The Challenges of Democratic Development in Nigeria, 1999 -2018

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of democratic development in Nigeria since 1999. Modernization theory was reviewed as a theoretical framework. Secondary sources of data were employed in carrying out the study as qualitative descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis and interpretation of findings. Democratic governments are expected to be concerned with and committed to policy formulation and implementation to raise the standard of living of the people through fair distribution of the state’s wealth for national development. However, this paper finds that there are major challenges against democratic development in Nigeria which include electoral irregularities and malpractices, inter and intra ethnic rivalries, religious crises and insecurity, poverty, inadequate and weak democratic institutions, political decamping and institutionalized corruption. These challenges have, no doubt, affected national development in Nigeria. The study recommends good governance for national development in the country, efficient policy measures to fight corruption, transparent electoral system to avoid rigging, internal democracy in party politics, review of electoral processes to improve voter turnout, among others.

Key Words: Challenges; Democracy; Democratic Development; Good-governance; Modernization; and Nigeria.

Introduction

Research has shown that democratic governance has the potentials to enhance development in a society. However, development has also been achieved under non-democratic contexts. All societies of the world strive to achieve development which is interpreted to mean improvement in the living standard of the people in the society (Shaapera & Ayatse, 2018). This presupposes that development must be accompanied by positive changes in such indicators as education, health, portable water supply, roads network and so on. Development means the self-sufficiency of a collective social group to deal with the environment jointly. According to Rodney (1972), man has shown through history that he has dominated his environment following the nature of activities he engages in to conquer nature. So, economic progress has been inherent in all societies. Scholars from the modernization school of thought like W. W. Rostow view development as synonymous with societal transformation from traditional to modern society and lack of which means absence of development (Rostow, 1971). Thus, often describe less developed countries as lacking development, while regarding more advanced developed
countries as developed ones (Areo, 2017). On the contrary, Scholars from the radical school like Walter Rodney maintain that development is universal because the conditions leading to economic expansion are universal (Rodney, 1972). Thus, Rodney disagrees with the conception that underdevelopment is the absence of development, noting that:

Underdevelopment makes sense only as a means of comparing levels of development. It is very much tied to the fact that human social development has been uneven and from a strictly economic viewpoint, some human groups have advanced further by producing more and becoming wealthier (Rodney, 1972:21).

To the radical scholars, it is not enough reason to conclude that uneven economic development is an indication of absence of development. Development is an inherent universal phenomenon that is not an exclusive preserve of any area of people and so it is erroneous to conceive development in a restrictive materialistic and economic sense. Development so conceived is economic growth which aims at modernization. However, a fundamental distinction prevails between growth and development: While growth is quantitative change, development is qualitative change. Thus, development is growth plus change. Change in turn is social and cultural as well as economic, the ultimate aim of which is improved quality of people’s life. Similarly, Todaro (1986) maintains that development must be conceived as a multidimensional process involving major change in social structures, popular attitude and national institutions as well as acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty.

Sustainable development encompasses economic, material, socio-cultural or spiritual improvements with the desire to equally improve the human condition: poverty, freedom, improved healthcare, housing, food, sanitation, education, etc, including the attitudes of members of the society and their aspirations. Essentially, development has inalienable qualities which indeed are value-laden. It consists mainly of quantitative and qualitative, transformative and progressive changes among other qualities. According to Todaro and Smith (2003:22-23), development has three major objectives which include:

1. To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.

2. To raise levels of living, including, in addition to higher income, the provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem.

3. To expand the range of economic and social choice available to individuals and nation by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but
also to the forces of ignorance and human misery.

