

GUERRILLA DEMOCRACY: AN EMERGING TREND OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Some people have argued that African leaders have the penchant of not leaving office at the expiration of their term of office. This made them go to inexplicable limits to be retained in such position. This phenomenon probably explains the reason several countries on the continent are embroiled in political crisis which could be attributed to bad governance of sit-tight presidents/Heads of states and the inability of the system to transit through peaceful, free and fair election, which concentrate the mind about the democratic prospect of post-colonial Africa democracies and its implication for good governance and sustainable democracy for development of the continent. Taking a cursory look at what is happening in various parts of the continent; one is bound to notice a trend of an emergent brand of democracy that has taken root in parts of the continent, one is bound to notice a trend of an emergent brand of democracy that is gradually taking root in parts of the continent which this article will refer to as “guerrilla democracy”, that is becoming more prevalent among leaders who had come to power taking up arms against former colonial rulers, monarchies or post-colonial regimes and had resorted to different strategies to stay put in power. This paper then conclude that although participatory democracy when applied to well established democracies may prove to be a big leap that entails a challenging transition and sustenance, but what is pertinent developing countries of Africa, is that the seed of democracy must be home grown for it to be accepted and function.

Keywords: Guerilla, democracy, democratization, democratic sustainability, governance.

Introduction

Most African leaders came to power chanting democratic choruses to later stultify the evolution and entrenchment of a virile democratic culture. The ambition of such leaders to hold on to power is not a new phenomenon. After attaining independence, dictatorship had become the fad in most African countries, while some had transmuted to civilian regimes with democratic pretensions in their bid to hold on to power.

It is then the observation of this paper that the threat to continental stability in recent time is not inter-state, but also intra-state conflicts which usually emanate from democratic failure or the failure to evolve the brand of governance that will take into cognizance the heterogeneous nature of the people in addition in relation to leadership succession through free and fair electoral contest. This is because conflicts that were direct result of bad leadership have become a major threat to continental peace and security in addition to the suffocating effects it had on political talents that leads to political stagnation with the exclusion of potential leaders with new ideas and innovations in governance.

This paper in its examination of the prevalent sit-tight syndrome in the recent time among elected African leaders, will briefly interrogate the principle of democracy, democratization and good governance to find an explanation for the obvious penchant of African leaders to stay put in office after the expiration of term in office and the strategies some of them adopt in their bid to hold on to power, and also attempt an analysis of the emergent democratic culture and the incidence of ex-guerilla leaders who deposed the existing status quo by sheer force of arms, which Tatalo Alamu (2015), refer to as “guerilla democracy” and which the paper finds apt to contextualize the issue under discussion. The question here is does term limit lead to economic and political development? This is one of the issues the paper will also attempt to analyze.

Historical Perspective: Some explanatory Factors

This paper as an introduction, will prescribe that anybody attempting to study the contradictions of the post-colonial nations in all its anarchic possibilities and impossibilities should visit Africa to see the real thing in its classic manifestations.

Although this organic crisis of the nation and statehood reached full maturity with Military interventions, its fundamental causes actually predate military rule and go back to the very constitution of the colonial nation and the forcible disruption of the values and structure of traditional African societies

In an inorganic continent like Africa, which is particularly vulnerable because of its size and population, this assumes some negative possibilities which can be very disturbing. This is when states acting in concert with the pliant judiciary and a corrupt and compromised legislature capitalizes on the divisive and destabilizing interplay of politics, religion, micro or macro ethnicity, becomes a fascist terror machine that came to power through guerrilla campaign and had overtime adopted various strategies to hang on to power, hence the term “guerrilla democracy”.

Before further progress is made on the discussion on the emergence of this brand of democracy and the prospect of democratic sustenance in Africa, the paper is of the view that the examination of the concept of democracy, democratization, governance and good governance will be made to give the appropriate background for a proper understanding of the issue under consideration.

Democracy

Like many concepts employed by social scientists, democracy does not lend itself to easy definition. But in recent times, democracy that owes its origin to the Greek civilization had been elevated to the centre stage of national and international discourse.

Macpherson (1973), for brevity sake, defines democracy as representative parliament, the separation of power, the rule of law, civil rights and, other desirables. Others like Adrian (1983), towed the line of Macpherson by asserting that democratic politics involve important institutions of free elections, free speech, existence of certain kinds of rights and liberties. It also involves rights and opportunities to effective participation in decision-making about the use of production and distribution of resources in the society.

