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**THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN
AFRICA: NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract

Nigeria pride herself as one of the giants in the continents of Africa owing to its population, landscape and natural resources endowment. Nigeria, like most Africa countries gained her independence from the Britain in the late 1950s during the cold war that reshaped global politics and enthroned democracy as the most acceptable form of government in the world. Nigeria's journey into nationhood has been characterized by several events ranging from military intervention to civil war, ethno-religious conflicts, corruption, political instability, insecurity and economic crisis among others. Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 after about three decades of military rule raised the hope of its citizens that constitutionalism, rule of law and credible democratic process will be restored; almost two decades after, six successful democratic transitions and general elections, the country is still struggling to consolidate its democratic process. Elections have been hailed as the hallmark of democracy, but the challenge of conducting free and credible elections that will be acceptable by all parties has being a challenge in Nigeria's fourth republic. The story is not different in most African countries, for example, Kenya's Presidential elections among others.

This paper takes an historical analysis into Nigeria's post-independence political experience, it empirically reviewed it trends since her return to democracy in 1999, identified the challenges of democratic consolidation in the country and finally, proffer solutions that will strengthen and enthrone democracy in the country and the continent at large. The paper is qualitative in nature; it relied on the author's compilations and secondary sources of data. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis method.

Key words: Democracy, consolidation, fourth republic, election and corruption.

Introduction

Nigeria's return to democratic rule on 29 May, 1999 after almost three decades of military rule raised the hopes and expectations of her citizens for good governance in a liberal society. However, after two decades of uninterrupted civil rule, six successive democratic transitions (1999, 2003, 2007, 20011, 2015 & 2019); the debate for democratic sustainability and consolidation is still at its peak in the country. The basic elements that characterize democratic rule such as respect for the rule of law, free, fair and competitive elections, constitutionalism, competitive party system, citizen's participation and representation, accountability and transparency in governance are far from reach.

The country is bedeviled with a mirage of challenges ranging from electoral malpractices and violence, weak public institutions, insecurity, corruption, judicial rascality, abuse for the rule of law, ethnic and religious divide to lack of trust among others. The concept of democratic consolidation is universally premised on two basic assumptions. One is that there is an already existing state of democracy in the country. Two, which must be an offshoot of the first is that there is need to sustain and consolidate the existing democratic gains (Kolawole, 2011). Nigeria had attained the basic of the first assumption by moving from authoritarian regime to civil rule. Unfortunately, the country is still struggling with sustaining democracy.

Nigeria's journey into nationhood predates her independence in 1960. The focus of this paper is her political experience from independence till date with emphasis on the fourth republic. Between October 1960 to January 1966, the country was under civil rule (first republic); The military ventured into Nigerian politics in January 1966 and held sway to October 1979 (13 years) when power was returned to democratic government in October 1979 referred to as the second republic. The military took over the political leadership of the country barely four years into the life of the second republic (1979 - 1983). A period some scholars called "the second coming of the military" which lasted for sixteen years. Although, the country witnessed the abortive third republic (1990 - 1993) with this period (Etebom, 2015; Zaira, 2013; Adeniyi, 2010; Ola & Tonwe, 2003).

The Nigerian state like most African countries had experienced military intervention shortly after Independence. The country was under the siege of military dictatorship for 29 years out of her first 39 years' post-independence history as a nation (1960 - 1999). Despite the 20 years of uninterrupted democratic rule, the country is still struggling on all fronts; political, economic, security, electoral, cultural and unity to sustain its democracy far from consolidation. It is against this backdrop that this paper analyzed Nigerian political post-independence history and examined the trends in the fourth republic. The paper further identified some major factors militating against democratic consolidation in the country and made policy recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy

The term "democracy" means different things to different people. There is a wide range of perspective as to the meaning and content of democracy as well as to the conditions for its realization, all of which vary depending on the proponents: philosophical, ideological, political, social, cultural and economic perspectives. In the word of Bernard Crick (1993), The world "democracy" is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public

affairs. A term that can mean anything to anyone is in the danger of meaning nothing at all. Among the 193 countries worldwide that are recognized by the United Nations, 123 are said to be democratic (<http://www.freedomhouse.org>). thus, more than half of those countries have set up a form of government that is characterized by the participation of its people, under whatever form it may be.

