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Democracy and Development: A Case of the Obasanjo's Administration (1999-2007)

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Abstract

The essence of democratic government is for the political and social development of the state. Therefore, this paper examines the impact of democracy on national development during Obasanjo's administration, as well as investigates whether democracy has actually impacted on the development of the Nigerian state during the civilian rule of the retired General Olusegun Obasanjo. We shall make use of secondary data and the descriptive method shall be the approach data analysis.

Keywords Democracy, Development.

Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the influence of democracy on development in Nigeria, using the Olusegun Obasanjo's democratic rule as our study. After Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country experienced both military and civilian rule. Nigeria has had five democratic governments, namely: the Balewa, Shagari, Obasanjo, Yar'adua and Jonathan

administrations. These administrations are spread into four Republics, and of all these civilian rules, Obasanjo's administration was the longest, lasting for 8 years (1999-2007). Other two democratic administrations have lasted for 4 to 6 years. At independence, Nigeria inherited parliamentary rule headed by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, which lasted for 6 years (1960-1966). And the Second Republic under Shehu Shagari lasted for 4 years.

According to Adeyemo (2002) of Nigeria's 52 years of independence, the military has ruled for more than 30 years while civilian rule is gaining relevance. The questions now are : How did Nigeria fared under democratic rule of Obasanjo administration? Did democratic rule engendered more development in Nigeria? These are the salient questions that this paper seeks to answer.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy is a form of government in which state-power is held by the majority of citizens within a country or a state. It is derived from the Greek word *dēmokratía*, "popular government", which was coined from *dēmos*, "people" and *krátos*, "rule, strength" in the middle of the fifth-fourth century BC to denote the political systems then existing in some Greek city-states, notably Athens following a popular uprising in 508 BC (Suleiman, 2009).

According to McLean & McMillan (2003), "democracy is synonymous with majority rule. And this 'majority' appears to be more clear cut than 'people'; it means 'more than half.'" Appadorai (2004) defines democracy as a form of government in which the ruling power of a state is legally vested not in any particular class or classes but in the members of a community as a whole. Modern democracy is representative, indirect; the people govern through

representative periodically elected by them.

Smith (1994) defines democracy as "free elections contested by freely organized parties under universal suffrage for control of the effective centers of governmental power. Even though there is no universally accepted definition of 'democracy', there are two principles that any definition of democracy include. The first principle is that all members of the society (citizens) have equal access to power and the second that all members (citizens) enjoy universally recognized freedoms and liberties (Suleiman, 2009).

Development on the other hand means making a better life for everyone. In the present context of a highly uneven world, a better life for most people means, essentially, meeting basic needs: sufficient food to maintain good health; a safe, healthy place in which to live; affordable services available to everyone; and being treated with dignity and respect (Peet & Harwick, 2009).

In the same vein, McLean & McMillan (2003) see as a normative concept referring to a multidimensional process and dismiss any universal formula. According to McLean & McMillan (2003), "increased economic efficiency, expansion of national economic capacity, and technological advance are generally accepted as necessary conditions if development is to be sustainable, as are economic and industrial diversification and adaptability in the face of shocks."

Peet & Harwick (2009) posit further that beyond meeting these needs, basic to human survival, the course taken by development is subject to the material and cultural visions of different societies. The methods and purposes of development are subject to popular, democratic decision making.

Flowing from the above scholars' viewpoints of democracy and development, it is important to note for the

purpose of this study, that democracy is government of the people, which stands to deliver the desires or expectations of the governed. On the other hand, development is advancement and achievement of the desires and expectations of the people or society anchored on people's government. Therefore, democracy is the catalyst of development. In other words, democratic government entrenches development, and it is the essence of growth in the state.

In Nigeria, the emergence of a democratic rule in May 1999 ended 16 years of consecutive military rule. Olusegun Obasanjo became the steward of a country suffering economic stagnation and the deterioration of most of its democratic institutions. Obasanjo, a former general, was admired for his stand against the Abacha dictatorship, his record of returning the federal government to civilian rule in 1979, and his claim to represent all Nigerians regardless of religion (Nigeria-Planet.com, 2010).