Osaghae (2000), from the contemporary perspective, view democracy as a process of continuous struggle and, engagement to make the state, (ever) more responsive and accountable to the citizenry, which makes the institutional requisite and processes more purposive and meaningful. His perception underscores the relevancy of the citizenry among who we have the human resources that are involved in the effort to institutionalize the institutions of democracy. His definition contradicts formulations which see democracy only as a finished product of requisite institutions and processes, such as party politics, periodic free and fair elections, popular participation, and rule of law, relative autonomy of civil society, observance of human rights, effective institutions and mechanism of oversight. Etc. It is instructive to point out that polls in a democratic system among other functions is the acceptable way of legitimizing governments, while term limits only apply to presidential system of democratic governance.

The inconclusiveness of the definitions of democracy by political scientists is an indication that these democratic ideal remains an ideal or a mirage because democracy as practiced by the Greek city states is not possible in contemporary period. Consequently, the difficulty in providing a concise and precise definition that captures the essence of democracy had made scholars like Dahl (1956), to stress on free election, free assembly, government by the people, social equality and free market economy as essential traits of democracy; that is if the latter is looked at in its entirety. They thus reflect the perception which is used as a yard stick for assessing the extent to which a country could be said to be democratic. But the beauty of democracy compared to any other system of government is its art of participatory governance.

Therefore, a country is described as democratic if it combines most of the above mentioned features, semi democratic if it combines only some of the elements and undemocratic if its polity is marked by the absence of most or all the features.

Thus, in the light of these definitions, it could be asserted that most African countries fall into the semi-democratic category with a sprinkling of authoritarian regimes, while the former Soviet Union and other defunct and still existing socialist countries, ruled by military regimes in Africa and Middle East monarchies, and the defunct fascist regimes of Japan, Germany, Italy and Spain are all dictatorships, while all others that are not in this category could be said to be democracies.

Democratization

To say that African states practice democracy will be wrong in the light of the above definitions as what currently obtains on the continent are attempts or pretensions at democratization (Adejumobi, 2000). To him, democratization as a process, involves the creation and expansion of the political space for multiple actors to interact, negotiate,

compete and seek self-realization within set and permissible rules that are usually enshrined into the constitution of countries.

Osaghae (2000), explained further that it is neither a one start event, but a continuous process through which liberal democracy is evolved. It is neither a non – linear process, but one that is relative, incremental and variegated. He also pointed out that it is also the process through which the institutional infrastructure germane to the construction of a democratic polity is established. Which include the parliament, impartial judiciary, electoral institutions, police, independent media, codification of civil liberties that guarantees the rule of law, and the evolution of a process of constitutionalism?

Liberal democracy

Democracy in the classical sense as argued by Ake (2000) is a concept that is uncharacteristically precise. To him, it simply connotes popular power. It is not about delegated authority or representative governance, but the popular expression of power by the people. Liberal democracy on the other hand is about government consent by the consent of the people. Consequently, when most people today use the term democracy, what they actually mean is liberal democracy, in which there is the choice of political leaders by the people through competitive elections, a guarantee of extensive civil and political rights, the rule of law and public accountability.

Although liberal democracy shares some affinities with the concept of democracy, they are nevertheless marked different. It therefore could be concluded that what many African countries are trying to achieve with their current processes of democratization is liberal democracy which is a prototype of the western political economy.

The liberal principle modifies the democratic principle in at least two crucial ways. First, it proclaims that from the point of view of moral and political life, our common humanity is more fundamental than difference of class, sex, race and even religious belief. And second by defining freedom and equality in terms of rights that pre-exists government, the liberal democratic principle asserts that there are some actions government may not take against individuals regardless of how large or how passionate the majority is in favor of them.

Often touted as the most ideal form of governance ever devised by humanity, there is as yet no perfect democracy on earth. Great Britain, the founding father of modern liberal democracy, still has a constitutional monarchy, and the American president is not elected by popular votes but by an electoral college.

Governance

Governance, a concept like democracy, is also a contested one. The concept, according to Pierre and Peters (2007), is a concept that is slippery, frequently used by social scientists and practitioners without concise definitions. However, the range of definitions that have surfaced can be subsumed into two broad categories. On the one hand are those that view governance in a technical sense. In this case, the concept borrows directly from its usage in the corporate world. It implies and emphasizes the efficient management of state institutions, issues of public accountability, transparency in government procedure, rule of law and public law and public sector management.

However, this restricted view of governance to all intents, seems to suggest that the essence of this governance approach is to discipline the state and its institutions for economic purposes.

