

Citizens' Perceived Implications Of Nigeria's Democracy

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Abstract: *Nigeria's embrace of democracy after more than twenty five years of military governance received both local and international accolades in 1999. Democracy was thought to be a vital tool towards liberalization and development. While employing the Political Economy Approach, the study investigated the perceived outcomes of democracy on the socio-political lives of Nigerians. A cross sectional survey was carried out in the six geopolitical zones of the country, and was analysed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The study observed that there was a significant relationship between the nature and practice of democracy in Nigeria and the citizens' commitment to nation- building and development. Thus, if Nigeria is to achieve the goal of economic development, viability and democratic consolidation; there is a need to make democracy truly participative, free and fair.*

I. Introduction

Democracy has been seen as a pre-condition for development in third world states especially in this era of globalization. To this end it had become a precondition for access to various forms of international aid and incentives. This perception is hinged on the principle of free choice. It is intended that citizens should not only be free to choose what to buy in a trade liberalized world but also be able and free to choose who rules over them; and also participate fully in the nation's political development.

To this end therefore, many hitherto dictatorial and self imposed government in third world states, especially in Africa had transformed into democratic states. Nigeria, on May 29, 1999 also joined these newly democracy embracing states when General Abdusalam Abubakar, the then military head of state willingly handed over the reins of government to the democratically elected President and Commander in Chief of the Nigeria Armed Forces, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who himself was a retired soldier.

However, the democratic experience of Nigeria has been at different times and fora been described by scholars as unstable, corrupt and an antithesis of a true democracy. Thus, the practice of democracy had been hampered by godfatherism, corruption, electoral malpractices and electoral violence. (See for example Ogundiya, 2010 and Muhammad, 2013). Contrary to this gruesome description of democratic experiences, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria over the years has also perceived the nation's democracy as healthy, thriving and responsive to people's needs and aspirations.

Given these contradictions, this study seeks to find out the extent to which the embrace and practice of democracy, as perceived by respondents, have in the past fifteen years impacted on the social well-being of the citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs the system theory as a theoretical framework. A system has been defined as a set of two or more interrelated elements in which each element of the system has an effect on the functioning of the whole (Ackoff, 1981). Given that in a democratic environment, the participation of the masses in the electioneering processes and their support or otherwise to the actions (or inactions) of the elected goes a very long way in the stability of such political systems, the system theory gives an appropriate insight to the interactive function between the centre and the peripheries. According to Yamma (2008), the relevance of Systems theory to a study as this lay in the fact that it provides a purposive interdisciplinary approach that can treat the complex interdependencies of democratic practice and the attendant implications in a dynamic manner. This is in tandem with the assertion of Alexander Laszlo and Stanley Krippner (1998) that the advantage of systems theory lies in its potential to provide a trans-disciplinary framework for a simultaneously critical and normative exploration of the relationship of the respondents' perceptions and conceptions on democracy and its implications on their socio economic lives.

II. Methodology

A Cross-sectional survey research design, was conducted using semi-structured questionnaire to elicit information on citizens' perception of the outcomes of Nigeria's practice of democracy on their political

participation, quality of life, commitment to nation building, ability to meet family obligations, self confidence and democratic participation. Convenience sampling technique was used to select a total of 1029 respondents, from the six geo-political zones of the country. In addition to this, publications of Central Bank of Nigeria, Africa Peer Review Mechanism country report and press reports were used to cross validate the data obtained from the citizens. While secondary data was content analyzed, primary data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation. For the purpose of this research, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 15) was used to analyze the raw data collected from the field. Descriptive data analysis was used to describe the percentage of responses to the questions asked, while the correlation coefficient was used to determine the type and levels of relationships which existed amongst and between the variables employed in this study. Thus while the Pearson Product Correlation test was used to evaluate the extent and direction of associations among the study variable, data were presented in frequency tables and percentages.

III. Respondents' Perception on Democratic Practices in Nigeria.

From Table 1.0, the advent and continuity in democracy, which is one of the tenets of globalization and an important factor in neo-liberal's panacea for development, seems to have had a positive impact on the lives of the respondents, particularly with regards to their commitment and work for their country. Thus, 57.1% and 52.3%, respectively reported a positive impact in those areas. However, given the responses in the study, it is pertinent to note that Nigerians do not believe that democracy is being practiced as it ought to be. Thus in the area of political participation 68.7% responded that democracy had not positively impacted on their lives and living. As observed by the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM 2008), this response could be partly traceable to their findings that:

"The rights of children are not yet well established in Nigeria despite the country's having signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child....There are still unacceptable rates of infant and child mortality, child labour, trafficking, rape and sexual harassment, lack of quality education, gender inequality and children living on the streets....Over the past years, the plight of vulnerable groups, including the disabled and the poor was left to the attention of kin without government intervention. The rights of Persons living with Disabilities (PWDS) are inadequately protected and promoted at Federal level and in several states, most of which lack the necessary policy and institutional frameworks as well as adequate resources to protect these rights...."