The greatest challenge of almost every state is how to promote economic, social and political development. From the post-World War II and the post-Cold War eras, numerous states have embraced democracy believing it to be the best system of government that can help confront development challenges and make life better, more peaceful and prosperous for their respective citizens. Proponents of democratic rule suggest that democracy is highly correlated with higher prospects for overall societal development compared to other political systems like socialism, communism or military dictatorship (Sarup 2006; Morris 2008). In reality, while some democracies have been well nurtured, developed and sustained to deliver its anticipated benefits, as largely seen in Western Developed Societies, many other states, especially from the less developed parts of the world, remain democratically less developed, weak and unable to deliver satisfactory dividends of democracy as anticipated. Since 1999, Nigeria has fully returned to democratic rule, which it has sustained without interruption. Yet the level of democratic development in the country is apparently weak and characterized by pervasion, irregularities, electoral malpractices, rigging, lack of stable and credible political party system, electoral violence, election related litigations etc. Most studies on Nigeria’s democracy look at its role on national development. The problematique of this paper hinges on why has Nigeria’s democracy remained poorly developed? The paper will examine the realities of the Nigerian democracy and discuss some of the major challenges threatening its development.

Democracy and Democratic Development in Perspective

Democracy has so many explanations regarding its nature and essence. Thus, Sartori (1962) observes that:

In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides… the defenders of any kind regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they have to stop using the word if it were tied down to one meaning (Sartori, 1962:3).

According to Sartori (1962), the term democracy has not only a descriptive or denotative function, but also a normative and persuasive function. He adds that the two qualities coexist in democracy and thus cannot be substituted or taken in isolation. However, there are some basic requirements very crucial to the understanding of democracy: The consent of the people is sought through periodic elections; there is guarantee of freedom of expression, worship and association; accountability in governance, fairness and sensitivity to the wishes of the governed through the provision of their material well-being which are also intrinsic in democracy. The equality of qualified people to vote and be voted for as well as a recognition and acceptance of the elector’s candidate(s) of choice constitute the hallmark of democracy. Maduagwu (2003) aptly states that without election, there is no democracy. Election is the minimal procedural condition that has to be fulfilled in order that a regime could qualify as democratic. But more than just elections, under democratic process,
elections are to be necessarily characterized by freeness and fairness, transparency and conducted at clearly specified time frames. Thus, democracy is best regarded as a system that serves the basic needs of the citizens in diverse ways.

Ramaswamy (2005:170) insists therefore that democratic governments should be bothered about the values of the citizens in terms of promoting such values as well as guaranteeing equal rights for all. He stresses this view by saying that democracy is concerned with:

The raising of living standards, seeking a fair distribution of a nation’s wealth, devising a means to give equality of opportunity to all, or to protect the rights of individuals and associations, developing institutions which will curb the rulers and make the consent of the governed meaningful and effective, and allow maximum freedom for individual and social life, express universal cravings (Ramaswamy, 2005:170).

This implies that democratic governments are expected to be concerned with and committed to policy formulation and implementation to raise the standard of living of the people through fair distribution of the State’s wealth for enhanced national development. Incidentally, attention of scholars has over the centuries been drawn to what constitutes democratic minimal requirements. One of these scholars, Dahl (1982:11), calls these requirements the ‘seven procedural minimum conditions for democracy, which include:

i. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in the elected officials.

ii. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections.

iii. All adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.

iv. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government.

v. Citizens have right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters.

vi. Citizens have the right to seek alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.

vii. Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including political parties and interest groups.

These points do not, however, exhaust all the salient features of democracy as there are many more that are not listed here. With these ideas in mind as presented, democracy appears to give the impression that it is a flawless system and therefore, perfect. Democracy, especially in young democratic nations, is subject to a lot of manipulations and scheming by the political class to suit their ego. Democracy to Appadorai (1975) could be likened to two sides of the same coin: While it offers political rights and many more advantages, it also demands ability and character from the citizens. Appadorai (1975) stresses that irrational conduct on the part of the leaders and the led is a serious threat to democracy. This is to say that democracy is best nurtured by responsible conduct on the part of the citizens whether elected or private citizens. Consequently, when power is conferred
permanently, or where, on account of an atmosphere of fear and coercion, people do not feel free to discuss, vote and displace existing Government if they want to do so, democracy cannot be said to exist even though the other political rights enumerated continue to be enjoyed by the people.

