

Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria 1999-2012

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Abstract

Democracy is a system of government through which the people choose their leaders and hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. The people decide who will represent them in parliament, and who will head the government at the national and local levels. They do so by choosing between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections. It is also designed to allow all citizen irrespective of their social status, religion, ethnic or gender status to have a voice in decision making, thereby promoting good governance and enhance socio-economic development of the country. The question is, to what extent has this principle been achieved in contemporary Nigeria? The paper argues that issues such as corruption, ethnic militancy, pipe line vandalization, kidnapping, thuggery, child trafficking, corruption, lack of observance of rule of law, honesty, transparency and violent ethno-religious crisis are the bane of good governance and accelerated socio-economic development in Nigeria. The paper therefore suggests that for democracy and good governance to thrive in Nigeria as a parameter for achieving rapid socio-economic development, the system must observe the rule of law, transparency and accountability. Systematic and logical opinions, that can accelerate socio-political and economic development especially that of the opposition party, should be accommodated in Nigeria political system.

Keywords: Democracy, Good Governance, Decision Making, Corruption, Rule of law

1. Introduction

One of the basic conditions for democratic rule anywhere in the world is the acceptance of constitutionally infused limits to the holding of elective office. As many political philosophers have argued over the ages, such limitations are necessary in order to safeguard the sovereignty of the people by constantly reminding, those who offer themselves for public service that they are servants of the people not masters. Democracy in Africa has faced many challenges. These challenges are the reluctance of political leaders to share powers, to build consensus and show respect to those who challenge them. African leaders are guilty of centralization of power and inability to build legitimacy by promoting the principle that emphasize that *“the people participation must find expression in the political process”*. (Mohammed, 2006:8).

Thus, the concepts of democracy and good governance are essentially alien to Africa. These concepts are adapted to Nigeria's local condition and targeted to her peculiar problems. While democracy provides a platform for peace and good governance, it is also an imperative phenomenon for sustainable political system. Hence the greatest challenge to democracy and good governance in Nigeria is the political class in government and the political arena where they operate from where they see democracy only in instrumental terms. Indeed for a sustainable democratic polity and national development, a democratic culture of tolerance and accommodation, hard work and ensure the value of justice, fairness and equity, as guides for all activities are imperative. Democracy is a system of government based on the acquisition of authority from the people, the institutionalization of the rule of law, the emphasis on the legitimacy of rulers, the availability of choices and cherished values including freedom, transparency and accountability.

In essence, good governance deals with how those who have and use state power make efforts to achieve the goals or the objectives of the state through the maintenance of law and order, the provision of welfare for its citizens and the pursuit of national interest in the global arena. Governments therefore exist to achieve these objectives. Western democracy insists that “good governance” entails the existence of democratic institutions and values. Thus, the principles of good governance include participation, equity, the rule of law, transparency and accountability, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services.

2. Democratic System of Governance in Nigeria 1999 – 2012

There can be no viable democracy without relative peace, though relative peace is often assured by “good” governance. Both “good” governance and peace are therefore imperatives for a durable democratic polity. Thus, between May 29, 1999 to May 29, 2012. The country had been engulfed with crises of different dimensions and magnitude. Amongst the problems encountered was the electoral fraud where elections were fraudulently conducted and fictitious results were declared igniting unprecedented violent crisis in most parts of the country.

Hence politics in Nigeria is not a game but a battle. The political exclusion of political figures has been a major source of conflict. In addition, the blatant rigging of elections creates a reservoir of ill-will for the so called winners. Seeing no prospects of peaceful changes, the aggrieved often take the violent route. The Jos crises of 2001 and 2008 are good examples of violent conflict which started as electoral problems but later took ethno-religion coloration. More so, the presidential elections of 2011 witnessed serious crisis in the northern parts of the country where many churches were burnt, many lives and properties were destroyed.

However, within the period under review the Nigeria youths have become very restive and flippant, they got engaged in violent armed robbery, ethnic militancy, kidnapping especially in the Niger-Delta region. In most of the violent attacks which the various militant groups have waged, the youths are the primary executors, wielding offensive and dangerous weapons, looting, maiming, raping, vandalizing pipelines and kidnapping expatriates oil workers and Nigerian bigwigs. To these set of youths, the issue had gone beyond that of resource control agitation. To them it is now a means to an end, a lucrative business from which huge money is made. (Tola, 2007:30). Thuggery is another turf also where Nigerian youths have excelled. The youths are ready weapons in the hands of political “warlords” who often equip them with dangerous weapons with which they unleash reigns of terror on perceived political opponents. In most of this situation, the youths are often used as cannon folders. Some of them go out of their way to form primordial groups that help politicians to win elections and secure campaign grounds, all at a fee.

Although many Nigerians were initially shocked by the stories and revelations about Nigerian youths as victim of child trafficking abroad, it has since become a common feature. Many youths abroad have been turned into sex objects by the syndicate groups.

