THE TENETS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS PRACTICE UNDER GOODLUCK JONATHAN’S ADMINISTRATION

MOHAMMED – HASHIMU YUNUSA (PhD)
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  IBRAHIM BADAMASI BABANGIDA
UNIVERSITY.LAPAI, NIGER STATE

ABSTRACT
There are different kinds of democracy in the world. Even dictatorial or autocratic regimes claim some if not all, the indicators of ‘democracy’. The concern of this paper is liberal democracy. It is democracies that guarantee for citizens much broader spectrum of social and economic rights. Today, countries all over the world including Nigeria are claiming that they are practicing liberal democracy. This paper evaluates the practice of this form of democracy and its conformity with the tenets of liberal democracy. The paper argued that, issues like corruption, mediocrity, thieving, election rigging, ill-preparedness, etc, etc have become the major hallmarks of socio-economic transformation in Nigeria under the Goodluck Jonathans administration. To fulfill the tenets of liberal democracy, it is recommended that Nigeria needs a democracy capable of addressing the overwhelming material poverty of the people. We need the type of democracy that promotes the equality of all the sociolinguistic groups. We need matured and strong political parties. Let the masses be empowered. The hopes and ideas of all our people should not be distorted.

Keywords: Democracy, elite, liberal democracy, governance, development.

INTRODUCTION:
The origins of democracy lie in ancient Greek political thought. Greek philosophers classified governments according to the number of citizens involved in the process. Imagine a continuum running from rule by one person, through rule by a few, to rule by many. At one extreme is autocracy, in which one individual has the 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 an 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 contend that, these countries only appear to be democracies because they hold free elections but they actually are run by wealthy business elites for their own
benefit. Nevertheless, most people today agree that government should be democratic (Janda, Berry and Goldman; 2008;33).

Americans have 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 we 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 (Yunusa; 2007;45).

The word democracy originated in Greek miffing around the fifth century E.C. Demos referred to the common people, the masses, kratos meant ‘power’. It is a type of governance in which all citizens exercise power and civic responsibility, directly or through their freely elected representativeness. 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. A few examples are Athens’ General Assembly under pericles (495–429 BC), New England Town meetings, Swiss land sgemeinde, and Igbo village republic (Ohacracies) Mbachu; 2009;5).

There are different kinds of democracy. Even dictatorial regimes claim some indicators of “democracy”. But the concern of this paper is liberal democracy. It is a democracy that guarantee its citizens a much broader spectrum of social and economic rights. Today countries all over the world including Nigeria are claiming to be practicing this form of democracy.

The focus of this paper is to assess the performance of President Goodluck Jonathan in a ‘liberal democratic” state viz – a viz, the tenets of liberal democracy.

To achieve this, the paper is structured into six parts. Part 1 is the introduction. Part 2 is conceptual and theoretical clarifications. Part 3 is the tenets of liberal democracy. Part 4 is rebirth of liberal democracy in Nigeria. Part 5 is the practice of liberal democracy in Nigeria under Goodluck Jonathan’s administration. Part 6 is conclusion and recommendation.

CONCEPTUAL / THEORETICAL CLARIFICATIONS:

Democracy is a household political concept in many parts of the world today, which often reoccurs at political participation discussions. Any government (civilian or military) now lay claim to it because it sounds 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 of democracy as “the power of the people and the rule of the people”. Furthermore, Appadorai (1975:137) describes it as ‘a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly through representatives periodically elected by themselves’. Schumpeter (1967:153) reduces the concept to the procedural, when he defines the democratic method as the ‘institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals require the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’. And from the Marxist point of view, as represented in the work of Marx and Engels (1981). The communist Manifesto, democracy connect the dictatorship of the proletariat”, that is to say, majority rule of the common people, the plebians. It was very much a class affair; it meant the sway of the lowest and largest class.
The 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 noticeable advocates of this theory are Vilfredo Pareto (1848 – 1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858 – 1941), Robert Michel’s, James Burnham, Joseph, A. Schumpeter, Raymond Aaron, Giovanni Sartori and Karl Mannheim. They theory is mainly concerned with the institutions of democracy and realities of the Western liberal democratic political system. It provides a description, an 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. It does not aim at change in the existing socio-economic situation. Its object is to suggest a political system best suited to the existing order (Mahajan; 2005:820).

The dictionary meaning of elite is the chosen element in the population. According to Suzanne Keller in Mahajan: 2005:820, “elites are those minorities which are set apart from the rest of the society by their preeminence in one or more of these various distributions.” In order to be very effective, an elite group should possess three qualities: group consciousness, coherence and conspiracy. Elites are divided into two categories: strategic elites and segmental elites. Strategic elites are those who claim or exercise wide influence over the entire spectrum of social set-up. The segmental elites are those who have influence or responsibilities only in a sub-domain of society. However, both of them draw their elite status from either or a combination of the following factors: heredity, excellence in arts and literature, position in the ruling class or party or bureaucratic hierarchy, material affluence and physical process. Out of the two the strategic elites are more important.

