

ISSUES IN NIGERIA DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE AND PARTICIPATION: A TEMPLATE FOR AFRICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

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Abstract: *Democracy as a system of government has no flesh, capacity or definitions without citizens' active participation or input because the institution of the people supersedes every other institution of government since the core of democracy begins and ends with the people from time to time irrespective of the regime or circle of government officials in power anywhere in the world. Nigeria as a state is regarded as a giant of Africa due to several positive attributes that ranges from large land mass, population, military and economy which placed her at the top most position in Africa democracy and participation but her failure to lead by example as far as democracy is concern has also led to the collapse of this system of government in the continent. Therefore, this paper significantly sifted issues in Africa democracy as it affect the level of participation using Nigeria as the guinea pig since she is a significant voice in the continent. Discovering shows that democratic participation in Africa is all time low due to several issues amongst which are: crisis of governance, state and management of security, failure of democracy amongst others. The paper therefore, recommended that African citizens should not be idle or indifference to change, instead let the fight to change the status quo be eternal no matter how difficult it is because struggle have always and will continue to be medium of change. Power belongs to the masses in a democratic setting. The liberation of the Africa mind should be the ultimate goal. Good governance, political freedom, equity and better welfare are in the mind and therefore, Africa leaders should change their culture or approach to governance. For the case of Nigeria and most African countries, it is better to mentioned that anyone who has ever tasted power before at any level should not be given another access. There seems to be no advantage of experience or residual skills acquired before. New hands should be allowed to handle the steering to lift the nations from their rumbles.*

KeyWords: *Democratic practice, Democratic Participation, Political Culture.*

Introduction

The persistent cry for a reformed democracy in Africa cannot be overwhelming because it is the second largest continent in the world with the largest population with a lot of untapped resources (Abonjo, 2021). Africa must be free by entrenching true democratic practice and participation for which Nigeria as her giant must uphold. According to Lumumba (2021) the day Nigeria rise up Africa will never be the same again. In his words Nigeria has shortchanged Africa because Nigeria is Africa. According to David (1995) the trajectory of Africa liberation began during the great protest movement for nationalism and independence from the shackled colonial emperors after the Second World War during the early decades of the twentieth century. Other reason enunciated by Iiffe (1995) is the increase in African population and the mass demand for freedom. Further, more the new brand of young African leaders who got their education in the United States, England and France ginged the African bargain with the European powers to confer political authorities to Africans and be given full sovereignty to run an independent (Aboribo, 2013). Involved in the struggle for independence were pan Africanist who emphasized on the need for unity among Africans.

People such as William Edward, Burghardt Du Bois, who schooled in Harvard University, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana also schooled in the United States and Marcus Garvey in Jamaica who lived at Harlem in New York city (Adebayo, cited in Agbefe, 2017). Others such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya were also a strong freedom activist who argued that the British invasion and administration was detrimental to the culture and tradition of African people, therefore they should be granted independence (Aluwa, 2020). In line with that argument, Marcus Garvey in 1920 issued a declaration of human right of the Negro people of the world which boosted the moral of Africans in the struggle for independence (Allen, 1972). Africa was able to gain independence and self-determination but much is left to be done. This is the reason Dimkpa (2015) asserted that after political freedom the next is the freedom of the people. Therefore, Nigeria must rise because of her place in the continent.

Statement of the Problem

Africa continent is the second largest among other continent of the world. There is much about the continent taking the lead worldwide but reversed has been the case since after donkey years of independence. As popularly known all fingers are not equal so it is with Nigeria one of the most privileged country in the continent with the largest economy, largest population, land mass, military and many others which has naturally placed the country in leadership position as far as the continent is concerned. Indeed the failure of a leader in any organization is the failure of the organization. Hence, this study is aimed at examining the Nigeria's democratic practice and participation as it affect the African political culture.

Conceptual Clarifications

Democratic Society: A society that is democratic is easily known because it has the crops of active, participatory, critical thinking and problem solving citizens with a strong sense of justice. According to John (2021) A democratic society is a society that is fully consistent with democratic principles of liberty, equality, justice and power to the people including the structures, systems and culture that are required to fully implement it. The following are the basic characteristics of a democratic society:

Rights: They are privileges or things a society owe an individual such as safety and security including democratic right to vote and run for political office (John, 2021).

Freedom: Freedom is limit to the power and authority of a state that allows an individual to decide certain things for themselves. Democracy can't exist without certain freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of the press and freedom of conscience (Akpotor, 2015).

Civic Duty: These are responsibilities that individuals have towards a society. It includes abiding by reasonable laws (Sunday, 2019).

Civility: It is the culture of resolving differences using the mechanism provided by the society such as laws, norms, political participation and peaceful protest (Adam, 2022). In the words of Afonughe (2020) protest can be described as a plural disagreement by a section of people over a circumstances, events or policies.

