DISCOURSE ON DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Democracy is a system of government mostly cherished by countries of the world because of the dividends that accompanied its practice. Though national integration is considered as indelible mark of unity, the greatest challenges facing Nigeria’s democracy is that of disunity among the diverse cultures that made its population which have impacted negatively on the task of national integration. This paper seeks a discourse on democracy in Nigeria and national integration with particular emphases on the challenges. Methodologically, the study made use of qualitative means of data collection through journal articles, internet materials, books, newspapers, magazines, radio and television documentaries, it adopted the descriptive research design to analyze the data collected. The research utilized the integration theory as its framework of analysis. The paper concluded that lack of democratic tenets have been a bane for democratic consolidation and national integration while democratic institutions have remained abysmally weak. Findings from the research revealed that democracy as it is practiced in Nigeria has greatly impeded national integration due to challenges like absence of good and quality leadership, corruption and general insecurity. The paper recommends among other things that the rule of law should be entrenched in Nigerian democracy to ensure popular participation; corrupt public office holders should be made to face the full wrath of the law while ethnic identity should be jettisoned in all its ramifications.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, National Integration, Law.

Introduction
Democracy refers to government through consensus. It is a form of government in which the people have the right, the power, and the freedom to choose those that will govern them (Ugbudu & Mailumo, 2016). According to Jega (2007) democracy therefore entails a situation of broad based and active participation of all citizens in the conduct of their public affairs in the society. Ultimate political power in a democracy therefore lies with the majority of the people and not a few because the system survives on popular participation facilitated by political and civil freedom. This means that it connotes the idea of representatives and responsibility in the whole process of governance, which is central for any meaningful development to take place.

However, it is interesting to note that the Nigerian state is still struggling with governance and national integration despite its huge natural and human resource endowment (Mailumo, 2013). National integration has been a serious challenge in Nigeria because of its heterogeneous society. There is lack of social justice, love, creation of employment, good governance at all levels, accountability and transparency. All these have hampered the success of the Nigerian project. It is expected that patriotism should be the watchword of all Nigerian while the primary responsibility of the government will be the provision of security and welfare to its citizenry. There is no doubt that government has failed in this regard resulting into
agitations from different quarters in Nigeria. More worrisome is the renewed agitation for the restructuring of the country (Ikyase and Egberi, 2014). This implies that there is lack of unity and hence, lack of national integration.

The Nigerian state is bedeviled by various forms of conflict which include ethnic, religious, electoral and other forms of political conflicts, indigene versus settler conflict, conflict between nomadic pastoralists and food producers, all these presented debilitating consequences on the Nigerian state, thus, enhancing mutual suspicion between and amongst the political class from the north and south in terms of power acquisition at the centre.

At the dawn of post-independence Nigeria, concrete efforts were made to reflect the determination and resolve to accomplish concrete unity through a process of nation-building and national development. For instance, the eventual establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and the Federal Character Commission (FCC) reflected a nationalistic devotion to national integration. Federal Character is both a reaction as well as a system. It is a positive reaction to correct those practices of the past, especially in the conduct of public management which tended to exploit the diversities of the nation and by so doing cause ill will. The Federal Character principle involves a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring the proper distribution of amenities and government projects in the country (Agaigbe & Alagh, 2015,126 – 127).

The main issue of democratic governance and national integration got its greatest threat as a result of the Nigerian civil war which started on July 6th, 1967 and ended on January 15th, 1970. This unfortunate incident brought about varied, complex and controversial as well as irreconcilable differences among the peoples that constituted Nigeria. These included amongst others educational imbalance, intellectual and elitist parochialism, regional politics which found expression in tribalism, disunity and fear of domination, thus, laying a foundation for the prevention of real patriotism or nationhood (Onoja & Mailumo, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this paper seeks a discourse on democratic governance and national integration with particular emphases on the challenges being faced. The paper interrogates democratic governance as a basis for a cohesive and integrated country for a nationalistic endeavour.

Conceptual clarification.

Democratic governance

Democratic governance is a system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions. Democratic governance is fundamental to ensuring that democracy delivers for all of society and gives citizens a say on how decisions are made. Strong democratic governance is characterized by transparency and accountability in both the public and private sectors. An open, participatory governance process responds to citizen and business needs, resulting in better and fairer government policies (Wonah, 2010).

