

Democracy: Its Meaning and Dissenting Opinions of the Political Class in Nigeria: A Philosophical Approach

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ABSTRACT

The nascent democracy in Nigeria is plagued with myriad of intrigues, discordant opinions of the political class. The reason is not farfetched. Every political party sees its manifesto and plans of action as the best for the citizenry. They elbow each other in the process of garnering political recognition and vibrancy. Their unhealthy rivalry only heat up the polity. How be it some Nigerians see these political dissent as a necessary tool to a sound democratic process. They argue that dissenting voices amongst the political class are necessary since a democratic process would never be devoid of antagonism and democracy would never thrive on rational consensus. This paper seeks to define democracy, explore the dissenting opinions of the political class which many say attempt to make or mar the democratic process in Nigeria. The study would further examine the role of the media in fast tracking the entire democratization process with a view to ascertaining whether the practice of democracy in Nigeria is in tandem with acceptable practices in the well recognized democracies of the world. Finally, the paper would proffer possible solutions and make necessary recommendations that would help deepen true democratic culture in Nigeria.

Key words, democracy, politics, dissent, mass media, democratization process.

The Concept of Democracy

It is difficult to reach a consensus on the definition of democracy. However, the main idea of democracy is widely accepted to have originated from Athens in the 5th century BC.

The Webster New Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1995) defines democracy as a government in which supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through representation. According to Lindell, and Scott (1999), the term originates from the Greek word (demokratia) “rule of the people” which was coined from (demos) “people” and (kratos) “power” or “rule” in the 5th century B.C.

It is important to note that the political system postulated by the Athenians was such that democratic citizenship was exclusive to an elite class of free men only. Slaves and women were excluded from participation.

In a lecture titled “What is Democracy”? Larry Diamond (2004) gave an overview of what in his opinion is democracy. He describes democracy as a system of government with four key elements:

- i) A system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections;
- ii) Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life;
- iii) Protection of the human rights of all citizens; and
- iv) A rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

Popper as cited in Javie (2006) defines democracy in contrast to dictatorship or tyranny. He places emphasis on the availability of opportunities for the people to control their leaders and to them without recourse to a revolution.

Popper’s view must have hinged on the fact that there are many variants of democracy today. The most dominant variable is what he terms the direct democracy in which all citizens of a country are given direct and active participation in the decision making process of their countries. Another variant is the representative democracy in which the whole body of all eligible citizens remain the sovereign power but political power is exercised indirectly through elected representatives.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, the concept of representative democracy arose largely from ideas developed during the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions.

Dahl, Shapiro, Cheibib (2003) state that in a representative democracy, every vote has equal weight, no unreasonable restrictions can apply to anyone seeking to become a representative, and the freedom of its eligible

citizens is secured by legitimized rights and liberties which are typically protected by a constitution. An offshoot of this variant is the Westminster system as practiced in the United Kingdom, with a sovereign monarch, parliamentary participation and a judicial independence. This is totally different from the democracy practised in United States of America which practises separation of powers between three arms of government: the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.

A common characteristic of all the variants of democracies discussed above is that representative democracy allows competitive elections which promote equality among all eligible citizens in all respects, and also ensures that the rules of all elections are clear, set out in advance, and do not privilege any group or individual over another.

In furtherance of this, Kelsen (1955) and Barak (2006), assert that representative democracy which allows freedom of political expression, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are considered to be the essential rights that allow eligible citizens to be adequately informed and able to vote according to their own interests.

From the foregoing, one can conclude that the basic feature of democracy according to Nassbaum (2000) is the capacity of all voters to participate freely and fully in the life of their society, and that democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in law-making (Diamond, 2006).

It might be necessary, at this stage to highlight another key word in our quest to discuss democracy. This is simply the concept of politics.

