

DEMOCRACY AND FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA FOURTH REPUBLIC EXPERIENCE (1999-2017)

CHINNAH PROMISE CHINWE

Department of Political Science

(Post graduate studies)

Faculty of social sciences

Ignitus Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuorlumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers state.

Abstract:

This paper will examine the conceptual definition of democracy and federalism, history of Nigeria democratic experiment, tenets and principles of democracy, federalism principles and reason why Nigeria adopted federal system of government. The fourth republic journey of democratization and federal governance system will be explained. The equilibrium between democracy and federalism discussed and recommendations made on how democracy can be better practiced to yield its dividends as done in developed Western nations. In line with issues affecting Nigeria federal system will be raised focusing on the fourth republic, the journey so far. Solutions proffered on how democracy and federalism can work together to ensure development.

Introduction

Nigeria gained her independence in 1960 from Britain her colonial master. The journey from imperialism to liberation is not an easy task. The beginning of colonialism marked the surrounding of African right, will and power to the whims and caprices of the white (Great Britain our colonial masters).

The Berlin conference of 1884-1885 was where African nations were shared and eaten raw unknown to African nations until they came with their imperial policy colonialism. The British established her dominance here in the geographical enclave called Nigeria. There was no name like Nigeria, the people you see as Nigerians today were living in their respective ethnic territorial bounded territory with a system of government. No wonder Late Pa Awolowo referred to "Nigeria as a geographical expression".

The establishment of imperial power and policies were resisted by African kingdoms, tribes and nations but Africans were defeated militarily and surreptitiously subjugated coupled with introduction, dogma in religious teaching.

As event progresses, despite the early resistance from African kings, rulers and leaders, another form of opposition came from new set of people, namely the educated elites and ex-service men. They were aware of the diabolic and economic intent of the colonialization. The colonial imperial policy met with strong resistance from nationalist mostly from the educated elites and those that came back from the World War II in 1945.

The clamor for self-governance and freedom from colonialization gained ground and hence our colonial master Britain had no option than kowtow to pressure from amiable dynamic nationalist, coupled with the United Nation Charter Declaration for freedom of Nations and individuals rights.

The Northern and Southern part of the geographical expression called Nigeria today, were merged together in 1914 for administrative commence by the British government based on economic reason, which was headed by a Governor General at the center who reports directly to the secretary for state in London. Nigeria was divided into 3 regions, each of the regions headed by a Lieutenant -Governor. The three regions are western region, the northern and the southern region.

There were series of administrative changes, conventions, and constitutional conferences which was climaxed by the attainment of independence on 1st October, 1960. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as president, Alhaji Abubaka Tafawa Belewa as prime minister under the parliamentary system of government.

The joy of independence was short lined as there was a bloody coup in January 14, 1966. Aguyi Ironsi became the military head of state. That was the end the first republic. Another counter bloody coup took place on 29th July 1966; many Igbo officers in the military and outside the military were killed. The unabated killing of the Igbos led to the secessionist move of the Igbo out from Nigeria which the federal government saw as an affront. This led

to a civil war that lasted from 1968 to 1970, which the head of state General Yakubu Gowon then declared as no victor no vanquished.

From then Nigeria has witnessed both military and democratic system of rule, this paper focused on the fourth from 1999-2017.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

DEMOCRACY

The term democracy has a lot of definitions according to how authors view it in his/her own perspectives. The usage of the word democracy by people sometimes put me in state of confusion as even military and dictatorial regime tend to say that, they are democratic. The only way to understand this concept is by given it its special operational meaning according to its content and contextual operation and application.

The activities of the agitation for self-rule led to political and economic sensitization and orientations of the masses against the evil of colonialism. Some pressure group were formed, cultural organizations were instrumental in the sensitization programme which some later metamorphosed to political parties,

The Clifford constitution of 1922 made provision for elective principle for Nigeria into the legislative council. The introduction of elective principle in 1922 marked the beginning of democracy in Nigeria. The elective principle introduced led to the formation of political parties in Nigeria. The first political party formed in Nigeria was the Nigeria National Democratic Party 1923 formed by Herbert Marcauley who is also regarded as the father of Nigeria nationalist movement.

