



## **Democracy and Development: The Nigerian Experience (1999-2010)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article is a contribution to the debate on democracy and development. It examines the relationship between democracy and development, using a contextual analysis of the Nigerian democratic experience. The key concepts, democracy, and development were ventilated as to make for a better understanding. Democracy as practiced in Nigeria is denied of its life blood, that is the peoples' right to vote. It is democracy without the people. The article therefore concluded that given the corrupt nature of our politicians, the manner and way in which power to govern is acquired, their recklessness and insensitivity every development effort will definitely fail and continue to fail. In the circumstance, the article considers people oriented government and the shunning of every corrupt practice as a highly useful and pivotal option.

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is common occurrence in recent history to find developing countries in a state of transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes as witnessed in Nigeria. The questions begging for answers are (i) Is democracy inherently good? (ii) Does democracy facilitate development? And (iii) Is this trend a product of bandwagon effect? It appears rational to answer the first question affirmatively, democracy is good because it facilitates free choice, breeds trust in government and furthers mass political participation. The answer to the second question is an empirical one, while the answer to the last question has to centre on the psyche of the people. There is debate within the development field about the effects of democracy on the development process. Some development scholars argued that, the experiences of Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia show that a strong authoritarian regime is better able to engineer a successful process of development than democratic regimes such as India (because of its ability to discipline fractious groups demand). But the paper argues that the empirical record of

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authoritarian developing states is about as mixed, if not worst than that of democratic states. The argument is based on Ake (1985) conceptualization of the state. He conceptualized the state thus:

The state is a specific modality of class domination, one in which class domination is mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mechanism of domination is differentiated and dissociated from the ruling class and even the society and appears as an objective force standing alongside society. The state form of domination is the modality in which the system of mechanisms of class domination is autonomised – that is the institutional apparatus of class domination is largely independent of social classes, including the hegemonic social class p.1.

In terms of the specific character of the state, Ake (1985) has highlighted its key feature of limited autonomy, a condition that is prevalent in post-colonial African countries:

The unique feature of socio-economic formations in post-colonial Africa, and indeed in contemporary periphery formations generally, is that the state has very limited autonomy. That is, the state is institutionally constituted in such a way that it enjoys limited independence from the social classes, particularly the hegemonic social class, and so is immersed in the class struggle. p.3

In simple terms, Ake (1985) is arguing that the state in developing countries like Nigeria is fully and openly dominated by the ruling class. Indeed the state is openly and defacto an extension of the hegemonic ruling class. If this conceptualization of the state is anything to go by, it implies that the authoritarian regime will only directs its attention to the social class, especially the hegemonic class to the detriment of the poor masses who are helpless. It is on this note that democracy comes handy, because only democratic institutions give any promise of tilting economic development policies toward the interests of the poor. However when there are deviations from the above, the dynamic working mechanism of democracy is expected to come to play in ensuring a change of government. The rationale behind this is that democracy is the government of the people, for the people and by the people. Therefore, the ultimate power resides within the people.

But the opinion of this paper is that judging by the way and manner in which democracy is being practiced in Nigeria the chances of achieving development are rather slim, if not impossible.

The rest of the paper is structured into five sections. Immediately after the introduction, is section two which centres on conceptual issues, section three examines the relationship between democracy and development, while section four dwells on democracy and development in the Nigerian setting. Section five is the conclusion and recommendation.

### **Conceptual Issues**

The concepts, democracy and development are rather complex and multi-dimensional hence the need to ventilate them to make for clear understanding. Democracy is coined from two Greek words: demos (the people) and kratos (rule) which in simple parlance means people's rule. It is an institution of government which envisages a popular government as practiced in ancient Greece. But the conditions in a modern state make direct participation of all the people in the governance of the state impossible. Therefore power is exercised by the people indirectly through a system of representation.

