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development. Considering the history of other federal democracies, elsewhere, it becomes relevant to lend support to the incessant calls for (Sovereign) National Conference, where these differences can be reconstructed because these differences remain the greatest telling effects of the disequilibrium of our political (and by logical extension, of our socio-economic) circumstances. Above all, there is the need to imbibe democratic culture and fight corruption and perversion of laudable policies if we are to have any meaningful sustainable human development in Nigeria.

Second Term Syndrome and The Challenge of Democratic Succession in Nigeria

By

*Fatai A. Aremu**

Introduction

Nigeria was ushered into democracy for the third (or fourth) time only close to four years ago. Since its inauguration, the new Republic has exhibited some characteristics common to the previous republics. One of these features however stands out. While it is an incontrovertible fact that incumbent administrations all over the world have always expressed the desire for second term in office where constitutions allow the dose of this desire being played out in Nigeria since 1999 is indeed huge and frightening. Most political actors have often been given the impression that a second term in office is a prerogative. This should not necessarily be so.

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The disturbing trend of seeking political office by all means has reached alarming dimensions. We are increasingly seeing political office holders being linked with all inconceivable foul means of settling political scores. Hundreds, if not thousands of lives have been lost in the last three years due to political intolerance on the part of our elected officials. Many more lives are likely to be lost as election dates draw near. We are also likely to see more of political witch hunting by men and women we have elected to govern us.

Ordinarily, one would have ignored the anti-democratic traits of our new democrats but for the danger that they portend for our infant democracy. One conspicuous fall out from this is that instead of the democratic space to be expanding to make our democratic experiment all inclusive, the second term syndrome is inadvertently closing up the democratic landscape leading to the strengthening of a regime of political apathy. It is equally observable that the members of international community have been rather cautious in their relations with Nigeria largely because of the indecent behaviours of our democrats that have the potential of generating instability in the polity.

The above scenario has inspired us to investigate the issue of second term syndrome in Nigeria. Our objective in embarking on the effort is to raise the necessary alarm on the harm that is being done to the country's democratic project by no other person than the direct beneficiaries of the last military political transition programme.

Conceptual Clarification

Second Term Syndrome

Throughout history, it is held that power is the currency of politics (R. Dahl, *Modern Political analysis*, 5th edition, New Delhi, Prentice Hall, 1995). The more of it an actor has the more of it is sought after. In this context, power is seen not as an end in itself but as a means to an end. It is therefore possible to situate the unending quest for second term in office as a natural phenomenon and an ideal ubiquitous to most polities. Put simply, even the advanced democracies are not immune from the second term syndrome. Under normal circumstances for instance, there is yet to be a President of the United States who will not vie for a second term.

Quite often, political actors almost immediately after oath administration nurture an agenda for re-election. However, within the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria, certain trends are discernible. First, that it is unimaginable for incumbent not to vie for another term in office. Second, that it is also often unlikely that the incumbent will lose the party ticket at the primary election. In extreme cases, the officeholder could be declared 'unopposed' as a consensus candidate in a stage-managed party primaries. This scenario results from monopolization of state power and depluralization of politics, ultimately culminating in gradual transition toward authoritarianism. Apparently, because of the control of party machinery and state resources, the officeholder enjoys patronage and support of the delegates, the bulk of which is drawn from unelected Special Assistants and Personal Advisers of the incumbent. Other aspirants and dissenters either acquiesce or decamp to opposition parties.

The third trend relates to the possibility of the ruling class to attempt to gain victory at the polls by all means. Though having to contend with batches of the disjointed opposition present less potent challenge to the incumbent who by virtue of his control of state apparatus like the media and certain institutions (especially the electoral commission) and security, could use same to further undermine and incapacitate the opposition. This unequal playing field constitutes a major challenge to democratic transition.

Another trend is the tendency for eruption of violence especially where the government – opposition cleavage follows ethno-religious fault line. Having been disadvantaged in the politico-constitutional terrain, the opposition may mobilize any ethnic, religious or geo-political sentiments to bolster its claims and chances. Allegations of fraud, domination and marginalization could deflate the credibility of the electoral process as well as entire democratic succession attempts. and at this juncture, what is at stake is no longer democratic consolidation *per se*, but the corporate existence of the state itself. Why then has it been difficult for the political class to ensure a successful democratic transition? Why is the officeholder often unwilling to quit after the first term? To answer these questions, it may be necessary to subsequently examine the historical origin of the political class in Nigeria.

