REINFORCING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
It has been variously contended and profoundly demonstrated that democracy is at the crossroads in Nigeria. However, despite the vicissitudes of democracy in the Nigerian State, the horrendous setbacks brought about by the State’s recent encounter with authoritarianism make it imperative for Nigerians to fully embrace democracy. But democracy in its current tendencies in Nigeria is also not so attractive for such full embrace. It is contemplated in this study that what needs to be done necessitates the reinforcement of the existing pillars of the democratic foundation in Nigeria. Thus, this paper is centrally a contribution to the debates surrounding democratization in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study therefore, are (i) to identify the central deficient element of Nigeria’s democracy and (ii) make recommendations on the modalities of reinforcing democracy in Nigeria. The theoretical framework of the study is the elite theoretical framework. The methodology of the study is the critical mode of research. Findings of the study finally indicate that the central deficient element of Nigeria’s democracy is locatable in its elite dependence. Reinforcing democracy in Nigeria, the study therefore concludes, principally entails the making of the democratic culture, fully participatory and undeniably inclusive.

KEYWORDS: Reinforcement, democracy, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION
It has been variously contended and profoundly demonstrated that democracy is at the crossroads in the Nigerian State (Joseph and Gillies, 2010; Awopeju, Adelusi and Oluwashakin, 2012; Kumolu, 2013; Idike, 2014; Nnanna, 2014; Oni and Segun, 2014). According to Idike (2014:133) democracy in Nigeria is currently characterized by immense experimentation. In other words, the usual procedures of enthroning democratically elected governments in Nigeria, are still marked (even marred) by administrative and executive trials and errors (Idike, 2014). As a matter of fact, Nnanna (2014) has highlighted that unless great care is taken, Nigeria’s democracy is heading towards uncertain waters, in the coming few months. However, despite the vicissitudes of democracy in Nigeria, the horrendous setbacks brought about by the Nigerian State’s recent encounter with authoritarianism make it imperative for Nigerians to fully embrace
democracy. But democracy in its current tendencies in Nigeria is also not so attractive for such full embrace.

It has been posited in this regard that democracy’s advantage over authoritarianism lies not in some inherent democratic ability to offer citizens instant gratification of their needs and desires, but rather in democracy’s superior institutional and intellectual readiness to cope with the dissatisfaction produced by its citizens’ choices (Krastev, 2010:118). It is thus, contemplated in this study that what needs to be done necessitates the reinforcement of the existing pillars of the democratic foundation in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper is centrally a contribution to the debates surrounding democratization and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are (i) to identify the central deficient element of Nigeria’s democracy and (ii) make recommendations on the modalities of reinforcing democracy in Nigeria. The theoretical framework of the study is the elite theoretical framework. The methodology of the study is the critical mode of research.

CONCEPTUALIZING DEMOCRACY

The definition of democracy has continued to defy all attempted propositions of common understanding (Idike, 2014). Kroenig (2011) argues that democracy has gained the status of a mantra. Yet there is no consensus about how to conceptualize and measure regimes such that meaningful comparisons can be made through time and across countries. In any case, a major problem with the various attempts at conceptualizing democracy is the tendency to imbue the concept with too many attributes. As posited by Munck and Verkuilen (2002), the tendency to specify the meaning of a concept in a way that includes too many attributes - the problem of maximalist definitions - has two potential drawbacks. On one hand, the sheer overburdening of a concept may decrease its usefulness by making it a concept that has no empirical referents. The inclusion of the notion of social justice as an attribute of democracy is an example. On the other hand, even if a concept is defined in such a way that empirical instances can be found, maximalist definitions tend to be so overburdened as to be of little analytical use. For example, if a market-based economic system is seen as a defining attribute of democracy, the link between markets and democracy is not left as an issue for empirical research. The problem with such definitions, as Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi, and Przeworski (1996) argued, is that they foreclose the analysis of issues that may be “just too interesting to be resolved by a definitional fiat” (Munck and Verkuilen, 2002:9).

