EXCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the subject of exclusive democracy and national insecurity in Nigeria, interrogating the nature of the relationship between these variables. The methodology of the work is logical argumentation. The study is framed on the elite theory, further positing that the Nigerian brand of democracy is still filled with curious tendencies, bordering on immense exclusivities in democracy practices. To confront the attendant generic insecurity, the study calls for a critical role by the civil society. Linkages were established in the paper between the incidences of insecurity and joblessness in the country. The work concludes that democracy may be in decline on a global scale but the Nigerian democracy must not be part of this decline, for it (democracy) has hardly even ascended to any nationally acceptable profitable level in the country. We further concluded in the paper that national security may only be obtained in the country by the neutralization of the energy-dissipating forces inherent in the defining features of exclusive democracy in Nigeria. And this requires the emergence of a nationally formidable leadership team in the country. Confronting the mammoth insecurities and catalyzing the enabling environment for the requisite genre of leadership indeed requires the closing of ranks by civil society organizations.

KEYWORDS: Exclusive democracy, national security, national insecurity, civil society organizations

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is globally in decline (Willige, 2017). Therefore, even in the United States of America (USA), the former internationally renowned flag bearer of democracy, the recent cantankerous presidential elections, which produced Mr. Donald Trump as 45th president, supports the thesis of comparative regression in the democracy proposition. In emerging democracies however, the seeming delirium of democracy may still be subsisting. But it remains a more plausible engagement, to continue at attempts to rescue this increasingly disoriented ideology from the onslaught of its conceptual and empirical detractors. Incidentally, it has remained immensely contentious, if the trajectories of the Nigerian democracy have ever engendered (on the national scale) the much expected dividends of the process for this country - and invariably her citizens (Atelhe, 2014; Awojobi, 2014; Jamo, 2013; Nkwede, 2013; Lamidi & Bello, 2012; Omodia & Egwemi, 2011).

On the other hand, national insecurity has persisted in the Nigerian state, despite the country’s lengthy embrace of the democratic system of government. This indeed presents a scenario of double jeopardy for the country and her nationals (as democracy deteriorates). Then why has democracy not delivered in Nigeria in particular? And what has made generic insecurity a persistent phenomenon in the country? And how may the fading democracy-trends in the nation become profoundly arrested? What is the relationship between exclusive democracy and national insecurity in
Nigeria? These are indeed the central research questions of this study. The general objective of the research therefore is to examine the nature of the relationship between exclusive democracy and national insecurity in Nigeria. The work is accordingly more specifically built on the following research question: What is the relationship between exclusive democracy and national insecurity in Nigeria? The methodology of the investigation is logical argumentation. The theoretical framework of the paper is the elite theory.

2. CONCEPTUAL ELUCIDATION

2.1 Exclusive Democracy

An exclusive democracy is describable as a defective type of democracy whereby, one or more segments of all adult citizens are excluded from the civil right of universal suffrage (Merkel, 2004, p.49). However, it is strongly suggested in this study that all forms of profound exclusion in the practice of democracy in a nation-state have already given to such tendencies the toga of exclusive democracy. This concept therefore may also refer to a self-evident pattern of disregard for others, in the designs, practices and profits of democracy, by a self-serving group of citizens. The exclusive group is invariably made up of elites. But democracy is essentially a system of government in which the people control decision making (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011). It is not a system of government by some elite-invaders. Profoundly inherent in the concept of democracy therefore is an assumption of inclusion. Thus, democracy is describable as empty when it lacks this specific character of comprehensiveness. But how may this all-inclusiveness become realized in democratic designs and practices, particularly in the context of nation states, without turning the democracy process, into an unwieldy experimentation (at best, and in the worst-case scenario, a recipe for complete disorder)? Representation ordinarily appears like the panacea (Blais, Morin-Chassé & Singh, 2017; Kuyper, 2016).

Omodia & Egwemi (2011) thus enthuse that democracy is about participation and representation. Hence the concept of representative democracy enters the lexicon of democracy discourses (and practices). Curiously however, representation is also in some instances (an increasingly large number of instances for that matter) bedeviled by grave shortcomings. The height of this representative defect therefore is locatable in the incidence of self-centered representation, particularly in its elitist regards. This negates everything that democracy claims to be. It contradictorily introduces exclusivities to the tenets of democracy. And this portends danger for every polity and the associated political processes in such communities.