A more helpful starting point from which to consider the nature of democracy is Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (1863), which in today is the most popular definition of democracy. He defined democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people" "what this makes clear is that democracy links the government and people.

This idea of democracy has been postulated earlier by some philosophical and political thinkers in the 17th century. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), emphasized the view that, all social institutions are betterment of man as an individual. They laid the foundation for the development democratic thinking (Moyeh, 2015). Hobbes argued that the state was created by the people through a social contract for the protection of personal interests. Locke made his contribution to democracy by regarding the consent of the people as the basic of political power. He contended that, "political power was the trust of the people in the hands of government" "while Mill sees democracy as that form of government in which the whole people or some numerous portion of them, exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by themselves.

The ideas of the early political thinkers that laid the foundation of democracy were clarified and given practical shape by thinkers of succeeding centuries such that by the 19th century, systematic ideas in the liberal theory of democracy had begun to develop. Bentham and Mill (2009), for example, advocated the right to vote and representative government, thereby, laying a

theoretical foundation for adult franchise. By the 20th century, the liberal democratic theory was strengthened on the account of extension of franchise to women and lowering the age of voting to 18 years, thereby liberal democracy was more equalitarian. The overall concept of democracy or democratic rule as defined by various scholars has gone beyond the thoughts of the early thinkers.

Sir Karl Popper posits that:

By democracy, I do not mean something as vague as “the rule of the people” or “the rule of majority” but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, i.e. the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permit public control of rulers and their dismissal by the ruled and which makes it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the ruler (Popper, 1988).

Lipset, S.M in his book, *The Political Man* (1959), defined democracy as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decision by choosing among contenders for political office. From the above definitions, it is evident that elections are no doubt a critical part of modern democratic process. Ball (1989), identified the characteristics of liberal democracy to include the following: that competition is open and not secretive, it is based on established and accepted procedures. Entry and recruitment to positions of political power are relatively open, there are periodic elections based on universal suffrage, civil liberties are recognized and protected, etc.

The basic principal purpose for which democratic government is established by the people is in the protection and promotion of their right, interest and welfare. Democracy requires that each individual be free to participate in the political community's self-government. Thus, political freedom lies at the

heart of the concept of democracy (Huntington,1991; Palma, 1990; Dahl, 1966).

Basic Tenets of Democratic Rule

1. The supremacy of the will of the people
2. Citizens participation
3. Equality
4. Political tolerance
5. Accountability
6. Transparency
7. Periodic elections
8. Independence judiciary
9. Neutrality of state institutions
10. Rule of law
11. Separation of power
12. Human rights
13. Public opinion and freedom of the press

Election

Elections are the very core of democracy. Lindberg (2006), argued that many have hailed elections as the hallmark of democracy. It is what distinguished a military regime from a civil regime. The concept of election like other concepts in social science has no single definition. An election is a decision making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Elections have been the usual mechanisms by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections are used to fill offices in the executive, legislative, sometimes in the judiciary and regional and local government. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations; from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations.

Elections are the very core of democracy. Even if democracy is conceived as involving more than elections, and even if an ideal democracy includes important forms of direct participation by citizens in many aspects of public decisions, still the most basic constraint on oppressive state authority that we have is the fact that we elect the decision-makers and can get rid of them if we dislike what they do. Generally, election is what distinguishes a military regime from a civil regime. It offers the people the opportunity and right to choose their leaders without hindrance, and it is the hallmark of democracy universally. However, in most cases, elections are means to an end in themselves. It serves as a process of achieving particular goals or aim for individuals or groups within a state, especially in the control of governmental power, and they serve as the source of political authority.

