



ELECTION AND CONUDRUM OF SUSTAINABILITY OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Democracy as practiced all over the world denotes that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is largely vested in the members of the community. This means is a situation where the people participate actively in choosing their representatives in a free and transparent election devoid of any form of malpractices. This paper argued that democracy as it is being practiced in Nigeria is marred by factors such as insecurity, disjointed information among others. The paper however concluded that for the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria, the people should be allowed to freely choose their leaders and as such those so chosen should be responsible to the people.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Sustainability, Representatives

Introduction

Democracy according to Mandal (2007) is seen as a form of government where the people share in directing the activities of the state, as distinct from governments controlled by a single class, select group or autocrat. Based on the above, it simply means that it is the constitutional right of the people to determine who governs them in a free and fair elections and also that those who govern the people should give account of their stewardship in a periodic election. Therefore democracy is unthinkable without free and transparent election which provides a conducive atmosphere for sustainability of democracy. Election does not only confirm or reaffirm the legitimacy of those who govern through regular consent but provided a conducive atmosphere for democracy to thrive. Democracy makes it possible for those holding political offices not to have an automatic security of tenure but can be challenged or even be displaced according to democratic principles or ideals. Democracy is all about participation and accountability.

Nevertheless, despite the vital role of elections in any democratic process as the only means of changing political office holders, the conduct of elections in Nigeria remains a great challenge which hinders the sustainability of the nations democracy since Nigeria's return to democratic rule as elective processes have continued to be marred by extraordinary displays of rigging, do or die affair, ballot snatching at gun point, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats to life and criminal manipulations of voters register, brazen falsification of result, underage voting, vote buying, intimidation, the use of security agencies against political opponents, to abscondment of electoral officials and materials. (Raw lence and Albinlackey 2007, Nnadozie 2007, Adigbuo 2008, Onike 2010), Omotola 2010, Bekoe 2011. These scenario is evident in the just concluded All Progressive Congress (APC) ward, local government and state congresses of the party and also, the governorship primary of the party in preparation for the 2018 governorship election in Ekiti state. In many states in Nigeria, the Congress of the party turned bloody which in many cases resulted to loss of human life, all in a bid to control party machinery and hence determine who gets what.

According to Gueye and Hounkpo 2010, Idowu 2010, elections in Nigeria remains one of the major causes of conflict which threatens political stability and sustainability of democracy in Nigeria, even though an average voter in Nigeria is only interested in what goes into his pocket and will very easily trade off his vote when induced. This was the case of the 2017 governorship election in Anambra State where political parties pay as high as N3, 000 to N5, 000 to individual voter, all in a bid to win majority votes and to be declared as the winner.

However, this worrisome situation could be attributed to the high level of poverty in Nigeria and also total absence of basic amenities which will improve the living conditions of the people. Also, worthy of mention here in the activities of the election management body which cripples the sustainability of democracy as elections are conducted in such a way that it will favour the ruling political party through poor planning, exclusion of electorates from voting in places considered to be their strongholds as was the case in the 2013 governorship election in Anambra State where majority of the voters in the country home of the candidate of the People's Democratic Party could not find their names in the voters register and the abscondment of the INEC official in the Idemili North of Anambra State considered to be the stronghold of the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC). The picture above was manifested in the conduct of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria which was not different from the former elections since 1999. The election was characterized by vote buying, underage voting, stuffing of ballot boxes, rigging, non availability of electoral materials, ethnic politics, corruption, Godfatherism etc. This paper however examined the conduct of elections and Conundrum of sustainability of Democracy in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarifications

Elections and democracy

Election all over the world is a very important aspect of the sustainability of the democratic process because it concerns the choice and consent of the people. It is the formal process of selection of a public office holders. According to Gwinn and Norton (1992) it is a means by which a society may organize itself and make specified formal decision adding that where voting is free, it helps in making certain decisions regarding the power relations in a society. The essence of a democratic election is freedom of choice. According to Mandel (2007) election is a decision making process where people choose people to hold official offices. This is the usual mechanism by which modern democracy fills offices in the Legislature, Executive in both the state, local and national levels. To Eya (2003) election is seen as the selection of a person or persons for office through ballot and making choice through alternatives. However, it is only democratic election that can lead to the sustenance of democracy.

