

DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE AND THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

Sunday Ichima (PhD)

Department of Political Science
I B B University, Lapai, Niger stste
Tel: 08035990922
Email: sunyich4u@gmail.com

Abstract

The practice of democracy is expected to facilitate political, economic and social development of a nation through easy identification of the needs of the people, deliberate rational allocation of resources and projects and the regular involvement of the people in the formulation of policies that affect them. In Nigeria, democratic practice has resulted in unanticipated negative consequences that have retarded the development of the country. Alienation of the elected representatives from the people, embezzlement of funds meant for development and the entrenchment in office of ineffective and self-seeking politicians are among the negative results of democracy being practiced that have contributed to the underdevelopment of the country. The paper has suggested among others, that, to solve the problem, remunerations of political office holders should be reviewed downwards , corruption be more vigorously checked and limitations be placed on the length of time any person can occupy political offices.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, underdevelopment, politics, corruption

Introduction

Democracy is the practice of governing a people where the choice of those to govern is determined by the governed and where the public decisions affecting the people are decided by the agreement of the majority of the representatives of the people. To the Webster's Dictionary, 'it is a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives'

Some of the basic features of democracy are:

- a) An elected or selected set of representatives of the people making policies for and on behalf of the majority
- b) Conduct of elections that are held periodically to select or elect the representatives
- c) Powers devolved to the elected to make decisions on behalf of the people
- d) Existence of democratic institutions such as parliaments, electoral bodies and judicial systems

Development is expected to result from good democratic practice in that the later would ensure proper and regular consultations between the governed and the governor, prompt attention to the needs of the governed and deliberate steps at improving the living conditions of the populace. Where the people fail to experience benefits of democracy therefore, or where there are noticeable

negative effects of governance it could be said that underdevelopment rather than development is the outcome of the democracy in practice.

Conceptual Clarification

Development is the continuous and cumulative improvement in the social, political and economic status of a people. It is the positive manifestation of the effectiveness of national plans in terms that relate to lives of the people by increasing and improving distribution of life-sustaining provisions, raising standard of living and expanding the range of political, social and economic choices (Singh 1986)

Underdevelopment connotes the stage of lowering or obstructing development efforts through the direct or indirect actions of another party (Ichima: 2000). In this context therefore underdevelopment is used to refer to the delay of development due to the negative effects of democracy as practiced.

Governance refers to ‘the action or manner of administering a state or organisation’(Odojin & omojunwa ‘2007) It is how government actions affect the people in the country.

Politics is the decision of who gets what within a nation. It is the way people living together make decisions about what concerns them as a group. It could be decisions as to who gets ministerial appointments or where projects should be located or even how much should be budgeted for a project. It is the totality of decisions made and guided by political party interests.

Corruption according to Abdul-Ismael (2009) is ‘an anti-social behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the capacity of authorities to improve the living conditions of the people’ The World Bank quoted in Egwemi (2012) defined corruption as ‘the abuse of public office for private gains’

Statement of the Problem

Democracy is practiced and expected to facilitate development because it aims at coordinating the interest of every group within a polity so as to improve their individual and general well-being. In Nigeria however, the years of practicing democracy have left the nation pillaged economically, provided less infrastructure than expected and witnessed several destructions of human and material resources expected to improve development of the country.

This study therefore sets out to investigate why democratic institutions and by extension, the practice of democracy has not helped to improve development in Nigeria. Why has democracy as it is practiced in Nigeria not created enabling environment in which policy formulation and implementation would enhance speedy development of the nation?

Theoretical Framework

There is a school of thought that tries to explain the low level of development in developing countries as a consequence of poor governance in their countries. The school of thought among who is Ikubaje argues that the level of development in developing countries cannot be compared to that of the developed countries because there are environmental circumstances constraining developing countries. They argued that the high level of development in developed countries is a function of low level of corruption and maladministration. This has made resources available for development. Scholars like Ikubaje (2006) argue that the weak and poor economy of developing countries breed corruption which hampers good governance and consequently limits development because the limited financial resources is corruptly utilized.

This study uses this theoretical framework to explain the continued underdevelopment of Nigeria caused by continued poor governance resulting from uncontrolled corruption and mismanagement of public funds, poor planning and rigged elections that put wrong persons in political elective and appointed offices.

An Overview of Democratic practice in Nigeria

The democratic structure in Nigeria is patterned on three layers: the Federal, the state and the local government levels. Each of these levels of government are constitutionally empowered to function with financial, manpower and legislative outlays to enable them perform their roles. Elections are held periodically to determine the political party and consequently the people to play specific roles within the three layers of government. The country has thirty six (36) states and a federal capital territory and 774 local government areas. It operates a federal system of government with a strong central control

Nigeria is a multi-party system with two political parties-the Peoples' Democratic party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) as the major parties alternating in the control of the central government.

