

## THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY ON MULTI-ETHNIC AND MULTI-RELIGIOUS AFRICAN STATES; A STUDY OF NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is on challenges of democracy on multi-ethnic and multi-religious African states; a study of Nigeria. The emergence of globalization has thrown up democracy as one of the best system of government. African states and their leaders continuous to see states in Africa not with democracy as an outcast due to the advantages that democracy suppose to bring, but in Nigeria, democracy tend to be bedeviled by several Lacunas. The paper adopted the Elite Theory as basis for explanation and relied on the secondary method of data collection as it methodology, although democracy was suppose to provide development, close the gap of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria but it has not due to the lacuna associated with democracy in Nigeria. It is base on these lacuna that the paper by recommendation suggest that the Nigerian Constitution should be amended to deal with those grey area that make democracy through participation a burden to the ordinary man as democracy should really be seen as government of the majority, as popular candidate does not need to buy peoples conscience to emerge a leader and Nigeria democracy should be designed to be DEVELOPMENTAL oriented. It is only when Nigeria's Democracy is patterned along provision of development that the dividend of democracy can be accessible to Nigerians because democracy was suppose to provide succour and not pains.*

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Multi-Ethnicity, Multi-Religious, Secularism, Political Culture.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Globalization in the current world order has provided the opportunity for the world to be shrink into a global village, which has made the international system to be treated as one. Democracy is one of those elements that is seen as a contemporary practice by nations of the world, so much so that countries that fail to practice democracy are seen as “outcast” when it comes to global politics, alignment and re-alignment with the notion that democracy does not go to war with itself. Countries of Africa in contemporary times are beholding democracy as a form of government that Nigeria is seen as a “victim” of this new world order called democracy.

Western and Eastern Europe has been able to sell democracy to other parts of the world and Africa as one of those last continents that has embrace democracy especially Nigeria. That Nigeria has had about twenty-four years of uninterrupted democracy shows that democracy is becoming one of the norms in Nigeria as the military and other forces has the condition to accept that democracy is the best form of government in the world this statement have subjected the Nigerian military into subordination of the interest to civilian administration under the famous military disengagement Nigeria is a plural Society meaning that there are over 350 ethnic groups and avalanche of religious groups, one cannot say emphatically that's democracy accommodate this multi-diverse ethnic group and religious in Nigeria. From close observation. the paper presenters does not think that democracy has really helped Nigerians in achieving quantitative and qualitative transformation because country's political system prepared by its form of government to achieve development at the expense of luck poverty marginalization and other form of vices that make people that the efficacy of the form of government being practiced as in the case of democracy in Nigeria.

### **Objectives**

the objectives of these papers among other things are

- i. to examine the shortcomings of democracy in Africa
- ii. to examine the lacunas is associated with democracy in the complex country like Nigeria
- iii. to provide recommendation that will mitigate the challenges associated with democracy especially as it affects Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

methodology here relates to the method of data collection. The secondary method of data collection was used in arriving at data used in this paper and their sources of this secondary method include textbooks, newspapers and other public and non-public materials during this exercise. Important parts that directly speak to the topic were reviewed and extracted to help in a conceptual clarification analysis of this paper.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification and Analysis**

The concept used in this paper that needed to be clarified are democracy, multi-ethnic groups, multi-religious group, secularism and development.

### **i. Democracy**

According to David (2022:16), democracy is a popular government or preservative government or participation in government or Republican government or some overlap between some of all these. On the one hand and on the other hand, democracy is a system of government by the whole population through elected representatives of a state so that government and or an organisation is governed on democratic principles in the world of use of the present. Democracy is a system of government where minorities have their say and majorities have their way.