Experience over the ages has shown that the activities of the city states can only be successfully carried on with the voluntary co-operation of the citizens and the main instrumentality of this co-operation lies in the free and fair discussion of government policies in all their aspects by the people. The foundation of all democracy is the right to vote. The people must be allowed to elect their representatives, express their choices, and make their preference at the polls. It is imperative that such polling should be fair and free from force, fraud, intimidation, and corrupted or undue influences.

Felix and Wilson elsewhere defined democracy as:

A system of government with high level of civil and political liberties, that allows for competition between political groups for political power and in which there is mass participation by adults in selecting leaders through free and fair election.

Democracy therefore allows the majority to rule and grants the minority the right of dissent. It encourages mass participation in the decision-making process and grants equal opportunity to all participants irrespective of the region or tribe.

The next is development. The concept of development is multidimensional and has had varied interpretations by the various schools of thought in the social sciences. The issue of development in the contemporary world came to the fore at the end of the Second World War in 1945 (Okowa, 2005).

Arising from the massive poverty that infested the peoples of Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), and Latin America, the so tagged underdeveloped World (Third World) Economists initially equated economic growth with economic development. Lewis (1955), one of the founding fathers of modern development economics, indeed titled his major work on development

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“Theory of Economic Growth” and stressed the point that his major aim was to enquire into the factors that made for growth of per capita income. The equation of economic growth with development persisted over the period 1945-1965, Arndt (1987).

Unfortunately, development in the 1960s clearly showed that societies could grow economically without actually “developing”. Myrdal’s (1968) monumental *Asian Drama* demonstrated a case of economic growth with increasing poverty in South East Asia. The above experience negates the “trickle down” theory, that economic growth would improve the incomes of the poor through the trickle down process of economic development. Consequent upon the failure of the trickle down” theory, economic development took a drastic transformation. Issues of poverty, unemployment, and inequality take the lead in the conceptualization of economic development.

The questions to ask about a country’s development are therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result “development” even if per capita income double (Seers, 1969:3).

In essence, the concept of economic development was bloated to encompass growth, poverty alleviation, income distribution, and the provision of the basic needs (food, shelter, cloth, health and education).

With the passage of time however, and the intervention of the Marxist social scientists, the concept of basic needs increasingly become expanded beyond material needs to the arena of political and social needs (Okowa, 2005). The term economic development increasingly could not support the expanding menu of material, political and social imperatives required in the definition of development. Increasingly also, those who approached the issue of development from the holistic political economy perspective argued the fallacy of any compartmentalized study of man the economic, social and political animal. Development therefore increasingly replaced economic development as the subject matter of analysis.

Development, in its essence must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory and toward a situation

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or condition of life regard as materially and spiritually “better”. (Todaro, 1981:70).

In specific terms, development became defined in terms of three interrelated conditionalities or core values ala (Todaro 1971). These three core values are life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom from servitude. We shall take each in turns.

**Life Sustenance:** Here, development requires sustainable improvement in the ability of an economy to provide the basic material needs of its people. These needs include food, shelter, health, education, and a clean environment.  
**Self-Esteem:** This implies the “sense of worth and self respect, of not being used as a tool by others for their own end” (Todaro 1981:71). It is a harbinger for the respect of the dignity of man.

**Freedom from Servitude:** Todaro (1981) aptly put it thus:

Freedom here is not to be understood in the political or ideological sense (e.g. the free world), but in the more fundamental sense of freedom or emancipation from alienating material conditions of life, and freedom from the social servitudes of men and women to nature, ignorance, other men and women, misery institutions and dogmatic beliefs p.71.

However this paper adopts Akpakpan, 1987 and Wilson (2002) conceptualization of development. Development according to them is defined qualitatively as a process of improvements in the general welfare of the entire society usually manifested in desirable changes in the various aspects of the life of the society such as:-

- (i) a reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities,
- (ii) a reduction in absolute poverty,
- (iii) a reduction in the level of unemployment
- (iv) a rise in real output of goods and services and improvement in techniques of production
- (v) improvement in literacy, health services, housing and government services,
- (vi) improvement in the level of social and political consciousness of the people,
- (vii) greater ability to draw on local resources both human and materials to meet local needs (self reliance) and,
- (viii) reduction in pollution and/or environmental degradation.  
(Akpakpan 1987, Wilson 2002).

