

## **Good Governance and Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria: Issues and Prospects**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*After 18 years of return to civil rule, Nigeria continues to grapple with the challenges of democratic consolidation and good governance. All efforts by successive civilian governments to entrench true democracy and good governance in the country seem to have met brick walls in which for every step, two are lost. The generality of Nigeria, had expected that the return to democratic rule in the country in 1999 will usher in a new dawn. These optimism, hope and great expectation seem to have been dashed. This work interrogates this state of affair and shed lights on those critical elements in the country's democratic experiment that tend to frustrate the enthronement of democracy and good governance. The work recommends among others, transformational leadership that works the talk, policy of inclusiveness, effective fight against corruption and free and fair elections as the way forward for domestication of democracy and good governance in the country.*

***Keywords:** Democracy, good governance, transformation, development and challenges*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite all social and economic policies that have been implemented by successive administrations, Nigeria has remained a laggard in social, economic and political developments. Subsequently, political instability, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, heightened crime rate, poor health prospects, widespread malnourishment have been the main feature of Nigeria political economy. The history of Nigeria's democratization began at independence with the adoption of democratic institution modeled after the British West Minister Parliamentary System. After independence, the new

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political elite had the duty of not only institutionalizing the democratic process but for developing a political culture which would buttress the inherited institution from the British colonial authority. There have therefore high hopes at independence of Nigeria emerging as a fertile and large field for the growth of democracy in Africa. However by the end of 1965, it became Obvious that the future of democracy and good governance in the country had become bleak. In January 1966, the military aborted the new democratic experiment in a bloody coup d'etat. The military subsequently held on to power for almost 33 years after the 1966 coup, except for some flashes of civil rule between 1979 and 1983.

In 1979, Nigeria adopted the Presidential system of government modeled after the America system in preference to the British Parliamentary system. In 1999, Nigeria returned to civil rule and for the past 17 years, it has remained uninterrupted. The fact that the civilian rule has not been interrupted does not suggest that the various administrations have delivered creditably well. It is one thing to have a democracy; it's another thing to consolidate the ideals of democracy and good governance. This is perhaps where the government has failed. The two most used concepts in this paper are democracy and good governance and they require clarification.

## **Democracy**

The term democracy like most concepts in social sciences lacks a precise single definition, rather, it is generally a matter of intellectual supposition. There are various meanings, opinions, perceptions and definitions of the terms by scholars. According to Elaigwu cited on Yio (2012), the concept of democracy is alien to Africa and needs to be domesticated to Nigeria's (Africa) local conditions and targeted to her peculiar problems. He defines democracy as a system of government based on the acquisition of authority from the people the institutionalization of the rule of law, the emphasis on the legitimacy of rules; the availability of choices and cherished values (including freedom) and accountability in governance. This definition brings out the principles of democracy and the core one being the residence of sovereignty with the people. As Yio (2012) had argued from its Athenian origin, democracy is viewed as a Government by the people with full and direct participation of the people.

Huntington (1996) argues that a political system is democratic, if its most powerful collective decision makers are chosen through fair, honest and periodic election and in which candidate freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote. Also, Colen (1971) notes that democracy is a system of community government in which by and large, the large the members of the community participate or may participate directly or indirectly in making decisions that affects them. This means that democracy could be seen as any system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in the governance of the people rightly belongs to the people, that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in the equal rights and where equitable Social and economic justice are the inalienable rights of individual citizens in the society. Chefe (1994) on the other hand, opines that democracy means the involvement of the people in the running of the political socio-economic and cultural affairs of their policy.

Abraham Lincoln offered one of the simplest definitions to democracy as “government of the people by the people and for the people”. In this wise, democracy is first and foremost people centered. It also involves mass participation and basic individual freedom as its hallmark. Ukase (2014) stresses that democracy demands that people should be governed in the basis of their consent and mandate, freely given to establish a government which is elected, responsive and accountable.

