

DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA AND INDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES TO CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

Democracy that is said to be exported is representative democracy which traces its origin to the western world and more specifically the US and Britain who are the fathers' of presidential and parliamentary democracies respectively that have dominated the rest of the world. The importers – Asia and Africa among others have had to face the challenges of adaptability according to the original models (American or British). Some of the challenges range from poverty, corruption, underdevelopment that is heavily alleged to the legacy of colonialism in these continents – Asia and Africa. In spite of all the odds, India defied the theories of democracy that development must come before democracy; but India had thrived amidst hardship, poverty, but good nationalist leaders that today India is a known existing democracy for decades as against Nigeria who virtually lacked the Indian – like nationalist leaders. Finally, exporters must be more realistic to consider that the terrain of importers is different in culture, national experience, and development from theirs.

Key words: Exporters/importers of democracy; related institutions; representative democracy; institutions of democracy

Types of Democracy

Democracy is a term that is coined from two Greek words 'demos' which means 'the people' and 'kratein' which means 'rule of or by.' Hence Abraham Lincoln, American president rightly describes it as 'the government of the people for the people and by the people'. Democracy can be defined as popular government or a government that is meant to represent the interest of the majority of the populace of a country. Democracy varies from one country to another. Today, democracy is said to have so many variations even more than the number of democratic countries.

The two major types of democracy are the parliamentary and the people's democracy (Nnoli, 2003). The variants of parliamentary democracy are the cabinet system as practised in England and the presidential system as practised in the USA. The peoples' democracy is exemplified by

the defunct USSR, China, Cuba and Vietnam. By convention, democracy basically divided into presidential and parliamentary democracy and a third category is called direct democracy. For the purpose of this paper, we shall consider some modern democracies using the following as a basis of comparison:

- a. Salient features
- b. Extent of faults charged to the governments
- c. Qualities that assist democracy's institutions to work rightly.

The countries that we shall examine from the above viewpoints are: France, US and Switzerland.

France

The French system of parliamentary democracy had been rocked with foundational problems. The struggle for the balance of power between the legislative and the executive had ever been the major source of frequent change of government to an average of 6 months tenure under the Fourth Republic (1946-58). The two parties, that is the, Gaullists who were on the right and communists of the constitution, but ordinarily they maintained their identity as opponents.

It became difficult to control the legislative by the executive, as the two extremist parties "had sufficient combined strength in the National Assembly to thwart initiatives and force the resignation of weak coalition governments" (Magstadt 2006: 167) It was this chaotic situation of the Fourth Republic that earned the French parliamentary democracy the description: "the power of the legislative".

In spite of all that transpired in France in the past, today France is described as having "a robust economy (not trouble-free), a strong civil society (with occasional protests by students, farmers or labour groups) and a vibrant culture. (Magstadt 2006: 175)

The changes that took place in the Fifth Republic turned around the situation in France such that France is listed among the successful democracies in the world today.

USA

The presidential system of democracy here is symbolized by the dependence on the constitution as a guide for the government. It is referred to as the "power of party organization and control" (Bryce 1963). This is because there is a wide application of popular election to the choice of officials which even includes judges. Recently, they introduced a more direct popular legislation which comes in the form of referendum. Also there is the participatory democracy which resembles the practice of direct democracy, which is used in the recall of judicial as well as executive officials based on popular vote.

