

Mitigating the Challenges of Nigeria's Democracy

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Abstract

The notable challenges that Nigeria's democratic processes and development suffer from includes cases of electoral misconduct such as rigging, use of thugs to interrupt the election process and use of money to bargain the votes of the poor hungry Nigerian. Inter and intra party conflicts, ethno religious violence, inequality, pandemics, along with others. Studies on Nigeria's democracy exist but are limited to providing a ground breaking approach to mitigating the challenges of Nigerian democracy. This article presents an innovative approach from the political behavioural change theoretical and practical insight to mitigating the challenges of Nigerian democracy through a qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Findings concludes that challenges of Nigeria's democracy can be mitigated through an innovative political behavioural change approach that centers on meeting the most pressing issues and demands of the electorates. And in the manner democratic process and practices of the Nigerian political system is handling generally. This would ultimately help to connect democratic values with democratic attitude, democratic attitude with electorates' electorates and leaders' democratic behaviour with most pressing issues and demands. Issues and demands with democratic policies and institutions, local or international significant for democratic development.

Keywords: Democracy; Nigeria; Challenges; Innovative Political Behavioural Change.

Introduction

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has faced vast political instability particularly during the military regime. The turning point was in 1999 when a fresh constitution was passed, and a democratic administration was approved where elections were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and, recently, 2019. Nevertheless, these elections were attributed to cases of electoral misconduct such as rigging, use of thugs to interrupt the election process and use of money to bargain the votes of the poor hungry Nigerians. Spectators have said that the conduct of the elections was not 'free and fair', except the 2011 and 2015 general elections described as relatively free and fair.¹ In general, elections in Nigeria's democratic process can be categorized into four stages precisely; elections in the colonial period (1922-1959), elections in the initial time of independence (1960-1965), elections in the years of military rule (1965-1999) and elections in the Fourth Republic (1999 till date).

Inokoba and Kumokor Adekola, Omotola, Ibrahim, Onuoha, Nnadozie, Olaitan, Seteolu, postulate that democratic development in Nigeria unveils some irregular features. The most prominent of these relates to the high level of instability that characterises Nigerian politics. Before the inception

¹ Fafchamps M and C. P. Vicente (2012) Political violence and social networks: Experimental evidence from a Nigerian election. *Journal of Development Economics*; Oshodi, A. (2007). Return to civilian rule in Nigeria: Problems of electoral culture and transparency over the past three Nigerian elections (1999–2007). *The Round Table*, 96(392), 617-630.; Collier, P., & Vicente, P. C. (2014). Votes and violence: Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria. *The economic journal*, 124(574), F327-F355.; Igwe, D. O. (2012). The perception of electoral violence and democratization in Ibadan, Oyo State Southwest Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 8(1), 51-71. Olaniyan, A., & Omotola, S. (2015). Ethnic crises and national security in Nigeria. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 31(4), 303-318.; Albert, I. O. (2010). When the State Kills: Political Assassinations in Abacha's Nigeria. In *Encountering the Nigerian State* (pp. 199-215). Palgrave Macmillan, New York. Kuenzi, M., & Lambright, G. (2015). Campaign appeals in Nigeria's 2007 gubernatorial elections. *Democratization*, 22(1), 134-15

of democracy on 29 May 1999, there had been eleven changes of government since independence in 1960, comprising the Ernest Shonekan's Interim National Government (ING). The high level of instability, as a result of coups and counter-coups, is linked to the nature of electoral processes and their negative implications for democratisation. Democratic promotion through transitional elections and the dominant features of electoral politics in Nigeria that tend to subvert democracy include electoral fraud and violence. Inevitably, this has ensured that elections in the country are associated with political tension and an atmosphere of crisis. This is usually in the form of the use of political thugs and militias, ballot box stuffing, intimidation of opposition political party members and agents, falsification of results, maiming and killing and related anti-conventional means. Furthermore, governance at local, state, and federal levels in the Nigerian society remains unsuccessful to bring the anticipated socio-economic and political dividends of democracy. This re-occurrence of unsuccessful governance has also created disappointment in the electorates, which has obviously made the sustainability of democracy problematic in Nigeria. Quite a lot of reasons have been recognised as been liable for the disappointing performance of governance. This remains very clear in Nigeria's electoral crises with issues of incompetence in the conduct of credible and fair elections although there are successful ones. But, for a sustainable democracy in Nigeria, elections must be conducted free and transparent with efficient electoral process to provide the needed platform and strength for democratic development.²

