

The Roles of Political Science in Democratic Governance

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Abstract

Democratic governance values and practices are crucial for democratic institutionalization and the development of any country strength. The practice of democracy in Nigeria over a decade ago has not yielded much needed good governance; however, the history of Nigeria's democratic experiments demonstrates that elections and electoral politics have generated so much animosity which has, in some cases, threatened the corporate existence of the country. This is because democracy is practiced in such a way that responsible and competent people are scared away. Scholars have attempted at unraveling the factors militating against translating democracy into good governance. The paper adopts elite theory as its theoretical framework because of its relevance in explaining the role of political leadership in democratic governance and how it affects public policy including all socio-economic and political matters. The paper revealed that democratisation in Nigeria is pervaded by electoral violence, manipulation of election results and political participation constraints; these identified challenges have made it impossible to attain consolidated democracy that can, in turn, facilitate good governance. It is therefore concluded that to validate a true governance in Nigeria, democracy should be a catalyst for accountability, transparency and responsive government which brings about good governance.

Keywords: *Democratic Governance, Electoral Politics, Government, Development and Political participation.*

Introduction

Democratic governance values and practices are crucial for democratic institutionalization and the development of any country strength. However, the history of Nigeria's democratic experiments demonstrates that elections and electoral politics have generated so much animosity which has, in some cases, threatened the corporate existence of the country. Democratic governance with its ideal of elective representation, freedom of choice of leaders, rule of law, freedom of expression, accountability etc has become the acceptable system of government all over the world. According to Oyovbaire (2007) democracy as a system of government seeks to realize a generally recognized common good through a collective initiation and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegate authority to agent to implement the broad decisions made by the people through majority vote. Thus, in contemporary times, democracy has been referred to as the expression of popular will of the political community through elected representatives, the contemporary democracy rest on representative government (Raphael, 2003). Democratic governance in Nigeria has been a different thing when compared to what is obtainable in other part of the world. Generally, political science are very essential to democratic governance, it constitutes a central instrument of democratic governance, it provides the means of promoting accountability, collective action, popular participation, inclusiveness, legitimacy and accountability through the integration of their competing principles, ideologies and goals for eventual control of the government in the state. Political science is the intermediate link mediating the affairs of both the people and personnel and agencies that exercise state power. Democracy and political science are related to good governance is interrelated and complementary but appear to be antithetical in

Nigeria. Democracy in Nigeria is alien and its practice has proved difficult. The erosion of good governance by the practice of democracy has deepened the crisis of democracy. When democracy is abused, good governance becomes elusive and evasive. This is what Dahl (2003) describes as "virtual democracy", democracy that shares resemblance with true democracy but lacks basic tenets of democracy. Democracy in Nigeria has three unique features which include: insulation of economic matters from popular participation, manipulation and monopolisation of democratic process including the use of violence and electoral fraud to secure legitimacy and peripheral participation of citizens. Surface-level political science does not have far-reaching influence on the outcome of policy choices.

The Roles of Political Science in Democratic Governance: Conceptualization

Democratic governance, by extension, refers to a democratic mode of exercising powers and performing functions by established institutions to achieve developmental goals (Lafenwa, 2009). Jega (2006) correctly listed the constitutive elements of democratic governance to include the following;

- i) **Representation:** People having the freedom to choose their representative through periodic free and fair election.
- ii) **Participation:** People being involved in the processes of policy formulation and policy implementation and in the general management of public affairs.
- iii) **Responsive and Accountable Governance:** Delivery of service to the people and communities in a manner that creates utilitarian value i.e. policies of government bringing greatest happiness to the greater number of people.
- iv) **Egalitarian Society:** Equality before the law, rule of rule, constitutional

The Roles of Political Science in Democratic Governance

regime, fairness, economic and social justice.

- v) **Transparency and Accountability:** in both public conduct and in the management of commonwealth (public resources).

The attainment or elusiveness of these elements in a political science is, simply, a measure of its democratic stature. In revisiting basic questions concerning the values and nature of democratic governance, the concept is approached by emphasizing two of the main pillars of the liberal democratic tradition; citizen participation in the determination of government itself and in decision making processes; and a rights 'platform' that supports and protects the role of individuals in the governance process. Broadly speaking, political science in democratic governance, in the expressions of Roberts and Edwards in Bello-Imam and Obadan (2004) depicts: The dominant role of political science in democratic governance is much stressed by Agorundu (2009) and Achi (2005). Agorundu not only described political science as 'central organs in any democratic setting', but also alluded to the fact that strong and viable parties are a 'prerequisite to an enduring democratic culture'. He further noted that political science based on principles of equity, representation, diversity and choice is important for the democratic governance. Similarly, the critical links between political science and sustenance of democratic governance reinforces what Achi (2005) refers to as 'non-negotiable imperative of strong political science as a bulwark for the survival of democracy'.

Theoretical Framework

The need to theories about the nature of control and the role of leadership in democracy and good governance occasions the study of elites by Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) (Dowse and Hughes, 1989).

