

# Democracy and Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience

S.M. Omodia Ph.D., FCIM

Associate Professor,  
Department of Political Science,  
Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria  
Email: [ostephenm@yahoo.com](mailto:ostephenm@yahoo.com),  
[omodiasstephen@gmail.com](mailto:omodiasstephen@gmail.com) +2348020651272

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n1p569

## Abstract

*This paper discusses the hyphen and buckle between democracy and development in Africa with specific focus on the Nigerian State. Its major focus is anchored on the positive transformation of the standard of living of the people. This transformational change in the lives of the Nigerian people was unfolded through the factorial analysis of the concepts: poverty, quality of governance cum political participation and national integration. The conception and argument of the researcher is that democracy as a political mechanism for development has witnessed minimal or no qualitative transformation in the lives of the people as it pertains poverty reduction, political participation and national integration as a result of poor governance. Thus, the researcher recommends that if democracy is to positively impact on development especially in the Nigerian State, there is need for the present democratic system to be restructured in such a way that the system is largely integrative of the people through their involvement in policy or programme initiation at the party level, communal and national level. Coupled with the above is the need for vibrant political opposition that would provide functional alternatives to issues that borders on poverty, performance and national integration.*

Keywords: Democratization, Governance, National integration, Political participation, Poverty, Rotational presidency.

## 1. Introduction

The conception of democracy here is the liberal type through which political power resides in the people. This political power could be directly exercised by the people especially in modern times through their decisions on sensitive matters expressed in form of plebiscite or referendum; or indirectly through their representatives in government (Magstadt, 2009). The import of this notion therefore is that democracy is a process and indeed a developmental process which encompasses the people. In other words, the people are so central to democracy in that when the people develop politically, then the democratic process is bound to transform to maturity stage.

Conversely, while the above paragraph unfolds democracy as part of development, as a matter of fact political development; it is also important to note that democracy itself could also impact on development. This is because the democratic processes, especially in emerging states of Africa, constitute a learning process in which democratic attributes such as tolerance, accountability, effective organization, and transparency are learnt and manifested as part of democratic norm for the good of the system and for political development.

In Africa, the need for democratization especially as witnessed in most nation-states in the 1990's is based on the conception that democratic governance constitutes a major tool for socio-economic and institutional transformation or development (Olagunju *et.al* 1993; Omodia 2007; Johari 2011; Omodia 2012a). Thus, the pattern of democratization was majorly anchored on the transition from either one-partyism to competitive party democracy or from military rule to competitive party democracy.

In the case of Nigeria political transitions into republicanism except in the first republic, were from military dictatorship to competitive party politics. Although it must be stated that under military governance, developmental strides at reducing poverty and strengthening national integration were intended through the adoption of various strategies (Aku *et.al* 2007; Omodia 2005; Omodia 2007b). However, one need to mention that political development was quite minimal as a result of the nature of military governance which is not designed to be integrative of the people. This factor no doubt also negatively impacted on the success of poverty reduction and national integration strategies of military regimes.

Thus, democratic governance especially in the mid 1990's and late 1990's in Nigeria was viewed as a functional mechanism that would bring about an enduring development to the Nigerian state. As a result, the focus of this paper is

to unfold the extent through which the present democratic experiment has brought development to the Nigerian people with specific focus on the concept of poverty, political participation cum governance and national integration.

In order to achieve the above stated objective, this paper in addition to the introduction is sectionalized into the followings: Framework of analysis, democracy and poverty reduction, democracy and governance, democracy and national integration, towards national development in Nigeria and concluding remarks.

## 2. Framework of Analysis

The framework of analysis is anchored on the elitist democratic theory. This is basically for the purpose of unfolding the pattern of poverty, political participation cum governance and national integration in the Nigerian state with reference to democracy and development. The elitist democratic theory views democracy as a process in which the notion of majority rule is ideal and utopian (Janda *et al.* 1997). The conception of this school of thought is that the democratic process tends to be manipulated in favour of the elitist class as a result of their organizational political skills. And although the democratic system unlike an autocratic system allows for various interests to be articulated, there is no doubt that policy output and political representation is basically a function of elitist interest. As a matter of fact, the argument is such that the democratic process could be viewed as cosmetic in term of majoritarian rule because the electorates are often manipulated to choose between elites or candidates thrown – up by elitist determined party primaries.