In addition to these, it has also been observed that actual political participation of the people had been inadvertently limited to attendance at rallies, payment of party dues and arguing in favour of their political parties at instantaneous street debates.

In line with this, one of the interviewees observed that with regards to elections, in Nigeria:

"The post elections government formed in Nigeria had not in the period under survey being a government of the people by the people. It is a common known fact that, validated by the countless numbers of electoral cases filed at the tribunals that elections in Nigeria is merely an endorsement of pre-selected candidates. A comedian once said that in Nigeria, we already know the winners three months before elections are held. This is sad, but it is the truth. In Nigeria, votes do not count. What counts are the desires of the ruling elites "

Although the existence of security is one important factor in the attraction of foreign investors, only 32.1% responded that democracy positively impacted on their personal security. This response is also in line with some other researches (see Isaac Albert, Derrick Marco and Victor Adetula 2007, IFES 2007) conducted with regards to security at the period under study. However, with regards to the respondent's quality of life, self confidence and meeting of family obligations, positive impact responses of 46.3%, 43.5% and 45.5% respectively were recorded. Democracy however did not seem to encourage foreign investors' participation in the economy to the desired extent as it seemed not to have impacted greatly on an anti-investment malaise, that is corruption. The reason for this could be traceable to the possibility of the foreign investors losing, as it were, confidence in the ability of the political class to ensure a laissez-faire environment, which was not present in the country's corrupt democratic practice. In tandem with this the APRM (2008) had also observed that:

...In spite of these endowments, Nigeria political leadership has yet to satisfactorily solve democracy and political governance problems as well as reconcile conflicting ethno-regional interests. It also faces the recurrent challenge of managing the process and benefits of economic development to ensure equitable distribution and growth in the country

The failure of the political class as explicated above had in its wake brought forth series of political violence, kidnapping of expatriates 'to press home political demands', assassinations and various forms of social upheavals that are non-promotional to foreign investments in the country as would have been expected. This is explicated in the fact 63.3% of the respondents did not seem to agree with the assertion that the advent of democracy positively impacted on their perception of eradication of corrupt practices in the country.

Democracy has been touted to increase the people's ability to make choices which they felt would deliver to them good life and enhanced good quality of life. However, 54.5% of the respondents

did not perceive a positive influence of democracy in their efforts at meeting family obligations, and 53.7% of the respondents did not record any positive influence of the practice of democracy in the improvement of their quality of life. A further inquiry revealed that the dividends of democracy had been concentrated in the centre for most states, thus neglecting the so much needed infrastructural development in the local areas (where it is much needed). In tandem with this observation, NEPAD also observed that:

"Decentralization of governance to lower levels (where the majority of Nigerians are to be found) remains a challenge to the constitutional order...Section 8 of the Constitution enjoins the states to make laws, provide for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of councils. In several states, the practice by state executives has been to use their powers to subordinate the local government councils to the federal and state functionaries, some of whom have abused their powers and rendered several local government councils in-effective and non-responsive to the needs and demands of the people".

Also, with regards to their perception of the entrenchment of Democracy as being able to eradicate corruption, 63.3% of the respondents perceived that democracy did not promote the eradication of corruption but rather exacerbated it. In their opinion, this could be due to the high cost of contesting elections in Nigeria and also, the enormous powers wielded by political office holders that enables them to indulge in corrupt practices. Corruption in democratic practices is also in the form of vote-buying, and electoral scores manipulation. Thus, NEPAD had also submitted that this scenario is due to the lack of internal democracy. The report states that:

"The electoral processes and outcomes of elections in Nigeria remain controversial and thus creating an environment of skepticism and inadequate confidence in the electoral system. Lack of internal democracy within the political parties stifles genuine intra-party competition. Many stakeholders believe that the crisis that characterizes the electoral process and the continuing fraud in electoral management are directly linked to the lack of internal democracy and cohesion in the party political system in Nigeria. Persistent corruption especially the use of money in politics is a great hindrance to the development of constitutional democracy in Nigeria"

Also, one of the cardinal tenets of globalization is the right of choice which is explicitly encapsulated in democracy and trade liberalization. This therefore informs, (beyond the bitter experiences of the June 12 annulment and its aftermath), the clamor 'and extra efforts to make the nation's 'nascent democracy' a success. It was a high expectation that given the pre-democracy agitations and Nigeria's re-absorption into the comity of nations, democracy would be practiced in a manner that would portray actual people's participation in governance.

