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Challenges to Sustainable Electoral Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Elections are essential for maintaining a democratic system; however, there are numerous obstacles to achieving a sustainable electoral democracy in Nigeria. This paper examines these challenges that hinder the attainment of a lasting electoral democracy in the country. The study employs the Cultural Theory of Democracy (CTD) as its theoretical framework and uses content analysis as its research methodology. The findings reveal that the challenges to sustainable democracy in Nigeria are extensive. They are not limited to flawed electoral laws but also include systemic issues such as leadership problems, a dysfunctional federal structure, and the self-serving nature of the ruling class. The recommendations include right political structures, strong institutional framework in place, strengthening of the law, provision of a platform for credible and deserving candidates to be elected, and a peaceful and stable political environment. Challenges to sustainable electoral democracy are not only prone to Nigeria democratic process, it is also being faced by other lands but a further study of those who have passed these challenges and adoption of working democratic processes will be a panacea to countries that are searching for measures to contain their political and even economic challenges.

Keywords: : Sustainable, Electoral, Democracy & Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is practicing electoral democracy, for more than a decade now, and with a population of over 200 million, it could be called the most populous democracy in Africa. Nigeria is termed the giant of Africa, that people say that as Nigeria sneezes, Africa catches cold, therefore, as much is given to Nigeria, much, is expected from the country. The status of political independence came from the British colonialists in the year 1960. The nation since then has suffered much chequered electoral political history; after independence, the roots of democracy were yet to germinate when the democratic experience collapsed as a consequence of flawed electoral process. This quagmire of electoral fraud resulted

to serious implications for Nigeria's political future because the phenomenon rather than abating, keeps growing and becoming more sophisticated with every subsequent election (Yagboyaju, 2011). The credibility of the elections becomes imperative if the process of change is to be sustained and nurtured. The proper gestation period between one election and the other is determined by the political will of the people and the machinery of state actors in the process. This development reinforces itself in the quality and ruggedness of the outcome of any public election. Democracy is therefore watered and nurtured by this singular attribute, and so, democratic sustenance becomes a function of the smooth conduct of elections in all its ramifications.

According to Lyman (2007:14), Nigeria holds a significant position in Africa. However, if Nigeria's democracy were the only thing at risk, there would be little cause for concern. Instead, Nigeria's position in Africa foreshadows a larger stake because it is not only a leader and a stakeholder but also a major player in events occurring throughout the continent. With strong backing from the Nigerian government, Nigerians Olusegun Obasanjo, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, and Wade of Senegal, among others, outlined the principles of good governance and economic management for the emerging New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), highlighting the nation's progress toward developing a legitimate electoral process.

Beyond platitudes and rhetoric, Nigeria has emerged as a key role in thwarting attempts to subvert West African political processes, among other places, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Sao Tome, and Principe Togo. Together with the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), Nigeria caused coups to be reversed and constitutional procedures to be challenged. Nigeria has lost a tremendous deal of life and treasure in maintaining peace in other countries, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Niger, and Mali. As a result, Nigeria has paid a high price for peace. In a similar spirit, Oyebode (2011) agreed that Nigeria's democracy has an impact far beyond its borders and proposed that if political turbulence in Nigeria worsens, it will spread to other African countries as well as the rest of the world

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework Democracy

It has been argued that the Greek terms *demo*, which means "people," and *kratos*, which means "rule" or "power," are the source of the word democracy. According to Anyanwu (2012), in his Gettysburg address in 1863, American president Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. There isn't consensus on a single, conclusive definition despite the abundance of definitions proposed. Democracy, according to Schumpeter (1947), is the process of holding elections and selecting representatives of the majority. It is the right and opportunity of the people to approve or reject the individuals running for office. Democracy, according to Rousseau and Rivero (2003), is the ability of the people to act, think, and participate in order to increase their influence over decision-making.

Sustainable Democracy

According to Okowa (2015), maintaining the rule of law, respecting human rights, having a legitimate electoral process, providing for one's basic needs (food, shelter, healthcare, education, and transportation), having accountability and transparency in government, having an independent judiciary, and having press freedom are all essential components of a sustainable democracy. According to Zhizhi and Ibrahim (2020), respect for civil and political rights, widespread literacy, national sovereignty, majority rule and minority rights, the rule of law, and effective government are just a few of the elements that make up a sustainable democracy. Sustainable democracy encompasses more than just free, fair, and regular elections; it also includes the events that take place prior to, during, and following elections.

According to Kaur (2007), democracy can only continue as long as there is a vibrant opposition that may overthrow a sitting administration by presenting electors with viable alternatives that they find appealing. Consolidation or sustenance of democracy should ideally refer to a thorough political process in which the principles of democracy are deeply ingrained, validated, and upheld by the populace over an extended period of time. Democracy's core principles must be ingrained in the political process, fostered by a strong political culture, and upheld by a broadly embraced constitutional framework.