² Inokoba, P. K., & Kumokor, I. (2011). Electoral crisis, governance, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 27(2), 139-148.; dekola AA 2010. Democratic Development in Nigeria since Independence: Challenges and Prospects. Ibadan: College Press and Publishers Lt; Ibrahim, J. (2006) Legislation and the electoral process: the third term agenda and the future of Nigerian democracy, *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development*, 6(2), pp. 46-74.; Nnadozie, U. (2007) History of elections in Nigeria, in: A. M. Jega & O. Ibeanu (Eds) *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*, pp. 45-74 (Lagos: NPSA).; Olaitan, W. A. (2005) Elections and the making and unmaking of democracy in Nigeria, in: G. Onu & A. Momoh (Eds) *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, pp. 43-54 (Lagos: Nigerian Political Science Association, NPASA).; Omotola, J. S. (2004) The 2003 Nigerian second elections: some comments, *Political Science Review*, 3(1-2), pp. 126-137; Omotola, J. S. (2007b) Constitutional review and the third term agenda: Nigeria's democracy at the crossroads, *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development*, 6(3), pp. 57-77. Omotola, J. S. (2008a) From importer to exporter: the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values in Africa, in: J. Pretorius (Ed.) *African Politics: Beyond the Third Wave of Democratisation*, pp. 32-54 (Cape Town, SA: Juta Academic Press).; Onuoha, B. (2003) A comparative analysis of general elections in Nigeria, in: R. Anifowose & T. Babawale (Eds) *2003 General Elections and Democratic Consolidations in Nigeria*, pp. 46-67 (Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation).; Seteolu, D. (2005) Historical trajectories of elections in Nigeria: the state, political elite and electoral politics, in: G. Onu & A. Momoh (Eds) *Elections and*

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Idada, Uhumwuangho, Epelle, Sklar, Abati Kesselman, Akhaineet point out that the Nigerian government is unable to effectively develop the huge human and material resources to break the cycle of poverty inherent in the country. Consequently, the Nigerian state remains struggling between the forces of democracy and authoritarianism, and characterized by push for development and the pull for underdevelopment, the problem of public corruption and the pressure of accountability. It is obvious that democratic development faces a lot of challenges in the country. The political leaders are not altruistic with less concern for the desires of the general public. There is the need for changes, and strategies and measures need to be embraced and applied by all stakeholders. Fundamentally, there is a pressing need for the political leaders to change the ways and manners state affairs are conducted.³

Frank and Ukpere, Khakee, Youngs, Omilusi, Toyin, Isaac, Obi, Kew, and Adigbuo postulate that democracy in Nigeria has upstretched significant matters such as the militarized political behaviour in Nigeria's democratic setting. This was particularly during the regime of former president Obasanjo as a democratic president. Its economic outcome was incessant mismanagement of the social forces of production. The norms of democracy basically which includes dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation remain problematic. Politicians act as battalion commandants. Politics is assumed to be a do or die affair. The results of elections have been the

Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, pp. 34–42 (Lagos: Nigerian Political Science Association); Omotola, J. S. (2009). 'Garrison 'democracy in Nigeria: The 2007 general elections and the prospects of democratic consolidation. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47(2), 194-220.

³ Idada, W., & Uhumwuangho, S. O. (2012). Problems of democratic governance in Nigeria: The way forward. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 3(1), 49-54.; hunmwuangho SO; Epelle A 2009. The Democratization of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics. *African Journal of Contemporary Issues*, 9(2): 30; Sklar, R. L. (2015). *Nigerian political parties: Power in an emergent African nation*. Princeton University Press. Abati R 2007. The Sad Story of Nigeria. From <<http://www.ngrguardianews.com>> (Retrieved March 20, 2007). 100 Days Mandate, Guardian News Paper, September 17, 2007, P.7 3; Odion-Akhaine S, Bona Chizea, Felix Oriakhi 2007. The Political Economy of Godfatherism in Nigeria. *The Constitution*, 7(2): 1-10.