The two major defects of the US democracy as identified by James Bryce are:

Money Power has attained such huge proportions as to assail the virtue of officials and demoralize some State legislatures must be largely ascribed to the prodigious fortunes which the swift development of a new country's resources created, the possessors of which found it worthwhile to buy favors from politicians who had them to sell. Similarly, the worst scandals of municipal misgovernment appeared where a sudden influx of old-world immigrants flooded cities that were already growing fast... (Bryce 1963)

Switzerland

The type of democracy in practice in Switzerland is described as consociational democracy. This is because of the diverse nations that find themselves in one state. Each nation seeks equal representation at the central government. The central government is not even as strong as the Cantons. The Cantons are the subdivisions that could be likened to the regions or states as in the

federal system of government. There is constant voting on issues. The major means of policy making is based on the Referendum. A system where an idea generated from personalities, organizations or institutions can get a national vote because of a predetermined number of signatures of persons who consent and generate the voting process. There is constant voting and not all matters that pass through the process are enacted into law but the populace is made aware of the idea on ground and could affect other policies in the future. . There is also the 'recall' that is a device that is used to remove an official from office (Magstadt 2006).

Related Institutions to Democracy

Democracy as a popular system of government, has some institutions that are always associated with it. Some of these institutions include among others:

Constitution:

The constitution of a country is the description of the basic organizations and how the operations within the government powers and limitations are put in place.

Most countries have a formal written constitution with the exception of Britain whose constitution is on the mind of the British. The real constitution is not necessarily written, but is engraved on the hearts of the citizens. (Friedrich1963) This perhaps is the school of thought that gave the British the strength to pay less attention on the written form of constitution.

Whether a written constitution or not, there are certain functions that must be carried out by the constitution in a democracy. They are: responsiveness to the people, limited pursuable goals and effective maintenance of law and order; to prevent such evils as ministerial instability paralysis in decision making and destruction of constituted authority by anti-constitutional means. (Magstadt 2006: 68 and Nnoli 2003: 130)

A government is said to be constitutional where "the leaders are recruited through open and regular competitive processes..." (Eckstein 1963:97) It is also a democratic government that the "constitution molds and shapes political life"... (Friedrich 1963) Where the constitutional government fails to achieve responsiveness to people's need, limited goals and effective maintenance of law and order, then democracy is still in view and not reality in such a state.

Political Parties

Political parties are part of the instruments for state consolidation and democracy. They serve as a means for the government to reach to the people in order to get their support, political parties also are used to reach out to the government by the people. Political parties are fundamental in providing a "stable pattern of government from one faction of a ruling class to another"(Nnoli 2003: 206).

The functions of political parties include, but not limited to these below as identified by Ayandiji Daniel Aina:

- Parties should present clear and coherent programmes
 - Nominate candidates
 - Structure the voters' choice
 - Propose alternative government
 - Coordinate the actions of Government Officials
- (Aina, 2004).

Different countries have different party systems ranging from one-party, two-party to multi-party system. Each of these party systems has its merits and demerits. The two-party system that

was experimented in Nigeria for instance in the 1990s proved successful but the same military government which brought it also destroyed it and betrayed the electorate's trust and mandate.

. Electoral Systems

Elections are a means of getting the electorate to participate thereby ensuring, representation. It is election that gives the citizens a chance to make some level of choice in the preference of laws and policies. But this function is not often achieved by citizens.

The electoral system as a complex of rules and regulations guides the selection of office holders. Elections ensure justice and fairness through the use of rules and regulations. Elections play their role of recruiting persons into offices in spite of the type of democracy that is practiced. In other words, it is a means of getting officials into office, be it government organization or otherwise. It is "a process of choice agreed upon by a group of people". (Nnoli 2003: 220)

The electoral system is a follow-up in the sense that, it sets rules and regulations for carrying out elections in a representative government; it decides who is recruited into political office as well as the parties that can form a government (Nnoli 2003; Akindele, et al 2000).

Executive, Legislative and Judiciary

The division of power among the three arms of government enables the practice of democracy to succeed. Each of the arms of government represents the interest of the government as well as the citizenry. Where these bodies fail to carry out their respective responsibilities or they struggle for supremacy or other selfish interests as in the French Fourth Republic the practice of democracy is denied its rightful position in such a country.

Challenges of the Workability of Democracy according to Original Model

In the western world, independence, industrialization was attained before democracy. But, they in turn impose democracy not minding the extent of development of the importing countries.

