

African Research Review

An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 4 (3a) July, 2010

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

Democracy and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Pp. 31-40)

Oke, Leke - Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences,
University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
E-mail: lekeoke@yahoo.com
GSM: +2348033658474

Abstract

The symbiotic relationship between democracy and good governance is globally acclaimed. This is borne out of the belief that democracy premised on the principle of the rule of law and constitutionalism is capable of ushering in good governance and societal development. It is equally believed that democracy conforms to the principle of justice, equity and fair-play as a democratic state is based on consent and popular participation. However, since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, it is observed that the prolonged adventure of the military into Nigerian government and politics is such that has permeated the body politics to the effect that observance of basic democratic tenets seems difficult for those saddled with the political power and responsibilities. Thus the political class continues to dispose and demonstrate known military attributes and values in issues that are characteristically civil and democratic. Authoritarianism tendencies continue to shape the character of politics as reflective in limited regard for the constitution and the illiberal dispositions of the political elite and the civil society. Rather than producing good governance and developed the state, the

above scenario has resulted in bad governance and has further pauperized the citizenry.

Introduction

The universal acceptance of democracy as the best system of governance is incontestable. This is premised on the participatory opportunity democracy affords the citizenry in the selection and election of their leaders and representatives. It guaranteed some recipe for good governance and the fundamental human rights of all law abiding citizens. These enviable attractions coupled with the global urge precipitated the return of the country (Nigeria) to democracy on May 29, 1999 after a prolonged heinous military dictatorship. Upon the return, Nigerians heaped a sigh of relief that at last they are liberated from the shackles of unilateralism and arbitrariness that characterized military rule. However, the envisaged opportunities and hope seem to have given way for illusion and bewilderment 10 years after the experimentation (with democracy). This is accounted for by crude politics, corruption, selfishness and greed of the political leadership.

For instance, despite her energy wealth, Nigeria is often mired in the dark; and despite her abundance human resource her economic and political affairs cannot be effectively managed. This is reflective in the on-going political cannibalism that is crippling the economy in deference to the unhindered citizen participation, tolerance of opposing views, abhorrence of arbitrary rule and unilateral decision making that political democracy involves. Since 1999, the polity has witnessed an increasing build-up of authoritarian structures and institutions and human rights abuses. The resultant unstable political atmosphere has combined with poor social infrastructure to frighten off local and foreign investors.

Conceptual Clarification

Terms like governance and good governance and democracy are hereby explained for clarity.

Governance

Governance is defined by the World Bank as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. Good governance, will in effect mean the use of power by the government i.e. the President, and his ministers, senators, members of House of Representatives and how the public service operates: (a) to promote democracy, accountability and transparency (b) to formulate and implement good policies (c) to effectively and efficiently manage the Nigerian human

and financial resources in order to achieve sustainable national development, to achieve economic prosperity to alleviate poverty (Yahaya 1999:15).

Thus, achievement of the objectives of good governance is heavily dependent on the caliber and orientation of the political leaders in government and a competent, well trained, and motivated public service. From the World Bank definition, it is obvious that good governance can be guaranteed on a platform of a plural democratic system and a public service that can work and achieve results.

Good governance includes “both a broad reform strategy and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objective of making government more accountable, more open and transparent and more democratic (Minogue, 1997:4)”. It involves the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. These include:

- (i) The process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced;
- (ii) The capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies, and
- (iii) The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interaction among them (kaufmann, kraay and zoido-Lobatan, 1999:1).

Good governance becomes very fundamental and imperative when viewed against the backdrop of massive deterioration of government institutions, pervasive poverty and widespread unemployment, corruption, as well as the near total collapse of moral and ethical standards engendered by nearly three decades of military rule in the country, which saw governance capacity weakened at all levels (World Bank, 2002; Ujomu, 2004). Forer president Obasanjo vividly captures the country's deplorable national experience in the following words:

The parlous state of our infrastructure, huge debt and poverty combine with the moral decay in our society, the pervasive corruption, lawlessness, selfishness and cynicism that have taken over all areas of national life have led to a persistent deterioration in the quality of governance and the functioning of all public institutions. This has led in turn to the attitude of indifference to the common good or welfare (Obasanjo, 1999a: 132; 1999b:140; 2000a:160).

