

Governance and Democratization in Africa: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract: This study through the elitist theoretical framework unfolds governance and democratization in Africa with specific focus on the Nigerian State. The study accentuated the elitist democratization process in the Nigerian State through colonial and military efforts at instituting democracy in Nigeria which were not people's driven thereby making such effort at democratization not to be enduring. As a result, an institution and people driven process was recommended for tackling the problem. This is coupled with the need to adopt a Participatory Poverty Alleviation Scheme that will enable for functional inputs from the people to serve as a stabilizing force.

Key words: Governance, democratization colonial, military, stabilizing force

INTRODUCTION

According to Olagunju *et al.* (1993) political transition in form of democratization became more manifest in Africa in the 1990's. Since 1990 transitions to democracy, have occurred in Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin Republic, Gabon, Cameroun, Maritania, Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya, Angola, Algeria, Togo, Nigeria to mention a few.

The propelling move towards democratization in Africa to a great extent has been associated with the argument that democracy is an instrument for development (Ake, 2001; Olowu *et al.*, 1995). That is the adoption of democracy as a political system could help in bringing underdeveloped African economies such as Nigeria and others out of the socio-economic and political problems associated with poor political leadership. Political instability, corruption, poor industrialization to mention a few.

For instance, the march towards democratization or re-democratization in States which either witnessed long years of military dictatorship or one party dictatorship, such as Nigeria, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire to mention a few, has manifested forms of inconsistencies with civil war fought in Liberia, currently going on in Cote d'Ivoire and the tendency for Nigerian process to snowball into civil disobedience if personal drive for political power is unchecked in the present civilian administration of the Nigerian Fourth Republic which is largely viewed as a transitory process to full blown democratic governance.

It is from the above background that this paper intend to look at efforts at democratization as well as assessing the efforts or process in the Nigerian

experiment with the view of suggesting the way forward for sustainable democracy not only in Nigeria but also to States of similar political experiences.

Theoretical framework: Governance and the pattern of democratization in Africa, especially the Nigerian State cannot be divorced from the elitist approach to the understanding of politics. According to Putnam (1976) the view of the elite theorists such as Pareto, Mosca, Michels, Mills, Bumham and James Meisel could be summarized as:

- The cynicism that political power is unequally distributed in any human society and that the unevenness of distribution is a function of wealth, skill etc;
- That because of the factor above, human society is basically classified into two: Those who have political power and those who do not;
- That the elite is internally homogenous, unified and self-conscious class;
- Elitist class is largely self-perpetuating class who exercises political dominance of the masses through the process of elite recruitment or recycling;
- That political activities and decisions are largely a function of elitist interests.

Conversely, the above views especially as regard the elitist class being internally homogenous and that political activities are largely a reflection of elitist interest, Omodia (2004) stated that in the Nigerian political system democratic stability in the Nigerian State is often marred by elitist contradictions as a result of the excessive premium placed on political offices. The

implication is that since there are different types of elites based on occupational achievements and functions (traditional, political, military, bureaucratic elites et.c), the contradictions also tend to be external. That is, for instance, between the military and the civilian politicians, especially as regard setting up a functional process for military disengagement from State politics.

In addition, this internal and external contradictions between and among elites tend to affect the quality of governance and democratization in Africa.

Efforts at democratization in Africa a focus on Nigeria:

Democratization process in Africa is very complex, as it is characterized by inconsistencies and uncertainties and encompasses the process of ushering in the open market system (Akpotor, 2006). Efforts at democratization in Africa could be broadly classified into two. These are: The colonial effort and the military effort. The march towards democratization in Africa could be said to be attributed to the influence of colonialism in Africa. Although scholars such as Nyerere in his political thought Ujamaa could be said to have purported that democracy was part and parcel of pre-colonial African state in the sense that decisions were based on communal discussions rather than through competitive formal institutions like the political parties (Nwoko, 1988). This pattern of democracy or pre-colonial governance could be said to be characterized by instability as a result of strife and expansionist policy of pre-colonial African societies which were engaged in wars of domination which was not hygienic for sustainable democracy.