Multi-nationality/multi-ethnicity: Nigeria for instance has over 250 ethnic cleavages and 400 languages which make it hard to unite the people with such diverse nations in one state created without their consent.

Elite circulation: The few early opportune leaders do not want to lose relevance in the society; hence they circulate themselves either through their friends, relations or a few recruits to protect their continuous selfish interest at the expense of the general public interest (Aina 2004).

Colonialism left a very big vacuum in the colonial states whose effect has become very difficult to erase on national development and has been challenging to recover from its destruction of the indigenous traditional political system of governance.

Colonial Legacy:

Colonialism was a major obstruction to the peaceful and the pace of development of the countries that the Europeans dominated. The different strategies adopted by the colonialists to pursue their interest ranged from assimilation as in the French colonies and native rule as in the case of Dutch in Indonesia. Great Britain, the most aggressive in terms of territorial occupation mixed the two methods together – native rule to maintain law and order and a level of assimilation by sending a very few natives to their schools to study even to the university level.

Colonialism could be reviewed from a Eurocentric point as contributing to the development of the colonies in the areas of health, education and transportation. These provisions were limited and also benefitted the colonialists most at the expense of the colonies. Magstadt illustrates the relationship vividly:

Europeans did introduce some elements of modernization including modest advances in health (hospitals), education (schools), and transportation (roads). However, these changes were quite limited in impact and came at the expense of economic and political self sufficiency, as well as traditional ways of life... any gains have to be measured against the losses, namely the humiliation, oppression and diseases (epidemics introduced by Europeans into populations with no resistance to new germs) associated with colonial rule. (Magstadt 2006: 254).

Kesselman further describes the distortion in the order of government by the colonialist they "...weakened the previous practices of accountability and participation while increasing western individualism." (Kesselman 2010)

It is a known fact that the current states of Africa were creations of the colonial regimes. The maps are artificial creations to satisfy the selfish interest of the colonizing countries. Magstadt further explains the impact of the acts:

Colonial empires were created without regard to the pre-existing ethnic identities, territorial boundaries, and loyalties of native populations. When the European powers withdrew they typically created a crazy quilt of new states with borders that made no sense because they cut across traditional religions, ethnic and tribal territorial lines. The result...chronic political instability, coups, revolutions, civil wars and even genocide. (Magstadt 2006: 255)

The effect of colonialism and its attendant legacy cannot be over emphasized. It is a common history that almost all the former colonial territories, now states have experienced or still experience, civil war, incompatibility struggles, political instability, military rule and economic setbacks as a result of the calamitous conditions they find themselves and worse still the neocolonialism that seem to have no end.

Nigeria as an Importer of Democracy

Nigeria as one of the former British colonies had its own share of the negative effects of colonialism. This still remains a challenge to democracy as the overwhelming defects have taken precedence over time in the political life of the country. We shall attempt to illustrate the relationship between colonialism, its legacy and current political situation in the country.

Colonialism and Administrative structure

The introduction of indirect rule in the northern part of current Nigeria was an easy way of governing the people through their already existing leaders. Since the British used the strategy of native rule to achieve their aim of ensuring that law and order was maintained; which was their major concern. Law and order were necessary for their continuous stay to exploit the resources they found on the land.

In the eastern part where the society was highly decentralized, it became difficult and impossible to adopt the indirect rule system immediately so, the British had to appoint some persons and

made them warrant chiefs' which meant that they had the permission of the British government to act as leaders and law enforcement officers even contrary to their people's interest and will. The British played off ethnic and social divisions to keep Nigeria from developing an organized political resistance to the colonial rule. They practiced the principle of "divide and rule". Instead of the diversity to be a source of strength to it became a weakness. (Kesselman 2010)

The Nigerian populace was made to be passive subjects because of the level of suppression and oppression on them. This was contrary to the pre-colonial traditional checks and balances that existed in the society. Since the British and the few Nigerian-made-administrators, ran an exclusive system of government, it was impossible for the natives (Nigerians) to make any input in the government.

