

CHALLENGES OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN GOODLUCK JONATHAN'S ADMINISTRATION FROM 2010 - 2015

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of liberal democracy in Goodluck Jonathan's administration from 2010 - 2015. It further evaluates the practice of this form of democracy and its conformity with the tenets of liberal democracy. It is democracies that guarantee for citizens much broader spectrum of social and economic rights. The paper adopts the Elitist theory of democracy as its tool of analysis. Relating the elitist theory to this paper is the facts that President Goodluck Jonathan belongs to the group of segmented elites as he exercises his power over the entire Nigeria rightly or wrongly. Too, he attained the Presidential status as a member of the ruling class and People's Democratic Party. Furthermore, existing bodies of knowledge were consulted in relation to the challenges of Liberal democracy and observed that liberal democracy vis-à-vis, its tenets under president Goodluck Jonathan's administration was characterized by conflict of communal, religious, and ethnic groups. More to these are problems of corruption, thieving, election rigging, ill-preparedness, destruction of necessary infrastructures that are needed for development, etc. Finally, this paper finds out that the challenges and underdevelopment of genuine liberal democracy is masterminded by our political elites and against this backdrop these elites struggle to fix this anomaly. The paper recommends that Nigeria needs a democracy capable of guaranteeing not only fundamental human rights but also address the overwhelming issue of material poverty of the people.

Key Words: *Liberal Democracy, Challenges, Tenets, Democracy, Government*

Introduction

Because Nigeria's political history has been primarily dominated by conservative, ethno nationalist, religion nationalist or militaristic entities, the presence of liberalism in Nigeria outside such realms is hard to come by from previous historical research and records. The closest that the political scene in Nigeria has come to any form of liberalism in the presence of progressive political parties; however; is in the areas where progressive parties have ruled at the local or state levels. The progressive government with such majorities has

either engaged in initiatives or passed law which may run against the idea of civil and personal liberties while focusing more on economic development.

Furthermore, the liberal contingent is much more represented in the non-political civil right activism and advocacy organization in Nigeria. Such organization and their members have been subjected to both state sanctioned, clerically-sanctioned, and non-official persecution throughout Nigeria's history.

The growth of liberals in Nigeria was very much witnessed during the period after colonization. The origins of democracy lie in ancient Greek where philosopher's classified government according to the number of citizens involved in the process- from rule by one person, through to rule by a few, to rule by many. At one extreme is autocracy, in which one individual has power to make all important decisions. The concentration of power in the hands of one person (usually a monarch) was a more common form of government in earlier historical periods. Oligarchy puts government power in the hands of elite. At one time, the nobility or the major land owners commonly ruled as an aristocracy. At the other extreme of the continuum is democracy, which means rule by the people. Most scholars believe that the United States, Britain, France, and other countries in Western Europe are genuine democracies. Others contended that, these countries only appear to be democracies because they hold free and fair elections but they actually are run by wealthy business elites for their own benefit. Nevertheless, most people today agree that government should be democratic (Juda, Berry and Goldman; 2008; 33).

American has a simple answer to the question, 'who should govern' it is, "the people" unfortunately, this answer is too simple. It fails to define who the people are should he include young children? Recent immigrants? Illegal aliens? This answer also fails to tell us how the people should do their governing, should they be assembled in a stadium? Vote by mail? Choose others to govern for them? We need to take a close look at what government by the people really means (Yunsa; 2007;45).

The word democracy originated in Greek around the fifth century E.C. Demos referred to the 'common people', the masses, Kratos meant 'power'. It is a type of government in which all citizens exercise power and civil responsibility, directly or through their freely power and civil responsibilities. Thus, a true democracy, i.e. a system in which all citizens meet periodically to elect state officials and personally enact laws, has been extremely rare.

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Democracy and Nigeria are like Siamese Twins; though conjoined, they are uncomfortable and under intense pressure that could result in all forms of hurt, even death. Although, democracy, may not be strange to an overwhelming percentage of Nigerians; what may be strange to them is the brand of democracy that invests, first and foremost in human and material resources for the purposes of political stability, economic liability, scientific advancement, technological breakthrough, educational development and life-enhancing social services given the general optimism that Nigeria was going to be a leader of democracy in Africa. Following her independence from Britain in 1960, one should normally expect that by now democracy should be deeply rooted and institutionalized in the country; ironically and unfortunately, Nigeria, as far as the practice and delivery of dividends of liberal democracy is concerned, is yet a cripple that can barely stand let alone walk or run.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourses

Democracy is a universal concept, its practice differs from one place to another with regard to acquisition of (and disposition to) power and institutional arrangement. Hence, one can talk of American democracy, British democracy, Irish democracy, Canadian democracy and so on. It has been pointed out in this paper that the concept of egalitarianism has more theoretical connotations than practical application. There is nowhere in the world where democracy is a republic of equals. Thus, socio-economic and political inequality is a prominent and permanent feature of democracy particularly in Nigeria where democracy has widened the gap between those who have access to power and public funds and those who do not. Since democracy is said to be government of the people by the people and for the people, it is therefore generally assumed that democracy is the most suitable form of government at least as far as the delivery of Ronald's 'political goods' is concerned. It is therefore generally taken for granted that the pursuit of the welfare of the generality of the people is the epicenter of democracy whenever it is practiced. While this may be so in some democracies, the reverse is the case in others; while democracy is synonymous with holistic development and aggregated growth in some climes; it is the representation of betrayal and inhuman deprivation in others. Nigeria probably personifies the latter. While some countries aspire to and do indeed practice democracy for the socio-economic benefit of the generality of the people or at least as many people as possible; others like Nigeria, make their own brand of democracy government of the few by the few and for the socio-economic benefit

of the few. Indeed, the most outstanding feature of Nigeria democracy is mind boggling and unpardonable waste of public funds on the comfort of a few Nigerian the democracy of waste practiced in Nigeria invests, first and foremost, in the comfort of officials rather than in human and national resources.

Democracy is a household political concept in many part of the world today, which often occurs at political participation discussions. Any government (civilian or military) now laid claim to it because it sound as an ideal form of government. However, the controversy surrounding the employment of the concept is a clear indication that it means different things to different people and societies (Abia, 2003; 55). Sartori (1965;19) conceive democracy as “the power of the people and the rule of the people”. Furthermore, appadoria (1975; 137) describes it as ‘a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly through representatives periodically elected themselves. Schnumpeter (1967;153) reduces the concept of the procedural, when he defines the democratic methods as the ‘institutional arrangement for arriving at political decision in which individual require the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people vote’. And from the Marxist point of view, as represented in the work of Marx and Engles (1981). According to the communist manifesto, democracy connects the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” That is to say, majority rule of the common people, plebeians, it was very much a class affair; it means the sway of the lowest and largest class.

This paper adopts the “Elitist theory of democracy” as its tool of analysis. The elitist theory of democracy has developed mainly during the present century. The notable advocates of this theory are viltredopareto (1848-1923), Gaetono Mosca (1858-1941), Robert Michel’s, James Burnham, Joseph H. Schumpeter, Raymond Aaron, Giovanni Sartori and Karlmannheim. The theory is mainly concerned with the institutions of democracy and realities of the western liberal democratic political system. It provides a description and explanation and justification of the existing political system in western democracies. This theory arose due to the need for the maintenance of stability and equilibrium in the capitalist liberal societies. Its object is to suggest a political system best suited to the existing order (Mahajan; 2005; 820). Clearly, elite theory describes a government that operates in an undemocratic fashion.

Relating the elitist theory to this paper is for some facts that President Goodluck Jonathan belongs to the group of segmented elites as he exercises his power over

the entire Nigeria rightly or wrongly. Too, he attained the present status as a member of the ruling class and People's Democratic Party. Today, President Goodluck Jonathan belongs to a minority of the population that takes the major decisions.

Government by the Consent of the Governed

This principle is a fundamental pillar of the concept of Liberal democracy. It can also be termed as representative government which stems from the conduct of free and fair elections competitive elections. Government by consent can only be achieved through the conduct of elections. Elections play important part of representative democracy. Individuals and groups have to compete in an open contest for the peoples votes. When this is done fairly and creditably, the wishes of the people would easily prevail.

Nigeria since her independence as a political entity has experienced several types/forms of government; that is, government by the consent of the governed and the government without the consent of the governed, i.e civilian and military government and regimes. All the military regimes that we have had in Nigeria have all come into power without the propel approval from the governed/electorates. Hence, it has failed/fall-short of this principle of liberal-democracy. In total, Nigeria experienced her first military intervention in politics on January 15, 1966 and since then there has been four other successful coups, 2 abortive coups, one attempted coup and 3 alleged coups all by different military government at different times in history.

However, the government by the consent of the governed which must come from the conduct of a free, fair and competitive elections, as also been slightly dysfunctional due to the fact that elections conducted in Nigeria have to a large extent been far from been free, fair and competitive. Elections serve as one of the major instrument for selecting political officeholders. It serves as means of ensuring accountability and mobilization of the citizens for political participation. Yet, elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by malpractices such as: election rigging, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes, political intimidation, and assassination prior to during and after elections.

Elections are critical aspects of democratic framework for governing modern political societies. They serve as instruments of political choice, mobilization, and accountability. In the context of liberal democracy in the world, elections are to

facilitate the smooth transition from one civilian administration to the other and help in legitimizing sitting governments.

Since her return to civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian experience with general elections has shown that the political elite have not truly come to terms with the referents of elections for democratic sustenance. More often than not, the elite has failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which prioritizes politics of tolerance, conflict and consensus, bargaining and compromise. They see

Political parties which organize for elections are also, like a band of men and women going to war, where there must be victors and the vanquished. Elections in Nigeria have become warfare where it is a sin to lose.