It is imperative to note that democracy by its basic requirements is a system that is supposed to allow for such values and virtues as justice, equity, fairness, rights and general wellbeing of the citizenry. More importantly, democracy connotes the protection of the basic rights of the citizens, including the minority groups, fair distribution of the nation’s wealth, etc as its inherent virtues. Essentially, democracy is a system that is concerned with the promotion of general good in the society. In Nigeria, for instance, this is more so because having suffered all kinds of injustices in the hands of the military due to its prolonged misrule, the people looked up to democracy as a system to remedy the battered situation in the country. Thus, the mass of the ordinary people in Nigeria entertained very high expectations that democracy, through their elected representatives, would reshape the country and their longsuffering condition will be ameliorated or improved via effective formulation and implementation of public policies in the country devoid of unnecessary challenges.

According to Jega (2007), democracy entails a situation of broad based and active participation of people in the conduct of their public affairs in the society. This implies that in a democratic society, the people decide what is to be done in their society and therefore take their destiny firmly into their own hands. Thus, democracy provides for the actualization of individual and group aspiration and also involves freedom to make choice about what one does, where he lives and how he uses earnings, the operations of institutions, the rights of justice and fairness, the absence of social class barrier, equality of opportunity among the people and so on. This equally shows the potentiality of democratic governance to formulate and implement policies that would provide for the actualization of individual and group aspirations and thereby engender national development.

Theoretical Review: Modernization Theory of Development

There is a general need, the world over, to achieve development in modern societies. “It is the bid to arrive at the unresolved problem of development that several theories and models have been advanced” (Ayatse, 2015). Akuva (2009), for instance, uses the ‘modernization school of thought’ to support the developmental miracle in Malaysia as lessons for development efforts in Nigeria. In this paper, we opt for the modernization theory of development to assess the challenges of democratic development in the country. Some of the scholars of this approach include Martin Lipset, John Mennard Keynes, Ian Roxborough, Walter W. Rostow, Everetttre Hagen, McClelland, Talcott Parsons etc. Modernization theory arose after the Second World War and was used to explain the causes of development and underdevelopment which therefore presents options for Third World nations seeking economic development. The theory assumes that development necessarily involves a proactive political leadership that is focused and determined to succeed in the face of harsh odds. Thus, as Black (1966) argues, nations should be able to adopt their traditional cultural society to benefit from the opportunity made available by modern globalization. They should be sufficiently able to transform traditional agriculture to modern and commercialized methods of
production to increase agricultural production to be able to feed the growing population in the cities, provide raw materials for manufacturing industries and directly provide further capital for investment.

Seymour Martin Lipset (1963) shows that there is significant correlation between democratic development and levels of economic development in societies. He argued that the extent to which a state is economically well to do determines its chances of democratic sustenance. His argument is well captured in the following statement:

all the various aspects of economic development – industrialization, urbanization, wealth and education – are so closely interrelated as to form one major factor which has the political correlate of democracy (Lipset, 1963:41).

Lipset (1959) identifies three ways in which modernization promotes democratic development. Firstly, he argued that economic growth is more relevant to democratic development than certain levels of socio-economic development; secondly, socio-economic development triggers social change which can potentially promote democratic development; and thirdly socio-economic development leads to development in other sectors such as the organization of the middle class which is conducive for democratic development (Lipset, 1959).

Consequently, the level of modernization a society achieves reflects the relationship between its political institutions and the social forces which comprise it (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002:45). Other assumptions of modernization emphasized by Huntington, as captured by Akuva (2009), involve urbanization, industrialization, technological improvement, change in values and attitudes. For Huntington, a state advances when it is able to penetrate its economy with new innovative policies. To Pye (1972), economic development requires a reduction or absence of authoritarian leadership style. To this end, Talcott Parson argues that these values of development should be diffused to those societies that lack it so that they could also become advanced. Thus, the central assumption of the modernization theory is for underdeveloped societies to imbibe the pattern of advancement in the developed nations (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002).