The colonial bureaucracy tended to arrogate unto itself all political functions, always acting to suppress organisations whose activities were manifestly political. The colonial bureaucracy was a "political organization" without a legitimate constituency. It was both unrepresentative and unresponsive-the two hallmarks of undemocratic social systems. It lacked respect for competitive politics. It acted politically but pretended to be apolitical. (Oyugi and Odhiambo 1998)

Since the few 'opportuned' Nigerians in leadership during the colonial rule were not necessarily the people's choice, the idea of opportunism was nurtured in their minds which made them to turn to selfish, self-centered representatives who saw state control as a means of satisfying self – interest. The result of the self-centeredness was further encouraged by the regionalization of the country with a few representatives who saw themselves as opponents of the other regions. The effect was inter – group competition and not national interest.

As a follow – up, ethnic identity and ethnicity became an instrument to use to pursue competition and mobilize public support. This was the situation that the nationalists found themselves working with which led to the breaking up of the political parties to suit and represent only regional interests under the guise of a national representation. Hence NPC was a northern party; NCNC became an eastern affair and AG was meant for the west.

The above scenario was the nature of the nationalists' background against a united British government who later at the end of the colonial period turned around to 'preach' or 'teach' democratic political system after instituting authoritarian political culture. It was this state of confusion of the country's identity that made late Awolowo in 1947 to remark "... there are no Nigerians. Nigeria is not a nation but mere geographical expression ... No Nigerians as there are English (language and people)..."

The ethnic affiliation at the expense of national interest became the bedrock of Nigerian politics, till date, all political parties have their leanings based on the "old order" of politics – ethnic and not national parties or worse still a circulation of the elite not minding their ethnicity. Political parties are a good source of letting the electorate express its choice based on policies/ ideologies of the parties, it remains the basis for affiliation, since ethnic or now ethno – religions policies dominate the political parties' policies and not national development in Nigeria (Nnoli, 2003). The question is: how can democracy thrive on subjective representation?

Finally, the same selfish interest led to the civil war after independence and the continuous military rule till 1999. Till date, the challenge of national interest identity remains a problem with the zoning system and not merit system of presidential candidacy.

Democracy in India

India is a very good example of why democracy survives. While the Nigeria situation earlier examined is in congruence with the line of thought of theories of democracy which posit that poverty; widespread illiteracy, and a social structure heavily relied hierarchy are at variance with democracy, (Magstadt 2006). In India all of the conditions identified above were found but why did democracy thrive?

In answering the question how democracy survives in India, we shall adopt the four part answer that scholars such as **Rajni Kothan**, **James Manor**, and others gave based on their work in this area.

Historically, the type of party formation process of India was democratic from inception. The quest for the Indian leaders Nehru and Gandhi for nation-building above selfish personal interest accounts for their major success. In India, the nationalist leaders did not pursue independence through violent means. The leaders instead converted their ethnic, cultural groups into political units which eventually they transformed to a nation. (Varshney 1998)

The British allowed the indigenous politicians partial self-rule at the local level, in the 1880s and at the provincial level in 1935. The Congress party craved for more power while specializing in local self – rule. It was between 1937, 1939 and 1946 that the congress was able to get to state – level governance (Varshney 1998).

The two nationalist leaders of India Nehru and Gandhi worked hard to mobilize their people into desiring self – rule while detesting British rule. The success of these leaders to turn around the segmented Indian people into a nation in opposition of the British is what Nigeria lacked in the years of independence movement.

Another factor that played a good role towards Indian democratic self – rule is the unexpected breakaway of the Muslim Leagues. The creation of Pakistan as an independent entity from India brought the Indian internal class to an end.

