Volume 21 Issue 19
Originally issued as A5



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 21 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2021
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 160699*



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Africasian Democracy: A Political Prescription for Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract- The liberal democracy copied from the West is not working in Nigeria because of cultural and ethnic diversities as well as many other factors. The masses are ethnically disunited against themselves while the members of the predatory political class from different ethnic groups are united in sharing the national cake in what is known as elite conspiracy or club of capture. Using descriptive method of data analysis, some illiberal democratic traditions in Asia appear to have been strengthening developmental efforts in the continent while the liberal political system in Nigeria constitutes an impediment to economic growth and development. The Asian political system and the communal traditions in Africa can be blended to form *africasian* democracy and put into practice in Nigeria for sustainable development and good governance. To this end, it is recommended that in the next presidential election in Nigeria, a courageous candidate who can be violent in decision taking should be elected as president to dismantle the fallacious, elitist and wasteful system of government.

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I. Introduction

Politics has never brought happiness to the greatest number of Nigerians, obviously due to the way it is being played in the country. The bloated size of government is wasteful and it impedes accountability and transparency as a result of unnecessary duplication of roles of many agencies and departments. Politics had therefore become a meal ticket for predators who call themselves politicians. How far have the Federal and State Governments affected the lives of Nigerians, given the enormous resources exploited since 1999? This clearly shows that the so-called democracy copied from the US is not working for us. The democracy in Nigeria has been the coming together of politicians of different ethnic background to form a club of capture (Pat Utomi, 2017) or an elite conspiracy (Olisa Agbakoba, 2015) to determine who gets what and why, probably after misconstruing Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Asisi Asobie). Apart from being susceptible to corruption, the system of government encourages waste of scarce resources. The Nigerian government is just wasting all the resources to maintain the predatory political elite in power. This point is better understood if the salary and allowances paid to members of the executive branch as well as members of parliament are calculated. This leads to the enduring issues of high cost of governance and restructuring.

Democracy is supposed to be concerned with the judicious use of resources for the wellbeing of the citizens irrespective of party affiliation (Anyang Yongo, 1998) but this position has been negated by the Nigeria experience. In Nigeria today, over 80% of the masses are in abject penury while the political elite is living in affluence. This is clearly buttressed by the yearly budgetary allocations of larger amount of money for recurrent expenditure including humungous wage bill for government officials than for capital expenditure. This is an index of failure on the part of any government. The type of wasteful democracy being practised in Nigeria makes politics to be seen as a means of sharing the national cake as painted by David Easton and Harold Laswell in their misleading definitions of politics. Politics is about promoting the welfare of the citizens by embarking on massive production of goods and services, rather than 'sharing' or distribution of resources. In the name of democracy, Nigeria government is only preoccupied with setting up of political factories in form of agencies, commissions and ministries which carry out very similar roles in a bid to fritter away the oil wealth from the Niger Delta seen as free money. For instance, we have a police commission and ministry of police affairs. We have NDDC and ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. A ministry of Sports exists, yet we have several sports federations, and very many other examples. This is unnecessary duplication of roles. Some years back, Steve Oronsanye's Committee Report (2011) had recommended the scrapping of some agencies and departments carrying out similar roles to reduce cost of governance, but the implementation is yet to kick off probably because of myopic and parochial political considerations, as most of these political factories are used for political patronage.

Because of the wastages in government in the name of democracy, politics has become a gateway to easy wealth and as such, it has gravitated into warfare-a zero sum game played without morality, and amoral politics, according to Prof Peter Ekeh (1975), is destructive. People always die during general elections in Nigeria as a result of electoral violence as thugs are recruited and armed to unleash terror on perceived formidable opponents and to cause violence in polling centres where opponents are popular, to scare away voters (Odisu, 2015). How long would Nigeria continue

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with these acts of savagery? Very nice and unblemished Nigerians rarely win election because of the rigging prowess of some of the morally bankrupt political opponents and the enormous support from their lunatic godfathers (Odisu, 2017). In the same vein, Osayi (2015) described the monstrous roles of godfathers in Nigeria as regressive democracy.

