
Democracy and Development in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Sixteen Years

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ABSTRACT

The third wave of democracy meant a global diffusion of democratic norms and ideas in hitherto authoritarian states. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, the last one and half decade have been most commendable as we have witnessed the consolidation of democracy. However, how democracy has driven the much needed development in the last sixteen years remains a debate. As a democratic state over the last years, how has Nigeria fared? The study examines the nexus between democracy and development in Nigeria in the last sixteen years. Data for the study was sourced through content analysis approach. I argue that the lack of strong and inclusive institutions and adherence to the rule of law hindered the maximization of Nigeria's full potential for economic growth, poverty reduction and human development. Finally, I recommend adherence to the rule of law, the strengthening of democratic political institutions and inclusive economic institutions for improved and sustainable development outcomes.

Keywords: Democracy, development, Nigeria, PDP.

INTRODUCTION

In the last half a century, many countries have transited to democracy. More than half of the world's population now live in a democracy of some sort, although only some 13 per cent of that population reside in full democracies (EIU, 2010). Huntington (1991) dubbed this era of increased transition to democracy as the third wave of democratisation. The increased global diffusion and acceptance of democratic governance melted a lot of authoritarian regimes and also blew its wave to Nigeria in 1999 after long and tortious years of military dictatorships. The return of multiparty democracy raised hope as to the arrival of the solution of Nigeria's crisis of governance- good governance, the rule of law, freedom as well as institutional, infrastructural and national development. However, sixteen years on, the rule of law remains jeopardise, institutional weakness is still a concern and good governance is still far from reach with impunity and corruption a challenge, and a good number of Nigerians still living below the poverty line. Successive policy focus of the successive democratic regimes; Obasanjo's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) Yaradua's Seven Point Agenda and Goodluck Jonathan's Transformation Agenda have delivered little in terms of improving infrastructural development, reducing poverty and unemployment and improving Nigeria's potential of economic growth. Policies no matter how good, will not deliver better and improved public goods in a polity with weak institutions, neo-patrimonial networks, client-patron politics and near absence of political will. Nigeria's enormous human and material resources in an enabling environment that strong democratic institutions and the rule of law provide, would have yielded more dividends for the country and her citizenry in the last sixteen years save for the 'politics of the belly'. Politics Leftwich (1996) has argued is central to the design and maintenance of institutions and strong institutions essentially explains state formation and state capacity which are important factors in dictating development and poverty reduction in developmental states. The kind of politics the former ruling party (PDP) played at the centre and the various states they controlled, partly explains why democratic institutions of governance delivered less than was expected.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The first step in dealing with the subject of this study is to clarify the meaning of democracy and development which are core concepts in order to provide an analytical foundation. The definition of

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democracy in the literature is contested and for political science the theorization of the concept of democracy is problematic. As a form of government, the sovereign tradition of democracy was historically inspired by the Greek myth of *demos*-people and *kratos*-power in the Greek city state. This early democratic tradition involved privilege direct participation where the common good is decided by the will of the majority.

According to Huntington (1991) the modern usage of the term democracy as a form of government is defined in terms of sources of authority of government, purpose served by government, and procedures for constituting government. The central procedure of democracy for Huntington is selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern. This minimalist perspective is drawn from Schumpeter's (1942) definition of democracy as a system for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. According to Przeworski *et al* (1996), a democracy is a system where political office is filled through regular, free, and fair election between competing parties with the possibility of a winner freely assuming office. From his discourse on polyarchy, Robert Dahl (1971) conception of democracy comprises of components such as: voting equality, freedom of expression and association, effective participation and right to run for office. These democratic criteria Dahl wrote are necessary because when violated, the members of such democratic community will not be politically equal.

