

DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The "Giant of Africa"ⁱ, seventh most populous country of the world, most populous in Africa, having 90 million youth below the age of 18ⁱⁱ, next only to China and India got independence from Britishers in 1960. It became a federal republic in 1963. Thus Nigeria has been an independent country for the last 59 years but till 2000 it did not witness a stable democracy. Fortunately after 1999 election, no military intervention has taken place but it is an irony that presidents elected democratically have also been ex-army personnel. This paper proposes to understand the meaning of democratization and the conditions which are must for any democracy. A bird eye view of reasons which failed the democratic attempts till late nineties shall also be taken into account. The presidential election of 1999 will be discussed in detail as democracy has stabilized after that.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the West African Country, borders Niger in the North, Chad in the North-East and Benin in the West. It was a British colony and got its independence in 1960. Though its official language is English but there are about 250 different ethnic groups that speak nearly 520 languages.ⁱⁱⁱ Its religions are Islam (roughly 50%) in the Northern Nigeria, Christianity (roughly 40%) and traditional beliefs (10%) Christians dominate South-Nigeria. Nigerian Constitution declares itself to a secular state. However some Northern states have added Sharia law into their legal system which has opened controversies.^{iv} In 2014 it was measured to be the 20th largest economy and overtook South Africa in 2014 to become Africa largest economy^v however, due to unequal distribution at the highest level suggest that 33.1% of people are living below poverty line. But few scholars disagree with data on

poverty level. He writes that it is not acceptable and it may be due to lack of information about the information of informal sector data which is huge, probably 60%.

Now one more thing should be pointed out here which I have found during different readings of Nigeria and the important point is that the merger of Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria was artificial in 2014. Seemingly, there was not any social and political movement to integrate the entire country into one fabric. The real problem lies in the fact that the loyalty of the common man is more towards his region, religion and ethnic group. So this proves to be detrimental towards democratic health of national interest.

Having analyzed the bird eye view of the socio-economic and religious aspects, let us move on to democratization of Nigeria:

Democracy is an art of ruling ourselves. In a society it develops a mechanism of conflict resolution to avoid violence. It is based on the concept equality, liberty and justice. In simple term democratization is a process of establishing a democratic political regime. The transition could be to partial democracy or full democracy from an authoritarian / semi-authoritarian rule. Democratic political system is based on electoral system through different level elections. History, economic development and civil society leave a strong imprint on democratization.

CAUSES OF DEMOCRATIZATION

1. Economic development: The French revolution of 1789 ignited interest in democracy across Europe. The ruling classes in Britain concluded that whatever was happening in France could happen in Britain also. It was perceived that the alienated and indifferent working class possessed great destructive power. So with the economic development, demand for liberty and share in political power increased every passing day. The only way out was the path of democracy. Study of American civil war, British civil war and French revolution indicate that economic development increases the chances of transition to democracy or if the democracy exists there, it gets consolidated.
2. Capitalism: The basic theory of capitalism is open market and free competition. This concept itself implies that it can survive only and only if the freedom is granted to common man.
 - a. Democracy too needs freedom as the core of its foundation. Capitalism enhances individualism, compromise, and negotiation, art of conflict resolution, equality of law and equality before the law along with due process of law. Non-interference from any other quarter is a virtue for it. So is the case with democracy. Only democratic rule promotes individualism along with mutual respect and equality before the law and equal protection of law. Thus capitalism and democracy are interlinked and both promote similar circumstances with similar values.
3. Brushing aside capitalism, Marxist have different meaning of democracy. They emphasize that if the state control the economy and the individual is not the basic entity, then democracy is achieved. The funniest phenomenon is that they start with dictatorship to achieve ultimate democracy “where state itself weathers away.
4. Equality: Equality of status and opportunity and liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship.....^{vi} is a guiding force for the development of human as an individual and a democratic force for the society. It is a way of life.
5. In any society where inequality reaches its horizon, democracy will die and a revolution is imminent. Revolution again can be bloody and peaceful depending on who leads us- Lenin or Gandhi.
6. Even cruel monarchy has offered concessions if the threat of revolution credibly looms over their head and the concession do not prove to be costly. Thus, the chances of democracy surviving with deep roots in a egalitarian society.
7. Class Character: Class character of any society is very important. Generally the society can be divided into three broad categories: higher class, middle class and lower class. Higher class or ruling class is in fusion with each other. They help, guide and control each other. The lower class generally keeps struggling for his basic needs to be fulfilled and not or little aware

about the situation of the nation. But middle class is very important. It is very important because it is the bedrock of the governance. It influences the government to the extent that it extracts few concessions also in a democratic frame work. It provides oxygen to democracy and governance. Infact, middle class provides balancer's role between the higher class control and lower class aspiration.

8. **Civil Society:** Civil society works through pressure group which time and again keeps the government in control through suggestions, support and struggle. NGO's, trade unions, women associations, labour organisations, teacher's organisations etc. are important in gradients of civil society. By democratizations, dharna and marches they spread education of various policies brought up by the government. When they challenge the government's policy, government can neither ignore it nor accept it in totally. They think over the policies and if they find suggestions to be substantial, they review and revise it. Through various activities, civil society also provides leadership quality amongst its workers and many dynamic leaders emerge out of it.
9. **Education:** Educations makes a man, an analytical man. Such persons analyse the problems from different perspective and then try to enter into a compromised solution which brings out the best of every perspective. They are liberal and more competent compared to illiterate or semi-literate person. They uphold the value of equality, liberty, justice, freedom and even agree to disagree on politics and policies being implemented.

Educated people are those who tend to provide suggestions and solution when invited by the government for the same. They not only hold pro-democratic value but also strengthen the functioning of the government keeping in mind the then situation.