sabotage of the democratic process instead of its consolidation. The poor majority are disempowered by elections that do not represent their will or offer them a choice to vote for real change. The Nigerian dominant political elite are well known for manipulating the electoral game to legitimize their monopoly of power, in a context where the legitimacy of the state, and that of its elected representatives, has worn thin in the eyes of the electorates helplessly. Democracy for the people is more than the freedom to vote without choosing. It is about democracy dividends that will pave the way towards a better living and creative participation, devoid of oppression, fear and poverty. The struggle for democracy is also stressed by the class struggles around the oil in Nigeria between factions of the dominant elite mainly for the quest of federal power which is the site for power over oil rents. This struggle also spreads to the governing elite and the people over the distribution of oil revenues, and the quest for resource control, which grounds the ethnic minorities of the oil producing Niger Delta against the federal government and foreign oil corporations. Since 1999, the Niger Delta engages in a form of unrest comprising armed insurgency and intra and inter-communal conflicts. Thus, instead of a triumph of electoral democracy, what has been witnessed in the Niger Delta and Nigeria is its destabilisation by a hegemonic transnational alliance: local, national, and global, feeding on the political economy of oil. Therefore, to alleviate these unfavourable aspects in Nigerian politics, there is the need for good governance, consensus orientation, participatory, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitability and general rule of law based on justice and practice of democracy with its operational principles. The political behaviour of the political actors and that of the masses at the national, state, local government levels require a necessary change for democratic development to prosper in Nigeria.⁴

⁴ Frank, E. O., & Ukpere, W. I. (2012). The impact of military rule on democracy in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 33(3), 285-292.; Omilusi, M. (2015). From Civil Rule to Militarized Democracy: Emerging Template for Governance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 6(6.2).; Toyin, O. S. (2015). The Impact of military coup D'état on political development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 6(10), 194-202.; Isaac, A. (2013). Military regimes and nation building in Nigeria, 1966-1999. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 5(7), 138-142.; Obi, C. I. (2007). Democratising Nigerian Politics: Transcending the shadows of militarism.

Thus, Joseph, Ibrahim, Bala, Oke, Ahunwan, Inokoba, Kumokor, Brechenmacher, George-Genyi, Oyovbaire, Iwuoha, Ayatse, Akuva, Suberu, and Meagher argue that the rationality and legacy of prebendalism in Nigerian democracy after more than three decades of military regime gives a significant opportunity for democratic governance. Whereas the change brought about regular elections at the national and state levels, people's engagements in the governance process and the ability to hold their leaders answerable have been at best inadequate, creating a huge crisis of governance. The catastrophe of governance in Nigeria is driven by four connected historical influences: prolonged military authoritarian rule, weak governmental institutions, corruption, and personal rule. The long years of military regime has trapped Nigerian political system in a manner in which social structures and values have been shaped in the way of dictatorship, consequently, the executive branch is comprehended, and behaves as both the leading and overbearing organ of government.

As a result, other legitimate institutions comprising of the legislature, the judiciary, political parties, and the executive bodies are made to slowdown in growth or they are seriously deteriorating. For the legislature, there was no provision earlier to practise the value of law making derived from a representative social order because there was no legislature distinct from the executive in politics and governance under military regime. Certainly, since 1999 the legislature has failed to perform its constitutional responsibility and holding the executive to account. On the other hand, it is rather the legislature that strives to perform executive functions in the form of

Review of African Political Economy, 34(112), 379-384.; Obi, C. I. (2008). International election observer missions and the promotion of democracy: Some lessons from Nigeria's 2007 elections. *Politikon*, 35(1), 69-86.; Kew, D. (1999). "Democracy: Dem Go Craze, O": Monitoring the 1999 Nigerian Elections. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 27(1), 29-33.; Adigbo, E. R. (2008). Defender of the faith: the challenges of Nigeria's 2007 presidential election. *Politikon*, 35(2), 223-245.; Khakee, A. (2007). EU Democracy Promotion in Nigeria: between realpolitik and idealism. Youngs, R. (Ed.). (2010). *The European Union and democracy promotion: a critical global assessment*. JHU Press.; Obi, Cyril I. "International election observer missions and the promotion of democracy: Some lessons from Nigeria's 2007 elections." *Politikon* 35, no. 1 (2008): 69-86.

constituency developments. Every subsequent election produces almost 80% of a new legislature. Thus, development in politics of law making is always delayed by this high level of turnover. Similarly, the political economy inherited by the fourth republic was a class character of the economy; it which creates unfair wealth in the form of corrupt amassing of state resources by some unpatriotic individuals and this has tilted power relations away from the majority of the people. The role of money in elections has as well made it problematic for a huge part of the political class to participate effectively in the quest for power. Corruption has, as a result, been democratised, infusing practically every section of the society and becoming a major yardstick of politics and electoral contest and thereby backing the growing poverty, inequality and violence. Therefore, corruption solely remains a huge challenge to the national development and stability because it weakens accountability, and popular sovereignty. These negative impacts of corruption are against the basis of constitutional and democratic government.⁵