Exclusive democracy indeed demobilizes the engines of democracy and calls to question the essence of statehood and the meaning of nationhood. It refuses to criminalize dishonesty and rather epitomizes political and economic sleaze. What else is sleaze (corruption) other than when a predatory group or different exclusivities continue(s) to confiscate and dismember the national resources of a state? It is not although, as if these resources are ploughed (even in exclusivity) into any further productive purposes. The otherwise national possessions are rather deployed into some opulent consumption. Hence a particularly detrimental dimension of exclusive democracy (to society) is that the excluded citizens would standby and helplessly watch as some band of hedonists that propagate segregated eudemonism for themselves, their families and their other acolytes, devours a nation’s wealth and leads every other person into retrogression in the process. A certain well-dressed name for this elite-led national decline in contemporary Nigeria is economic recession, but more appropriately denoted as massive economic compression by Chukwuma Soludo, former Governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank (CBN) and a professor of economics (Udo, 2017).

2.2 National Insecurity

When national (even) international insecurity/security is mentioned, the first thoughts that usually come to mind relate to the issues of violence and physical destruction (Awojobi, 2014; Jamo, 2013; Nkwede, 2013; Igwe & Okoronkwo, 2013, Okeshola, 2011). Actually embedded in the notion of insecurity are these tendencies and more so. Security thus connotes the assurances of safety and protection. Insecurity on the other hand alludes to the absence of these values and provisions. A nation is not a complete abstraction. It is given life by the human beings that inhabit its total space. When the safety and protection of these inhabitants are endangered on a mammoth scale, it translates to national insecurity. More importantly, this danger may be posed by the threats of violence and destruction or the actual occurrence of these phenomena. In addition, the imminence of hunger and starvation, the incidence of ill health and ill feelings on massive scales, the prevalence of curable diseases that could not be cured, the presence of burgeoning ignorance and non-diminishing high levels of illiteracy in a nation state, are all symptoms of national insecurity.

Hence, when the safety and protection of citizens are not guaranteed in a nation, there is national insecurity. When citizens are subjected to situations of innumerable deprivations, there is also national insecurity. Guns may or may not be booming but there is national insecurity. In essence, a net position of despair in any nation-state indicates insecurity. And in any case, violence and physical destruction can also be the functions of relative deprivations that give rise to the
lacks and poverties identified above. Hence, a nation is insecure when there is hunger, starvation, disease, ignorance, illiteracy and ill-feelings on colossal scales in such a state. The Nigerian state is not far from the massiveness of the above mentioned deficiencies and egregious malfunctions (Ayegba, 2015; Raimi, Akhuemonkhan & Ogunjirin, 2015). More fundamentally, a restricted democratic space breeds insecurity. The excluded elites would also instigate insecurity. Indeed, when under a democracy, critical segments of a country still feel neglected and marginalized (relative deprivation) it breeds insecurity (Aleyomi & Bakar, 2018; Ojebode, Onyishi & Aremu, 2017; Osayi, 2015).

3. SOME DEFINING FEATURES OF EXCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

3.1. The phenomenon called cabal

A cabal is denoted in this study as an exclusive and self-serving group of people on the corridors of power. In its more positive nuances and tolerations, it could be called a think-tank or kitchen cabinet (even when the two latter concepts may possess some more constructive dimensions). In its recent Nigerian tendencies, the cabal as political phenomenon became prominent during the presidency/health crisis of Umaru Yar’Adua as president of Nigeria (2007-2010). President Yar’Adua, who actually had a frail medical history, was flown to the King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 23 November 2009, for the treatment of acute pericarditis (Omotola, 2011, p.232). He was later smuggled back into the country in the midnight of 23 February 2010 by the cabal and subsequently died on May 5, 2010. Omotola (2011) contends that the regime of Yar’Adua was cabalised.

For instance, during the health crises of President Yar’Adua, David Edevbie, his Principal Secretary, on 26 December 2009, travelled to Saudi Arabia where the Nigerian leader was believed to be hospitalized. His mission was to sign into law, the N353.60 billion (about $235.733 million) 2009 supplementary budget of the country. Then David admitted not seeing the president, but returned with the budget duly signed. And suspicion was rife in some quarters that the cabal forged the signature of the president, in order to raise enough funds for the invisible presidency and enrich the personal pursuits of core members of this cabal (Omotola, 2011, p. 236).

Cabals do not allow state institutions to crystallize (Albert, 2012, p.1). In the case of President Muhammadu Buhari (as current Nigerian leader) his wife, Mrs. Aisha Buhari, had to raise an alarm that the government was hijacked by a pitiless cabal. She lamented that most of the officials of the government were usurpers who did nothing to help the regime come into power (AbdulSalam, 2016). It has also been posited that a cabal hijacked and fully destroyed the government of ex-President Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari’s predecessor (Ameh, 2016). But this cabalism in the modern Nigerian brand of democracy must have a root cause. Essentially therefore, what translates into the reign of the cabals and leads to the exclusivity of democracy in the country is the incidence of sickening leadership, whereby the ostensible leader’s capacity to cope with the demands of his office is apparently questionable.