Specifically, the pre-election activities of the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) portrayed the feeling that it was being used as a witch-hunting rather than crime fighting instrument. For example Ugochukwu (2007), observed that:

There had been complaints about the discriminatory manner in which the EFCC carried out its duties long before the 2007 elections. The body made an obvious but inordinate distinction between supporters of the President and those who opposed him. While those supportive of the President were generally shielded from allegations or charges of corruption, those opposed to him suffered under the hands of the EFCC. And this scenario became starker as the 2007 elections drew nearer. Similarly, as Obasanjo contrived ways to extend his tenure beyond the constitutionally allowed limit, the EFCC became more instrumental in forcing politicians opposed to the plan into acquiescence or retreat.

The immediate outcome of this 'discriminatory manner' was the series of impeachments and attempted impeachments of 'corrupt' office holders in different parts of the country. The resultant effect of this was violence, and assassinations in some of the states involved. This could also have contributed to the low perceived impact of democracy to the citizens' personal security. The various litigations that followed the conduct of the 2003 and most especially 2007 elections go on to show that democratic practice in Nigeria in itself is entrenched in corruption. Also, while commenting on the practice of democracy in the area of foreign policy, in response to our interview questions, members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs were of the opinion that there was nothing democratic about Nigeria's Foreign Policy at that period. Foreign Policy decisions always emanates from the Presidency without due consultations with the National Assembly, and the President then, also doubled as the country's foreign minister. Despite all these however, President Olusegun Obasanjo in one of his speeches had also hinted inter-alia that:

"Democracy may not necessarily ensure rapid economic development or affluence, but it is at least, the best form of government so far devised that ensures participation by majority of the people in the means and issues that concern their governance".

However, the President seemed to have neglected the human supporting factor in the achievement of rapid development. From our study, it has been observed through the Pearson Product correlation analysis that the way and manner by which democracy was being practiced in Nigeria actually determined the extent to which Nigerian were committed to the regimes' course of achieving development For example, in terms of

commitment to the nation, there is a negative correlation of -0.821 , and also their determination to work for the attainment of national goals also had a negative correlation of -0.775 . This is an extreme correlation which portends that democratic practice in the nation has not delivered its expected socio-political dividends to the people. Thus, when the democratic practices of the nation are perceived to be beneficial, then the citizens' commitment would be higher and vice versa. However, as observed by Isaac Albert, Derrick Marco, Victor Adetula and IFES survey, the practice of democracy in the period under study was more of a politics of exclusion of the populace rather than inclusions. This exclusion is portrayed in the perception that people's voice and votes did not really count in the democratic experience of the period under study. This is explicated in the various electoral petitions that followed the aftermath of the elections. Table 2.0 showcased the 2007 election petitions by States.

Only one state (Jigawa) was embroiled in the arduous task of validating or otherwise, election results. While the number of litigations may seem far and remote, given the number of political parties (around 60), yet these are quite significant taking into consideration the fact that there existed three dominant political parties involved in the elections, each bent of wielding power. Thus findings in this study corroborates Basil's observation that:

"Such has been the situation in most Nigerian elections that its citizens have already lost hope in elections, let alone democracy. Hardly is the process fair to the participants as those with power use it to skew the field against many and in favour of few... Because the manipulation is often stark for all to see, it is therefore very difficult to disagree with those who line up in the courts after the elections pleading their rights and asking for vindication"

Thus, one can decipher that the window of opportunity to the political development of the masses through the electioneering process was either neglected or subterfuge. The outcome therefore was political violence and the wastage of financial resources aimed at 'claiming back stolen mandates'. These resources, time and social unrest also affected the achievement of a standard security of lives and properties. Thus, there existed a system of fear and paranoia within the political system. This socio-political situation no doubt inhibits the total commitment of citizens to the achievement of government goals and visions. The attending influence of these socio-political uncertainties and disdain also affect (negatively) the expected returns of economic diplomacy, that is, the attraction of foreign direct investments.

Furthermore, the Pearson Product correlation in Table 3.0 indicates that the practice of democracy had significant relationships with the respondents' commitment to Nigeria [$r(1027) = -0.82$ at $P < 01$], working for Nigeria [$r(1027) = -0.78$ at $P < 01$], political participation [$r(1027) = -0.77$ at $P < 01$], security [$r(1027) = -0.76$ at $P < 01$], meeting family obligation [$r(1027) = -0.75$ at $P < 01$], perception of corruption eradication [$r(1027) = -0.75$ at $P < 01$], quality of life [$r(1027) = -0.76$ at $P < 01$], and self confidence [$r(1027) = -0.72$ at $P < 01$].

In tandem with the above, Osaghae, had also reiterated that the support or withdrawal of the people's resources to nation building and development is determined by the extent of the political regime's ability to serve their interests. Thus the significant relationship of the people's interest of involvement in political participation with a correlation of -0.768 and the enjoyment of personal security of life and properties at a correlation of -0.763 , on democratic practice during the regime corroborates the President's earlier remark that 'democracy may not necessarily ensure rapid economic development.