### **ii. Multi-Ethnicity**

In the words of Olayode (2016:35), ethnicity in the Nigerian context can be explained in the light of the multifarious and diverse nature of Nigeria's vast territory comprising people of different backgrounds, ancestry, legacies and traditions. According to Onifade and Imhonopi (2013:14), an ethnic group consists of those who regard themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, language, custom as well as tradition. Multi-ethnicity is the multifarious and diverse nature of Nigeria that practices democracy based on its ethnic affiliation for the purpose of protecting the interests of these ethnic groups.

### **iii. Multi-Religious**

According to Ekwenze (2018:9), religion is man's relation to divinity, to reverence, worship, obedience and submission to mandates and precepts of supernatural or superior beings. It

essentially connotes all form of belief in the existence of superior being exercising power over human being by violation, imposing rules of conduct with future rewards and punishment. The multi-religious stance of Nigerian nation stem from the singular fact that the nature of the Nigerian constitution recognizes the existence of religious bodies provided it does not infringe on the right of existence of other religious. Multi-religious connote the existence of more than two religion practicing in Nigeria.

#### **iv. Secularism**

Secularism in the views of Tell (2002:29) means among other thing, the “theory that religion and state should be separate” and “secularism” is defined as “a view of life or of any particular matter based on the promise that religious consideration should be ignored or purposely excluded in government; a system of social ethics based on a doctrine that ethical standards and conducts should be determined exclusively with reference to the present life and wellbeing without reference to religion”.

#### **v. Political Culture**

According to (Dibie, 2012:62), it refers to the way the members of apolitical community behave in their political activities, e.g. voting. It refers to the usual attitude, beliefs and perception of people towards politics. It also deals with the various reasons which conditioned the behaviour of the people in apolitical community. The role of political culture is to set the standards of behaviour of public officials and citizens. Some countries with developed and established political cultures are Britain, U.S.A., France etc.

### **Typologies of Democracy**

In the words of (Dibie, 2012:64), there are direct and indirect democracy.

**i. Direct Democracy:** According to (Dibie, 2012:48), it refers to an **idea of** government by which all citizens **meet** together, periodically, to discuss **issues** affecting the community. This simple **system** is possible in tribes or villages. Direct **democracy** is suitable for small states **only**. The village or the community must be **very** small, usually not more than a few thousand people. Therefore, direct democracy is **seen** as a close interaction in which people **can** continually take an active part.

ii. Indirect Democracy: In the words of (Dibie, 2012:122), this form of government becomes operational where citizens are qualified to choose their own representatives to rule on their behalf. This form is complicated and can easily go wrong, if not properly operated. Representative democracy is government by means of persons elected to serve the interests of others, whether in a local government council, parliament or in the executive. Population growth globally has made it impossible for the adoption or retention of direct democracy. Indirect democracy has therefore replaced direct democracy and it has come to stay in modern political systems.

### **Characteristics of Democracy**

i. Political liberty: According to (Dibie, 2012:62), it is an indispensable factor - the equal rights of all normal adults to vote and to stand as candidates for elections, periodical elections, and equal eligibility for political offices etc.

ii. Value of individual personality: According to (Dibie, 2012:62), in democracy, the belief in the value of individual personality is restored. It implies the need to respect the other man, to listen to his arguments and to take into account his point of view.

iii. Free associations and groups: According to (Dibie, 2012:62), people should be able to choose their own candidates or support political parties without being intimidated. Citizens can form parties and canvass for support for their programmes.

iv. Free association and periodic elections: According to (Dibie, 2012:62), these are some of the essentials of democracy. They make for the possibility of an alternative government.

v. **Provision of opportunities:** According to (Dibie, 2012:62), democracy provides opportunities for an individual to develop his or her personality. It provides access to knowledge and free education, security against unemployment, fair working conditions, leisure etc. It also allows the individual to have a say in his place of work and to guard against economic slavery.

vi. Rule of law: According to (Dibie, 2012:62), there should be the application of the rule of law and no one should be above the law.