2.1 Boko Haram Insurgency

Boko Haram is an Islamic extremist group founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002, based in Maiduguri the capital of Borno state at the North-Eastern end of Nigeria. The organization seeks to abolish the secular system of government and established a sharia system of government in Nigeria. The movement sees Western education as a sacrilege. The group first came into limelight, following the sectarian valence in Nigeria in 2009. It propagates that not only interaction with the Western world is forbidden, but is also against the Muslim establishment and the government of Nigeria (Bartolotta: 2011). The security of the entire country is under serious threat and they have molested the people of Nigeria.

2.2 Political Intolerance

There is so much intolerance among politicians, amazing and yet disgusting intra-party squabbles have led to deaths of many politicians who were clandestinely assassinated by their opponents. Political violence takes place in some parts of the country, the political bigwig with the use of thugs defend themselves and intimidate their political opponents and sometime eliminate them the case of Bola Ige the former Attorney General of the Federation cannot be forgotten in a hurry.

Nigeria leaders have subjugated the people for too long through economic emasculation perpetual pilfering of natural resources. In the people’s bid to escape unabated bashing by their leaders, they have become desperate for alternative means of survival, through unthinkable machinations that vary from corruption, advanced fee fraud, ritualism, to religious violence and the likes.

Furthermore, most Nigerians lived below the poverty line while, their leaders and their cohorts live at the pinnacle of opulence. Their children and grand-children are in, Yale and Harvard while their subjects learn under trees. The Nigerian economy is still in bad shape, the exchange rate is about ₦160 to 1 US dollar, inflation hunts the hope for a good take home pay, some banks are up till now at the precipice of collapse, and the manufacturing sector has experienced closures in spite of the privatization process (the latest being the textile factories). There seems to be greater invasion of the market by external forces than investment; infrastructures are dilapidated; educational system is collapsing and health sector is severely in pains (Elaigwu, 2012: 24). In the midst of economic hardship including galloping inflation and unemployment, government companies are being sold off in the name of privatization. Companies could no longer produce at their highest capacities, leading to mass sack of workers. While some companies are closing down new ones are simply in short supply, on the other hand, Power Holding Company remains the “god” of darkness and has adversely affected the production capacities of companies and allied cottage industries.

Poverty and unemployment have become a cradle and nursery for various violent conflicts in Nigeria with a large reservoir of unemployed and unemployable marginal’s who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given course for a token. Nigeria is in the sludge of governance predicament (Ajayi, 2012). Thirteen years after the end of military rule, the conduct of many public officials and government institutions is so pervasively marked by violence and corruption as to more resemble criminal activity than democratic governance. Indeed, the evil effects of bad governance in form of corruption, total lack of security and welfare have all become part of daily lives in Nigeria.

2.3 Corruption

High level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development. Nigeria state is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry. A very good plan supervised by a thoroughly corrupt state can hardly do a thorough and good job (Mimiko, 1998; Nwokora, 1990). With the high level of corruption, the country has been given a bad image globally; the citizens are also smeared, scorned and rough handled at most international ports. It is highly disheartening that despite the anti-corruption crusade of former president Olusegun Obasanjo's administration through the two institutions Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) created for this purpose corruption has not abated, instead it has sunk deeper into the heart of the nation. Primitive accumulation by the self adulated *nouveaux riche* has dealt serious blow to the developmental efforts of the nation leaving the poor to scamper around for the left over crumbs.

Another factor is the mono-economic base of the country. The country largely depends on crude oil for her survival to the detriment of other resources. All other sectors of the economy are neglected, for instance agriculture which constitutes the main stay of the Nigeria economy in the 1950s and 1960s, has been thrown into limbo over the years. How would government encourage export promotion when there is virtually nothing to export? The economy is not diversified and this is not suitable for a sustainable development (Mimiko, 1998) Despite these problems witnessed within 1999-2012 time frame, it is worthy of note that democracy provides rights to individuals and groups. It expresses the rights or freedom of expression by the individual. Thus it is understood that the dividends of democracy since May 29, 1999 showed that the country has made progress and there is some positive signs. There is greater freedom of speech, though, worship, movement and association since 1999, similarly, the parameters of political contestation through political parties have witness positive changes even if political parties are not necessarily democratic in their internal structure. (Elagwu, 2012).

3. Good Governance and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria.

The search for good governance seems to be Nigeria's most urgent need at this point in its history. Most Nigerians believe very strongly that the factor which has crippled the country's progress in virtually every field of human endeavor is leadership and bad governance. (Nkom, 2000: 75). As the country staggers from one crisis to another, nobody is left in doubt that a lot of home work still remains to be done on how to fashion a more effective and acceptable way of managing public affairs in the country. Most intellectual and political discourse on Nigeria has quite understandably been pre-occupied with this dilemma of poor governance with a population of over one hundred and sixty million. The country is blessed with abundant human material and financial resource.

More so, improving the quality of governance is one of the major pre-conditions for arresting this situation of political inertia and economic stagnation. It is one of the important requirements for moving the country forward and transforming its immense potentialities into reality. What must be avoided in the search of good governance is the temptation to go for easy solutions. To search for a way forward there must be understood and operationalized within the context of Nigerian's history, culture and social realities. Indeed no other country's solutions or institutions will provide an automatic panacea for Nigeria's problems (Adedeji, 2000).