The aforementioned highlighted characteristics of good democratic governance were glaringly deficient in governance during the military interregnum, thus making good governance as an element of constitutional government to be in its infancy in Nigeria. Democratic governance can therefore be acknowledged as the term that symbolizes the paradigm shift of the role of governments (Adeyemi, 2017). It is important to note here that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governance, forge national integration and promote what can be called real economic progress, through deliberate and well articulated policies has led to mass poverty and unemployment.

Democratic governance is the range of processes through which a society reaches consensus on and implements regulations, human rights, laws, policies and social structures in pursuit of justice, welfare and environmental protection. In a democracy, power belongs to the people, and democratic governance recognizes it holds power in trust for the people. Its legitimacy is derived from the authority invested in it by the people. This goes to say that political authority emanates from the people and that any authority that is not a product of the people’s consent is not democratic. Ayua (2002, 4) averred that democracy is a way of life with permanent values such as tolerance, humility, order and discipline, and the desire to live peacefully with other citizens. It therefore entails the ability to listen to the people, not out of a sense of
benevolence but because it has no choice and if it must retain its legitimacy, it has to carry the people along all the time. Democracy in itself is an ideal, but one worth striving for by the society that practices it.

Democracy in Nigeria has come a long way in the past two and half decades with four transitional elections and as many as over 10 million registered voters (Aremu, 2014). On May, 29th, 1999 Nigeria returned to civil rule after a protracted military rule that lasted for more than three decades. Since then, the democratic system including the structures needs to be consolidated having experienced some stress due to the prolonged military rule whose common denominator was the lack of democracy, accountability and good governance. The abuse of these time-honoured principles of governance was legendary and its negative impact on Nigerian’s politics is better imagined than stated. Thus, after more than a decade of return to democratic rule in Nigeria, the country is not anywhere near the realization of the ideals of good governance, which is the sin-quo-none to democratic rule.

In Nigeria, the exhilaration generated as a result of the return to democracy has been cut short by widespread dehumanizing poverty and under development; insecurity; corruption; mass illiteracy; unemployment; amongst others has created mixed feelings about the desirability or otherwise of democracy. Democracy in Nigeria is going through tortuous difficult and traumatized times as viable democratic institutions such as credible electoral system; independent judiciary, rule of law, among others are yet to take root in the country in the face of such flaws like massive corruption in every facet of the nation’s public life. These flaws in the system have become worrisome giving rise to disillusionment with politics. The ability of the democratic system to transform the lives of the people is dependent on its provision of adequate mechanisms for the smooth conduct of elections that culminate in the transfer of power from one regime to another.

It must be noted here the hasty and feeble preparations for democratic rule on the eve of independence did not benefit the nation very much. It was ridden with political instability as it was only a “crash programme” as the military and the bureaucracy were the most powerful tools of subjugating and ruling the people (Omenka & Akaan, 2013). The lack of credible election has resulted in the erosion of political legitimacy on the part of public office holders. For instance, the 2003 and 2007 elections in the country were marred by brazen electoral frauds. Where democracy is devoid of credible elections, good governance is negated and the sovereignty of the people is relegated to the background if not completely denied. The result is that majority of the people would become subservient to the whims and caprices of the political actors who are shielded from any legal action by the immunity clause; hence they conduct themselves based on their proclivities. Even with the noticeable improvement in the freedom of speech and respect for the rule of law, the effort of the government in establishing a peaceful democratic society has been bedeviled with problems. Some of these problems are systemic and therefore, have much to do with the way the institutions of democracy are used for expediency.

Others are attitudinal and hence, the result of the failure of the Nigerian state and the political elite to change their attitude of “business-as-usual” with zero impact; and cultivate a new mindset that conforms with democratic principles. Thus, Nigerians are not only disenchanted and disillusioned with the way and manner the government is toying with the public affairs but also lost hope in the leadership of the country at all levels of government. In line with the above, Achebe (2004, p. 23) decried the situation, by saying “I am disappointed with Nigeria... Nigeria is a country that doesn’t work”.