In this highly interesting contribution to the conceptual issues in democracy, Munck and Verkuilen (2002:9) further acknowledges that the effort to avoid the problem of maximalist definitions usually takes the form of minimalist definitions, which have the obvious advantage of making it easy to find instances of a concept and allowing for the study of numerous empirical questions. However, minimalism has its own problems. Indeed, if a concept is so minimalist that all cases automatically become instances, researchers must add attributes to a concept as a way to give it more content and thus better address relevant theoretical concerns and discriminate among cases. Thus as a counterpart to the problem of maximalist definitions, analysts must also be sensitive to the problem of minimalist definitions, the omission of a relevant attribute in the definition of a concept (Munck and Verkuilen, 2002:9). The fact remains however that in the case of democracy, the orthodoxy has become more of maximalism than minimalism. We may be accused of minimalism in this study as we only view democracy as a people-centered system of government. Idike (2014:134) further affirms that people are central to the democratic concept and practices. Democracy is therefore, essentially people-centered (Idike, 2014).
A SYNOPSIS OF THE ELITE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Izueke (2014), the elite theory seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in contemporary society. The theory posits that society is stratified into two, the masses at the bottom and the ruling elite at the top. The elite are the rich, well educated and politically influential groups, who share common beliefs and use their influence to dictate public policies. A major proponent of the theory, he highlights, is Thomas Dye. Hence, according to Dye (1981), the elite actually shape mass opinion on policy questions more than the masses shape elite opinion because the people are apathetic and ill-informed about public policy. Dye and Zeigler (1981) further stated that public policy may be viewed as the preferences and values of the governing elite. This implies that public policies portray the preferences and values of the governing elite and not those of the masses. Public officials and administrators merely carry out the policies decided upon by the elite. They neither contribute nor influence public policies (Izueke, 2014).

Furthermore, the elite theory postulates that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than demands of the masses. The elite consist of those few individuals who wield powers and hold leading positions in the strategic aspects of society. The majority, the masses, only obeys and are guided, controlled and governed by the few. Many of the elites do not hold formal or legal authoritative powers but are rather behind the scene, teleguiding and manipulating overt political and policy actions. It is on the basis of presumptions that the masses are contented and are incapable of challenging the authoritative position of the elite that the elites dominate public policy and its processes (Ikelegbe, 1994; Arowolo and Aluko, 2012).

THE CHARACTER OF NIGERIA’S DEMOCRACY

Nigeria’s democracy is highly cantankerous. This cantankerous character is principally due to the fact that political leanings of the partisan politicians are not based on discernible ideological inclinations. The political parties operate without identifiable programmes. Nigerian politicians therefore continuously move from one political party to the other. The case of Governor Theodore Orji of Abia State was highly remarkable. Within a period of three years, Governor Orji migrated from the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), to Progressive People’s Alliance (PPA), to All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and then back to the PDP. According to Ugwu (2010) Orji had on July 2, 2010 officially moved to APGA, after severing his links with the PPA, which gave him the ticket to become governor. The well celebrated defection brought APGA’s national leader, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and others to Umuahia (the Abia State Capital) to embrace their new high profile member. Orji and his wife were publicly issued APGA membership cards by the party’s national chairman, Chief Victor Umeh. Barely three weeks later, Orji appeared set to defect once again, this time to PDP. The national chairman of PDP, Dr Okwesilieze Nwodo, led a team to Umuahia to woo the Abia Chief Executive. Orji was originally a PDP member but followed his then boss, Dr Orji Uzor Kalu (former Governor of Abia State) to form PPA when the PDP became too uncomfortable for them. Now the PPA has caught the crisis bug, making Orji to part ways not only with his erstwhile political godfather (Orji Kalu) but also with the party that gave him the platform to become a governor. Onyemaizu (2010) confirms that Governor Orji’s eventual decampment from APGA to PDP was actualized in less than two months of his joining APGA. Essentially, these movements were all about the estranged relationship between the two Orjis (Theodore Orji and Orji Uzor Kalu) as
Kalu had attempted to rejoin the PDP and with his monstrous financial influence preparing to teach his turncoat former political lieutenant a lesson or two, as he was preparing to re-contest for the position of Governor in 2011, under APGA (Onyemaizu, 2010). Hence, while Governor Orji was stating “the wishes of his people” as the reasons behind his untoward movements, it was the cantankerous relationship between him and his former governor-mentor that informed his decisions. He eventually re-contested for the position of Governor, under the PDP and remained Governor of Abia State.

