

# Democracy and National Development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of democratic practice in Nigeria. It identifies the disconnection between the electorates and the elected leaders as the major cause for the non-realization of the values of democracy in Nigeria. This disconnection results from the wrong interpretation of the concept of politics in the contemporary Nigerian society, which has also paved way for the wrong interpretation and practice of democracy as a political ideology. The paper argues that politics in the contemporary Nigeria is interpreted in the Machiavellian way thereby making politics not to achieve its true essence. For democracy to realize its values, the paper argues for the traditional conception of politics where the pursuit of public interest and social order is considered paramount to political practice.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Nigeria, Social Order, Development, Machiavelli

## I. Introduction

The Nigeria democratic experience as observed since 1999 calls for reflection on whether democracy as a political ideology for Nigeria has realized its values. Traditionally, democracy as a political ideology is supposed to give power to the people, promote the pursuit of public interest and enhances social order. However, what the present democratic experience has offered us is nothing other than economic and social problems manifesting in high level of insecurity. All these problems are militating factors against national development.

The political philosophy of Niccolo Machiavelli (henceforth referred to as Machiavellianism) has generated a lot of debate among scholars. The debate revolves around the contention whether his philosophy as contained in his work *The Prince* is suitable for any society or not and that his kind of politics is amoral politics. Thus, it is maintained that the Machiavellian conception and practice of politics is considered a wrong interpretation because it does not represent politics in its true sense. It is from this point of view that we critically examine the Nigeria democratic experience and seeing its manifestation in our political practice, we contend that for Nigeria to experience development in all ramifications, Machiavellian politics should be jettisoned and the spirit of traditional idea of politics should be embraced. The paper is divided into four sections. In section one; we examine the meaning, nature and values of democracy. The idea of national development is also discussed. Section two focuses on the challenges against the Nigerian state. The various crises confronting the Nigerian society is discussed. In the third section we considered democracy and its practice in Nigeria. Section four centres on Machiavellianism, democracy and development in Nigeria. The traditional conception of politics is also discussed. We conclude the paper by arguing for a return to the traditional conception of politics as against Machiavellianism.

## II. Democracy: Meaning, Nature and Values

Democracy is one of the political ideologies that have been over emphasized in contemporary times. A lot has been written about it in so much that it has consciously or unconsciously overwhelmed other ideologies. In fact, it has become so popular in our day that it is now taken as the only legitimate form of government for humankind or the only "civilized" form of government. No other form of government is recognized or acceptable and there is an uncritical acceptance of democracy as the best form of government. This widely acceptance of democracy does not take cognizance of the differences in the socio-political, educational, moral and economic conditions of the different societies of the world.

The word 'democracy' is essentially a contestable concept in political philosophy. Though, it is a form of government that is quite old, yet the various meanings adduced to the concept is seen to be of a value question as it reveals only where the individual stands along the political spectrum. The contemporary discussion of democracy may be brought under four rough headings: 'the meaning of democracy', 'the conditions of democracy', 'the justification of democracy' and 'the relation of democracy to other political concepts and principles'. To have a whollistic view of the meaning of democracy, the four headings identified are important but for the purpose of this paper we shall focus only on one of them and that is, the meaning of democracy.

The word 'democracy' is coined from two Greek words "Demos" (people) and "Cratia" (rule). The combination of the two words simply means "the people rule" or "the rule of the people". Examining the combination of these two words and their meaning at the time of Athenian's democratic glory informs the simple interpretation of democracy as 'the government by people who are freely elected by and responsible to the electorates'. This interpretation underpins the relationship between the people elected to govern or lead and those who elected them to the leadership position. It suffices to say however, that it was Abraham Lincoln's (1809-

1865) definition that gave democracy its popular meaning. Lincoln expressed democracy as ‘government of the people, by the people and for the people. This expression “of the people” points to the power of citizens to choose those to rule and to ensure that they are governed in conformity with the general good of the society. In the same way, the expression “of the people” suggests that democracy is a system of government whose constitutional rules, principles and procedures are set up by the people themselves. In this regard, democracy enables people to participate in decision making concerning their lives, community and society (Gyekye 1997:133-134, Busia 1975:453-455). This understanding of democracy stresses the notion of the people which place democracy as a system that gives institutional expression to the will of the people. It also recognizes the inalienable rights and power of the governed to remove any government that no longer serves the general good of the community.

