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THE REVIVAL OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPACT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria was under military rule for near to 30 years out of her 55 years of existence after independence. During this period, corruption reached peak levels causing societal retrogression. The dawn of the Fourth Republic in 1999 heralded the revival of elections in the country. It is against this background that this study investigates the extent to which democracy has advanced and improved the living standards of citizens and increased per capita income among others. A total of 642 people, 393 males, 236 women and 13 respondents took part in the case study. The study underscores the need for a policy road-map while hinting at a strategic framework for understanding and addressing the 'democracy-development nexus' in the Nigerian political system.

Key Words: Democracy, development, elections, military, socio-economic transformation.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Nigeria is a federal republic located at the eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea, with an estimated population of about 182,200,000 (UN, 2015), earning the country the title of the most populous nation in Africa and the seventh most populous nation in the world. Nigeria shares territorial boundaries with the Republic of Benin in the West, Chad and Cameroon in the East, the Niger Republic in the North and Atlantic Ocean in (Gulf of Guinea) the South. The country measures approximately 923,769 square kilometres, made up of 909,890 square kilometres of land and 13,876 square kilometres of water (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE STATE AND GOVERNANCE

There is a consensus among scholars that Nigeria is a Federal State (Ijalaiye, 1979; Osuntokun, 1979; Osadolor, 1998; Tanumo, 1998; Anifowose and Babawale, 2010; Idahosa and Aghahowa, 2010). Nigeria, as a Federal State, is unofficially divided into six (6) geopolitical zones which include North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East and South-South. The country is officially delineated into thirty-six (36) states and a federal capital territory.

Nigeria's federal system consists of three tiers of governance; federal, state and local governments. There is a clear-cut separation of power between the arms of government. The executive head at the federal level is the president, governors head the states and chairpersons for local councils. With regard to the law making process, the state and local government practice unicameralism while bicameralism functions at the federal level.

A SYNOPSIS OF NIGERIA UNDER MILITARY REGIME

Nigeria became a republic in 1963, three years after gaining independence from Great Britain. And no sooner had the colonialists left the shore of the country than topsy-turvy of the political scene, tomfoolery of the political gladiators and entrenched regional disharmony became the order of the day (Ademoyega, 1981; Onovo, 1997; Iroanusi, 2000; Onah, 2000; Tonye, 2010).

On 15 January 1966, the military struck and overthrew a democratic government. There were seven successful military takeovers and four unsuccessful coups between 1966 and 1999 when the army handed over power to an elected government. The long spell of military rule was a great setback for Nigeria and its negative effects are still felt.

1.2 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

One of the cardinal characteristics of democracy is free, fair and credible elections. Olurode (1987) and Akinboye (2004) allude that democracy is the pivot around which election revolves. Elections have become an integral part of Nigeria's democratic governance. Anifowose (2004) notes that 'a contentious political issue in Nigeria since independence on 1st October 1960, has been the politics of power shift'. Still, unlike earlier democratic experiments truncated through coup d'état due to succession crises, in the current dispensation, Nigeria has had four successful political transitions.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Nigerian political landscape reeks of unfulfilled electoral promises and the death of 'dividends of democracy'. There is a primordial accumulation of the commonwealth of our beloved country depleted by political office bearers and their allies to the detriment of the helpless poor masses. As a consequence, the negative effects of this are enormous and they include the shortage of infrastructural facilities, youth restiveness, a high crime rate, brain drain, low life expectancy and irregular migration through Sahara or Mediterranean routes among others. Thus, this study investigates and illustrates the extent to which democracy has affected the quality of life of Nigerian citizens.

3.0 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The main aim of this study was to collect enough data to help in examining the extent to which democratic institutions speed up or decelerate developmental process in Sub-Saharan Africa with specific reference to Nigeria. It also seeks to investigate why the Nigerian leadership at the federal, state and local levels has been incapable of addressing the problems connecting corruption, systemic failure, institutional decay and political inertia leading to the underdevelopment of the country.

Core research question: Does democracy accelerate or decelerate the developmental stride of Nigeria?

Sub-questions:

1. Is every ethnic, religious or social group free and able to exercise their right to take part in national politics?

2. Has any household gone without the life's necessities including access to clean water, healthcare and energy since 1999?
3. Since the return of democratic governance, has corruption declined, the condition of social amenities together with the security situation improved? And has the condition of the medium, and small-scale enterprises and the value of national currency improved since the return to democratic governance?
4. Do elected officials have the requisite qualifications to do their job in an effective and efficient manner?
5. To what extent are the elected officials accessible before and after elections in Nigeria to guarantee political accountability?
6. Do incumbent politicians embark on projects on the eve of elections to enhance their chances of victory in the elections?
7. Are election results reflective of the wishes of the majority of the electorates?
8. Should Nigeria's electoral system prohibit potential candidates with a shady character or previous/current involvement in corrupt practices from contesting for federal, state or local government seats?
9. Are those elected officials able to improve the quality of service in government and ease the poor's suffering while in office?
10. Has the economic condition of Nigeria improved or deteriorated since the return to civil rule?
11. Are Nigerians satisfied with the way democracy works and the way elections in the country get conducted?
12. Do Nigerian citizens have confidence in their elected leaders?