It is sad that even professors recruited as adhoc staff by the electoral body to act as returning officers have started playing ignoble roles in the game of election rigging. One of them, from University of Calabar, was recently convicted and jailed for three years for electoral fraud in the 2019 general election in Akwa Ibom State (Premium Times, March 25th 2021). Professors are seen as role models in any society who cannot easily condescend to commit an infraction hence the electoral body took the decision of engaging them. As things stand now, even if all Nigerians were PhD holders, good elections that would enthrone credible contestants cannot be seamlessly conducted. This is so because politics in Nigeria is about life and death and some politicians can go to the extreme to get victory. Stephen Ellis (2008) talked about the deadly 'Okija shrine' politics in south east Nigeria and revealed what politicians can do to capture power. What this means is that the type of democracy being adopted in Nigeria is fraught with many pitfalls and has to be jettisoned for the country to make progress like many other nations in the world. The way politics is played in the country now can never bring out development, but misery and hopelessness.

It is such a shame that after over sixty years of independence, Nigeria is yet to get it right politically, economically and in infrastructural development, despite the enormous crude oil dollars generated from the criminally impoverished and environmentally degraded Niger Delta region (Odisu, 2015). Professor William Ehwarieme (2020) also alluded to the neglect of the region and the poor management of the oil wealth in his inaugural lecture and expressed concern over what would happen if the oil dries up tomorrow or if it loses market value. The country is presently the poverty capital of the world with the highest unemployment rate and very poor secular common welfare: lack of steady power supply, clean pipe borne water now elitist commodity, general hospitals have turned abattoirs, now worse than mere consulting clinics as described by late General Sani Abacha in 1983, comatose public tertiary institutions have turned revenue generating firms by charging unholy school fees, inability to turn crude oil to petroleum products despite being an oil bearing nation, terribly dilapidated major roads, and frightening state of insecurity as kidnapping has become the most lucrative business among terrorists. Against this backdrop, what then is the role of government or the state? A government that cannot prevent or overcome all these ailments cannot be a democracy because democracy is not just about conducting laughable and incredible elections periodically with hefty public funds to enthrone predators and buccaneer capitalists. It is about using state power and resources to build an egalitarian society to promote the welfare of citizens (Odisu, 2016)

Why is the democracy copied from the West not working in Nigeria? Politics is an interest driven game, but the problem in Nigeria and some African countries is that this interest is personal rather than for public sake, unlike in Asia. Individual interest in politics gave birth to corruption in public office in Nigeria in the second republic. Ethnicity is also implicated in the failure of western democracy in Nigeria. Because of primordial sentiment, religious and ethnic prejudice, everybody wants the man from his or her town to be the local council chairman or legislator or the governor etc. This desire facilitates the emergence of incompetent rulers. It should be said to our shame that despite our level of education we are still deeply involved in ethnic politics that breeds rancor, calumny and dissension. The only panacea to this national problem is to fashion out a political system that can accommodate the communal and cultural features of Africa and some inhibitive Asian traditions that can curb the predatory excesses of Nigerian politicians. The blending of these two traditions is what I refer to as africasian democracy. Nigeria cannot continue to practise an unproductive and inefficient political system at its peril just to please some countries, it should work out an alternative system that suits its condition, as it is futile to do same thing repeatedly and expect different result. The dysfunctional western political system that has been responsible for the earth-quaking corruption in Nigeria over the years accounts for its underdevelopment. There is no need dwelling on the corruption saga here as doing so would turn the paper into a novel. The reason why Nigerians are fantastically corrupt needs to be interrogated. This is a good research question for criminologists. The fact that the political system creates loopholes for infractions is not a criterion for politicians to have a field day.

With the unity among the members of the insatiable political class in Nigeria, no constitutional conference recommendations can be adopted to address the retinue of socio-political problems bedeviling the nation, hence the various reports of past confabs didn't see the light of day. Therefore, the thinking that a national parley would change this unworkable political system and truncate or disrupt what illegally accrues to the power brokers and their protégés is merely wishful. For instance, which parley can reduce the national assembly to a unicameral chamber of 36 member-senate and the 36 houses of assembly to 6 regional parliaments, as well as drastically reducing the number of ministers? This can only be done by a courageous patriot who has the determination to take volcanic decisions aimed at changing the ugly face of

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Nigeria politics and laying a solid foundation for the building of an egalitarian society as done in Asia. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to elect this leader in 2023 who will discard the existing constitution and produce a new pro-masses constitution for a new Nigeria. To support the assumption that the africasian system would positively change Nigeria, there is need to appraise the political ideology of the Asian continent.