Let us consider another illustration. The All Progressives Congress (APC) is the new opposition amalgam of different political parties that have come together as a single political party with a single agendum (no other programme known to anybody) of dislodging the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from power. One of the party’s “heavyweight members” is Modu Sheriff, former Governor of Nigeria’s Bornu State. In the party’s national convention late June, 2014, to elect its first substantive national officers, Oladesu (2014) records Sheriff as declaring as follows: Today, we are making history. This convention shows that we have come together for the APC. APC will solve all the problems we are facing in Nigeria. Meanwhile, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a former Governor of Nigeria’s Lagos State is generally regarded as the Leader of the APC. Owete (2014) narrates that in March, 2014, the National Executive Committee, NEC, meeting of the All Progressives Congress, APC, almost turned violent following the threat by a former governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff to beat up a national leader of the party, Bola Tinubu. Mr. Sheriff exploded midway into the meeting, raining abuses on Mr. Tinubu and threatening to slap the former Lagos State governor. But for the intervention of some party leaders attending the meeting, including a former Head of State, Muhammadu Buhari and a former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, the former Borno Governor, almost made real his threat. The APC NEC meeting was convened to discuss some pressing issues in the party, including the intended inaugural ward, local government and state congresses as well as a national convention (Owete, 2014).

Mr. Sheriff is a member of the NEC, in his capacity as a former governor and a leader of the defunct All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP, which last year merged with the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, Congress for Progressives Change, CPC, and a section of the All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA, to form the APC. He was the Chairman of the ANPP Board of Trustees until the merger. On his part, apart from being a former governor, Mr. Tinubu is a respected leading light of the country’s main opposition party. At the end of the meeting, the APC NEC fixed May 24 for its first national convention. It also fixed April 5 for the ward congresses while the local government and state congresses would hold April 12 and 23 respectively.

Owete (2014) narrates how Messrs. Sheriff and Tinubu clashed when the meeting began discussions on the congresses and convention. Angered by a certain development at the meeting, the former Borno State Governor grabbed the microphone and expressed his opposition to the issue at stake. Mr. Sheriff was also said to have made some remarks which suggested that he believed that APC was not yet mature as a party. He was reportedly cautioned by Mr. Tinubu, who asked him not to speak about the party in a negative manner. The former Lagos State Governor also asked Mr. Sheriff to quit the APC and go elsewhere, if he was not comfortable with the party. At this point, Mr. Sheriff, who was now holding firmly to the microphone, allegedly began to insult Mr. Tinubu, asking him if he owned the party. All the leaders of the party present at the meeting reportedly watched with amazement as the former Borno State governor reportedly rained abuses on Mr. Tinubu. It was the former Head of State among them,
Retired General Buhari who saved the day when, sensing danger in allowing Mr. Sheriff to continue insulting Mr. Tinubu intervened. The former Head of State was said to have tongue-lashed Mr. Sheriff for losing his composure (Owete, 2014).

Owete (2014) further narrates that Mr. Sheriff’s action was seen as a product of bottled-up anger over the refusal of the party to accord him a prominent place in the fold since the conclusion of the merger talks and eventual registration of the APC as a party. The former Borno governor was said to have repeatedly positioned himself to play greater role given the positions he had occupied as a senator, governor and ANPP Board of Trustees Chairman. Sheriff was believed to have always blamed Mr. Tinubu, for the “ill-treatment” and the former Lagos Governor’s remark presented a veritable opportunity to strike against him (Tinubu). Mr. Sheriff, it was further learnt had always believed that Mr. Tinubu had not politically made more achievements than him as they were not only former senators, but also fellow two-time governors. It was further gathered that some APC leaders suspect Mr. Sheriff to be a mole planted in the opposition party by the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, perhaps due to his closeness to some senior members of the ruling party. However, in spite of all this, Owete (2014) narrates, some of the party’s leaders were not willing to let Mr. Sheriff turn his back on the APC as he was still believed to have some political value to bring to the merger. This, it was gathered, is majorly because of his popularity in the north eastern state of Borno.

Hence, in the course of this study, very strong indications emerged that all was set for this same Sheriff to decamp to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). According to Omipidan (2014), Sheriff was expected to defect to the PDP, with a view to leading the re-election bid of President Goodluck Jonathan in Borno State. This same Bornu State we recall has been the epicenter of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria and as a matter of fact the birthplace of Boko Haram. In addition, Modu Sheriff had variously been linked to the insurgent group in the past though he had equally denied any link to the group (Okocha, 2014).