General Olusegun Obasanjo took over a country that faced many challenges, including a dysfunctional bureaucracy, collapsed infrastructure, and a military that wanted a reward for returning quietly to the barracks (Nigeria-Planet.com, 2010). The President moved quickly and retired hundreds of military officers who held political positions, established a blue-ribbon panel to investigate human rights violations, ordered the release of scores of persons held without charge, and rescinded a number of questionable licenses and contracts let by the previous military regimes. The government also moved to recover millions of dollars in funds secreted in overseas accounts (Nigeria-Planet.com, 2010).

Essentially, this paper is to explain how well Nigeria has fared under a democratic government of Olusegun Obasanjo in terms of economic and social development of

the nation. Our source of data shall be secondary; these include relevant books, conferences papers, journals and the internet; and descriptive method will be used to analyse all data gathered.

Therefore, this paper is divided into five parts. Part one is the introduction, part two is the theoretical linkage, Part three discusses the challenges of governance in Nigeria, while part four explains the economic policy of Obasanjo's regime and the effects of Obasanjo's policies, and lastly, part five is the conclusion.

The Democratic Peace: the theoretical linkage

Owen (1998) posits that the proposition that democracies seldom if ever go to war against one another has nearly become a truism. According to Owen (1998), "The "democratic peace" has attracted attention for a number of reasons." It is "the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations," reports one scholar. It poses an apparent anomaly to realism, the dominant school of security studies. And it has become an axiom of U.S. foreign policy. "Democracies don't attack each other," President Clinton declared in his 1994 State of the Union address, meaning that "ultimately the best strategy to insure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere." Clinton has called democratization the "third pillar" of his foreign policy (Owen, 1998). Owen (1998) posits further, "Wars are so rare that random chance could account for the democratic peace." Accordingly, liberal democracy as a state that instantiates liberal ideas, one where liberalism is the dominant ideology and citizens have leverage over war decisions (Owen, 1998). Liberal democracies are those states with a visible liberal presence, and that feature free speech

and regular competitive elections of the officials empowered to declare war. Liberals believe that individuals everywhere are fundamentally the same, and are best off pursuing self-preservation and material well-being. Freedom is required for these pursuits, and peace is required for freedom; coercion and violence are counter-productive. Thus, all individuals share an interest in peace, and should want war only as an instrument to bring about peace. Liberals believe that democracies seek their citizens' true interests and that thus by definition they are pacific and trustworthy. Non-democracies may be dangerous because they seek other ends, such as conquest or plunder. Liberals thus hold that the national interest calls for accommodation of fellow democracies, but sometimes calls for war with non-democracies. When liberals run the government, relations with fellow democracies are harmonious (Owen, 1998).

Theories of the Democratic Peace

Placel (2012) identified two theories of the democratic peace. They are Structural and Normative

Structural Explanation

According to Placel (2012), of the two main variants of the democratic peace theory, the structural account argues that it is the institutions of representative government, which hold elected officials and decision-makers accountable to a wide electorate, that make war a largely unattractive option for both the government and its citizens. Because the costs and risks of war directly affect large segments of the population, it is expected that the average voter will throw the incumbent leader/party out of office if they initiate a

losing or unnecessary war, thus, providing a clear *institutional* incentive for democratic leaders to anticipate such an electoral response before deciding to go to war. This view does not assume that all citizens and elected representatives are liberal-minded, but simply that democratic structures that give citizens leverage over government decisions will make it less likely that a democratic leader will be able to initiate a war with another liberal democracy. Thus, even with an illiberal leader in place, institutions such as free speech, political pluralism, and competitive elections will make it difficult for these leaders to convince or persuade the public to go to war.

Normative Explanation

In the same vein, Placel (2012) posits that the proponents of the normative/cultural perspective, by contrast, argue that shared democratic and liberal values best explain the peace that exists between democratic states. According to this view, democratic political culture encourages peaceful means of conflict resolution which are extended beyond the domestic political process to other democratic states because leaders in both countries hold a reasonable expectation that their counterparts will also be able to work out their differences peacefully. Political ideology, therefore, determines how democracies distinguish allies from adversaries: democracies that represent and act in their citizens' interests are treated with respect and consideration, whereas nondemocracies that use violence and oppression against their own people are regarded with mistrust and suspicion. The importance of perception means that even if a particular state has 'enlightened citizens and liberal-democratic institutions,' unless other democratic states regard it as a genuine liberal democracy then the democratic

peace proposition will not hold. This argument can, therefore, explain a number of contentious cases: Americans did not consider England democratic in 1812 because England was a monarchy (War of 1812) and liberals in the Union did not consider the Confederacy a liberal democracy because of their use of slavery (American Civil War).