In a true democracy, the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government. Nigeria operates a nominal democracy in which it maintained the outward appearance of democracy through elections but without the rights and institutions that are equally important aspects of a functioning democratic system. Indeed, democracy and good governance are the bases for legitimacy, social mobilization and development because of their responsiveness to the yearnings and aspirations of the poor majority of the population. Good governance translates into the provision of basic infrastructures, access to medical and health-care services, educational, industrial, and agricultural development of the society, and above all, the institutionalization of the rule of law.
National integration

The concept of national integration in the words of Duverger (1976) connotes a process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based on an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. This refers to a situation whereby members of a community formed a united front to live together in peaceful co-existence. It was also conceived by Morrison (1972) as a process by which members of a social system develop linkages so that the boundaries of the system persists over time and the boundaries of sub-systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process, members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community.

This implies that national integration is a situation whereby members of a community have sense of belonging among themselves. In the words of Coleman and Rosberg, (1964), national integration is the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogeneous political community. This involves laying more emphases on what unites a nation than those things that divide them. It may equally mean unity in diversity when such nationalities consist of a heterogeneous society. This can only happen when members of such communities are ready to compromise their agitations and treat each other fairly and equally. This is to enunciate that disputes and areas of disagreement must be settled in a non-violence and peaceful manner devoid of bias, sentiment, favouritism and prejudice.

Challenges of National Integration in Nigeria

Myriads of literature on democratic governance blamed the colonialists for all of Nigeria’s woes. Thus, rancor, rivalries, conflicts etc, became well rooted in Nigeria’s body politics. Recent events in the country have revealed that the political class in Nigeria is not ready to work by dint of their qualities rather, they have found solace in using divisive methods to achieve their goals through corruption, self actualization, primitive accumulation and gaining of personal adoration have become an accepted norm. To make things worse, many political leaders use ethnicity for personal advantages. Accordingly, the challenge of national integration in Nigeria has been a regenerative breed of selfish and greedy political gladiators who seize power through electoral fraud or stolen electoral mandates. As they competed for power, prestige and associated benefits, the political elite in a bid to secure the support of members of their own ethnic groups heighten ethnic differences and demonize accountability in governance. Their major pre-occupation in partisan politics is to engage themselves in endless blackmail, mud-sliding, thuggery and deliberate frustration of other’s efforts. This has made everybody to be tired with the practice of democratic government in Nigeria.

Corruption has also eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian state. Corruption here connotes the act of requesting, offering, giving or accepting gratifications directly or indirectly or taking undue advantage or the prospect thereof, which distorts the proper performance of any duty or behavior required of the recipient of the bribe, the undue advantage of the prospect thereof (Kofele-Kale 2006). According to Maiangwa (2013), corruption has indeed placed a heavy burden on the act of governance as appropriated resources meant for development are diverted to other use by political leaders which apparently undermine the effectiveness of the political process. In the words of Olu-Adeyemi (2004), corruption transcends officialdom and discussing corruption broadly as a perversion or a change from good to bad will not be inappropriate. Unfortunately, after years of independence, Nigerians still harbor the mentality that public money belongs to no one and that any person who has access to it should convert it into his or her personal use. Corruption permeates every sector of the Nigerian society, from millions of Nigerian officials transferring large sums of money out of the country, to the police officers who routinely set up roadblocks, sometimes every few hundred yards, to extract bribes of 50 naira, from drivers (Polgreen 2005), the most disturbing and damaging form of corruption is made manifest in the succession of democratic governments, which has produced extremely wealthy generals and political leaders. Also, citizens thrill at the non-enforcement of the rules that define the institutional basis of social, political and economic exchange, as corruption has become the dominant social norm and reflections on the first four decades of political
independence no doubt indicate that citizens themselves are instrumental to the national decay, however, they are receptive to corrupt friendly regimes, thus, celebrating the potent force of mal-governance and underdevelopment (Oyediran and Adeshola, 2017).

Similarly, electoral corruption is prevalent. This is a situation that includes the purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favors, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election, sale of votes, killing and maiming of people in the name of election, and a situation where losers end up as the winners in elections, and votes turn up in areas where votes were not cast. Apart from the above, Nigeria manifests the prevalence of client patronage and all of these have undermined democratic governance and national integration in the country.

