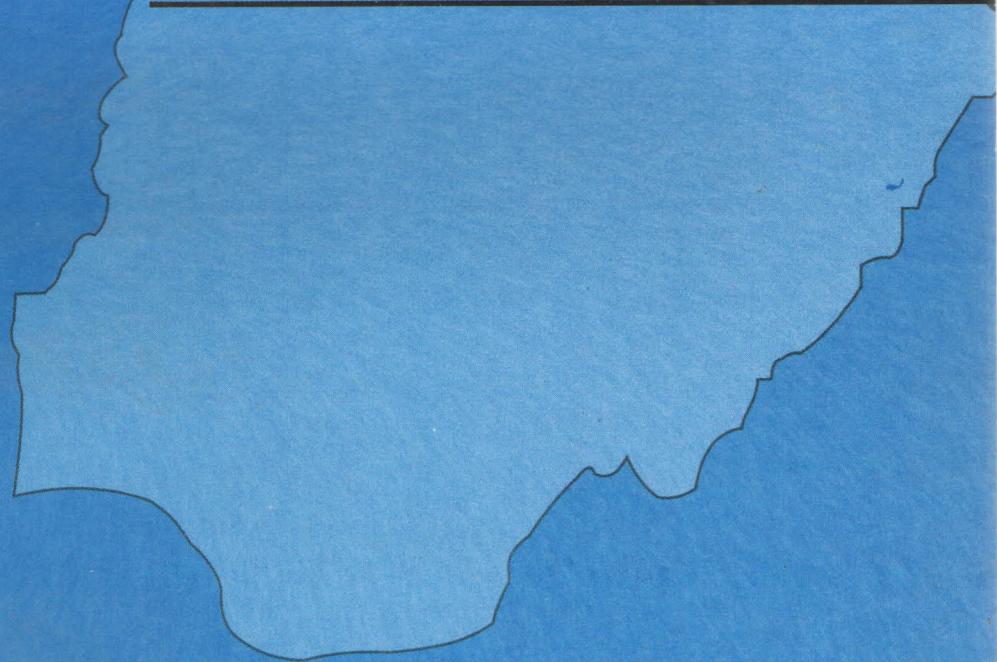


Lapai
Democracy
Series

THE FOURTH REPUBLIC in **NIGERIA**

A Decade of Democratisation Reviewed



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Notes on Contributors

8. Analysis of Factors Inhibiting Democracy and Democratisation in Nigeria, 1999-2007 <i>Emuel Ikedegwa Odeh</i>	133
9. A Decade of the Hypocrisy of Democracy in Nigeria, 1999-2009 <i>Kevin C. Arua</i>	143
10. The Need for Political Ethics in Nigerian Democracy <i>Franca S. Jando</i>	153
11. Democracy and the Problem of Local Government Creation in Nigeria <i>Wasiu G. Adebambo</i>	163
Index	180

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8. Analysis of Factors Inhibiting Democracy and Democratisation in Nigeria, 1999-2007

Lemuel Ekedegwa Odeh

Introduction

After the long occupation of the political arena by the military, Nigeria is now on the path of transforming civil rule into full democratisation. Though the problems of democratic transition, nurturing and consolidation are daunting, the challenge has to be faced (Ojo 1998). For democracy is an avenue through which members of the society possesses the right of choosing the leadership through elections. Nigeria's march to constitutional democracy has, however, been a chequered one marked by anti-colonial struggles, crisis, coups and a thirty-month agonizing civil war (Ojo, 1998). The collapse of the past few democratic administrations came as a result of the weak foundations of democracy paving the way for military incursion into politics and governance. The demise of the First Republic in 1966 marked the beginning of 'soldier go, soldier come' syndrome which was detrimental to the process of democracy in Nigeria. Colonialism, ethnicity and religious bigotry have been identified as inhibiting factors in democratisation in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1995). Other constraining factors identified by Ihonvbere (1997) include the failure of a workable federal system, the debate over resource control and corruption.