Lincoln’s traditional expression of democracy as considered above has led to many other definitions from various scholars. In the words Karl Cohen (1971:7) democracy is that system of community government in which by and large the members of the community participate or may participate directly in the making of decision which affects them all. This definition emphasized the notion of equality and direct participation implicit in Greek version of direct democracy. The modern democracy concerns participation through elected representatives and majority rule. In line with this, Phillips Shively (1991:322) defines democracy as a state in which all fully qualified citizens vote at regular intervals to choose, among alternatives candidates, the people who will be in charge of setting the state’s policies. Santon reconstructing Locke’s definition of democracy define democracy as the “rule of the entire people who are the source of the political power of the government of the day” (Santon, 1965: 17- 19, Sabine 1973:844)

From the various definitions of democracy considered above, we can infer two meanings for the concept:

1. It means that member of the society should have the chance to participate either directly or indirectly in decision making and the governance of the society. In this sense, democracy means ‘people rule’.
2. Also that the will of the majority will prevail.

Democracy, whether it is direct or indirect rule through representatives, has been a widely desired and accepted political ideology and its practice considered the best form of government the world over. These consideration and acceptance is underpin by the basic values that are inherent in the ideology and which promises good government and the enhancement of a good society. According to Adegboyega (2010: 59) the values of democracy includes the following: the belief in and the acceptance of the supremacy of the people, the dignity of man, the rights of the citizens to free will, self-expression, free choice among existing association, freedom of choice among contemporaneously competing alternatives especially in the political game and social justice. Considering these cardinal endearing values of democracy, he contends that democracy is most likely to be the ultimate of human kinds.

Our understanding of democracy from the above indicates that any democratic government is or must be based on the consent of the governed. It is an ideology that is concerned with how political decisions are made, the procedure that enables ordinary citizens to participate in the making of such decisions, the need to create a sense of belonging, promote equality and togetherness among citizens. If we bear this in mind, it is an obvious reason why from inception, Nigeria, which consists of various ethnic groups, with tens of traditional languages and different cultural backgrounds has to adopt a parliamentary democracy. This is to enable every part constituting the country to have a say in their governance. The objective and aspiration have been to have at the heart of the country’s political arrangement equality, unity, peace, truth, love and altruism that are democratic virtues which to their mind, if imbibed, will sustain the country called Nigeria.

The underlying idea of course is that if a large number of people participate in the making of governmental decisions; their decisions would be the one that produce liberty, equality and justice for the greatest number of citizens. These underlying ideas was drawn from the familiar descriptions of democracy as ‘government of the people by the people and for the people.’ Furthermore, democracy underscores certain assumption about human nature, mainly that the ordinary person is rational enough to use his political influence for the purpose of fostering democratic values. It also requires that the majority know their rights and obligations and also their responsibilities as citizens. They can stand up and demand for their right when due from the officials and must keep an eagle eye on officials to ensure that they perform their duties constitutionally and efficiently. To enable this, democracy dictates that government should not only be responsible to the people but that political power itself should emanate from the popular will of the people. The supreme power is vested in the generality of the citizen. In other words, the people possess the right to withdraw their support for any candidate or representative, if they do not perform to expectation through ‘power of recall’. Also, the citizens have the right to disobey any order or refuse to comply with any policy that appears dictatorial and which is not in the interest of the citizens without any form of victimization.

### III. The Idea of National Development

Development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism. It is a difficult word to define. However, attempts have been made by scholars to conceptualize it. For instance, Gboyega (2003: 6-7) define development as an idea that embraces all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well-being of all citizens, not the leaders and the rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today's consumption does not affect their future. It also demands that poverty and inequalities of access to the good things of life be removed or reduced to its barest minimum. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances.

To Chrisman (1984), development is a process of societal advancement, where improvements in the well-being of people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. Suffice to say here that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves socio-political exercises. Indeed it encompasses all facets of societal life. According to Ogundowole (1988: 91), development is "the desire and ability to use what is available to continuously improve the qualities of life, liberate people from the hazardous power and influence of natural geophysical and world historical environment."