Hamalai, Egwu, Omotola, Nwanko, Okafor, Ezirim, Adegami, Uche, Muhammed, Agbaje, Akande, Ojo, and Osaghae maintain that Nigeria's political system, particularly the presidents of the fourth republic (1999-2016), employs the footpath of dictatorship; restrains supposed opponents and tries to modify the constitution to remain in power. They abuse laws with immunity, lack respect for democratic standards, abuse human rights, obstruct excessively on issues of

⁵Joseph, R. (2013). The logic and legacy of prebendalism in Nigeria. *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations*. London: Palgrave, 261-280.; Ibrahim, J., & Bala, S. (2018). *Civilian-Led Governance and Security in Nigeria after Boko Haram*. United States Institute of Peace. Ahunwan, B. (2002). Corporate governance in Nigeria. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 37(3), 269-287.; Brechenmacher, S. (2019). *Stabilizing Northeast Nigeria after Boko Haram*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Inokoba, P. K., & Kumokor, I. (2011). Electoral crisis, governance, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 27(2), 139-148.; George-Genyi, M.E. Good Governance: Antidote for Peace and Security in Nigeria. *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences*2(2) pp. 56-65. Imam, Y. O. (2004) *Religious Crises and Social Disruption in North- Eastern Nigeria*, Ibadan: Loud Publishers.; Iwuoha, V. C. (2019). United States' Security Governance in Nigeria: Implications on Counterterrorism Strategies against Boko Haram. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(8), 1175-1194.; Ayatse, F. H., & Akuva, I. I. (2013). The origin and development of ethnic politics and its impacts on post-colonial governance in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(17).; Meagher, K. (2009). Trading on faith: religious movements and informal economic governance in Nigeria. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 397-423.; Suberu, R. T. (2013). Prebendal politics and federal governance in Nigeria. In *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria* (pp. 79-101). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

parliament, disobeyed rule of law, and clamp down on the judiciary, and other similar governmental establishments. Thus, government and politics are tarnished with corruption. Public resources are drained off with supporters and political clique, poverty remains widespread, and absence of social justice continues. The politics of recycling their cronies becomes the order of the day. For instance, the same set of leaders and their military associates linger to control the country's political prospect. Consequently, corrupt governance leads to conflicts, insecurity, and poverty. Without good governance, obedience to the regulations of the land and removal of the immunity clause shielding the leaders over economic and financial related issues, meaningful development will only be a mirage.⁶

Studies on Nigerian democracy and its challenges exist but focused on pointing out the political, economic and sociocultural issues and cleavages, such as ethno-religious and sentiment/partisanship drives to Nigerian democratic process. These studies are limited to presenting an innovative solution to the challenges of Nigerian democracy base on an empirically well an academically sound approach that focuses on the most pressing issues and priority concerns and demands of the electorates in mitigating the challenges of Nigerian democracy. The current research gap is to examine and present an innovative approach towards mitigating the challenges of Nigerian democracy and factors to motivating it. It is within this context that the study was developed into five sections. The first section introduces the article and discusses the background and issues related to Nigerian democracy, its significance to development and the electorate's

⁶ Hamalai, L., Egwu, S., & Omotola, J. S. (2017). Trends in Election Outcomes, 1999–2015. In *Nigeria's 2015 General Elections* (pp. 125-137). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. Nwankwo, C. F., & Okafor, U. P. (2017). Voting in Nigeria: Determinants of Turnout in the 2015 Presidential Election. *Statistics, Politics and Policy*, 8(2), 249-260.; Ezirim, Gerald Ekenedirichukwu. "Oil crimes, national security, and the Nigerian state, 1999–2015." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 1 (2018): 80-100. Agbaje, A., Akande, A., & Ojo, J. (2018). The People's Democratic Party. *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics*, 351. Adegami, A., & Uche, C. I. (2016). 'Despotic democrats' versus good governance: challenges of administration of Nigeria's fourth republic. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 50(4), 195-210.; Mohammed, U. (2013). Corruption in Nigeria: A challenge to sustainable development in the fourth republic. *European Scientific Journal*, ESJ, 9(4); Osaghae, E. E. (2010). The limits of charismatic authority and the challenges of leadership in Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 28(4), 407-422.

welfare. The second section presents challenges of Nigerian democracy. The third section provides clarifications on Methodology. The fourth section presents approach to mitigating the challenges of Nigerian democracy. The fifth section, which is the last, concludes the article.