Democracy

Generically, democracy involves the opportunity to participate in decision making in the political process. It repudiates arbitrariness and authoritarianism. It extols the consent of the governed and it protects human personality and values (Ake 1991). Democracy whether liberal or African or modern includes fundamental recognition of popular sovereignty, equal opportunity for all, majority rule, representativeness, minority rights, right of choice between alternative programmes, popular consultation, consensus on fundamental issues and more essentially periodic elections (Oke, 2005:45). The concept of democracy confers the opportunity to participate in decision by all adult citizens. The citizenry enjoys wide spread participation in the political process.

Democracy provides a veritable platform for the entrenchment and consolidation of good governance through institutional arrangements citizens' participation (Apter, 1991: 463; Touraine, 1999: 268; Held, 1993: 24; Clapham, 1994:423; Ghali, 1995:6). Nevertheless, the ongoing democratic experiment in Nigeria, since May 1999, is yet to engender good governance, as a result of the increasing rate of poverty that rose from 17.7 million in 1980 to 34.7 million in 1985, 67.1 million in 1996 and well over 70 million in 2004 (Omotoso, 2004:17). This is coupled with the high rate of unemployment, inflation, deteriorating social institutions and structures, as well as increasing population, which is due, basically, to the specific policy choices and strategies pursued by the Nigerian government. These include deliberate withholding of resources, both fiscal and juridical, from states and local entities for political and ideological reasons, central bureaucratic hostility and weakness; a turbulent economic and policy environment which has undercut local institutions; absence of complementary reforms needed in national administrative law and systems and an underdeveloped local civil society that has left local government "rudderless" as they try to develop policy and deliver services (World Bank, 2004:1-2).

Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Governance in today's Nigeria is such that has portrayed and presented a mockery of the widely acclaimed symptom of good governance; democracy the official governmental practice has been hijacked by military apologies to the extent that citizens now experience despair instead of hope, insecurity instead of security, tragic and untimely death instead of long life and high life expectancy, illusion instead of expectation, deficits instead of dividends, militarization instead of civility, dictatorship instead of rule of law, political

selection instead of election etc. thus the Nigerian political landscape seem headed for disaster. Some of the country's political leaders have stripped naked the rules of civil engagement, jettisoned the constitution and have allowed cacophony to hold sway. The instructive statement by Lord Acton (1834-1902) that: "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" seem to have fallen on deaf ears with reference to the Nigerian polity.

Governance in the Nigerian Fourth Republic is symptomatic of the following:

Corruption

Doubtlessly, Nigeria is one of the leading corrupt countries in the world. The Transparency International in her annual rating made Nigeria third, fourth and fifth most corrupt nation in the world in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively. Corruption has become part of governance in Nigeria. General Abacha was said to have stolen more than \$3 billion between 1993 and 1998 (Falola, 1999:2008). Cummulatively, Nigerian leaders, according to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC), had within the last 40 years stole a total sum of \$500 billion (Amalu, 2006;1). Thus corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation and has shaken it to its foundation. While the spate and ramified nature of corruption in Nigeria today cannot be holistically adduced to the military, it can be said to a great extent that the interplay of 'military-civilian-military' rule in the country has polluted both the military and the civilians and has diffused corruption to such an extent that the country has taken a frontal position in the comity of corrupt nations. The pervasive phenomenon of 'ten percent' kickbacks by public officers as executors of a whole array of public policies insisted on a prepayment to themselves of at least 10% (or more) of the value of the favour being sought by members of the public (contract, license, scholarship, employment, etc) before performing the duty for which they are already being paid generous salaries and allowances from the public treasury are pointers to corruption. In the words of Kolawole (2005:13); the situation was so bad that the principle of public accountability and probity was observed more in disobedience than in obedience.

Civilian Authoritarianism

The prolonged military rule resulted in the over-centralization and concentration of power in the centre and the personalization of political power. This has manifested significantly under civil governance. In fact, the shift in power from the military to the civilian rather than resulting in

democratic governance is such that is best described as ‘authoritarian’ as elected leaders in the three tiers of government in the country exhibit military traits and values in governance. Most culpable in this regard is the former president (Obasanjo) who in power assumed the position of ‘Alpha and omega’ in administering the country. The ex-president was dubbed “impatient, intemperate and very often dictatorial” (Utomi, 2002:29). Also in the words of professor Wole Soyinka, democracy has been openly, blatantly and contemptuously rubbished by the president” (Soyinka 2005;1).