As a matter of fact, according to Okocha (2014), on November 22, 2011, the PDP in Borno State sent a 10-man delegation to media houses and also held a press conference, giving graphic accounts and declared in the media houses and on camera that Modu Sheriff created Boko Haram in the build up to 2003 elections. The PDP Chairman, (then) Buba Basharu said this and all the media carried it (Okocha, 2014). Three weeks ago, Okocha (2014) continues, the Minister of Information, in the Goodluck Jonathan Government, Labaran Maku, was on Channels Television and NTA (the Nigerian Television Authority) where he alleged that Boko Haram was a creation of Bornu State Government during the regime of Modu Sheriff. The minister spoke for the federal government that Goodluck is heading (Okocha, 2014).

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Another critical issue is that democracy in Nigeria is predominantly finance-dependent. Everywhere in the world, even in the advanced democracies such as in the United States, campaign finance is a central issue in the political process (Roberts, 1995; Smith, 1995; Lessig, 2014). However, the Nigerian campaign finance issue is of a different variant. How the funds are generated and how they are utilized remains usually questionable. It is however well known that when the funds come from the coffers of the state, victory is usually guaranteed. Thus, as soon as
elections are over, the winner steps into office and starts preparing for the next round of elections, by amassing wealth from state sources. It is not usually his programmes or the manifesto of his party that would guarantee victory for him in the next round of elections but how much money he has siphoned off the state sources for subsequent elections. It is in a nutshell, not his achievements in office that assures him of victory in the next round of elections, except if achievements are then measured by how much money he has dubiously made in office. The Nigerian democrat who ignores this fact of electoral democracy in Nigeria would at the end of the day have only himself to blame. An important aspect of what the funds are used for is to practically distribute it to potential voters, either as directly distributed by the candidate himself or as given out to him by middlemen who would claim that the vote-money will get to the potential voters. In any case, how much money that enters the hands of the voters is a determining factor in who wins the election. Hence the political middlemen and their perfidious principals have learnt to play by the rules of their dubious games. The studies of Adetula (2008) have also demonstrated that in Nigeria it has been a case of money-dependent democracy.

At the end of the Governorship election in Nigeria’s Ekiti State on June 21, 2014, the politically urbane sitting Governor of the State, Dr Kayode Fayemi, lost the election to his rival, the maverick former governor of the state who was removed from office during the Olusegun Obasanjo anocratic Presidency in Nigeria, on grounds of corruption and was now staging a comeback. Political bookmakers had given victory to Dr Fayemi. National and international good governance crusaders had predicted a landslide for Governor Fayemi, who had been a stylish member of this class. Indeed, Fayemi’s records of achievements in office, had assured him of victory in his reelection endeavour. But he lost the election. Former Governor Fayose, it is now acknowledged, is the better Nigerian politician. While Fayemi was developing infrastructure, Fayose was directly giving bailout cash to needy citizens, giving them food items and attending to their sundry personal problems. Thus, in the governance language in Ekiti State there arose the twin paradigms of physical infrastructure which Governor Fayemi was largely acknowledged to be developing and the stomach infrastructure which Fayose was availing to the potential voters (Adindu, 2014; Akeredolu, 2014; Ogundele, 2014).

As a matter of fact, to underscore the role of cash distribution in the Ekiti election, Durotoye (2014) opines as follows: Even though the election was largely free and fair, the overzealousness of some security officials who restricted the movement of some APC Governors into Ekiti and the arbitrary arrest of some officers of the party also prevented the APC from perfecting its last minute plans for the election. One of those plans included the distribution of money to all the 177 wards to influence voters in favour of its candidate. Even where the money got to the ward level, party officials were not able to share the money before the election due to the heavy presence of security personnel. The security personnel were said to have looked the other way when PDP was distributing money two days before the election (Durotoye, 2014). Campaign finance in the Nigerian hue of democracy is largely understood in this manner of cash distribution.

Nigeria’s democracy is a center-related democracy that lacks important periphery attention and invariably, important periphery input. This is highly attributable to the fact that the collective resources of the Nigerian federation are disproportionately pooled at the center, to the detriment of the other federating units - the States. According to Abubakar (2014), the federal government is too big, too rich, and too strong relative to the federating states. Nigeria’ Federal Capital Territory in Abuja might as well be designated Nigeria’s center of democracy. But that would be a misnomer, as it is inherent in democracy to abhor centralization.
All the Governors of the 36 States of the Nigerian Federation, every notable person in partisan politics in Nigeria, are all full fledged or quasi residents of the Federal Capital Territory, in a bemusing manner. This is strongly indicative of the fact that the dividends of democracy, in the form of modern infrastructure are not as available as they would be found at the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. Is it then whose responsibility to provide these facilities in these other Nigerian areas?