Going by the assumptions of dependency theorists, the integration of Asian countries into the world market would have also ended with negative implications of a continued underdevelopment but the success of Japan and a host of other emerging economic powers from East Asia today attests to the relevance of commitments in public policy formulation and implementation in a society which also shows the ahistoricocity of the premise of dependency theoretical assumptions because these countries have been able to sift policy measures that are carefully formulated with greater commitment to policy implementation for development in their territories. This shows further that the level of development a society achieves depends so much on commitments to policy formulation and the extent of policy implementation devoid of unnecessary challenges.
Challenges of Democratic Development in Nigeria

The practice of democracy in Nigeria has encountered a number of challenges which presumably hinder the potentialities of democratic development in the country. According to Ogbonnaya (2012), among the challenges that have confronted democratic governance in Nigeria since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999 include electoral irregularities and malpractices, inter and intra ethnic rivalries, religious crises and insecurity, poverty, inadequate and weak democratic institutions and institutionalized corruption. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, successive transitions from one civilian regime to another have been recorded. This shows that democracy is sustained in Nigeria but the credibility, freeness and fairness of the elections that brought about this process have been the subject of thorny debates in contemporary national discourse because the elections have been characterized by monumental irregularities and malpractices which magnitude increased with every election. Both local and international observers have observed and reported that 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections in Nigeria marked by obvious irregularities, though in different degrees. The institutions of the state such as the police, the military, and even the electoral body – the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have been accused of aiding manipulation of the electoral process in favour of certain candidates. Thus, situations where individuals have been declared winners at elections for which they were not winners have been witnessed. In some other cases, INEC had conducted elections in states where the tenures of sitting Governors were still subsisting as in the case of Governor Peter Obi against Andy Uba of Anambra State in 2007. Incidentally, in every periodic election, local and international observers have been unanimous in their reports that the elections generally fall below internationally accepted standards. The history of election administration in Nigeria’s democratic experience is therefore a history of electoral fraud and violence (Ajayi, 2007). Thus, almost every election in Nigeria resulted to dissatisfaction of the outcome, leading to judicial litigations in which the judiciary has played significant roles in exposing some of the excesses of the electoral processes. Many instances exist where the judiciary has nullified or upturned the elections of some candidates on the grounds of irregularities. Thus, the poor electoral system breeds persistent crises of legitimacy in governance (Omodia, 2009).

Another challenge to democratic development in Nigeria is ethnic cleavages and security crisis. Internal and intra ethnic rivalries, religious crisis and insecurity also constitute potent challenges to democratic governance in Nigeria. Several scholars (Best, 2001; Duru and Ogbonnaya, 2010; Adewale, 2009; and Duruji, 2010) have written on the challenge of ethnic cleavages and security crisis in Nigeria’s democratic development. According to Duruji (2010), for instance, the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999 opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethnic demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule. The expression of these demands resulted in the emergence of ethno-nationalist insurgencies such as the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and many related militancy groups agitating for resource control in the Niger Delta region (Garba, 2017), the renewed demand for Biafra, spearheaded by the Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the increasing notoriety of the Odua People’s Congress (OPC) in the south-west.
This has also resulted in incessant ethnic clashes in the Middle Belt region, the crises between Farmers and the Fulani Herdsmen in the Benue Valley and other parts of the country; the Ijaw-Ishkekiri ethnic clashes in 2009 among others. Another prominent example is that, in June 2017, youth groups from the Northern gave three-month notice to Igbos, South-East resident in the North to evacuate the region or get attacked (Premium Times 2017). This threat attracted national and international condemnation but was later relaxed.