Ethnic violence and intolerance has dangerous impact on democracy and national integration in Nigeria. Azeez (2009) lamented about the negative impact ethnicity has had on the national integration, cohesion and democratic development efforts of the country. In fact, Azeez supports the view of Otite (1990) that the ethnic virus has been the chief catalyst of social crisis and political instability in Nigeria; and that ethnicity has been perceived in general as a major obstacle to the overall politico-economic development of the country. Thus until the political and ruling classes answer the ethnicity question, the present morass of ethnic violence and intolerance may remain convoluted for a long time to come.

Political and election violence has continued by politicians against their opponents and recently politically motivated bomb blasts have surface on the Nigerian political scene, even after over a decade of unbroken democratic governance. According to Joseph (2010), there are three thresholds that countries seeking to establish consolidated democracies must cross: the non-violent resolution of political competition; the acceptance of alternation in power, and supremacy of the rule of law. Joseph (2010) further stated that despite Nigeria’s shortcomings, Nigeria has one of the best judicial systems and legal professions in Africa, where although the protection of rights and liberties is never certain, their abuse can be vigorously contested and redress often achieved. However, Nigeria has failed in the area of enjoying the non-violent resolution of political competition and the acceptance of alternation in power because of the hubris of political actors from some sections of the country for the control of the levers of power and political hegemony. The 2011 post-election violence in the northern part of the country that trailed the much-avowed free-and-fair election as attested to by domestic and international observers is a reminder of the recalcitrance and arrogance of the political class to portray the spirit of sportsmanship by accepting election defeat. Therefore, resolving this crisis should become a priority for the state and its managers before any attempt is made to integrate Nigerians.

Another hurdle to realizing national integration in Nigeria is the existence of weak political institutions of the state. In Nigeria, it is criminal to be honest and honest to be criminal. Such weak, embryonic, sterile, insensitive and amoral characteristics of state institutions have further tilted Nigeria to the precipice. Lastly, lack of fairness, justice and equity in the country with regard to resource allocation and distribution, power sharing, enjoyment of fundamental human rights and punishment of criminals who hide under political umbrellas or bunkers created by the ruling classes takes the country backwards with disregard to national cohesion.

Another striking challenge to National integration is the issue of resource control. The federal government is very overbearing as it controls about 80% of the country’s resources leaving state and local governments at its mercy. Where regions, states or geographical zones have the power to control their resources and to have access to the necessary funds for community development programs, democracy strives. In fact, it is only true federalism that can guarantee fairness and justice in the society. More importantly, it enables each locality to progress according to the aspiration of the people. A durable and enforceable people’s constitution is an indispensable tool to make this feasible, as the constitution protects the people and determines socio-political activities in a society. As noted in the philosophy of Aristotle “we can decide the identity of a state only by examining the form (and contents) of its constitution”. In Nigeria we lack the reality of such a federal constitution and true federal state (Awuudu, 2012). This has brought up fresh agitations for restructuring of the country.
Conclusion and recommendations

Democratic governance was welcomed in Nigeria with high expectation and enthusiasm since it has the capacity of ensuring political stability and socio-economic development. However, this hope has been dashed as the political landscape of the nation has turned to a battlefield. Instead of peace, stability, development and an egalitarian society, the nation is now characterized and marred by political instability. It is a surprise to many political observers that Nigeria is able to survive the onslaught against the successful handover of power from one civilian president to another since 1999. The battle for the soul of democratic governance in Nigeria has been formidable and relentless. From the discussions above democracy as it is practiced in Nigeria has greatly impeded national integration due to challenges like absence of good and quality leadership, corruption and general insecurity occasioned by corruption, ethno-religious conflicts and continuous agitations for resource control and other sundry issues. The paper therefore makes the following recommendations: The rule of law should be entrenched in Nigerian democracy where there will be popular participation, independence and funding of the electoral bodies, corrupt public office holders should be made to face the full wrath of the law, ethnic identity should be jettisoned in all its ramifications, the judiciary should be adequately funded and properly staffed to handle electoral cases with the needed dispatch as against unnecessary delay in dispensation of justice, the need to de-emphasize politics and put more emphasis on governance after general elections should be advocated and vigorously followed so as to promote good governance, merit in political appointments rather than partisanship to have an all-inclusive government, and there should be accountability in governance so as to strengthen democratic structures for national development and integration.

References