An understanding of the above examined meaning of development shows that development can be conceptualized as the progressive movement of a nation, which involves not only economic growth, but also some notions of equitable distribution of resources, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. If we grant this meaning, then, national development can be described as the overall development of socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. It is therefore imperative to say that the pride of any government ought to be the attainment of development in such a way that its citizens would derive natural attachment to governance.

Despite the adoption of democracy as the political ideology that can facilitate the attainment of developmental objectives in the country, lack of development and inequality persist. The gap between the few rich individuals and the poor is widening on daily basis. Majority of Nigerians lives in abject poverty. The problem of unemployment, urban population, rural stagnation, economic depression and decay of social infrastructure stares the country in the face. And, in spite of the huge human and natural endowment and the various strategies and developmental plans the hopes of development is becoming difficult, just as the political arrangement of the country has not in any way encouraged the realization of developmental goals and objectives.

### IV. The Challenges against the Nigerian State

From the above analysis of the idea of democracy and development, it can be argued that the expected positive influence that the values of democracy would have on the citizens in particular and the country in general underpins the reason for its adoption. These values is to enhance the connection between the leadership of the state and the citizens. The cooperation that ensues from this will promote unity, social order, tolerance, justice, public interest and growth. All these are indices of national development. However, the important questions that agitate the mind are, how is Nigeria faring under democratic practice? Has democracy been able to realize its values? Has politics been able to realize its true essence in the society? These questions become necessary given the state of the country, which can make one to classify the country as a failed state. The political arena has remain volatile; insecurity, lack of social order and disunity have been rearing their heads in the recent past and the traits of underdevelopment is clearly seen in every sectors of the country.

#### Crises in Nigeria

Though, Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural and human resources, however, the country has always been in one crisis or the other, ranging from political, economic, ethnic and religious crises. It is obvious that in the recent past, the country has become a battle field where socio/ethno-religious crises have become the order of the day. In the Northern part of the country the insurgence of *Boko haram* suffices. The group which has been identified as a religious group in the Northern part of Nigeria is said to be agitating against western education, culture and other related issues. They believe in Islam and all its attending cultural and judicial system. Thus, Nigeria to them should be turned to an Islamic state. To achieve their aim, they engage themselves in bombing of churches, motor parks, villages, government offices as well as kidnapping and killing of innocent and harmless citizens and security personnels. Over two hundred students of Chibok Girls School were kidnapped and for over a year (365days) now the girls are still been searched for by the security agents. It is doubtful if the numbers of people that have been murdered by this group can be ascertained by the government of the federation.

In the Eastern part there is the Niger/Delta militants that have been involved various cases of kidnapping of citizens for ransoms. In some parts of the West and East there are cases of oil pipeline vandalism. All these have created chaos and insecurity in the country there by militating against the development of the country.

Aside the above, is the ethnicity crises. Nigeria is made up of over three hundred ethnic groups that span across the North, East and the West and South geographical zones of the country. These ethnic groups also do not share the same tradition, culture and languages, which is a sufficient cause of rivalry among the existing ethnic groups. However, it suffices to say that at during the period of colonialism, the marriage of inconvenience of the diverse ethnic groups was maintained and the diversity was united without any problem. With the exit of the colonialists, things started falling apart and the center could no longer hold. Regretting the action taken by the British to merge diverse ethnic groups into one in Nigeria, the former Secretary of State at the British Colonial Office (1952-1959), Sir Peter Smitters, was reported to have lamented that it was extremely dangerous to force diverse radical and social entities into single rigid political structure (Ali, 2004).

Though, the amalgamation of the numerous ethnic groups in Nigeria has been criticized, one doubts the alternative options that could have been adopted by the colonialists in administering a diverse group of people with diverse cultural and ethnic identities. It should be noted here that the large size of the country and the pluralism of the ethnic groups of the socio-geographical area, called Nigeria, have called for a number of steps to ensure its unity. A conglomerate of over three hundred ethnic groups, each having its distinct history, language, culture and political systems before the colonial rule, all preserved in mitigated forms with the British system of governance super-imposed and named Nigeria. Interestingly, the colonial administration, for administrative convenience, merged the various minority groups with the major groups in their respective regions, Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, which serves as the major ethnic groups were all brought together to form the country Nigeria. Through a constitutional arrangement the three political/administrative divisions – the north, the east, and the west were established. At independence and post-independence era, the status-quo of the colonial era was retained, as every group retained its traditions, language, and culture while sharing the common central institutions in a federal arrangement. As if what constitutes the federalism is not satisfied, there have been agitations for reversing back to the old regional autonomy of the different groups for the purpose of determining the pace of their development and control of their respective resources. For instance, the Odua People's Congress (OPC) was put in place by the Yoruba in the south-western part of the country to defend the interest of the Yoruba race in Nigeria. In the eastern part was the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), fighting for cessation of the Igbo ethnic tribe from the Nigeria. There is also the formation of the Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC) among the Hausa in the north and the Igbo Peoples' Congress (IPC) in the south.

