

The State Of Democracy In Africa With Special Reference To Nigeria, Kenya, And Zimbabwe: Current Trends And Needs In The Advocacy Space

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Abstract

The crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have to a great extent motivated opposition African leaders to push for democracy on the continent. They had become tired of military rule and inept civilian governments that had already failed the masses. One-party systems and authoritarian governments have been the mode of governance since independence. Thus, the quest of progressive African leaders to hunger for democracy and the ideal system of governance it offered was very appealing. Unfortunately, defining democracy is not as straightforward as it appears, especially as it relates to African countries. This leads to two very important questions as suggested by (Ottaway, 1997); What is democracy? And how can African democracies be measured? Are they true democracies in Africa or liberal states? The state of democracy in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, in West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa respectively, will be examined. These three countries were former colonies of the British. Can Africa possibly have a homegrown democracy that suits its unique characteristics? Especially in the light of the heterogeneous mix of people in most African countries, where tribe and ethnic divisions influence and cloud the way citizens of the same country think, behave, and perceive issues of national interest, including governance of the country. How do you get Africans to see their nation first before their tribe and ethnic group? Putting the well-being of the Nation first is what many African countries have failed to do. Nepotism, tribalism, and godfatherism play a fundamental role in selecting those in governance, not really minding if there are better competent people to do the job more efficiently. This article rather than looking at whether the countries in question have **enough democratic content** to be called a democracy or semi-democracy, would follow the suggestion of (Baker, 1999) and look at the **nature of the content of democracy**, by way of democratic auditing. "Democracy is a continuous process that can be considered as a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is the fruits of democracy that Kenyans deserve and not simply the status of being a democratic country", (Nyadera, 2020). This statement also applies to both Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The question is are the citizens enjoying the fruits of Democracy? If we say that there is democratic governance in these three countries in question.

Key Words: Governance, Good Governance, Democracy, Elections and Suffrage, Representative Democracy, Democratic Auditing.

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I. Introduction

This article starts off by defining pertinent terms and phrases so that the meaning of what the author wants to convey is clear to the reader.

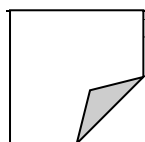
Governance

Governance according to (Bevir, 2012), is the process of making and enforcing decisions within an organization or society. It is the process of interactions through the laws, social norms, power (social and political), or language as structured in the communication of an organized society.

Good governance is the process of measuring how public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption and with due regard for the rule of law. Governance in this context can apply to corporate, international, national, or local governance as well as the interactions between other sectors of society.

Democracy

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Democracy is a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of



representation usually involving periodically held free elections. It is a government by the people, the rule of the majority.

According to the Parliamentary Education Office of Australia, a democratic society works towards the ideals of democracy which are:

- Respect for individuals, and their right to make their own choices
 - Tolerance of differences and opposing ideas
 - Equity- valuing all people, and supporting them to reach their full potential
 - Each person has freedom of speech, association, movement, and freedom of belief
 - Justice- treating everyone fairly, in society and in court
- Some forms of democracies include:
- **Parliamentary Democracy:** The people elect representatives to a parliament who then choose a prime minister to govern the country.
 - **Presidential Democracy:** The people elect a president who serves as president and head of government. This is the American system of Government.
 - **Constitutional Democracy:** The people elect representatives to make laws and govern according to the Constitution.
 - **Representative Democracy:** The people elect officials to create and vote on laws, policies, and other matters of government on their behalf. In this manner, representative democracy is the opposite of direct democracy, in which the people themselves vote on every law or policy considered at every level of government.

An Election is a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office. Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century (Bernard, 1997).

Suffrage

Suffrage deals with the question of who may vote in elections. The electorate does not generally include the entire population; for example, many countries prohibit those who are underage from voting. All jurisdictions require a minimum age for voting.