Majority Rule: It is a society that is designed and run by the majority of the people. For example, the right of the majority to strike down unpopular laws, taxes and government unconventional practices (Odhe, 2015).

Minority Rights: Foundational rules such as a constitution that prevent the majority from oppressing the minorities (Aboribo, 2012).

Pluralism: It is the tolerance, inclusion and neutrality that allows for the peaceful coexistence of multiple world views, political parties, religions, ethnic groups and other minority groups (Spacey, 2021)

Rule of law: A set of laws that applies to everyone equally without exception (Spacey, 2021).

Due process: A set of legal rights that the state can't override to ensure a fair justice system and equality (Mukoro, 2019).

Bureaucracy: The bureaucracy and technocracies of the state are controlled by elected representatives. The state may enter international agreement with the consent of the people. Anyone who derived authority from the state is monitored and held accountable by the people (John, 2021).

Checks and Balances: It is a society that is structured such that every government representative has limited power and independent oversight (Oduwue, 2015).

Equality: There is no subordinate office as power and authority are equal. It necessarily means that no personal entitlement can buy influence (John, 2021).

Accountability: This amounts to where decision makers are held accountable or liable to their success or failure through relevant institutions of the people and other anti-corruption organizations (Akpele, 2016).

Democratic Participation: It is known as popular participation where citizens are involved in decision making. According to Sokoh and James (2014) it is the act of involvement of the citizenry in the political process of their country. That is the involvement of the masses or citizenry in the determination of both the composition and the structure of their country's government (Ikelegbe, 2020). It includes activities involved in partisan politics such as contesting elections, voting during elections, rallies, discussions, meetings, constructive criticisms of government policies and programmes with attendant recommendations, membership of pressure groups, financial and material assistance to political parties (Ajeobi, 2013). According to Agashe (2005) citizens participate in politics to gain awareness, hold political offices, elect popular candidates with the portfolio of good governance and control of government machinery, obey constitutional obligations and get involved to make government and its institutions responsive and accountable. The involvement of the people in a democratic society makes for oneness and peaceful coexistence. As corroborated by the National Democratic Institution for International Affairs (2013) genuine public participation can help to foster specific democratic values of legitimacy, justice and the effectiveness of government decision making which make for good relationship and promote a balance of power between citizens and government. Mohammed (2015) mentioned that citizens accessing information and being heard are important but it is still a far cry from being involved in decision making. Furthermore, lack of meaningful space for citizens to engage with public officials inexorably erodes participation (Hassan, 2023). In the works of Scholte (2001) collective social interaction is a method of enabling public engagement, consultation, openness or transparency in and accountability in democracies.

However, democratic orientations can have consequences for behaviour, just as being involved in specific actions can have consequences for these orientations (Quintelier and Van Deth, 2014). Oser (2017) distinguishes the differences between the four forms of political participant in a state who do not only differs in the overall degrees to which they participate but also in the combination of methods use to express their demands which he categorized as all round activist, high voting engaged participants, mainstream participants and disengaged citizens. In whatever shades they may take or be the citizens are always engage in state activities to engineer a better reform for growth and development because it is truly the mainstream of complete checks and balances of government policies and actions. No wonder Amma, Erik and Ekman (2014) described that citizens participation may not be at the same level due to issues of norms or political distrust from institutions of democracy manipulated by officials to deliberately hood wink the effort of the people.

In view of Bengtson (2015) citizen pattern of democratic participation is always in consonance to their corresponding ideas about what democracy is as a system of government or acceptable conventional practice. No wonder democratic participation in Africa and the western world is not at same pal due to different level of orientation and identity and operational technicalities. According to Freedom in the world (2017) the reign and precedents of autocrat in any society or state is a global threat to democracy anywhere in the world. Thus, the core of democracy is popularity, legitimacy, sovereignty, authority and a willing trait of compliance (Gherghima, Sergiu and Brigitte, 2017).

The Africa Continent: Africa as widely known is the second largest continent in the world with an area of 30, 044, 000 and the largest population in the world (United Nations, 2023). The first attempt to create a politically unified state encompassing the whole of the continent were made by European colonial powers in the 19th century with the intent of harnessing the vast natural resources and huge amount of man power the continent had to offer to their empires (Tu-doff, 1997). However, the strong rivalry between the European powers such as Britain, Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Portugal created the reality that no one nation is stronger than the other (Obikeze, 2016). Instead, they carved the continent between themselves scrambling for control of as much territory as possible and attempting to prevent their rivals from obtaining favorable regions (Gherghima, Sergiu and Brigitte, 2017). They virtually maintained control of their territories as colonies until the second half of the 20th century when changes in European policy and thinking led to the releasing of control over their African colonies and the creation of independent nations across the continent took place between the 1950's and 1970's (Satyabrata, 2017).