It is important to state that while MASSOB attempts to resuscitate the call for a Biafra state; the APC were agitating for Sharia law and the demands for a confederation; the South-South were demanding for resource control. All these and other inter-ethnic /religious conflicts in various states across the country are all part of the bubbles that characterize democratic practice in Nigeria. They are caused by the historical structures of mutual fears and suspicions among Nigerian groups in a competitive process. The political ideology adopted in Nigeria, that is, democracy and federalism as an approach to national unity, has resulted to anarchy in the country. Fear, suspicion, intolerance, and greed have been constant in every crisis and confrontation in Nigeria, which can be described as the psychological fear of discrimination and domination. Fear of deprivation or not getting one's fair share. This we consider at the political level as constitutional imbalance; at economic level as uneven distribution of national cake; and at the educational development level as inequality of opportunity.

We recall that attempts to check the shortcomings in the democratic system culminated in the birth of many principles, like the 'quota system' or rather 'proportional representation' and finally the Federal Character principle in 1979. It also led to the establishment of federal institutions in most states of the federation, promotion of national sporting activities, and, more importantly, the National Youth Service Corps (N.Y.S.C) program, to mention a few. All these were meant to foster unity, alleviate the fear of the minority group, but it is obvious that the marriage of inconvenience of the ethnic groups is still begging for irrevocable divorce.

Furthermore, there have also been crises of economic sabotage activities. These include bunkering and pipeline vandalism, (Shosanya 2009). The extraction of natural resources such as oil, gas and minerals provides significant revenues for the country with which the government is expected to improve the lives of its citizens. However, the spate of human and material losses resulting from illegal bunkering activities and vandalism of oil and gas pipeline in Nigeria has become unquantifiable. So many lives and properties have been lost due to the act of vandalism and scooping fuel which have led to fire out brake in the Niger Delta areas and some areas in the western states of Nigeria.

Corruption has also been identified as another major crisis in Nigeria, (Gboyega 1996). Corruption can be viewed from different perceptions. For instance, it can be seen as or described as including the use of public offices for private gains, especially through bribery and theft of government financial resources. An overview of the Nigeria nation shows that the phenomenon called corruption is manifesting in various forms such as political corruption, electoral corruption, bureaucratic corruption, judicial corruption, bribery, embezzlement, extortion, fraud, nepotism and many other unholy activities that are clog on the wheel of social order, peace, growth and development. The manifestation of corruption in the political arena makes it look as if it is another defining

characteristic of democracy in Nigeria. Political office holders often abuse their positions by enriching themselves and their cronies with public funds. They exhibit flagrant disregard to judicial pronouncement. They pursue private interest as against the interest of the citizens who they represent.

#### **V. Democracy and Its Practice in Nigeria**

An overview of the principle of democracy reveals the pursuit of public interest as a cardinal feature of democracy and this underscore the general understanding and its conception as 'the government of the people by the people and for the people.' The underlining expression in the principle of election during any democratic process is the art of entrusting into the hands of the elected political leaders, the citizen's rights and freedom, which are to be managed by the elected leaders. It marked off the connection between the citizens and their leaders. As a matter of fact, the connection was more of a contract. The democratically elected leaders are representatives of the people. It is therefore expected that decisions that will be made, policies that would be formulated and implemented must be in the interest of the people and not the individual interest. But, the opposite is the case in Nigerian democracy. Decisions were taken without respect to people's opinion. For instance, on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2012 when the Nigerian citizens were in the euphoria of the New Year, President Goodluck Jonathan reviewed upward the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) by over 70% in the name of oil subsidy removal without any form of consultation. The National Assembly was not consulted and there was no public opinion poll. The country was plunged into a state of crises, protests were organized and the expression of the people shows that such a policy from the presidency was unpopular yet the president imposed a new price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) on the citizens without taken into consideration the feelings of the people about the policy and number of lives that were lost during the protest. Events that unfolded after the crisis exposed some individuals, private organizations and agencies of government as responsible for the misappropriation of over One hundred and fifty (150) million dollars which was spent as subsidy in the year 2012 and over Twenty billion (20) billion dollars spent as subsidy on Kerosene in 2013/2014. All those who were involved in the misappropriation are yet to be prosecuted accordingly. Aside these, while the Nigeria minister for petroleum was accused of spending Ten (10) million dollars petroleum ministry's money to maintain her personal jet, a onetime minister in the Aviation ministry was accused of purchasing a bullet proof car to the tune of Twenty-four (24) million naira. Neither of these two ministers and other ones were investigated. Given this and many other experiences, it seems the contemporary Nigeria political environment seeks to protect the interest of the powerful group in the country.