The Concept of Politics

The term politics is derived from the Greek word polis – a city state (Nwogu, 2001). According to Crick (1978) “the simplest perception of politics is that it is about the relationship of rulers to the ruled, the few to many, “them and us”, government and its subjects or the state and its citizens”.

Appadorai (1974) states that “when a body of people is clearly organized as a unit for purposes of government then it is said to be politically organized”. This opinion could be more evident, according to him, when it is realized that every man desires to have his own, to think and act as he likes in society where one man’s desires may conflict with those of others. This, he reasons, necessitates the regulation of the behaviours of the individual members of a society to promote good relations.

Appadorai (1974) further states that politics as a discipline is not an exact science, like physics and chemistry, because the material with which it deals is incapable of being treated in the same exact way. As a result, he holds the view that politics is a social science because “the motives which lead men to act, no less than the consequences of these acts are so complex and variable that it is difficult to predict the other since social phenomena are more difficult to control”.

Chakravarty (1958) lends a voice by stating that the speculative character of the subject (politics) coupled with lack of order and continuity in “the phenomena of the state” compels the educationist to deny it the character of a science. He asserts that the word ‘politics’ today refers to current problems of a country which engage the serious attention of the government.

Wikipedia Free Press (2014) sees politics as the practice and theory of influencing other people on a civic or individual level. It further states that politics refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance – organized control over a human community, particularly a state.

Politics is applied to other areas of human endeavour such as entertainment, education, food and even fashion, art, science and literature where democratic processes are used to reach decisions. This explains why Wydra (2007) maintains that the development of democracy should be seen as an ongoing “process of meaning formation” and not a static concept. His reason is that “power emanates from the people [.....] but it is the power of nobody”, since there is no such thing as the people or demos. He opines that democratic political figures are not supreme rulers, rather they are temporary guardians of an empty place.

Any claim to substance such as the collective good, the public interest or the will of the nation is subject to the competitive struggle and times for gaining the authority of office and government. He states that the essence of the democratic system is empty place, void of real people which can only be temporarily filled and never be appropriated. The seat of power is there, according to him, but remains open to constant change. As such democratic progresses should be seen as a continual and potentially never ending process of social construction,

which gives room for divergent opinions. At this stage it may be necessary to examine another key word in this study – the dissenting opinions.

Dissenting Opinions

A dissenting opinion (or dissent), according to Wikipedia Free Press (2014) is an opinion in a legal case written by one or more judges expressing disagreement with the majority opinion of the court which gives rise to its judgement. When not necessarily referring to a legal decision, (Oxford Dictionaries; Macmillan Dictionary) state that this can also be referred to as a minority report.

The dictionaries cited above further state that a dissenting opinion does not create binding precedent nor does it become a part of a case law yet can be cited from time to time as a persuasive authority when arguing for the overturning of the court's holding. It should be noted that dissenting opinion (minority reports) are always written at the same time as the majority opinion.

In our usage in this paper, dissenting opinions, simply refer to various views held by different personalities in a political party, or views held by an individual or party in contradiction to the views held by others. In a democratic setting citizens have the right to be informed of public issues and how they affect them. They have the right to express their opinions and interests openly. They also have the right to know how their political leaders and representatives use their constitutional powers. But this is not always the case as citizen's rights are constantly muzzled. This may be responsible for what Rawls (1971) describes as the origin of the current disaffection within the democratic institutions and the rampant crises of legitimacy affecting western democracies; and if I may add emerging democracies as witnessed in Nigeria.

Defining democracy as a system in which people have the opportunity of accepting or rejecting their leaders, through a competitive electoral process, Schumpeter (1947) subscribes to a new understanding of democracy as that which should put emphasis on aggregation of preferences, taking place through political parties for which people have the capacity to vote at regular intervals.

Reasoning along these lines, Downs (1957) examines what notion is considered as “common good” and “general will”, and is of the opinion that these terms which were acknowledged as coextensive with the very idea of “the people” are mere appellations given in the self interest of the ruling class. He is of the view that stability and order were more likely to result from compromise among interests than from mobilizing people towards an illusory consensus on the common good.