Violence and political intolerance have now become the hallmark of politics. There has always been the use of violence or the threat of violence within and between parties and candidates. The ultimate prize is the capture and retention of political power at all costs. Thus by implication the practice and nuances of democracy have never been allowed to germinate in the country. Samuel Cookey (1987) in a major documentation on the misuse of state power against opponents lamented as follows:

In all the crises, all available state apparatus were employed by the power elite discriminately against their opponents....Not only to win and return power but to control the centre which though politically weak, had all the dominant resources.

The phenomenon of godfatherism has come to assume a dangerous dimension as a consequence of the monetization of politics. Godfatherism is one of the biggest dangers to democracy today and paradoxically it only survives with government support. It produces an unresponsive leadership. Godfatherism, in a broad sense, is an ideology which is constructed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets party ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest. Godfathers are men who have the ‘power’ and influence to decide both who gets nominated to contest election and who wins in the election. Godfatherism in this sense means the practice of political office seekers getting connected to an individual who is believed to have the ability to deliver desired outcome in an electoral contest (Jibrin n.d). It is the intention of the godfather to rule by proxy. The relationship between godfather and godson is not free floating, it is contractual and the contract is sometimes written and even sealed spiritually with an oath, or at the extreme, in a shrine. Godfathers are merchants of fear. They dispense violence freely and fully to those who stand in their way, in this they play the additional role

of warlord (Ayoade 2006:83). Godfatherism negates all tenets of democratic process by obstructing candidate selection and even executive selection once government is installed. They reduce the legitimacy of government and void the electoral value of the citizens.

Economic and Infrastructural Decay

This could be explained in the culture of profligacy arising from the low level of accountability that characterized governmental administration resulting in unbridled corruption, borrowing from the international market, instability of monetary, fiscal and especially investment policy, general climate of political instability, global economic meltdown as well as the problem of limited participation by the public in the formulation of economic policies and the strategies for implementing such policies.

These abysmal economic failures culminated in serious infrastructural decay to the extent that most institutions of government were not working to expectation. The country's road, rail, electricity, water, postal and telecommunication infrastructure were in a state of decay and total collapse. In spite of the huge budgetary allocations made to the country's road infrastructure, most remained in a state of disrepair and, in the worst cases, were unmotorable all year round. Similarly, the national railway system virtually collapsed, in spite of the recourse at huge financial costs, first to Indian and then Chinese technical support to revive it. The dilapidation of the road network and the virtual collapse of the railway took its toll both on intra and interstate economic transactions.

By the time the Abacha regime consolidated itself in 1995, it also became clear that the national petroleum infrastructure had been allowed to go into a state of disrepair, with the pipeline network and the refineries suffering from a lack of the most basic and essential maintenance. Even the joint ventures commitments of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) were neglected with implications for the development of upstream and downstream activities. The cumulative result was the bizarre spectacle of Nigerians having to queue for days unending in petrol stations in order to buy petrol, kerosene, gas and diesel; this is in spite of the fact that their country is one of the biggest producers of oil in the world. With the refineries crippled, the government resorted to the importation of refined petroleum products for domestic use, a process that was itself marred by high level corruption, cronyism and recrimination (Olukoshi 2000:8). Consequently, the economy remains grossly mono-cultural and dependent on external markets amidst

global economic crises. Industrial production and travels have gradually ground to a halt as petrol and industrial fuels are in short supply with exorbitant prices for all categories of businesses, the cost of operating shot up astronomically. The bigger business concerns devoted huge amount of capital to purchasing electricity generating sets for which Nigeria emerged in the period from the late 1980s as the single most important export destination (Ibid). The sustenance of the economy in spite of the depletion of the supporting infrastructure has been hinged on the informal sector and the activities of transnational oil companies which continued to mine oil in the volatile Niger Delta and thus, assured the state of access to a modicum of revenues in foreign exchange (Ibid).

Other attributes of governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic include over politicization of impeachment, general insecurity of life and properties, election rigging, bad governance reflective in disregard for the constitution and the rule of law, police brutality as well as press censorship reflected in the dilatory attitude of the National Assembly to passing the Freedom of Information bill.

The above scenario painted a bleak future for the country and as well symbolized underdevelopment. These contrast sharply to the tenets of democracy and good governance. In the words of Michael camdessus (1997).

Good governance is important for countries at all stages of Development....Our approach is to concentrate, on those aspects of governance that are most closely related to our surveillance over macro-economic policies-namely, the transparency of government accounts, the effectiveness of public resource management, and stability and transparency of the economic and regulatory environment for private sector activity.