The elite theory is a philosophical explanation of the role of the leadership in governance as it affects public policy including all socio-economic and political matters. If the formal structures of government are central to explaining 'who gets what, when and how', then the study and relevance of elite in policy process is equally important. Elites dominate the formal institutions of government and are a determining factor in governance and decision making processes. Elites are the decision makers in the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society. There are varying perceptions on the role of elites in democracy. While some believe that elites are bulwarks of democracy protecting it from the dangers of totalitarianism, the soul source of value and element of democratic consolidation and political stability and constituting integrating force in the society without which it may fall part; others believe that elites are chief threat to the survival of democracy (Dowse and Hughes, 1983). They have exceptional access to key positions in the society and appear to wield control over crucial policies disproportionate to their number and they, to this extent, can understandably be a living contradiction to the notion of democracy. On this philosophical basis, it is assertive that credit of democratic stability and good governance should be given to the elite. Also, blame of democratic failure and bad governance will also be on the elite, since it is central to governance stability or otherwise. It is scientific to study and analyse governance and democratic process in any country using elite theory. The elite theory postulates that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than demands of the masses. The elite consist of those few individuals who wield powers and hold leading positions in the strategic aspects of society. The majority, the masses, only obeys and are guided, controlled and governed by the few. Many of the elites do not hold formal or legal authoritative powers but

are rather behind the scene, teleguiding and manipulating overt political and policy actions (Ikelegbe, 2006). It is on the basis of presumptions that the masses are contented and are incapable of challenging the authoritative position of the elite that informs elites' reflection of policy and its processes. The elite theory directs attention to the source of policy flow and whose interest's public policies serve. The theory attempts a realistic explanation of the source of policy by predicating it in the elite rather than the masses. It also explains the nature and source of policies in Nigeria. Various policies in the public service can also be viewed as emanating from the Nigerian elite- the political, administrative and economic leaders. This is contradictory to democratic tenets that lend credence to participation, openness, accountability and freedom in all spheres of societal life. Elites are capable of setting the tone of society by coming out with policies of their choice. The level of stability and progress achieved in any society is function elites' initiatives. The civil unrest experienced in Africa and the advancement of Europe cannot be divorced from the inclusion and activities of elites in these areas. The fact that Nigeria is oscillating between democratic stagnancy and governance backwardness is reflexive of elites' pursuit of personal aggrandisement and promotion of egocentricism rather than altruistic policies, that are nationalistic and 'peoplecentric' in nature. Peoplecentric policies are policies that are people-centred, whose objective primarily is designed to engage the citizenry and serve the interest of the people and the community.

Roles of Political Science in Democratic Governance

Political science helps governments to perform the functions required to promote socially equitable and sustainable economic

growth, create enabling policies for participation in a globalizing economy, and combat poverty. Among the most important of those functions are:

- a) Developing human resources;
- b) Protecting human rights and political freedoms;
- c) Protecting security, health, safety and welfare;
- d) Building social capital by strengthening civil society;
- e) Protecting the natural environment;
- f) Mobilizing financial resources for development;
- g) Creating partnerships and collaborations with the private sector and non-governmental organizations for service delivery;
- h) Democratizing and decentralizing government;
- i) Providing or facilitating the provision of physical and technological infrastructure; and
- j) Enabling private sector development.

Although each of these functions is important in its own right, they are all interrelated and together affect the ability of governments to achieve social and economic development goals. Achieving socially equitable economic development depends on the ability of the leaders of national and local governments. The challenge facing all governments in the 21st century is to create a system of governance that promotes and supports efficient economic interaction and that, at the same time, advances the health, safety, welfare, and security of their citizens. All states face continuing challenges in renewing political institutions, finding new modalities of governance, and expanding political capacities to guide national economic activities without undue intervention and control. Innovative governments create a political system that can elicit at least a minimum level of political science consensus on social and political goals; encourage political economy growth. Among the means available to

The Roles of Political Science in Democratic Governance

strengthen political science are constitutional, electoral, governance, administrative, and civil service reforms. Constitutional reforms restructure and revise the basic principles and institutions of governance; establish the structure of government as a federal, federation, or unitary system; identify the purpose and powers of the State; delineate the powers and limitations of and relationships among legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government; and clarify the responsibilities and obligations of government and citizens. Electoral reforms create new types of and bases for representation; establish or revise the qualifications for registration and voting; modify election rules and voting procedures; determine the process of candidate selection; prevent corrupt or unfair voting practices; guarantee voting rights; and determine how the public can hold elected officials accountable.