Although some scholars regard the institutional and normative explanations as mutually exclusive, a much more intuitive and persuasive defence of the democratic peace theory emerges from combining these two viewpoints. Thus, the particular democratic practices that make war with other liberal democracies unlikely – free and fair elections, the rule of law, free press, a competitive party system – are driven by both 'converging expectations about what conventional behaviour is likely to be' (institutions) and 'standards for what behaviour ought to be' (norms). These two explanations are complimentary and mutually reinforcing: cultural norms influences the creation and evolution of political institutions, and institutions help generate a more peaceful moral culture over time.

Democratic Peace Theory is able to explain development from the point of view of absence of war. The absence of war will bring about peace and this peace will enhance and strengthen growth. Since the government in power will have to address issues patterning to development and meet the needs of its electorates. Therefore, development will be enhanced under democratic rule.

The Challenges of Governance in Nigeria

There are a lot of factors militating against democratic governance in Nigeria. These factors have been a stumbling block against Nigeria's democratic progress and

development. These factors are: electoral fraud, good leadership and government, corruption, religion issues (sharia law).

Electoral Fraud

Uwakwe (2011) posits electoral fraud and crisis have always been a mile stone for Nigeria to cross. Since voting commenced in the country in 1923, there has never been one form of electoral crisis or the other due to alleged rigging and intimidations. The most recent could be traced from 1999 when the country returned to full democracy. Then the 2003 and 2007 elections were far more worst than each previous ones.

And in the same vein, Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) affirm that Nigeria's April 2007 elections were widely believed to be the most flawed and fraudulent since her independence in 1960. Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) go to assert this fact:

The country's own 50,000 strong independent election observers, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), described the process as a 'sham' and a 'charade', while Nigeria's *ThisDay* newspaper labelled the poll a 'rigging and killing extravaganza.' Groups like the Nigerian Bar Association, the Nigeria Labour Congress, the Nigerian Union of Journalists, and the Academic Staff Union of Universities also criticised the elections. Ballot boxes were stuffed and stolen, voters intimidated, and results appeared out of thin air in areas where voting had clearly not taken place, particularly in the Niger Delta (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008).

The administration of late President Musa Yar Adua

Corruption

Poor management of funds, political instability and poor governance continue to tear Nigeria apart. Nigeria is the most corrupt country in Africa with very high unemployment rates. Almost all political figures in Nigeria today engage themselves in corrupt activities leaving the people with nothing but poverty and despair (AfricaW, 2012).

Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) believe Nigeria's leaders have clearly lacked a sense of noblesse oblige (the obligations of rank). In this light, they assert that an estimated \$380 billion of the country's oil wealth was stolen by its post-independence leaders: about two-thirds of all economic aid given to Africa during this period. Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) believe that the government of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-93) was unable to account for \$12.4 billion of missing oil revenues that were part of a windfall from the Gulf War of 1991.

Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) also identify these corrupt cases of Nigeria's leaders:

1. "The family of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) had to return \$700 million (out of a reported \$3 billion) in looted money after his death in June 1998."
2. "Despite allegedly spending more than \$2 billion in reconstructing roads and over one trillion naira on the power sector, the civilian regime of an erstwhile military leader, Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), failed to revive the country's dilapidated infrastructure and electricity sector, and the country's oil refineries were producing less when he left office in 2007 than when he was first elected in 1999."

Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) posit further

The Obasanjo regime also announced that it had lost \$4 billion in potential oil revenues in 2006 to insecurity and the damage of pipelines by armed militants in Nigeria's volatile south-east Niger Delta region. As Adigun Agbaje, Adeolu Akande and Jide Ojo eloquently noted: 'Nigeria is a resource-rich country of poor people in which pathological substance often triumphs over sanitised form; institutional recession masquerades as institution building; endless new constitutions parade as substitutes for constitutionalism; and ... performance is often in direct contrast to fervent declarations of intent and achievement (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008)

Every year, Nigeria rolled out graduates from her higher institutions, most of them end up on the streets with nothing at all to do after college. Most of these unemployed graduates engage themselves in online internet scam and fraud (popularly known as 419 business) just to survive (AfricaW, 2012). And this has contributed in no small way to the insecurity in the country.