Ujo (2000), describes election as “a procedure that allows members of an organization or community to choose representatives who will hold position of authority within it”. The critical features of this definition of election are (1) procedure or process, (2) population or people, (3) representatives and, (4) position of authority, whether governmental or private. These features are important in any discourse on elections.

However, in discussing liberal democracy, Schumpeter (1947), believes election is the opportunity people have “of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them”. While Sandbrook (1988), argued that election implies the right of virtually all adult citizens to vote and be guaranteed of a range of familiar political and civil rights in any society.

Adejumobi (2000) in his contribution sees election as a social pact between the state and the people positing that election symbolizes popular sovereignty and the expression of “social pact” between the state and the people, defining the basic of political authority, legitimacy and citizen’s obligation. It is the kernel of political accountability and a means of ensuring reciprocity and exchange between governors and the governed.

Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democratic consolidation literally means an identifiable phase in the transition from authoritarian rule to civil rule and by extension, democratic system that are germane and fundamental to the establishment and enthronelement of a state, institutional and enduring democracy (Oni, 2014). The concept is universally premised on two basic assumptions. One is that there is an already existing state of democracy in the country. The Nigerian state had erected only on the very fundamental tenets of democracy via her return to democracy rule and successive democratic transitions through regular periodic general elections. Two which must be an offshoot of the first is that, there is need to sustain and consolidate the existing base of democracy. According to Kolawole (2011), democratic consolidation would imply a need to make firmer, more solid and resilient the base of the existing democracy. But it needs to be understood that this second assumption itself flows from the consciousness of the fragility of the base of the existing democracy. He further argued that, it would be meaningless demanding democratic consolidation if advanced democracies like France, Germany or the United State of America. In those states, the democratic processes have been institutionalized. The challenge for Nigeria is traceable to the prism of historical emergence and military involvement in political. Essentially, arriving at a consolidated democracy requires nurturing democratic values and ethos, principles and institutions in a matured sense that prevents a reversal to a hitherto authoritarian regime. It also rests upon a strong and dynamic civil society whose responsibility it is to check repeated abuses of power hold public officials accountable for their actions and inactions in the management of public resources and also serves to mitigate political conflicts (Diamond 1994 cited in Oni, 2014).

The question on how to identify a democracy that is consolidated arises. Different criteria are proposed in extant literature to identify a consolidated democratic system (Schedler Andreas et.al 1998) but two are discernible in this context. First, there is the ‘two election test’ or put differently the ‘transfer of power test’. This criterion reckons with the ‘behavioural’ aspects

of democratic consolidation as it questions the attitude of political actors when defeated in an electoral contest. Clearly stated the probability of democratic survival is not high until and unless democratically elected regimes loose elections in subsequent contests and accept the verdict. Democracy is therefore consolidated when a ruling political party or class hands over power to an opposition party after losing the contest. This speaks volume of the readiness of major political players and their supporters to respect the rules that govern the game of electoral contest and their readiness to sacrifice their personal and/or sectional interest for the good of the democratic system.

The second is the “simple longevity” or “generation test”. The import of this criterion is that 20 years of regular competitive elections should be sufficient enough to adjudge a democracy consolidated irrespective of the fact that power is not transferred to another political party or class. The criterion argues that continuous and regular elections would have created in people a mind-set that develops apathy for any near alternative to democracy. It is therefore unthinkable for the electorates to explore another method of appointing their leaders. However, the foregoing discussion has evidently demonstrated that no one criterion or condition is a ‘pure type’ on its own and that democratic sustainability is a product of a combination of factors or conditions operating together. An accumulation of these facilitating conditions therefore offers the prospects of democratic survival and deepening to be enhanced. There have been 6 successive democratic transitions cum general elections; and 20 years of uninterrupted democracy in the country. However, the basic tenets of democratic rule are largely lacking in the country as will be discussed subsequently in the paper.