Conclusion

The crisis of democratic governance in Nigeria in the last decade is myriad and complex. The bulk of which was created by leadership ineptitude arising from electoral frauds. Democracy in Nigeria since independence is practised with regard to subjective factors and primordial loyalty to one's place of birth, social connection and group affinity. Consequently, voting pattern has been ethnic-based. Democratization is always directed towards ethnicism. Campaigns are not issue-based and election victory is a function of level of intimidation, thuggery and rigging. Sub national consideration has displaced national interest and mediocrity took preference over merit and competence in the election of national leaders. The unfolding events in Nigeria evidently point to a departure from the guides of democratic ethos and ethics. Politics in Nigeria has been described as sectional politics where denial of rights takes priority in the distribution of and access to national resources. The

segregated politics of the governments at all levels create primordial ethnic loyalties where groups jostle for the "national cake" in a way that could inhibit the continuity of the Nigerian State. Ajayi (2007) recaptures this assertion when he opines that "politics and political parties were ethno-centrally based. Sub national considerations overshadowed national interest. Primordial politics and the syndrome of the 'son of the soil' took preference over merit and competence in the choice of national leaders. The culture of intolerance that leads to denial of rights to participate in politics has made individual to think and believe that fighting for the national interests is a perversion and in contrast, fighting for individuals and groups is 'an acceptable norm' in Nigeria. Politics and political behaviour in the country are soaked in the 'miry clay of zero sums' where tenacity of office has become a rule rather than exception. Onyeoziri (2002) emphasized the evil of denial of rights when he warned that: *By subjecting the minority nationalities to the domination of the majority nationalities and also subjecting the entire Nigerian edifice to the domination of one of the regions, regionalism questioned the legitimacy of the Nigerian federation, the inherent inequality in the latter also fostered hostility and competition among the component units of the nation state. This in turn excited subunits nationalism against nationalism for the Nigerian nation-state. Each of these effects of the policy of regionalism: threat to system stability: alienation of citizen loyalty from the Nigerian state: undermining of the legitimacy of the political order.* Rolling back doldrums of bad governance perpetrated and perpetuated by anti-democratic forces requires building strong democratic institutions that surpass the tenure and manipulation of the political actors that create them.

Recommendations

The Roles of Political Science in Democratic Governance

Some of the issues in the way forward are discussed here:

There is need for viable electoral reform. Reforming electoral processes in Nigeria will accord the citizen's sense of belonging and participation vote's count and their leaders emanate directly from them. Electoral frauds have also been discovered to be the major impediments to development. It is the greatest threat to economic development and unity. In fact, other impediments gravitate around electoral frauds. It is, therefore, imperative to reform the process to enhance quality, free and fair elections. Reform is also needed to stabilise the polity. Electoral reforms will completely eliminate political violence, sit-tight syndrome, corruption and ineptitude and improve political participation. Reform is also capable of bringing about good governance, as meritocracy rather than mediocrity determines who occupies what position. The inseparable synergy between politics and economy makes reform in electoral processes a matter of necessity. Political stability creates economic stability. To evolve robust economy therefore, it is desirable to have electoral reforms geared towards political stability. Judiciary should be strengthened and be alive with its responsibility. Judiciary should be bold enough to give verdict in favour of those who truly won elections. The psychological implication of this is: One, it will deter politicians from wasting money, time and energy on hiring thugs and stock-piling arms. Two, it will engender the emergence of responsible political leadership. Three, it will divest the youths of destructive tendencies. Four, it will encourage political participation and free exercise of franchise on the part of the electorate. Electoral reforms should also be backed by the political will to implement and enforce. Perpetrators of political violence should be brought to book against all odds, as this will serve as deterrent to others and rid

democratisation process of violence. There should be a minimum of six months litigation period for the conclusion of grievances and all electoral litigations arising from electoral malpractices before swearing-in or constituting new government. This is to prevent a case whereby state funds are used to pursue electoral litigation and using state resources to hire thugs and unleash terror on the people. Appropriate sanctions, ranging from jail term without option of fines to permanent disqualification from contesting future election, should be imposed on any erring political actors and INEC officials that are involved in or known to have aided any form of electoral malpractices.

Any breach of the electoral law (no matter how insignificant) should render the election invalid and void and the next highest scoring candidate should be declared winner. Election re-run should be seriously discouraged in view of the heavy resources required for such exercise. It has been widely observed that Nigeria does not require strong men but strong institutions. Strong institutions are capable of compelling the occupants of the offices to behave according to the dictates of their offices. Another important point to note is the need for good leadership. Leadership is good when it pursues public good and places national interests over and above personal interests. Leadership, in this sense, is responsive and responsible. The late President Umar Yar'adua constituted Electoral Reforms Committee. The committee was to, *inter alia*, look into electoral issues in Nigeria with a view to coming out with acceptable and viable electoral reforms necessary for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The committee, among other things, recommended that INEC chairman and its commissioners should not be appointed by the President but by National Judicial Commission (NJC) and that the funding of INEC should come from Consolidated Fund, independent

candidacy, proscription of carpet crossing among legislators and so on are recommended by the committee. It is suggested that Uwais report should be fully implemented. Another important point is to make Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) truly independent. This could be done by structuring the composition of INEC. The composition of INEC should be broad-based. This can be achieved through the following suggestions: involvement and appointment of representatives of all major political parties in the constitution of INEC; the major political parties can be determined through the seats won in the National Assembly; membership of INEC should also comprise the representatives of the civil society organisations, labour unions, etc.; the nominees from these organisations should be sent to the National assembly for ratification; the confirmed members to select their chairman, who shall not be partisan and that the funding of INEC should come from consolidated revenue account.

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