## **The Pros of Democracy in Africa**

- i. **Legitimacy:** In the words of (Dibie, 2012:82), it gives legitimacy to the elected government. This is because the elected government has the support of the people.
- ii. **Operation of the rule of law:** In the words of (Dibie, 2012:82), those in movement rule according to the provisions of the constitution.
- iii. **Misuse of power:** In the words of (Dibie, 2012:82), democracy does not allow for misuse of power because power is not concentrated in the hands of one person.
- iv. **Tolerance:** In the words of (Dibie, 2012:82), democracy encourages tolerance of the views of the opposition. The majority will have its way, but the minority must have its say.
- v. **Superiority:** In the words of (Dibie, 2012:82), democracy is superior to other forms of government because the rights and interests of every person are guaranteed.

## **The Challenges of Democracy in Africa**

- i. **It leads to slow decision-making:** According to (Dibie, 2012:14), when opportunity is given to everybody to express his or her views before the final decision is taken on any issue of public importance, decision making is slowed down.
- ii. **Expensive to operate:** According to (Dibie, 2012:14), democracy involves many people in the decision-making process and that makes it very expensive to operate.
- iii. **Incompetent people may be in government:** According to (Dibie, 2012:14), in a democracy, many people who do not have the ability to govern may get elected.
- iv. **The idea of democracy involves representation:** According to (Dibie, 2012:14), those who are representatives of the people may be representing their own interests.
- v. **Self-minded individuals:** According to (Dibie, 2012:14), elections held in most cases may not be free and fair, leading to the enthronement of irresponsible, callous and self-minded individuals.
- vi. **Rule of ignorance:** According to (Dibie, 2012:14), democracy is the rule of ignorance. It pays attention to quantity, not to quality. Votes are counted, not weighed.

vii. Political education: According to (Dibie, 2012:14), the citizens may not be sufficiently educated to appreciate the meaning of the issues which come before them at elections.

viii. The rule of many: According to (Dibie, 2012:14), democracy can never represent the rule of many because as a rule, the people merely accept the opinions of their leaders.

### **3. Theoretical Analysis**

The assumptions of the elites theory was majorly attributed to the works of vilfredo Pareto (1842 - 1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1936) and Robert Michels (1876-1936). These classical elitist were influenced by the thoughts of early philosophers like Aristotle and Plato. They were concerned with man activities in the society and how it relates to Statecraft.

According to (Agarwal, 2005:14), Pareto (1935) an Italian sociologist, contributed to the 'theory of elites, and circulation of elites', in his book, 'the mind and society'. He applied socio-psychological factors in identifying elites and their nature. In his opinion, men are born unequal everywhere and unequal physically and mentally in respect to their abilities and capacities. Stratifying the society on the basis of psychological traits such as "superior class people as elites and the inferior one as non-elites". He sees the elites as a small number of individuals who are found in the commanding heights of the society in various professions. They are the best and occupy higher positions on the basis of certain attributes and marked qualities.

#### **Implication of Elites Theory to Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

According to (Ogundiya & Baba, 2007:48), the Nigerian State witnessed the birth of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic on the 29<sup>th</sup> may, 1999 with the proclamation of the 1999 constitution under a presidential system of government with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as executive President, commander-in-chief of the Nigerian armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Nigerian State no doubt is controlled by the political elites who dominate the political landscape and control the reins of power and authority. State actions and outcomes are invariably determined by this group who rule in the interest of members of the elite. It is within this context that the character of the Nigerian State can be appreciated.

According to (David, 2002:34), it must be noted that, the control of Political power by the elites in Nigeria guarantees access to State resources which the elites use to manipulate and command loyalty and obedience from the lower class (masses). As such, the Nigerian State is regulated and control by the elites who occupy top positions in government and constitutional empowered to make and enforce policies and law. The State in Nigeria therefore, is an institution that protects the interest of the elites and dispenses economic patronage to the elites. The political economy of the Nigerian state is under the control of the elites whose presence are seen and felt in every sector of the polity.