Our preference for this definition of development is based on the fact that it is more encompassing and the indices are measurable and can be easily seen.

**Relationship between Democracy and Development**

There has been an extended debate about democracy and development, and the relations between democratization and economic growth. Huntington (1968) characterizes the debate in terms of “conflict” and “compatibility”. Some scholars have maintained that democratic regimes are in general less capable of engineering development process than authoritarian regimes. The central premise of their reasoning stem from the observation that development requires change, and that change affects some voters adversely. So governments dependent on the electorate support in the next election will definitely tend to avoid choices that impose hardship on significant numbers of voters. Przeworski (1971) presents a thoughtful argument to this effect, in his work *Democracy and the market*. Others have argued that democratic regimes are positively associated with economic development, and especially with more egalitarian modes of development (Alesin, 1997; Akpakpan and Umoh 1999). Finally, there is a body of thought which holds that democracy is neither positive nor negative with respect to development. Sirowy and Inkeles (1990) provide a careful review of this issue and the empirical data that pertains to assessment of the various hypotheses.

Peeler (1998) describes the experience of Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Bolivia from the point of view of this direction of causal arrow. Peeler (1998) is of the view that there is generally positive causal relationship flowing from the presence of democratic institutions to effective economic development.

A large number of empirical studies have been undertaken in the past 30 years to investigate this relationship. However, the empirical case is suggestive but inconclusive (Jakob and Siemann 1996). The data support some optimism in support of the “compatibility” theory that democratic institution has a net positive effect on economic development. However, the association is empirically weak, and there are numbers of counter – examples in both directions; authoritarian regimes have good development records and democratic regimes equally have weak development records. In their major review of available cross-country studies of democracy and development, Sirowy and Inkeles (1990) conclude that there is little support for a strong positive causal relationship between democracy and development, and there is little empirical basis for choosing between the “conflict” hypothesis and the null hypothesis (Sirowly and Inkeles 1990). Overall these scholars conclude that there are few robust conclusions that can be supported on the basis of existing empirical multi-case studies of these factors. They believe that methodological flaws in the studies are an important part of the problem-leading to the possibility that more refined studies may shed greater light. Przeworski and Limongi (1993) arrive at a similar conclusion. They examine 18 cross-country studies, and conclude that these studies do not provide a clear basis for conclusion about the causal properties of democratic institutions with regard to development. Both of these review essays point to

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the methodological difficulties that stand in the way of effective statistical test of these causal hypotheses (de Haan and Siermann 1996).

This suggests, however, that it is reasonable to work on the assumption that democratic institutions are compatible with effective economic development.

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The fledging democracy, rather than produce positive results, has been the bane of Nigeria (Ozor, 2002). Relying on the 2002 and 2003 reports of Economic Intelligence Unit, Nigeria has nothing close to genuine democracy. For instance, Chris Uba (the Godfather of Anambra politics) confesses publicly that he was the one who wrote the 2003 election result in Anambra State (precious 2006). The fact that he made this public does not mean that such magic happened only in Anambra State. It happened in all the thirty-six states of the federation. This is a rape of democracy, because it denies it, its life blood which is the right to vote, it is democracy without the people. This was made possible because politicians distributed different kinds of ammunition to different recruited thugs, cult groups, and area boys, with the hope that at the end of the election, such weapon will be withdrawn from them. But evil begets evil, since then nothing good has ever come from the environment than increasing destruction of life and properties. Okowa (2005:10) aptly described the situation as follows:

The contemporary crises of violence, killings and destruction are inevitable, given the character of the governing class and the method by which the power to govern was acquired. When power is acquired through the backdoor, violence, killings and destruction become the norm. p.10.

The above lamentable state of the nation captured by Okowa (2005:10) is in line with the teaching of Jesus Christ as presented by John in his epistle:

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber ... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy .. (St. John's Gospel, Chapter 10 verses 1-10).

