

The Fragility Of Nigerian Democracy And Elite Politics: Institutional Weaknesses, Political Economy And Prospects For Consolidation

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Abstract

Nigeria's democracy is deeply rooted in a long history of shifts between military and civilian rule, a cycle that has brought about both hope and disappointment. Democratic expectations have remained high since civilian rule was restored in 1999, but old patterns of elite dominance, patronage politics, ethno-religious mobilization, weak institutions, and an over-centralized federal structure continue to influence political life. Public institutions struggle under the burden of politicization, elections often elicit more mistrust than confidence, and many citizens still choose their leaders based on religious or ethnic cues. This study employs elite theory to examine how a small group of bureaucratic, military, political, and economic elites continues to influence Nigeria's democracy, often at the expense of the general populace. The paper examines flaws in political parties, the judiciary, electoral management, and the broader political economy, utilizing secondary data and content analysis. Additionally, it draws comparisons between Nigeria and Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa in order to learn from situations where democracy has taken root more firmly due to stronger institutions, civic engagement, and credible elections. The study argues that deeper structural issues, such as rentier politics, institutional weakness, an over-centralized federal system, and elite capture, are more significant contributors to Nigeria's democratic fragility than faulty elections alone. The study recommends enhancing democratic norms, fortifying electoral institutions, independent judicial procedures, inclusive economic policies, accountable political leadership, and efficient reactions to insecurity as ways to address these issues. Ultimately, the study concludes that Nigerian democracy won't progress until public institutions gain the confidence of the populace, leaders accept responsibility, and political power is no longer concentrated in small elite groups.

Keywords: Democracy, Elite Dominance, Elite Politics, Participation, Power.

Introduction

Nigeria has maintained its position as Africa's potential leading democracy since gaining

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independence in 1960. The country's large population, abundant natural resources, and diverse cultural heritage led many to expect it would establish democratic leadership across Africa. The promise of democratic leadership in Nigeria remains uncertain after more than sixty years of independence. The Fourth Republic, established in 1999 as Nigeria's longest democratic period, faces ongoing challenges because of institutional weaknesses and public distrust in its institutions (Suberu, 2016; Omotola, 2011).

The Fourth Republic, established in 1999 after military rule, has so far become Nigeria's longest-running democratic period. The ongoing electoral irregularities and widespread corruption, security threats, and inadequate governance systems make people question the stability and permanence of the democratic system (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Campbell, 2020). The political history of the state created fundamental issues that continue to affect the nation. The First Republic's collapse in 1966, followed by multiple decades of authoritarian rule resulted in weak institutions and a society that ignores the law. The current civilian government of the republic maintains similar patterns of clientelism and ethnic politics and elite control despite holding democratic elections (Ibeanu, 2007).

The rentier system has become entrenched because of oil dependence which allows politicians to use their office for financial gain and protects them from accountability and perpetuates corruption (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). The Nigerian democratic system has demonstrated its ability to endure despite these challenges. The peaceful transfer of power during the 2015 and 2023 elections demonstrates that Nigerians are increasingly embracing competitive political processes (Bekoe, 2011; EU EOM, 2023). The democratic space has expanded through civil society activism and independent media, and youth-led movements such as #EndSARS, which challenge elite power and advocate for institutional changes. (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010). All together, these trends highlight that while troubled, Nigeria's democracy is not stagnant.

Nigeria is an important test case of democracy in complex, resource-dependent, multiethnic states. The historical foundations of democratic struggles, institutional and governance shortcomings, and the socioeconomic and security factors influencing participation are all covered in this paper, which uses a political economy lens to analyze Nigeria's democratic trajectory. The study therefore aims to: examine how elite politics, rentier dynamics, and institutional weaknesses shape democratic outcomes; assess the extent to which socioeconomic and security conditions influence citizen participation and trust in democratic institutions; and explore the prospects for building a more inclusive, accountable, and resilient democratic order. It also poses the question: Why, in spite of numerous transitions, has democracy remained fragile? In what ways are economic, structural, and institutional factors limiting it? What are the prospects for an order that is more inclusive, accountable, and resilient? By tackling these problems, the paper contributes to debates on democratic consolidation in Africa and the global south.

