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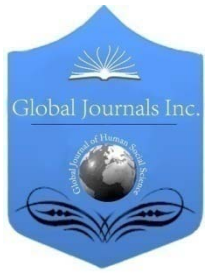

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Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

By Dr. Linus Ugwu Odo
IBB University, Nigeria

Abstract- After 55 years of political independence, Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenges of democratic transformation and good governance. All efforts by successive civilian governments to entrench true democracy and good governance in the country seem to have met brick walls in which for every gained step: two are lost. The generality of Nigerians had expected that the return of democratic rule to the country in 1999 will usher in a new dawn. These optimism, hope and great expectations were regrettably misplaced. The paper interrogates this state of affair and sheds light on those critical elements in the country's democratic experiment that tend to frustrate the enthronement of true democracy and good governance. Worried about the future prospects of democracy in Nigeria, the paper concludes with suggestions on the way forward towards the domestication of true democracy and good governance in the country, stressing that the time to act is now.

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Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

Dr. Linus Ugwu Odo

Abstract- After 55 years of political independence, Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenges of democratic transformation and good governance. All efforts by successive civilian governments to entrench true democracy and good governance in the country seem to have met brick walls in which for every gained step: two are lost. The generality of Nigerians had expected that the return of democratic rule to the country in 1999 will usher in a new dawn. These optimism, hope and great expectations were regrettably misplaced. The paper interrogates this state of affair and sheds light on those critical elements in the country's democratic experiment that tend to frustrate the enthronement of true democracy and good governance. Worried about the future prospects of democracy in Nigeria, the paper concludes with suggestions on the way forward towards the domestication of true democracy and good governance in the country, stressing that the time to act is now.

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I. Introduction

The history of Nigeria's democratization began at independence with the adoption of democratic institutions modeled on the British Westminster parliamentary system. Under this system, the prime minister who was the leader of the party with majority seats in the parliament was the substantive Head of government at the centre (federal) while the President was a mere ceremonial Head. From independence onwards, Nigeria has been grappling with the task of entrenching the culture of democracy in governance through its provisions in the independence constitution of 1960; and the Republican constitution of 1963. These constitutions have prescribed the British-modeled Westminster parliamentary system for the country.

After independence, the new political elite had the duty of not only institutionalizing the democratic process but for developing a political culture, which would buttress the inherited institutions from the British colonial authority. There were therefore, high hopes at independence of Nigeria emerging as a fertile and large field for the growth of democracy and good governance in Africa. However, by the end of 1965, it became obvious that the future of democracy and good governance in the country had become bleak. In January, 1966, the military aborted the new democratic experiment in a bloody coup d'état. The military, subsequently, held on to power for almost 33 years after the 1966 coup except for some flashes of civil rule between 1979 and 1983; and 1987-1989. In 1979, Nigeria adopted the Presidential system of government modeled after the American system in preference to the British parliamentary system.

Nigerian's short-lived democratic experiment after independence could be attributed to the following factors among others:

- Breakdown of the rules of the game of politics, which profusely polluted the political stadium and made politics as dangerous for players as well as spectators;
- Gross misuse of political power;
- among public officers including impudent political and economic decisions in allocation of scarce but a locatable resources;
- Erosion of the rights of individuals;
- Disenfranchisement of the Nigerian populace through blatant rigging of elections;
- Conspicuous consumption of politicians amidst the abject poverty of the masses; and
- Excessively powerful regional governments, which threatened the relatively weak federal centre with wanton abandon (Elaigwu, 2011).

These challenges made it difficult for the first democratic government in Nigeria under the prime minister ship of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to build a solid democratic culture and good governance. Indeed, for a country that was granted independence without a strong economic base as well as porous democratic culture it was expected that the military and the political elite would have been more cautious because it was a period of learning the state of the art of democracy. This was the period when democratic institutions were expected to be established and democratic culture accepted and imbibed by the state actors and civil society at large. As Mohammed (2008) cited in Yio (2011) observed, in this phase, success and goal attainment depend on how quick the leaders and the society learn to work on the basis of democratic principles and practices. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, politics were not driven by nationalistic and class consciousness but by primordial sentiments of ethnicity, religion, regionalism, etc with the consequent deepening of poverty and under development in the country.