Hebermas (1996) however enunciates a proceduralist approach in which no limits are put on the scope and content of political deliberations. He states that procedural constraints of the ideal speech situation would eliminate the positions to which the participants in the moral discourse would disagree. Benhabib (1996) describes the features of such a discourse as;

- 1) participation in such deliberations is governed by the norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chances to initiate speech acts, to question, to interrogate, and to open debate;
- 2) all have the right to question the assigned topics of the conversation;
- 3) all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the very rule of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied and carried out.

According to Cohen (1998) a decision is collective when it emerges from arrangements of binding collective choices that establish conditions of free public reasoning among equals who are governed by the decisions. Mouffe (2000) is of the view that provided that the procedures of the deliberations (political discourse) secure impartiality, equality, openness and lack of coercion, they will guide the deliberation towards generalisable interest, which can be agreed upon by all participants – thereby producing legitimate outcomes.

Wittgenstein (1969), however, holds a different opinion about the creation of consensus. According to him “giving grounds” or reaching agreements is established not on significant but on forms of life. In other words, allegiance to democracy and belief in the value of its institutions does not depend on giving them an intellectual foundation. According to Wittgenstein (1965) it depends on a passionate commitment to a system of reference. In an attempt to acknowledge the limits of consensus, Wittgenstein states that “where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and an heretic.”

This view persuades us to give up the dream of a rational consensus since according to him “we have got on to the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because

of that, we are unable to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground”, (Wittgenstein, 1958).

The implication of “Back on the rough ground” according to Mouffe (2000) is that the free and unconstrained public deliberation of all on matters of common concerns is a conceptual impossibility since the particular forms of life, which are antithesis to ideal discourse are its very condition of possibility. He therefore asserts that politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; and it is always concerned with the creation of an “us” by the determination of them”. He argues further that the current trend in a democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but attempting to domesticate hostility by defusing potential antagonism that exists in human relations through an ensemble of practices, discussions and institutions such that conflicts and antagonisms which evade human relations can be assuaged. In other words, Mouffe sees the whole idea of democracy as not entailing our condoling ideas that we oppose or being indifferent to those we disagree with, but treating those who defend them as legitimate opponents.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia defines democratization as the transition to a more democratic political regime. This may be a transition from an authoritarian regime to a full democracy, and a transition from an authoritarian political system to a semi-democracy or a transition from a semi-authoritarian political system to a democratic political system. The Encyclopedia further states that the outcome (of the democratization) process may be consolidated (as it was for example in United Kingdom) or may face frequent reversals (as it has faced, for example, in Argentina). No matter the angle one looks at it, democratization is influenced by various factors, including, economic development, education and civil society.

One of the factors responsible for democratization is traceable to economic development. According to Sen (1983) economic development is the sustained, concerted actions of policy makers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a people. Such actions according to Sen can stimulate the development of human capital, critical infrastructure and regional competitiveness. He describes this “economic growth” as an aspect of the process of economic development. Przeworski, Adam, et al (2006), also state that economic development either increases chances for a transition to democracy or helps newly established democracies to consolidate. Wealth, according to Przeworski, Adam, et al (2006) also correlates with education as a factor of economic development. According to them, a poorly educated and illiterate population may elect populist politicians who on election abandon democracy and become dictators even where there were free and fair elections.

A third factor is described as a “Resource Curse” theory which suggests that countries with abundant natural resources, such as oil, often fail to democratize because the elite can live off the natural resources rather than depend on popular support for tax revenues (Investopedia, 2014). On the other than Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) are of the opinion that elites who invested in the physical capital rather than in land or oil, fear that their investment can be easily damaged in a case of a revolution. As a result they would make concessions and democratize than risk a violent clash with the opposition.