Coleman (1986) posited that the 1930 ushered in new waves as the second phase of nationalist movement were less militant and resistant but focused on sentiment activities and organizational development aimed at self-government and independence. Political association formed to pursue national interest. Other political parties formed during the colonial era include:

- (1) Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) 1923
- (2) National Council of Nigeria and Cameron (NCNC) later changed to National Council of Nigeria citizens (NCNC 1944)
- (3) Northern Element Progressive (NEPU) 1953
- (4) United Nation/Independent Party (UNIP) 1953
- (5) Northern People Congress (NPC) 1949
- (6) Action Group AG (1951)
- (7) United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) 1955
- (8) Nigeria Youth Development Party

To mention but a few, the formation of political parties and introduction of elective principle in Nigeria was a welcome development that pave way for democracy in Nigeria. I

will say that political parties are pathfinders for liberal democracy to excel if the needed enabling environment is provided.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

A popular definition of the concept known by every political science student was the one by an American President Abraham Lincoln "government of the people, by the people and for the good of the people".

According to Reference.com, democracy is a system of government based on the principle that states power is vested in the people and may be used by the people or their elected officials. It may be direct or representative.

Sartori (1965) describes democracy as the power of the people and the rule of the people.

Appadorai (1975) describes democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representative, periodically elected by themselves.

Schumpeter (1967) define the democratic method as the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals requires the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote.

Dahl (1989) gave a comprehensive definition of democracy by stating some vital elements for democracy to function which includes:

- (a) High level of civil liberties
- (b) Political pluralism (extensive competition by contestants including individuals, groups or parties for government.
- (c) Political participation that provides the choice of the electorate to select candidates in free and fair election.

Elaiigwe (2004) sees democracy as a concept that has five different characteristics which must be used to understand its full meaning.

They are:

- (1) The locus of authority in a democratic polity. He maintained that the political authority in a democratic polity must originate from people. This point to the fact that the leaders must be chosen by the people through a free and fair process.
- (2) The second characteristic according to him is that democratic system/government must be based on rule of law. This talk of due process, obedience to the rule and regulation. It ensures that the law rules rather than men. That arbitrary abuse of power should not be tolerated in any form anywhere in a democratic system.
- (3) Thirdly, that in a democratic system, there must be legitimacy. This means that leaders' election must be through a legitimate action and process. The leaders have the mandate from his people and must rule rightly to satisfy his people.

Satisfaction of the masses welfare must be the interest of leader/ruler, bearing in mind why he/she was elected.

- (4) Choice is the fourth characteristic. This means that there must be alternatives for one to choose from. The existence of multi party system where candidates should be provided for the electorate to choose from. Besides, it also connotes that the people should have right to effect change in leadership through periodic election that goes with free and fair election. Change of policy through public opinion poll too.
- (5) Transparency and accountability is the final characteristic as postulated by Eliagme (2004), it behooves on leaders/rulers in a democratic system to be transparent and accountable to the people in discharging their duties. Leaders should be held accountable for all their action and inactions. There should be room for evaluation of their policies and programs.

Oludayi (2006) view democracy as a system that allows people to decide when, where and how to choose their leaders, such decisions are not end on themselves but based on the need for leadership to perform well, be ready to subject themselves to free and fair elections as at when necessary and will be willing to accept the outcome of such election in good faith. He further postulated that the democratic system goes with assessment; good leaders should be rewarded through re-election, respect and obedience and honored by the people while bad rulers should be sanction either legally or morally.

Huntington (1991) sees democracy as a form of government based on sources of authority of government, purpose served by the procedure for constituting. In his postulation he added that leaders must be selected through peaceful competitive election process by the people.

Prezeworski (1996) viewed “Democracy as a system where political office is filled through regular, free and fair election between competing parties with the possibilities of a winner freely assuming office.

