threat to national development.

The political philosophy of contemporary politics generates a lot of arguments. The arguments center on the contention whether the philosophy is applicable to our today's society or not. Therefore, it is believed that the perception of this philosophy and the practice of the politics are considered a wrong interpretation because it does not in any way represents politics in its true sense. It is from this point of view that the paper examines the Nigerian democratic experience and to look at the manifestation in the current political practice.

The paper is divided into four parts. In part one; the paper examines the meaning, nature and values of democracy. In part two; it discusses the idea of national development. In part three, the paper highlights challenges surrounding the Nigerian states in democracy. Some of the crises facing the Nigeria are also discussed. The last part of the paper places much emphasis on the prospects of the above said challenges. And in conclusion, the paper argues and suggests for the return of the traditional perception of politics where the general interest of the electorates will be truly given favorable consideration.

Conceptual Framework

Democracy: Meaning and Nature

Democracy as one of the ways of governance is given so much attention in the recent times. It has become so apparent today as if it is only legitimate way of governance practiced in the country. This wide acceptability and recognition given to the concept (democracy) is not the only alternative that will benefit the socio-economic, political and moral conditions of the societies as expected particularly in the third world countries.

The concept 'democracy' is basically a contestable concept in political philosophy. However, it is a form of government that is barbaric, but still the various interpretations attached to the concept seem to be of an importance question as it reveals where the individual perceives it from political point of view.

The word 'democracy' is derived and coined from two Greek words, that is 'Demo' means (people) and 'Critia' refers to (rule). The combination of the two words literally refers to 'rule of people'. But, technically democracy is seen as the form of government rule by the people either directly or through elected representatives. Democracy is not just a political ideology or type of government; it is a set of political forms and series of philosophical assumptions about the nature of man, society and the state (Arthur, 1992). In most cases, people regard democracy as the best form of government. For this reason, almost all countries claim that its government is democratic in nature.

Democracy is a form of government in which citizens elect their representatives who will govern on their behalf and according to the wishes of the majority. In this case, for any government to be regarded as democratic, it must possess some



basic characteristic. These include; popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultations of majority race and rule of law.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) defines democracy as the “government of the people, by the people and for the people. This expression clearly indicates the power of citizens in choosing those to rule and ensure that the administration is in compliance with the general interest of the society. It also entails democracy is the system of government whose constitutional rules, principles and procedure are set up by the people themselves. Therefore, democracy gives People Avenue to participate in decision making concerning their lives, community and society in general.

This understanding of democracy stresses the idea of the people which put democracy as the system that gives institutional expression to the will of the people. It also recognizes the rights and power of the electorates to remove any government that is no longer serves the general interest of the community (Gyekye, 1997).

National Development

In the perspective of this study, national development is directly connected to economic development which in the end will bring human development. Development as a concept is defined by various authorities according to their perception in different ways:

Gboyega, 2003 conceptualizes development as a plan that encompasses all attempts towards improving the condition of human existence in all aspects. This means the improvement of social and material well-being of citizens, not the upper class and political office holders alone. It also demands that, poverty and inequalities of access to the good things of people’s life to be reduced to its barest minimum. It seeks to improve the personal and physical security and lively hood of the people. But Walter, 1984 adduces it as the process of societal advancement, where improvements in the well-being of people are generated through well-built partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is obvious to say that, development is not only an economic exercise, but also a composition of socio-political and guaranteed security. Indeed, development comprises all aspects of human life. Meanwhile, Malta, 1956, perceives development as the desire and ability to use what is available in the improvement of the qualities of people and to free them from dangerous power and influence of natural geophysical and world historical environment.

To effectively figure out the meaning of development, this shows that it can be conceptualized as the progressive progression of a nation which involves not only an economic growth but efficient and equitable distribution of the available and natural resources, provision of good health care facilities, sound education, housing and other essential services all with a view of improving people’s life. In a nut shell, national development can be described as the overall development of socio-economic and political progression. It is therefore essential to say that the pride of any government is to help its citizen in transforming their standard living of life.

However, despite the adaptation of democracy as the way of governance that can facilitate attainment of the developmental objectives in the nation, but still lack of developmental and inequality exists. The disconnection between the rich and the poor is increasingly on daily basis. Most of the Nigerians live in miserable poverty. Hunger and starvation surround the most parts of the country. The problem of unemployment, urban population, economic depression and collapse of infrastructures stares the country in the countenance.