Conceptual Review

Democracy: Democracy remains perhaps the most widely invoked yet deeply contested concept in political science. At its core, democracy denotes the system of governance in which political authority stems from the consent of the governed, usually expressed through periodic elections, respect for civil liberties, and institutional checks on power. Classical theorists like Schumpeter frame democracy procedurally: a method for

picking leaders through competitive elections. In contrast, Dahl's notion of polyarchy focuses not just on elections but on inclusive participation, civil liberties, and institutional pluralism.

The meaning of democracy in contemporary African politics is further textured by the legacies of military rule, authoritarianism, and state fragility. Democracy, in these contexts, is often imagined as both a political process—that is, elections, party competition, constitutionalism—and a developmental aspiration characterized by accountability, transparency, and social justice. Democracy may work "electorally" yet fail to be substantively democratic—a condition reflected in circumstances where elections are held, but institutions remain weak, corruption is rampant, or citizens have little impact on policy decisions.

Therefore, democracy in Nigeria is better conceptualized not as a finished model but as an ongoing negotiation between formal institutions and entrenched informal practices.

Elite Politics: Elite politics is the patterns of power, influence, and decision exercised by a relatively small group of people occupying strategic positions in society. The classical elite theorists Pareto, Mosca, and Michels postulate that every society is divided between a minority of rulers, the elite, and a majority of ruled, the masses. These elites control the major levers of political, economic, military, and bureaucratic authority.

In contemporary political science, elite politics refers to: Political elites include elected officials, party leaders. Economic elites, business magnates, and rent-seeking networks. Military and security elites. Bureaucratic elites. Traditional, religious and technocratic elites

Elite theory would, therefore, maintain that democratic systems only rotate, regulate, or mask elite rule, but do not eradicate it. Even in electoral democracies, power tends to circulate within narrow elite circles through patronage networks, godfatherism, identity-based mobilization, and control of state resources.

The historical development of elite politics in Nigeria is embedded in legacies of colonial administrative heritage, military incursion into politics, oil rents, and ethnoregional competition to consolidate power among leading actors in the decision over electoral outcomes, policy priorities, and political institutions. Thus, elite politics often embodies a serious constraint on democratic deepening and produces what scholars term elite capture, or the appropriation of public institutions for private or sectional interests.

Relationship Between Democracy and Elite Politics

Democracy and elite politics exist in a persistent tension. While democracy aspires to broaden participation and enhance accountability, elite politics narrows decision-making and reinforces hierarchy. This is precisely the contradiction that can be seen in Nigeria: formal democratic institutions have been expanded since 1999, yet elite networks continue to dominate candidate selection, resource distribution, and public policy. Thus, democratic consolidation depends not only on holding elections but also on transforming the structure of elite power and expanding meaningful civic participation.

Historical Context of Democracy in Nigeria

The beginning of the democratic issues of Nigeria is traced back to its colonial past, the British colonial rule established the bases of modern-day governance in Nigeria but did so in ways that accorded significant value to control, centralization, and indirect rule at the detriment of genuine democratic participation (Coleman, 1958; Ake, 1996). Ethnic cleavages were reinforced by administrative boundaries and policy discrimination in favor of some groups versus others, sowing seeds of suspicion and rivalry that would later have an impact on post-independence politics (Osaghae, 1998). Colonial domination also left behind weak institutions, built to tap resources as opposed to nurturing broad political participation, and a tradition of politics whereby ethnic or regional identity typically trumped national identity (Young, 1994).

When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, it carried on its colonial legacy by adopting the Westminster model of parliamentary government. But even post-colonial politics soon became dominated by ethnic and regional conflict. As a result of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) being close to regional blocs, Nigeria's political system became more competitive and focused on ethnic and regional division than on national integration (Suberu, 2001). The military coup and the fall of the First Republic in 1966 were the consequence of further strained relations brought on by disagreements over census data and electoral manipulation (Diamond, 1988).

The subsequent military era radically reshaped Nigeria's political trajectory. From 1966 to 1999, and only briefly intermitted by civilian rule, the military held sway. Military rulers veiled their coups in terms of reestablishing order but actually entrenched authoritarianism, delegitimized democratic institutions, and centralized power in the executive (Joseph, 1987). The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) more generally eroded trust in the state, as ethnic and regional affiliations hardened in the face of deadly violence.