Theoretical Framework

The Cultural Theory of Democracy (CTD)

Diverse views exist on sustainable democracy, each emphasizing certain facets and constituents of democratic stability. The Cultural Theory of Democracy (CTD) aims to clarify how culture and values contribute to the maintenance of democracy in a community. It makes the argument that a society's democratic culture and institutions are determined by its cultural traditions, values, and beliefs. The significance of historical legacies, religious and ethnic variety, and cultural views regarding the chances for democratic stability are all highlighted by the Cultural Theory of Democracy (CTD), also known as the Cultural Theory of Politics (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982). The authors of "Risk and culture, a comprehension on the selection of technical and environmental dangers," Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, contend that people's worldviews and cultural beliefs influence how they view democracy and engage in democratic

processes. With an emphasis on how cultural values impact democratic political processes and political culture, the theory investigates the connection between political culture and democratic survival (Cichowski, 2000). This theory's central tenet is the necessity of reevaluating the presumptions and findings about the kind of political culture that sustains democracy.

The opposition to deference as a beneficial component of democratic political cultures or institutions is more evident in political culture literature (Thompson & Wildavsky, 1990). The Cultural Theory of Democracy has been embraced by the social sciences as a paradigm for conducting critical analyses of democratic behaviors and practices across a variety of cultural contexts. The theoretical framework of democratic sustenance presents several obstacles for those studying it. According to Ogbe et al. (2015), sustainable democracy is the act of upholding and advancing democratic culture and principles within a community as well as the people's right to vote. Thus, maintaining a political behavior that is prevalent among the populace is what constitutes sustainable democracy rather than just talking points.

In actuality, democratic cultures place a strong emphasis on the right of citizens to choose representatives in government and on the existence of free, fair, and regular elections. A functional electoral system does not inevitably indicate the existence of true democracy or rule out the possibility of manipulated structures and behaviors, even if elections are a vital component of democratic sustainability. Focusing on the essential conditions for a sustainable democracy, Dahl proposes polyarchy, which offers a

helpful mindset for this purpose. Polyarchy demands free and fair elections, but it also demands universal suffrage, the ability to run for office, freedom of speech, access to alternative information sources, and freedom of association (Dahl 1968). People's values, beliefs, and attitudes, thus, shape their orientation both individually and collectively and influence the results of social and political processes, including democratic and electoral processes.

Research Methodology

This study utilized research data from published papers and literature reviews from other authors. The qualitative research approach was applied in this study. The qualitative information gathered from secondary sources—such as books, journals, and official publications—were analyzed to provide a more comprehensive understanding and explanations, and this information served as the basis for additional reports.

Findings and Discussions

These were made under the following headings:

A Persisting Challenges to Sustainable Electoral Democracy in Nigeria

B Sustainability of Democracy and Hope for the Future

A Persisting Challenges to Sustainable Electoral Democracy in Nigeria

There are many ways to undermine a sustainable democracy, thus it is always necessary to strengthen the election system and other democratic institutions and make them more resistant

to manipulation. Reform can lessen the damage that powerful politicians' self-serving mechanizations and interventions—particularly those of the executive branch—do to democracy. The two main pillars of the country's attempt to consolidate democracy are tribe and religion. Every ethnic group in Nigeria has its own culture, language, and goals, and these factors influence each group's and the social institutions' economic and social destiny. According to Dike (1979), they make it extremely difficult to forge a shared identity and agreement, which makes it harder to achieve a viable democracy. Nigeria lacks the essential democratic characteristics, there is a great deal of social unrest, ethnic violence, and political instability. Therefore, in order to turn its democratic experiment into a functioning democracy, the country needs to create and maintain the political institutions necessary to safeguard citizens' rights, lives, and property.

One obstacle to the country's democratic endeavor is the lack of a truly federal framework. About 80% of the nation's resources are under the exclusive list due to the federal government's overuse of central control, which leaves state and local governments at its mercy. A true federal system would provide every state, region, and geopolitical zone the authority to manage its resources and allocate money for community development initiatives.

A strong, functional structure is essential because it gives individuals power and establishes the socio-political standing of a community. According to Aristotle's philosophy, we can only determine a state's identity by looking at its form and contents (Olufemi 2012). Poverty and illiteracy are significant obstacles to the country's efforts to

establish a viable democracy since they can be used by political opportunists and bigots to sow fear throughout the populace. Unfortunately, politicians and political parties lack ideological rigor. Maintaining democracy is impossible in the current climate, when political parties stand for more than just bribery and corruption. It is noted that Nigeria's journey toward true democracy is hampered by poverty, which is exacerbated by widespread unemployment. The federal government's fight against poverty has not been successful, unemployment has not decreased, and those who lack economic power are unable to engage fully in a democratic political process.