Good governance

The other holistic conceptual perspective to governance goes beyond the state and its institutions, as it is seen as the process of steering state and society towards the realization of collective goals. Good governance, a term that was reputed to be coined by Brettwood scholars on the other hand, flows logically from the concept of governance. According to Mohideen (1997), governance becomes good when operated in accordance with the legal and ethical principles as conceived by society.

In other words, good governance is a normative concept by which society seeks to provide a guide and direction for it through standards and norms embedded in the governance idea that strives to steer state and society according to defined rules and procedure and ensuring that governance in all its ramifications serves the interest of the greatest number of people in the society through a collective participatory endeavor. But the essential element of good governance is transparency. This is because reforms dealing with public accountability have transparency as its objectives.

In addition, there is this controversy on what system could bring about good governance in developing countries of the world. According to Adejumobi (1999), the concept of good governance is originally interlinked with the objective of liberal democracy and that they are seen as mutually reinforcing elements in which the latter is a pre – condition for the realization of the former.

We may then conclude that democracy is essential to good governance. The only issue in contention is the form of democracy to be practiced in different social context. To this end, social democracy seems to offer the better possibility of development and ensuring greater happiness for the greatest number of people in the society, thus delivering dividends of democracy.

Sustenance of Democracy

Panyarachun (2010), is of the opinion Britain's *Magna Carta* of 1215, was the starting point of century's long process that helped shape the principle of democracy and rule of law that is so much valued today, which to him implies that there is an implicit premise that democracy is inherently better, stable, rational and beneficial than other forms of government. And because democracy derives its authority from the consent of the governed, it can claim this primacy.

Historically, Europe's development is a chronicle of civil wars, revolutions and dictatorship, which implies that the evolution of democracy was slow and non- linear. Yet, it took root. That historical experience shows that stable democracy as we understand it today is a relatively new phenomenon. If we take universal suffrage as the key event in western democracy, we find that the broad, inclusive participation of all citizens is a little more than a hundred years old. Yet, it remained elusive or could not be sustained.

One of the key reasons that democracies around the world remain fragile is the unequal emphasis on their political processes and economic development. This is because the political process must be viewed along with the level of development. As development occurs unevenly, so too does the state of democracy. This is to say that they are two sides of the same coin, as one cannot happen without the other.

It is also against this background that this paper will agree with Owoye (1993), that the end product of democracy is the improvement in the living standard of the people. This is also underscored by the fact that democracy occupies a central position among the values imposed upon the global system consequent upon the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new world order.

It therefore becomes important that any country desirous of development and relevance in the emerging world order, coupled with the intention to enjoy the benefits associated therewith, must succumb to the dictates of the liberal democratic ideology and this constitutes the minimum political project through which many African countries had for some time sought to evolve good governance.

It is therefore surprising that with the end of the cold war, Fukuyama, suggested that the end of history was upon us (1992), but almost thirty years later, the triumph of democracy has been less than absolute. It is surprising to observe that some countries have turned away from the liberal brand of democracy and embraced a more authoritarian rule, while delivering marginal social and economic benefits to their citizens.

At the same time, some countries that have democratic systems seem to be struggling with issues of accountability and governance, as democracy with its virtues, should have had no difficulty in taking root around the world, yet for many countries, “government of the people, by the people, for the people” remains an elusive ideal.

What will sustain democracy is the shared realization that, although democracy is far from perfect, the alternatives are even further from perfection. Some societies come to this realization sooner than others. Some are experimenting to see if only parts of democracy such as good governance and accountability can be enjoyed without the implication of a full – fledged democracy. As long as they demonstrate a commitment to the larger welfare and well-being of the people and deliver public services, the majority may well be contented with the status quo and not protest.

The Asian and Russian Paradigm: As Case Study

In the Asian context as in the West, democracy is won not just through the ballot box but on the streets by students, farmers, and ordinary citizens who usually came out en- masse to express their opinions, subsequently, there had been street protests over the course of over fifty years in the republic of Korea, and the people’s power has also swept through Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, as well as other countries as it has been done in South Asia, which Parayachun, a former Prime Minister of Thailand claimed has the largest and active voter populations. To him, for democracy to thrive; citizens must resist the temptation of being complacent. Each community, workplace, and schools needs programs for promoting grassroots democracy.

This is premised on the realization that an apathetic electorate is easy prey for any power ambitious organized group to seize power by force of arms or fraud, giving rise to totalitarianism. That in much of Asia, where harmony is a core value, and conflict avoidance as first response, the challenge of leadership in their clime is to embrace criticism – weighing pros and cons in a disagreement as part of the maturation of the democratic process in the Asian context.