4.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study intends to provide a better understanding of how viable democratic institutions can help in fostering human development and the actualisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) in Nigeria as well as the African region.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a blend of data from both primary and secondary sources.

5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs a survey research design.

5.2 STUDY POPULATION

The population includes a reasonable range of actors such as scholars, policy makers, opinion leaders, members of civil society, members of women groups, security sector personnel, youth groups and very importantly, the poor and near-poor individuals in rural areas.

5.3 STUDY LOCATION AND SITE

The primary data was obtained from the six geo-political zones of the federation viz., Northeast (Yobe State), North West (Kebbi State), North Central (Abuja FCT and Niger State), South West (Lagos State), South East (Enugu State) and South-South (Edo State).

5.4 SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Six hundred and forty-two individuals were selected to be part of the study using probability sampling with the intent that every Nigerian has a chance of taking part. The six geo-political zones got just representation in the study; from the North West 116 respondents, 137 from North East, 56 from North Central, 109 from South West, 122 from South East and 77 from South-South. More so, an additional 25 respondents who did not state their geo-political zones.

5.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND INSTRUMENTATION

Only one questionnaire was used for this study, consisting of six parts. The questionnaire elicited relevant information from the respondents. Part A consisted of items on respondent's socio-demographic profile. Part B, C, D, E and F consisted of 40 items that sought for respondent's perceptions on main concerns affecting Nigerians on a daily basis using Rensis Likert five-level scale Strongly Agree, Agree Somewhat, Disagree, Strongly Disagree and Have not Formed an Opinion.

5.6 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher sent out questionnaires to Nigerians in the selected states of the federation. Data was generated from the responses of 642 respondents.

5.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Portions of the data collected got further analysed in details using analytical tools such as the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel.

6.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented and discussed in order of the research questions.

7.0 A SYNTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Through the study it was discovered that:

1. Democracy has not engendered sustainable development in Nigeria. The quality of life of a larger percentage of the Nigerian population, in particular, the rural poor has not improved as expected. Election winners have neither done much to improve the quality of government service nor helped to ease the poor's affliction while in office.
2. Since the return to democracy, Nigeria's state of national security has been in shambles and misuse of office and corruption has worsened.
3. The value of Naira (the Nigeria's national currency) has continued to depreciate despite assurances for its stabilisation.
4. Although most people seeking for elective offices in Nigeria are academically qualified, the study showed that majority of them lack the integrity to handle public funds; and adequate knowledge with regards to the problems faced by their constituencies.
5. Most of the elected officials are accessible during electioneering campaign. But once elections are over and they are sworn in, accessing them becomes nearly impossible.

6. Political Business Cycle (PBC) is a norm in Nigeria's political system. Politicians often embark on projects on the eve of elections to boost their chances of victory and abandon them soon as election season comes to an end.
7. Nigeria's electoral system will be more transparent and apt if it restricts people with questionable character vying for political offices.
8. The Economic condition of Nigeria has improved, though not significantly, since the return to civil rule.
9. The way democracy works and the way Nigeria conducts its elections is in general, acceptable.
10. While the majority of Nigerians have confidence in the current president to move the nation closer to the 'promised land' considering his antecedent; the confidence they have in their state governors, senators, members of House of Representative and State Houses of Assembly is at zero level.

8.0 CONCLUSION

Democracy is essential to development if its fundamental principles are well articulated and holistically harnessed. The type of democracy practised in Nigeria for the past sixteen (16) years leaves nothing to be desired and is not at par with other nations. This is the *raison d'être* that, in spite of Nigeria's diverse resources, democratic governance has failed to produce meaningful economic growth and sustainable development. Results and the findings from the analysed data gathered have been jurisprudentially dissected to establish this fact. Afterwards, panaceas on how democracy can stimulate sustainable development in Nigeria were proffered. It is envisioned that if the current government discards the terrible burden bequeathed on this country by past government and embraces a new policy roadmap as buttressed below, the country will be the better for it.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above findings the following recommendations are made:

1. Nigerians should not go without the necessities of life such as water, food, clothing, shelter and energy.
2. A conducive business environment should be created for both local entrepreneurs and foreign investors. Necessary start-up capital should be provided for genuine small and medium scale entrepreneurs at a reasonable interest rate.
3. A strategic framework for tackling corruption should be developed. Anti-graft agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) among others should be rejuvenated and empowered to 'bark' and 'bite'.
4. Enticing the electorates with infrastructural facilities and economic resurgence on the eve of elections intending to win their votes should be discouraged through an enabling law. Fulfilment of electoral promises should start from week one (1) when a political office holder assumes office.

5. Nigeria's electoral system must take guidance from a legal framework that complies with global best practices.
6. Political accountability should be encouraged. As such, any individual, regardless of how highly placed, that is implicated in electoral fraud should not only be disqualified but also prevented from vying for any elected office in the country.
7. Since elections are crucial for the future of Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must be an independent executive arm of government in the truest sense, with the funds for meeting the financial needs of the body drawn from a consolidated account.
8. The major cause of the problems bedeviling Nigeria such as violence, terrorism, crime, illegal migration, rural-urban drift to mention a few, is poverty. Thus government at the federal, state and local government levels should adopt a practical and sustainable strategy to reduce abject poverty in Nigeria.

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