Above all, democracy in Nigeria is squarely an elitist engagement. Critically speaking, from the combatants in Nigeria’s Abia State, the opposition fighters in the APC and the different turncoat democrats in Bornu state and elsewhere in the Nigerian State, political battles in Nigeria have immensely bordered on elite perfidy. The welfare of the people usually remains unimportant. In the process, the Nigerian elite have turned democracy into a government of the elite, by the elite and for the elite. In their elitist imaginations, they conclude that what Nigerians need are “cashless economy”, “electronic voting”, “rebasing of GDP”, “Vision 20-20-20” and all the other esoteric nomenclatures that mean little or nothing to the masses. In our bizarre imaginations, we conclude that if we concentrate on masses-oriented issues as “war against hunger and starvation”, “security of lives and property”, affordable housing schemes for the masses”, “preventive healthcare programmes”, it would look demeaning for our exalted positions. Hence, commenting on the 15 years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria, Ero (2014) posits:

Fifteen years down the line, not much value seems to have been added to the lives of the people while our values as a people appear not to have changed from what has kept us down as a nation and stunted our growth more than 53 years after independence. Rather than abate, our woes seem to be multiplying. We still lack basic amenities, such that have been taken for granted even in some fellow African countries. Our huge oil revenues have not changed the life of the ordinary Nigerian. Our infrastructure are still dilapidated or non-existent. We’re facing grave security challenges that are unprecedented in our chequered history from Boko Haram that is threatening our existence as one country. The menace of Boko Haram has made such vicious crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping and related crimes pale into insignificance. The Federal Government releases economic figures and statistics that are completely out of tune with the reality on ground as it affects the standard of living of Nigerians. Power supply is epileptic even though it is being priced beyond what the people can conveniently afford. Worse still is the painful fact that people of the clay-footed “Giant of Africa” troop to their less endowed neighbours like Ghana to get good education because here, universities and polytechnics can afford to shut their gates against students for even up to a whole session.

**REINFORCING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

In reinforcing democracy in Nigeria, the first critical step that needs to be taken is to return partisan politics and electioneering campaign in Nigeria to an issues-based pedestal. The role of the mass media in this regard is critical. If the Nigerian political parties lack ideologies and have
all agreed to operate without manifestoes and well defined programmes, the mass media should take up the critical role of providing the agenda for political debates and political campaigns in Nigeria. The Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) can also play a leading role in this regard. As a matter of fact, let it be the agenda released by the NPSA that the mass media would now adopt. The issues to be chosen from are indeed legion and the scenario therefore calls for the role of a leading articulator, who releases the current issues that would engage our democratic national attention. It could be free education, creation of additional states out of the present number of states in the country, etc. It could be issues bordering on war against hunger and starvation in the country, security of lives and property, affordable housing schemes for the masses”, etc. As a matter of fact, whenever the generic business of politics and the specific genre of electioneering become fundamentally issues-based in the Nigerian State, the attendant democratic culture will also become immensely participatory and undeniably inclusive. Hence, if Nigerian politicians want to exchange fisticuffs, let it be on these issues. In an issues-based electioneering campaign, nobody needs cash inducement to vote in support of his favourite programme. In soccer tournaments for instance, nobody needs cash inducement to support his favourite team.

Nigerian democracy must be saved from its Abuja dependency. It has to be returned to the people, whom democracy is about their concerns. The local government system in the Nigerian State for instance, needs to be strongly reinforced; with powers, resources and commensurate autonomy to impact on the lives of the citizens. This may entail a constitutional amendment to increase the constitutional influence of the local government council in Nigeria. This would compel the Nigerian elite to return to a local government base to attempt his elite antics. He will be attempting this at the home base of the masses too and it will not be business as usual for him.

CONCLUDING REMARKS
Dahl (1971), cited in Muncck and Verkuilen (2002:9) has submitted that democracy consists of two attributes - contestation or competition and participation or inclusion. The contests and competitions that surround democracy in Nigeria are therefore parts of the acceptable processes of democracy. We have however argued in this paper that these contests and competitions can be done devoid of mutually destructive tendencies and elite perfidies. Invariably, the balancing attributes to the contestation and competition that are inherent in democracy, are participation and inclusion. Findings of the study finally indicate that the central deficient element of Nigeria’s democracy is locatable in its elite dependence. Reinforcing democracy in Nigeria therefore, principally entails the making of the democratic culture, fully participatory and undeniably inclusive.

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