Democratic Succession

Democratic succession, in its ordinary sense, could refer to a phenomenon in which an elected civilian regime is able to successfully conduct another transition to produce another civilian regime. However, this conception may be simplistic. Democratic succession does not end with conduct of election. In Nigeria for instance, two “successful” transitional elections could be said to have been conducted

by democratic regimes in 1964 and 1983. What then is the problem.

It may therefore be necessary to rely on the contention that using the second election to define transition is an insufficient framework of analysis. Ideally, democratic succession and consolidation should include popular legitimation, diffusion of democratic values and civilian supremacy over the military over time.

Generally, popular participation should be the bulwark against ‘reversal wave’ toward military dictatorships. This is likely to extend the life expectancy of the democratic regime beyond the electoral phase or the short-term imperatives. Therefore, Democratic succession, for the purpose of this analysis, is seen as a continuous process in which there is peaceful regime change through the ballot box without reversion to military rule.

Historical Analysis of the Political Class and Political Transitions in Nigeria

To understand the nexus between the problem of democratic transition in Nigeria and the ‘sit-tight’ syndrome, and excursion into the origin and nature of the ruling elite within its historical context will afford us a preliminary understanding of its behavioural patterns vis-a-vis the state. It will also provide an insight into the evolutionary and socialization process to which the ruling class had been subjected and which has shaped its perception and orientation toward the state.

Essentially, the political class in Nigeria is a colonial creation. The colonial state, whose origin was associated with the need to preserve mercantilist and imperialist exploitation of colonies, was designed to cater for the economic imperatives of western capital. Nationalist resentment of the colonial state was to challenge its political

exclusion rather than socio-economic domination of the people. At independence, nationalist leaders inherited the mantle of rulership of a state designed to satisfy not the interest of its people but of foreign capital. The political class views the post colonial state as, like its colonial progenitor, a viable terrain for primitive capital accumulation having inherited (but did not alter) the state machinery central to the commanding heights of the economy and allocation of values. The state bequeathed to Nigeria therefore, is only a 'contested terrain' where groups compete for appropriation. Every actor in the political realm, Claude Ake noted, only seeks to privatize the gains of this enterprising state.

In the post-independence era, the state which retained its exploitative character as well as its centrality as the ultimate allocator of values became the most reliable if not the only access to wealth. The state having become the (only) escape route from poverty and want through inflated contracts, lucrative appointments, provision of business incentives and other perquisites, transformed to a tool of prebendal predation by the patrician class.

Consequently, a fraction of the political class fortunate enough to have occupied the state house would only stop at nothing to retain its dominance and prevent its exit from an arena where it massively benefits. On the other hand, the excluded group struggles to either expand the bracket or supplant the ruling elite. These excluded elements could include faction of the ruling party or members of the opposition party(ies). Ultimately, therefore, the quest for access to the control of the lucrative state enterprise form the crux of the crises as succession produces inevitable intra-class squabbles.

As a prelude to an overview of political transitions in Nigeria, it may be necessary to put forth that contrary to the general belief, Nigeria's problem has not been the conduct of

successful transition (election) *per se* but the management of post electoral phase of the consolidation process. There has been two democratic transition failures in Nigeria – First Republic (1960-1966) and Second Republic (1979-1983), the controversial Third Republic (1993) was still born and may not merit much attention.

The pre-independence elections ushered in the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in a coalition government. It was the crisis surrounding the 1964 general election coupled with the violence associated with the 1965 Western Regional Election which marked the waterloo for the First Republic in 1966.

The military was to quit the political stage much later in 1979 after handing over to a civilian government led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The regime, once more sailed through the first term. It was the succession crisis which followed, and improper management of the electoral process characterized by rigging, thuggery and unbridled display of incumbency power which brought an end to the second republic.

The Third Republic which was midwived under a military dispensation and ended in a stalemate, does not fit our discussion of democratic transition. Therefore attention is focused in the first and second democratic transition failures.

Explaining the Second Term Syndrome with selected cases of display of Power of Incumbency in the Fourth Republic

Though various actors offer basically similar reasons of 'continuity' as the rationale for seeking re-election, it may be necessary to probe further into some of the motivation. For instance, while declaring his intention for a second term.