This chapter attempts to probe into the influence of the aforementioned issues and their consequential effects on the Nigerian polity within the period of the Fourth Republic.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy

The contesting nature of words like democracy, which cannot be solely subjected to a single meaning, need to be in-depthly appraised. The ideological, historical and cultural variations largely explain the underpinning and meanings which democracy is subjected to in different climes, regions, and societies world over. Democracy has been variously defined and observed as a technique through which popular participation is enjoyed among the civil masses to decide whom their leader is. In the same view, Abraham Lincoln, the famous American president, viewed democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people (Wada Nas, 2004). The understanding that could be discerned from Lincoln's observation pointedly expressed is that democracy is an avenue through which popular participation of the masses is involved in the selection of their representatives. However, a situation whereby election is marred by rigging and corrupt practices does not seem to represent a government of the people.

The basic contention is that no compelling justification for democracy could oppose the view that people ought to be treated as political equals (Seward, 1998). In understanding this view, we can clearly state that, for democracy to thrive, it must supercede any hegemonic disposition. Nevertheless, democracy should be based on honesty, decency, and good governance whereby the will of the people in choosing their representatives is most effectively respected. This study will adopt Seward's definition of democracy because of its adequacy. He stated that "democracy is a political system in which citizens themselves have an equally effective input into the making of binding collective decisions" (Seward, *Ibid*).

Democratization

An instance where democracy is examined with dictatorial performances is said to be undemocratic. According to Seward (1998), "The amount of democracy in a system is importantly a matter of degree, in addition to a matter of presence or absence". Thus democratization involves processes in which

democratic government is established, confirmed and conform to internationally acclaimed barometric gauge of democratizing and democratization (Ojo, 1998). In another way, Onyeoziri (1989) argued that democratization needed to be situated within the following poles:

1. The domain of individual and group rights and freedoms;
2. The domain of popular and equal participation in collective decision;
3. The dimensions of accountability of government to mass publics and constituent minorities; and
4. The dimension of the application of the principles of equal citizenship in all spheres of life – social, economic and political.

He further opined that "a system that recognizes more of these rights has democratized more than one that recognizes only few of these rights" (Onyeoziri, 1989). Also Sarabjit (2002) added that "there should be a balanced development of institutions with each institution performing the role specifically assigned to it". Some of these institutions are the judiciary, armed forces, electoral bodies, legislature and executive among others.

What we can deduce from the above is that the strict adherence to workability of rights and freedoms and those institutions are antidotes of ailing democracy and not just on paper. Thus to Seward (1998), "we cannot praise society for qualities which belong to it by definition rather than by political contrivance".

Issues in Democracy and Democratization in Nigeria

Lack of Good Governance and Corruption

It is an understatement to suggest that all colonized African states abhorred colonialism. A highly influential revolutionary theorist, Frantz Fanon posited that liberation ought to be intensified against neo-colonialism (Falola and Babawale; 1988). Thus neo-colonialism has ensured that even after decolonization the British still control and regulate affairs in

Nigeria. So the genesis of Nigeria's political crises could be traced to the time of colonization as a result of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914. Hence, leadership struggles have continued to surface from time to time and threatening the establishment of democracy vis-à-vis its consolidation. This has given rise to the problem of good governance, corruption, ethnicity, religious bigotry, political violence, regionalism, travesty of justice, lack of political will and intolerance, insecurity, nepotism and arson among others.

As observed earlier, good governance has for many years remained elusive in Nigeria's political terrains because of the fact that this worthy aspects of culture, tradition and norms, political vestiges have been abandoned. Rather, despotic and corrupt leaders mostly in uniform have always found their ways into the polity as leaders (Joseph, 1987). The fundraising for presidential library project of President Obasanjo exposes how leaders use state funds to settle personal political homage and scores. In addition to this was the withholding of the statutory allocation of local governments in Lagos state by the Obasanjo federal government. On several occasions, the apex court had ruled in favour of Lagos State but the president insisted that Lagos State should revert from 37 to the old 20 local governments as the criteria for the release of the statutory allocation. In response to this position of the federal government, Alex Ekwueme stated thus:

Nowhere in the constitution is the president empowered to withhold or suspend the payment of allocation from the federation account to local government councils of state government (*Tell*, July 25, 2005).

A situation whereby an act of this nature emanates from the central government to federating a state is a breach of the rules of democracy.