According to Siegle (2005), Democracy means governance system in which leaders are selected through free and fair election with institutions that foster a share distribution of powers, and citizens have extensive opportunities to participate in political life.

From the above definitions of democracy, I define it as a system of government determined and favored by the people through a credible accepted norms and values of the people with the power to change the system as enshrined in the constitution of the people.

In collaboration with Robert Dahl (1989), Elaigwe (2004), those features and many more are the characteristics of democracy. Any democratic system where they are not found is undemocratic as members of such democratic state will not be politically equal.

The definitions given above about democracy put me in serious pensive melancholic mode and cogitation to what system of government that is practiced here in Nigeria. I don't want to write on the principles, features and characteristics of democracy as they were captured in R. Dahl, (1989), Eliagwe (2004) definitions and others as given above.

Liberal democracy constitutional representative government is very far from Nigeria compared to what is practiced in Western world like USA, France, China, even Ghana our neighboring West African country.

From the journey so far since independence, Nigeria has never practiced true liberal democracy with its principles and features present and in operations and observance as postulated by liberal democratic theorist. There are so many democratic aberrations in Nigerian democracy.

Federalism

There are so many definitions on what federalism is, authors look at it in their own personal perspective but all points to the same phenomenon of power sharing among level of government which must be more than one. The classical and liberal theorists have different views about it but with the subject matter of its power devolution and sharing among components units.

According to William Riker (1975), Federalism is a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional government and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities it takes final decisions.

Awa, E (1976) sees it as the coming together of different (sometimes also distinct) political units under a single political umbrella as a central authority that faithfully represents the whole and acts on behalf of the whole in such areas as external affairs, which are in social contract agreed to be the mutual interest of the different constituent units.

Nwabueze, B. (1983) sees federalism is an arrangement whereby power of government within a country are shared between a national (nationwide) government and a number of regionalized (territorial localized) government in such a way that each exists as government separately and independently from the other, operating directly on persons and property within its territorial area, with a will of its own, and its own apparatus for the conduct of its affairs and with an authority in some matters exclusively of all others.

K. C. Wheares (1953) who is seen as a legal/constitutional father of federalism defined federalism as a method of dividing powers so that the central and regional government are each within a sphere coordinated and independent.

Kincaid (1995) sees federalism as the approach to governance that seek to combine unity or shared rule with diversity or self- rule.

R. L. Watts (1985) sees federalism as a political system characterized by two systems, one of central government the other of state government, in which the component governments are coordinated in the sense that neither is politically subordinate to them but interact with each other at many parts both cooperatively and competitively. The same level of independence and autonomy exist within in the federating units. There is imperative need for interrelatedness and cooperation among the units as components parts, Ola (1995) added.

C. J. Friedrich (1963) sees federalism in different angle, he looks at it as a process by which number of separate political communities enter into arrangement for working out solutions, adopting joint policies and making joint decisions on joint problems and conversely, the process by which a unitary political community becomes differentiated into federating organized whole.

Federalism is a political system/process where powers are shared among component units that are independent and autonomous in the constitution of the country. That is to say from the definitions above including my own definition, the sharing of powers among component separate is the common variable. This power sharing goes with an institutional framework and guided by the constitution of the country.

K. C. Wheares identified the following as tenets of federalism:

1. There must be at least two level of government and there must be a written rigid constitution.
2. There must exist a supreme independent court. Judiciary must be independent to handle disputes as conflict is bound to arise in power sharing.
3. The court must be independent and capable of resolving any issue referred to them for adjudication.
4. Each level of government must be co-ordinated and independently autonomous.
5. Each level of government must be financially independent for effective performance of functions and to avoid dependency.
6. That no level of government should have undue power over the amendment of the constitution.

The definitions above put Nigeria under a federal state. With some structural institutionalized arrangement but its practicability is a zero sum game from 1954 till date from all indications.