Nigeria's democratic institutions were shown to be weak by the failed Second Republic (1979–1983) and Third Republic (1993, abortive) attempts at transition. A coup d'etat overthrew President Shehu Shagari's Second Republic, which suffered from corruption, election manipulation, and incompetent economic management. The 1993 elections, which were largely considered the freest elections ever conducted in Nigeria and which Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola won, were annulled. This was a clear indication of the entrenched elites' desperation to transfer power via the democratic process (Adekson, 2004).

The transition back to civilian governance in 1999 ushered in the Fourth Republic, which continues to reign supreme today. The experiment of democracy was greeted with optimism, fueled by the adoption of a new constitution and assurances of reforms. Nevertheless, most of the colonial and military rule institutional inheritances of structural contexts like centralized federalism, oil rentier economy, and superficial institutional restraints of executive authority lingered (Suberu & Diamond, 2002).

Elections remained marred by fraud, violence, and elite manipulation, although civil society and the judiciary achieved some small victories in establishing their ideal position. Therefore, the historical record suggests that Nigeria's democratic deficiencies are not new but also the product of decades of authoritarianism, colonialism, and post-independence decline. In the Fourth Republic, where there are institutionalized democratic patterns with fragile cohabitation with identity politics, patronage groups, and hegemonic elites, such tendencies continue to define the nature of democratic practice.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the analysis is based on elite theory in examining the challenges and prospects of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic from 1999 to 2019. The elite theory, as popularized by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Roberto Michels, among others, no doubt explains the Nigeria electoral process. The elite theory is propounded on the premise that society is composed of two broad categories, namely: the leaders, otherwise described as “the selected few, who are capable and therefore, have the right to supreme leadership”, and the followers, which consist of “the vast masses of people who are destined to be ruled”. It is however, important to emphasize the various forms of elite. etc. These include bureaucratic elites, religious elites, military elites, traditional elites, etc.

It is also important to state that elitist classifications are not mutually exclusive in the sense that an individual elite can fall within more than one classification; such classification also varies from time to time. For instance, the military elite during a military regime could also be qualifying as a political elite, especially when they are involved in the authoritative allocation of state resources (Pareto 1991). Dye, in his book “Irony of Democracy,” explains that elites are the few who have power, and the masses are the many who do not. Power is deciding who gets what, when, and how, it is participation in the decisions that shapes our lives. The masses are the many whose lives are shaped by institutions, events, and leaders over which they have little direct control (Dye 2003)

Looking at it from the above point of view, it is evident that the elites are those with power (economic, political, intellectual, strength, etc.) and are in leadership positions, while the masses are the majority who have no choice but to follow. Harold Lasswell, the great political scientist, puts it in this form:

The division of society into elite and mass is universal and even in a democracy; a few exercises, a relatively comparative little (Lasswell in Dye 2003). From this, it is clear that power is held in trust by the few for the masses. This indeed is the irony of democracy. The Italian Political Scientist Gaetano Mosca expressed his view of the central idea of the concept of elitism thus:

In all societies... from societies that are underdeveloped and have largely attained the dawning of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies- two classes of people appear, a class that rules and a class, always the less numerous, performs all the political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is more brutal and violent (Mosca in Dye 2003).

This view embraces all the attributes of the elite in a democracy. It is the elites and not the masses who control the national resources, governmental political power, economic power, the best education, and skills. They are the ones who have access to information and means of communication. They are the ones who are gainfully employed in well-paid jobs and businesses. They are the ones with the golden spoons in their hands and mouths. The Nigerian elites are what can be said to be a fraud on democracy, as they seem to stand against all that democracy stands for, the utmost happiness for all, etc. They have become the necessary evil that Nigerian democracy cannot do without because the success of any democracy rests on the shoulders of the “elite”, for they direct and formulate its strategy.

The choice of the elite theory is informed by the fact that Nigeria’s independence

was an elitist independence, and its democratic process has an elitist approach. In addition to this is the fact that all problems being encountered in Nigeria's experiment with democracy have the semblance of emanating from the elites. This is because the masses of Nigeria are wallowing in abject poverty and are so disunited to form any "formidable mass" to effect any tangible change.

Key Issues in Nigeria's Democratic Process

Nigeria's democracy is compromised by the institutions designed with the sole purpose of consolidating it. INEC, in order to organize elections, is under the administrative and financial control of the executive, and therefore, its neutrality cannot be trusted. The judiciary likewise is politicized for the bulk of the time, while political parties are not intraparty democratic but godfather-and-patronage over-dependent in candidate selection (Suberu, 2019; Omotola, 2010). These are the loopholes that likewise undermine confidence and stifle democratic consolidation.

