



Nigeria and 21st Century Democratic Dispensation

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Abstract

With the inception of the 21st century in Nigeria politics, the expectation for good governance became high.. This was as a result of the country's return to democratic system after several years of military regimes in 1999. However, despite its return to a civilian administration, the menace has been on enjoyment of democratic dividends. This study, therefore, makes a conceptual and explorative understanding of Nigeria's 21st century democratic dispensation. The study infers that despite years of civilian rule since 1999, there are challenges ranging from election malpractices, insecurity, poverty and economic mismanagement which pose threat to the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The qualitative method of study is adopted and secondary data used. This study, therefore, recommends that the constitution should be thoroughly checked and reviewed in order to effect positive changes in the society. The political leadership must have the will to turn around the socio-economic and political challenges facing the country so as to ensure development in all sensitive and non sensitive sectors. If all these are given adequate attentions, Nigeria's democratization would be positioned higher in the midst of other democracies.

Keywords: Nigeria, 21st century, Democratic Dispensation

Introduction

Nigeria as a developing nation has witnessed some level of democratic stability and truncation from a historical perspective. It witnessed her first republic in 1963 as a sovereign entity. This first democratic achievement was truncated on 15th January 1966 by a military coup d'état. Her second republic came in 1979 in which Alhaji Shehu Shagari was elected under a democratic dispensation. In 1983, the military interfered and halted the administration, which ushered in a military regime. The third republic was ushered in in 1993 but was annulled by another military junta until 1999 in which a new democratic dispensation emerged with Olusegun Obasanjo as the civilian elected president and has not been truncated by another military regime till date (Department of Defense, 2005). Democracy in any society has been observed as one of the vital strategies that promote and propel social stability, economic development, better standard of living and political proficiency in the present day society.

Democracy in the present day Nigeria has been observed as a simple political desideratum which hangs on a hitching utopia (Adewusi, 2011). Therefore, a sincerer democracy is a sine qua non

in bringing development to every sector of a nation's economy. In the same relation, Ojukwu and Nwanolue (2012) observed that the overall success and achievement of any nation practicing democracy is highly centered on three major contests. One of these factors is identified as legislative efficiency, in which the exercise of the legislative organ must reform and reflect positively the political and socioeconomic challenges that have been hanging on the nation for some quite of time. While the second factor involves executive contest and management of the nation's economy. The last contest has been identified as hanging on the legislative willingness to make a policy of inclusiveness which will enable her citizens take a vibrant participation in the daily activities of government of their country (Hassan & Mamudu, 2011). However, from the above observation, this study sets out the sole objective to achieve a conceptual and exploratory understanding of democratic dispensation in the Nigeria 21st century of democratic practice. A qualitative study, secondary data, and liberal democratic theory were adopted to achieve this aim.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy

Democracy as a concept has not enjoyed any general and accepted definition just like every other concepts in the field of social sciences. Schumpeter (1950), observed, democracy as a formal organizational arrangement for achieving administrative, political and legislative decision or a system in which a citizen ascertains the legal right to take part in decision making through the means of struggle which involves a competition to achieve the vote of the people. In a similar view, Cohen (1971) believes that democracy involves a system of public government in which members of the public have the equal opportunity to directly take part in the decision making of their society that affects all. Therefore, in view of the above, several scholars maintained the argument that democracy is a good system of government on the basis that, it enables the people with the opportunity to make contribution, especially on the issues that affect their society and usually on the production and delivery of those that represent them in the government and thereby promoting development and stability in the society.



Democracy by participation enhances people's independence and in so doing, becomes the most recognized systems of government in the world as it promotes political equity in the society. Democracy involves the consent of deliberation through natural form and devoid of threat. In a related view, Mohammad, (2007), asserts that, one great feature that has made a democratic system of government a world hotcake is hinged on the fact that it gives an individual or group the legal and free opportunity for articulation and pressing home his or their desires or demands and invariably making a contribution to public policy that will guarantee positive achievements in the society.

