

Nigeria and the nature of its political system in a civilized world

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Abstract

The concept of civilization is not new as many scholars have thought, however, it has assumed new dimensions in the face of recent socio-political, economic and communication developments. As the world is gradually bridging the gap between the developed and underdeveloped, through the removal of all forms of barriers that hinder effective human interaction in the globe, Nigeria cannot live in isolation. This becomes even more necessary when one quickly considers the effort of United Nations and other international institutions to curb inadequate and corrupt political systems and make the world a peaceful place for human interaction. This paper discusses the nature of political system in a heterogeneous country as Nigeria. It pays close attention to the benefits, and modalities adopted by leaders and political elites in delivering political services to the people since inception of democracy in the modern day Nigeria. According to David Easton, "A political system is an interaction through which value are authoritatively allocated for a society. It is refers broadly as a process by which laws are made and public resources allocated in a society, and to the relationships among those involved in making these decisions. The question is: Is this true of Nigeria democracy? This is therefore the problem with Nigeria democracy and the political system it operates. Finally, this paper will conclude by offering measures to enhance the process, practices and the application of Nigeria political system for the purpose of achieving a better democracy.

Keywords: Nigeria; Political System; Democracy; Civilization; Corruption

1. Introduction

In the 17th century, John Dame a renowned poet in England said. No man is an Island, entirely on itself, every man is a piece of continent, a part of the main, any man's death diminishes men because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never sent to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for me.

He was obviously thinking about the nature of inter-group relations among human beings, how human activities are intertwined and can spell progress or retardation for the human race. Human relations involve exchange of civilization, technology, culture, politics, conflict and interaction of human and natural endowment.

According to Carroll Quigley, civilization can be seen as a producing society with an instrument of expansion. Generally, civilization is defined as an advanced state of human society containing tightly developed forms of government, culture, industry and common social norms. This simply means that civilization is a characteristic of people, it is one of the things that set human being apart from other species. While it is true that all living things form societies, it is only human beings who have a civilization. A civilization provides man with numerous basic needs and wants. They are classified as follows:

- Physical and material (economic) needs such as shelter, food, clothing and tools

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- Spiritual and psychic (religious) needs such as a world view
- intellectual needs
- gregarious (social) needs such as companionships and interrelationships between people
- Military
- technological needs and
- cultural needs

In other words, civilization is vital to man's living. Without it solidarity, cooperation and fraternity among people cannot be achieved. Hence, every civilization regardless of its size and lifespan has contributed tremendously to other civilization.

The big issue is in Africa especially in Nigeria where tongues differ what can be done to effectively practice a political system that will as a matter of necessity address the challenges and improve the quality of lives of the people. As attractive as Nigeria political system appears the majority of the people are yet to experience the intended benefits and dividends of democracy. Severally questions have been asked. What is the cause of this problem? Can it be traced down to the kind of political system being practiced or incapability or underperformance of those elected to deliver?

David Eastern opined " A political system is designated as interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated to a society" Going forward, he stated that it is a process by which laws are made and public resources allocated in a society, and to the relationships among those involved in making these decisions. In other words, political system is a vehicle through which dividends of democracy is conveyed to the people. Again, does this practice spell progress or retardation for Nigeria people? A well practiced. political system should be able to deliver its dividends to the masses. This expectation has been constantly defeated in Nigeria as a result of corruption incapability, ingenuity, and nepotism on the part of those elected to leadership and poor institutions of democracy. Nigeria practiced federal system of government but over years, all the attempt made by the people to rebuild a progressive and a well structured system of government that survive the test of time in terms of progress had yielded little or no fruit.

The nature of Nigeria political system is a Federal Republic in the senses that there is both a national government and government of its Thirty Six (36) states. It utilizes a form of government in which the people hold power but elect representatives to exercise and utilize that power with the executive power exercised by the president. The president is the head of state, the head of government, and also the head of a multi-party system. Nigerian politics takes place within a framework of a Federal presidential, representative democratic republic, in which executive power is held by the Federal government and the two chambers of legislature, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The legislative arm is responsible for and possesses powers for the formulation and making of laws.

Together, the two chambers make up the law making body in Nigeria called the National Assembly which serves as a check on the executive arm of government.