The corollary of the above is that, when politicians rig themselves into power, they will steal, kill, and destroy, according to the logic of this Christian scripture. By the same logic, politicians who rig themselves into power are thieves and robbers by intent and will ultimately manifest these characteristics.

A man's life is as worth as that of a fowl during this democratic dispensation. It can be destroyed and abandoned in the full view of many. This is why governments official convoys do not really care about those they

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send to their early graves on our high ways and road, showing the insensitivity the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) led government. Below is the pathetic account of the above assertion: On December 26, 2000, Victor and Naomi Umoren, a newly wedded couple were killed in an accident involving a car in the convoy of Chief Dapo Sarumi, former Minister of Cooperation and Integration in Africa. On October 17, 2002 a car in the convoy of Micheal Botmang, the Plateau State Deputy Governor, swerved off the road and hit a 14 year old girl. She died 3 day later. On October 28, 2002, the official convoy of Chief Tony Anenih Chairman of Board of Trustees of the PDP ran into an Opel car driven by Mrs. Grace Ezea; she bled to death (precious 2006).

On February 16, 2004 Mr. Rasak Olayiwola, a motorcyclist, was knocked down by a car in the convoy of Osun State Deputy Governor. He died a month later in hospital (Festus 2004). The circumstances that surrounded the death of the hundreds in the Bellview Airline crash on Saturday December 10, 2005 have their roots on the unsafe political environment and administrative decadence of our society. Amidst these executives recklessness are the cases of political assassinations. Among these assassinations were the penultimate murders of Chief Aminasoari Kala Dikibo, former National Vice Chairman, South-South zone of the PDP. He was hacked down on his way to Asaba, on March 4, 2003. Before him was Dr. Marshall Harry who was brutally murdered in his house in Abuja (James 2004; Obo, 2003).

On June 21, 2003, Chief Ajiboki Olanipekun (SAN), another PDP chieftain from Oyo State was shot dead in his bedroom at Ibadan (Dayo, 2004). In September 2002, the nation was confronted with the horrifying picture of the badly mutilated body of Mr. Barnabas Igwe and his wife Abigail Igwe, until his death, was the chairman Onitsha Branch of Nigeria Bar Association (NBA). Before then, Igwe had made the headlines when he led NBA to issue an ultimatum to the then Anambra State Governor, Dr. Chimaroke Mbadinuju to pay workers who had embarked on strike action. In August, 2002, Victor Nnwankwo was mould down by some assassins in his house in Enugu. Professor Chimere Ikoku, former Vice Chancellor, University of Nigeria, Nsukka was killed in Enugu State (Obo, 2003). In the same August, in Ondo State Mrs. Janet Olapade an active politician was hacked down in her house. In Kwara State, Alhaji Pategi, the State Chairmen of PDP, and his police orderly were assassinated on their way to Abuja.

In June, 2001, Mr. Elizat Bakis, a prominent member of All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) was murder in his home state Nassarawa. In September 2001, in Rivers State Monday Ndor a member of the House of Assembly was sent to grave by assassins. The list is unending, thus giving credence to the assertion that under the present democratic dispensation, a man's life is as worth as that of a fowl.

Next is on the issue of poverty, the National Bureau of Statistics (2008) showed that the poverty incidence of Nigeria by the year 2008 was 78.30 percent. By the year 2008, the Nigerian population had increased to an



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estimated 147.8 million. With the incidence of poverty at 78.30 percent, those living in poverty would have increased to 115.8 million. These are terrifying figures. The Nigerian population is growing at the rate of 2.8 percent per annum. If the incidence of poverty remains at 78.30 percent, then each year not less than 3.2 million human beings will join the club of the poor in Nigeria. By the year 2025, the population of Nigeria is estimated to increase to about 206 million so if the incidence of poverty does not rise above the current 78.3 percent or so, then there should be about 161.3 million poor Nigerians by the year 2025.