It is apposite to state here that many reasons have been adduced for the formation of a political society. For instance, the society exists in order to ensure peace so that the individuals can freely pursue their life goals without infringing upon other people's interest (Adegboyega: 57). To John Locke (1952: 124-135), the main purpose for establishing a society is to ensure that the life, freedom and private properties of the individuals are protected. According to J.J Rousseau (1966:246-251), the society is a devise by the rich and powerful to protect themselves and their properties against the attack of the poor, and to legalize the inequality they have created among men.

Suffice to say here that from the onset, the Nigerian democratic society was not created to protect the interest of only a fewer strong and powerful members and to guarantee their freedom to amass to themselves the country's wealth as they can at the expense of the vast majority of the citizens. It was created to cater or provide the basic needs for every member; to promote brotherliness, justice, truth, unity and peace. It exists to encourage moral cooperation between the leadership of the country and the citizens in order that social order, unity, growth and development are attainable. Thus, strict adherence to harmonious relationship, the virtues of justice, honesty, truth, peace, dedication, love and so on, could be argued to be the determinants of social, political and economic development of the country, as we observed from the adopted anthem and national pledge that can be taken as the ideology for the nation. It is the duty of the Nigerian democratic society to prevent the strong, greedy and unscrupulous individuals from exploiting and over enriching themselves at the expense of the weak ones. And, to ensure that every citizen gets a fair share of the resources that belong to all. However, the Nigerian democratic society has failed in the realization of these aims and objectives. The attending effects are the above identified social crises. The consequences of these identified social crises is that even though the country is naturally endowed with resources that can enhance growth and development; Nigeria still suffers lack of growth and underdevelopment.

From the above analysis, we contend that the reason for the underdevelopment of the Nigerian society, which is a direct effect of the non-realization of the values of democracy and which has caused various social crises in the nation is that there is a disconnect between the citizens and the leadership of the country. The political leaders do not see themselves as been responsible to the citizens that elected them to offices. The leadership's of the country shows no commitment to the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens who they represent. Policies are made and implemented without due consultations and adequate consideration of its effect on the citizens. The majority of the people are wallowing in abject poverty while the political elites live in

affluence. The pursuit of personal interest is the defining feature of the democratically elected political elites in Nigeria. Thus, since the gap between the leaders and the led gets wider by days, the citizens also engage themselves in various social crises in order to survive in the state where they are to cater for. The disconnection between the citizens and the political elites has greatly impaired the practice of democracy in Nigeria. The negative effects of this disconnection, which has been manifesting in the various sectors; economic, political, religious, judicial, social and so on, results from the wrong interpretation that the political elites have given to the meaning of politics.

The practice of politics in Nigeria has been after the order of Niccolo Machiavelli's interpretation that we called "Machiavellianism". By "Machiavellianism" (Machiavellian politics) we mean the practice of Niccolo Machiavelli's socio-political philosophy. What runs through the mind when we study Machiavelli's (1999) book *The Prince* is the presentation of politics in an amoral sense. His opinion is that, in politics, any means employed can only be justified by the realization of the desired goal. His view implies that the essential thing in politics is to try to grab power by all means: fair or foul. Having grabbed power, it must be retained at all cost. Thus, to Machiavelli, like Obafemi Awolowo, what is central to the idea of politics is the acquisition of power. They, however, differ in the mode by which the political power can be acquired. To Awolowo and many other political philosophers, power must be acquired through the people's consent and with absolute moral consideration (Ogunmodede, 1986: 40). But, Machiavelli identifies various ways by which power can be acquired in a state, which are; through war, through one's arms and skill, through the arms of others and fortune, through wickedness and nefarious means and through the favour of one's fellow citizens. Machiavellianism expresses that, to be successful in politics, one should simply ignore morality and use amoral means. What is important is that one succeeds in the end. The success of the acquisition, retention and expansion of power in Machiavellianism is very crucial for it is the standard (the only standard) by which all political actions are judged.