## **Good Governance**

The concept of good governance defies a single definition. The variability in the definition stems from the fact that what are considered indices for good governance in a country may not be the indices for good governance in another country; this has given rise to various sentiments of good governance. The World Bank (2003) provides a simple definition of good governance and an extensive detailed analysis of its major components. Here the Bank contends that governance consists in the exercise of authority in the name of the people while good governance is doing so in ways that respects the integrity and needs of everyone within the state. Good governance according to this conception is said to rest in two important core values, namely: inclusiveness and accountability. This supposes that good governance is measured by how much the people are carried along in the business of

governance and also the degree of public accountability of the leaders that are assigned to hold public offices in trust. Medhar (2007) contends that good governance is tied to the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated by in reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down:

### **What are the Indices of Good Governance?**

From the foregoing, it has been discovered that good governance can only thrive on the soil of democracy. We cannot be talking about good governance in a military regime or dictatorial or autocratic regime as good governance is an alien to them. Good governance surfaces in a democratic environment. Having returned to civilian democratic rule in 1999, after about 33 years of military rule, Nigeria is in dire need of good governance to enable her consolidate her democracy. But before we delve into discussing the Nigerian experience of good governance, it is very pertinent to first isolates the salient features of good governance. Good governance is not just an abstract; it can actually be seen, touched and felt by the people. What are the indicators of good governance? These indicators will serve as the mirror through which we can see ourselves in the eyes of good governance. Some of the key indicators of good governance can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Policy of Inclusiveness and Participation:** This is perhaps the fundamental indicator of good governance. Since it has been identified that good governance thrives in democratic setting, and democracy is a government of the people by the people are for the peoples it follows therefore that good governance is measures by the degree to which the people, their views and interest are carried along and represented in the overall governing process of the government. According to Nwizu (2016), in a popularly elected government, the issue of people participation at different levels in administration is a vital aspect of good administration. It therefore connotes that for good administration or governance to be said to be in place the people must be carried along. The various policies of government must reflect the yearnings and aspirations of the people and not that of few individuals or elites.

2. **Public Accountability:** Elected Public office holders are simply individuals that are privileged to found themselves in public offices to hold power in trust for the people. It therefore follows that the politicians should be accountable to the people; this is described by Nwizu (2016) as “democracy in action”. Elected public office holders must account to the people how they use the powers they gave them with the resources that followed, they must not see themselves as “demi-gods” rather, they must be evaluated by the people with reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. Ozigbo (2007) opines that before discussion context of the term governance. According to him, governance denotes how people are ruled and now the affairs of the state are administered and regulates. Governance can therefore be good or bad depending on whether or not it has the basic ingredients of what makes a system acceptable to the generality of the people. The ingredients of good governance include freedom, accountability and participation.
  
3. **Responsiveness:** Good governance is measured by how much the government is ready to respond to the yearnings and aspirations of the people. A responsive government must take note of the needs and aspirations of the people directly affected by, or concerned with the work of the various administrative agencies... in order to make the system and administration more responsive, one of the most important, though extremely difficult step should be to bring about an attitudinal change in the public servants. Their attitude has to change from the present maintenance of status quo to the welfare of people (Nwizu, 2016).
  
4. **Adherence To Rule of Law:** This means a principle of governance in which all person, institutions and entities, public and private, including the state itself are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated and which are consent with the international human rights norms and practices it means that public office holders should be subject to the laid down principles for governance. They should not act as if they are above the law and when they run short of the laws, the law should

be allowed to take it full effect on them. They should not bend the rule to accommodate their malpractices rather they should rule the bend it the society. Adherence to rule of law means when a public office holder break the law, he should be made to face the full weight of the law, and where they are found guilty, they should be sentenced.

- 5. Government Effectiveness:** By government effectiveness, we mean the ability of government to provide dividends of democracy to the people, in the form of social amenities like water, electricity, hospitals, schools, access road and other public infrastructures. Wherever this is found, good governance can be said to be in place.