Democracy is aptly defined as a form of government with certain acceptable universal principles like popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultations, and periodic elections etc, all of which are attributes that facilitate good governance (Sambo, 1999). Good governance can only exist when there is accountability in governmental procedures, decentralization of power and decision-making, free flow of information, respect for civil liberties etc. Thus democracy and good governance are in tandem and both aim at development. For Nigeria to move out of the cocoon of underdevelopment she is presently entangled in, there is the need to develop

her human resources and improve the welfare of the people, there should be free and fair elections to elect leaders into public offices, the judiciary must be independent and impartial, all levels of government should take security of lives and property seriously. This is in line with Ake (1996) that:

If people are the end of development, then their well-being is the supreme law of development. But the well-being of the people will only be the supreme law of development if they have some decision-making power...But the only way to ensure that social transformation is not dissociated from the well-being of the people is to institute democracy.

References

- Ake, C. (1996): *For Africa, the way forward*. The Guardian, Lagos; November 13.
- Amalu, C. (2006): "Over N60 trillion was stolen by Nigerian past leaders – EFCC Vanguard, Lagos vanguard Newspapers Ltd. October 17.
- Ayoade, J. A. A. (2006): "Godfather Politics in Nigeria" in *Money, Politics and Corruption in Nigeria. IFES*.
- Camdessus, M. (1997): *Good Governance: The IMF Role*. Being an address to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, July 2.
- Clapham, C. (1994): "Democratization in Africa obstacles and prospects" *Third World Quarterly*, 28.
- Cookey, S. (1987): *Report of the Political Bureau*. Lagos Federal Government Printer.
- Falola T. (1999): *The History of Nigeria*. London Greenwood Press.
- Ghali, B. (1995): "Democracy: A newly Recognized Imperative", Global Governance Goetz and Gaventa (2001).
- Held, D. (1993): "Democracy: From city-states to a Cosmopolitan Order?" in Held, D. (ed.) *Prospects For Democracy*, Cambridge policy Press.
- Jibrin, I. (n.d.): "The Rise of Nigeria's Godfathers" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3956540.stm>
- Kolawole D. (2005): The symmetry of an Asymmetric Relationship; Nigerian Foreign Policy and military rule 14th Inaugural lecture, University of Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, Ado-Ekiti. The University of Ado-Ekiti Press.
- Minogue, M. (1997): "The Principles and Practice of Good governance" *Law and Governance 4*, British Council Briefing.

- Obasanjo O. (2000) "New Year Speech at the May Day Parade of 1st May 2000" in *RECALL NO. 2* (January 2000).
- Obasanjo, O. (1999a): "Inaugural Speech of 29th May, 1999" in *RECALL NO. 1* (January 2000).
- Obasanjo, O. (1999b): "On the Moral Foundations of Nigerian Policy", Independence Day Address of 1st October, 1999," in *RECALL NO. 1* (January 2000).
- Oke, L. (2005): "Globalization, democracy and women empowerment: Issues and challenges in Nigeria". In Olufayo, Olu-Olu (ed.): *Perspective on Globalization and Africa Development*. Lagos. Bolabay Publications.
- Olukoshi, A. O. (2000): "Economy and politics in the Nigerian Transition" in *African Journal of Political Science* Vol. 5, No. 2.
- Omotoso, G. (2004): "Cock-Crow for civil service" *The Comet*, Wednesday June 30.
- Sambo, A. (1999): *Quality governance and its implications for democratic culture*. Paper presented at a seminar on Statistics and Transparent Leadership in a democratic setting, organized by F.O.S., Ijebu-Ode, November 18-19.
- Soyinka, W. (2005): "Soyinka knocks deal on Lagos funds; Rule of law endangered" in *The Comet*, August 24.
- Touraine, A. (1991): "What does Democracy Mean Today?" *International Social Science Journal* 128 (May).
- Ujomu, P. O. (2004): "Development Institutions Participation and the Problems of Social Engineering in an African Nation-State" in Ajayi, K. and Ayodele, B. (eds): *Perspectives on Democracy and Development in post-military Nigeria*. Ibadan, Julius and Julius Associates.
- World Bank (2002): "Memorandum of the president of the International Development Association and the Executive Director on an Inter-Strategy update for the Federal Republic of Nigeria: Report No. 2363.
- World Bank (2004). "Nigeria-State Governance Work," Report No. AR592 <http://www.worldbank.org/infoshop>.
- Yahaya, A. D. (1999): "Public Service and good governance", in the *Guardian*, Friday, June 4.