Thus, colonialism could be seen as the effort towards making societies to manifest the needed conducive atmosphere of political stability that was needed for economic exploitation. As a result, in the Nigerian state for instance, effort at democratization started as a result of the demands of the National Council of British West African members who made representation to the Queen of England through the Secretary of State for the Colonies demanding for the right to participate in governance. Their efforts however, paid off with the introduction of the Elective principle in the 1922 Clifford Constitution. Although the level of competition for political power was restricted to the Southern cities of Lagos and Calabar and to one political party (NNDP), the constitution no doubt set the pace for democratization process in Nigeria as successive constitutions, the 1946 Richards Constitution, the 1951 Macpherson Constitution and 1954 Lyttleton Constitution widened the space for political participation through the formation of other political parties such as what later became National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Action Group (AG) and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). It will be recalled that

the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 introduced full blown federal democracy in the Nigerian state and which eventually led to the attainment of political independence in 1960 after the 1957 and 1958 Constitutional conferences.

Conversely, the attainment of political independence in 1960 however was not synonymous to the entrenchment of democratic values in the Nigerian body-politic. This was basically due to two factors: The non attainment of republican status before 1963 and the gradual embibement of democratic norms and culture which could be regarded as political socialization process which was fragile in operation. The resultant effect of the fragile democratic behaviour exhibited by Nigerians especially after the attainment of political independence was made manifest in the incompatibilities and contradiction of political behaviours that culminated in the demise of the First Republic. This factor, in addition to the factors of personal ambition on the part of military officers, poor economic growth, threats to military corporate existence, just to mention a few (Nordlinger, 1997; Thompson, 1980; O'kane, 1981; Oyedele 1994), continued to negatively affect the epileptic state of democratization or democratic stability in Nigeria, especially with the demise of the second and aborted Third Republic. The above no doubt is a vivid indication that the democratic process as witnessed during colonialism was not purposely designed for the sustenance of democracy.

AN ASSESSMENT OF DEMOCRATIZATION ATTEMPTS IN NIGERIA

As regards the democratization process of military regimes in Nigeria, two basic premises could be offered. The first is that military guarded democratization processes are always fashioned in such a way that will enable the military to come back to power in the shortest possible time. The second is that the military democratization process in Nigeria is always all-embracing in the sense that it embodies the process of ushering in or sustaining the open market system whenever it is being threatened (Akpotor, 2006; Oyedele, 1994). A vivid analysis of military guarded democratization process no doubt could be said to have manifested these traits. The Obasanjo, Babangida and Abdulsalam political transitions. Analysing the Ibrahim Babangida aborted political transition for instance which was embedded in Decree 19 of 1987, (Ola, 1995) stated that the process no doubt manifested the above premises. This will be well appreciated if the schedules of the political transition programme are indicated and analyzed. The decree set out the following schedules.

Schedule 1-Programme for 1987.
3rd Quarter of 1987

- Establishment of the Directorate of Social Mobilization.
- Establishment of a National Electoral Commission.
- Establishment of a Constitution Drafting Committee.

4th Quarter of 1987

- Elections into Local Government on Non-party basis.

Schedule 2 – Programme of 1988.
1st Quarter of 1988

- Establishment of National Population Commission.
- Establishment of Code of Conduct Bureau.
- Establishment of Code of Conduct Tribunal.
- Establishment of Constituent Assembly.
- Inauguration of National Revenue Mobilization Commission.

2nd Quarter of 1988

Termination of Structural Adjustment Programme.

3rd Quarter of 1988

- Consolidation of Gains of Structural Adjustment Programme.

4th Quarter of 1988

- Consolidation of Gains of Structural Adjustment Programme.

Schedule 3-Programme for 1989

- Promulgation of a new Constitution.
- Release of new fiscal arrangement.

2nd Quarter of 1989

Lift of Ban on Party Politics.

3rd Quarter of 1989

- Announcement of two recognized and registered political parties.