The National Assembly of Nigeria is the democratically elected body that represents the interest of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its people. They make laws for Nigeria and hold the government of Nigeria to account. The National Assembly is the nation's highest legislature, whose power to make laws is summarized on chapter one, Section four of 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Section 47-49 of the constitution states inter alia that there shall be a National Assembly for the Federation which shall consist of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives".

2. Democracy in Nigeria

After achieving her independence and republican status in the year 1960, and 1963 respectively, Nigeria experienced its first military coup in the year 1966 and thereafter civil war broke in 1967 and lasted till 1970. The constituted government after the civil war helped to bring back the democratic system for a few years.

This certain period of democratic system did not last very long and was soon over in 1983 as a result of some military rulers who came into power via coup d'etat and promised to return the country to democracy.

Nevertheless, among all the successive military leaders at that time, Abdulsolami Abubakar took the control of the nation after the death of Sani Abacha and stuck to his word and returned the country to democracy. The country's modern constitution became official in 1999. The elections in the year 1999 were more successful compared to that of the previous military rule and what we have today.

The newly emerged president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo put a stop to the military regimes that kept switching one after the other for almost thirty (30) years. The end of military rule culminated in a new era of regular elections as well as the return of civil liberties, a free press and an end to arbitrary arrest and maltreatment of people although human rights violations still occurred regularly. Nigeria was democratized in 1999 with the start of the fourth Republic, but has suffered some setbacks to become fully democratic state.

Elites in Nigeria have been found to have more power and influence than average citizens and as a consequence of this, there has been a great deal of corruption in Nigeria politics and general life. A good sign of democracy in Nigeria had been quite minimal. The early sign of conducting elections devoid of irregularities, fraud and all manners of molestations and denials would soon be eroded by the Nigerians elites. At the beginning we witnessed an interesting indicator of a strong democracy in which the citizens of the civil society have the right to act and speak freely in concert with a strong use of media for everyday life. This right also is gradually being encroached and the right being denied the Nigerian people.

According to the 2020 World press freedom index, Nigeria is the 115th most free nation in the world. It has been noted as a nation with perpetuating violence against freedom of speech and press. The nation is vulnerable due to the effects of inner conflict and governance issues. Freedom House has rated Nigeria as a “partly free” nation. In the last presidential election, the process was tainted by violence, intimidation and vote buying which have been prevalent in many of recent elections within Nigeria.

Similarly, in the most recent legislative elections, citizens claimed that the process was also characterized by intimidation and other inconsistencies. The electoral process and related laws are thought to be enacted in a mostly fair fashion, but there have been instances of intentional complication against voting and effective turnout. The people of Nigeria feel as though there is more freedom in their right to have different political parties to present their opinions. This is exemplified by the vast number of legitimate parties seen in elections.

More so, Nigerian opposition parties have a slim legitimate chance to participate in politics and win official positions. In regards to freedom of political expression, freedom house indicates that opinions and institutions are often heavily influenced by non-governmental, external entities or individuals. In Nigeria, all ethnic groups and religious backgrounds have an equal opportunity to participate in politics. However, there is grossly inadequate number of women elected into the government. Nigerian, Federal governments officials like the legislators are elected to enact policy and laws, and are usually allowed to do so without interruption, but in recent years, their ability to legislate has been marred by corruption and instability. Corruption has been a major problem for the Nigerian government since its independence from colonial rule. The government has tried to enact measures to combat corruption that infringes upon the functioning of the state but have only being quasi-successful. The government has also been rated as lacking in transparency, often not allowing records to be available to the public.

3. The Nature of Nigeria Political System

Nigeria is a federal republic with a presidential system divided into thirty six (36) states run by governors and a Federal capital Territory. However, the polity is only Federal in name, the reality is that Nigeria runs a unitary system with states having very little autonomy over their policies. In the current structure, states depend on Federal budgetary allocation which is sadly heavily dependent on crude oil revenue. This structures leaves resources in total waste .It is also the main reason bureaucracy is killing policy implementation.

Nigeria runs a multi-party democracy. Parties are not divided along ideological lines, they are rather divided along ethnic lines. This trend is however slowing down as the poverty stricken majority are beginning to see through the façade of ethnocentrism. The reason why parties are divided along ethnic lines is because the country itself was created as a marriage of convenience by the British. The union is not necessarily a bad thing, but not many people affected by the union had a say in it. This is the root cause of the multiple secessionist movements in the country. With power left coming from the Federal Capital Territory and a boat of bureaucracy in between states and federal institutions, people’s lives are rarely affected by policy. As such, people don’t care about government and governance. In fact, most Nigerians cannot quote a single line from the constitution, many more do not know the names of their representatives neither do they care.