Thus, it is true that election do not necessarily guarantee worthwhile democratic rule. It is an incontrovertible fact that election is at the heart of the modern conception and discourse of democracy following the inability of the modern society to accommodate the classical democratic governance involving every citizen in decision making (Olaitan 2005). Nevertheless, it is through election that the formal allocation of power occurs in all democracies which give meaning to power relationship within the political community. It is the foundation of the social contract between the people and their governors. It is through election that the will of the people which forms the basis of democratic government is expressed. Indeed, since power is vested in the electorates, who supply and withdraw mandate from those who direct state affairs, elected officials are compelled to be accountable to their constituencies. Apart from serving as a means of enhancing government responses, election also serve as a medium of legitimacy that is the right of rulers to govern.

Nonetheless, Democracy according to Abraham Lincoln is seen as government of the people, by the people and for the people. To Appadorai (1974) it is the system of government by which the people exercise the government power directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. This therefore mean that a state could be seen as a democratic state if it provides institutional mechanisms for the expression and supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy. To Bayles (1958) Democracy is the equality of the opportunity to participate in making group decisions and equality of obligations to participate in carrying them out once they are made until they are revised. In the same vein, Bryce, (1921) opined that democracy is that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is largely vested in the members of the community as a whole. The implication of the above postulations are that those who hold public offices should do so for the benefit of all and not for the privileged few. Democracy therefore is the government by the people especially rule by the majority. A government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections. Democracy is

therefore freedom from hunger, the right to education and health. However, democracy is worthless without the supremacy of the law, independence of the judiciary and also the legislatures. The supremacy of the law is the foundation of any democratic government. Therefore a democratic state is that which ensures the equality of rights of all persons, political privilege, social and legal equality, and those who govern, govern only by the consent of the people. Those who hold office do so for the interest of the general public and not for their personal gains. To Schumpeter (1962) Democracy is only meaningful when people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men and women who are to rule them.

This therefore means that election can be seen as the hallmark of democracy which provide the people the opportunity of choice as to who should govern them. Indeed, there is a significant relationship between sound electoral process and true democracy. This was why Duru (2002) opined that without commitment to the rule of the game by the political class, the whole idea of democracy is seen as a fiction. It is worthy of mention here that political institutions in Nigeria are presently being occupied by many politicians with stolen mandate. This has adversely affected the image and respect for such national institutions. Since 1999 the conduct of elections which is one of the cardinal principles for the sustainability of democracy has been characterized by various forms of electoral malpractices which therefore denies the people the opportunity of choosing who should govern them. There is no doubt that electoral malpractices which either stems as a result of poverty or as a result of selfish interest on the part of the politicians and the recycling of old people in governance will hamper the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria because of the ultra privatization of transition project by money bags (Ebegbulam 2011). With this therefore, the legitimacy of the people and political institutions that are meant to direct the cause of democracy in Nigeria still remains questionable forever as lip-service is paid to the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. Today there is total violations of the fundamental rights of the people which should be the major concern of every responsible government.

The government of the day has failed woefully to protect the right to life of average Nigerians as people are being slaughtered in cold blood on daily basis. There is utmost suppression of press freedom, lack of basic amenities which will enhance the living condition of the people, high poverty level, corruption, unemployment, lack of political will on the part of the leaders, total neglect of the rule of law. Faced with all these challenges, an average Nigerian voter often wonders why he/she should participate in the electoral process when elections hardly fulfill the people's basic expectations of freedom of choice as election results are always manipulated. The conduct of elections in Nigeria have been held under undemocratic circumstances resulting in election outcome that have led to the non sustainability of democracy. The conduct of elections in Nigeria is seen by many as the process of gathering votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich by promising to protect each from the other (Ebegbulam 2011). According Ntalaja (2000) Democracy is a universal principle of governance that upholds high moral imperatives, accord the people right to participate in the decision making that adheres to the collective will and interest.

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by the Marxian political economy approach. The theory arose in reaction to the Western liberal theory of state which contends that the state is impartial, and independent force as well as a neutral umpire those carters for the main interest of every member of the society (Okoli 2009). Thus one can situate the paradigm within the primacy of physical needs of man such as food, cloth, shelter, and other material needs that exist in the society. However, the importance attached to material condition has created two dialectical socio-economic classes via the bourgeoisie, the haves and the have not. Based on these two classes in the society, it is important to point out that the electoral fraud in Nigeria is as result of the country's operations and practice of the tenets of capitalism that breeds class distinction. The competition for material wealth in Nigeria today has been the order of the day and the quickest means of achieving this is through politics. This is possible because all forms of capitalist operations revolve around politics. The politics of the ruling class has resulted to ties of relationship at all levels of government in Nigeria today.