## **VI. Machiavellianism, Democracy and National Development in Nigeria: A Reflection**

The above view of Machiavelli, without any doubt, characterizes the past and present political condition of Nigeria, where politics have been practiced in an amoral sense. The practice of democracy, and more importantly, the acquisition of political power since independence, has always taken after Machiavellian politics. The mentality of the political leaders is incompatible with democratic mentality. No political leader is ready to step down for anybody. According to Joseph Omoregbe, "when election is conducted they use their incumbency power to rig it, manipulate it, and perpetuate themselves in power" (Omoregbe 2007: 43).

Activities that surround the means of acquiring power whether through coup d'etat' as we have experienced in the past or election, raises fundamental moral and legal questions. It also generates the question on, whether the acquisition of political power by the leaders was truly democratic. That is, were all the necessary values of democracy observed? Were values like, freedom of choice of candidates at elections, rule of law; independent electoral body; free and fair election and so on considered? An observation of events in Nigeria has shown that dictatorship, thuggery, attacks, use of money, molestation, threat, rigging, and all forms of electoral malpractices were employed to win and secure political power. Also, general enlightenment, political consciousness, political education of the electorates, which are fundamental to true democracy are absent. In fact, the level of illiteracy in Nigeria is over seventy percent (70%) (Ibid.). Rather than winning the heart of the electorate through issue based campaign and good manifestoes, the political elites capitalizes on the poor literacy level of the electorates as well as the high level of poverty. At every elections, political elites distributes money, food items cloths and other material things to the electorates so that they can vote for them and remain in power. All these means abound in Machiavellian idea of politics, and most importantly, they constitute what he regards as virtues that can be employed in the art of political practice. Like Machiavelli, politicians have been so shrewd, swift, violent and brutal in their efforts to acquire political power. To describe events of things in this regard, Omoregbe, argues on the experiment of Machiavellian principles since independent, when he contends that: "First, most elections are not free and fair. All elections we have been conducting since independence has been sham, with their outcome manipulation" (Omoregbe 1993: 131).

The point that follows from here is that Nigerian politicians profess to be democratic when indeed they are devoted to Machiavellian principle. This is because Machiavellian principle undermines democratic values and principle, which has as its basis moral consideration. In any true democracy, the acquisition of power and its retention must place optimum consideration on morality, the consent of the people as well as people's well-being and common good. The observation so far shows that political leaders have over the years acquired power for selfish purposes. In this regard, the phenomenon of political power in Nigeria has nothing to do with public interest and common good. The average politician in Nigeria in fact thinks of their self and the interest of their group alone. Politics, when practiced in this manner, is regarded as amoral politics, and it is this amoral sense of politics that informs Ambrose Bierce's (Owolabi, 1995: 8), definition of politics as "strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principle, the conduct of public affairs for private advantage". Experience has also

shown that political leaders have to respect the wishes and demands of their political godfathers (against that of the citizens) who would want nothing else than to regain and make profit on the ‘investment’ they have made on them either by nominating them at the party level or by spending on them during the campaign. The concept of “sacred cow” as against equality of all citizens before the law does not hold in Nigeria. Democracy in Nigeria can be re-defined as “the government of the few rich, by the few rich and for the few rich” or “government of the political elites by the political elites and for the political elites”

Thus, while the leaders remain perpetrators of injustice, treasury looters, unfaithful, flouting the law, tyrannical, despotic, the citizens also engaged themselves in nefarious actions that cause social crises in the society in order that they may survive in the already polluted system. This mark off the point of the disconnection, as the political elites are no longer keeping to the contract of good representation. The society therefore is plunged into a state of chaos, a state that would have been prevented if the true essence of politics have been allowed to take its course. The true essence of politics is embedded in the traditional conception of politics.