### **Challenges and Prospects of Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria**

The quest for democracy and good governance has been a major pre-occupation of the Nigerian state since her independence in 1960. This aspiration has remained elusive due to many challenges, which have continued to undermine the democratization process in the country. These challenges include failure of leadership, corruption, insincerity of purpose, lack of political leadership, lack of accountability in governance, amongst others.

**Failure of leadership:** Since independence Nigeria has never had a leader that is prepared for leadership, what the country has had at best is “accidental leaders”, these are leaders whom the mantle of leadership fell on by default not minding their capacity, experience and in most cases they are neither prepared nor expectant of such huge responsibility. This issue of leadership accounts for the problem of Nigeria since independence. Most of Nigerian leaders have shown lack of commitment for true nationhood and allowed personal ambitions and ethnic, regional as well as religious persuasions to override national considerations.

**Corruption:** According to Joseph (2001) cited in Osimiri (2009), corruption has resulted in catastrophic governance in Nigeria. In view of the deleterious effect of endemic corruption on governance, various governments in the country have embarked on anti-corruption campaigns. Most of Nigerian leaders are grossly corrupt. Money made for the provision of public goods ~~is found in the pocket of private individuals. We have a situation whereby the~~

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few individuals that were privileged to find themselves in the corridors of powers are grossly richer than the entire population put together. This accounts for the decayed state of public infrastructure in Nigeria. This has remained the bane to good governance are democracy in Nigeria.

***Electoral Malpractices:*** Even though elections are gradually becoming part of the political culture in Nigeria, they are typically manipulated and hijacked by “money bags” and incumbents, who deploy all states apparatus of power and resources to ensure their re-election. Thus, elections in Nigeria are largely nothing but a charade to perpetuate the reign of the perfidious. Free and fair elections confer legitimacy on the electoral process. The wide spread electoral malpractices, which often characterize elections in Nigeria are inimical to the consolidation of democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

***Impunity:*** This is a big threat to democracy, in order to domesticate the equaling of every Nigeria before the law, the immunity clause must be expunged from the constitution. Leaders that are found to be corrupt should be punished just like an average Nigeria. Nobody is above the law, and all Nigerians must be treated as such.

***Lack of public Accountability:*** Nigeria leaders carry themselves as demi-gods that are not accountable to anyone but to themselves. This explains why they behave the way they do.

***Vested Interest:*** Nigerian leaders do not carry out policies and programmes that promote the welfare and well being of generality of Nigerians. They are concerned with their personal pockets and if the policy does not suit their interest it is avoided. Attention is not given to what the people want but what will service the interest of the members of the political cabals. This does not ensure for entrenchment of democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD**

Good governance is to democracy what blood is to human life. It is a necessary *sin qua non* for the survival of democracy. The paper has examined some of the indicators of good governance and also the key issue challenging good governance in the country. The paper ended by advancing certain

recommendations that will help to ensure good governance in our country. However, if the current civilian-democratic rule in the country will be sustained, there is serious need to ensure for good governance that will help to fast track development. To this end the following suggestion are hereby advanced.

- i. The fight against corruption must be carried out with total commitment from the political leadership backed by strong political will devoid of lip- service and rhetoric.
- ii. The political leadership should imbibe the culture of leadership by example anchored on selfless service to the people with total commitment and sacrifice. They should not see political office as means of self enrichment and personal aggrandizement.
- iii. There is need for attitudinal change through a re-branding of the country value system to promote hard work, integrity, honesty, transparency and accountability at all levels of governance people should be enlightened from their elected representatives report of their stewardship.
- iv. Election should be conducted in free, fair and transparent manner such that peoples votes count in the choice of who become their leader and
- v. The immunity clause for certain categories of politicians to the electorate even while in office.
- vi. Provision of basic social amenities should be made. Like good drinking water, access road, stable electricity among other.

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