1. **Election Malpractice:** Elections are the lifeblood of democracy in Nigeria, but continue to be bedeviled with credibility issues. Violence during elections, snatching of ballot boxes, and voter intimidation continue unchecked despite innovations such as biometric registration of voters and electronic transmission of results (EU Election Observation Mission, 2019). Security personnel hired to protect elections who have a mandate to do so are themselves sometimes victims of intimidation or discriminatory prosecution. This clogs the courts with a sea of post-election lawsuits and drains the credibility of governments (Ibrahim & Egwu, 2015).
2. **Corruption:** Corruption erodes democracy by way of decline in governance and disillusionment. Nigeria is ranked as one of the corrupt countries annually by Transparency International (Transparency International, 2022). Elite impunity and clientelism are supported by abuse of oil wealth (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). Corruption swallows up public institutions, dismantling accountability and deepening the gap between citizens and the government.
3. **Religious Divide:** Differences in religion are such cleavages that threaten a perilous threat to Nigeria's democracy. Electoral politics is primarily characterized by ethnic and regional identity, with regional competition for federal power (Mustapha, 2006). Religious polarization brings political conflict, especially in the Middle Belt and northern states, where Christian-Muslim violence is combined with governance issues. Secessionist tensions, such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and militancy in the Niger Delta, illustrate how strained ethno-political alignments along identity bases can weaken democratic consolidation (Akinola, 2017).
4. **Civil Society and Media:** Media and civil society are the fulcrum of Nigeria's marred democracy. Civil society organizations like the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) exert pressure through monitoring elections and demonstrations. Social media also acts as an effective mobilization tool, such as during the 2020 #EndSARS protests, but it also becomes subject to fake information and state surveillance (Iwilade, 2021). There are still various traditional media that shape public opinion, but are owned by the elite and are therefore a weaker check on the government.
5. **External Forces:** Nigerian democracy is vulnerable to external forces. External

monitoring of elections and foreign pressure through the use of foreign aid elicits reform, yet loan terms and generosity of donor benevolence are at times contradictory to home politics (Abrahamsen, 2000). Globalization opened Nigerian markets but confines policy space, which has the potential to drive governments in the direction of international economic norms rather than democratically implemented change supported by local interests (Rodrik, 2018).

These, in aggregate, indicate the vulnerabilities of Nigeria's democratic process. The Institutions remain fragile, and the government remains rotten. Socio-economic and ethno-religious cleavages remain profound and are further destabilizing. Democratic deepening is aided by external actors and civil society, but insecurity and structural inequality are eroding dangers to democratic consolidation.

Current Political Landscape in Nigeria

Nigeria's democracy has evolved into a few-party competitive system with a few large parties, and the 2023 election saw institutional resilience but deficiencies in electoral credibility, party discipline, and judicial independence. Politics is characterized by big-party competition, swing elections, and the judiciary in conflict resolution.

1. **Major Political Parties:** Nigerian politics are dominated by weakly institutionalized parties, the PDP and APC in the major, which are bargaining and patronage elite platforms rather than ideologically driven (Salih, 2019; Omotola, 2009). The parties are divided and structurally divided and are not homogeneous (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006). Despite the rise in the power of small parties like the Labour Party in 2023, economic and institutional factors bar them from venturing into business (INEC, 2023; Suberu, 2023).

This multi-party change is both a measure of Nigeria's democracy's health and fragility since political parties are competitive and vibrant but weakly institutionalized, and patronage- and personality-motivated instead of ideologically motivated.

2. **Electoral Processes:** Electoral management is enhanced in some places, such as biometric accreditation of voters and electronic transmission of results, but problems of a serious nature continue to detract from credibility. Selling of votes, coercion, and functional inadequacies are the order of the day, and fairness issues are created (Bekoe, 2011; Nwokedi, 2022). INEC's credibility and neutrality are generally questioned despite efforts to be more open, especially in high-stakes national elections (Adebayo, 2021). The 2023 elections ushered in technological innovation alongside the ever-present issues of trust, inclusiveness, and credibility (INEC, 2023).