Therefore, considering the above observations, it is made clear that democracy as a system of government has gained a world acceptance. It ranges from the facts that it promotes the culture of a popular representation, participation and contribution in decision making in the society, freedom of speech among others. However, it becomes clear that in the present democratic dispensation there must exist free and fair election, legitimate government, fundamental human rights and the existence of multiple political parties, political tolerance, separation of power, accountability, rule of law, transparency and equality of all men (Edigheji, 2005). Similarly, democracy involves a kind of political system which allows decision makers to be selected through periodic elections that must be on the basis of free, fair and honest. In a democracy, all the adult people are eligible to vote and thereby allowing candidates seeking for public office to compete freely for votes. In fact, democracy has to do with equality in a society among all citizens, popular participation in governance, sovereignty of the population, supremacy of the rule of law, limited government, protection of human rights and their essential freedoms, and a clear separation of powers among the three arms of government (Malan, 2009). Therefore, in a nation said to be practicing democracy and all these features missing, it only becomes an expression of democracy and not a practical democracy and stands questionable. However, Nigeria suffers from all kinds of challenges which include, Boko Haram insurgency, Niger Delta Militancy, Corruption, Failure of leadership, poor political will, insincerity among leaders, absence of accountability in governance and Improper vision of the political leadership and so forth at the present democratic dispensation in the country (Linus Ugwu, 2015).

Liberal Democratic Theory

The liberal democratic theory was adopted in this study as it aids the exploratory understanding of Nigeria's 21st century democratic dispensation. This theory is a common theory, especially among the capitalist nations such as Britain, United States of America (USA) and France, etc., however, developing capitalist countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are not an exception to this. Therefore, this theory describes the system of democracy established in the politics of developed nations and gaining supporters throughout the world. Similarly, it was observed that this knowledge of democracy arose at the time when capitalism became the major mode of production in both North America and Europe. However, the great proponents of this theory include J.J. Rousseau, Adam Smith, John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Baron De Montesquieu, etc.

Basically, this theory of liberal democracy set-out to project a system of political organization that promotes the enhancement of moral development and individual participation of the populace. It promotes the right of every adult citizen in a political system to vote and be voted for without regard to his/her gender, property ownership, and race. The theory was adopted in this study because it helps in the exploratory understanding of Nigeria's 21st century democratic dispensation, as it creates a political structure through which a political democratic system can operate efficiently and effectively. Similarly, it explains and exposes the anticipation of any political organization and mostly, as it has to do with the exercise of a credible election, which stands out as one of the elements responsible for a democratic dispensation.

However, this theory has come under a serious attack by critics. It has been criticized on the basis that it lacks respect for the total majority rule (except only in the election of representatives). The precedent or the constitution decided by previous generations usually restricts the liberty of the majority rule. Also, relatively small representatives or groups in the community control the power. Some authorities observed it is a pure decoration of an oligarchy. For the left wing such as the Marxist, observed it as an integral branch of capitalism. Therefore, it is undemocratic and does not promote participation, but a class base system. Although, other theories such as, the pluralist theory of democracy, elitist democratic theory, classical theory of democracy, the Marxist theory of democracy and the political-economic theory were observed or could have been used in this study, but they lack sufficient capacity to have a perfect



exploratory understanding of the study which led to the adoption of liberal democratic theory as the best option. This theory has the following attributes which include:

- The rule of law.
- Separation of power, checks, and balances
- Pressure groups
- Acceptance of capitalism
- Free, fair and periodic elections and universal franchise
- Multiple party systems

Emphasis on individual rights or civil liberties such as assembly, religion, freedom of speech and the press. Abhorrence to change of government through the approach of revolution (Kwasau, 2013 Mohammed, 2013).

