

# TWELVE YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA AND THE IMPERATIVE FOR RAPID DEVELOPMENT: THE JOURNEY SO FAR

**Ajayi, T.**

*Political Science Department  
College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria  
E-mail: tunde\_a7@yahoo.com*

## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study was to examine critically the twelve years of democracy in Nigeria between 1999 and 2011, and the imperative for rapid development. This study is reviewed within the twelve years that Nigeria started this journey on a "neutral course" and there is a need to find out how far and well we have traversed this course. This paper shared the truth that it is never too late to make a new start, if necessary. The appeal of this work lies in the fact that this is not a foreign critique of Nigeria's democracy as the study cannot be accused of hypocrisy, conspiracy or "bad belle". This, indeed, is a patriotic assessment of the tender and genuine steps taken, so far, towards optimal democracy. This presentation would attempt to find out why the black man prefers to turn the operations of democracy upside down. Why has it continued to be difficult to organize free and fair elections in the Dark Continent? The implication is that democracy has not grown firm roots in the terrain of the upcoming generation. That is a recipe for disaster. Democracy must be made appealing to the younger generation. It is in them that the taproot of democracy must be sown. The inability to popularize democratic tenets among the youths is the greatest evidence of slow pace and inertia in our democratic quest. However, our leaders still have time to address all these shortcomings and to make a new determined start. On the part of the citizens, prayer for men and women of sterling character and spirit might be a good starting point.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1999, Nigerians have been haunted by these famous words of Sankara who himself was betrayed on the altar of democracy and paid with dear life. Nigeria stands the best chance of changing the inglorious historical notations of the black race but do our leaders possess the requisite character and spirit? Military dictatorship compounded Nigeria's problem and created more social contradictions within the polity. Just as the dictatorship was degenerating into fascism, a new man emerged on the scene who bequeathed democracy on Nigeria. As ever, there is this nagging doubt at the back of our minds: are we prepared to be better than Mugabe of Zimbabwe and can we match India or even do better than Indonesia. These are questions that many Nigerians do ask. Democracy is not just a system of government; it has become a tool of modernization and development. The democratic skills of compromise, bargaining, superior argumentation, give and take, consensus building, lobbying, bridge-building and pragmatic resolutions have become yardsticks of enlightenment, human civilization and rapid transformation of societies (Adedayo, 2000).

*Even racist philosophers have come to accept that Nature distributed intelligence evenly amongst peoples, races, colours and geography. What has not been shown to be evenly distributed is human character and spirit. In medieval and modern history, the black man has not been able to point to a remarkable accomplishment as his contribution to current civilization. Worse still is the inability of the black man to manage a system with equal dexterity and success as the caucasians. Now that Africa is adapting and accepting democracy, there is the hope that a nation in mother Africa will match the accomplishment of Canada, England and Japan, on this neutral course ( Thomas Sankara1987).*

Students from Europe, Latin America, Africa, North America and Asia appear to have agreed on the five progressive stages of democracy. It has also been proved that there are no hard and fast rules on how long it would take a nation to move from one stage to another. Byden (2007) reaffirms the fact that United States of America spent sixty years to move from Nominal Democracy to Liberal Democracy. The same journey took Britain about sixty five years. The largest democracy (India) has now reached the fourth stage of constitutional democracy, having been on the journey since 1949. In other words, it has taken India sixty two years to get to stage four, with one more stage to go.

The inference here is that the time spent on this worthy journey depends entirely on the operators of democratic government, in the various countries. However, the most salient and profound discovery is that all the nations which have chosen the path of democracy have had to go through these five progressive and undeniable stages of development. And, therein lies the major problematique for Nigeria: Can the highly expectant citizenry of this nation afford a sixty year wait before enjoying the dividends of liberal democracy? Do we have to make and repeat the mistakes of other nations even when the Nigerian political elite know what must and should be put in place for each stage, as consolidatory steps for democracy?