II. Asian Political System

Asia political systems were built upon theory that reflects different priorities and needs. This accounts for the huge development achieved in the continent within a few years unlike Africa. Illiberal or Confucian democracy is practised in the continent that is why its leaders are erroneously called dictators by the West (Odisu, 2016). The leaders who transformed some Asian States into what is now known as Asian Tigers didn't pride themselves as democrats, they were just very disciplined, patriotic and selfless. Such leaders include Mao Zeng Dong of China and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, etc. Democracy is just an ideology and the importance of any ideology or a political system is not the sound of its concept, but the ability to bring out justice and order. Lee Kuan Yew believed that the ultimate test of the value of a political system is whether it helps that society establish conditions that improve the standard of living for the majority of the people. According to him, what most countries needed was discipline, not democracy, as democracy doesn't necessarily lead to development (Time: Asian Different Drums, June 14th 1993). Therefore, the political system in Asia rests on the theory of utilitarianism: striving to bring happiness to the greatest number of the citizens, as idealized by J .S Mill (Utilitarianism, 1861, Wikipedia.org) which should be the goal of any political system.

Civil liberties are forfeited for social stability and basic welfare which are the priorities. Political rights are curtailed in the interest of society, as societal needs supersede individual rights. This point was stridently made known by the East Asian States very unequivocally in the 1993 UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna. Checks and balances are disallowed from hampering the collective goals but there are strong cultural values that drive social cohesion and checkmate individualism. Checks and balances and rule of law are unnecessary sermons in as much as the government works for the interest of society (Tokashi Inoguchi et al, 1997). Corruption is checkmated with presumption of guilt unlike in Nigeria where there is presumption of innocence as enshrined in the so-called rule of law that encourages irresponsible public servants to swim in corrupt practices. Western liberal democracy would have been a negation to the economic growth and infrastructural development of the Asian states if it was adopted, as it undermines efficiency, stability and causes gridlock among institutions. This is why the States are inhospitable to the Western political system (Huntington, 1991).

The US had spent enormous resources in building liberal democracy in Philippine, yet many Philippine nationals had wanted to relocate to Singapore despite the absence of rule of law because of its fledging economy and superb infrastructures (CNN: Lessons for Leaders, March 28th 2015). It is an indisputable fact that illiberal democracy or benevolent dictatorship is much better than the liberal system given the exploits of the Asian Tigers and the underdevelopment and massive corruption in some countries like Nigeria and the odious social disorder in the West such as the unholy gay marriage. The citizens of Asian states are enjoying the massive, superb and world class infrastructures such as good roads, flyover bridges, tunnels, stable power supply, and good health care delivery system. Of what use is rule of law without basic social amenities and good infrastructure? Of what use is the right to abuse or criticize the president and governors and live without basic items such as power supply, good health care, and pipe borne water like a refugee or an internally displaced person (IDP)? Ninety nine percent of Nigerian citizens would prefer having basic social amenities to useless political rights. There is longevity of regimes that prevents waste of funds for frequent elections. No person cares about how long a leader stays in office if there is evidence of discipline and good governance.

III. Establishing the New Ideology in Nigeria

Western liberal democracy in Nigeria is all about the struggle for state power in every four years by politicians using ideologically bankrupt political parties. At the end of the day a winner would emerge and appoint supporters bereft of ideas into government, not to further or entrench an ideology, but to start accumulating funds from the public coffer in preparation for the next election. Hence there is always the case of motion without movement. The next Nigerian president that would be enthroned in 2023 is expected to be violent in taking decisions that can *de-roof or remove roofing sheets from buildings even without windstorm or tornado.* Such volcanic decisions, which would be captured in the new constitution, include the following:

- Suspending the 1999 constitution and writing a new one.
- Reducing the national assembly to a 36-member unicameral senate, 6 from each of the geopolitical zones.
- Appointing 6 interim premiers for the geopolitical zones or regions.