#### **4. Body of Work**

##### **Lacunas of Democracy in Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Nigeria**

According to (Olayide, 2016), there is no gain stating the obvious that democracy has its merits and demerits as well as its characteristics, but in this section, the paper wants to interrogate the lacunas associated with democracy in Nigeria and these lacunas are;

- i. Too expensive
- ii. Non-developmental
- iii. Very elitist
- iv. Creation of ethnic and religious inequality

**i. Too Expensive:** In the words of (Wedel, 2017:30), one of the greatest problems associated with democracy in Nigeria is the high cost required to practice democracy in Nigeria, thereby making democracy a “commercial venture” and raising commercial politicians who see politics in Nigeria as investment and not a call to service. The danger of this is that it has created a criminal angle to Nigerian politics. Democracy in Nigeria has led to the emergence of godfatherism, thuggery, criminal inducement to win roles and to the extreme political assassination and political banditry with adverse effects both to the political systems and economic system as various government institutions have to suffer on account of the very expensive nature of democracy in Nigeria.

**ii. Non-Developmental:** According to (Onifade and Imhonopi, 2013), this is another serious lacuna associated with democracy in Nigeria from evidence in the last 23 years of unbroken democracy Nigeria has had to cope with more infrastructural decay compared to the era of the



military regime. More money has been budgeted for provision of road, electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals and other amenities with nothing to show. Under democracy, qualitative and quantitative transformation has been a mirage as democracy in Nigeria has thrown up more “LEGISLATHIEVES” more “EXECUTHIEVES” and more “DIRECTOTHIEVES”. The level of corruption within the last 23 years has been monumental all to the detriment of development in Nigeria.

**iii. Very Elitist in Nature:** In the words of (Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015:62), one of the cardinal feature of democracy is franchise that is the right to vote and be voted for; but in Nigeria, this franchise have been destroyed as people only have the right to vote and not be voted for, due to the implication of elitism, democracy in Nigeria has become the affairs of the rich, high and mighty as these elites constitute themselves as party executives to determine how much is the party form ticket, zoning arrangement and the process of choosing who emerges as the candidate representing the party. Thereby, shutting out the interest of all who are in the majority. Politics under the democratic arrangement has been monetized without recourse to the quality of leadership.

**iv. Creation of Ethnic and Religious Inequality:** According to (*Yamokoski & Dubrow, 2008*), democracy was supposed to be a unifier, going by the philosophy that democracy is the government by the majority, but this is not so as democracy has succeeded in increase gulf between and among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. the Nigerian society is charged up and the system is been heated up due to the dominance of major ethnic group in Nigeria. There by making none sense about the Nigeria Federation. The inequality created by democracy has lead to tension and agitation by Christians rejecting the Muslim / Muslim ticket of the APC, Christian Pressure Group now sees their Muslim brothers as threat meaning that democracy has not helped in achieving religious harmony rather religious crises among the two major religion in Nigeria.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Democracy, going by the explanation, features and pros of this system of government, one would have expected that development, good and better life would have been possible just as it is other developed countries of the world, but in Africa democracy has not really provided quantitative and qualitative living to the African people. In Nigeria, democracy tend to cause

us more sorrows considering the lacunas highlighted above. It is based on these lacunas associated with democracy in Nigeria that the following recommendations are made to include;

- a. The Nigerian Constitution should be amended to deal with those grey area that make democracy through participation a burden to the ordinary man as democracy should really be seen as government of the majority, as popular candidate does not need to buy peoples conscience to emerge a leader.
- b. The Electoral Act 2022 need to be amended to accommodate a clause that the people need to own all the political parties operating presently in Nigeria. The ideal is to reduce the over bearing influence of godfathers and their cronies in other to achieve better and quality leadership.

Nigeria democracy should be designed to be DEVELOPMENTAL oriented. It is only when Nigeria's Democracy is patterned along provision of development that the dividend of democracy can be accessible to Nigerians because democracy was suppose to provide succour and not pains.

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