Indeed, the attitude of protecting this link had led to various forms of electoral fraud just to attain powers to consolidate their selfish plans and intentions, including the projection of their patron's interest. The quest for material wealth has led to harsh competition in the nations politics and as such fraud has become the order of the day. The political economy approach as used in the above context has helped to showcase the sources of electoral malpractices in Nigeria and how it is being perpetrated and for whom.

Conundrum to sustainability of democracy in Nigeria

Since the cornerstone of competitive election which gives the people the opportunity to freely choose who will govern them in any democratic dispensation is free and fair elections, it therefore means that the credibility and legitimacy accorded an election victory is measured by the extent to which the process is free and fair (Garuba 2007, Bogaard 2007). The implication of the above opinions is that free and fair elections is the only mechanism for legitimizing any government. The above also means that democratic rule is inconceivable without elections, because, it is only election that can give the people opportunity of participating in governance. According to Akinsanya (2006), a sustainable democracy could be measured by the extent to which a country has regular free and fair elections, that is genuine contestation over selection. He argued that when this occurs in any society, it encourages stability, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and competitiveness. Elections are not only for installing democratic government, but a necessary condition for wider sustainability of democracy. To Schumpeter (1962) election is the only defining institution of democracy. However, the bid to conduct free and fair election in Nigeria, which will ensure the sustainability of democracy, is being constrained by the following factors:

Insecurity

This is one of the major problems of the country's nascent democracy. Today in Nigeria the rate of insecurity is very high. By way of illustration, the activities of the Boko Haram that has murdered thousands of innocent citizens of this country thereby rendering people homeless, the activities of the Fulani herdsmen in Taraba, Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Kogi, Nasarawa, Enugu, Delta, Edo. People are being slaughtered every day. The menace of kidnapping for ransom, and armed robbery which have claimed several lives, the activities of politicians which has led to the death of many Nigerians, the most recent one being the murder of some Nigerians in the just concluded All Progressive Congress (APC) congresses and many other politically motivated killings since the return to democratic rule in 1999. All these poses a great challenge to the sustainability of Democracy in Nigeria as democratic elections for choosing public office holders should be peaceful.

Poor Justice System

The Nigerian judiciary is said to be confused and in disarray. Today in Nigeria, it is only the rich that can afford it. While the rich are above the law, the poor are below it. In other words, the law is made for the poor. Just to show the poor state of justice delivery in Nigeria most of court verdicts are conflicting. It is always very easy for the rich to get frivolous injunctions to truncate or impede the wheel of justice.

Cross Carpeting

Nigerian politicians are greedy and as a result they always want to remain in power at all cost and the worse of it is total lack of ideological orientations. Politicians in Nigeria see nothing wrong in defecting from one political party to another that offer them the opportunity to stand for election. Today people are defecting from different political parties to the ruling political party at the centre. An example was the mass defection of members of the people's Democratic Party to the All Progressive Congress (APC) before and after the 2015 general election in Nigeria. All those who lost party primaries in Nigeria usually defects to another political party to contest. Just recently those who lost in the party primaries for the just concluded primary in Ekiti have cross carpeted to APC. An example is the PDP publicity Secretary who defected to APC. Democracy can only be sustained in Nigeria if there is vibrant and credible opposition.

But if members of an opposition defect to ruling party, the country will be moving towards one party state which is worse than military regime. It will be stated here that without opposition, there can never be good governance because the ruling party can misbehave without fear of being unseated in the next election. Today in Nigeria, there is no press freedom or freedom of expression as one of the fundamental right of every Nigerian Citizen. The government in power is doing everything possible to silence the voice of the opposition as people are no longer safe to express their opinion. Today, security agencies instead of protecting the rights of the individual are being used to intimidate and victimize the masses. For democracy to flourish there must be the existence of rule of law. The government in power must begin to see the judiciary as the last hope of common man and as well learn to obey court orders. To Ebegbulam (2005), democracy as it is practiced in Nigeria has no plan for the people. To him the people's right are not protected neither are their wishes carried out by the government. He lamented that the purpose of the government is for the good and welfare of the rulers instead of the masses. This is because; our leaders have succeeded in mismanaging the resources of the country. It is only in Nigeria that the leaders empower the people of his constituency by providing them with wheel barrows.