Meanwhile, in spite of the enormous human and natural endowments and the various levels and developmental plans at hand, the hope of development is becoming difficult just as the political arrangement of the country has not in any way helped the realization of developmental objectives (Abdullahi, 2010).

The Difficult Task against the Nigerian States in Democracy

It is of no doubt Nigeria needs to be developed, that is from the above breakdown of the idea of democracy and development. It can be argued that the predictable positive influence that the morals of democracy would have been on the citizens in particular and the country (Nigeria) at large. Those principles are to get the link between the leadership of the state and the citizens. And to promote unity, social order, tolerance, justice public interest and appropriate protection of human right. All these and many more are measures of national development. Nevertheless, the considerable questions that disturb the minds are, how far Nigeria gone under the democratic practice? Did the democracy been able to achieve the said values? Did politics been able to attain it is true real meaning in the society? Did democracy been able to target the targeted citizens in the society? These questions and many more have become necessary to be known. From all indications the political arena in the country becomes unstable, insecurity, lack of social order and disunity. All these said factors are attached to underdevelopment in one way or another (Akwen, 2012).



Some of the Crises in Nigeria

Nigeria is called a Giant of Africa. This is simply as a result of plentiful human and natural resources deposited in the country. Nevertheless, upon all these blessings Nigeria has always been in crises from socio-economic, political, religious and ethnic. It can be observed that recently, the country experienced some notable crises. For example, in the Eastern part of the country there have been the problems of kidnappings of innocent citizen for ransom. In South-South (Niger-Delta) there is a problem of oil pipeline vandalism.

The most well-known and famous in the crises is the recent one in the Northern part of the country. In the North-East particularly, there is a cases of insurgency popularly known as Boko haram. This group is identified as religious set up and it is said to be agitating against western education, norms, values, culture and other related issues concerning western powers. The group believe and reaffirm that Islam must to be practiced all over the country. To perpetuate their mission, they engage in bombing spiritual worship places such as churches, mosques, motor parks, villages, government offices and other strategic places that people meet. The group also kidnaps and kills innocent people and security personnel. All these are factors that are generating disorder and commotion there by militating against the development in the country (Joseph, 2010).

Ethnicity is another problem in Nigeria which started time in the past. The genesis of ethnicity in Nigeria could be traced back to the time of Amalgamation of 1914. This was a time when the entire three Protectorates were forcefully joined together spear-headed by a single administration. The then colonial masters did not take into consideration the different ethnic groups in the country. But, due to their economic motives, they accomplished the plan. In addition, the country is made up of different ethnic groups that cut across the North, East and West. These different ethnic groups do not share the same custom and languages, which is considered as the preliminary basis of rivalry among the existing ethnic groups.

On the other hand, it is apparent to say that, during colonialism there was an absolute coexistence among the diverse different ethnic groups and the diversity was united without any problem. But, with the exit of the colonial masters, things started weakening and the then central leadership could not be able to withhold the matter. Regretting the action taken by the colonialists in bringing the different ethnic groups together, the then former Secretary of the State at the British colonial office (Sir Peter Smitters) was reported to have lamented the danger towards Amalgamating Nigeria (Ali, 2004).

However, the amalgamation process in Nigeria has been challenged, but it could be considered as the only alternative option that the colonial masters to follow in handling the existed diverse group of people with different ethnic entities. It should be understood here that, the great size of the country and the pluralism of the different ethnic groups of the socio-political area attempted a number of steps to ensure its unity. A combination of over three hundred ethnic groups, both having its separate history, language, norms, values, tradition, political system and culture before the colonial rule, each and every one potted in diminished forms with the British system of governance applied to name Nigeria. Attractively, the British for administrative convenience compounded the various groups to form the country to be called Nigeria.

In order to have a victorious administration, the three administrative/political divisions were established through constitutional arrangement. These included Northern region, Eastern region and Western region. At independence and post-independence era, the status-quo of the colonial period was preserved, as every group maintained its traditions, language, norms, values and culture while sharing the universal middle institution in a federal arrangement. It was under this platform that the first election took place in 1954(first republic) under the three major political parties. The parties are; Northern People's Congress (NPC) from the Northern region, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC) from the Eastern region and Action Congress (AG) from the Western region. Contrary to the reflection of national interest, each party was representing the interest of its region not the interest of the state. This in essence reaffirms the idea of ethnicity among the Nigerians (Adeleye, 1967).