Hence, between 1999 and 2017, Nigerians have been governed by four presidents: Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Yar’Adua, and Goodluck Jonathan; currently by Muhammadu Buhari. The regimes of the last three of these leaders have been associated with the presence of these merciless cabals. But under the Obasanjo administration, nobody talked about cabals. And objective observers may not also accuse President Obasanjo of having lacked the capacity to cope with the challenges of his exalted position as president. Under the scenario of this brand of democracy in the country therefore (exclusive democracy of cabalism), the incumbent president merely watches as some band of ravenous elites (which may include his family members and other disciples) turn the headrests the impoverished masses have been expecting from the national democratic processes, into some cabalised bolsters for the political conspirators’ fetid rear ends.

3.2. The Nigeria governors’ forum

The Nigerian brand of democracy is indeed filled with immense curious tendencies. A particular type of this oddity has to do with the ease of forming some exclusive and unnecessary informal organizations by the elected office holders (in addition to or despite the availability of the constitutionally provided structures of governance in the same regards). One of such bodies is the Nigeria Governors’ Forum (NGF) which is actually a congress of doubtful value to the generic Nigerian politico-economic system. It is a council of Chief Executives of Nigerian states who have mainly remained pathologically unable to pay the salaries of civil servants in their states. The workers thus continue to lament that they have been pauperized, as they live under gloom, frustration, bitterness, anger and despair (Ahiuma-Young, 2016). The initial bail-out funds availed to these states by the Nigerian central government (under President Muhammadu Buhari) was substantially deployed into dubious purposes by these state administrators (Mutum & Abah, 2016; Akinkuotu and Makinde, 2016).
And when the Buhari administration acquiesced to the extension of further bail-out cooperation to the governors (for the principal purposes of continuing to reduce the workers’ salary areas) the dubious elite-political-players ensured that substantial sums of these funds were diverted to their own exclusive uses and purposes (Premium Times, 2016; Sahara Reporters, 2017). According to Daniel (2016), most of the states that received the bailout funds from the federal government of Nigeria (for the settlement of salary arrears of the workers) diverted the funds to some other purposes, thereby negating the aim of the central government’s effort to provide relief for the public sector employees.

Furthermore, besides maintaining this body (Governors’ Forum) at the national level, there are also, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) Governors’ Forum and the All Progressives Congress (APC) Governors’ Forum. These are the two major political parties with more than one state governor from their party (Nobody knows how the governors of the other two parties, the Labour Party (LP) and the APGA - All Progressives Grand Alliance - which have also managed to have an elected governor (each) would have been feeling as the isolated officers could not partake in the exclusive businesses of any of the governors’ forums). There are also the Northern Nigeria Governors’ Forum and governors’ forum for each of the six geo-political divisions in the country – South East, South West, South-South, North East, then North West and North Central Governors Forums. And each of these other congregations is autonomous from the one at the center.

It is claimed that the formation of the NGF (the flagship forum at the center) was not only expedient but imperative for the states the governors represent, to assert themselves, and to collectively influence the nature and course of policies at the national level of governance in the Nigerian federation. Furthermore, that given the state of the polity in the days following the end of many years of military rule in the country, there was a clear need for the states to re-assert themselves and exercise the level of independence that was required in a true federation. It then became necessary for these states to regain their past glory by constituting a credible unit within the wider context of the federation, thereby removing the manifest distortions which militate against the realisation of true federalism in the Nigerian nation. And so, the governors’ forum was formed (NGF, 2017). The issue however is that when the governors’ forum that is not recognised in the Nigerian constitution boldly claims that the foregoing were its responsibilities, what are the governors reserving for the representatives of the various states in the National Assembly of Nigeria (The Senate and House of Representatives) as their own roles in these matters? Above all, these governors are already (as enshrined in Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution) members of the Council of State and the National Economic Council. To posit that the leading forum at the center and its other partisan political and regional trajectories are superior structures to the constitutional provision, for effective executive participation by the governors in Nigerian affairs, would only amount to expensive political sophistry by these governors.

Then among the core values (sic) of the Nigeria Governors’ Forum is that every activity undertaken by the body will be done in a manner that is non-partisan and focused on establishing understanding through equal representation of the collective interests of all stakeholders (NGF, 2017). The language of this ostensible core value is underscored in this study. In the first place, what are these collective interests of the stakeholders? Besides, do they have the stakes in what? As a matter of facts and records, this body is strongly believed to have largely operated as an exclusive club of elected officials whose major inclinations are tailored towards usually holding the Nigerian central government by the jugular, to squeeze out funds for the members stake-holding (Sahara Reporters, 2017).