Author: Department of Public Administration IBB university, Lapai, Niger state. e-mail: dr.odolinus1@gmail.com

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Democratic politics and good governance did not fare better in the Second Republic as well as the Third Republic. But since 29 May, 1999, when the Fourth Republic was ushered in, politicians in government have continued to use the phrase "dividends of democracy" which refer to the provisions of material welfare to the people, such as roads, rural electrification, potable water, improved educational and health facilities, housing, amongst others. However, It is pertinent to note that democracy and good governance in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world cannot be achieved through the mere provisions of material welfare such as roads, jobs, food, electricity, education, health care services and others since they are even easier to provide under authoritarian rule. As Elaigwu (2011) observed:

> In Britain, issues of economic distribution were handled before political rights. The success of the "Asian Tigers" lies in their utilization of authoritarian political structures for aggressive economic development. Democratization followed later.

Democracy provides rights to groups and individuals. It presupposes the right or freedom of expression by the individual. When this is allowed under democracy, the government will be more accountable to the people as of right. In addition, people can insist on transparency in government business and with this, leaders in government can no longer violate citizen's fundamental rights with impunity. Indeed, successive governments in Nigeria since independence have failed to expand the frontiers of freedom or liberty and respect for human and individual rights, which are the core values of democracy and clear indices of good governance. In the country's 55 years of political independence, none of the two experimented models of democracy i.e. the Parliamentary system, and the Presidential system, have been able to internalize democratic culture and good governance. There are critical challenges militating against the enthronement of democracy and good governance in Nigeria, which demand attention. This, then, underscores the concern of this paper. In simple terms, the objective of the paper is to identify and discuss the challenges to democracy and good governance in the country and proffer suggestions for a better democratic Nigeria.

The paper is structured into sections. The first section is the introduction, which states the problem the paper sets out to discuss. The second section is the conceptual clarification of the key terms used in the paper to ensure proper understanding of the underlying discussions. The third section addresses the challenges and prospects of democracy and good governance in the country. The fourth section offers suggestions on the way forward towards domesticating democratic culture and good governance in Nigeria; while the fifth section is the conclusion.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

Democracy and good governance are the key terms used in the paper, which require clarification.

Democracy: The term democracy like most concepts in social sciences lacks a precise single definition rather; it is generally a matter of intellectual supposition. There are various meanings, opinions, perceptions and definitions of the term by scholars and philosophers like Rousseau, Locke, Jefferson, Lincoln and Mills (Akindele, 1987). According to Elaigwu cited in Yio (2012), the concept of democracy is alien to Africa and needs to be domesticated to Nigeria (Africa)'s local conditions and targeted to her peculiar problems. He went further to define democracy as:

> 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 rules; the availability of choices and cherished values (including freedom); and accountability in governance.

This definition brings out the principles of democracy and the core one being the residence of sovereignty with the people. As Yio (2012) had argued, from its Athenian origin, democracy is viewed as "Government by the people with full and direct participation of the people". But democracy in practice even in Athens was not inclusive in the absolute sense as it excluded women and slaves who were integral components of the Greek city states.

Huntington (1996) argued that a political system is democratic; if it's most powerful collective decision makers are chosen through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote. It also implies the existence of all those civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble and organize that are necessary for political debate and the conduct of electoral campaign. Also, Cohen (1971) noted that democracy is a system of community government in which by and large the members of the community participate or may participate directly or indirectly in making decisions, which affect them. This means that democracy could be seen as any systemof government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in the governance of the people rightly belongs to the people; that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in the equal rights; and where equitable social and economic justice are the inalienable rights of individual citizens in the society.

Chafe (1994) on the other hand, opined that democracy means the involvement of the people in the running of the political, socio-economic and cultural affairs of their polity. Schumpeter cited in Ukase (2014) sees democracy as a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a

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competitive struggle for the votes of citizens. It is a situation in which people have the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the men who are to rule them. Also, Sand brooks cited in Ukase (2014), captures the concept thus:

> Democracy is a political system characterized by regular and free elections in which politicians organized into political parties; compete for power by right of the virtue of all adults to vote and by the guarantee of a range of political and civil rights.