Poor health situation in Nigeria, health facilities in Nigeria have generally decayed. Today the average Nigerian expects to live for 52 years. In the area of infant mortality, 75 children out of every 1,000 born to Nigerian parents are expected to die as infant. The average for the developing world is 61, much more lower than that of Nigeria. Our public Hospitals are now death trap as doctors embark on incessant strike action as a result of poor pay package and lack of the much needed facilities. The worst hit are the rural areas. One wonders how a doctor would operate without power, water and other essential facilities required for such services.

The education sector is not immuned against this rot. The quality of the products of our educational system has declined. We are producing generations of students who want to pass their examinations without reading, in line with the attitude of their parents who want to acquire political office without been voted for. The result is the increasing tales of examination malpractice, cultism, and prostitution are dominant phenomena in our tertiary institutions.

...students leave the university after four years as worse people than when they came in. More likely than not, they have imbibed the culture of violence as the only way to get what you want and many have fallen victim to the insidious plea that in Nigeria you need to be part of a gang to be safe and able to “get along”. The universities have lost their integrity, credibility and professionalism (Ade-Ajayi, 2001:8).

Tell magazine’s special report on education in Nigeria identifies some of the critical dimensions of the country’s educational crisis, specifically in the area of higher institutions.

Today, the dominant issues in higher institutions of learning are fashion, music, cultism, and other social vices. Books, and studying have taken second place in the priority of Nigeria’s future leaders (Tell Magazines, 2004, p. 42).

Ade (2001) position cited above shows that the realization of development in Nigeria is a mirage. In the area of unemployment, the unemployment rate in

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Nigeria is estimated at 50% (National Bureau of Statistics 2008:264). This is really frightening and may be one of the reasons for the increased level of poverty incidence in the country. Despite the much orchestrated poverty alleviation programmes of the PDP led government the impact is yet to be seen.

With regard to inequality, the gap has been widened under the present democratic dispensation; legislators in Nigeria earn more than all the legislators in the world. Amuchie (2010), aptly captured the situation thus;

Currently, every Senator earns N225 million (\$1.5 million) in salaries and allowances per annum when the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country is \$175 billion, while their counterparts in the United States where the minimum wage is \$29,634 earns \$174,000 per annum. On the other hand, the US President for instance, earns \$ 250,000 yearly in an economy that has a GDP of \$13 trillion.

Esele (2010), president Trade Union Congress (TUC) said “Nigerian legislators currently earn the highest remuneration in the world even with their current emoluments, earning more than their counterparts in the United States and other countries”.

Corruption in Nigeria has become an in house thing despite the various anti-graft agencies instituted by the government to curb this social vice. Unah (2004) in his interview with the New Age Newspaper, of February 2004, said:

How do you tackle corruption when at the very highest levels of government people are neck deep in it, there is no sincerity of purpose, those in authority are highly compromised, and so they cannot deal with the cases of corruption. p.12

What a hopeless situation for our dear country. Only those that disagree with the president of the country are tagged corrupt while those who are loyal can even empty the state treasury and walk freely on the street.

Given the above scenario, development in the Nigerian context will ever remain illusive.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper attempted to explore the concepts of democracy and development with the view to unraveling the relationship between them. It x-ray the literature on the relationship between democracy and development and therefore attempted to conceptualize the discussion, using the democratic experience of Nigeria.

The study found that the current state of democracy in Nigeria gives cause for concern given the way and manner in which it is practice. All the

indices of development cited in Akpakpan (1987) and Wilson (2002) definition of development are affected negatively as unemployment is on the increase, poverty incidence on the increase, illiteracy rate very high, inequality gap widened, poor health situation etc. The manifestation of these social ills is as a result of the way and manner in which democracy is practice in Nigeria. Therefore given the corrupt nature of our politicians and the manner and way in which power to govern is acquired, their recklessness and insensitivity every developmental effort will definitely fail and continue to fail. The way out is to constitute a people oriented government and shun every form of corrupt practices.

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