The essential theme of this theory is that there is in every society a minority of the population which takes the major decision in the society. As those decisions have political implications, the elite exercise considerable political influence (Mahajan; 2005:802). 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 segmental 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 Peoples Democratic Party. Today, President Goodluck Jonathan belongs to minority of the population that takes the major decision in Nigeria. However, how this decision is taking viz – a - viz the tenets of liberal democracy and its practice in Nigeria is the major concern of the paper.

**TENETS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY**
Liberal democracy refers to political system in which, there are attempt to frame rules that maximize the well being of all or impost citizens (Mbachu and Eze: 2009;86). In his political continuity and change, Peter H. Merki has enumerated four principles of liberal democracy.

(a) Democracy is a government by consent.

(b) Liberal democracy is base on majority rule.

(c) There is the recognition of minority rights

(d) Another tenet of liberal democracy is constitutional government (Mahajan:2005:814).

In his book modern politics and Government, Alan Ball has identified some characteristic of liberal democracy: there is more than one party competition for political power, democracy promotes patriotism, there is an experiment in public education on a large scale
Above all, there must be an election through voting process. It is through the voting process that people exercise their wills. Just as it was done in Nigeria in the late 19th century that led to military disengagement from politics and the rebirth of liberal democracy on May 29, 1999.

THE REBIRTH OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

The birth of the present democratic government in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 was welcome with high hopes and expectations and the belief that a new dawn had eventually arrived. Such expectations were informed by the fact that, democracy is reputed to be the best form of government, which offers better opportunities and challenges especially in this patently globalised world. (Lame and Dabin:2000;62). No wonder, President Nkrumah urged his countrymen to seek first the independence of Ghana and all the good things of life would be delivered at their doors. Similarly, General Abdulsalaam’s appeal should be heeded: Seek democracy and all the good things of life shall become accessible to all the various social strata of Nigerian society (Odofin, 1999).

The 21st Century poses serious challenge to Nigeria. A major challenge that confronts Nigeria is the achievement of a stable political and constitutional order that promotes development and guarantees her citizens, human rights and good governance through law. This involves the building of political system that allows citizens to participate fully in the governance of the state, and the creation of institutions that are capable of meeting the challenges of governance, security and development (Mbachu:2009:03).

There is widespread consensus that without an efficient, secure and capable state, economic and social developments are impossible. Critical to security and sustained economic development, is the existence and presence of strong democratic institutional structure that are cable of establishing feasible state objectives (Mbachu;2009:4), hence the birth of liberal democracy in Nigeria. As earlier stated, hoping that it would be a desideratum to socioeconomic and political maladies that have attacked the state (Nigeria).

THE PRACTICE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA UNDER PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN’S ADMINISTRATION.

“Today, our dream and struggle for democratization is fading away. Instead of free and flair elections, we have sham elections and scientific rigging; instead of true federalism, we now have creeping unilaterialism.; instead of an independent judiciary, we have executive impunity. (The Nation; Tuesday, June 2012. Vol.7 No:215431) vintage, Lagos.

Liberal democracy under President Goodluck Jonathan alienates rather than empower. It is anti-people, anti-intellectual and anti-development. It has zero tolerances for criticism. It prefers conformists and cronies. The characteristics of Nigeria’s liberal democracy under President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration can be described as follows: personalization of political rule, professionalization of corruption, institutionalization of violence, hegemonization of domination, subordination of democratic and social force, ruination of the peasantry, emasculation of opposition forces, compradorisation of development, and veneration of political crooks. Additionally, there was de-industrialization and de democratization. To be sure, the professionalization of corruption has resulted in the epidemiology of stealing. There is a
posturing by a so-called emergent economic class pursing a superficial economic reform, within a deceptive statist accountability framework and driven – by a tokenist approach to the youth and women question (Momoh Cited in Yunusa:2007:49).

Under President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, the issue of poverty is treated as contempt for the people. Daily, people die of poverty, rather than tackle poverty. The worse of it is that poverty is seen as a discourse in which the victims have no say, they say has to come from others, the non-poor, the donors and humanitarian agencies. The poor are seen as both object and subject of poverty, as both victims and perpetrators. The poverty discourse is a big ruse, a cover-up; it does not raise the issue of agency, the structures of production and reproduction of poverty and why some people are poor and other are rich (Momoh Cited in Yunusa:2007:49)

Corruption is a scourge that is rapidly eating away our national entrails, subverted our national dream and stunted our growth. There is criminalization of our political leaders, some of whom are found guilty and convicted in the media. The media lynching that follows every hint of alleged act of corruption often obfuscates the facts with no one any wiser to the substance of the issues. With due process ignored, the person in question suffers double jeopardy. He is unwarrantedly defamed and his reputation tarnished (Uduagham;2007:9).