While the minimalist conception of democracy gives us a procedural understanding of democracy, there is also a liberal notion of democracy which pays attention to political and civic pluralism, individual rights, group freedoms and civil liberties against the tyranny of the majority to ensure political equality. Diamond (1999) and Sklar (1996) opines that the liberal notion of democracy requires the horizontal accountability of office holders to one another in order to constrain executive power, protect constitutionalism, legality, and the deliberative process. For Wolterstorff and Cuneo (2012) the liberal notion of democracy entails commitment to the equal rights of citizens to full political voice-voice to be exercised within an explicit constitutional framework that imposes limits and guarantees on government, within a legal order that protects citizens against impairment of their rights to full political voice by their fellow citizens. According to Siegle *et al* (2005) democracy means governance system in which leaders are selected through free and fair elections, with institutions that foster a shared distribution of power, and citizens have extensive opportunities to participate in political life. This they argue explicitly requires a high degree of basic political freedoms, civil liberties and political rights. The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy, view democracy as a set of practices and principles that institutionalise and thus ultimately protect freedom. For them at best, the fundamental features of a democracy include governance based on majority rule and sovereignty derived from the consent of the governed, periodic free and fair elections, minority and human rights. Democracy also involves equality before the law, due process and political pluralism as well as strong institutions. Democratic institutions- constitution, laws, values, rules of the game and practices, formal accountability mechanisms and sanctions are also central to a democratic polity. These institutions rather than personal authority produce codes and limitations on individuals and societal conduct, with no exception to the legislation across persons. The foundation of democracy therefore, is institutions. Strong institutions free from executive or political interference that guide political action and inaction of both the ruling class and the ruled.

I now turn to the concept of development. Development means different things to different people. For some, it means making a better life for all. To others, development means economic growth (increase in GDP). Development is also equated with progress and modernity (Willis, 2005). According to Martinussen (1997) the various conceptions of development include economic growth, increased welfare and human development, modernisation, elimination of dependency, dialectical transformation and capacity building. In its strong sense, development means using the productive resources of society to improve the living conditions of the poorest people (Peet and Hartwick, 1999). The origins of development is disputed, but for many writers on this subject, its intellectual roots lie with the European enlightenment of the eighteenth century. In its contemporary guise, development emerged more conspicuously after the Second World War with the creation of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and IMF) designed to drive post-war reconstruction and international economic stability.

In strict economic terms, development has traditionally meant achieving sustained rates of growth of income per capita to enable a nation expand its output at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population. Emphasis is often on increase output measured by gross domestic product (GDP) (Todaro and Smith, 2011). Generally, the higher the per capita, the more developed a country's people are conventionally said to be, and the higher the annual growth rate per capita, the more rapidly a country is said to be developing (Peet and Hartwick, 2009).

Development according to Sen (1999) can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. The freedom that determinants such as social and economic arrangements like facilities of education and health care as well political and civil rights like the liberty to participate in government scrutiny provide. Development Sen argues requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as a systematic social deprivation, neglect of social facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states. Sen's thoughts are in line with the human development index (HDI) which bring to fore an increased awareness that the commonly used economic measures of development are too limited. The emphasis for the Human Development Index (HDI) is that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country and not economic growth levels alone. For Dudley Seers (1969) when we talk about development, we must answer the question of what has happened to poverty, unemployment and inequality. For Seers, understanding how a country is fairing in these three indices can help us answer the question of how developed a country is. Seers (1969) questions are still crucially relevant today in development discuss and in understanding how emerging democratic states like Nigeria are tackling the socioeconomic and political challenges they face.

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT: Theoretical Perspectives

The standard modernisation hypothesis or argument in the literature that economic development leads to- and is a necessary pre-condition for democracy is contested and hardly acceptable universally. Lipset (1959), one of the leading light of the modernization school had argued that economic development generated a greater likelihood of democracy. Increased wealth he argued will reduce the level of inequality, weaken status distinctions and increase the size of the middle class. In this sense, economic development would also contribute to democracy by giving rise to a large number of organisations that will inspire political participation. Following the modernisation theorist line of thought, Diamond (1992) argue that when development is inclusive insofar that it reshapes class structure, political culture, state-society relations, and civil society, it facilitates and deepen democracy. Writing on this subject, Przeworski (2000) argue that the modernization theory appears to have little, if any explanatory power. Productive factors he argued can grow under a dictatorship, but the use of resources may be more efficient under a democracy. Recent studies by Glaeser et al., (2004) and Hawkes and Ugur (2012) point to a different causal path, suggesting that income levels, educational attainment and economic growth all lead to stronger institutions.