Corruption

Corruption is now a norm in Nigeria to the extent that it looks very strange to condemn it. Many Nigerians believed that Nigeria cannot survive without corruption. Some politicians are in the office for the singular reason of stealing. Also, the poor economic condition of majority of Nigerians makes corruption to thrive and this in turn makes the electorates susceptible to money bag politicians. The unstable economic situation in Nigeria is a prime motivator for corrupt individuals to subvert the electoral process by making election a do or die affair. To ensure that they get into public office to have access to public funds thereby influencing those who are economically improvised to trade their votes for as little as cups of rice or N1,000 only. Poverty has therefore become a strong factor against choosing credible leaders in free and fair elections. Today in Nigeria, there are many corruption cases against public office holders with some having being decided in the court while others are still pending. The most recent being the conviction of the former governor of Taraba State. Huge sums of money are either abandoned in toilet or are being discovered through the Federal Government whistle blower policy. All these looted funds would have been used to provide basic infrastructure for the masses. According Mohammed (2013) the consequences of political corruption in Nigeria are cyclical crisis of legitimacy, fragile party structure, institutional delay, chronic economic problem and unemployment, and general democratic volatility.

Politics of Godfatherism

The influence of Godfatherism in the Nigerian politics has demeaned the conduct of free and fair election. According to Ogundiaya (2010) Godfatherism is both a symptom and cause of violence and corruption common in the Nigeria electoral space. This means a situation where public officials who owe their positions to the efforts of their political Godfather incur a debt that they are expected to repay throughout their tenure and this hinders them from being responsible to the people they represent. Mohammad (2013). The politics of Godfatherism prevents the people from choosing qualified candidates that will represent their interest. It creates a situation of exclusion and denial of legitimate benefits which the people are meant to get. The politics of Godfatherism enhances total neglect of accountability which is one of the cardinal principles of democracy (Gambo 2006).

Power of Incumbency Factor

According to Jaja and Alumona (2011) it connotes the appointment of corrupt and compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of electoral tribunals to protect stolen mandates, use of security agencies to intimidate the opposition, denial of access to Government owned media, denial of the use of government facilities for campaigns by opposition in order to regain or elongate their tenure against popular will of the people. This manifest itself in Nigeria as political office holders uses all government apparatus to hold on to power by intimidating political opponents. The worst case is the conduct of local government election where the ruling political party in the state through the state independent electoral commission rigs election for the ruling political party. Asiwaju (2009) while commenting on the nature of electoral contest in Nigeria where election is seen as a do or die affair described the conduct since 1999 as political banditry. To him, the conduct of election under Professor Maurice Iwu is a situation where the commission supervises the conception, monitoring and execution of mandate robbery all in a bid to ensure that those who occupy these offices are returned as winners while the losers can go to court and this continued with reckless abandon.

Poverty

This is one of the major factors which hinder the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. This is because; poverty as caused by high unemployed situation in Nigeria is a barrier to sustainability of democracy. According to Ake (1996) a society of beggars, parasites, bandits, cannot develop. To him such society cannot know peace or stability and cannot be democratic. What this means is that any human being that lacks the basic means of survival cannot participate effectively in any democratic process. The poor is therefore not a fully fledged social individual as he/she lacks the basic freedom to engage in the life he/she enjoys. Poverty is a major hindrance to sustainable democracy since economic chaos can topple democratic institutions. Today about 80% of Nigerians are poor and this explains why various forms of inducements and gratification which provide temporary relief from the surge of poverty are given central attention in elections.

Disjointed Information

In any democratic dispensation, the media is seen as mechanism for accountability and good governance. When there is press freedom, it will help to prevent abuse of power. This is so because press freedom and freedom of expression is one of the principles of democracy, and so, it serves as a watch dog. On the contrary, despite the provisions of the constitution that recognizes this, there is today in Nigeria total suppression of the press freedom, provision of disjointed information and half hazard information which limit the capacity of individuals to develop a reservoir of political knowledge to assist them in controlling authoritarian rule and effective participation in politics. In the words of Awuudu (2012) the Nigerian media is classified into the elite structure “the big man syndrome or upper structure and this hinders the deepening of democracy”.

Conclusion

From this study, it has been observed that democratic rule is inconceivable without free and fair election. This is because electoral process determines to a large extent the level of stability in the polity. If the electoral process of any nation is not transparent, the citizens are easily agitated. The sustainability of the nations nascent democracy can only be achieved only when Nigerians elect their leaders in a free and transparent election devoid of rigging, vote buying, violent free, corrupt free, free from Godfatherism influence, adequate information etc. this is because the essence of democracy for the people to participate actively in governing themselves.

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