The truth however, is that China; a communist state run by dictatorship of the communist party of China and some other Asian dictatorship, operates a vastly successful political strategy that has been dubbed the “Beijing Consensus”, which is made up of a blend of Confucianism, communism and capitalism. It is an ideological medley which developing countries shopping for political stability and economic planning and execution strategies now found more attractive than the well-practiced “Washington consensus” made up of open markets floating currencies and free elections. Ironically, developments have shown that the Washington consensus as a system has created unemployment, strikes, post-election violence, political instability and retarded economic growth anywhere it is practiced. But important to note according to analysts is that, since the Beijing consensus weathered the last global recession better and more efficiently than its Washington alternative there is this tendency of the developing countries to embrace the Beijing model.

So also is in post-cold war Russia, where Putin latched on to Russian nationalism, and Pan-Slavic eagerness, to nurture an authoritarian democracy which guarantees safety, security and reasonable accountability without giving a hoot about freedom of association, expression and ultimately freedom of election.

For the past two decades, Putin has been in power without his national support diminishing. When he exhausted his constitutionally delimited terms in office, he simply put his trusted ally and served as prime minister while ruling from the background. After the completion of the terms of office of his surrogate, he once again came back to office without little or no opposition. Putin’s success according to Tatalo (2015), is due to Russian nationalism which is more potent than the finer ideals of democracy.

The Putin’s model finds a fertile soil among a Russian populace that had been historically long accustomed to treating patriarchal and harshly paternalistic but benevolent authoritarianism with indulgence and reverence and having exchanged Czarist rule for a long-line of socialist dictators, they find anarchic individualism of liberal democracy repugnant.

Why don’t the African leaders try out the Russian option by installing their surrogates to fulfill all democratic righteousness? This is where national question and complexion comes to into play in post-colonial states of Africa. Unlike Russia which is a fairly organic and homogenous country in terms of culture and ethnic composition, most African countries are a curious admixture of multi-ethnic, regional and cultural contradictions.

Analysis of Emerging Trends of Democracy in Africa

Events unfolding in parts of Africa, like Burundi and Rwanda in the great lakes region of the continent about the prospects of democracy in post-colonial Africa are quite disturbing. In Burundi, the determined efforts of the Hutu president, Pierre Nkurunziza to hang on to power after exhausting the constitutionally stipulated two terms has led to widespread bloodshed at an alarming rate that was reported to be only comparable to the 1972

genocidal mayhem, which affected the nation and set it on a path of instability. The country erupted in chaos with Nkurunziza taking up arms against the Burundian state and its Tutsi supremacists.

In neighboring Rwanda, it signaled the beginning of the genocide. After the ensuing Burundi civil war that lasted ten years, Nkurunziza was elected by parliament after a long negotiation for peace through the efforts of President Julius Nyarere and Nelson Mandela. The present bone of contention is that Nkurunziza's argument for a third term is that since he was not originally elected president by a popular suffrage, his first term in office could only be regarded as an interim tenure, he is therefore entitled to a third term in office.

In neighboring Rwanda, Paul Kagame is also toying with a constitutional amendment which will allow him to run for a third term and perhaps perpetual rule. It will be recalled that the former guerilla who returned from exile in Uganda had been the de facto ruler of Rwanda since 1994 amidst the carnage and cannibalism that accompanied genocide.

In Uganda, Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986 and Robert Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1979 and are not yet ready to quit office, we can now conclude that the iron rule of strong men is the rule rather than the exception in that part of Africa. This is not discounting the democratic Republic of Congo where Kabila the son has been in power since the assassination of his father in 2001, or the other Congo where Nguesso had ruled his country in one guise or the other for almost thirty years. One common trait among them is that they were all former guerilla leaders who deposed the existing status quo of their respective countries by sheer force of arms and are still in power. That is Guerilla democracy for you.

Despite Kagame's outstanding performance in governance and efforts at engendering unity and harmony on his fractured country, it appears that he still fears another Hutu apocalypse meltdown once he vacates office or loosens his grip on the levers of power that he has wielded with such authoritarian sternness and severity. With Hutu nationalism very much at play despite genocide and Kagame's sterling performance, it's a very difficult situation that he had on his hands.

In Burundi, curious reverse logic is at play. His fear of Tutsi supremacist and old ethnic warlords of the nation who had assassinated the former president, Nkurunziza fears that evacuating office state control and the levers on military institution would result into another war.