The 2023 elections were characterized by both forward and backward steps in that election turnout was low (around 27%), youth mobilization was unprecedented, and results transparency was bitterly contested. Nigeria's electoral process is therefore stuck in reformist aspiration versus obstinate structural shortcomings.

3. **Role of the Judiciary:** The judiciary's role is to settle election-related disputes, but its objectivity is being called into question more and more. Election decisions are frequently made by the judiciary, raising questions about judicial politicization and electoral integrity (Nwangwu & Onuoha, 2020). Public trust in its impartiality has been damaged by executive meddling, allegations of corruption, and unbalanced rulings (Obi, 2018; Aiyede, 2021). Controversial decisions have raised concerns about whether the judiciary upholds democracy

or supports elite dominance, especially during presidential elections (Oko, 2019). One persistent obstacle to Nigeria's democratic development has been judicial independence.

attention when opposition parties approached the outcome of the presidential election in a petition. The ruling of the courts on such matters continues to enlighten the public on whether or not Nigeria's democracy is premised on the rule of law or maintained by elite bargains.

The Political Economy of Nigerian Democracy

Democracy in Nigeria is influenced by its extreme dependence on oil, which has been responsible for more than 80% of government revenue and upwards of 90% of foreign exchange earnings since the 1970s (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). This reliance has resulted in the “resource curse,” according to which oil rent generates volatility, corruption and frail institutions, rather than sustainable development (Karl, 1997). Fiscal control has been monopolised by governments that spend oil rents primarily on the distribution of wealth to political elites, and less for investment in productive sectors, making states more accountable first and foremost to oil rents rather than their citizens, constituting a threat to democratic governance (Watts 2004).

Patronage networks flourish in such an oil-based arrangement, where political support is incentivised by the distribution of state resources, contracts and jobs (Joseph, 1987). Political parties are far more likely to be concerned with capturing state rents than policy development, perpetuating prebendalism and transforming elections into competitions over oil revenues rather than accountability (Lewis 2007). This rent-seeking behaviour has seeped into state institutions as well as social relations, undermining democracy.

The relationship between state capacity, governance and democracy points to the delicate experiment that is Nigeria's attempt at democratic rule. Rent-seeking undermines institutions, and if protracted, will undermine the state's capacity to provide public goods and security, as well as shake citizens' faith in democracy (Suberu 2019). The potential for social pressure to serve as a challenge to patronage networks, as demonstrated by movements such as #EndSARS (Iwilade, 2021), however, remains massive, but elite domination and popular demands coalesce in Nigeria's democratic path. Through comparisons with other resource-rich democracies, including Botswana and Ghana, it is clear that institutional strength and transparency are essential to avoid a resource curse. Nigeria, on the other hand, boasts fragmented institutions and deep-seated prebendal practices which enable oil wealth to finance authoritarian-leaning propensities; they seem not at all that certain a condition after all, but depend largely on institutional arrangements alongside accountability mechanisms.

Prospects for Strengthening Democracy

The future of Nigeria's democratic consolidation hangs in the balance on the extent to which state and society can overcome endemic institutional frailties and socio-political challenges. Notwithstanding the fact that the country has solidified corruption, rigging of elections, and elite capture, there exist some spaces where consolidating democracy can be undertaken as outlined below:

1. **Electoral Reforms:** Democratic legitimacy relies on trustworthy elections, and recent reforms in INEC, such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and electronic transmission of results, aim to reduce irregularities and

bring transparency (INEC, 2023). Logistics issues, technical issues, and rigging allegations during the 2023 elections also highlight the imperative to accelerate institution-building calls (Nwangwu & Onuoha, 2020). Enhancing voter education, ensuring the independence of INEC, and enhancing citizens' trust in technology-based processes are all critical elements of Nigeria's democratic elections.