There had also been frequent inter-religious clashes and sharia-instigated riots in the Northern part of Nigeria as well as the emergence of the Boko Haram Islamic Jihadists with well-known preferences in religious belief and social practices (Eso, 2011). Theses crises not only result in the loss of human and material resources that could not be quantified in monetary terms with untold economic hardship and which most fundamentally bread state of anarchy that threatens the unity and corporate existence of the Nigerian state (Duruji, 2010). For example, the 2015 general elections which were scheduled for 14 and 28 February 2015 were shifted by six weeks based on security advise by the then National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki that Boko Haram might interrupt the elections. The shift was meant to enable the security forces degrade the insurgent group and prevent likely interruptions with the elections. This decision attracted mixed feelings and conflicting interpretations of the real motives behind government’s extension of the elections with some believing that it was done for political reasons such as to buy time and strategize on how to rig the elections because of fear of possible defeat by the opposition party. The opposition largely described that extension as setback for Nigeria’s democracy. However, others accepted the extension as justifiable (BBC, 2015; Washington Post, 2015).

Poverty is another factor that constitutes grave challenge to democratic development in Nigeria. Unarguably, Nigeria is blessed with abundance human and material resources. This notwithstanding, the nation ranks among the world’s poorest. UNDP (2016) report shows, for instance, that in Nigeria, hunger exhibits its ugly face in most homes where the average citizens contend with a life of abject poverty. Nigeria’s poverty profile has been consistently low as more than half of the population has been living in severe poverty. For example, the UNDP Report (2016:13) reveals that Nigeria’s poverty rate for 2003/04 was 64.2% and 62.6% in for the period 2009/10. Although, the rate had declined by 2%, the number of poor people had risen from 80million to 102million. A more recent report by Brookings Institution (2018) reveals that Nigeria has overtaken India as the world’s top country in severe poverty ranking as at May 2018. The report shows that 87million Nigerians are severely poor, which is more than India’s 73 million; and that in every minute, Six Nigerians are becoming severely poor (Vanguard, 2018). In the same light, life expectancy is also low compared to developed nations of the world. As at 2016, UNDP report contains that Nigeria’s life expectance in Nigeria is 52.5 (UNDP, 2016:1). With all these, the common man is alienated from himself as he lacks the wherewithal to afford the basic necessities of life such as education, medical facilities, good roads, pipe-borne water, and so forth. Thus, poverty makes corruption to thrive, especially in promoting the use of money to buy votes and manipulate electoral processes and outcomes in Nigeria, thereby affecting the development of democracy in the country.
Another challenge to democratic development in Nigeria has been that of weak democratic institutions. By democratic institutions, it is referred to the executive, judiciary, the legislative and electoral agencies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In principle, Ogbonnaya et al (2012:690) buttressed that each of these institutions is constitutionally empowered to maintain a certain degree of independence and autonomy while serving as checks on each other. In practice, however, the tendency for the executive to dominate by employing all manner of advantages on its side is a reality. The domineering and over-bearing tendencies of the executive is located in the pattern and practice of dictatorship in Nigeria especially during the military era. Accordingly, Bankole (2009) asserted that decades of military dictatorship have had the effect of eroding constitutional federalism, the erosion of the rule of law, the enthronement of culture of arbitrariness and impunity resulting in high levels of corruption. This legacy has fundamentally impacted on the power relations between the executive and the other democratic institutions. The consequence of this has been the existence of a subdued judiciary, weak oversight capacity of the legislature and the dumbness of the electoral bodies at both the federal and state levels.

Omodia (2009) expresses the situation in Nigeria’s democratic dispensation that the electoral body is not independent of the party in power. This, he further argues, had been defined in relation to the manner in which the electoral body has conducted elections in the way that often put the party in power at advantage (except during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria). Meanwhile, the judiciary has served as a tool for creating political circumstances that undermine the democratic process. Thus, Duruji (2010) explains that the judiciary has been unable to sustain the democratic process in Nigeria by failing to convict anybody through the judicial process for the several cases of arson and killings that have characterized inter-and-intra-ethnic clashes while the legislative institution has proven incapable of interfering decisively in the management of ethno-religious and security crises in the country.