Methodology

Qualitative method allows a researcher to understand and describe and analyse electorate's perceptions through discourse analysis with empirical evidences and facts. Some aspects of social life, experiences, and attitudes of individuals, using words or discussions with varying methodological practices,⁷it is against this background that the study adopt a qualitative method in its data collection and analysis.

Findings

The academic discourse on democratic governance is extensive, and characterised into two key factors: effectiveness and legitimacy. Effectiveness inspires a professional and technocratic method to governance. It views governance as an instrument to get things done with best outcomes. The legitimacy focuses on the political characteristics of governance and raises issues such as establishing democratic institutions, encouraging social justice, rule of law, human rights and how the government interrelates with the masses. Democratic governance remains a multipurpose notion that refers to different things to different actors particularly in international development studies. It consists of political, administrative and economic matters. Rhodes, Pereira, and Hyden further argue that democratic governance refers to the formation and raise of an administration that

⁷ McCusker and Gunaydin, (2015); Gough and Lyons, (2016)

establishes the public realm in which state and non-state actors interrelate to resolve matters distressing the wellbeing of the people. Therefore, democratic governance is the politics over rules: the constitutional, legal, or procedural context in which policies are made and implemented. It considers people as the true constituency of the state with both representative and accountability aspects. Though people elect their leaders to make governance promising, they are as well anticipated to stay observant and hold these leaders answerable to make governance genuine particularly to ensure sustainable democracy and development. Thus, democratic governance is characterized into five comprehensive dimensions namely, political, legal and judicial, administrative, economic, and social. Economic is the capability of the state to create a favourable atmosphere for business in all sectors and ensure macroeconomic stability. Administrative is the capacity of the state to manage its human, financial and technological resources and deliver basic services. Political dimension focuses on the political space, the contestations, and behaviours of political actors comprising civil society, institutional use, and abuse of political authority, and the citizens' faith in the political process. Social dimension refers to the capacity of the state to take care of the vulnerable sections of the society. It includes the roles and quality of the civil society, media, and environmental governance. Legal and judicial dimension emphasizes the capability of the state to uphold law and order, safeguard human rights and enable access and delivery of justice.⁸

⁸ Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996), The New Governance: Governing without Government, *Political Studies XLIV*: 652-67; Pagoulatos, G. (1999), European Banking: Five Modes of Governance, *West European Politics 22(1)*: 68-94.; Pereira, C. (2002). Configuring "global," "national," and "local" in governance agendas and women's struggles in Nigeria. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 69(3), 781-804.; Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996), The New Governance: Governing without Government, *Political Studies XLIV*: 652-67; Hyden, G., Hydén, G., Mease, K., & Mease, K. (2004). *Making sense of governance: empirical evidence from sixteen developing countries*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. Hyden, G., Hydén, G., Mease, K., & Mease, K. (2004). *Making sense of governance: empirical evidence from sixteen developing countries*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.; Abdu, H. (2013) When Protectors Become Aggressors: Conflict and Security Sector Governance in Nigeria. In Mustapha, A.R. (ed.). *Conflicts and Security Governance in West Africa*. Abuja: Altus Global Alliance, pp. 160-198.; Omar, M. (2009). Urban governance and service delivery in Nigeria. *Development in Practice*, 19(1), 72-78.

Therefore, all these are practical to mitigating the challenges of Nigerian democracy through a general political behavioural change from the rulers and the electorates. With a view towards comprehending the relevant role of the electorates in the politics, Political behavioural change approach as an analytical concept can be adopted to collectively mitigate the challenges of Nigerian democracy by focusing on the most pressing demands and social priorities of the electorates, how democratic leaders approach, and respond to particular needs of the electorates. In this sense, the use of behavioural change approach would ultimately help to connect democratic political values with democratic political attitude, political attitude with electorates democratic political behaviour, electorates and leaders' democratic behaviour with social choices, social choices with democratic policies and institutions, local or international significant for democratic development and electorates welfare.

Conclusion

The challenges of Nigerian democracy can be mitigated through an innovative political behavioural change approach, and in the manner democratic process and practices of the Nigerian leaders and electorates within the political system is handling generally. This would ultimately help to connect democratic values with democratic attitude, democratic attitude with electorates' electorates and leaders' democratic behaviour with most pressing issues and demands. Issues and demands with democratic policies and institutions, local or international significant for democratic development.

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Author Contributions

R. A. G designed and analysed the data and draft the manuscript. M.N.U. and M.M. contributed in the manuscript draft and data curation. All authors reviewed and edited the manuscript.

Competing Interest

The authors affirm no competing interest.

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