In its effort to check the shortcomings of these problems, this democratic system culminated in to the coming out of many doctrines, such as proportional representation, quota system and in the end the Federal Character principles in the late 70s. This also led to the formation of several federal institutions in most states across the federation, promotion of national sporting activities and most significantly, the National Youth Service Corps (N.Y.S.C). All these were meant to inculcate unity, tolerance and togetherness. All the same, the agony of ethnicity remains the order of the day (Shively, 1991).

Additionally, there is also a problem of economic disruption in Nigeria which is also associated to the problem of ethnicity. This economic disruption includes oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism. And this remains the major setback to the economic development of the country. The major revenue generated in Nigeria is from the extraction of natural resources which include oil, gas and minerals. It is which these minerals resource that the government is anticipated to improve the living condition of the citizens. Although, the level of economic sabotage such in the country such as oil bunkering and vandalism becomes



unimaginable. There are a lot of reported cases of lost of lives and destructions of properties as a result of the act. And sometimes it led to the outbreak of fire which in South-South areas.

Another famous problem in Nigeria which is described as a menace is corruption. The perception and conception of corruption depends from an individual's point of view. The general opinion of Nigerian populace shows that the phenomenon called corruption is manifesting in various aspect. This comprises political corruption, embezzlement, bribery, extortion and many unwanted activities that remain a bottle neck to the growth and development. The demonstration of corruption in the political cycle is another topic of discussion which is related to the attribute of Nigerian democracy. For example, the entire Arms of Government (Executive, Legislative and Judiciary) use their position by enriching themselves and their associate with the public funds. And this is quite practicable in the country (Novak, 1982).

The Practice of Democracy in Nigerian Society

It is quite agreed that the quest of public interest remains a prime interest as a characteristic of democracy. The above expression in the theory of election during any democratic procedure remains an art of entrusting into the hands of the elected political leaders, the citizen's right of freedom, which are to be handled by the executive elected leaders. This marked off the connection between the citizens and their leaders. In fact, this association was more of contracts. The democratic office holders are ideally representatives of people. It is therefore, expected the policies and decisions which will be taken must be in the interest of the people. But, in the context of Nigerian democracy, it is upside down. Decisions were mostly taken without the consent of the electorates. This shows that the Nigerian democracy is not created to protect the interest of the citizens; rather it is protecting the interest of few individuals. It is created to cater or provide the basic needs of for every member in the society, to promote or inculcate togetherness, justice, peace and unity. The Nigerian democracy exist towards encouraging moral cooperation between the leaders of the country and the citizens in order to that social order, unity, growth and development are achievable. In view of the above, there is need to strict observance to achievable relationship of honesty, peace, devotion, justice and trustworthy among Nigerians (Lijadu, 2013).

However, contrary to the above expression the purpose of the existence of any society is to ensure peace and stability which at the end will bring national development. And at the same time, individuals can freely get their life goals achieved without any difficulties. As result, J.J Rousseau (1966) reaffirms that the society is device by the rich and powerful to protect themselves and their properties against the attack of the poor and to legalize the inequality they have created among themselves. But, to according to John Lock (1952), the main purpose behind the establishment of any society is to ensure the life, private properties and freedom of individuals is well protected.

It is obvious to conclude from the above analysis that the reason behind the underdevelopment of Nigerian society, which is in essence the direct consequences of non-actualization of principles and values of democracy and which cause several social disorder in the country is a detachment between the leaders and the ruled. The political leaders do not regard themselves as been responsible to the citizens that brought them into the office. They show no concern and effective commitment to the aspirations of the electorates who they represent. Most of the policies are made and implemented without the electorate's consent. The majority of people are living in excessive poverty despite the blessings of natural resources of the country, whereas the political elites live in luxury life and their families. The hunt of suggestion interest is the defining characteristic of the democratic political elites in the country. Therefore, since the breach between the leaders and the ruled gets much space, the electorates engage themselves in various social crises in order to earn for living. The gap between the citizens and the political leaders has seriously weakened the practice of democracy in Nigeria. The negative results of this episode which has been manifesting in the various sectors in the country such as economic; judicial; and religious result from the wrong understanding that the political elites have given to the meaning of politics. (Sabine, 1973).