HISTORY OF NIGERIA FEDERALISM

The history of Nigeria federalism will be traced from 1906 when the colony of Lagos was merged with Southern protectorate. In 1862 Nigeria was divided into three protectorates; the Lagos colony, Southern and Northern protectorate until 1906 when the colony of Lagos was joined with Southern protectorate for administrative convenience by the British imperial power under the leadership of Ralph Moor.

In 1914, the protectorates of Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria were merged to form one Nigeria. Each of these protectorates was made up of nations, ethnic groups and tribes with their respective language, culture, religion and government.

As Britain continued with their colonial policy, in 1923 political parties were formed following the introduction of elective principle by the Clifford constitution of 1922. Then 1946 Richard constitution, the country was divided into region, with unitary operations in federal structure. In 1951 the Macpherson constitution established a central legislative and executive council. The 1954 Lyttleton constitution provided and made provision for proper implementation of federalism. This federal system and structure created by natural forces, colonial and willingness of our nationalist leaders were sustained till independence in 1st October, 1960. From then till now Nigeria has been practicing federalism, which is unique to Nigeria which runs contrary to federalism as practiced in other developed nations of the world namely USA, China, India, etc.

REASONS FOR NIGERIA FEDERALISM

1. Nigeria pluralistic, heterogeneous, multilingual and venegated nature was in accordance with federal system of government.
2. The population nature of the geographical expression called Nigeria was vast, in fact Nigeria is Belgium, France put together. To protect and preserve those local autonomous groups.
3. Federalism makes for even and rapid development as component state are independently autonomous; there is competition which will in turn lead to national development.
4. It was adopted to protect minority interest.
5. The Nigeria Nationalist leaders and stakeholder wanted federalism. The constitutional conference in London and Lagos of 1954, Nigeria had the option to back out from federal system but they accepted it. The (white) Britain wanted it based on economic advantage to them.
6. Security and geographical proximity.
7. It will bring government closer to the people

DEMOCRACY AND FEDERALISM EXPERIENCE, FOURTH REPUBLIC EXPERIMENT 1991-2017

The concept of democracy and federalism were defined in this paper. Federalism can be seen as the pathfinder to the practice of true federalism.

Nigeria democratic and federalism experience since 1999 till 2007 is nothing to write home about from Nigerian's expectations after years of military government. Nigeria political system has been with the Khaki men for years, many democrats and human right activists fought for democracy, some died in cause of the struggle, some were imprisoned, some went on self -exile, for the sack of democracy.

The military plundered and buttered our economy, encumbered human rights and quarantined press freedom for many years. The military government headed by General Abusalami Abubakar initiated a transition programme from military to civilian. Election was conducted on 27th February 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo was elected president of the country and he assumed office on 29th May 1999.

The democratic process that brought him to power was characterized with irregularities. Obasanjo was not the rightful candidate for the post but his choice was influenced by the military cabal to pacify the Yoruba tribes for June 12 1993 election and the demise of Abiola.

Obasanjo's government made little or no impact to the welfare and development of the nation Nigeria. The much expected hope from the new civilian administration was dash a total mirage to Nigeria masses as Obasanjo's government did nothing to ameliorate the suffering of Nigerians. The tenure of Obasanjo marked monumental corruption; recently Buhari accused him of spending #816 billion naira on power sector with nothing to write home about on ground.

Obasanjo institutionalized corruption with the inauguration and formulation of (ICPC) Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offence Commission -Economic and financial crime Commission (EFCC). These agencies were used to diplomatically institutionalize to perpetrate corruption and cover up corrupt leaders, in the same vein used to deal with people that are not loyal to the government mostly the opposition. The same scenario operates till date. They are against the opposition parties.

It was in Obasanjo's regime that Nigeria lost all federal owned public corporations in the name of privatization. It was Obasanjo's regime that fuel rose from N20 to N75 all under his watch. Adebajor Ayo (2018) in his autobiography titled: Telling it as it is (2017) described Obasanjo's regime as a tragedy and calamity for Nigeria describing his score card as nothing to write home about.

Obasanjo's regime destroyed Odi town, Zakin Brian, all these military action in civilian uniform. He didn't consider human right.