The oil curse, according to Investopedia (2014), is described as “a paradox of plenty” as skilled workers from other sectors of the economy migrate to the resource sector. The result is higher wages which gives rise to inflation. Netherlands is cited as a country which suffered from the discovery of large deposits of gas (Investopedia 2014). This explains why Ross (2012) states that countries, rich in petroleum have less democracy, less economic stability, and more frequent civil wars than countries without oil.

Again, according to Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) where there is social equality, egalitarian societies thrive as people have less incentives to revolt. They are of the opinion that democratization emerges in countries where elites offer concessions (1) because they consider the threat of a revolution credible, and (2) the cost of the concessions is not too high.

We might be tempted to ask the question: What is the role of civil society in a democratization process?

Dictionary of 21st century Lexicon defines civil society as:

- 1) the aggregate of non-governmental organisations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens, or
- 2) individuals and organisations in a society which are independent of the government.

In generic terms, the term civil society applies to elements such as freedom of speech, independent judiciary, unions, human rights, and so on. They are sometimes referred to as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs or NPOs).

According to Zaleski, Stephan (2008) the relationship between civil society and democratic political society, dates back to the early classical liberal writings of Alexis de Tocqueville.

They were however, according to Almond, Verba (1989) significantly developed by 20th century theorists like Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, who identified the role of practical culture in a democratic order as vital.

These theorists argued that the political elements of political organisations facilitate better awareness and a more informed citizenry, who make better voting choices, participate in politics and hold government more accountable as a result.

Putnam, et al (1994) arguing along those lines state that non-political organisations in civil societies are vital for democracy. Their reason is that they build social capital, trust and shared values, which help to hold society together, thus facilitating an understanding of the “interconnectedness” of society and interests within it.

However, some analysts have questioned how effective democratic civil society operates. Zaleski (2006), Agnew (2000) are of the opinion that civil society actors have now obtained a remarkable amount of political power without contesting elections or anyone assigning them political portfolios. Pithouse (2005) lends a voice to this by adding that civil society is biased towards the global practice.

Howbeit, other scholars, according to Pallock (2001) have argued that since the concept of civil society is closely related to democracy and representation, it should in turn be linked with ideas of nationality and nationalism.

The next question is: What is the role of man media in a democratic setting?

MASS MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

The press for a very long time, has been a means of bringing out the nationalist tendencies in many developing countries of the world. To Tharamel (2010) just as everyone needs food, clothing and shelter for survival, so is communication an indispensable factor for the social welfare of the people. He goes on to state that the mass media attempt reaching out to a large audience through advertising, marketing, propaganda and political communication.

From the foregoing, one can infer that access to information is a pre-requisite for the growth of democracy in the following ways:

- 1) mass media enable citizens of a particular country make guided choices rather than opting for ignorance; and
- 2) constant release of information is a check on elected representatives to uphold their oaths of office, thus carrying out the wishes of their electorates.

The above reasoning, points to the fact that democratic systems depend on efficient, accurate dissemination of social, cultural and political information in a societal setting. Matters of public interests are freely discussed among peers, intellectuals and even among ordinary folks in order to affect most of the actions taken in their communities. In this way, mass media, can be described as an integral part of a democratic process. This, it does, by ensuring freedom of expression, thus freedom of conscience which is facilitated through communication. This is the very essence of individual empowerment which is a crucial ingredient of democracy.

No matter how savoury the above points may sound, critics of mass media opine that the media has a tendency to encourage gossips, scandal and even violence. They are of the view that their original role of sensationalizing every piece of information has been taken over by unnecessary sensitization of information. The critics further claim that the mass media today is carried away by over celebration of celebrities and reality shows rather than paying attention to urgent national interest and events. These, they claim, have made the media no longer interested in news worthiness any more.