Therefore, Dike (1979) notes that increasing one's liberties not only makes life richer and less burdensome but also enables one to be a fulfilled social being and have an impact on the world. Poverty, a high rate of illiteracy, discrimination, ethnicity, tribalism, and poverty are closely related issues because they impact people's capacity to make significant contributions to society and engage in social issues. Many residents are more focused on their ongoing fight to survive financially than they are on the utopian ideals of democracy, which they feel will not provide for them. According to Mirsky (1994), economic growth fosters the social space necessary for democracy to be feasible and allows a democratic administration to carry out its promises. Unfortunately, economic concerns are abandoned since hard effort is not valued; instead, crime and banditry are frequently exalted and have a negative influence on residents' lives, making the establishment of genuine democracy a challenging endeavor. Another major danger to Nigeria's ability to retain democracy is leadership. Until

political leaders are able to make wise decisions and enact progressive laws that encourage democratic behavior, no country can truly achieve its potential. Election oversight organizations must guarantee fairness for all candidates in order to have a true democracy, as Dahl (1968) questions "if we don't believe in economic growth. Unfortunately, economic concerns are dropped in favor of criminality and banditry, which have a negative impact on citizens' lives and are frequently praised. This makes it difficult to achieve true democracy.

The sustainability of Nigeria's democracy is also seriously threatened by leadership. No country can achieve its full potential until its political leaders are able to make the proper choices and enact progressive laws that support democratic behavior. Dahl (1968) asks, "If we don't believe in democracy, how we can achieve a true democracy?" in which the electoral authorities provide an even playing field for all candidates. Political corruption is viewed as a pandemic in Nigeria since corruption is incompatible with the country's democratic existence. In Nigeria's political landscape, there is a great deal of election and bureaucratic malpractice, bribery, political fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favoritism, and nepotism. Nigeria's sustainable democracy faces many obstacles that must be overcome in order to maintain the rule of law, good governance, distributive justice, openness, accountability, and feasible election changes.

Similarly, the independent electoral commission, which was established, funded, and overseen by the executive branch during every general election, functioned more like a government ministry than an umpire. The electoral body's stance appears dubious

because it is evident at every election which party they support. The All Peoples Congress (APC), which is in power, used delay tactics to elect a presidential candidate, and in 2022 the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) unconstitutionally extended the deadline for the ruling party to conclude its presidential primary. The electoral system has recently been manipulated by limiting the number of affluent politicians who are permitted to run for office. The general election of 2023 clearly showed INEC to be an APC branch. Because of the extreme poverty in the country, wealthy politicians and political parties have turned to buying votes from those whose primary concern is simply putting food on the table, rather than determining who will govern.

B Sustainability of Democracy and Hope for the Future

The viability of democracy depends on a wide range of elements, including the social structure, socioeconomic growth, political history, and political culture. The electoral process is not the only factor that affects democracy's ability to survive. It is impossible to overstate the many advantages of a sustainable democracy; a solid institutional framework and appropriate institutional structures could support and enhance the rule of law and serve as a foundation for an honorable and legitimate electoral democracy. Political violence, the "sit tight" syndrome, corruption, and incompetence will all be totally eradicated by electoral reform, which will also encourage political engagement. Credible reform can also usher in excellent governance, in which positions are filled by meritocracy rather than mediocrity.

Election reform is essential because political stability fosters economic stability, and politics and the economy go hand in hand. Therefore, electoral reform aimed at promoting political stability and sustainable democracy is required to develop a strong economy. Nigeria's variety makes it evident that democracy is the only political alternative available to it for survival and growth, and that creating genuine government is the only way to address the problems facing the country right now. An efficient election system can do this. It is still true that the system needs ongoing strategic review to keep the enduring issues of collation and result manipulation under control, even with recent revisions. To preserve sustained democracy, the aforementioned issues must be taken into account in forthcoming election reforms.

Conclusion

Electioneering and electoral reforms merely serve to highlight the political class's ongoing desire to steer public policy and choices in their favor. The illusion known as the "dividends of democracy," which they obtain for themselves on behalf of the people, makes this clear (or in the name of the masses.). The elites' political maneuvering and the ruling class's judicial manipulation are to blame for the current state of democracy. The opposition is under fear of having to accept the results of the rigged elections or face legal action in order to defend and ensure political stability.

The key to a lasting democracy is having strong institutional frameworks and appropriate political structures in place. Other solutions include enforcing the law more strictly, giving worthy and reputable individuals a chance to run for

office, and creating a calm and stable political atmosphere. However, what's required goes beyond systems and procedures. The electoral process and democratic practice are characterized by the resolve, or lack thereof, of the political elites. In order to create a functioning election process and a lasting democracy in Nigeria, a mutually agreeable agreement is therefore essential.

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