The traditional conception of politics indicates that the activities of politics ought to be guided by the norms of ethics. The traditional philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, see social order to be vital to politics. This social order to Plato (1945: 41-168) is usually formed in a properly regulated ‘polis’ and it is directed towards the common good of its members. However, the theoretical design and practical implementation of such an order are impossible without virtue. Thus, in the Platonic interpretation of politics, virtue, which he explained to be justice, is an underpinning factor in the enhancement of an ideal state. In the ideal state there is a good political order and political practice is directed towards the pursuit of common good of the whole community and is to the advantage of everyone. In the same vein, Aristotle (1962: 292-299) conceives politics as that through which the citizens can achieve their end, which is happiness. He holds that politics will inculcate into the citizens moral virtue that will enhance good behaviour towards other citizens and the state. Also, the citizens either as individual or collectively must also enable the state to attain its end which is the pursuit of common good and the interest of all citizens. In a nutshell, politics, in Aristotle’s view is meant to promote public good and preserve public interest. St Thomas Aquinas (1947: 90-91) corroborated the position of Aristotle when he asserts that the essence of having a political society is to enable the maintenance of social order, peace and all that will enhance common good. This is because the society consists of evildoers and those who would be inclined to disturb the peace of the society. The state therefore, is created to prevent immorality that can degenerate into social disorder. In a nutshell, the need for normative principles to guide human action led to the formation of a civil society and hence the development of a political society and political power.

Thus, the above, traditional philosopher’s position represent what politics ought to be and not what it is as seen in the Nigerian political elite’s context. The belief of these traditional thinkers, is that a well regulated state will form an order that will be directed towards the common good of its members and enable them to cooperate in the pursuit of ideals that were fundamental to humanity. Although, we recognize that the state should play a regulatory and, where necessary, repressive role, our contention in this paper is that there is a symbiotic relationship between the positive potentialities of politics and the values of democracy. Thus, the realization of the values of democracy, which we have identified in the earlier part of this paper and the attainment of good governance, social order, unity, growth and development in democratic society depend on how the idea of politics is construed and practiced. Failure to consider politics in the traditional sense will negatively affect democratic process and development in any society. We argue this way because, the values of democracy on one hand promise adequate care for all members of society, irrespective of educational status, ethnic group, financial status, religious affiliation and so on. On the other hand, the traditional idea of politics as argued by the traditional philosophers if adhere to will create an enabling environment for social cooperation, social order, justice, progress and therefore development. Furthermore, while values of democracy assure fundamental human rights, equality of all before the law and places power in the hands of the people, traditional conception of politics prevail on the naturally egoistic nature of human kind that is capable of causing anarchy in a society. Since a nation consists of different ethnic groups, culture, language and religion, its political administration must be properly construed and this explains why democracy is seen as a good political ideology.

## **Conclusion**

The need for a re-evaluation of the practice of democracy in Nigeria is fundamental. A critical examination of the contemporary Nigeria society shows that democracy cannot be claimed to have been well practiced. It is obvious that the values of democracy that ought to have heralded social order, unity, growth and development in the country are absent. This has made the political arena to remain volatile with various social crises across the country. Though, we admit that democracy may not be a perfect system of government. It encourages corruption especially in its method of election. It is a game of the majority and the opinions of the majority are always imposed on the minority. Aside this, democracy wrongly presupposes that the majority is always right whereas that is not always the case.

Despite all these ills of democracy and considering its goals it should be preferred to other systems of government. Democracy strife towards the well-being of the citizens. The well fare of the people is paramount. It is a moral system of government, which presupposes a high level of moral integrity on the part of the citizens and especially on the part of the rulers, a high level of honesty and accountability. We make bold to say here that if these goals can be achieved then the Nigerian state will be a better place. Thus, to save the country from impending doom of total chaos, the political elite must embrace the traditional norms of politics. Only the traditional conception of politics can enhance the true values of democracy and realization of its goals. The values of democracy especially, participatory democracy, which seeks to promote social order, public good, stability and national development cannot be achieved if politics is seen and practiced as the pursuit of private interest. In this sense the idea of development will remain an illusion in Nigeria. It is therefore expedient to point out that in Nigeria, the realization of any developmental plans that may be structured out for the country depends on ensuring that true democracy is allowed its appropriate status in the country.

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