Thus, it could be seen how in a post-colonial Africa torn by ethnic, regional and religious divisions, fighting old tyrants often breeds new ones. It will be recalled that the only time Robert Mugabe allowed free and fair election; he was defeated before he "disbanded both the elected and the electorate."

It could then be claimed that it is the fear of the unknown or life after office as enunciated elsewhere by Ehindero (2013) that has turned Mugabe, Bongo, Yoweri Museveni, Kabila the son and many other African leaders into despots and tyrants.

Much as the western democracies clamor for democratic rule in Africa, it can be observed that the situation depends very much on the actual forces on ground, and varies from country

to country, and from sub-continent to sub-continent, depending on the logic of the cultural and political dominant forces.

In West Africa, despite family tyrannies in Togo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, with military and civilian despotism in Gambia, Congo Brazzaville and Cameroons, the subcontinent as a whole has taken giant strides towards the consolidation of democratic rule in the last two and half decades as there is no single case of Guerilla democracy in the sub-Saharan region. Among the Economic Community of Africa (ECOWAS) bloc, there seems to be a movement towards term limit and consensus on two term basis, which seems to have brought more stability to the sub-region.

In Republic of Benin, Ghana, and Nigeria, entrenched military autocracies and regnant forces of the status quo have been defeated in recent elections. In Senegal, the political status quo has been defeated twice by nationalist forces. In Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone, armed insurgency leading to civil wars had weakened old political hegemony. The same thing had happened in Mali, Guinea, and lately Burkina Faso, where military interventions led to the self-destruction of the old order.

It is instructive to note that the emergent scenario that happened in West Africa is a clash of the residual formations of liquidated pre-colonial hegemonies, whereas in Burundi and Rwanda, it was a different and unique situation of pre-colonial feudal formations and kingship systems that survived colonization while casually reclaiming authority and dominance after colonization that had to be challenged violently and the result was a devastating civil war and genocide.

In a post-colonial nation like Nigeria, divided by ethnic, religious and cultural cleavages, what often drives the system is a negative equilibrium powered by competing and countervailing centers of power, often and with enough prayer's and luck, the equivalent of tribal nuclear deterrence had been enough to prevent the nation from disintegration. But this neither guarantees national stability nor enhances democratic development in the long run. It merely hardens the cleavages leading to a fractured nation of competing proto-republics.

Conclusion

Historical and contemporary developments highlight the fragility of democracy. Even, when seemingly well-established democracy can be subject to tampering, especially, in time of crisis, then there is no democracy that is so strong that it is invulnerable to the manipulation and ambition of power mongers.

For the past three decades or so, it is obvious that a trend towards more direct, participatory democracy has become a fad worldwide, which in the final analysis, when applied to established democracies, may be an incremental change. However, going from autocracy to mass participatory democracy may prove to be a big leap that entails a challenging transition and sustenance. What is important however is that the seeds of democracies must be home grown for it to be accepted and function? For this, each country must work on its contradictions to suit its own environment and compelling priorities, as different sizes of shoes are made for different individuals, so also should it be for countries, and as experience has shown, strong states are built on open governance through strong institutions.

As African countries are now tilting towards what political and economy scholars refer to as the "Beijing Consensus", democracy as conceived by the "West" (Washington consensus),

may for the time being remain elusive, and for Africa to sustain economic growth, basic principles of democracy must be strictly complied with, in accordance with their constitution, and situation, or on the other hand, parliamentary democracy where no term limit in office is prescribed.

Recommendations

- To foster sustainable democracy, a nation must focus its efforts on building a system that empowers people not only through the right to vote, but also through entrenched norms, institutions and values that supports those rights and makes it meaningful.
- Each country on the continent needs to bolster its strengths and banish its fears. In vibrant western democracies with entrenched citizenship, democracy is sustained when individuals, groups, and guilds subsume their competing and countervailing egos and self-pride under the rubric of higher national interests.
- In order to enhance the prospects of democracy and accelerated development, African countries must achieve what we now propose as equilibrium of ethnic hubris that is a situation in which ethnic narcissism of competing ethnic formations is discarded.
- A way out is the need for constant innovation by taking another look at the political architecture of nations and re-align it in such a way that it liberates, and harmonizes the competing and countervailing energies and geniuses of their diverse people.
- In a multi-ethnic nation, what holds true for genuine federalism also holds for genuine democracy as no power bloc nor a cultural unit must be in a position to the lord over the others or possess veto power on the democratic destiny of the nation.
- The conscious building and nurturing of stronger democratic institutions with the devolution of more powers to the other arms of government.

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