To add salt to injury, we can see the proliferation of channels owned by different political parties which highlight their achievements and promote their personalities. The result is that voters are swayed by the political propaganda filled with meaningless slogans bringing about voter apathy and total loss of faith in democratic

process. According to these critics, the mass media has only succeeded in transforming citizens into spectators of their selfish aggrandizement.

Howbeit, we should not forget the role mass media played in the liberation struggles of most developing countries of the world. The “*West African Pilot*”, a newspaper edited by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was founded in 1937 and was according to Uche (1989) dedicated to fighting for Nigeria’s independence from British Colonial rule. According to Coleman (1971) the newspaper played a key role in the spread of racial consciousness and nationalistic ideas in the interior of Nigeria. Aguolu and Aguolu (1997) state that its motto was “show the light and the people will find the way”.

DEMOCRACY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Democracy got some footholds in Nigeria from 1999 when the military handed over to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo after a democratically contested election. Otherwise what held sway in Nigeria before this date were series of military interregnums.

Nigeria, no doubt gained political independence from Britain, her former colonial master in 1960. This was however, short-lived as the military struck in 1966 suspending the country’s constitution and in the stead introduced a number of military decrees which they executed with fiats. This was accompanied with denial of human rights, mismanagement of the newly acquired oil money at the time, corruption and widespread poverty. According to Barak (2006), Williamson (2004), and Preuss (1991); if any democracy is not structured so as to prohibit the government from excluding the people from the legislative process or any branch of government from altering the separation of powers in its own favour, then a branch of the system can accumulate too much power and destroy the democracy.

The military subtly took power as self-styled liberators of the common man from the oppression of the ruling class but few years after abandoned that role and became despotic and completely immersed in corruption which they had earlier claimed to salvage.

Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief when General Abdusalam Abubakar handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1999 to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military head of state. For fifteen years now the country has witnessed uninterrupted democratic governance which critics say is also bedeviled with the negative tendencies which crippled the earlier ‘democracies’. At this stage it might be necessary to examine some of the endemic problems plaguing the democratic process in Nigeria.

i. Corruption:

According to Transparency International (2012) political corruption is the use of powers by government officials for illegitimate private gain. The organisation above quoted further states that forms of corruption vary, but include bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft and embezzlement. In Nigeria, bribery is the most outstanding form of corruption.

Black’s Law Dictionary (1911) defines bribery as the offering, giving or soliciting of any item of value to influence the actions of an official or other person in-charge of a public or legal duty.

Funk (2011) defines bribe as the gift bestowed to influence the recipient’s conduct. It may be any money, good, right in action, property, preferment, privilege, emolument, object of value, advantage or merely a promise or undertaking to induce or influence the action, vote, or influence of a person in an official or public capacity.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that corruption affects the running of any government in many ways. In politics, corruption undermines democracy and good governance as government officials are prone to flouting routine processes. Corruptly elected representatives distort representation in policy making and this reduces accountability. Corruption erodes the powers of governments to follow laid down procedures, as short-cuts are employed to siphon resources, and public offices are allotted to cronies, thus flouting formal processes.

The discovery of petroleum and natural gas in Nigeria only helped to elevate the level of corruption in the country. According to Obafemi Awolowo (1979) “since independence, our governments have been a matter of few holding the cow for the strongest and most cunning to milk, under those circumstances everybody runs over everybody to make good at the expense of others.

This explains why Business Anti-Corruption Portal (2013) asserts that it is difficult to do business in Nigeria

without having to make facilitation payments to public officials. The journal further states even tax administration lacks transparency that has led either to high levels of tax evasion or tax officials demanding bribes in returns for lower tax rates.

The police is not left out. The journal states that the police are perceived to be one of the most corrupt institutions in Nigeria and X squad, the disciplinary body responsible for investigating corruption inside the police is reportedly corrupt themselves as well.