Liberal democracy in Nigeria has witnessed and still witnessing the cult of mediocrity. Our leaders, from Federal to the Local levels have failed to deliver the dividends of democratic governance to the Nigerians because they themselves do not possess the credentials of good leaders, nor do they seem to have a due governance. A good number of them are either ill-prepared or un-prepared for the challenges thrust on them by the electorate. Neither do their psychophantastic lieutenants. Such mediocre leaders lack the spiritual stamina to confront the socio-political upheavals that assail their people. Mediocre leaders also thrive on cheap popularity as a means of hiding their lack of definable ideology or agenda. They do not bear criticisms with equanimity; rather, they resort to witch-hunting and mudslinging to mask their ineptitude. The result of hoisting a mediocre leader in power is nothing but inefficiency, a decline in national productivity and under-development. It can also lead to social unrests (Machungo:2001;D).

Nigeria’s liberal democracy under Goodluck Jonathan’s administration was characterized by conflicts – religious, ethnic and communal. Added to these were the political cum electoral violence. Peace which is a strong prerequisite to development is no where to be found. Today in Nigeria, big fraudsters, MEGA thieves are decorated with the accolades or spangled with confetti then the big chieftaincy titles, all in celebration of big thieving. Liberal democracy under Goodluck Jonathans’ administration destroyed politics, it has destroyed Agriculture. It has destroyed the economy. It has destroyed or prostituted religions. It destroyed all infrastructures needed for development. Today, we are master destroyers yet, we have the audacity to expect development According to David-West in Yunusa (2008:279). This can never come by juju or voodoo or fellowship.

CONCLUSION

The focus of the paper is to assess the practice of liberal democracy vis-à-vis, its tenets under president Goodluck Jonathan’s administration. To do this, the paper is structured into 6 parts with introduction as part 1. Part 2 is conceptual and theoretical clarifications. Part 3 is tenets of
liberal democracy. Part 4 is rebirth of liberal democracy in Nigeria. Part 5 is its practice under President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration. Part 6 is conclusion and recommendations. The paper concludes that; liberal democracy under Goodluck Jonathans’ administration was characterized by conflict – communal, religion and ethnic. More to these are problems of corruption, thieving, election rigging, ill – preparedness, destruction of necessary infrastructures that are needed for development, etc, etc.

Today, we are faced with a dilemma. We have gone through an ‘election’ and political power had been handed over to Goodluck Jonathan and his lieutenants, many of whom are guilty of one or even all of the above misdeeds. Given this situation, it is legitimate to ask one important question. Is it possible for the same people who were central to the creation of these problems, who by their actions, have contributed to underdevelopment of genuine liberal democracy, to help to create the necessary conditions for its sustainability and move Nigeria forward? The answer to this question are: No if we are pessimistic and yes, if we choose to be optimistic, “believing in the infinite, God- given possibilities of human beings to realize their mistakes and make amend”. With “faith, you can move a mountain” let be an optimists. This paper therefore recommend that:

(a) Nigeria needs a democracy capable of guaranteeing not only freedom but addressing the overwhelming material poverty of the people.

(b) The nature and the process of state formation in Nigeria demands a type of democracy that could address the problems of uneven development between the various regions of the Federation guarantee individual and group liberty and allowed unfettered access to power and resources (Yunusa and Aliyu 2012:120).

(c) We need the type of democracy which promotes the equality of all the socio-linguistic groups irrespective of their sizes. Democracy must be viewed as a vital element of the humanitarian process. In this case, the way in which we should account to each other to express our human needs and thus achieve the full realization of the human task in the interest of our liberal democracy and the people is crucial.

(d) Liberal democracy is dependent on the strength and maturity of political parties. In situation where there is absence of strong, mass based political parties, it has been easier for undemocratic forces to impose their will on the rest of the society. In addition parties that are not rooted in the ideology that is informed by the plight and concern of the poor people are unable to respond to the challenge of underdevelopment and poverty. This failure must surely lead to the betrayal of the interests of the people, the elevation of those of the elite and therefore, resort to repression to suppress the dissatisfied masses of the people to lead them away from recognition of their true interests (Yunusa and Aliyu: 2012:126).

(e) It is important that as we practice our liberal democracy and use it as necessary platform for the acceleration of development, the progressive movement should ensure that the orientation of our parties is informed by the need to empower the masses of our people so that they themselves can lead the renaissance of democracy in Nigeria.
Finally, the challenge to our intelligentsia, as indeed to all of us is therefore, to ensure that, the ideas, concepts, and hopes of all our people are not distorted because the very act of distortion is a threat to our liberal democracy.

REFERENCES


University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.