Between 50-60 percent of the Nigerian population live below poverty line. Most people have given up on education because they find nothing useful to do with their degrees after college. These days you see children of school-going age roaming about on the streets doing petty trading (AfricaW, 2012).

Another important challenge of Governance is the Sharia Issue

Richardson (2010) posits that the Nigerian legal system was established and modelled under British colonialism legal system in the late 19th century. And divided the country into northern, Lagos and southern Nigeria and south reunited in 1914. After independence, in

1960, English law was still part of the Nigerian legal system. In an attempt to meld the pre-colonial system of regional governance and un-codified laws of the people with the English legal system, Islamic and customary law were re-enacted under local administration. Islamic law presided over the mostly Muslim northern states, and customary law governed the Christian south. In the same vein, Richardson (2010) posits, the Islamic and customary laws of a century ago held limited authority over cultural and civic matters such as marriage and succession. They were enforced upon consenting members of the community by local religious and regional leaders, not through the criminal court system. After Nigeria's independence in 1960, customary and Islamic law remained under the jurisdiction of the Nigerian Federal system, and a secular constitutional legal system was formed in the "spirit of mutual coexistence.

According to Richardson (2010), after a shift from military rule in 1997 and the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, federal control began to loosen resulting from a new emphasis on democratic freedom. Governor Ahmed Sani was the first to declare his state (Zamfara) a sharia state on 25 October 1999, and by 2000, a third of Nigeria's states had adopted sharia law. Capitalizing on the time of transition, politicians created loopholes and extended sharia law to include criminal rulings. Politicians used Islamic law to appeal to large Muslim populations in the north in order to get their votes, and they pressured Muslim voters who didn't support sharia by portraying them as anti-Islamic. Many voters supported sharia because they desired a just government that would put an end to corruption and poverty. Unfortunately, sharia law as implemented is inconsistent with broader Islamic values, and it has done little to bring justice to the people. Instead, sharia has degraded rule of law in Nigeria and encouraged

harsh and unfair criminal punishments (Richardson, 2010).

In 2001, Sufiyatu Huseini, a 35-year-old woman from the northern Nigerian state of Sokoto, became the subject of international media attention and scholarly debate when sentenced to death in a sharia criminal court as punishment for adultery. According to the Quran, adultery can be proven only if four male witnesses testify, but Ms. Huseini's case was evaluated under the strictest interpretations of sharia law, with her infant child serving as evidence of her crime. She was eventually acquitted in 2003, but many Nigerians have been sentenced to lashings and amputations for comparable criminal offenses (Richardson, 2010).

Cases like these demonstrate the effects of a version of sharia law that includes oversight of criminal offenses. Ten years after criminal sharia was adopted, the authority of the Nigerian state continues to erode because the implementation of sharia law contradicts the penal code of the secular federal system. Legal pluralism under sharia has threatened the legitimacy of the Nigerian constitution and exacerbated existing hostility and divisions between Christians and Muslims. In order to avoid total state failure, citizens, religious leaders, and the international community must continue to demand a limited purview for sharia as one way to strengthen the federal state and unify the Nigerian people (Richardson, 2010).

Economic Policies of Obasanjo's Rule

In Nigeria, the long years of military rule had a devastating effect on the Nigerian economy. Economic planning was haphazard, policies distorted, and implementation processes undermined. In addition, corruption, fraud and general mismanagement became the order of the day. As such, the Nigerian economy was in a serious comatose when

the civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo came into existence in May 1999 (Mudasiru and Adabonyon, 2001).

The Obasanjo's administration that was inaugurated on May 29, 1999 had to immediately embark on image redeeming mission across the globe. The government's foreign policy sought to restore Nigeria's integrity among the comity of nations, due to the misrule of the military regimes and to provide the enabling domestic environment for foreign investors and development. Obasanjo's administration was able to record the following advantages: the removal of the so-called pariah status from Nigeria, and the re-admittance of Nigeria into the comity of nations, as well as the aggressive pursuit of globalization through transformation in information technology, reintroduction of privatization and engendering of a stakeholder-driven developmental governance. This aggressive pursuit of globalization led to a plethora of progressive developments, which include the debt relief, the \$18 billion debt relief - the largest in such financial deal in sub-Saharan Africa. Obasanjo's regime stemmed inflation at 10.9 per cent in 2006; achieved 5-6 per cent growth rates; stabilised the naira (the national currency); improved the country's credit rating to increase investment; and built up foreign exchange reserves which stood at \$48 billion in April 2007 (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008). Also, he embarked on the expansion of the telecommunication industry, deregulation of the energy sector, expansion of the transportation industry and of course, the foreign policy forays and economic diplomacy that had impact in Congo, Sao Tome & Principe, Togo, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia (Mudasiru S. and Adabonyon: 2001). The economic diplomacy that has had effects in France, Europe and even in the Americas, making Nigeria prominent in the G7.