The model of good governance which can work and achieve best result in Nigeria will necessarily require an intelligent and programmatic blending of the lessons and experience of other people and the peculiarities of our socio-historical realities. Only political and administrative solutions which are rooted in the country's indigenous culture and experiences have a credible chance of succeeding. This implies that the search for a way forward must involve a return to the grassroots in order to draw from the political traditions, institutions and experiences of Nigeria's communities instead of trying to rely on sophisticated models of political engineering from Europe or America.

Good governance deals with how those who have the authority of the state make efforts to achieve the goals or the end of the state, the maintenance of law and order, and the provision of welfare for its citizens and the pursuit of natural interest in the global arena. Governments therefore exist to achieve these ends. Western democracy insists that "good governance" entails the existence of democratic institutions and value. (Elaigwu, 2012).

Hence good governance must also be entrenched with zero or minimal tolerance for corruption, promote true participatory democracy and rule of law in which justice would be seen to be available and accessible by all irrespective of their class, creed or ethnic affiliation.

Thus General Obasanjo quoted in Mohammed (2006), strongly advocated for democracy and good governance as the basis for Nigeria's socio-economic development. The fundamental elements according to him are:

- Periodic elections in which the electorates view the performance of their leaders and renew or terminate the mandate they had given them.

- A real democracy is one which people have choices between competing alternatives.
- A viable democracy is one which is fostered and strengthened by effective and independent non-governmental organizations, the civil society.
- An independent judiciary that imposes sanctions on unconstitutional transgression of social and political norms and regulations and also puts premium on protecting the rights and liberties of citizens against overzealous and high handed officialdom is necessary.

Having articulated these essential elements of democracy and good governance General Obasanjo warns that:

“An irresponsible arrogant or careless leadership breeds disenchantment, antipathy and disenfranchisement in the followership” (Mohammed, 2006:9)

A free independent and responsible press is a critical element too. He therefore recommended very strongly that:

A democratic government protects the different and most times conflicting interest of the various segment society, democracy must strive to include most, if not exactly all segments of the society in the run of things. Consensus or compromise must always be sought. A society that is run otherwise risks antipathy from within it. Democracy must anchor on the rule of law. (Mohammed, 2006:10)

Good governance requires responsible and responsive political leaders at the grass roots. These leaders must not only be elected but also be held accountable for their action by their electorate. (Akin, 2000). Good governance promotes accountability, entails the tolerance of divergent view for the accommodation of political opponents and the widening of the frontiers of politics through inclusiveness but not alienation and exclusion.

Consequently, good governance, must involve some institutionalized mechanism for holding leaders accountable to the people, for renewing or withdrawing the mandate of such leaders, and for ensuring probity and transparency in public affairs. It has been stated that, Governance focuses on the state and institutions, and the relationship between them and the people. It also emphasizes how rule are made and implemented in a society. Good governance also embraces the values that one caught by individuals and groups within the society (Tunde, 2000).

Good governance accords the welfare of the citizen's top priorities, promotes political accountability and establishes a new partnership between the government and the people. More so, good governance is expected to build an effective relationship between the people and their governments. Good governance is an essential ingredient of and tool for creating an enabling environment for sustainable development. Where good governance prevails, the government becomes responsive to popular demand. Good governance creates mobilization forces that encourage the people to participate effectively in the implementation of governments programs (Yaqub, 2000).

Thus, the essence of privatization and deregulation was to allow for private participation or simply, the handover of property and provision of services by the government to private individuals or groups. Wherever there is good governance, it provides an enabling environment for the development of the private sector and ensuring that there is no monopoly in social and economic enterprises. Olawale, (2003:35) contended that privatization democratizes ownership of business through sales of shares to wide spectrum of local investors. This according to him leads to equitable distribution of wealth and resources thereby narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. In a situation where good governance prevails, foreign investors are attracted into the economy.

Good governance provides good climate for political progress and this scenario to a large extent, affects business operations positively. Where there is stable government, there will be relative peace and this will help the entrepreneurs to easily predict possible future business trends. Indeed good governance plays regulatory role and also performs facilitating function for economic development. Laws according to Iyanda (1988) may seek to remove obstacle in the establishment and operations of business or provide incentives to reduce investors to invest. It therefore means the more law abiding, peaceful and stable a society becomes the more the expected economic progress and development.

3. Conclusion

Government as a matter of urgency must provide a conclusive and enabling environment for investment in power supply and refineries, for these are the pivot of industrial development and growth in Nigeria. Again, government must take more pragmatic steps towards securing the lives and property of her citizens against the rising waves of violent crimes in order to give foreign investors the confidence to invest in the country's economy.

Education, being the bedrock of any country's development, steps must be advanced to provide conducive learning environment, learning materials, improve teacher's remuneration and adopt a stable curriculum. Many youths are unemployed and some are even unemployable with this scenario, the high rate of crime is not surprising, hence parents need to pay more attention to their children.

Government must demonstrate and ensure high sense of probity, accountability, forthrightness and

transparency so that the country would be better for all. Our leaders need to cultivate the virtues of patience and honesty and uphold the virtue of “a good name is better than riches or gold”.

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