Judiciary, adjudged the world over, as the last hope of the common man, is also said to be corrupt, as corruption in the judiciary compromises the day to day running of the country. A situation, where the judicial system in Rivers State is comatosed for several months now as a result of a cold war between the Rivers State Judiciary and the Nigeria Judicial Commission (NJC) over the appointment of a Chief Judge of Rivers State is a case in point.

ii. INSECURITY

Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary (2012) defines insecurity as a feeling of unprotectedness and helplessness, while Medical Dictionary for the Health Professionals and Nursing (2012) defines insecurity as a feeling of vulnerability and helplessness. American Heritage Dictionary of English (2000) defines insecurity as inadequately guarded or protected; unsafe,.... lacking self-confidence; plagued by anxiety.

In Nigeria security lapses is the order of the day. Its origin is traceable to the birth of Nigeria as a nation. In a country with about 250 different ethnic affiliations, the fear of one ethnic group dominating the other has been a constant cause of uprising in Nigeria. Hence, all leadership tussles in the country tend more towards ethnic outlook instead of who is best suited for the job.

The literacy level is low thereby leading to poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. This emphasizes the local slogan that “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop”. The illiteracy rate is very high in the far north where the unemployed, uneducated youths become a veritable tool in the hands of the few rich to cause uprising. These uneducated young minds are easily engaged in election rigging and other illicit activities. Because they are unemployed and uneducated, they are tools in the hands of religious fanatics who even teach them that western education is sin as demonstrated by the Boko Haram Sect.

The political unrest in the north – eastern part of Nigeria is accentuated by poverty, illiteracy and unemployment as the political class has often used this class of people to rig elections and on their part; the ruled lose faith in the electoral process; never reaping the dividends of democracy but only used to oppression by the ruling class who are simply holding public offices to feather their own nests.

This trend also replicated itself in the South-South Region of Nigeria where oil and gas abound in large quantity. The oil was drilled and revenue accruing from it was used to build the sky scrappers at Lagos and Abuja.

The rich in their region garnered all the revenues that accrued to the people and the majority who were to benefit from the wealth of the region wallowed in abject poverty. The scenario only changed when the youths took to the creeks and disrupted the activities of the major oil companies and also crippled the mega-bucks that oil produced for the nation. They called themselves militants and until massive training programs were rolled out for them and a general amnesty granted them, the nation did not have peace.

iii. POLITICAL BIGOTRY

According to Diamond (2004), democracy is a means for the people to choose their leaders and to hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. He goes on to state that the people decide who will represent them in parliament, and who will head the government, at the national and local levels. They do so by choosing between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections.

Though Nigerians decide who represent them in parliament, and who will head the government at the national level, elections in the country are marred by political bigotry. For an election to be free and fair, a lot of preparations are made, such as training of political parties, electoral officials and even the electoral monitors. Independent observers must be involved at the voting centres as well as the vote collation centres. Different parties are disposed to present their proposals and manifestos to the people both directly and through the local and national news media.

Over the years, it has been discovered that most parties present identical proposals to the electorate. This makes

it difficult for a voter to distinguish between what party A has to offer as different from that of party B. This leads to voting aparty as a wise voter would want to listen to the views of the different parties and candidates, in order to make up his mind on whom to vote for.

What the political parties do is to pressurize and in some cases intimidate (threaten) electorates into voting them to office. A case in point is the just concluded governorship election in Ekiti State where a political party (APC) is accusing the ruling party of doling out rice as a bait to lure voters into voting for the winning party (PDP). In 'Buzz', a social media diary of the (Famutimi, 2014) titled PDP and the politics of kerosene distribution, Mr. Buniji Kashamu, Chairman, organisation and mobilization committee of PDP in south-west Nigeria is criticized for distributing 66,000 litres of kerosene to residents of Osun State.