From how the things are going, the practice of politics in Nigeria has been the interpretation of some wicked politicians whom by all means must remain in power. To them, the fundamental thing in politics is to get power by all means and having grasping the power, the power must be grasped by at all cost. Unlike Obafemi Awolowo, what is vital to the idea of politics is the permissible acquisition of power. That is to say, power must to be obtained through people's absolute moral consideration. In addition, it is the people who will vote their leaders and be led them according to their wishes. Before taking any decision, their consent must be heard and respected (Appadori, 1975).

The prospects

No matter how difficult or bad the situation is, there is a possible solution or hope for it. In the case of Nigerian democracy, it is advisable to adopt the traditional conception of democracy where the real political pursuit of public interest and respect of the constitution is considered as something very paramount to the practice of politics. Unlike presently where the whole issue



is upside down. Actually, today all the rules and regulation are there, but unfortunately the regulations are on paper written, they are not strictly followed.

Additionally, the traditional conception of politics stresses that the activities of politics need to be guided by the norms, values and ethic of the electorates. This social order is normally formed in a proper and regulated ways and it is directed towards the common good of the members of society. It is no doubt that the theoretical practical design and accomplishment of such an order is impossible without desirable quality (Plato, 1945).

Consequently, the above conception of this traditional philosopher represents what politics ought to be as the way forward to the good practice of contemporary politics which Nigeria inclusive. The belief of this traditional thinker, well regulated state needs to be fashioned out and an order will be directed towards common good of its members and enable them to team together in the pursuit of good morals that are respected as the basic to human development. Even though, it is known that the state should play a regulatory act where necessary, the relationship in this work is that there is a symbiotic connection between the good potentialities of politics and the principles of democracy.

Thus, the understanding of the values of democracy which are identified in the first segment of the paper and the attainment of excellent governance, social order, unity and growth in any meaningful democratic society depend on how ideas of politics are well shaped and practiced. In essence, failure to consider politics in the traditional sense will pessimistically have an effect on the democratic procedure and momentous development in the society. It is argued in that way, the values of democracy on the other hand is to provide adequate care for all members of the society and uplift their standard of living. In the meantime, the traditional idea of politics as argued by traditional philosopher that if firmly followed it will create an enabling environment for social teamwork, social order, justice, growth and development.

It also assists the fundamental human rights, equity, and equality before the law and ensures power in the hands of people. As a way forwards to good democratic practice in Nigeria, Maitma Sule (Danmasani of Kano) 2000, asserts that for proper and credible election to take place which will lead to the coming of good leaders, all the political office holders should leave their offices three months prior to the conduct of the election. This according to him will reduce the rate of rigging in the election. And it will also enable the electorates to have chance to vote their representatives hence change is possible through ballot box. This will also bring sanity and efficiency in the process. It is hoped that, with the credible representatives, democracy will be practiced in it is logical way which in essence will bring positive national development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the need for the re-assessment of how democracy is practiced in Nigeria is very crucial. According to critical assessment of the current Nigerian society reveals that democracy claims to have been practiced. That is to say, all the rule and regulation is mare on paper. They are not being practiced in its real sense. This made the political arena in the country remains unstable and unpredictable circulated with social crises and social unrest. It also encourages corruption especially in the conduct of the election. As it is known, democracy is the game of majority and the opinion of them should be respected. Beside, the concept is wrongly assumed that the majority is always right while that is not the case.

Regardless of all these impediments of democracy and considering its goals, it should be taken into consideration that the system is preferred compared to other system of government. The system emphasizes on the well-being of the electorates. It is a moral system of government which is the moral system of government, which assumes the high level of moral integrity concerning the citizens. It is obvious to say that if these goals can be truly achieved, definitely Nigeria will be a better place.

Consequently, what is required to save the country from the ongoing problems and absolute misunderstanding, the Nigerian political elite must adopt the traditional values of politics. From all indication, only traditional conception of politics will improve the actual values of democracy and realization of its said goals. The basic principles of democracy particularly the participatory democracy, which asks for the promotion of social order and stability of development, cannot be achieved if politics is seen and practiced as the pursuit of private interest.

In actual sense, the initiative of national development will remain a misapprehension in the context of Nigerian democracy. It is therefore convenient to point out that in the Nigerian society; the actualization of any meaningful developmental arrangements that may be planned out for the country depends on the ascertaining, that genuine democracy will only be allowed to its suitable condition in the country. This in essence will enhance the national development in the context of the Nigerian democracy.



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