Challenges to Liberal Democracy in the 21st Century Nigeria

The model democracy that is popular in this age of globalization is liberal democracy, democracy is a descriptive term that is synonymous with majority rule, and it is associated with democratic consolidation and good governance. However, in Nigeria, efforts to attain high level of democratic consolidation and good governance have been made but are yet to be crowned with much success. The literal meaning of "democracy" comes from a combination of two words *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule), and its Core, "democracy is a form of government in which the people rule". The term originated in Athens and was a part of the standard classification of regime forms that distinguished rule by one (monarchy), several (aristocracy), and the many (democracy). However, beyond the literal meaning of democracy, there has been considerable debate over the criteria that distinguish democracies from non-democracies. It can be argued that democracy is a system of government where the opportunity to participate in an authoritative decision making is opened to all who are willing and interested to share. However, it is a system of government that recognized individual rights, a system based on the principle of man one vote and one vote one value.

The Nigerian state assumed a new governance status in 1999 following the demise of authoritarian regime in the country. Military dictatorship was replaced by representative democracy with the hopes and aspirations of good governance much higher than what the seemingly collapsible democratic institutions could fulfill. The source and nature of transition in 1999 was later found to constitute

threat to the foundation democracy and obliterates the current efforts at consolidating democracy.

Since restoration of democratic rule in the country, change of government has been orderly while elections have been periodic. Between 1999 and 2015 four different civilian administration have emerged and there have been four successive transitions from civilian government to another (Obasanjo administration, 1999-2007), Yar' Adua/Jonathan administration 2007-2011, Jonathan administration 2011-2015 and incoming administration Buhari administration 2015). The country has successfully passed through five legislative houses both at the centre and at the component units. Despite the fact that Nigeria has experienced about sixteen years of interrupted democracy practice, they are various challenges confronting democratic consolidation and good governance in the Nigeria. These challenges are:

(A) **Bad Governance:** Bad Governance is a major obstacle to the survival of liberal democracy in Nigeria. The widespread nepotism and persistent corruption in the Nigerian polity pose a serious threat and challenge to democracy. When citizens feel that appropriated funds are not well managed in the common interest, it discourages loyalty to the nation and kills the spirit of jingoism.

(B) **Bourgeois over Proletariat:** The issue of class different and class struggle in our politics is still a challenge as the ethnic minorities in some geo-political zones of the country struggle to get voted for at the national level which lead to constant and prolonged neglect of their region by the majority ruling the country over the years.

(C) **Sit-Tight Syndrome:** The unending quest by our political leaders to remain in power forever has always been a challenge to liberal democracy and democracy of Nigeria at large. Some leaders exercise all their powers to stay in power for life thereby negating the constitutional tenure system.

(D) **Abuse of Power:** The unrestrained use of power by government officials against innocent citizens still poses a serious challenge. The approval of unbided contracts, the illegal detention of Nigerian citizens in many cases could be seen as extravagant use of power that reinforces undemocratic norms.

(E) **Electoral Malpractices:** The activities of political parties during elections are very different from the tenets of liberal democracy. Some Political parties and

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their members still breach with impunity the constitutional provisions of elections as well as formation of political parties. Thuggery, ballot-box snatching, kidnapping is the order of the day in our political parties.

Conclusion

The focus of the paper is to examine the challenges of liberal democracy, its tenets under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. To do this, the paper is structured into 5 parts with introduction as part 1. Part 2 is conceptual and theoretical clarifications. Part 3 Challenges to Liberal Democracy in the 21st Century Nigeria. Part 4 Government by the Consent of the Governed. Part 5 is conclusion and recommendations. The paper concludes that; liberal democracy under Goodluck Jonathans' administration was marred by Crisis - religion and ethnic. More to these are problems of corruption, looting, election rigging, destruction of lives and properties that are needed for development, to mention but a few.

Recommendations

- a. There must be a deliberate and conscious effort by government to surmount these challenges to democracy outlined above which if not tackled will continue to witch-hunt Nigeria's liberal democracy.
- b. Military coups are persistent menaces that have often truncated democracy in Nigeria. To put coups at bay forever, the country needs to clearly outline some heavy punishments that will be meted out to any coup plotter.
- c. Furthermore, our leaders should always do their best and resist the temptation of sit-tight syndrome. They need to borrow a leaf from their western counterparts and note that they must abide by the oath of office they took before assuming office which is to protect the constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria.
- d. The enthronement of free and fair elections will tremendously advance the installation of democracy in the country. The first step here is to ensure that INEC is adequately and independently funded as epileptic release of funds during the 2007 election experience amounted to delays in printing and distribution of election materials.

- e. Political parties also have a role to play to ensure that their member is not used as thugs and hooligans during and after the elections.
- f. Finally, the government and other governmental agencies need to orientate the citizens on the need to protect and guard democracy jealously because with democracy which is rule by majority, the country will develop at a speedy pace.

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