Abraham Lincoln offered one of the simplest definitions of democracy as "government of the people by the people and for the people". In this wise, democracy is first and foremost people-centered. It also involves mass participation and basic individual freedom as its hallmark. Ukase (2014) stressed that democracy demands that people should be governed on the basis of their consent and mandate; freely given to establish a government which is elected, responsive and accountable to the people.

In spite of the differences in conceptualization and practice, all the versions of defining democracy share one fundamental objective, which is how to govern society in such a way that power, actually belongs to the people.

Good Governance: The concept of good governance defies a precise single definition that commands universal acceptability. This has given rise to different meanings of the concept. The World Bank (2003) provided a simple definition of good governance and an extensive detailed analysis of its major components. Here the Bank contends that governance consists in the exercise of authority in the name of the people while good governance is doing so in ways that respect the integrity and needs of everyone within the state. Good governance, according to this conception, is said to rest on two important core values, namely: inclusiveness and accountability.

Madhav (2007) contends that good governance is tied to the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. Ozigbo (2000) cited in Okpaga (2007) opined that before one discusses good governance, it is first necessary to examine the context of the term governance. According to him, governance denotes how people are ruled and how the affairs of the state are administered and regulated. Governance refers therefore, to how the politics of a nation is carried out. Public authority is expected to play an important role in creating conducive environment to enhance development. On this premise, Ansah (2007) viewed governance as encompassing a state's institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making process and implementation capacity and the relationship between government officials and the public.

Governance can therefore, be good or bad depending on whether or not it has the basic ingredients of what makes a system acceptable to the generality of the people. The ingredients of good governance include freedom, accountability, and participation (Sen, 1990). The basic features of good governance include the conduct of an inclusive management wherein all the critical stakeholders are allowed to have a say in the decision-making process. Accordingly, good governance is the process through which a state's affairs are managed effectively in the areas of public accountability, financial accountability, administrative and political accountability, responsiveness and transparency, all of which must show in the interest of the governed and the leaders.

It, thus, means that good governance thrives in a democratic setting; hence to achieve good governance, there must be a democratic system in place. By this, it means where there is no democracy there cannot be good governance, which explains why democracy as a system of government commands such popular appeal among the countries of the world today.Although, the concept of good governance lacks any precise single definition that commands universal acceptability, there is little disagreement over its defining elements, which include accountability, transparency, predictability, the rule of law, and participation.

III. Reflections on Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

Democracy and good governance are the most successful political ideas of the 21st century. Democracy lets people speak their minds and shape their own and their children's future. Many people in different parts of the world are prepared to risk so much for these ideas, which is a testimony to their enduring global appeal. The idea of democracy became popular in Nigeria following the rise of nationalist movements to demand for the country's independence from British colonial rule. This paved way for the introduction of political parties to enable Nigerians contest for elective positions. For instance, in 1922 Governor Clifford introduced elective principle in respect of the three legislative seats in Lagos and one in Calabar. This was followed by the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) by Herbert Macaulay in 1923. The development continued with more political parties coming on board and in 1960, Nigeria gained independence under a democratically elected government.

Democracy in Nigeria has come a long way in the past two and half decades with four transitional elections and as many as over 10 million registered voters (Aremu, 2014). On May, 29th 1999 the country restored civil democratic rule after a protracted military rule that lasted for more than three decades. Since then, the democratic system including the structures meant to

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consolidate it have experienced some stress mainly due to the hang-over effect of the prolonged military rule whose common denominator was the lack of democracy, accountability and good governance. The abuse of these time-honoured principles of governance was legendary and its negative impact on Nigerian's politics is better imagined than stated. Thus, after two and half decades of a return to democratic rule in Nigeria, the country is not anywhere near the realization of the ideals of good governance, which is the natural accomplishment of democratic rule.

In Nigeria, the exhilaration generated by widespread dehumanizing poverty and under development; insecurity; corruption; mass illiteracy; unemployment; amongst others has created mixed feelings about the desirability or otherwise of democracy. Democracy in Nigeria is going through difficult times as viable democratic institutions such as credible electoral system; independent judiciary, rule of law, etc are yet to take root in the country in the face of such flaws like massive corruption in every facet of the nation's public life. These flaws in the system have become worryingly visible giving rise to disillusion with politics. The ability of the democratic system to transform the lives of the people is dependent on its provision of adequate mechanisms for the smooth conduct of elections that culminate in the transfer of power from one regime to another.