2. **Rule of Law and Judicial Independence:** There can be no effective democracy without an independent and public confidence-inspiring judiciary. The judiciary system, as a political organ within Nigeria, has also been performing a crucial but contentious function in the settlement of election controversies with repeated claims of partisanship and corruption (Obi, 2018; Aiyede, 2021). There is a need for reforms to guarantee the safeguarding of judges from arbitrariness by the executive, accountability in appointment, and strengthening of institutional integrity. Without a strong judiciary to resolve conflicts in a fair and equitable manner, democratic competition may be manipulated into elite bargains instead of citizen choice.
3. **Decentralisation and Restructuring Discourses:** Federalism has been controversial in Nigeria; the demands for restructuring are a response to discontent with resource control, regional self-determination, and fairness of development (Suberu, 2019). More decentralisation of finance and administration can soothe grumblings, consolidate local government, and place responsibility on pedestals by compressing decision distances between citizens and leaders. These are politically hard reforms, however, since entrenched elites resist them because they would decentralise authority and dilute their grip on federal funds. The future of Nigerian democracy thus hinges on whether the federal structure can evolve in a manner which will balance national integration and regional autonomy.
4. **Civil Society, Media, and Youth Activism:** The greatest democratic asset of Nigeria is civil society. The #EndSARS protest of 2020 harnessed the strength of youth activism, online activism, and grassroots mobilisation in holding governments accountable (Iwilade, 2021). The civil society organisations and independent media will also continue to have to watch over the government, expose corruption, and ensure citizen engagement during periods of periodic repression. Enforcing the guarantee of free speech, strengthening the NGOs, and opening the gates for women and minority groups will remain essential to broadening the democratic space.
5. **Regional and Global Assistance:** Nigeria's democracy is shaped by regional and global players. ECOWAS stepped in to deal with West African political instability, while the U.S., EU, and global NGOs helped to monitor elections and enhance the government (Adebajo, 2020). Foreign support can only be additive, not substitutive, for local reforms. Nigeria's democratic legitimacy is based on domestic agency to construct institutions, consolidate civic freedoms, and decentralise elite dominance.

These paths suggest that while Nigeria's democracy is confronted with profoundly rooted structural issues, it is not a lost cause. Electoral reform, judicial independence, restructuring talks, and mobilisation by civilians provide the potential for change. But whether these reforms are sustainable or not depends on whether Nigeria can attain a political compromise that spans elite interests to democratic consolidation.

Comparative Lessons for Nigerian Democracy

It is only by putting the Nigerian democratic experience into perspective that one can understand that it has not existed in isolation but as part of an African episode, and such is the case with other African nations, as a shift from dictatorship to democracy in any shape or form. Comparative perspective presents cautionary lessons and ennobling lessons on how Nigeria could potentially witness a stronger democratic order.

Ghana's Consolidation by Electoral Credibility: Ghana is a West African model of democratic consolidation as it has won the confidence of the general public through its free transfers of power between parties since 2000 (the two major ones being NDC and NPP) 15 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). Ghana boasts an impartial Electoral Commission and a highly active civil society that does not give any room for manipulation. This means that institutional autonomy and credible elections buoy public trust in institutional setups even where they are poorly funded. Nigeria's INEC reform, such as BVAS, seeks to achieve the same, but is negated by elite manipulation of the process and implementation.

South Africa's Institutions and Inequality: Transition in South Africa speaks about how democracy can be sustained by rights-based and robust institutions, but governance breakdown and enormous inequality express the need for socio-economic change (Friedman 2015). The lesson to Nigeria is one of balancing institutional progress with policies that target poverty, inequality and unemployment, the enemy of political stability.

Kenya's Ethnic Politics and Electoral Violence: The 2007-2008 Kenyan election violence is the classic case of the pitfalls of ethnicized politics in multi-ethnic societies, in which inter-elite competition across different ethnic groups spawned massive violence (Branch, 2011). The post-crisis reforms, like the 2010 constitution, remade power and made checks on executive dominance rigorous. Deficits exist, of course, but Kenya's experience underscores the value of constitutional design and decentralisation in containing ethnic diversity.

These comparative cases provide three useful lessons. First, democratic electoral institutions like Ghana's can induce a shift of competition away from mainly patronage and towards more policy-based competition. Second, robust constitutional and judicial guarantees are necessary but only if complemented by economic integration so as to prevent disillusionment (as the South African experience attests). Third, Nigeria's ethnic diversity necessitates institutional innovations such as Kenya's devolution in order to reconcile local identity and national purpose. In the absence of credible institutions and participatory policies, as illustrated by Nigeria, elections by themselves cannot guarantee democratic stability.