Above all, can Nigeria as a nation-state survive the kind of Middle East peoples' revolution from the youths if tolerance changes to restiveness and restiveness changes to agitation and agitation changes to confrontation?. This paper does not attempt to define democracy along any classical theoretical line, rather, would explain the term from the perspective of association and operational modes of attachment. By doing so, it avoids the contentions and controversies currently surrounding the real definition of democracy. By explaining instead of defining, it also has the unique advantage of not committing itself to an existing theory or paradigm of political science.

#### **DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC RULE IN NIGERIA**

For the purpose of this work, we associate democracy with civilian government; a government based on the practice of struggle between political parties for the capture of the instruments of political power within a nation-state. In this context, the essential aspects of democracy include political parties, professional politicians, electoral bodies, voting exercise, adult suffrage and mechanisms to resolve electoral disputes (Akintola, 2010).

Since the French Revolution of 1789 and especially the Industrial Revolution of Europe in the 19th century, profound and significant changes have occurred in the concept and practice of democracy. The exploratory and exploitative visits of the Europeans to Africa with the resultant colonization of the continent also brought additional changes to the practice of democracy. Over the years, five distinct phases have been identified as progressive, undeniable and unavoidable stages which democracy traverses. History further affirms that no nation has jumped over or avoided any or some of the phases:

- (a) Nominal Democracy
- (b) Ritualized Voters' Democracy
- (c) Transformative Economic Democracy
- (d) Constitutional Democracy
- (e) Liberal Democracy

As tutors and students, there is the need to fully grasp the essential differences in the various phases and stages because of the inherent interpretative responsibilities which fall on the shoulders of professional politicians, political analysts, lawmakers and power elites of different nations (Claver, 2009). Besides, it is when we understand the dynamics of each stage that we can be both sympathetic and patient with the slow pace of democratic governance and intrigues. It is also then that we can understand what to prescribe to hasten the slow process, especially in Nigeria.

The first stage refers to democracy in its infancy. The practice is more nominal than real in that what is celebrated is essentially the transfer of power from one hegemonic block to a new one. In Nigeria, the eight years of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) represented *nominal democracy*. Under him, democracy was more by name than by practice and the general happiness of the people had more to do with the departure of the military than with a novel practice of democracy.

The second stage is often referred to as *ritualized democracy* when voters go through the obligatory ritual of registration, listening to campaigns of candidates, actual voting, swearing in of elected persons and celebrations of popular successful choices. In some countries, this second stage of voters' democracy could go on for decades. The only time when you see a semblance of democracy in action is during the often flawed process of electioneering and voting. As soon as the moment of voting is over, democracy also abates, awaiting the next four years for a repeat of the "democratic ritual".

The third stage of *transformative economic democracy* usually describes the period of public concern for economic growth and transformation of the society. History tells us that even the most despicable politicians, at this stage, become obsessed with the need to give financial and material returns to the investment of the people. This is the stage for the pursuit of what we glibly call the dividends of democracy, in Nigeria. And truly, democracy is the investment of the people while economic growth should be seen as the returns on such investment. At this stage, democracy is usually more pre-occupied with linkages to the international capitalist system and the

development of intra national structures to promote and support the envisaged economic transformation of the society. The fourth stage of democracy is the phase of *testing the limits and elasticity of the democratic provisions* as enshrined in the statutes and the all important constitution (Birai, 2007). Naturally, the general level of awareness is high enough for both institutions and persons to pursue individual rights and collective liberty. Many scholars refer to this phase as the trial of the judiciary in democracy; and the gains which are won are also regarded as the contributions of jurisprudence to democratic growth (Damlong, 2009). At this stage, one often hears or reads of people taking their governments to court for the pursuit of rights and/or damages. This phase entails the use of legal frameworks to determine rights, obligations and justiceable provisions of the constitution. States may sue states while local government councils may pursue cases in the courts against the central authority and its agencies.