There were numerous cases of corrupt changes under his watch; there was religious intolerance, frictions, unlawful military actions, kidnapping and high rate of unemployment. Obasanjo's projects such as National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, National Poverty Eradication Programme were projects to satisfy his cronies, all ended up in corruption.

Obasanjo wanted to go for third tenure, but was stopped as a result of pressure from Nigerians even his vice president failed out with him. He handed over to another civilian president Musa YarAdua after an election in 21st April, 2007.

YarAdua had vision for the country but his vision was truncated by his demise. His seven point agenda came to nothing. He died on 5th May, 2010. His deputy Ebelle Jonathan Goodluck took over from him and he came up with his own transformation agenda, which was basically a forum to share our national wealth.

On 21st May, 2015 President Buhari came as the President of the most populous nation in Africa with a change mantra. Buhari not too strong for some time travelled abroad for medical treatment for months, so many things went wrong.

He is fighting corruption. The fight against corruption without policies that will make life meaningful is tantamount to nothing. The same EFCC, ICPC are used negatively. The judiciary and Independent National Electoral Commission are not independent. Nothing has changed in Nigeria from 1999 till date.

A nation that produces crude oil yet imports fuel, a nation that cannot build one refinery for many years. A blessed nation where people beg to eat. A nation where impunity is taken for immunity. A nation where thugs and militants are rewarded. A nation where election is always characterized with killing, violence, arson and other electoral abnormalities. A nation where political office holders are paid what a professor emeritus cannot take home for one year in two months.

A nation where insecurity, killing, robbery is growing on alarming rate. A nation where godfatherism is a passport for any political office.

A nation where cultism is a passport for higher political offices. Membership of fraternal bounds is tied to aspiration for political office. A nation where election gets much budget than education. A nation where budget is been padded and sometimes disappear.

A nation where over 80% of the nation's budget goes to National Assembly. A nation where corruption is glorified, and corrupt officers given higher position. A nation where independence of the judiciary is guirgmired by political party in power. A nation where democracy is taken as demo-crazy.

From 1999 till date nothing has changed in Nigerian federal and democratic experiment as experience. As the nation has been under the siege of corruption, high cost of governance, over concentration of power at the national level, electoral malpractices, killing, high cost of living, prebendalism, secessionist clamor, religious intolerance, unemployment, underdevelopment, intimidation of opposition party members, money laundering and power failure.

DEMOCRACY AND FEDERALISM EQUILIBRIUM

Democracy as a concept cannot be practice in the air, it needs and organized sustained institutional structural arrangement for it to survive according to its tenets and principles. An enabling environment must be provided for the existence and practice of democracy. I have explained in details its meaning and characteristics all these can only be achievable in good atmosphere devoid of rancor and friction against the operations of democracy.

Federalism and liberal democracy are just like Siamese twins that cannot be separated, if optional benefits must be achieved from the use of the two construct. For democracy to work and achieve its goal an enabling environment must be provided. The provision of the enabling environment depends on the system of government which federalism seems to be best option for democracy to exist.

The federal system, through its instrumentalities of power should ensure that a people's constitution is written, obeyed, made available for people to have copies. In the same vein, the duties functions, rights of individual, agencies and parastatals should ensure that they perform their duties without influence, interference and intimidations from anywhere.

The agencies or bodies responsible for the conduct of election, collaborating agencies and security body should maintain a high level of sanity without compromises as an umpire in discharging their duties.

The judiciary should be independent in all ramifications in discharge of their duties. When the enabling environment is provided by the federal system, democracy will have a smooth sail and people will enjoy it as it will deliver its dividends to the masses both rich and poor.

When the federal system arrangement is corrupt, faulty and characterized with abnormalities, that will be replicated in the democratic process. It is just like a system, using the system approach. The two and their component parts must work separately in unison for the benefit of the people.