And once it is time for the Governors’ Forum, all the members would become non-partisan; thereafter (in their various political camps and parties) the typical hostilities that characterize political shenanigans among the greedy elite could continue. The Nigeria Governors’ Forum is indeed a medium of exclusive democracy in Nigeria. And the shortchanging of the citizens entailed by their exclusivities invariably adds to the anxieties, emotions, bitterness and agitations that translate to national insecurity in the country.

3.3. The exclusivity of party politics

Party politics has since become a prominent profession in Nigeria. The thorny issue however is that this pseudo profession is also peopled by sundry political bullies. It is increasingly becoming an exclusive club of godfathers, egotistic political diehards and other types of social renegades. Their generic slogan has consequently become: share the money. The overarching goal of this brand of politicians is to partake in the apparent bazaar that has since become party politics in the country. The nation may be undergoing economic recession. The managers of the economy may announce sundry measures of austerity for the excluded masses, but once it is election period, funds would surface from the blues for the bizarre financial displays that have become electioneering campaigns in the country.

Consequently, usually in the first year of four-year tenure for the elected official in Nigeria, preparations would commence for the fellow’s reelection. The exclusivity of the political club is thus guaranteed, as rooms are not
provided for non-members to nurse serious political ambitions. Then during the campaigns-proper, more political gangsters would be recruited as well-armed thugs, so that after the elections, small arms would litter the entire country, for violence and destruction to continue in the land (Adebayo, 2016; Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016; Sule & Tal, 2018).

3.4. The gender dimension

Despite the comparative progress made in gender inclusion, under the Jonathan administration in the country (2010-2015) the male gender is still in charge in Nigeria. The Nigerian democracy is consequently still male-dominated. More specifically, the so-called dividends of democracy are still controlled by the male gender (Akpan, 2018; Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). During the presidency of Barrack Obama in the United States for instance, the democracy limelight was almost equally shared between President Obama and his wife, Michelle. Currently also, President Donald Trump continuously presents his wife, Mrs. Melania Trump, as a representative of the female face of democracy. In contradistinction, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria once travelled from this country to Germany, to gleefully declare in a joint press meeting with Mrs. Mackerel (the German Chancellor) that his wife Aisha, belonged to “his kitchen and his other room”. Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari made his controversial comments, standing alongside one of the most powerful women in the world, Chancellor Angela Merkel, who seemed to glare at him (BBC News, 2016).

These President Buhari’s remarks are indeed illustrative of what the contemporary Nigerian male, in an ostensible democratic dispensation, thinks about his female counterpart. The verbalization was done by a sitting Nigerian President and it remains a mainstream male thinking in the Nigerian weltanschauung. It is this same insensitive male-thinking that makes the men ignore women and children in most of their political scheming. When these men embark on “share the money”, the hauls are for further Epicureanism, while unrelenting poverty pummels a larger section of the society (particularly women). When these same women attempt to square it out with the men on the political turf, the Nigerian worldview accuses them of unruliness and rebellion. Hence they tend to resign to their fate.

The female gender in the country is thus still predominantly associated with poverty and economic insecurity. It is highlight-able at this point that President Buhari was actually reacting to his wife’s earlier alert of the hijacking of the government under his leadership, by a ruthless cabal (AbdulSalam, 2016). Furthermore, the Nigerian cabals have in historical and extant contexts seemed to be predominated by the male gender.

3.5. Tribal exclusivity

Tribalism has remained a national phenomenon in Nigeria, albeit in the negative regard (Akindola & Ehinomen, 2017; Oyedeji, 2017). It is acknowledged in this study that tribalism could in its positive connotation indicate group allegiance and solidarity. Thus tribalism may be deployed into the promotion of the customs, beliefs and social realities of a (social) group (tribe) but when negatively propagated, particularly in the realm of national political activities in plural societies, it begins to translate into political exclusion or exclusive democracy. Moreover, the negative dimension of tribalism in Nigeria is largely elite-instigated. It would be rare for instance, to locate a market in Nigeria where peoples from all the Nigerian tribes are not commonly occupying their different stalls in amity as traders. The business of trading takes place in all these places in mutual respect to each tribe by others. But the elite, usually in sharing the booties of their exclusive control of national resources, would fly the kite of tribalism. It is actually this elite thievery (more than anything else) that debases the communal dignity of Nigerians and accordingly precipitates innumerable insecurities.