The highest stage of democracy, as of today, is what we call *liberal democracy*. This stage is characterized by the high empowerment of the civil society and high visibility of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The presence and influence of pressure groups and lobbyists are also visibly manifest in a liberal democracy. At this stage, governmental attention and observance of human rights are not cosmetic but sincere and real. Citizenship rights are protected within and outside the boundaries of states while the protective arm of the nation follows the citizens everywhere he/she goes.

#### **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FIVE STAGES**

Some scholars say that Nigeria has remained rooted at the Nominal stage of democracy while a few grudgingly say that Nigeria moved slightly to the ritualized voters' democracy in 2007, nine years after the journey began. People like Professor C. Ogbu are adamant that basic requirements for the first stage have not been met and so Nigeria cannot claim to have moved or migrated to the second stage (Ogbu, 2007). Indeed, four basic steps must be taken at the nominal stage of democracy before any nation can rightfully claim to move ahead:

- (a) Use of new laws to seriously discourage future hijack of government.
- (b) Use of propaganda and serious campaigns to popularize democracy amongst the masses.
- (c) Some necessary punitive measures against those who had seized power, in the past, through unconstitutional means.
- (d) Coordinated intellectual efforts to demystify dictatorship and others who usurped power illegitimately.

In the twelve and a half years of democracy in Nigeria, how many of these four basic steps have been taken? The 1999 constitution forbids the seizure of power through military coups or any other method not in accordance with law but it was only the amendment of the constitution that fully and finally made necessary adjustments in Chapters 1 under the General Provisions, Part 1, articles 4, 5 and 6. It is in the

amended version of the 1999 constitution that spelt out punitive measures against people taking over government through unconstitutional means. The attempt of the House of Representatives to stop payment of gratuity and maintenance to former military Heads of State did not succeed in the joint National Assembly but it sent necessary messages to coup planners. As of 2011, there is no agency established to promote the tenets of democracy or to ensure its appeal to younger generations. As for item (d) above, the opposite seems to be more the case. As recent as 2010, Prof. Sam Oyovbaire, together with ten other academics, produced a book which rubbished the accomplishments of Obasanjo's eight years as democratic president and glorified Babangida's achievements of seven years as a dictator. The major inference from the foregoing is simple and saddening. Nigeria has not dealt with the basic issues associated with nominal democracy, to allow her move fully into the next stage of democratic development. It is therefore not surprising that some people are already hoping and calling for military intervention again!

For a nation desirous of progress and economic transformation, Nigeria should not waste time on the second stage of periodic ritualized voters' democracy. The two requirements of this stage are not difficult to implement, provided we are lucky to have an enlightened, educated and responsive leadership. The federal and state governments must ensure the establishment of efficient, impartial and transparent electoral organs for both federal and state elections. Such organs must be assisted with modern scientific gadgets to make voting and counting error-free. The state of global science has gone beyond mere voting, where rigging and other forms of public disenfranchisement are allowed to fester. There are machines that count currencies and discover fake notes at the same time. The second condition to enable us quickly leave this stage of periodic democracy is to simply de-emphasise the parade and pomp that accompany voting. We must learn to treat election like an everyday affair, a simple citizen's obligation- just like helping the police with information.

For now, too much attention and focus are given to our electioneering process, making it look like a national celebration or a religious festival. The moment Nigerians start seeing it as a mere perfunctory duty, then, that would be the signal that Nigeria is ready for the 3rd stage of democracy. As noted earlier, the third stage of democracy is the phase for citizens to physically receive and see the reward of their investment in democracy. It is already established that democracy has the capacity to guarantee social harmony and resolve societal contradictions. It is at this third stage that democracy is expected to put more money and comfort into the hands and lives of the people. This stage takes careful planning and demands new structural and infrastructural realignments. To make success of this stage, Black (2000) enumerates four essentials for democracies in the developing world:

- (a) Choice of one or two developed countries for robust collaborative friendships that can translate into investment and partnerships;
- (b) Overcoming deficiencies in power, transportation and distributive trade mechanism,

- (c) Simplifying investment laws and other fiscal mechanisms related to immigration, customs and currency management,
- (d) Modernization of land laws to ensure easy access to land acquisition.