The working together of federal system and the total observance of all democratic tenets and principle for the benefit of the masses is what I call federal democratic equilibrium. This is the point where people can freely vote and be voted for without molestation and intimidation. When the constitution rules rather than men. When government are sensitive to the plight of the people. This the point when there is synergy between the ruler and the ruled

SUMMARY

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Nigeria is one of the most blessed nations in the world. The dramatic irony is that we are among the poorest nation where nothing works as planned. The question is what went wrong? How can all these abnormalities be corrected?

This paper will proffer the following suggestions on how democracy and federalism can be enjoyed by Nigerian masses. I have a dream that one day Nigeria as a nation will be repositioned among community of nation if suggestion given here will be rightly followed and implemented;

There is an imperative need for restructuring. Let all the component units, tribes, classes, profession come to a round table and renegotiate how the nation will be organized. This implies a new constitution. The constitution should reflect the will and wishes of all Nigerians, considering our heterogeneous pluralistic ethnic heritages and minority groups taken cognizance of the clamor for equity.

The constitution should clearly spell out duties, responsibilities and definition of words. For instance, you might not believe it there is nothing like “corruption” in Nigeria constitution. That is why it is difficult to punish any corrupt officials.

The anti -craft corrupt agencies should be renamed, restructured and be totally independent on its own as an umpire.

The electoral bodies, security agencies and electoral observers should be independent and own up to their responsibilities and duties. Public and political office holders should be made less lucrative.

National Assembly should be unicameral system on part time bases, and less payment be spent on them.

Let square peg be put in a square hole in terms of political appointment, recruitment, promotion and admission into higher school be based on merit.

Let there be reorientation and sensitization everywhere for Nigeria to be aware of their rights.

The mortgage judiciary should be made independent and umpire, free from any interference from anywhere, this will help to correct some judicial aberrational aberrations. Let salaries of judges and appointment be within the judicial commission based on merit and transparency process.

Immunity clause should be removed from the constitution/ as immunity has turned to impunity.

Leaders should be transparent and accountable to the people. Their activities and programmes should be evaluated once in a while.

I have clearly stated the characteristics and definition of democracy, if followed, Nigeria democracy will improve.

Let all organs of government act as check and balances.

Let policy foundation be based on people/masses interest. Let Nigerian government go into investment instead of multi consumption. Industries, companies should be built to create employment for the youths that are unemployed.

Nigeria can do rationally well with only agric if the government invest in Agriculture. It is sustaining many nations of the world -Israel and Brazil, Mexico.

REFERENCES

Appadorai (1975) Government and Politics

Abia V. B. (2003) Understanding Nigeria Government and Politics, Concept Publications Limited, Mushin, Lagos.

Ake, C. (1996) Is Africa Democratizing? Lagos Malthouse Press.

Adetola, O. (2011) An Exploration of Contending Issues in Nigeria's Federal Practice

Adeyemi, L. (2006) Democracy and Free Market. Concept Publishers, Lagos.

Akubo, A. A.; Yakubu, A. U. (2014) Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in

Amadon, K. (2010) Nigeria's Transition from Military rule to Civilian Rule: Transfer of Power.

Democracy Really Matter? Concept Publishers Lagos.

Democratization. African Studies Quarterly, Volume 12, 3.

Dhikru, A. Y. (2011) Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the Challenges of a Falling

Elaigwu, J. I. (2004) Democratic Government and Political Stability in Nigeria. A Paper

Enyi, J. E. (2014) Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Democratic or Civil Rule. Ambian Journal of Excel.Foreign Atlans.

<http://www.hotmail.sundayjune2009.foundar.org>.

Igbokwe, J. (2009) Ten Years of Democracy in Nigeria.

Journal of Alternative Representatives in the Social Sciences. Vol, No. 1, 1-33.

Nigeria Fourth Republic.Global Journal of Political Science and Administration 2, 3.

Oludoyi, S. (2006) Economic Development Financing: Does the Existence of
Presented at the Convocation Lecture of Benue State University Makurdi 7th May,
2004.

Schumpeter J. (1942) Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. London Routledge

Siegle, J. W.; Weinstein M. M. and Halperin, M. H. (2004) Why Democracies Business
and Management.Review Volume 2 No. 2