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission

The establishment of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) by Obasanjo to curtail the activities of the fraudsters in government and the general public. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), led by the fearless Nuhu Ribadu, recovered over \$5 billion in stolen assets and prosecuted 82 corrupt business men and policemen. In unprecedented moves in 2005, Tofa Balogun, Nigeria's Inspector-General of Police, was convicted of corruption and jailed. Fabian Osuji, education minister, and Mobolaji Osomo, housing and urban development minister; were also fired for respectively bribing legislators to pass a budget and selling government properties (including to close relatives of Obasanjo's wife). Investment banks like JP Morgan, Citibank, Deutsche Bank and Standard Bank also increased their presence in Nigeria, while \$1 billion of portfolio inflows entered Nigeria in the first half of 2006 alone.

Obasanjo's regime was credited with improving the telecommunication sector, increasing telephone lines from 400,000 to 40 million in six years (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008).

According to Adebajo & Mustapha (2008), this period also saw the establishment of a parastatal for Diaspora Affairs to enable a group of Nigerians estimated at 17 million to contribute to the country's development. According to Nigeria's government, in the first six months of 2007, Nigerians in the Diaspora sent home an estimated \$8 billion in remittances.

The Effects of Obasanjo's Policies

Obasanjo returned to the helm as an elected civilian

president in 1999 in rather more difficult economic and political circumstances. And despite, the laudable accomplishments recorded by Obasanjo's administration and stated above, Obasanjo's administration could not conduct free and fair elections. This is evident in the 2007 general election, in which Umaru Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan, both of the People's Democratic Party, were elected President and Vice President, respectively. The election was marred by electoral fraud, and denounced by other candidates and international observers (Total.com, 2012). The administration of late President Musa Yar Adua admitted to some flaws in the outcome of the elections and promise to correct same in 2011. The cold hand of death never allowed him to fulfill that promise and the vice president Goodluck Jonathan becomes the new president (Uwakwe, 2011). Obasanjo's administration was also noted for some anti-democratic norms. These are the deployment of soldiers to Odi and Gbeji in 2000 and 2001 respectively, which employed disproportionate force to 'pacify' the area in military campaigns of awesome destructiveness totally unworthy of a democratic government (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008).

Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) note that the EFCC was accused of manipulation by Obasanjo to target his political opponents in a selective manner. In the same vein, Adebajo & Mustapha (2008) observe further:

Obasanjo's unsuccessful and undignified attempt to change the Nigerian constitution in April 2006 to allow him to run for a third presidential term, and was reportedly offered bribes of \$400,000 to senators and representatives; had armed police break up a meeting in Abuja of legislators and governors opposed to a third term; and threatened state governors who failed

to support his bid with impeachment (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008).

Nigeria's economic problems which did not abate during Obasanjo administration, also prompted many of its citizens to turn to religion for succour. The popularity of both Islamic and Christian fundamentalist groups increased, even as wealthy and ostentatious preachers played on the gullibility of their desperate flocks (Adebajo & Mustapha, 2008).

Conclusion

Democracy is a form of majority rule, in which the citizens stand to benefit if properly managed and if the vote of the electorate counts. The salient point noted in this paper is that democracy will enhance development if the institutions put in place to anchor it (democracy) operate independently of influence of government in power. The various challenges inherent in democracy range from ethnic struggle for power, which has led to several ethnic and religious conflicts, electoral fraud, corruption and mismanagement of national resource. The institutions established to manage these challenges are not doing enough and the citizens are yet to feel the impact of government.

It is, therefore, recommended that for the democracy to be the anchor of development, strong institutions are needed to manage the socio cum political challenges in Nigeria. These institutions should be strengthened and allowed to operate independently.

More importantly, elections into political offices need to be free and fair so that political office holders will be accountable to the electorate.

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