Challenges of Democratic Dispensation in Nigeria 21st century

However, it has become regrettably that Nigeria's 21st century practice of democracy and democratic dispensation is inherently characterized by social disturbances, political instability and economic dwindling which have invariably resulted in a high rate of unemployment, abject poverty, sexual slavery, prostitution, hooliganism, electioneering disputing, serious hunger, and among different kinds of crimes ranging from kidnapping, robbery, arm bandit, theft, Boko haram, and Niger Delta militancy in the country (Ojukwu and Nwanolue, 2012). Since Nigeria independence in 1960, democratic dispensation has been a chief preoccupation with the affairs of the nation. But elusiveness has been at the center stage because of several domestic challenges being faced by the country and invariably undermines the level of democratic dispensation to the populace.

Impunity

Impunity as a threat stands as a major challenge and obstacle in the democratic dispensation of Nigeria at 21st century. Therefore, its measurement is not considered on the basis of democratic structure, but the extent at which the rule of law is promoted. However, in the country's struggle for some levels of democratic dispensation, the level of impunity is high in the country and must be curtailed through the constitution so that a pure domestication of equality of all Nigerians can be assured and democratic dispensation maintained.

The Failure of Leadership

The challenge of good leadership in Nigeria right from her independence in 1960 has remained

unresolved. It has not been opportune to be governed by a leader who has the country and the people at heart. Most of her leaders usually emerge by accident as most of these leaders because of their ways of emergence usually lack the experience, capacity of leadership, and most of all, they were mostly found to be unprepared for such enormous task. Therefore, this stands as one of the causes of failure of leadership emanating from policies of no vision. The election of 2015 that took president Buhari to power was a wonderful one in which Nigerians made their choice on who was to rule them. The president was handed with the mantle of leadership not on the basis of inexperience or unpreparedness, but on the basis of the choice of Nigerians.

Furthermore, Nigeria 21st century democratic dispensation is expected to promote the common good to the people, which can be accomplished through the sustenance of democratic values, such as, fiscal discipline, transparency, leadership accountability, a good conscience, due process, the rule of law, preservation of the constitution among others. However, leaders with credibility have not been found to have the above features accomplished for the common good of the society which is the basis of a democratic dispensation. Therefore, this explains the poor current state of the nation's democracy.

Insurgency and Militancy

The role of the militants in the South and Boko haram in the North stand as a great setback to a democratic dispensation in the Nigeria 21st century of political existence. The activities of these groups have continued to retardate the political and socioeconomic development of the nation. These activities invariably become a great challenge to a democratic dispensation in the country. Therefore, to curtail this setback, there must be a good political will from the political leaders and the security operatives in order to subdue the situation to a stand-still. The political leaders must be able and sincerely support the security agencies in order to ensure victory over the menace as it will invariably lead to the common good of the society. Poverty and underdevelopment must be handled with a great political will for democratic dispensation to thrive.

The State of Corruption

Corruption has been identified as a major challenge to democratic dispensation not only in Nigeria but the world at large. Osimiri (2009), Observed that corruption has caused democratic dispensation and good governance in Nigeria to be in a state of



catastrophe. Therefore, in view of this, several governments in Nigeria ventured into anti-corruption campaigns. One of these campaigns was the creation of Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) by Obasanjo's civilian administration in 1999 to curtail corruption so that democratic dispensation could thrive. In addition, these two agencies under the administration of Obasanjo were greatly commended both home and abroad for their great efforts. Although, they were also criticized for being selective in their operation and served as an instrument by the president to silence his political opponents. To promote democratic dispensation in Nigeria, corruption must not be handled softly, anti-corruption agencies must be empowered by a good political will by the political leaders and those found with cases of corruption should be dealt with accordingly without political interference from the political leaders.