Issues in Nigeria democratic: A template for African Political Culture

Having explored the attributes of democracy and democratic participation it is now worthwhile to x-ray Nigeria's case as it relate to or affect the African political scenario. According to Inibie (2021) it is not difficult to ascertain that over notable decades there are continuous overt recycled issues in Nigeria democracy and participation. Though the just concluded election witnessed a lot of electoral reforms but there is still much that meet the eyes. According to Yusuf (2023) the just concluded general election witnessed the lowest abysmal turn out. In the 36 states, less than half of the eligible population turned out to vote and no state had a turn out above 40% and of the 93 million registered voters this year, 87. Million people collected their permanent voters card and the total number of actual

voters on the election day was only 24.9million. Barely 9 million voted for the president Ahmed Bola Tinubu which represent 29% (Mohammed, 2023).

Moreover, according to data collected by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (I-IDEA) before the 2023 election, the 2019 election was the lowest of all and became the second lowest in the history of elections held in African countries, which only a bit better than the 32.3 percent recorded in the 1996 Zimbabwean presidential election which means that the Nigeria presidential election has the worst turn out in Africa. Nigeria as a country was rated among the ten (10) countries with the lowest voter's turn out (Mohammed, 2023). These dwindling scenario account for why Nigeria's politicians and state apparatus find it easy to continuously exclude the citizenry rather than including them in the affairs of governance (Leena, 2023). According to Idiyat (2023) the issues with democratic participation in Nigeria is hinged on voters apathy and poor economic situation due to the failure of democracy to deliver development and welfare. In addition, violence and voters suppression also plays a huge role (Inibie, 2021). Even the late deployment of officials and materials to some polling units was a debacle as well. Hasan (2023) also lamented poor election management by INEC in the form of lack of voter's register audit to delete out those who have died and all other ineligible voters from the system. It is on this note that Ikelegbe (2020), further enunciated the issues to be:

Crisis of Governance: The federal government approach to governance in every regime have been continuous under performance and absolute decline despite successive regimes taking over with high hope (Afonughe, 2021). Even the Freedom house report (2020) on freedom and democratic trends in the world ranked Nigeria as one of the seven countries in Africa that have experienced notable decline in democratic governance and respect for human rights.

The State and Management of Security: Conflict, violence and criminality have been rise and increasingly households are becoming exposed to different violent cases of cultism, resource dispute, massacre, communal and religious conflict amidst terrorism.

Utility and Development of State power: Governance in Nigeria have been increasingly concentrated in a few aides to the president popularly known as cabals whose composition, interest and goals seems to be narrow and identity based. Federal character, balance quota system and the love for equity have been thrown to the wind (Afonughe, 2021). Nigeria has become a place where individual have always been stronger than the laws formulated because they constantly dictate the pipe and the tone. No doubt Africa political culture has followed same direction despite that there are a few success in democratic participation as in the case of Rwanda in 2017 which recorded 98.8% of popular participation of the total number of registered voters (Freedom house, 2020). These same challenges are also duplicated all around African countries as nothing has change in these nations.

According to Marie-Noelle (2022) since 1990's the number of African democracies has drastically reduced to eight in 2022, with 41% of Africa's 54 countries classified as free and 44% not free. The core of democracy is participation but it is highly worrisome that in the Africa's context it is highly declining to the point where countries in Africa are even returning to autocratic military system as just recently witnessed in Niger republic among others (The Whistler, 2023). The fact remains that if Nigeria has set a good standard of positive leadership in democratic growth and development there would have been a better democratic tenets in the continent just as the United State of America is doing in the

West. Nigeria has everything she needs to become the beacon of democracy and development met to sharpen the political culture of Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria is the womb of Africa endowed with the capacity to birth growth, development and expands the frontiers of the continent due to the enormous resources at her disposal but she is besieged with wanton challenges that have its peak in leadership deficiency at every level no matter how small. There is just a uniform organized leadership behavior and psychology modeled to bring cultural and systemic failure. Too many recommendations to the epidemic of leadership fraught in Nigeria and the Africa continent are still awaiting implementations. Political bourgeoisie have continuously used their stay in office and its attendant capacity to delineate the good hands out of the political arena. The force of the citizenry in Africa has been made anemic due to the overwhelming influence of weaponized poverty against them. But the continuous yearnings for African liberation cannot be eroded or stopped despite poor response from state actors. It will therefore, continue until a safe haven is sighted. Therefore, the following recommendations are tenable:

1. Citizens should not be idle or indifference to change, instead let the fight to change the status quo be eternal no matter how difficult it is because struggle have always and will continue to be medium of change. Power belongs to the masses in a democratic setting.
2. The liberation of the Africa mind should be the ultimate goal. Good governance, political freedom, equity and better welfare are in the mind and therefore, Africa leaders should change their culture or approach to governance.
3. For the case of Nigeria and most African countries, it is better to mentioned that anyone who has ever tasted power before at any level should not be given another access. There seems to be no advantage of experience or residual skills acquired before. New hands should be allowed to handle the steering to lift the nation from its rumble in internally and in the continent.

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