And at the federal level, the composition of the delegates to the presidential primaries of the PDP was skewed in favour of the incumbent. Out of 3,042 delegates to the convention, over 1,000 was drawn from an array of Special Assistants and personal aides in the presidency. Heads of Boards of parastatals and Ambassadors all appointees of the incumbent president. Thus, even before the convention, the direction of the pendulum obviously swung in favour of the incumbent. Taken as a whole, the wanton display of the power of incumbency to ensure a second term in office has various implications for basic foundations of democracy, competitiveness and democratic consolidation as a whole.

Implications on Democratic Transition and Consolidation

The legitimacy of the government which emerged from controversial circumstances become easily challengeable. As the custodian of peoples' mandate, it expected that leaders emerge from a process transparent and fair enough to give equal opportunities to all aspirants. Where undue advantage is enjoyed by the incumbent over other contestants, the level of popular support for the government there from may be uncertain. Consequently, the fragility of the democratic structures, institutions and processes assume some form of permanence. And coupled with the fact that, military intervention becomes imminent when legitimacy of the civilian regime is minimal, the nascent democracy is incontrovertibly under threat.

Worse still, the democratization process itself becomes perverted as money becomes the sole determinant of entry into the race. Since the political game is open only to the rich, democracy gradually transforms to oligarchy. Under this circumstance, attention shifts from the

management of the economy to administration of election. While the economy suffers neglect and slips into comatose, the political field becomes turbulent. This potentially violent scenario scares away foreign investment, which further worsens the economy.

Multilateral financial institutions, creditors and donors may lose confidence in the political system. This results in loss of much needed assistance from the international community casting doubts on the democratic credentials of the nation. The negative cumulative effect of this on Nigeria's image in the comity of nations may surpass the situation during the military years. On the whole, democracy in Nigeria faces a bleak future as the democratic terrain moves towards uncertainty.

Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

Recommendations

At this juncture it may be necessary to stress the limits of the legal-constitutional model as put forth in most commentaries. Many writings seemed to have concluded that restricting the tenure of office to a single term will halt the desire for second term in office. This may appear simplistic as second term syndrome may likely re-incarnate in other forms. Nevertheless, the option may be relevant given our unique circumstance. At least, it may reduce the tension and crises generated by the self-succession bid of elected officials. Nigeria's constitution could then be amended to reflect this new thinking.

Another logical response to the probable inability to conduct a successful civilian-to-civilian democratic transition as a result of second term syndrome is to democratize the nomination process at the party level. Since

the first victim of the syndrome is the party machinery, attention could be focused on instituting an 'open' direct primaries in place of the 'closed', electoral college-based system. All card-carrying members of the party should be eligible to determine the party's flag bearers at general elections.

Contrary to the practice in which the bulk of the delegates draws from unelected executive nominees (Ministers, Special Assistants, ambassadors, Chairmen of Boards, etc.) and party 'elders', the direct primary election will invariably broaden the political space, level the playing field and give fairly equal opportunities to all aspirants. It will also empower the rank and file of the party and enhance greater participation in the political process. Perhaps through this process, the relative popularity and acceptability of the candidates could be assured.

Concluding Remarks

An attempt has been made in this article to examine the second term syndrome and its implications for Nigeria's democracy. The view in this article, is that though many issues and problems confront the Nigerian democratic project, none is as threatening as the tendency by the elected officials to keep themselves in power no matter the feeling of the electorate. Strategies and counter strategies have been worked out to frustrate those politicians who want to challenge them on the grounds of performance in keeping with democratic principles.

Stories of attempted assassinations and outright assassinations have been widely and regularly reported. The shameless increasing incidence of monetization of the electoral process has also been observed. These and other undemocratic traits have been creating genuine fears in the minds of Nigerians and their friends abroad on the possible

implications of this for Nigeria's democracy. Of course the article identified the contraction of the democratic space as a major implication of the mad rush for second term by politicians.

Based on the foregoing disturbing scenario, the article has canvassed for a more transparent electoral process at the level of political parties so that all eligible voters can participate in the process of nominating candidates for elections. More importantly, it identifies with the call by some Nigerians for a single term of five years for our elected officials. Although we are not unmindful of its limited democratic value, we still submit that pegging the term to five years would achieve the objective of sparing us from the ugly attributes that Nigeria has contributed to democratic practice in the world. After the stabilization of democratic rule, Nigerians may then decide to do away with the principle. But for now, the country surely needs a mechanism to arrest the monster called the second term syndrome.