Democratic Auditing

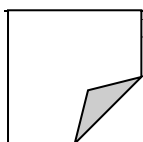
According to (Baker, 1997), democratic auditing is the systematic qualitative assessment of the performance of a regime's many parts against agreed democratic standards. In other words, how democratic are its various components? How well do its various institutions perform?

(Baker, 1997) in writing the audit questions examines:

1. The electoral process
2. The openness and accountability of the government
3. Civil and political rights
4. The democratic society: National consciousness and feeling of nationhood amongst the citizens

Democracy in Nigeria

The geographic expression called Nigeria came into being by the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, mainly because of administrative purposes, by the British colonial masters. The Federation of Nigeria was granted full independence on the 1st of October 1960 under a constitution that provided for a parliamentary government and a substantial measure of self-governance of the country's three regions. From 1959 to 1960, Jaja Wachuku was the First Nigerian Speaker of the Nigerian Parliament, also called the "House of Representatives" (Enang, 2022). The Nigerian political class, that were mainly Western educated, took over from the colonial masters when they left and unfortunately maintained the colonial economy. "Political parties were formed along ethnic lines" while the "political class politicized the ethnic divide". This led to the "politics of bitterness and winner takes all," instead of tolerance (Omamuyovwi, 2021). Political crises degenerated into a military coup by young military officers in 1966. This was the beginning of coups and counter-coups in Nigeria. Democracy was restored again in 1999 when President Obasanjo a former military head of state, became the commander-in-chief. Ediba (2020) argues that due to the long intervention of the Military in the Nigerian political scene, the culture of mismanagement of the country's resources and the denial of fundamental human rights of the citizens were grossly accentuated. He goes on to say that "Nigeria witnessed in place of transparency and accountability, the erosion of the rule of law, independence of the Judiciary and complete subordination of the structures of the state to the whims and caprices of the Military rulers". He concludes that the military was a big hindrance to Nigeria's socio-economic development by institutionalizing endemic corruption. All this resulted in weak institutions in Nigeria. This state of affairs has continued into the various democratic regimes, so much so that despite the huge petrol dollars the country has earned, things are not the way they should be for the common Nigerian, in terms of social infrastructure and



welfare. Poverty is still rife and Nigeria is bedeviled with crises, a lack of basic infrastructure, and no adequate social welfare net to catch the poor.

There is heightened agitation for resource control, and agitation to break away by different ethnic groups who feel marginalized. The Boko Haram, Niger Delta Militants, Fulani Herdsmen, and unknown gunmen are busy kidnapping, maiming, and killing people, and this is a big threat to the security of the nation. The high price of fuel and very high cost of living, rising unemployment, high crime rate, and high rate of inflation, are some of the issues Nigeria is battling with. Nigeria is a very ethnically diverse country with 371 ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Yoruba, Hausa, and the Igbo. (Vanguard, 2017). There is no lingua franca binding the nation. English is the official language used. Unfortunately, Nigerians have not been able to find strength in diversity. Instead, politicians have used this diversity for selfish political gains, further dividing Nigerians into ethnic and tribal lines. The National Youth Service Corps, introduced by the then Head of State, General Gowon after the civil war was geared at integrating university graduates from different tribes of the federation. This was to be achieved by making them serve the nation, for one year, in a state that is not their state of origin. By so doing, they would get to learn more about other tribes and ethnic groups. Some would even marry each other during their service year. Right now, Nigerians have cleverly learned how to influence the posting of their children to the state they want, thereby defeating the whole purpose of the exercise. The Federal Character principle as enshrined in the 1999 constitution seeks to ensure that “Government activities and Institutions must reflect the diverse ethnic groups that constitute the geographic expression called Nigeria” (Omamuyovwi, 2021). As laudable as this policy is, it has often been used to promote mediocrity in the system.