The population of India being about a quarter of a billion (250 million) in the 1920's was an added advantage. The British on the other hand had only about 150,000 colonial officials. The British were therefore no match to the Indians. Indians were not protesting against the British system of government but against the British rule of a people who are capable of ruling themselves according to the British parliamentary democracy. The British at this point had no choice but to handover government to the Indians after a long struggle though non – violent but persistent, diplomatic and systematic.

India under Nehru developed at its pace contrary to the dictates of the economic theories of development and democracy. India chose to democratize before developing so that, their local peasant farmers will not be overrun by external competition.

The responsive leadership of Nehru must be taken note of while understanding this point. Hence, Varshney explains:

Nehru chose democracy over development (or at least a model of development that he was initially inclined to favour). Guided by the advice of the Congress cadres from the several states, he realized he could not give suffrage to rural India and at the same time extract huge quantities of food from it at below-market prices. By not forcing the issue, the Congress party avoided putting democracy at risk. (Varshney 1998: 38)

Ethnicity has also been a major cause of wars and disputes in former colonial empires because of the boundaries the colonialists drew were not often realistic to the people. In India, unlike in Nigeria, the ethnic cleavages are specifically local and regional. The ethnic groups do not spillover to other regions which makes it possible to contain with disputes between and among ethnic groups. The cleavage that threatened India's unity was that of Muslim – Hindu divide. Despite the fact that Pakistan was carved out from India to forestall peace, it was done in a bloody way with an estimate of 200,000 – 500,000 loss of lives. The cordiality of Hindu – Muslim relations is still not achieved till date.

Favourable Conditions for Democracy

National unity: There is every need for nation – building to precede democracy.

National Wealth: Wealth is not everything to democracy as in the case of India, which is an exception, but it is a vital ingredient in pursuit of a democracy.

State Institutions: They are responsible for power sharing, maintenance of law and order as well as meting out justice and fairness to all citizenry.

Committed Elites: The self – centered elites would pursue personal goals at the expense of national public interest. If the elite are corrupt, not committed, the fight for democracy will not last; hence, the Indian success and Nigeria's failure.

Stable Party System: This ensures the participation of citizenry by choice.

A Middle Class: The middle class contributes to democracy by using their wealth to control authoritarian policies.

Support for disadvantaged people in the society includes gender egalitarianism and the fair and equal treatment of all citizens.

Education and Freedom of Communication is very indicative of a democracy or autocracy. Where the people have freedom of expression, the government is liable to questioning when wrong decisions are taken. It allows for more ideas to be generated from the people's expressed views.

Tolerance of Individual and Group differences is a very vital issue in democracy. In Nigeria and precisely the northern part, lack of ethnic and religious tolerance has ruined the peaceful co-existence and slowed down development. Now people live in fear and are not free to express themselves adequately for fear of offending an opponent. National interest must be pursued and not personal or group interests.

Recommendation

Different countries have different national experiences; national interests; cultures; economic endowments and stages of development. It is therefore not proper to use a single criterion or a set of criteria of a particular model of either parliamentary or presidential system of government as a yardstick for measuring all democracies. Different countries adapt to change either political, socio-economic according to their adaptive features which enable them use the local environmental needs in order to serve their people. According to Bryce, democracy

‘shows different features in different countries, because the characters and habits of peoples are different; and these features are part of the history of each particular country’. Hence Eghosa Osaghae affirms that “democracy: all versions whether liberal or capitalist, socialist and African brand share the fundamental objective of how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to all the people.” (Osaghae 1992:40)

Before colonialism came and subsequent export of western democracy, there were governments that were representative in their own capacity and their attendant institutions of checks and balances that kept the society in shape. These were rather disrupted and distorted with the foreign systems.

Finally, different countries adapt to change either political, socio-economic according to their adaptive features which enable them use the local environmental needs in order to serve their people. Therefore, both exporters and importers should know that whatever the form of government, the very essential and basic need is that the government should represent the interest of the public, for national development; it should be accountable to the electorates and must not be an imposition be it internal or external imposition.

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