According to Diamond (2004), people must respect the law and reject violence. Nothing ever justifies using violence against your political opponents, just because you disagree with them. In Nigeria, political parties denounce the other parties or even political opponents as evil and the activities of the opposing political parties as illegitimate. Just last week Governor Murhala Nyako of Adamawa State was impeached by the Adamawa State House of Assembly and this week Governor Al-Makura of Adamawa State is also threatened of impeachment. Reacting to this, General Buhari, a former head of state of Nigeria, accused President Jonathan of waging a war against Nigeria by using "the commonwealth to subvert the system" (Adetayo, and Isenyo, 2014). In reaction to this a political group, Transformation Ambassadors of Nigeria on Monday (21st July 2014) expressed concern over the spate of (hired) protests that have continued to trail the wave of impeachment across the states. In the Nigerian constitution (1999) there are specified clauses detailing impeachment offences as it concerns the executive governors of the states and the presidency. Whenever the excesses of state governors are highlighted and punishment meted by the legislative arms of government, their political parties react as if these governors are sacred cows.

According to Dr. Udentia, the Director of communications and strategy of Transformation Ambassadors of Nigeria (TAN), "the institutions of democratic governance should be applied whenever any process of impeachment was deemed faulty. He went further to warn against "the growing culture of political self-help in the form of protests and demonstrations: saying it was capable of retarding the nation's democratic development. Impeachment processes, according to him are law-based processes, derived from the relevant provisions of the constitution. If any person or political entity feels that those processes are legally faulty, redress should be sought in the courts of law. (Oloko, 2014).

Since the kidnap of Chibok girls on 10th April 2014, about 100 days ago, in Chibok town, Bornu State there have been series of dissenting opinions among the ruling class in Nigeria. While some party officials accuse the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of indifference to the rescue process of the secondary school girls, others applaud his efforts at winning the sympathies of such countries as United States of America, United Kingdom, Israel, Germany, China, the United Nations and even the African Union. One thing the critics forget is that confronting the Boko Haram sect head on in their Sambisa Forest hide out would involve the total elimination of most of those students whom they might use as human shield.

In a meeting with some of the students who escaped from the den of Boko Haram and representatives of the parents of the kidnapped girls in Abuja, on 22nd July 2014, President Jonathan assured them that efforts were being intensified to rescue the girls safely and tackle insurgency to a conclusive end (Onuorah, Abubakar and Oyedoyin, 2014).

Before this meeting, there has been a charade of accusations and counter accusations among the political parties, pressure groups, civil society organisations; each trying to outsmart the other in the war against terror in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study has examined what democracy is and traced the modern democratic process to the 5th Century BC Greek origin which today has its application rooted in the representative democracy where the supreme power is invested in the people. The study has also identified the politicians, mass media, civil societies and natural resources as key elements in a democratic process.

Government is chosen and replaced, as is the tenet of democracy, through the political class, in free and fair elections, to ensure that voters participate fully in the life of their society. Politics was however, seen as an avenue in "which every man desires to have his own, to think and act as he likes in society where one man's

desires may conflict with those of others”.

The study also reasoned that although there are generally dissenting opinions in all strata of governance, that stability and order were more likely to result from compromise among interests “than mobilizing people towards an illusory consensus on the common good”. The study also reviewed the dissenting opinions in the fledging democratic process in Nigeria, and is of the view that democracy demands of its practitioners tolerance and that those who are apposed to a particular ideology should not be perceived as enemies who must be destroyed but tolerated as equal partners in the democratization process.

Recommendations

National Security:

National security is vital to the development of any nation. Of recent security challenges have dominated every national and international discourse in Nigeria. The paper therefore calls for security education so that citizens are sensitized into realizing that national security is a collective effort which should not be left in the hands of the security agents alone. The political class should also be taught to avoid making inflammatory statements which politicize security matters. They should rather educate their electorates on basic security issues. This is where the study applauds the “Victim Support Fund” initiative which the President of Nigeria launched last week which is hoped will bring succor to the victims of the Boko Haram Scourge.