Obasanjo under the emergence of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999 ended 16 years of consecutive military rule. He inherited a country suffering economic stagnation and the deterioration of most democratic institutions (Enang, 2021). Obasanjo under the People’s Democratic Party ruled for eight years. This was followed by Musa Yaradua/Goodluck Jonathan from the same party. Between the two of them, the People’s Democratic Party ruled for 8 years, as Johnathan finished off Yaradua’s tenure because he died two years into office. Then the nation had a change of guard, The All Progressives Congress came into power with Mohammad Buhari. He ruled for 8 years and handed over to Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the same party in 2023. There is still a lot of tension and an uneasy calm as opposition parties head to the Supreme Court after losing at the election petition tribunal on the 6th of September 2023.

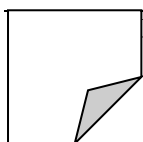
Democratic and Electoral Practices in Nigeria

Nigeria is a Federal Republic that comprises 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, with Abuja as the Capital. The Federal Government consists of the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary, which are independent of each other and derive their powers from the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Nigeria is a Federal Presidential, representative democratic Republic. Nigeria holds elections every four years. Since the dawn of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has held elections in 1999,2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023.

Elections are an essential ingredient in any democratic process. It serves as a measure of democracy. Thus, “the democratic quality of elections or electoral integrity becomes a critical concern for democracies” (Idowu, 2022). According to (Katz, 1997), elections are the defining tool of democracy. Elections must take place at certain given periods, as determined by the state, and must be free and fair. By so doing, the incoming government gains legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens and is seen by all as the government that was chosen by the citizens.

In Nigeria, like in most African countries, the quality of elections is compromised, most of the time. “In Nigeria, incidents such as voter intimidation, voter inducement, low citizen participation, partisanship by security personnel, abuse of incumbency, journalists’ harassment, and operational deficiencies still beset the country’s elections. Other malfeasances with Nigerian elections include lack of public communication and information (citizen engagement); violence; systematically muffling the judiciary; and conflicting and late rulings on electoral disputes, among others”. EU EOM, EU Election Observation Mission presents Final Report (2019). The role of the Electoral body that is charged with conducting free and fair elections, is very crucial. In Nigeria, The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has the task of performing this onerous task. Most Nigerians believe that INEC dances to the tune of the incumbent leadership and have little or no confidence in it. When, however, the Buhari administration said it would introduce a new electoral act that would be more transparent, the general public was elated and decided to turn out and make their votes count. The Electoral Act of 2022 was thus enacted and promised to deliver a transparent, free, and fair election, devoid of all the usual manipulations that had plagued previous elections.

“The Electoral Act 2022 is a law that regulates the conduct of Federal, State, and Area Council elections in Nigeria. It repeals the Electoral Act No. 6, 2010, and introduces innovations such as the use of card readers and other technological devices in elections and political party primaries, restriction of the qualification for elective office to relevant provisions of the constitution, and limit of campaign expenses. The law was signed by President Muhammadu Buhari on 25th February 2022” (Electoral Act, 2022). Despite all the



planning, and innovation that went into the presidential elections, one can say that elections were keenly contested and controversial in Nigeria. The transparency INEC had promised was far from visible. In Nigeria, the presidential election comes first and sets the tone for the others. 18 Political parties fielded candidates for the presidential and vice-presidential posts. The top contenders were:

- ✓ APC- The All Progressives Congress
- ✓ PDP- Peoples Democratic Party
- ✓ LP-Labour Party
- ✓ NNPP- New Nigeria Peoples Party

1. Mr. Ahmed Bola Tinubu- 70 years old: APC Presidential candidate
2. Alhaji Shettima Kashim- 55 years old: APC Vice-presidential candidate
3. Alhaji Abubakar Atiku-75 years old: PDP Presidential candidate 4, Mr. Okowa Arthur- 63years old: PDP Vice-presidential candidate
5. Mr. Obi Peter Gregory- 61 years old: LP Presidential candidate
6. Baba Ahmed Yusuf Datti- 53yrs old: LP Vice-Presidential candidate
7. Alhaji Musa Rabiu Kwankwaso- 60 years old: NNPP- Presidential candidate
8. Bishop Issac Odiri Idahosa-57 years old: NNPP Vice-Presidential candidate