Contrary to the argument of the modernization theorist, there is also claims that democratic good governance is not an outcome or consequence of development but a necessary condition of development and improved income (Chalker, 1991, Acemoglu et al, 2005). Evidence suggest that the primary direction of causation runs from democracy to income. Proponents of democracy first and development later like Joseph Siegle, Michael Weinstein and Morton Halperin are of the view that democracy have the institutional advantage to perform more than non-democracies (Siegle, Weinstein, and Halperin 2004, 2005). In their study, they find that low income democracies and democratizing countries have outperformed their authoritarian counterparts on a full range of indicators like life expectancy, literacy, access to clean drinking water, agricultural productivity and infant mortality. They argue that this is made possible by the core characteristics of representative governance which include; shared power, openness and adaptability.

In addressing this question, Leftwich (1996) argued that what matters for development is not the system of government, or regime type –that is, whether it is democratic or not but the type of state. Crucially for him, it is not the technical and administrative arrangements which determine the character and competence of the state, but the politics which both generates and sustains the state, irrespective of whether the state is democratic or not. However, findings on the relationship between democracy and development may hinge on one's definition of democracy. According to Evans and

Ferguson (2013) holding elections alone has no evidence or significant impact on development, but deeper measures of political inclusion-including political competition, issues-based political parties, and competitive recruitment to these parties are significant.

The Politics of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has been Nigerian ruling party over the last sixteen years (May 29, 1999-29 May 2015). As a political party, it metamorphosed from a group called G34 led by former Nigeria’s vice president Dr. Alex Ekweme in the heated and dictatorial days of General Sani Abacha’s military junta. The demise of the dark-glass general opened up the political space and the emergence of the PDP in August 1998. The party dominated by retired military officers with “heavy war chest” as founding members instead of backing Dr. Ekweme for the 1999 presidential primary elections, preferred Former president Olusegun Obasanjo who later won the presidential elections with a clear majority in the bicameral legislature. Devoid of any clear ideological bond, the party has succeeded over the years as a coalition of interest. Touted as the biggest political party in Africa by her apologist until Nigerians recent verdict in the 2015 general election, the party was in power from 29 May 1999- 29 May 2015, and succeeded as a national power house through its patrimonial, clientelistic and prebendal networks founded upon inequality with these factors themselves the major manufacturer of inequality. The struggle for power and the production of the state under their watch was highly socially stratified and bear the hallmark of the rush for spoils with active networks across the nation and key actors merely as political entrepreneurs. In the years when oil rents rose astronomically high, with available resources to drive massive infrastructural and inclusive socio-political and economic development under their watch, politics was more of the “belly”, “I chop, you chop” and “turn by turn” was the popular cliché. Corruption under the watch of the PDP is a subject of another essay. The avidity of her stake holders as they were popularly called was what they can get from the state. Their politics, was that of the “belly”. In framing the relevance of politics to development, Leftwich (2000) opines that politics is important in development and consist of activities of cooperation, negotiation and conflict in the production, use and distribution of resources. For him, the politics of development is about changing not only how resources are produced and distributed but also about how decisions are taken concerning such changes and the politics which implement and sustain desired changes or developmental outcomes. As the party in power in the last sixteen years, the politics of the Peoples Democratic Party’s (PDP) has at best been less developmental.

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: An Appraisal of the PDP Years

Measuring development is as problematic as conceptualising it. However, in this section, following the various perspective of development enumerated above, I appraise the PDP’s performance in the last sixteen years looking at how Nigeria has fared in terms of economic growth, poverty reduction, unemployment and political freedom. Although, compared to the 0.5 per cent economic growth rate of 1999, economic development data suggest that the Nigerian economy grew at an annual rate of 7.8 in 2010, 4.9 in 2011, 4.3 in 2012 and 5.4 per cent in 2013 respectively, and is today the biggest economy in Africa (WB). However, from Seers (1969), Sen (1999) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Human Development Index framework and perspective, if these figures do not address the questions of poverty, unemployment and inequality, education and political freedom, then development is still far. Sadly, poverty has been on the rise, with over 100 million people living on less than a dollar a day, despite economic growth statistics (BBC). It is arguable, that Nigeria’s population is growing geometrically. However, poverty figures are rising in an alarming and worrying dimension. Statistical figures available suggest that in 1980, 17.1 million Nigerians were poor, and this figure has continually risen to- 34.7 million in 1985, 96.1 million in 1996, 68.7 million in 2004 and 112.47 million in 2010 (NNBS). World Bank figures show a GDP of 521.8 billion dollars with a population of about 174 million as at 2013. Again, World Bank poverty figures suggest that in 2004 48.4 per cent of Nigerians were poor, with a 2 percent drop to 46.0 percent in 2010 and life expectancy at 52 years in 2013 (WB, 2015). Unemployment between 1995 and 1999 was 7.5 per cent and hovered between 7.6 and 7.7 per cent from 2005-2011 and 7.5 in 2012 and 2013 respectively. These stats, although show improved economic growth also suggest a disturbing trend of poverty and unemployment since the return of multiparty democracy.