Poverty Rates:

A recently published World Bank Report for the first half of 2014 has indicated that official poverty line in Nigeria, according to (Olajide, 2014) may be as low as 33.1 percent. This is a welcome development because the politicians have always used the poor, the hungry and the un-educated as pawns to foster their political interest. Efforts should be geared towards bringing this poverty line to as low as 20 percent in no distant future.

Voter Education

The study calls for voter education in Nigeria. It has been observed that voters are highly uninformed about political issues as they relate to economy and social activities. The culture of tax evasion is entrenched as many rural dwellers find it difficult to pay taxes on the flimsy excuse that they are yet to enjoy the dividends of democracy. Voter education, it is hoped, will also discourage ballot stuffing, violence, alteration of figures, ballot snatching and declaring of losers as winners which characterize Nigerian elections.

Revenue Sharing Formula:

One of the root causes of underdevelopment in Nigeria is imbalance in revenue sharing formulas with the federal government getting a lion’s share at the expense of states and local governments. Little attention is paid to the localities where oil is drilled. Even where funds are allotted to the oil producing areas, government officials appropriate them to themselves with little or nothing set aside for the communities they are meant for which suffer constant environmental degradation. The study recommends a new revenue sharing formular which releases more funds to the local governments, derivation communities, then states and federal government in that order.

Conduct of Elections

For democracy to thrive in Nigeria, all elections should be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The States Independent Electoral Commissions should be abolished as they are known to carry out the electoral dictates of the ruling parties in the various states of their operation.

Speedy Trial of Electoral Offences

To deepen democracy in the country, there should be speedy trial of electoral offences. Special courts should be created to handle all electoral offences. The snail speed trial of election petitions by Election Petition Tribunals should be discouraged because “justice delayed is justice denied”.

In Nigeria, no political party sees anything good in the other. Name calling and name dropping among the political class is the order of the day. Every activity, every policy of a ruling party is questioned and criticized by the opposition. This tends to overheat the polity. Politicians should endeavour to complement enduring strides made by opposing parties. On the other hand, constructive criticism should be openly acknowledged and amends made where necessary. This promotes enduring democracy and brings to the barest minimum dissenting opinions amongst the ruling class.

Political Unrest

Political unrest should be minimized at all levels of governance. “Rented crowds” and biased protest marches by non-governmental organisations at the least provocation should be discouraged. Situations where labour unions, including the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) abandon the classrooms for several months, or when Petroleum and Natural Gas Association of Nigeria (PENGASSON) keep off the roads at the flimsiest excuse should be discouraged. Dialogue thrives on dialogue. Disagreements between labour and their employers should quickly be resolved instead of their degenerating into sit in and sit out and in some cases wide protests and outright abandonment of routine duties.

Ethno-Religious Sentiments

Politicians often times whip up ethno-religious sentiments to achieve their ends. Voters are sometimes indoctrinated to vote along these lines. This is because each ethnic group fears to be dominated by the other. This poses a serious threat to democracy as mediocre candidates are voted into power along ethno-religious lines. The outcome is poor representation, voter apathy and in most cases uprisings, conflicts and dissenting opinion. Citizens should be allowed to choose whom they are convinced could further their causes irrespective of their religious or ethnic leanings. This would enunciate the right attitudes to our fledgling democracy.

The Role of Mass Media and Civil Societies

The Guild of Editors, Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Civil Society Organisations in Nigeria should retrace their steps and play their primary roles as “watch dog” and “conscience” of our nation respectively. The days of “brown envelopes” and “rented crowds” of protesters, should be numbered. Situations where the mass media are galvanized in the publishing of events in the country, along party lines; where journalists publish news items depending on who pays the bills, should be discouraged. We should go back the memory lanes and remind ourselves of the powerful editorials of the “West African Pilot”, “The Daily Times” and “Iwe Irohim”, (published by Chief Awolowo) etc, their liberation tones, the whipping up of the nationalistic conscience of our founding fathers; which won us independence in 1960 from the British.

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