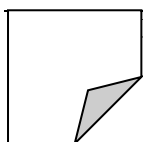
This election was very important for young Nigerians, due to the current economic difficulties, insecurity, and fallout from the End Sars movement, which saw a lot of young people losing their lives. Young people and many Nigerians had just gotten tired of the old way of doing things and wanted a change of guard. They wanted somebody with a known track record of honesty, transparency, frugality, and being able to deliver on his promise. Most of the political candidates were old guards who were basically recycled. This was why Peter Obi seemed to sweep Nigerians off their feet. According to the NOIPolls¹, they used almost the exact same methodology that they used in previous Presidential Polls in 2011, 2015, and 2019. The front-runner that was identified by the polls in all the past Presidential Polls, ended up winning the elections.

In 2023, the NOIPolls said: “Our 3rd and Final Poll result in February 2023 reveals that Mr. Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) remains in the lead, with Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu of The All Progressives Congress (APC) and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) both trailing him. Dr. Rabiu Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) emerged as the lone outsider. Mr. Peter Obi leads, with 21% of registered voters proposing to vote for him if the presidential election were to be conducted today; and 13% proposing to vote for Asiwaju Bola

II. Conclusion And Recommendations

What is the way forward for African countries? What is the nature of the content of democracy in these countries under review? They agitated for independence from their colonial masters, what did they do when they got it? They turned around and started treating their own citizens in an unfair manner just because of political gains and cultural reasons. poor leadership, bad governance, corruption, mismanagement of common resources that they were naturally endowed with, poverty, heavy debt burden, high inflation, youth unemployment, etc.. This has led to the cost of living being well below the global average, with many socioeconomic problems. The countries reviewed have the status of Democracy, but the dividends or fruits of democracy are not really enjoyed by their citizens the way they would have been if they had gotten their leadership and governance right. Their constitutions affirm the need for the democratic process, transparency, equity, justice, freedom of speech, rule of law, good governance, etc., so it is not a question of not knowing, or even not having laws to ensure democratic practices, it boils down to political will, putting nation before ethnic group and tribe, following and respecting the rule of law, dealing decisively with corruption, especially amongst government officials, running an open administration where everybody’s vote counts and elections are free and fair and people feel that they are part of the system because the people they actually elected to represent them are representing them. For Democracy to thrive:

1. There is a need for strong intuitions to prevent the executive or incumbent from tampering with the legislature and the Judiciary. As Jibrin Okutepe, SAN (2023) points out “that circumventing our laws whimsically and capriciously to achieve a predetermined outcome” is very undemocratic.
2. Elections that are not free and fair cannot lay a solid foundation for democratic rule. For democracy to thrive the electorate must see that their vote counts, and that they have a say in how they are being governed.
3. Strong electoral institutions that the electorate will believe they can deliver must exist. This will curb electoral irregularities
4. Embracing our cultural differences and ethnic identities is not wrong. We should, however, use it to contribute our unique ethnic contribution to the national development



5. Our Cultural endowments and uniqueness should be used for the social and economic progress of the nation
6. The liberation movement that liberated Zimbabwe has now transformed itself into a democratic system. There is no more need for force and intimidation that was used to gain independence.
7. The ZANU-PF has to be more tolerant of opposing views. Authoritarianism under the guise of democracy will not work.
8. There is a need to ensure that the youth in Zimbabwe register to vote. They should be included. The Liberation fathers must not see leadership as their birthright.
9. There should be more public enlightenment programs to educate the citizenry on the need to be patriotic, putting country first before tribe. This can only work when they see that the people in power are practicing what they preach.
10. Zimbabwe post 2017 devolution strategy was “a strategy for addressing regional inequalities, deepening local democracy and citizen participation, and ensuring local economic growth” (Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). This is all well and good but there should be a political willingness to implement a proper devolution framework that will work in Zimbabwe or else it will end up as rhetoric.