This is an area, which Nigeria is still not performing to expectations. The lack of credible election has resulted in the erosion of political legitimacy on the part of public office holders. For instance, the 2003and 2007 elections in the country were marred by brazen electoral frauds. Where democracy is devoid of credible elections, good governance is negated and the sovereignty of the people is relegated to the background if not completely denied. The result is that majority of the people would become subservient to the whims and caprices of the political actors who are shielded from any legal action by the immunity clause; hence they conduct themselves based on their proclivities. Even with the noticeable improvement in the freedom of speech and respect for the rule of law, the effort of the government in establishing a peaceful democratic society has been bedeviled with problems. Some of these problems are systemic and therefore, have much to do with the way the institutions of democracy are used for expediency.

Others are attitudinal and hence, the result of the failure of the Nigerian state and the political elite to change their attitude of "business-as-usual" with zero impact; and cultivate a new mindset that conforms with democratic principles. Thus, Nigerians are not only disenchanted and disillusioned with the way and manner the government is toying with the public affairs but also lost hope in the leadership of the country at all levels of government. As Achebe (2004) decried the situation, "I am disappointed with Nigeria… Nigeria is a country that doesn't work".

In a true democracy, the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government. Nigeria operates a nominal democracy in which it maintained the outward appearance of democracy through elections but without the rights and institutions that are equally important aspects of a functioning democratic system. Indeed, democracy and good governance are the bases for legitimacy, social mobilization and development because of their responsiveness to the yearnings and aspirations of the poor majority of the population. Good governance translates into the provision of basic infrastructures, access to medical and health-care services, educational, industrial, and agricultural development of the society, and above all, the institutionalization of the rule of law.

IV. Challenges and Prospects of Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria

The quest for democracy and good governance has been a major pre-occupation of the Nigerian state since her independence in 1960. This aspiration has remained elusive due to many challenges, which have continued to undermine the democratization process in the country. These challenges include failure of leadership; corruption; Boko Haram insurgency; insincerity of purpose; lack of political will; lack of proper vision by the political leadership; lack of accountability in governance; amongst others.

Failure of Leadership: Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, the country has not had the opportunity of being governed by a willing and ready leader but those that can at best be described as "accidental leaders". These are leaders whom the mantle of leadership fell on them by default not minding their capacity, experience and in most cases, they were neither prepared nor expectant of such huge responsibility. This has been one of the reasons for the country's failures resulting from visionless policies. Thus, the 2015 election offers Nigerians a good opportunity to vote wisely for a leader who out of personal conviction and preparedness is offering his or herself to serve rather than someone who will get there before beginning to plan. This underscores the fact that most of our developmental challenges are rooted in lack of sound, visionary and result-oriented leadership.

The issue of leadership accounts for the problem of Nigeria since independence more than all other speculative and assumed problems often adduced by scholars. Most Nigerian leaders have shown lack of commitment for true nationhood and allowed personal ambitions and ethnic, regional as well as religious persuasions to override national considerations. As Chimee (2009) noted, the three

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major strands that account for leadership failure in Nigeria are lack of ideology; ethnicity; and corruption. In all the activities of the country's political elites in leadership positions, the three variables played considerable role.

Nigeria, today, runs a democratic system of government that is expected to promote democratic values of public accountability; transparency; good conscience; fiscal discipline; due process; amongst others. However, there is lack of credible leadership to enforce these characteristics of democracy and good governance. This is the tragedy of the Nigerian nation, which explains its crawling posture at 55 years of political independence.

Corruption: Another serious challenge to democracy and good governance in Nigeria is the entrenched corruption in all facets of national life. According to Joseph (2001) cited in Osimiri (2009), corruption has resulted in catastrophic governance in Nigeria. In view of the deleterious effect of endemic corruption on governance, various governments in the country have embarked on anti-corruption campaigns. For instance, the Obasanjo administration established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFFC) to champion the war against corruption. As Osimiri(2009) noted, the Commission gained such level of notoriety in the country that it is often said that the fear of EFFC is the beginning of wisdom.