Nigerian Post Independence Political Experience

The history of Nigeria as a postcolonial and independent state is not edifying. The country was exposed to disunity, leadership incapability, religious intolerance, ethnicity and corruption from independence in 1960. Pereti (2004) argued that nepotism, corruption and misrule in the Balewa’s

administration led to the military intervention in Nigerian politics barely six years after independence January 1966 there was a counter coup led by Northern elements in the military in July 1966. Sadly, these events laid the foundation of other political events in the country. This counter coup led to the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 - 1970. The first coup threw up General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi as the first military Head of State in Nigeria. General Yakubu Gowon took over the leadership of the country in July 1966. The General Gowon led military government failure to return the country to civil rule as promised after the civil war was among other reasons given by the regime of General Murtala Mohammed for overthrowing the government in July 1975.

The General Murtala/Obasanjo regime succeeded in handing power over to civilian leadership in October 1979. it is worthy to note, that General Murtala did not live to see the end of that regime he was assassinated in an unsuccessful coup in February 1976 led by Lieutenant Colonel B.S. Dimka. General Olusegun Obasanjo, his second in command took over as Head of State and followed through the regime's transition programme to civil rule. The civil rule of Alhaji Shehu Shagari lasted for four years and three months when it was ousted by another military junta. The massive riggings, unprecedented post electoral violence, corruption and eminent collapse of the economy were the major reasons cited by the coup plotters which saw General Muhammadu Buhari assuming leadership of the country. The political events in the last Kogi and Bayelsa governorship elections characterized by massive rigging, political violence and manipulation under civilian leadership of the same General Buhari shows clearly that the Nigerian elite do not learn from history.

The regime of General Buhari was unseated in a palace coup led by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida the coup of December 1983 was referred to as "the coup of the Generals". It was a bloodless palace coup that saw only the Head of State and his deputy removed from office the General Buhari's government was accused of rigidity and unpopular policies (Zaria 2013)

The General Babangida's regime organized the most-lengthy transition programme in Nigeria's history. The political rascality of the regime got to its peak in the wake of the annulment of the today's known "Democracy Day" June 12, 1993 Presidential elections the elections were adjudged by both local and international observers as the fairest and freest in Nigerian political history till date.

With the annulment of the June 12, 1993 President poll allegedly won by Alhaji M.K.O. Abiola and the protest against the government made the General Babangida led government stepped aside and formed an Interim Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan in August, 1993. The Interim government was ejected in another palace coup (bloodless) led by General Sani Abacha in November, 1993 on the ground that the government lacked the support of the already elected governors in the abortive third republic and the ability to wield command in the country. This was evident when the Governors refused to attend meetings with the Interim President.

The sudden death of General Sani Abacha on 8 June, 1998 dramatically changed the political terrain of Nigeria and paved way for the inception of Major General Abdulsalam Abubakar as new Head of State (Zaria cit). The General Abubakar led military government dissolved all political parties and activities. A new date was fixed for a return to civil rule. Finally, President elections were held as the climax of the regime's transition programme and Nigeria returned to democratic rule on 29 May, 1999 after almost three decades of military rule.

Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Nigerian Fourth Republic

Extant literatures have identified some factors engendering democratic consolidation in Nigeria since her independence in 1960. Noticeable among these factors are her historical limitation owing to the circumstance that led to the emergence of the Nigerian state through colonialism. Another factor is the military intervention in politics which spans almost three decades after independence. The problem of leadership has been a reoccurring decimal in

Nigeria's quest for development. Other factors included poverty, corruption, political violence, ethnicity and religious intolerance amongst others (Adeosun, 2014; Kolawole, 2011; Oni, 2014; Tinubu, 2009).