Ideally, the third national assembly should have started work on these four essentials but the misfortune of Nigeria is that the composition of the 3rd national assembly was the weakest in terms of comparative education index, hardwork, office attendance and even, passage of bills (Africa Watch, 2008)

For Nigeria, the terms are clear to attract foreign investment and create financial opportunities for the people, all you need do is simplify your laws on land, work on your investment policies and get your act right on distributive trade which solely depends on good network of roads, rails and air transport, together with adequate power generation. The twelve years of the Senate and the House of Representatives have not addressed any of the four indices of Prof. C.E. Black. It is as if the operators of our democracy are utterly ignorant, completely slothful or absolutely unmindful of time. It is almost certain that Nigeria would waste another ten to fifteen years on the third step of democracy, when we eventually get there.

For Nigerians to enjoy the benefits of constitutional democracy, certain things must be in place and it is only when those conditions are in place that the nation can swiftly transit to the final stage of liberal democracy. This much was roundly debated and agreed upon by the Clement Ebri Presidential Committee on the Review of the 1999 constitution. Amongst other things, the panel noted that:

*the control of the federal government over judicial institutions and appointments in the state is rather excessive...The committee agrees with the need to decentralize judicial powers so that State High Courts shall exercise concurrent jurisdiction with Federal High Courts... An independent, impartial, courageous and innovative judiciary is a sine qua non for the growth and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.*

#### **REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE ON 1999 CONSTITUTION**

From both within and without, scholars have agreed on the three conditions necessary for the attainment and enjoyment of constitutional democracy. These three conditions are also pre-requisite for the stage of liberal democracy as well as a spiritual empowerment for individuals to pursue their rights to human dignity. Today, in Nigeria, senior sensitive appointments within the judiciary are handled by eighteen persons and representatives from six bodies. How appalling! For Nigerians to reach the fourth phase of democracy, the following conditions must be in place:

- (i) A review of the process of appointing judges. The system must be such that only brave, bold, courageous people with a history or track record of impartiality make the bench.
- (ii) Redesignation and creation of more courts to avoid overlapping functions and reduce time wastage in the pursuit of reliefs from courts
- (iii) Creation of Constitutional Courts and Special Courts for Corruption and Financial Crimes

- (iv) Reduction in court and ancillary charges to enable the common man enjoy the services of adjudication.

In the U.S.A., every appointment into the Appeal Court or Supreme Court either at the state level or at the federal level is subject to intense search from the Houses of Assembly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Press. The judiciary needs transparency to enable it commit to fairness and impartiality (Roger Hanson, 1996). Indeed, even now, it is not too early for the operators of our democracy to start working on putting these conditions in place so as to fast track quicker arrival at and attainment of constitutional democracy in Nigeria. For twelve years, our political system appears to have been dominated by people of low foresight, barely literate and totally uncommitted to a future plan other than selfish designs. The political elite, cutting across political parties and cutting across geo-political divisions must come together to agree on the necessary path of democracy. They need to consciously cut down on the number of years which each phase should take Nigeria.

Many of the indices required for Liberal democracy in Nigeria are already coming up. There is a vast network of Non-Governmental Organizations, covering various aspects of human endeavour, in Nigeria. They are so many today that some of them even appear to be comical and almost alien to our society. However, the gradual empowerment of the civil society is an on-going concern as the various governments at state, local and federal levels still distrust the Human Rights Groups. Yet, there is no denying the fact that lobbyists, human rights agitators, NGOs, and a revitalized civil society would play pivotal role in the final stage of democracy. In addition to an enlightened civil society is the rigorous training and effective police force to deliver social justice.