Conversely, the notion that the competition for the acquisition of political power is restricted to the political elites as conceptualized by the elitist democratic theorists (Geraint 1969; Robert 1975; Jenda *et.al* 1997; Omodia 2004) is an indication that contradiction tend to exist within the same class and that the elitist class is not as homogenous as operationalized by Robert (1975).

When the above stated scenario is related to the Nigerian state, the questions that come to mind are: what has been the impact of elitist dominated democratic system on poverty? What has been the impact on political participation or governance? What is the impact of elitist contradiction as regard the competition for the acquisition of political power on national integration? Could threats to the survival of the Nigerian multi-ethnic state be attributed to the manipulation of the state structure in favour of personal and class survival?

Thus, the justification of the elitist democratic theory as a framework of analysis could be based on its utility in addressing the above stated questions using the concepts of poverty, political participation and national integration with specific focus on the Nigerian Fourth Republic.

## 3. Analysis and Discussion

### 3.1 *Democracy and Poverty Reduction*

Poverty is a multi – faceted concept which encompasses economic, political, social, ideological and even technological dimensions. Economic poverty focuses on the inability of an individual or group to meet – up with the basic necessities of human existence. Political poverty on the other hand exists based on the exclusion of an individual or group from political participation. That is, politically an individual or group could be said to be poor based on their exclusion from participation in the political process.

Conversely, social poverty exist when an individual or group of people are discriminated against on the basis of social status; while ideological and technological poverty exist when an individual or group of people lack the value for developmental process or exist on primitive productive capability respectively (Aku *et.al.* 1997; Dike 1997; Omodia 2007b).

From the above understanding of the perspectives of poverty, it is important to accentuate that the dimensions of poverty are not mutually exclusive in that the existence of ideological, technological, political or social poverty in an individual or a nation state could impact greatly on economic poverty. For instance, a country that is lacking in technological capability for production would no doubt manifest attributes of economic poverty, and a country that is economically buoyant would no doubt possess the capability for technological advancement.

Thus, this section focuses on economic poverty as means of understanding democracy and poverty in Nigeria basically because other dimensions of poverty especially social, ideological, political and technological tend to influence the state of economic buoyancy.

As earlier stated, one of the reasons while Nigerians favoured democratic governance to military dictatorship especially in the 1990's was their conviction that democratic governance would be able to salvage the disgusting economic scenario in the Nigerian state which was to a great extent associated with long years of military dictatorship (Dinneya 2006). For instance while poverty was just 28% in 1980 during Shehu Shagari civilian administration, it rose to

46% five years after, and further rose to 66% in 1996 and in 1999 when the military transitioned to civilian governance poverty had risen to 70% (National Poverty Eradication Blueprint 2001; NEEDS 2004).

Under democratic governance, although the poverty level reduced from 70% in 1999 to 54.7% in 2004, however in 2010 there was an upward shift to 60.9% and it is expected to increase further in 2012 (Ale 2012) because of such factors as corruption and poor political governance. Infact, under the present democratic dispensation of the fourth republic, while the economy has been growing positively, the rate of poverty has been increasing. This could be associated with political corruption which has led to improved economic status of the few, especially the political office holders at the expense of the majority who live in abject poverty.

The effect of this scenario has been loss of confidence in democratic governance which has heightened military as a means of economic survival in most parts of Nigeria. Examples that come to mind are: the Niger – Delta militancy as a result of the poverty associated with the environmental degradation of that part of the country. This is coupled with the frustration and loss of confidence in democratic governance by the northern group 'Boko Haram' who called for the islamization of governance in the North.

### 3.2 *Democracy and Governance*

Democracy as a political system could be said to be antithetical to political poverty in that it is design to empower the people as regard political participation. However, if the conceptualization of democracy by the elitist school is taken cognizance of, it means that democratic governance especially as it pertain to political participation and majority rule could be viewed as 'ideal' which is different from the reality.