In a related development, another challenge to democratic development in Nigeria is the practice of decamping or defection from one political party to another. Candidates who fallout of favour with their political parties are often blocked from winning primary tickets. This makes them move to join rival or alternative party which are ready to grant them tickets or nomination to contest at elections. There is no consistency in party membership and thus, weakness in political ideology among political parties and inherent weaknesses in the electoral rules that condone such practices. For example, ahead of 2015 general elections, ex-Vice President Atiku Abubakar and five out of 7G Governor decamped from PDP to join APC (Premium Times, 2013). In 2018 also, 15 APC Senators and 37 Members of the House of Representatives decamped to PDP (Daily Post, 2018). Political decamping in Nigeria shows that therefore that political parties are mere platforms for the nomination of candidates rather than formulation of programmes that can strengthen democratic development in the country.

Weaknesses inherent with state institutions also impact negatively on democratic practices and threaten the consolidation of democratic governance for effective policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria. Democracy is only possible if the structures, processes and institutions through which the
people’s will is expected to be addressed accommodate their interest, values and aspirations. Consequently, democracy continues to fade in Nigeria not also because of inefficient, ineffective and deteriorating public institutions (Oghonnaya, et al, 2012). For example, according to Best (2001), the Nigerian police is an instrument of the state for the maintenance of law and order; yet it has repeatedly proved to be incompetent with respect to handling both simple and major internal conflict, be they religious, ethnic, communal, etc. while the state has failed to prosecute and punish people under the law.

Political and institutionalized corruption constitutes one of the greatest challenges and threats to the ability of democratic governance to be effective in public policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria since the First Republic. What is worrisome in recent times is said to be the degree of manifestation of corruption in the country even when the Federal Government’s propaganda seems to show that Nigeria’s government is seriously fighting corruption. Nigeria has been rated among the top most corrupt countries in the world as can be seen from the following data:

Table 1: Nigeria Corruption Profile 1999-2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Countries</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Score/100</th>
<th>Position from Bottom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>144</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>174</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>136</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ compilation based on various Corruption Perception Index (CPI) reports obtained from Transparency International website.
Table 1 shows that in 1999, Nigeria was ranked the 2nd most corrupt country in the world of all the 90 countries covered by the survey. Nigeria moved backward to 1st position in 2000 but steadily progressed to 3rd position in 2004. By the year 2006, Nigeria ranked 5th position and continued progressing with fluctuations to 16th position in the most recent ranking for 2017. However, the ranking is not the most important measure of a state’s improvement or otherwise but the score a state gets. This is because countries are ranked relative to others while the score represents the actual state of corruption in a state. In this case, since 1999, Nigeria has not scored up to 30% on the scale of 100 or despite its movement from the score of 16 in 1999 to 27 in 2017.

The Transparency International’s Corruption Performance Index (CPI) is the world’s most credible measure of domestic and public sector corruption. According to the CPI, every single public institution in Nigeria is corrupt and has failed to appreciate fully the obligation upon it to do something concrete about corruption. Transparency International (2011) reports that the level of corruption and other related crimes in Nigeria attract between $4 million and $8 million loss on daily basis and a loss of about $70.58 million to the national economy annually; the country has also lost more than $380 billion to graft since independence in 1960. Thus, nepotism, bribery and patronage are so deeply engrained in the daily life of Nigerians that even existing anti-corruption laws have little or no impact. It has also been argued that the war against corruption has been difficult to win in Nigeria because that act is perpetrated by policy makers themselves (Olo-Olu, 2006). Incidentally, like the national economy of the country, democratic governance in Nigeria has not been immune to the damages of corruption. This implies that public policy formulation and implementation in the country is plagued by the phenomenon of corruption and that serious efforts are needed to stop the menace for effective policy implementation.