4. The Nigeria Politics

Max Weber defines politics as an act of striving for a share of power or for influence on the distribution of power. He seems to express clearly his understanding of politics in terms of power politics. In other words, politics is the set of activities that are associated with making decision in groups or other forms of power relations among individuals such as the distribution of resources or status.

In the Nigeria context, this act of striving for a share of power or for influence on power distribution has suddenly become a system where power is and only found in the hands of few who perpetuate and control the distribution of power and resources. Political parties are not divided along ideological lines but rather along ethnic lines. As a result many indigenous, people chose to stay away from politics. This ethnocentrism had been there right from the formation stage of the country which resulted in the majority of the indigenes not having a say in the formation of the country in the 1960s. The decision, was made by the money powers of the time. Nigeria society has never been able to actually reconcile pre-colonial, political structures (Kings, nobles, Emirs etc) with modern democracy especially in the words of Abraham Lincoln who during the presentation of his Gettysburg Address defines democracy as the governments of the people by the people and for the people.

Traditionally, institutions still heavily influence Nigeria politics even though they differ in ideology. For example, traditional institutions do not believe in the Phrase "all men are born equal" That phrase renders their existence useless. This is the most evident nature of Nigeria politics. So in the end what you have is a country trying to implement democracy on a centralized mind set.

Most of the leaders claim to love the country but all they care about is their families. Various ethnic groups feel that their interest is not in the agenda of the government and as such display an enormous nonchalant attitude towards politics and government. This has therefore resulted in people not bothering to vote nor participate in any election. They believe that their participation will not change anything hence those who has the money and power will always have their way and will stop at nothing to promote ethnic interest at the detriment of the overall interest of the nation and larger population of the people.

There are well over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria where only three (3) are more powerful than others. They are Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. These groups are the largest of them all and decide the faith of the country. However the Hausa ethnic group is more powerful politically with quite a number of reasons. The top most is population. They arguably have the largest number. They also have the highest number of people enrolled in the military. As a result, they have the highest stake both in military and democratic government. In other words, both ways, they are in power.

The northern part of the country had therefore ruled more than any other tribe based on this stereo type and are beginning to have a sense of entitlement to this office.

The Yorubas who occupy the western part of the country are strong contender against the north and they are known for their high level of political sophistication. The Yorubas are able to work with what is obtainable, make compromise when there is need to achieve a purpose.

The Igbos who occupy the Eastern part of the nation claim that they have been completely ignored and left out in the political activities of the nation. They have had little or no contact with the office if the head of state. Consequently, talking about the structure, it appears designed to favour the north than any other tribe. Arguably, one can say that the north is the most powerful tribe and will stop at nothing to retain that status. However, a shift can only occur if the East shows strong interest and woo the north and other ethnic groups.

5. Recommendation

5.1. Corruption

The problem with politics in Nigeria is not actually from a political aspect itself. It is more of a moral issue. Sadly, it is a problem that cannot be fixed by the usual "vote for the right Man".

One of Nigeria's major problems is corruption and is not born by titles, but instead by internal decisions of an individual. You can impeach a corrupt politician but does that make him a clean slate? No. More so, the people are just as corrupt as their leaders. If we want to fix corruption, we have to fix ourselves.

Political will can turn the tide against corruption. The abuse of public office for private gain erodes people's trust in government and institutions, making public policies less effective and fair. Corruption siphons tax payers' money and takes government attention away from schools, roads, hospitals and so on. Corruption corrodes government's ability to help grow the economy in a way that benefits all citizens but the political will to build strong and transparent institutions can turn the tide against corruption.

Fighting corruption requires political will to create strong fiscal institutions that promote integrity and accountability throughout the public sector. This is because where there is a political will, there is a way. Corrupt countries collect fewer taxes, as people pay bribes to avoid them including tax loopholes designed in exchange for kickbacks. When tax payers believe their government are corrupt, they are more likely to evade paying taxes.

Consequently, fighting corruption requires building a professional civil service. Transparent, merit-based hiring and pay reduce the opportunities for corruption. The heads of agencies, ministries and public enterprises must promote ethical behavior by setting a clear tone at the top.