Hence, at the presidential level, once a Nigerian president is elected into office, he begins to look like the president of his tribe, in the eyes of his tribesmen and women. At the State House, all the hangers-on, praise-singers, incompetent personnel and even devious visitors would begin to adorn the tribal dress of the president - with the germane cap to match. The body movement of these phony characters would become interpretable as: this is our chance. Governance and democracy have thus become theirs in exclusivity. The other tribe then waits for its turn to also play the politics of exclusivism. In the particular case of the Buhari administration, the accusation has therefore remained loudest that the other peoples of Nigeria have been excluded from the processes of democracy, to the advantage of the Hausa-Fulani tribe to which the incumbent president belongs (Alechenu, 2016; Eme and Onuigbo, 2015).

4. CONFRONTING THE INSECURITY

Confronting the mammoth insecurity in Nigeria indeed requires the closing of ranks by civil society organizations. Essentially, the thriving of exclusive democracy requires the collaboration of the political and business elites (who are outside the categorization of civil society). The third force that could confront a societal challenge emanating from this elite amalgam (the political and business elite fusion) is the civil society. Faith-based groups must thus speak out in
condemnation of the tendencies that tolerate cabalism in Nigerian affairs. University-based unions are also expected to become more active in incorporating the course of the disadvantaged members of the Nigerian society into their own activisms. Women Organizations in the country indeed appear to have gone to sleep over the matter of impactful democracy in Nigeria. They even seem to have become lethargic over the issue of questioning why the poverty-ridden conditions in the country have refused to recede. And until these women groups rise in unison to interrogate these issues, the incidences of exclusive democracy and national insecurity in Nigeria would continue in the burgeoning regards. The Nigerian civil society for instance is expected in this study to participate in the exposition of the humongous double-dealing called Nigeria Governor’ Forum (NGF).

Furthermore, to confront the issue of exclusive democracy and the attendant national insecurity in the country, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) needs to register more political parties in Nigeria. Partisan politics itself must become democratized in the country. The registration and deregistration of political parties need to truly become continuous processes in the country. The parties when registered, may only field candidates for local government elections but they are political parties. Multiplicity of political parties in truly humongous numbers would widen to a great extent, the space for political participation, reduce the emotion of marginalization and the influence of national cabals even in the affairs of local administration. There would be sufficient number of political parties for interests’ articulation, interests’ aggregation and expression. Political parties are not solely formed for winning elections on yearly basis and once the party fails to win election in an election year, it ceases to be a political party? Some of the engraved indignations that subsequently grow into violent agitations in the country could be better managed if the belligerents were being studied and engaged as members of an identifiable political party.

The tale was once told about an illiterate Nigerian woman who went to the church to give testimony about how her family was now doing well, since her son became a kidnapper. She asked the congregation to join her in giving glory to God. And so kidnapping of Nigerian citizens and foreign nationals has undeniably become commonplace in the Nigerian nation state. And for the widespread tendency to be brought under control, democracy must lead to the reduction in the number of its contributory factors. One of these factors is unemployment. Democratically elected office holders in the country must begin to think about the establishment of farm-settlements in different parts of the country, for the engagement of the country’s armada of unemployed youths. Confronting the insecurity in the country therefore is squarely related to the dismantling of the situation of joblessness in the country.

5. Conclusion

Democracy may be in decline on a global scale (Plattner, 2015; Diamond, 2015; Diamond, 2016; Willige, 2017). Even the United States, the erstwhile international grandmaster of the democratic-governance paradigm now possesses a democracy that is easily perceived to be in danger (Mickey, Levitisky & Way, 2017; Kellner, 2016). But the Nigerian democracy must not be part of this decline and dander, for it has hardly even ascended to any nationally acceptable profitable level. The Nigerian experience with democracy has therefore largely tended towards inexcusable exclusivities. The failure of democracy to deliver in Nigeria is a function of this exclusivism. Defective and exclusive democracies have on the other hand precipitated national insecurities in the country. It is thus pointedly concluded in this study that the phenomenon of exclusive democracy breeds national insecurity in Nigeria.

Furthermore, we surmise that the exclusivity of democracy in the country falls within the overall undesirable patterns of elite shenanigans in the Nigerian nation state. National security may therefore only be obtained by neutralizing the energy dissipating forces inherent in the defining features of exclusive democracy in Nigeria. And this requires the emergence of phenomenal leadership, the type the Nigerian system has never ever truly generated. The overarching ambition of the country’s leaders in this regard would be the provision of national security in all its ramifications. Confronting the mammoth insecurities in the country and catalyzing the enabling environment for the requisite genre of leadership indeed requires the closing of ranks by civil society organizations.

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