According to Palmer (2009), democracy implies that “majority of the population makes decisions about all those issues on which they wish to make decisions,” including the choice of their representatives. Thus, there are “substantive freedoms enjoyed by free and equal citizens, notably
freedom of speech and assembly, but sometimes also including freedom of religion, exit [emigration], procedural rights to due process of law, and so on. Liberal democracies have several elements especially the existence of a loyal opposition (one that perhaps opposes the program of those in power but is loyal to their right to be in power) and elections that are free and supervised by independent authorities. An example of an Illiberal democracy might be one in which the opposition is punished—thus unable to oppose without danger, and elections which are likely to be corrupted. A liberal democracy exists where there is “one man, one vote, one time” (Palmer, 2009). Never the less, as Omojuwa and Odofin (2007) rightly noted, the Nigerian democracy is faced with the following challenges: Firstly, the political parties are yet to be transformed, they are neither coherent nor focused. They lack internal democracy and party discipline. Secondly, political institutions like the National Assembly are in a learning process: members are new and inexperienced. They find it very difficult to bargain without inducement.

Various factors combine to affect Nigeria’s democratic development. Those factors significantly affect voters’ willingness to participate in the political process. This may be coupled with the fact that the actual electoral outcomes hardly reflect expected outcomes, and dividends of democracy largely remain illusions to the common man. This is evident in observable decline in voter turnout in general elections in Nigeria since 1999, especially during presidential elections as shown on the table that follows:

Table 2. Voter Turn out for Nigeria 1999-2015 (Presidential Elections)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Voting Age Population</th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Voter Turnout</th>
<th>Percentage of Voter Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>91,669,312</td>
<td>67,422,005</td>
<td>29,432,083</td>
<td>43.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>81,691,751</td>
<td>73,528,040</td>
<td>39,469,484</td>
<td>53.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>71,004,507</td>
<td>61,567,036</td>
<td>35,397,517</td>
<td>57.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>64,319,246</td>
<td>60,823,022</td>
<td>42,018,735</td>
<td>69.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>52,792,781</td>
<td>57,938,945</td>
<td>30,280,052</td>
<td>52.26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) as at October 26, 2018.

Figure 2: Trends in Voter Turnout for Nigeria 1999-2015 (Presidential Elections)

Source: authors’ compilation
Figure 2 shows serious lack of progress in political participation among Nigerians despite the steady rise in the country’s population in general and the voting age population in particular from 52,790,781 to 91,669,312 in 2015. Number of registered voters also rose from 57,938,845 to 73,528,040 in 2011 but declined to 67,422,005 in 2015. Voter turnout was 30,280,052 in 1999 but increased to 42,018,735 in 2003, declined to 35,397,517 in 2007 and increased to 39,469,484 but drastically declined below the 1999’s figure to as low as 29,432,083. The percentage of voters that turned out in the various elections clearly show a consistent downturn in Nigeria’s voter turnout after the first transition in 2003. The 2003 elections recorded an increase from 25.26% to 69.08% but went down as low as 43.65% in 2015.

In short, Nigeria’s democratic development has encountered a lot of difficulties right from the nature of the political system down to the idiosyncratic character of the political actors which made so many regimes fruitless as a result of the implementation of unplanned policies as well as despotic nature of the rulers. These challenges have, no doubt, affected democratic development in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Democratic governments are expected to be concerned with and committed to policy formulation and implementation to raise the standard of living of the people through fair distribution of the state’s wealth for development. However, Nigeria’s democratic experiment has encountered a lot of challenges right from the nature of the political system down to the idiosyncratic character of the political actors which pose challenges to the potentialities of democracy to enhance national development in the country. Some of the challenges of democratic development in Nigeria include electoral irregularities and malpractices, inter and intra ethnic rivalries, religious crises and insecurity, poverty, inadequate and weak democratic institutions as well as institutionalized corruption. These challenges have, no doubt, affected democratic development in the country. The study recommends good governance for national development in Nigeria, efficient policy measures to fight corruption, transparent electoral system to avoid rigging and manipulation of electoral processes, internal democracy in party politics, review of electoral processes to improve voter turnout, among other measures.
References