The disloyalty of the people to the regimes' development plans (which is portrayed in lackadaisical attitude to work and several work stoppages) could be traceable to the neglect of Obafemi

Awolowo's earlier observation that "man's first loyalty, however is to his economic interest and his second loyalty will be given to any institution which serves to promote those interests" This study agrees with his observation in that some of these economic interests as portrayed in Table 3.0, which includes the peoples' ability to meet family obligations and attain a high quality of life showed significant relationships to the practice of democracy in the country. Thus, democratic practices in Nigeria, as perceived by respondents has negatively impacted on the social well of Nigerians.

III. Conclusion

The result of this study shows that the citizens of Nigeria had not benefitted much in the way and manner in which the nation's democracy is being practiced. Thus, democracy has not actually empowered the people, nor provide them the access to basic necessities of life. In direct response to this inadequacy in the nation's nascent democratic experience, citizens are not aslo committed to the improvement of national development performances. Thus, if Nigeria is to achieve the goal of economic development, viability and democratic consolidation; there is a need to make democracy truly participative, free and fair.

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Table 1.0: Perceived implications of Democracy

Perceived impact	Positive(N)	Positive(%)	No effect (N)	No Effect (%)	Negative (N)	Negative (%)
Commitment to Nigeria	588 (N=214S=374)	57.1	250 (N=140 S=110)	24.3	191 (N=116 S=75)	18.6
Working for Nigeria	538 (N=310 S=228)	52.3	278 (N=114 S=164)	27.0	213 (N=101 S=112)	20.7
Political Participation	323 (N=206 S=112)	33.0	367 (N=102 S=265)	35.8	339 (N=112 S=227)	32.9
Personal Security	330 (N=181 S=149)	32.1	391 (N=110 S=281)	38.1	308 (N=110 S=198)	29.8
Obligation to Family	468 (N=174 S=294)	45.5	334 (N=171 S=163)	32.6	225 (N=98 S=127)	21.9
Corruption	378 (N=122S=256)	36.7	246 (N=105 S=141)	23.9	405 (N=114 S=291)	39.4
Quality of Life	476 (N=205S=271)	46.3	340 (N=104 S=236)	32.0	223 (N=85 S=138)	21.7
Self Confidence	448 (N=216 S=232)	43.5	396 (N=103 S=293)	38.5	185 (N=92 S=93)	18.0

Source: Field Research, 2008

NOTE: N Is Northern Nigeria; S Is Southern Nigeria

Table 2.0: Analysis Of Elections Petitions By States.

S/ N/	State	Presidential	Governorship	Senatorial	House Of reps	State House of Assembly	Total
1	Abia		5	6	13	28	53
2	Adamawa		1	4	3	11	19
3	Akwa Ibom		2	1	4	4	11
4	Anambra		9	13	38	88	148
5	Bauchi		1	1	7	16	25
6	Bayelsa		2	4	1	22	29
7	Benue		4	4	9	13	30
8	Borno		1	3	2	2	8
9	Cross River		2	2	4	11	19
10	Delta		3	4	12	35	54
11	Ebonyi		2	1	3	11	17
12	Edo		1	3	9	19	32
13	Ekiti		2	3	9	18	32
14	Enugu		8	3	6	50	67
15	Gombe		1	1	2	8	12

16	Imo		6	6	19	17	48
17	Jigawa			2	2	1	5
18	Kaduna		3	2	6	10	21
19	Kano		2	3	18	20	48
20	Katsina		5	3	13	33	34
21	Kebbi		2	7	7	11	27
22	Kogi		2	4	6	34	46
23	Kwara		3	5	4	9	21
24	Lagos		2	1	7	2	12
25	Nassarawa		1	4	7	12	34
26	Niger		2	5	5	36	38
27	Ogun		4	4	10	36	54
28	Ondo		4	7	19	34	64
29	Osun		1	3	10	24	38
30	Oyo		7	1	8	24	40
31	Plateau		1	4	2	21	28
32	River		9	6	13	40	68
33	Sokoto		2	3	2	13	20
34	Taraba		4	3	5	10	22
35	Yobe		2	1	1	2	6
36	Zamfara		2	4	11	7	24
38	FCT	8	-	2	4	-	14
39	TOTAL	8	108	133	301	722	1273

Source: Basil O. (2009:201)

Table 3.0: Pearson Product correlation of Government Policies and socio-economic outcomes on Nigerians

Variables	Democracy
Commitment to Nigeria	-.82**
Political participation	-.77**
Meeting family obligation	-.75**
Quality of life	-.76**
Self confidence	-.72**

Source: Field Study 2008; Note: *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. N=1029