5.2. Build a United Nigeria

Another effective way to reform our political system is by building a united nation. The perception of every Nigeria leader is that they have spread division. For instance, president Goodluck Jonathan era was known for Asari Dokubo's loud vituperations and how they emboldened the likes of Tompolo through concession of state property. President Buhar's era also would be remembered with the common criticism that he reinforced the narrative of northernisation with his appointments. We need a United Nation, forged in common belief with strong assurances from the leaders built in the ability to effectively manage Nigeria diversity. Building an effective political system and democracy must emanate from the fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation. A thorough understanding of these differences must guide people's decision and recommendation for an acceptable system and democracy.

5.3. Examining The Nexus Between Religion and Politics

Throughout all epoch, the connection between religion and politics has remained contestable. While many societies have attempted to separate religion from politics as a form of conscious effort not to undermine the process of allocating values, the dissection has become difficult in some societies. The complex interaction between religion and politics is most visible in heterogeneous societies like Nigeria, with characteristics divisions in terms of ethnicity and religion inclinations. Although Nigeria is considered constitutionally as a secular state, the impact of religion in the country's polity has remained incontestable.

It is of course appreciated that religion and politics interact. The truth that is preached in religion is beneficial to the process of governance. Religion could also serve as an effective tool for propelling social mobilization and societal transformation. However, this is only possible where religion has not deviated from its original role. Religion could be volatile and vicious where it is expressed with so much passion and allowed to dominate the thinking of the populace. It is in that context that Karl Marx referred to it as the opium of the people. This is not to say that one should not hold a particular religious view. Perhaps, there have been constitutional provisions in most nations that provide for the people to hold their accepted religious view.

Section 10 of the Nigeria constitution provides that "the government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion". The fundamental right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is guaranteed by section 38 thereof. However, contrary to the secular nature of the state, Christianity and Islam have been adopted as state religion. In a peculiarly diverse nation as Nigeria, the mixing of religion with politics has done the country more harm than good. For instance, the record of violent in the country and the linkage of religion and politics to many of the riots shows how dangerous a mix of religion and politics could be. While religion may not necessarily impact negatively on politics if properly observed, the manipulation of religion as a political weapon could set a nation on fire. Nigeria has experienced its fair share of the terrible implications of religion and politics. from the era of kano riots of 1980, to the bloody upheavals in Bauchi in 1991, and the Jos riots which have remained potent since 2001. Among other series of violent conflicts, religious and political undertones have been read into their emergence.

6. Conclusion

As beautiful and attractive as any political system may appear, it is important to note that no democracy will be effective under the face of corruption and corrupt government officials. Corruption distorts government policies and it is an abuse of public office for private gain which erodes peoples trust in government. Reforming this menace must start with

a thorough sanitization of institution of governance, public office holders, and the general public as well. This is because to fix corruption, we must all fix ourselves first.

For Nigeria to build a sustainable and result oriented political system and democracy, a nation where no one is oppressed, despite our tongues that differs, we must tolerate the weakness of others, cherish and value our languages. The political elite and the masses at large must understand that National Unity is a sine qua non for the existence of Nigeria as a state and a country. There must be the understanding that everyone is a patriot and must be seen to be rooting for it. The real thing is that everyone must see national unity as a leverage for political power. The political elite and those in the corridor of power must use unity of Nigeria expediently like the rhetoricians of ancient Greece would do, not out of principles but to serve a contingent purpose. This is because the unity of Nigeria had always been a source of arguments for power ever before independence in which the Northern region feared domination by the southern region given its many advantages.

In demonstrating the nature of Nigeria political system among other facts established by this article, it also stated that there are enormous religious influences in both pre and post independence Nigeria. These religious influences have both positive and negative implications for the development of Nigeria nation. Without mincing words, the role religion could play in Nigerian politics is limited by the individuals orientation and the nature of society. In spite of these limitations, religion continues to influence political decisions of successive governments of Nigeria. This suggest that religion and politics could relate effectively in Nigeria. However, the benefits that could be derived from such relationship depend solely on the sincerity of those who are engaged in the practice of these phenomena.

In Nigeria, this interaction has often generated negative impacts, but politicians and adherents of religious faith need to recognize the right of individuals to freedom of religion. It is therefore on the above established grounds that the foregoing recommendations were made. If all these are adequately observed and put into practice, our political system and democracy will be effective as appropriate. Thus, national development will no longer be a wishful thinking and Nigeria will have an enduring democracy.

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