In the Nigerian state, the democratic process of governance and political participation is seen as a learning one. This is because the democratic structures and institutions are very fragile and coupled with the fact that the citizenry to a great extent manifest low level of democratic culture as a result of long years of military dictatorship. Thus, the democratic process is associated with low level of voter cum political education, party indiscipline on the part of party officials and party representatives in government, vote manipulations and political representation that is not people centred, weak party opposition among others.

As regard political education, the fragile and weak nature of political institutions in Nigeria, especially political parties, has led to a scenario in which voting is not base on issues. This is coupled with the fact that, political parties in opposition do not present themselves as credible alternatives to the party in government, the effect therefore is that the electorate in most cases do not tend to make informed decisions on what the parties stand for and how their programmes are likely going to affect them. This is in addition to the fact that vote cancellation is still on the high side and voter turn – out is on the average and this cannot be divorced from political education (Omodia 2012b).

On party indiscipline, the present democratic dispensation has manifested a lot of it. As a matter of fact, the period between 1999 to 2007 was associated with the cross – carpeting of elected government officials from one party to the other for the purpose of securing political advantage thereby betraying the trust of those who voted for them based on party affiliation (Omodia 2010). This is in addition to conflict that exists between party executives and party elected officials in government. A typical example is the conflict that existed between Audu Ogbeh, the National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Obasanjo, the head of the PDP administered executive arm of government as a result of utterances that were not complementary to the PDP administered federal government (Omodia 2010). Worthy of mentioning is the conflict between arms of elected government officials of the same party as the case between the President Olusegun Obasanjo led executive and PDP dominated legislative arm that threatened impeachment against president Obasanjo. The effect of course was the overbearing influence of the Executive in legislative affairs which led to instability in leadership in both the Senate and the Federal House of Representatives (Omodia 2010). This is not forgetting conflict and party indiscipline on the part of elected officials in the same arm of government. E.g. the President/Vice President conflict under the Obasanjo led administration and the several conflicts between Governors and their deputies in most states of the federation.

As regard vote manipulation and political representation, as a matter of fact, elections in the Nigerian fourth republic has been characterized by a scenario in which to a great extent votes are manipulated and design not to count by the parties in government in collaboration with the electoral body. The fact that electoral victories of the 2007 gubernatorial elections in states like Ondo, Edo, Ekiti, Osun to mention a few were redeemed through the judicial process is an indication of the magnitude of electoral manipulations that takes place at electoral booths, collations centres and the announcement of electoral results.

The implication of the above is that political representation and governance is not people centred and this of course is antithetical to democratic stability because for democracy or democratic governance to endure, it must be built on the people.

### 3.3 Democracy and National Integration

At this juncture, the question that comes to mind is: If democratic governance in Nigeria has not been able to curb poverty, if it has not been able to enhance governmental performance in contrary to the expectations of the people on democratic governance, what then is the implication on national integration? In discussing democracy and national integration, it is important to emphasize that the researcher's conception of national integration is not limited to territorial integration or sovereignty but most especially it is anchored on shared value system, and belief system in the project called the Nigerian state and its system.

Conversely, unfolding events in the Nigerian state, especially in the Nigerian fourth republic is indicative of threats to national integration as a result of frustration and loss of confidence in governance because of such factors as poverty and poor political leadership or representation. These frustration and loss of confidence in governance have led to persistent demand for the convocation of a sovereign national confidence in order to address the problem of Nigeria's federalism, revenue allocation, rights of the minority among others, in order to strengthen the national belief system.

As a matter of fact, the present democratic dispensation has manifested traits of poor integrative mechanism based on conflict and mutual suspicion that exist not only between the North and South, but also within regions. In fact, democratically speaking, the Nigerian state exist as a divide between the North and South in term of power acquisition at the federal level based on the principle of 'Rotational presidency'. This no doubt explain the political topsy-turvy associated with the demise of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the president of Nigeria in May 2010 vis-à-vis the heightened activity of 'Boko-Haram' – the northern ethnic militia that favours the islamization of the north (Omodia 2012a) based on its expression of lack of confidence in the Nigerian constitution that favoured the constitutional take – over of the Presidential Seat by Goodluck Jonathan from the South. The implication has been costly and damaging to national integration because of the anomic scenario in the north especially after the outcome of the 2011 presidential election which witnessed mass killings of Southerners in the North, and the subsequent rejection of about 6696 Batch B 2012 Southern National Youth Service Corps members from serving in some states in the northern part of the country (Daily Trust 2012).