WHY DEMOCRACY IS IMPORTANT

Having discussed the fundamentals, let us understand why it is important? It is important because there is no place for violence and democracy promotes peace. Development too requires peace. The Egyptian civilization is the oldest civilization of the world. Note it , that the geographical position of Egypt was such that there was no interference from outside world, or no violence in the state. This was the secret of its development.

Other noticeable fact is that there has hardly been any war between two strong democracies. Ist world war and II world war was fought entirely on imperialistic expansionism, though people claimed that it was to make the world safe for democracy. Generally, differences do crop up but they settle their dispute through peaceful means such as talks, summit, negotiations, treaty and their back stage diplomatic activities.

Democratization is too beneficial for such countries which have passed through authoritarian regime because apart from losing the peace and economic development, they witness pool of bloodshed and killing of important human resources.

The above importance loudly suggests that Nigeria should go for democracy permanently. It has all the fundamental of becoming a world power provided shuns violence. Social hegemony should be created and secularism must be grounded at any cost.

DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA

As already stated civil government has been replaced by military rule time and again. It is notable that in the first 40 years of its independence, civil rule could exist only 12 years and that too not in a stretched. For more than 28 years Nigeria was governed by military Junta. The implementation of their programme and policies were erratic and directionless. Oppression, suppression and killing,

resentment, discontent and fear loomed large amongst common man.

But after 1999 election, democracy has come to stay in Nigeria. It was through General elections that Ibrahim Babangida regime (1985-1993) and after that Abacha regime (1995-1998) who promised Nigeria to a road of transition from military rule to democratic rule became stable. However their intention was to entrench them to power. Though General Abacha started on a good note, he died in 1998. After Abacha's death general Abubakar Abdul Salam took over the power and the very next day came out with the Programmes of political and economic rejuvenation.

For Abubakar these Programmes became must because during his predecessor's time because of human rights violations and long drawn military rule, Egypt had attracted sanctions from some countries. Sanctions hamper the economic growth on one side and on the other hand the country and rulers are not entertained by many countries. Therefore, sanctions forced Abubakar in two ways. First he had to convince the world community that civil rule will follow in near future and second, he had to take all possible mean to energies economic activities.

Abubakar started consultation with all stakeholders and connected that "a defective foundation was created by earlier regime and on such foundation a solid democratic structure can never be constructed nor sustained. This was his conclusion from different consultation.^{vii} He took the following steps immediately:-

- 1) Dissolved five political parties registered by Abacha regime.
- 2) Their assets were overtaken by administrator appointed by the government.
- 3) Due to lack of credibility, all previous elections conducted under these parties were cancelled.
- 4) Local government councils were taken over by senior civil servants.
- 5) National electoral commission was dissolved.
- 6) New national electoral commission headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ephraim Akpata was formed.

The electoral commission declared that any party to be registered must get 5% of the total number of votes in at least 24 states. Fulfilling this and other conditions, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and people Democratic Party (ADP) were granted registration. This was based on the results of local government council's election.

Now these three parties were eligible to fight election in the remaining elections of the transitional programme.

The result of the chairmanship and councillorship in local government council were as^{viii}:

Name of the Party	Chairmanship	Councilors
Alliance for Democracy(AD)	100	1071
All Peoples Party (APP)	459	4650
Peoples Democratic Party (PDD)	591	5210

Other parties also took part in the election but their share in seats did not qualify them to be registered.

Thus the result shows that PDP won the maximum seats and its acceptability had a wider geographic area. It was followed by APP and AD. APP got major votes from north region while AD got main support from western part of the country.

Without delay on 9th January 1999, election for governorship and assembly elections were held. The vote share pattern again placed PDP at the top followed by APP and AD.

Immediately the assembly election was over. The election for National assembly was conducted in the month of February 1999. The pattern was same. PDP followed by APP and AD respectively.

Now the election for the president was to be held and it was a foregone conclusion that PDP candidate would win the election.

Now AD and APP decided to forge an alliance to check the growing popularity of PDP. In the presidential election which was scheduled for 27th Feb 1999, PDP declared retired general Olusegun as their presidential candidate, APP and AD under alliance declared Olu Falae as their Joint presidential candidate.

The surprising but fortunate aspect of their candidature was that both the candidates came from Southern part of Nigeria. The result was in favour of PDP candidate Obasanjo. He had secured 62.78% votes against the combined (APP+AD) candidate who secured 37.22%^{ix}

However some legal tussle took place and after a while Obasanjo was sworn in as the new president of Nigeria. Also the same day state governors were sworn. After few days, National assembly was inaugurated.

Since Obasanjo was re-elected with 62% of vote. He was again a PDP candidate and continued till April 2007.

In April 2007 Presidential election was held and ruling party candidate Umaru Yar's Adua won the election with 69.82%. Though, it was alleged by the observers from the European Union that it was the worst election witness by them. The Nigerian society witnessed peace and development in his period. Unfortunately, he died in 2010 due to illness.

After the death of Musa Yar' Adua, the vice-president Good-luck Jonathan took over the president ship and won election in 2011. During his tenure an Islamic organisation, Boko Haram group which insisted on implementing sharia law created a lot of problem for the president. In 2015 presidential election, free and fair elections were held and General Muhammad Buhari won the election.

Concludingly it could be said that Nigeria is running in a civil government for the last 20 years successfully. If it is successful in creating a sense of Nationalism and disturbances by Muslim organization is finished, the country has a bright future ahead.

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^v Daniel Magnowski; Bloomberg; 7th April 2014.

^{vi} Preamble of Indian Constitution.

^{vii} Guardian; July 21 1998.

^{viii} Tribune, December 15,1998.

^{ix} www.nationsonline.org.