However, the trends since the country's return to democracy in 1999 have taken a new and threatening dimension. One would have expected the elite, politicians and citizens to take all necessary steps to withstand, combat and repel the centrifugal and centripetal forces in order to consolidate democracy owing to her history of military intervention in politics (1966-1979; 1983-1999). There have been six successive democratic transitions from 1999 to date (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019). Each transition since 1999 have sprang up new and more challenges. The 1999 elections were won by the coalition of retired military officers. The 2003 poll was no different as it was a contest that involved two retired generals and head of state. The politics of *do or die*, electoral malpractices and post electoral violence characterized the 2007 and 2011 elections. In 2015, personality perspective took the center stage and money politics was at its peak with no post electoral violence. The incumbent president and ruling political party were defeated at the poll. The country and the international community celebrated in hope that Nigeria's democratic process is close to being consolidated. However, the high level of political violence, political manipulation, electoral malpractices and money politics that characterized the 2019 elections in the country left political actors and observers in the country and international community with a bitter tale. The level of political violence and use of state institutions against the will of the people in the recent Bayelsa and Kogi States Governorship elections further exposed the fragility of Nigeria's democracy. Unfortunately, Nigerians and her political leaders have failed to learn from history. There are increasing threatening challenges to the substance of the country's democracy after 20 years of democratic experience in the Fourth Republic.

1. Weak Public Institutions: the loyalty of public institutions involved in the electoral process in Nigeria are largely to the Commander -in- Chief

of the Armed Forces and the political party in power rather than the Nigerian state. The police, military and the electoral empire (INEC) are not free from this political partisanship in the discharge of their duties during the electoral process. Public institutions must be neutral in the discharge of their duties during and after elections.

2. Electoral Malpractice: No elections since 1999 has been free and acceptable by all the political parties involved the citizens and observers. The elections have largely been characterised by political violence, rigging, ballot box snatching, votes buying among others. There is the need for free, fair and competitive elections in order to consolidate the democratization process in the country.
3. Lack of Political Ideology: The rate at which politicians cross from one political party to another in the country shows there is no clear-cut political ideology in Nigeria's politics. Political ideology should be the guiding principle for political actions and policy.
4. Selective Respective for the Rule of Law: There is a high level of disrespect for the rule of law and constitutionalism in the country. The current government as well as past governments in this fourth republic are culpable. The illegal and continuous detention of perceived political opponents despite court orders is not healthy for democratic consolidation. All parties must obey court orders and respect the rule of law. This illegality is traceable to the military orientation in some of our national leaders.
5. Money Politics: Votes buying has become an acceptable phenomenon in Nigeria's polity. Until the will of the people are freely expressed without influence, elections cannot be said to be free and fair. The hallmark of democracy is free, fair and competitive elections.
6. Godfatherism: Political Godfatherism is anti-democratic and a destructive political phenomenon. Those who come into political offices not through democratic and transparent means will hold their loyalty to those who put them there and not the system. There is need to respect party's guidelines in selecting representatives to public office.

Godfatherism is a phenomenon that has found its way into almost all facets of our national life. Merit and capabilities are hardly used in the public service in the country.

7. Weak Political Opposition: The extent at which politicians defect from the opposition political parties to the ruling parties is frightening. The recent trends of defection by politicians who feel threatened by the anti-corruption agencies call for concern. Democracy cannot only strive when there is healthy political opposition in the country.
8. Political Desperation: Politics should be an opportunity to serve and not a means for self-enrichment. Political desperation either to hold onto power or get into office at all cost is the prime causes of the challenges confronting democratic consolidation in the country.
9. Apathy: Democratic consolidation demands the active participation of citizens. Voters are to come out and be able to express the right to choose leaders freely without fear or monetary influence. The level of political violence and lack of trust in the electoral process is largely responsible for voters' apathy.
10. Abuse of state resources: The amount of money needed to fund elections in Nigeria is huge. From party's ticket, primaries, campaign, settlement of political stakeholders to votes buying during elections. Since political offices are lucrative financially, public office holders use state resources to fund the electoral process in their favour.
11. Lack of Party Supremacy: This is one of the most dangerous trends in the fourth republic. Party members have no respect for political parties; and this is responsible for the high rate of defection witnessed especially after party primaries in the country.
12. Insecurity: Democracy cannot thrive in an unsecured environment. The security agencies are expected to be neutral and effective in the discharge of their duties before, during and after elections. Elections should not be seen as a do or die syndrome. The rate of political violence in the 2019 elections in some parts of the country and the post elections violence in 2011 amongst others should be checked. The high level of

insecurity in the country especially the insurgency in the North-East, robbery in the North-West roads, militancy in the South-South and kidnapping in the South-East will not enhance democratic consolidation in the country.