As regard intra-regional conflict, the present democratic arrangement and dispensation could be said to have thrown – up a lot of it in the history of the Nigerian state. This is because the nature of the conflict to a great extent is associated with democratic representation. A typical example is the conflict of 'indigeneship – settlersip' which is associated with political rights of representation and governance in Plateau State. Others include the Bassa – Egbira conflict in Nasarawa State, Ife – Modakeke conflict in Osun State, Uhrobo – Itsekiri conflict in Delta State among others. It is however, important to state that these conflicts cannot be divorced from political governance and representation especially at the local level.

### 4. Towards National Development

The discourse on democracy and development in Africa with specific focus on the Nigerian state from the perspective of this paper has shown that a lot still need to be done especially in the aspects of poverty reduction, quality governance and national integration. In order for the present democratic experiment to impact positively on Nigerians there is need for the present party system, though multi – partyism, to be restructured and rationalized with emphasis on membership recruitment, structure for political education, national spread to eschew ethnicism, practice of internal democracy and mode of funding. This will not only enable for party discipline in government, but also enable for vibrancy in political opposition that would allow for functional alternatives to issues that borders on poverty, performance and national integration.

### 5. Conclusion

The Nigerian experience as regard democracy and development based on the analysis of this paper has shown that poverty reduction, quality of governance and national integration constitute a major challenge to democratic survival and consolidation in the Nigerian fourth republic. The implication is that while these challenges could be viewed as challenges associated with democratic development, the conception here is that if the challenges are not properly managed and development integrative of the people, the present republic might go the way of past republics.

## References

- Aku, P.S., Ibrahim M.J., and Bulus, Y.D. (1997). Poverty and poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria. Proceedings of the Nigerian Economic Society, University of Ibadan.
- Ale, S. (2012). Creating a sustainable knowledge based and innovation driven economy, A Convocation Lecture Presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation of Kogi State University Anyigba, Kogi State Nigeria, 20<sup>th</sup> September. Daily Trust Newspapers, Tuesday October 2, 2012 p.1 and 5.
- Dike W. (1997). Understanding the multi dimensional nature of poverty. Proceedings of the Nigerian Economic Society, University of Ibadan.
- Dinneya G. (2006). *Political Economy of Democratization in Nigeria*. Lagos: Concept Publications.
- Geraint, P. (1969). *Political Elites*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Janda, K., Berry, J. and Goldman, J. (1997). *The Challenge of Democracy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Johari, J.C. (2011). *Comparative Politics*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers
- Magstadt, T.M. (2009). *Understanding Politics: Ideas, Institutions and Issues*. USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) Nigeria: Meeting Everyone's Needs (2004). Abuja: National Planning Commission.
- National Poverty Eradication Programme: Blueprint for the Scheme, 2001.
- Olangunju, T., Jinandu, A. and Oyovbaire, S. (1993). *Transition to Democracy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Omodia, S.M (2004). Elitist hedonism and democratic survival in Nigeria. *The Nigeria Academic Forum* 7(3):52-55
- Omodia, S.M. (2005). Poverty alleviation in a deregulated economy: challenges prospects for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. *Nasarawa Journal of Administration* 2(1):118-124.
- Omodia, S.M. (2007a). Governance and democratization in Africa; The Nigerian experience. *The Social Sciences* (2):134-138
- Omodia, S.M. (2007b). Poverty alleviation sustainable democracy in Nigeria: a case study of Keffi town in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. *Ph.D Thesis*. Department of Political Science, University of Abuja, Nigeria.
- Omodia, S.M. (2010). Political parties and party politics in the Nigerian fourth Republic. *Trakia Journal of Science* 8(3):65-69.
- Omodia S.m (2012a). Political leadership and national security in the Nigerian fourth republic: a discourse. *African Journal of Social Sciences*. 2(4): 90-96
- Omodia, S.M. (2012b). Political parties and the challenge of free and fair elections in Nigeria: a focus on Kogi State 2011 gubernatorial election. *European Scientific Journal* 8(3):188-199.
- Robert, P. (1975). *The comparative study of political Elites*. New York: Prentice-Hall Incorporation.