Democracy involves politics and politicking as a means of determining resource allocation within a polity. In Nigeria the practice of democracy has been with attendant negative consequences that have resulted in underdevelopment of Nigeria. From resource allocations to state/local government creations and poor management of political interests and party supporters, the practice of democracy has become the undoing of development in Nigeria.

Democracy is concerned with the authoritative allocation of the resources which is used to fund development projects .The persistent underdevelopment of Nigeria, particularly the rural areas and lack of efficiency in the general distribution of goods and services in the country has been attributed to poor democratic practice and consequent inefficiency of the public service. The 1989 World Bank Report on Sub-Saharan Africa stated that 'underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is the crisis of governance'. Governance connotes the exercise of legitimate political power to manage the nation's affairs. The arbitrary use of power arising from non-

legitimate possession of political power and the attendant politicking over resources meant for development and social services is known to have resulted in the state of poor performance of the nation's development efforts.

The position of this paper is not that the practice of democracy is bad in its totality but that in Nigeria, its unanticipated negative consequences have led to the underdevelopment of the country rather than the intended purposes. This paper therefore focuses on how democracy in practice has become the bane of development in Nigeria.

Unanticipated Consequences of Democracy in practice in Nigeria

Democracy in Nigeria since independence has witnessed the ascendance of the politically strong at the local, states and federal levels of governance. The political parties in power and by extension the politicians in power do not necessarily possess any concrete ideological attractions or identifiable manifestoes as springboards to power. Those that have occupied positions of power at the three tiers of government can therefore not lay claims to any superiority of ideas or good visions except that they had won elections as party members, mostly through election rigging and deceit of the masses through unfulfilled campaign promises. Vote buying and political thuggery have been the order of the day. The consequence is that there has been on the throne, a corps of rulers that lack utopia, vision or great dreams to pursue. This has had negative impact on the public service that would have no ideology on which to make policies or implement viable programmes. The public servants became advisers to vision-less leaders and so the job of national development became relegated.

Following closely to this is that many Nigerian political leaders at the three tiers of government where most Nigerians look up to, for concrete provision of development projects have no particular interest in development of their places having ascended to their positions through corrupt practices. In power therefore, they cannot deliver dividends of democracy to the people. Expecting construction or renovation of roads, provision of infrastructural facilities or even prompt payment of salaries to public servants have become neglected issues in pursuit of personal goals of the politicians.

The politicians specialize in personal enrichment at the expense of the public. From recent revelations they have built high profile and systematic means of drawing every available public resources to themselves. They approved for themselves huge salaries and allowances that are far higher than those of other public servants in the country. A sitting senator in Nigeria is said to be receiving a salary of about 36 million naira per month, a member of House of Representatives gets about 25 million naira per month. This is a country where majority of the Senators earn pensions as ex-governors and retired top military officers and yet they pay themselves such high. The money meant for provision of facilities to the people end up as salaries to Legislators thereby denying the people the needed development projects. About 3% of the national budget is said to be spent annually on the national assembly.

There is the tendency for Politicians in Nigeria to smuggle out and invest their ill-gotten wealth outside the country. They end up developing other countries rather than investing that money to provide employment and infrastructure for Nigerians.

Nigeria has many anti-corruption agencies like the Police force, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices commission (ICPC) etc. yet only selected few corrupt public servants seem to have been reprimanded because they belong to the ruling political parties that often shield them from the hands of the law. As reportedly said by Adams Oshiomhole of the All Progressive Congress Party, 'any politician accused of financial crimes and who crossed over to the ruling APC party would have his sins forgiven'. The politicians have made corruption so common and 'usual' that those trying to fight against corruption look abnormal. It is primarily an outcome of the desire by elected politicians to recover monies spent during their electioneering campaigns. All contract-awards are therefore shrouded in fake papers, ten percent 'kick-back' syndrome, payments for jobs not done etc.. The recent scandal of high level corruption in the Niger Delta Development Commission, the National Petroleum Producing commission and even the Federal Inland Revenue are case points.

According to Trump (2020) 'majority of these legislators are treasury looters who are intellectually barren but using the ill- gotten wealth to oppress the citizens of the country' Development of the country is consequently limited by such corrupt practices. What the public expects to gain as dividends of democracy therefore becomes a mirage.