If we take a critical look at the present level of corruption in the country, we will contend that corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the national fabric, which has been retarding our success as a nation. Taking a retrospective look to the time of independence, one will come

to know of how corruption brought down the pillars of Nigeria's first republic (*Tell*, March, 7, 2005). The military that have always been a threat to the growth of democracy have always retorted that the cause of their intervention is corruption, violence, arson and political assassination among other things. However, several instances in the past show that the military too were even more grievously guilty of similar allegations (Otedola, 1982). In stating what corruption entails, Saliu and Aremu posited that:

It entails a violation of the moral ethos to confer personal advantage on self or acquaintances. Above all, it comprises of acts that are likely to diminish the capacity of the state to meet its material and welfare obligations to the citizenry (Saliu and Aremu; 2004).

We should note that corruption is quite widespread and consists of various forms and this is why each successive administration in Nigeria has always been accused of corruption. Till today, it is pertinent to note that some state governors have been accused of corrupt practices including the immediate past Senate President, Adolphus Wabara, with some members of the National Assembly in league with the former minister for Education, Prof. Fabian Osuji (*Tell*, April 4, 2005). So also, the erstwhile Inspector General of Police, E. B. Balogun was convicted on charges of graft (*Punch*, July 5, 2005). All these serve as barriers to our growth as a nation because private interests have taken over public interest. Thus corruption has eroded efficiency and professionalism of patriotic services to the Nigerian federation. The severity of the situation made the Paris Club to demand the prosecution of corrupt officials by the Nigerian government as a condition for debt relief (*Punch*, July 15, 2005). This came in response to the call on creditor nations to grant debt relief to Nigeria. The response by the Paris Club is in consonance with the fact that they have records of how Nigeria's treasury is looted which was confirmed by the action of the former governor of Plateau state, Joshua Dariye, who was caught in London in possession of large sums of hard-currency. However, up till now, most corrupt officials are still free men, unprosecuted. There are

lots of amazing facts on corruption, which had been publicly known of which nothing has been done about. Truly as it is, corruption is no doubt an endemic problem that has thoroughly affected the development of the Nigerian economy. This in turn has clearly enhanced poverty, unemployment, prostitution, armed robbery, and many social ills that endanger the lives of millions of Nigerians by exposing them to a high level of insecurity within the polity.

Ethnic Sentiments

Ethnicity, from independence, has remained an impediment in the process of nation building in Nigeria. Right from the "divide and rule" tactics introduced into the polity by the British, it has led to the emergency of regional and ethnic leaders and this led to a situation whereby parties at the time of independence were ethnically based. The Action Group (AG) dominated the West and led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, NPC in the North was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello and the National Council of Nigerians Citizens (NCNC) controlled the East and led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Sklar, 1983). It can then be said that regional leaders employed ethnic affiliations for selfish reasons. This has brought about political instability as a result of the fact that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with a high population running into over 140 million people, whereby inter-ethnic rivalry have always heated the polity. It has been argued that the first military coup of 1966 were ethnically calculated to affect a particular region and among the reasons alluded to this was the fact that the majority of those that were assassinated were Northerners (Osaghae, 1998).

Among the various groups in Nigeria, the presence of hostility is rampant and this has constantly created instability in the polity as a result of nepotism (Nnoli, 1995). Merit and efficiency are sacrificed on the altar of ethnic Chauvinism". Hence conflict between groups seems to be the order of the day in the polity rather than the development of a cooperative spirit. The competitive nature among Nigerian ethnic groups has till date made census figures questionable because right from the first population census crisis of 1954 to that of 1962

the Southern ethnic groups have repeatedly challenged the return of high figures for the North. To resolve the contention, ethnicity and religion were expunged from the last census exercise in 2006. Ethnicity is therefore a plague that is prevailing over democratic consolidation in Nigeria as there were calls by the Christian and other socio-cultural groupings in the polity threatening to boycott the census if ethnicity and religion were omitted from the list of questions. This is as a result of the fact that census figures have been a backbone for the hegemonic disposition of a particular group in the Nigerian federation over the rest, so in the contest for the control of state power and resources, ethnic sentiments have always been employed by both minority and majority ethnic groups in the pursuit of national resources. The increased ethnic tension that this has brought, has affected economic development as the climate is considered not investment friendly.