The Electoral System

In the political system of Nigeria, election has been observed as gradually taking shape as a political culture. But these elections are constantly being hijacked and manipulated by the incumbents and those with economic power, who ensure that they hold on to power through all illegal means and just as was attempted recently in Gambia. This act of practice puts the nation's democratic dispensation into question and thereby denying the common man his common good. The free and fair election in the country has always being questionable. Abuse of electoral legitimacy and the electoral process. Electoral malpractice always leads to poor governance, leadership and slow pace of democratic consolidation in the country which will lead to better democratic dispensation. In the same manner, the result of the country's general election in 2011 led the nation into all kinds of electoral violence and a wanton destruction of peoples' lives and their property for alleged fraud emanating from the election. Therefore, in view of the above, for the people to enjoy a fair democratic dispensation. The beliefs' of the populace must be renewed towards democracy by the assurance of good governance and the common good in the society. Handle free and fair elections, allow the people to decide their political leader and insecurity tackled as they will not only ensure democratic consolidation but also will ensure the existence of democratic dispensation.

Human Rights

On the country's present democratic dispensation, the citizens' fundamental rights are still

questionable as they usually come under attacks irrespective of the advent of democracy. For instance, the protection, respect for human dignity and enjoyment of the right to life is hindered by the unavailability of socioeconomic infrastructures which are necessary for the guarantee of fulfillment and realization of human rights. Human rights reports by CDHR (ibid), the outdated ways in which peoples' respect for human dignity and the right to life is abused, arbitrary arrest and detention, the death penalty, assassination and extra-judicial killings, avoidable disaster, disappearances, the poor prison system, among others. All these abnormalities above have succeeded in putting democratic dispensation in Nigeria in a questionable state. In order to resolve this, the government of the day and the ones to come must work with all seriousness, transparency, accountability and respect for human rights which will guarantee democratic dispensation for the citizens.

Poverty

Poverty as an outcome of poor democratic dispensation has been identified as one of the greatest factors that stand as a challenge to a democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The country is endowed with both human and natural resources, but poverty is still rampant in the country. Similarly, United Nations Development Program (2007), observed that Nigeria exhibits its ugly look in several homes where an average individual struggle with a life of high poverty. In addition, an average Nigeria is isolated from himself as he suffers the capacity to provide for himself the life basic necessities which include medical facilities and education. Consequentially, the poor people are brainwashed easily and their rights toward choice are terribly manipulated and thereby making an objective choice rarely to consideration. However, different forms of gratification and inducements which produce short relief from the plague are usually given chief attention in making democratic choices. Poverty is equally observed by some scholars as one of the factors that promote security challenges which the country is suffering from (Harrington and Awoyemi, 2012). Therefore, when the people are embedded with a high rate of poverty, it affects their thinking, behavior, communication and even to demand their common good in an era of a democratic dispensation. The level of democratic illusion in Nigeria needs to be tackled with all levels of seriousness so that people can think right and demand their common good from their political leaders.



Conclusion and Recommendations

At the current state of world politics and democratic dispensation, the future of Nigeria as a sovereign entity with a democratic system of government is still questionable. Although, the present process of democratic change in the country is overwhelmed with a lot of expectations and hopes for the common good. However, Patrick (1992) observed that, in the history of mankind and particularly in the third world nations, good governance and democratic dispensation are very limited in nature. Therefore, the process of emergence within the circle of plural politics is always troubled by acute conflicts, tensions, and contradictions.

Therefore, this study was conceptually carried out in order to make an exploratory understanding of democratic dispensation in Nigeria's 21st century of democratic practice. Through an intensive study, the study found out that Nigeria from her independence witnessed a quite number of democratic truncation, but finally settled in 1999

and still in practice up to date. The study further found out that, Nigerians have never enjoyed any democratic dispensation from the inception of democratic practice in the country and owing to some negative domestic factors. Some of these negations are bad leadership, electoral malpractice, abuse of human rights, high rate of poverty, militancy, insurgency, money laundry, the emergence of leaders by accident, high rate of illiteracy, electoral violence, impunity among others. This study, however, recommends that, for a democratic dispensation to be achieved in Nigeria, the issue of illiteracy must be addressed through education so that people can know their rights and demand for their common good. Positive political education should be highly promoted. Elections should be carried out in the interest of the people and the influence of the incumbent should be checkmated. The government should provide infrastructural facilities and most of all; accountability, transparency, legitimacy and the wish of the people should be highly respected.

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