Appointments to public offices under the democratic dispensation have taken the shape of patron-client relationships of putting square pegs in round holes. Amuwo (1996) says it matters little whether or not the appointees perform. Indeed, the criteria for performance has nothing to do with how well or badly the job is done but how much material self-actualisation the appointees and their political god-fathers have attained. The Public Administrators cannot control these politicians and so there has been a steady decline in the performances of this programme-implementation arm of the government.

The political class has failed to keep the sovereign obligation that they owe the citizenry by abandoning what electoral promises they made during their campaigns. In most rural areas there are no functional primary health care facilities and this is resulting in avoidable death of many Nigerians. The Guardian newspapers of November 20th 2020 for example, reported that 160 thousand Nigerian children die yearly from pneumonia

The politicians have made various promises during campaigns for elections but once in power these promises are disregarded. The political class in Nigeria of whatever religion or ethnic background have rather formed a cabal to keep themselves in power and replace themselves with their blood relations rather than allow any other person that can perform to take their seats. The people are therefore perpetually held down and the public service that should provide goods and

services or implement the programmes of the political class for the masses are made redundant and an appendage of the political class.

Political leaders have formed the habit of making the public servants who are not known to have partisan loyalty to their political parties to be redundant. This trend has eroded the principle of neutrality of the civil service and made the profession anything but desirable. Only public servants who can play the game of politics remain at the top of their career for long or are given offices of responsibility that give them authorities to make meaningful decisions. The public service has therefore been rendered less effective and no more as attractive as before.

Party politics and politicking in the democratic dispensation has made the rule of neutrality of civil servants to be of no effect. Many civil servants particularly at the top management level now engage in partisan politics or are at least politically biased. They now display prejudices and sabotage government policies instead of remaining politically neutral and genuine advisers of any government in power. This politicization of the civil service has given it a new coloration that hampers its performance at all levels.

To worsen the situation, there was the Nigerian Supreme Court judgment of November, 2002 which has allowed civil servants to openly belong to political parties. Since then, politics and politicking in promotions, recruitments and postings to positions within the service are determined largely by party membership rather than ability and seniority as used to be the case. This has introduced mediocrity to the top echelon of the public service, breeding inefficiency and low productivity.

Since independence, the cries by the educationally less advanced tribes of marginalization and domination by the more educated ethnic groups has resulted in the politics of quota system or federal character representation in appointments and promotions in the government offices. Good as this policy apparently is, there are cries of deliberate introduction of supersession and untimely retirement of top senior public servants to allow for the enthronement of more junior ones to fulfill all righteousness of the quota system. This is a confirmation of low standard and an approval of office politics and mutual hatred that beclouds genuine co-operation for efficient work output. This has been worsened by the practice in the Buhari administration since 2016 where all the Chief Executives of the most important public organisations and the public security outfits in particular have been reserved and given to one ethnic and religious group, resource allocation, particularly revenue allocation, between the three tiers of government has been a thorny political issue since independence. Various principles have been utilized including population, equality, derivation etc. But none has been satisfactory enough. The local government council areas where every Nigerian lives and need to be provided for, continue to receive the lowest amount from the revenue formula. This politics has made it impossible for effective provision of goods and services to the rural areas. Democratic Practice is therefore seen as not impacting on a good number of Nigerians.

In the recent past Nigeria has been plunged into huge but avoidable debts. As at October 2020, Nigeria's foreign debt stood at about 38 trillion naira when the citizens are not seeing the effect of these borrowings on their lives (Tribune: 2020)

Politics and politicking under the democratic practice in Nigeria has greatly been affecting recruitment into the public service. As Adebayo (2001) and Otobo (1992) stated, employees entering the public service through the spoils system lack the required technical and professional skills for their positions. Their performances have therefore fallen below standards. Instead of reaping development of human and physical resources the democratic practice has led to high loss of merit in recruitments of even lower cadre workers. Applicants seeking employments are made to pay bribe money that is higher than what their annual salary would be. They enter into these public organisations owing no one any apologies for demanding any bribes for services they would render.

Education which is the bedrock of development has been neglected over the years. Embarking on strikes has become the normal thing since the government does not listen to the lecturers at the tertiary institutions for improvement of the education sector. The University lecturers have been on strike for over eight months in the year 2020 and the students have lost almost a whole session staying off classes. The education sector therefore keeps deteriorating

Now and again the political elites embark on reforms in the various sectors of the economy. Reforms in the public service have hardly gone beyond retiring public servants in the name of right-sizing and restructuring by re-naming ministries and/or regrouping functional arms of the public service. These actions are informed by politics and politicking as a way of demonstrating action by those in power rather than by any serious rational decision-making process. And as Obanya (2010) puts it, the way forward is to carry restructuring along with re-tooling and re-skilling which would imply mindset and work practice transformation, so that the reforms can also mean value-added staff performance and service delivery mechanisms. Because such a feature is lacking in the politically engineered reforms they rather translate into staff demotivation and poor service delivery. Any public service that is demotivated is a signpost for underdevelopment because they cannot pursue the development goals having been disoriented and disenchanted.