The two highest stages of democracy must help the Police to overcome its negative history. It is true that the Police Force was established by the colonial masters as protectors of foreign interest, to bully local people asking telling questions and as a force of oppression. Not much has changed. The long years of military rule further dented and devastated police image as the relationship between her and the military was essentially an unequal relationship where some few police men may have gained but the police establishment lost heavily in that the soldiers could not allow the police to develop materially, infrastructurally or even operationally, for fear of becoming a counter force to the military. Up till date, the Police Force is still more accusatory and less investigative; they tend to be confirmatory of the Executives' position, hostile to the people, distrustful of any individual with a sense of independence, intimidatory of discerning minds and thus, progressively alienated from the civil populace. Democratic structures must assist the Police because the enjoyment of benefits of constitutional democracy and liberal democracy stage is related to the good performance of the police role.

### COMPARATIVE NOTES ON SOME NATIONS' DEMOCRACY

It may have taken U.S.A and Britain sixty years or more before they arrived at liberal democracy, but, we are gladdened about the democratic experiment and experience in Far East Asia of Thailand and Indonesia and the current development in China. It may be true that there is no escaping any stage, but we now know that when democracy is applied with intelligence, the time for transition gets shortened. Indonesia spent just about thirty five (35) years to attain its inclusion into the developed, transformed economies of the capitalist world. Japan did not have to go through all the rigmarole of Canada or France before arriving at the summit of the ladder of development. By 1990, Japan had become an industrialized nation with just forty five (45) years of democratic practice after the Second World War. This achievement was not just based on the Marshal Plan but on the sensible and intelligent moderation of the forces of politics and economy, supplied by the Japanese themselves. They were in a hurry to leave the feudal agrarian stage of development behind and quickly move into the uppermost echelon of developed countries. An informed and cohesive Japanese leadership pushed the people and society to the fast track of democratic development by providing ample structures for the various phases of democratization. Turkey is today knocking on the doors of a new label as a developed nation in spite of less than forty (40) years on the road of European democracy.

In 1979, Turkey abandoned all oriental systems of government and opted for guided European democracy. Within thirty years, the G.D.P. of Turkey reached 280 percent, representing an average of 9.3 percent for each year between 1979 and 2009. There is the tendency to think that India's progress was slow compared to other democracies, but, that may not be the entire truth especially when one remembers that for the first fourteen years, India was virtually at war with the neighbours brutally carved out of India by Britain, that is, Pakistan and Nepal. The next thirty years marked the period of acute shortage when virtually the whole world donated food and relief materials to the 1.3 billion people of India. Indeed, if one takes 1985 as the commencement year of India, then, all scholars would be pleasantly surprised at the meteoric rise and phenomenal growth of India in less than thirty years.

Today, India is self-sufficient in food production, a manufacturer of vehicles and trucks, with an economy that is growing at more than eight percent annually and with a rail-system that is the envy of the entire planet. China, however, posts the most bewildering story. Her story is a classical showcase in man and resource management. Officially, China came into direct contact with democracy when in 1989, Hong Kong was returned to Mainland China after 150 years of cession to Britain. Even today, only two regions (out of eight) are allowed to try democracy but the results have been absolutely wonderful. China has become the major power, in waiting. The transformation of Shengzhou and Shanghai is amazing and bordering on miraculous. The entire nation is benefiting from the experiment and China is becoming the biggest trading outpost of the world, in the modern era (twenty four times larger than the exploits of Dubai) Infact, China is slowly but meticulously preparing for the take-

over from U.S.A. as the most productive nation of the world. Given its population and the work ethos of the Chinese, the wait may not be too long. What we have tried to show in this section is that the journey of democratic development has varied from nation to nation. Even U.S.A. and Britain did not spend the same time on the trip. The Asian countries, through guidance and strong political will, have been able to shorten the time. Nigeria cannot afford the delay or rigmarole with democracy, as being witnessed today. The political elite in Nigeria and the operators of democratic governance have been dancing on the same step for the past twelve years. It does appear, and very strongly so, that we do not have a "guiding group" for this democracy.