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- Replacing the 36 houses of assembly with 6 regional parliaments of not more than 36 members each.
- Creation of regional police force for the 6 regions to be headed by AIGs who must be indigenes of the regions. The regional police would be independent of the central government.
- Making Nigeria a federation with the approval of Resource Control and payment of agreed taxes to the Centre.
- Devolution of powers to the 6 federating units or regions
- Reducing the items on the Exclusive List to: defence, foreign policy, monetary policy, federal police, international treaties, immigration and customs and exercise. While both the centre and the regions to legislate on two items: judiciary and electoral commission.
- Making the membership of the federal and regional parliaments to be on part-time basis.
- Making the electoral body an adhoc commission to save cost.
- Scrapping the national youth service scheme to save cost of governance as the scheme has failed to foster unity among Nigerian youths.
- All elections to be conducted with option A4 to avoid senseless waste of funds.
- Voters in each region will elect the six senators and the thirty-six members of the regional assembly. The premier of a region will be elected by the victorious legislators who had received certificates of return. All the elected lawmakers in the six regions and the six premiers will thereafter elect the president.
- The president and premiers would have a single term of 5 years.
- Reducing the number of political parties to two.
- Abolishing money politics by reducing the cost of expression of interest / nomination form to N20, 000 for all the elective positions.
- Approving constitutions for the regions.
- Enshrining presumption of guilt in both the federal and regional constitutions to eliminate or drastically reduce corruption.
- Approving a uniform salary structure for public servants and all workers in the country such that applicants would not be fixated on a particular sector. This would help create more jobs as funds freed from sectors that pay jumbo salary to few staff shall be used in employing more people from the street.
- Prohibiting workers in essential service sectors from embarking on strike action.
- Rotating the presidency among the six regions.
- Abolishing state sponsorship of religious pilgrimage.
- Revoking the privatization of the power and steel sectors to pave way for investors who have the capacity of taking the sectors to a glorious height.
- Abolishing medical tourism.
- Redesigning the school curriculum to reflect the developmental needs of the nation and introducing free education at all levels.
- Abolishing open grazing of cattle and making Sambisa forest a national grazing reserve.
- Treating general hospital doctors who leave their duty posts for their private clinics as terrorists.
- Abolishing the monopoly in cement production and issuing license to interested investors.
- Approving death penalty without trial for any person caught with unlicensed firearm.
- Preventing the courts from hearing pre-election matters.
- Abolishing constituency project allowance and security vote.
- Selling off the ailing refineries and building modular refineries to be managed by private investors, and abolishing fuel subsidy.

If Nigeria must come out of the doldrums and become an ordered society, this is the way to go and it is obvious we cannot achieve all these in a liberal democracy that is concerned mainly with the protection of the selfish interests of the predatory political class. If the borrowed political system is working, how come the country is seen as a failed or failing state with all the institutions not responding to the needs and aspirations of the citizens? It is also difficult to get the above listed decisions approved by a constitutional conference peopled mainly by members of the political elite who would never allow their grip on the polity to be eroded. Therefore, the only way out of the quagmire is the enthronement of a politician who is brave and who is not interested in erecting mansions at the river banks in Nigeria and abroad. Such a man is capable of putting together a team that is not avaricious and that can deliver results within a short time. The new political order would put an end to insecurity, unemployment and the perennial agitation for secession as well as fostering national unity and integration.

People who would frown at this prescription are those who are milking the country under the guise of rule of law or rule of men. Many Nigerians are in Dubai acquiring properties despite the fact that UAE does not practise liberal democracy. What this means is that disciplined leadership is better than western democracy. The major source of revenue in Singapore is the seaport, and with disciplined leadership, there are state of the art infrastructures that are lacking in an oil-rich Nigeria because liberal democracy has opened doors for incompetent and amoral politicians to capture and misuse state power. South Korea, Japan and China are

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ruling the world in terms of electronics, automobiles, railway, power generation, health care, etc. This is as result of disciplined leadership and the sanctity of societal needs superseding individualism.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Nigeria is well endowed with mineral resources but there is nothing to show for all the blessings of nature because the liberal political system had created loopholes for the mismanagement of the national wealth by myopic and predatory rulers. Some Asian countries that are not as endowed as Nigeria are making waves in the provision of secular common welfare as well as in economic and infrastructural development. The great men behind these exploits in Asia are disciplined leaders who are enviously seen as dictators by the West.

The liberal political system also makes it possible for incompetent, corrupt and gutless politicians to emerge. The problems of unemployment, extreme poverty, out of school children, frightening insecurity and poor power supply are as a result of clueless leadership, hence Nigeria has become the world capital of poverty (Borgen, 2020). The shameful inability of an oil bearing nation to produce petrol, diesel and kerosene despite owning four refineries leaves much to be desired.

In order to overcome all these ailments, africasian political system is hereby prescribed for Nigeria. It is a mixture of the cultural values in Africa and some inhibitive political traditions in Asia. If adopted, many countries carrying the yoke and burden of the wasteful liberal democracy just to please western donors and creditors, would understudy Nigeria with a view to adopting the ideology because of the massive development the new ideology would trigger.

It is recommended that:

Eligible voters should vote massively for a presidential candidate of any political party that has features of courage and discipline.

The masses should unite against the political class.

The youths should not fall for the antics of politicians wanting to use them as thugs to rig or disrupt the presidential election.

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