Social violence arising from clashes of supporters of political aspirants are rife all over the country. Politics in a democratic setting as striving for elected offices has translated into destructions of lives and property in Nigeria. The fear of suicide bombers, assassinations and sudden violent clashes has beclouded the security consciousness of the people and threatened their development dispositions. The country has been torn by continuous ethnic and selfish clashes engineered by the politicians over little or no reasonable causes and so the pursuit of positive development goals become an illusion as no effective development plans can be implemented under such a situation.

The location of development projects such as infrastructural facilities, social amenities etc are determined by politics. The politicians who are able to influence the party in power end up bringing development projects to their constituencies. Areas where there are no strong and influential politicians therefore the constituencies are neglected and starved of development projects. Development projects are therefore not necessarily located on the basis of need and that accounts for why some areas are crowded with government projects at the expense of other areas. The neglected areas would conclude that, development has eluded them because justice and fair play in project allocation is hampered by the faulty democracy in practice.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

This study has shown that democracy as practiced in Nigeria has done damage to the development of the country. From project locations to poor project implementation, from poor policy formulation to poor policy implementation and the election of inefficient leaders to run the affairs of the people, there has been continued obstruction to the development of the nation. It is therefore necessary to make some suggestions on improving the situation:

1. Political offices should be protected from those who go there for selfish motives. Legislations should be made delimiting who should contest for legislative and executive positions in the democratic government. No one, for example should contest for senatorial or other legislative positions after serving as governor of a state. This will give room for more people to join politics and bring in their ideas for development of the country
2. No one should be allowed to draw pension or gratuity for serving as governor, senator or member of state or federal Houses of Assembly. This is because the four or eight years they serve has not qualified them as public servants to draw pensions or gratuity by the extant Nigerian public service rules and regulations. This will make the offices less lucrative and less competitive for the highest bidders
3. No one should be allowed to serve more than two terms in any political position and should no more be eligible for other elected political appointments after the two terms. This would give room for wider circulation of roles and better ideas for development. It will also reduce the do or die contest into elected offices, reducing the number of sit-tight legislators that do not contribute reasonably to the development of the place.
4. The salaries and allowances of legislators must be reduced to a reasonable level. The legislators at the federal level should not earn salaries more than the permanent secretaries at the federal public service. Similarly, the legislators at the state level should not earn more than the permanent secretaries at the state public service. It is then that the remaining money can be invested in development projects.
5. There is need to re-emphasise the political neutrality of public servants. Career public servants should differ from political office holders in their allegiance and flirtation with political parties. In fact, governments in power should ensure that career public servants

should be distanced from politics except as it affects policy formulations along political manifestoes of ruling parties.

6. Elected and appointed political office holders should be indoctrinated into imbibing in them the desire for selfless service. They should see their self-actualisation as not the size of their bank accounts and personal investments but more of what they have contributed to the development of the nation through effective implementation of government policies and programmes.

References

- Abdul-smail, A. (2009) 'corruption and its threats to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria', Mimeo, Bayero University Kano.
- Anyam, E. A. (2009) 'Religion and National Development', *International Journal of Development Studies*, 4(2).
- Chenoy, A. M. (2007) 'Democracy, development and discourse in central Africa' *journal of Development Studies* 50(1).
- Egwemi, V. ed. (2012) *Corruption in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and possibilities*, Abuja, Aboki Publishers
- El-Rufai, N. A. (2003) 'Is liberal democracy encouraging corrupt practices', *The Nigerian Social Scientist*, 6(2)
- Ichima, S. (2014) 'Politics and politicking: the undoing of effective public administration in Nigeria', *Journal of Social Science Tomorrow, India*, 1(9)
- Ikubaje, J. (2006) *Corruption and anti-corruption in Nigeria*, Lagos, Joe Tolalu and Associates.
- Odofin, A. P. and Omojuwa, K. A. (2007) *The challenges of democratization process in Nigeria*, Zaria s, A-Y Sule publishers.
- Onifade, C. A. & Ojukwu, C. C. (2009) 'Corruption: bane of sustainable development in Nigeria', *International journal of Development Studies*, 4(2) 46-52.
- Pottie, D. (2002) 'Party finance and politics in Southern Africa' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21(1) 5-25
- Singh, K. (1986). *Rural development: principles, policies and management*, India, kaegan
- Trump, D. (2020) #Rise#Up#Africa#