13. Corruption: The level of corruption in the electoral process in the country is alarming and frightening. All stakeholders are in one way or the other included in this act. The political parties during party primaries and nominations; the politicians during campaigns and votes buying on election days; the electorates, the security agencies and staff of the electoral empire are not left out. The courts are also involved. Until electoral corruption is checked and killed in all ramifications, it will be an impossible task attaining democratic consolidation in our polity.
14. Lack of Separation of Power: Separation of powers is a key component of democracy. There are three arms of government in the country; The Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. The relationship should be cordial with each arm playing its role effectively and responsively. However, the case has been different since 1999; the executive has always influenced the other two arms because of its vantage position and control of the nation's resources. The principle of check and balance which is the hallmark of presidential system of government is largely missing in our polity. The legislature, both at the state and national level have failed to rise above partisan politics and self-seeking agenda.
15. Rascality of the Judiciary: The judiciary is supposed to be a neutral arbitrator in the polity but it's not the case in Nigeria. The rate at which politicians secure court judgements and counter judgements in courts of the same jurisdiction calls for concern. Democracy cannot strive without an independent and impartial judiciary.
16. Religious and Ethnic Politics: One negative device that has deeply affected democratic consolidation in Nigeria is ethno-religious crises. The country in recent years has been divided along these political lines. There is the need for patriotism and inclusiveness to attain democratic consolidation in the country.

Recommendations

In order to attain democratic sustenance and consolidation in our polity, some suggestions are made here.

1. The political elite should learn from history. Most of the reasons the military claimed brought them into politics in 1966 and 1983 seem to be repeating itself in our polity; such as political violence, rigging, post electoral violence, corruption, unpopular government policies, and ethno-religious crises among others. The political class must take steps that will enhance the sustenance of democracy in the country.
2. The electoral empire both at the national, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and state level, State Independent Electoral Commission (SIECs) should be independent of state influence. These empires should be empowered financially, logistically and given the free hands to operate without external influence. INEC under the leadership Prof. Attahiru Jega came close to achieving this in 2015. E-voting should be introduced to reduce the cost and risk involved in conducting elections in the country.
3. Monetization of the electoral process should be de-emphasize and stopped. Unfortunately, this political menace cut across the entire electoral process. From high cost of party tickets, campaign funding to vote buying among others.
4. Remunerations and allowances of political office holders should be grossly reduced. The study further suggested that salaries and allowances of political office holders should be made public for accountability and transparency in our polity.
5. Democracy can only thrive where there is constitutionalism. The rule of law should be enforced and respected at all levels by all. The Executive should respect the independence of the Judiciary, the Legislature should perform their duties without fear and favour; party supremacy and discipline should be enforced and those who abuse the law should be

made to face the law accordingly. The principle of check and balance should be strictly adhered to in governance.

6. Civil society and the media should be more alive and objective in playing their roles in the polity. Since they are key stakeholders in the democratization process, the government should not be seen to be taking any step that will suppress or hinder them from carrying out their role as watch-dogs in the society. Civil society should be non-partisan and apolitical in the discharge of their duties.
7. The Judiciary is the last hope of the common man and plays a critical role in the polity for the sustenance of democracy. It must be independent, impartial and courageous in the discharge of its function of adjudication. The courts should cooperate with the other arms of government but not succumb to intimidation.
8. There is the need to re-orientate the security agencies involved in the electoral process, that is, the military and paramilitary organisations. They are to secure the lives of the electorates, electoral staff and materials. They should be apolitical and non-partisan. Their loyalty should be to the Nigerian state and not the ruling party or President. They should adhere strictly to professionalism in the discharge of their duties. The study strongly recommends that the direct use of the military for electoral duties should be stopped. The military should keep to its basic constitutional responsibility of safeguarding the territorial integrity of the nation.

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