4th Quarter of 1989

- Election into Local Government on political party basis.

Schedule 4-Programme for 1990.
1st and 2nd Quarters of 1990.

- Election into State Legislatures and State Executives.

3rd Quarter of 1990.

- Convening of State Legislatures.

4th Quarter of 1990.

- Swearing in of State Executives.

Schedule 5-Programme for 1991
1st Quarter of 1991

- Census.

2nd Quarter of 1991

- Census.

3rd Quarter of 1991

- Census.

4th Quarter of 1991

Local Government Elections.

Schedule 6-Programme for 1992

1st and 2nd Quarters of 1992

- Elections into Federal Legislatures and Convening of National Assembly.

3rd and 4th Quarters of 1992

Presidential Elections and the swearing in of new President and final disengagement of the Armed Forces.

From the above schedules, one could see that the Babangida led administration guarded democratization could be said to be all embracing because it embodied socio-economic as well as political transformation from military dictatorship to democratic governance.

As a matter of fact, the economic reforms of that administration which was anchored on Structural Adjustment Programme with such characteristics as liberalization of trade, privatization and commercialization, devaluation of currency could be said to be compatible with Western Capitalist interests (Ake, 1989). Thus, Oyedele (1994) stated that: The military intervention and rulership, while appearing to be acting in the best interest

of all Nigerians, has always been the most decisive guarantor and perpetuator of bourgeois rule.

In addition, the scenario that later unfolded in the cause of democratization of the Babangida regime especially as regard the hand over to a transitional government which further paved way for a palace coup could no doubt be said to be compatible with the conception of Olagunju *et al.* (1993) that military transitions or democratization processes are always designed in such a way that will give room for military return to power in the shortest possible time. For instance, the national census that was conducted in 1991 and whose exercise extended to the 3rd quarter of the year with barely less than twelve months for the administration to initially stay in office before the extension to 1993, could be seen as a deliberate effort on the part of that administration to either continue in office or to create a destabilizing problem for the incoming civilian government. This is because going by the history of national census in Nigeria especially the controversy that characterized the 1963 and 1973 censuses there is no doubt that its outcome would have negatively impacted on governance in a democratically elected government. It would be recalled that even in the life span of that regime (Babangida's regime) the census results were challenged by state governments and later Nigerians decided to hold their peace in order to be able to witness the much awaited transition to democracy which never came in the life span of that regime. The resultant effect of the regime's democratization effort however was the birth of another military dictatorship after the Shonekan led transition government was declared unconstitutional.

The resultant effect of political instability which often characterizes military democratization process no doubt has contributed enormously to the poverty of the Nigerian State (Gabu, 2006).

The way forward:

- It is important to state that no effort at democratization or democratic governance could be enduring in Nigeria if the problem of poverty is not checked. This is because poverty no doubt propels dysfunctional inputs into democratic process in form of rigging, electoral violence, insecurity, etc. Thus, the problem of poverty could be tackled holistically through the adoption of a Poverty Participatory Scheme which should be geared towards empowering the people economically, politically, technologically, to mention a few.
- Our analysis of governance and democratic experience in Nigeria shows that the Party system and the democratic process are often characterized by suspicion and lack of trust. Thus, there is need for actors of the political system to make governance and the democratic process to be deeply rooted in the people. This no doubt will help in system maturity through the manifestation of a matured political culture on the part of the people which has been learnt over the years.
- The experience of Nigeria's politics over the years also indicate political systems and processes which are purely individual driven rather than been institution driven. This factor no doubt account for the problem of lack of stability and inconsistency in governance. As a result, there is need for governance especially in the present democratic dispensation to be institution driven thereby widening the space for citizenry Political Participation to include policy making and the guarantor of policies through implementation or monitoring the process of implementation.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that an enduring democracy in Nigeria does not lie on the imposition of democracy on Nigerians but on good governance and the shared believe that democratic governance is better than other forms of government and thus is achievable when Nigerians can feel and touch democratic dividends without been told.

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