As already noted, ethnicity forms the basis of conflict in Nigeria and it stands to be a crucial factor to our political emancipation. Right from independence, attempts to bring together various ethnic groups have constantly yielded little success. As at today, what we have as states instead of regionalism came as a result of measures to curb ethnic pandemic and bring about national cohesion. But rather than resolving inter-ethnic discord, its potential was enhanced (Ojo, 2000). The consequences of ethnic discord are so daunting that it disrupts economic growth by scaring away foreign investors as noted above as a result of a very volatile environment. Some oil companies have been shut down due to ethnic uprisings in the oil producing areas and this has been a huge economic loss. The values of justice and equity have always been threatened by ethnicity at instances whereby ethnic eruptions were highly prevalent. Nnoli (1995) stated that, "Ethnicity promotes hypocrisy on the question of moral values such as justice and equity".

However, it is pertinent to note that various measures have been adopted to regulate ethnic tension. Among these measures are the federal character principles (Ojo, 2000), state creation, local government creation, revenue allocation, and

derivation formula, among others but what we should put into consideration is that submissiveness to national loyalty is always compromised (Nnoli, 1995). However, despite these measures ethnicity remains a volatile factor.

Religion

Meanwhile, one would argue that religion is about creation and not about destruction and thus, Nigeria as a secular state, should exist mutually in peace and harmony but the reverse is the case. A lot of devastating religious crises have erupted in Nigeria leading to loss of lives and properties in religious-volatile states like Kano and Kaduna (Osaghae, 1998). However, the violence and destructions cannot be traced to the moral teachings of any of the two prominent religions, Islam and Christianity. Ali (2004) posited that "different interest groups have at one time or the other employed or deployed religion as a political instrument for their mobilization". What rightly comes to mind are the sharia issues of the late 1970s and that of present Zamfara state at the early stage of the Fourth Republic. One will see that there exist political undertones because the sharia issue has been a political instrument. As rightly put by Ali (2004) "the religious crises witnessed in Nigeria cannot be said to be totally free from ethnic-cum-political influences". Hence, religious crisis have refused to portray Nigerians as a people that share mutual affection thereby putting governance of the state at risk.

Political Violence

Political violence is another phenomenon in our political terrain and the outcomes have most times been disastrous to national growth. It has brought death to the door of innocent people and a great loss of properties. Political violence has been a disruptive and destructive tool in Nigeria through its use as a means of contesting for power and recognition between individuals and groups in the society. Corsini quoted in Alanamu (2005) defines violence as "the expression of hostility and rage through physical force directed against persons or property". In Nigeria however, political violence has taken

many forms. A good example took place in Anambra State with a political undertone and this has made governance in the state a very tedious affair (*Tell*, September 22, 2003). Also there were political crises in other states like Kogi, Ekiti and Akwa Ibom which have affected the process of governance (*Tell*, June 27, 2005). In addition to these is the assassination of some key political figures which has remained a puzzle to date in the persons of Chief Bola Ige, Marshall Harry, and Adeteru Olagbaju among others (*Tell*, Feb. 23, 2004). All these threaten the nation because most of these deaths cannot be attributed to robbery considering the personalities involved but are rather politically motivated killings. A good study of the prelude to the killing of Bola Ige exposes more on the political crisis that occurred in Osun State before his assassination (*Tell*, September 22, 2003).

Finally, these situations have left a devastating threat to Nigeria's democracy as exposed and highlighted in this chapter. This also affects the development of Nigerian federalism vis-à-vis the unabated internal wrangling, violence, crisis and ethnic and religious factors thwarting our political stability and growth.

Conclusion

The chapter so far has reasonably established the fact that consolidation of democracy could be best harnessed when there is reasonable understanding among the federating units devoid of ethnic identity, religious bigotry, nepotism, corruption, violence, bad governance and other factors that pose as threats to political stability. It is suggested that integrative mechanism should be variously adopted and reviewed from time to time and synchronized to meet development and national integration needs of the country.

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