Thus, an over view of democracy and good governance in Nigeria with regards to transparency, inclusiveness, and the fight against corruption tend to paint a faint picture of some improvement but the records have much to be desired. While the EFCC, especially, under the Obasanjo administration received much commendation from within and outside Nigeria, it has been selective in focus and alleged to have been occasionally used as an instrument of silencing political opponents.

Electoral system: It has been pointed out that in the political arena, even though elections are gradually becoming part of the political culture in Nigeria, they are typically manipulated and hijacked by "money bags" and incumbents, who deploy all state's apparatus of power and resources to ensure their re-election. Thus, elections in Nigeria are largely nothing but a charade to perpetuate the reign of the perfidious. Free and fair elections confer legitimacy on the electoral process. The wide spread electoral malpractices, which often characterize elections in Nigeria are inimical to the consolidation of democracy and good governance. In 2011, the outcome of the general elections in Nigeria was followed by the eruption of violence and wanton destruction of lives and property for alleged election fraud. If people are to have faith in democracy, the most cardinal point is that they must be assured that their votes count in determining who will govern; and in getting rid of a government that has failed them.

Rise of Insurgency: Boko Haram has become a disaster of un-imaginable proportion. The terrorist activities of the group has retarded socio-economic and political development of the country, especially in the north eastern region, hence it poses a major challenge to democracy and good governance. Since insurgency is inimical to democracy and good governance, the only way to remedy the situation is to fight it to a stand-still. Thus, mustering the political will to pursue a full frontal attack on Boko Haram is no longer an option, it is the most desirable course of action. Many Nigerians are unable to come to terms with, why a so-called Africa's best army has been unable to bring to an end this horrendous situation. However, the military approach must be backed by a political solution, which will address the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment of northern Nigeria.

Impunity: This is a threat to democracy, which is not measured by the existence of democratic structures but by the promotion of rule of law. Thus, in Nigeria's quest for democracy and good governance, the impunity clause must be expunged from the constitution, in order to domesticate the equality of every Nigerian before the law.

These challenges are antithetical to the achievement of democratic culture and good governance. They are no doubt, immense and daunting but not insurmountable, once there is the political will to resolve and overcome them for the enthronement of democracy and good governance in the country.

V. Way Forward

The enthronement of democracy and good governance in Nigeria are necessary for the socio-economic and political transformation of the country in the 21st century. Indeed, Nigerians demand good governance, justice, equity, fairness and real development and progress of the country in order to encourage confidence and trust in the polity. To this end, the following measures are suggested to fast-track the process of deepening democracy and the enthronement of good governance in the country:

- There should be deliberate government policies to strengthen democratic institutions like political parties, the National Assembly; the Judiciary; the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); Civil Society; anti-graft agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); amongst others. These institutions must be allowed to operate freely and effectively to ensure the growth and sustenance of democracy and good governance;

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- The fight against corruption must be carried out with total commitment from the political leadership backed by strong political will devoid of lip-service and rhetorics. Also, there should be a serious drive towards poverty reduction and inequality through people-oriented policies and programmes, which would address the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, health-care services, safe drinking water, electricity, education, employment, amongst others;
- The political leadership in Nigeria must imbibe the culture of leadership by example anchored on selfless service to the people with total commitment and sacrifice. They should not see political office as a means of self-enrichment and personal aggrandizement;
- There is need for attitudinal change through a re-branding of the country's value system to promote hard work, integrity, honesty, transparency and accountability at all levels of governance. In addition, people should be enlightened and empowered to demand from their elected representatives report of their stewardship;
- Political offices should be made less attractive not to entice money conscious politicians and allow those who are genuinely concerned about rendering service into seeking offices;
- Election is one of the foundation principles of democracy. Elections should thus, be conducted in a free, fair and most transparent manner such that peoples' votes count in the choice of who become their leader; and
- The impunity clause for certain categories of political leaders should be expunged to make them accountable to the electorate while in office; etc, etc.

With a sincere implementation of these suggested measures there is much hope for democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

VI. Conclusion

The paper has examined the synchrony between democracy and good governance in Nigeria, the challenges and prospects. The analysis suggests that while the country is not oblivious of the crucial importance of democracy and good governance in fast-tracking its development and progress, there are challenges, which tend to undermine their actualization. The paper has therefore, recommended measures to address these challenges in order to enhance the prospects of deepening democracy and good governance in the country; stressing that the time to act is now.

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