There must be road-maps prepared by a strong amorphous intelligentsia to show how long we should spend on each step. Such an angelic "guiding group" would dictate to parties and organs what should be in place from time to time. In the absence of such a group, the dance with democracy becomes a rigmarole of questionable viability. The good thing is that the experiences of other nations and the historical knowledge of democracy had detailed for us the various steps we need to take, starting from propaganda work to judicial reforms to legal restructuring for land and commerce. The necessity to overhaul our federal structures and the need to transform the Nigeria Police Force into a peoples' force are issues that are not just desirable but extremely compelling, if the nation would excel.

The empowerment of the civil society and the creation of a workable environment for other pressure groups should take the attention of our political elites immediately. Nigeria needs more courts and many new innovations in the judicial system as she cannot enter the third phase of democracy with the current pallous conditions of the judiciary. The foreign policy imperatives of Nigeria must now include serious and robust cultivation of the developed nations and the growing markets in Africa and Asia. We must attract foreign investment from non-oil sectors based on mutually beneficial collaboration between Nigeria and other friendly nations. Such an enterprise would require rapid expansion of the middle class through superb education, improved salaries and programme exposure of Nigerians to other nations and cultures. Nigeria stands to gain a lot from the highly technologically advanced countries willing to invest in Nigeria.

Power generation and supply, transportation and agriculture must be given priority if democracy is to work properly in Nigeria. The establishment of a formidable Think-Tank to guide and moderate this nascent democracy cannot be over-emphasised. We stand to argue that democracy cannot be left to the whims and caprices of the professional politician whose sole interest is to capture the rein of power for self aggrandizement. Democracy is not just a tool of governance or a mere method of rulership in the hands of civilians. Democracy has been used in other nations as a firm implement of socio-economic and political transformation of the society. In moving from one stage of democracy to the other, the energy and synergy of the system can be used to propel a wise country to the doorstep of economic growth, industrial expansion, social transformation and technological advancement. The process could

take time but time cost is directly in the hands of political leadership. The argument here is that Nigeria's movement from step 1 to step 5 should not take another seventy years, given our knowledge of and familiarity with the operation of democracy in other lands.

### CONCLUDING REMARK

Nigeria has spent twelve years basking in the delusive euphoria of nominal democracy. Even at that, some consolidative steps expected of us, in this first stage of democracy, have not been taken. Nigeria cannot afford to spend another twelve years on step two of democracy otherwise we risk a popular uprising that may be more vicious than the Libyan and Egyptian samples under Gadaffi and Mubarak, respectively. Nigeria needs a guided democracy, supervised subterraneously by a progressive intelligentsia that would quickly take the country from one stage to another, with resounding success.

Malaysia, Indonesia and Nigeria should ideally be on the same platform. In fact, Nigeria had better resources, superior manpower and better population than these countries, at the initial stages. These other nations were however, able to produce superb leaderships with better spirits and greater determination than Nigeria. The introduction of civilian democracy in 1999 presented Nigeria with yet another opportunity to catch up with the rest of the world. But, shall the political leadership rise up to this challenge or, once again, start a dance of rigmarole with democracy? The next several years would be decisive. We are yet to see the young ones making use of the skills of democracy to settle disputes, address difficult situations or berate those calling for change of government.

The implication is that democracy has not grown firm roots in the terrain of the upcoming generation. That is a recipe for disaster. Democracy must be made appealing to the younger generation. It is in them that the taproot of democracy must be sown. In their daily lives, the young ones must be taught how to build bridges of social understanding, the advantages of compromise and consensual relationships etc.etc. The inability to popularize democratic tenets among the youths is the greatest evidence of slow pace and inertia in our democratic quest. However, our leaders still have time to address all these shortcomings and to make a new determined start. On the part of the citizens, prayer for men and women of sterling character and spirit might be a good starting point.

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