From the forgoing, it is glaring that economic growth is a crude measurement of development since it doesn't capture the distributional questions and the extent to which citizens needs are met. Like Morten (2013) argued, economic development data particularly from developing countries are often inaccurate, flawed or missing and basing development measurement on these data is misleading. Sen (1999) also argue that judging development only by looking at the growth of GNP and some other indicators of over-all economic expansion is inadequate. Observers of development he cautioned need to look at the impact of democratic governance on the lives and capabilities of the citizens. It has been common practice over the years in assuming that that growth of GDP per capita translates into improvement of the welfare of citizens. Political leaders of the former ruling party in Nigeria have never hesitated to use data on the growth of GDP to justify their continuity in office even when majority of Nigerians continue to live below the poverty line.

Perhaps, the weak structures of shared power fundamental in democratic societies which Siegle et al (2005) argue augments the prospect for social and economic development in democratic states partly explains this. Putting checks on the power of the executive, separating the party from state decision-making, establishing a merit based civil service, fostering an independent and embedded private sector, facilitating the free flow of ideas, and creating expectations of adherence to the rule of law are complementary factors for socioeconomic development in democratic societies (*ibid*). To improve and drive development, strong democratic political institutions, the rule of law and inclusive economic institutions must accompany democracy.

In terms of political freedom and equality in the political space, Nigerians were constrained over the years by the former ruling party's model of candidate and leadership recruitment. Internal party democracy have been lacking and the political door shut towards many with "god fathers" commanding unusual power in the leadership recruitment process from the local to the national level. Right to protest and public scrutiny like the fuel subsidy protest of 2012 were scuttled by the former ruling party with the instrument of state force. Furthermore, institutions of state like the Police and Army were allegedly used to harass opposition, the legislature and even rig elections. Court rulings and judgement were at various time neglected by the ruling party in clear disrespect to the rule of law and the constitution. More so, cases of executive interference and harassment of the legislative arm of government at various occasion meant that there was no legislative independence to undertake the constitutionally assigned oversight function to ensure probity and accountability in the management of the affairs of the state. In this regards like Sen (1999) argue Nigeria didn't expand her developmental fortune under the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) sixteen years reign, since the ruling party did not improve political freedom and expand the political space. Using Seers (1969) development measurement perspective, poverty, inequality and unemployment remains a major problem for Nigeria today sixteen years after the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) reign even though the party presided over huge oil rents accrued during this period. Democratic political institutions may be better than authoritarian regimes but how much socioeconomic and political development democracy gave Nigerians under the former ruling party (PDP) will remain a debate for years to come.

CONCLUSION

It is widely believed that the worst form of democracy is better than authoritarian regimes. However, how democracy improves development and the quality of life of the populace requires more than just democratic structures of governance, periodic elections, freedom-free press and free speech. I have argued here that as a democratic state, in the last sixteen years, Nigeria under-utilised her potential for growth, poverty reduction and national development due largely to the near absence of strong democratic institutional foundation and the nature of party politics played by the former ruling party. As Nigeria progresses in her democratisation journey, adherence to the rule of law, building strong and inclusive institutions (political and economic) will increase investor confidence in the Nigerian economy and attract foreign direct investment (FDI) as well as strengthen the private sector. This will improve accountability and fiscal discipline in the use of resources and the implementation of national, states and local government budgets for improved and more inclusive national development and pro-poor growth. On the part of citizens, a participatory and more active democratic political culture is crucial for the accountable functioning, sustainability and more importantly scrutiny of democratic institutions and actors. Civil society and citizen voice is also crucial in achieving

accountability and accountability of democratic institutions of governance is necessary if Nigeria will maximise her resources for greater and inclusive development.

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