Case Studies of Democratic Transitions: Democratic transitions in other parts of Africa and the world illuminate the conditions under which democracy succeeds or fails. Nigeria's pattern of recurring cycles of military rule, aborted transitions, and ineffective civilian governments is best explained through comparative cases of successful and unsuccessful transitions as follows:

Successful Transitions:

Ghana's Consolidation of Electoral Democracy: The most successful democracy in the African continent is Ghana's evolution towards democracy. Constitutional rule was resumed after decades of authoritarianism in 1992, and a peaceful 2000 transfer of

power sealed Ghana's democratic credentials (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). Ghana's democracy is now etched in stone with an independent Electoral Commission, robust civil society, and reduced electoral violence compared to Nigeria. Institutional credibility and elite agreement can reinforce democratic resilience in the manner that Ghana's case illustrates.

South Africa's Apartheid to Democracy Transition: The South African transition in 1994 is a classic example of pacted democratisation. Nelson Mandela's African National Congress negotiated a settlement with the apartheid regime, hammering out an inclusive constitution and rights protections (Friedman, 2015). Despite inequalities, South Africa has experienced regular elections, judicial independence, and a free press. For Nigeria, the South African model illustrates the parts played by elite bargains, constitutional reform, and reconciliation in sustaining democracy.

Failed Attempts:

Zimbabwe's Derailed Democratisation: Zimbabwe's failed democratisation is a warning story. Where the initial post-independence period was promising with regard to inclusive rule, Robert Mugabe's regime discredited electoral contestation through state manipulation and corruption, resulting in authoritarianism instead of consolidation (Raftopoulos, 2009). Nigeria's elite manipulation of elections moves in the same direction, highlighting the pitfalls of captured institutions.

Nigeria's Disrupted Transitions and Weak Democracy: Nigeria is the typical example of disrupted transitions. Cancellation of the 1993 presidential election, which was perceived by most observers to have been free and fair, stunted the country's democratization process until 1999 (Suberu, 2007). Despite the Fourth Republic, Nigeria's democracy remains weak with electoral manipulation, judicial corruption, and weakness in accountability. As compared to Ghana and South Africa, Nigerian transitions have too often been marked by the absence of elite consensus, strong institutions, and reciprocal commitment to democratic norms.

Conclusion

Nigeria's democratisation is one of progress and persistent instability. More than sixty years as an independent state, and the country is yet to achieve a balance between the ideals of rule by the people and the imperatives of rule by the elite. Patronage politics, weak institutions, and the rent economy remain to challenge democratic consolidation. There is, however, also a type of democratic resilience in the Nigerian experience: even with repeated crises, the system holds on, remakes itself, and renews itself every now and then through public mobilisation, electoral change, and popular debate.

The study finds that the democracy of Nigeria is still constrained not just by flawed elections or corruption, but by more fundamental structural deficiencies: a rent-seeking economic structure, a hollowed-out political class, and institutions that lack autonomy and moral authority. Reform must therefore move beyond the manipulation of elections. It must deal with how to rebuild public confidence, construct institutions of rule, and give more space to people's participation.

Lessons from other African democracies, such as Ghana and South Africa, show that there is a possibility of making progress if institutions, not individuals, become the foundation of governance. Nigeria's work is to balance political power and public good

so leadership may be service, not privilege. In the end, Nigerian democracy will not mature by decrees or donor schemes but by citizens who insist they be heard and by leaders who accept the truth that power, once vested in them, is in trust and not forever.

Recommendations

This paper was informed by the need to know why democracy is not yet consolidated in Nigeria, and it was observed that lots of factors are militating against its consolidation, as discussed above. To curtail the observed challenges, the following policy options are hereby recommended:

1. There should be a complete deepening of democratic principles, which includes adherence to the principle of the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights and the protection of lives and properties, etc. These principles of democracy must not just be imbibed but must also be deepened for the prospects of democratic governance to be realized.
2. Nigeria's electoral system should be strengthened. There is a need for Nigerian citizens to freely and fairly elect their leaders, such that those elected will owe their allegiance to the people of Nigeria and not to a few people. This way, those elected will be responsive and responsible to the people who voted them into different political offices.
3. The government should pursue viable economic, political and social programs and policies that will give the citizens the opportunity to overcome the problems of poverty and unemployment.
4. All politicians, the electoral umpire, law enforcement agencies and all other government agencies, as well as private individuals, should perform their duties and responsibilities within the framework of the constitution towards the achievement of a consolidated democracy.
5. The government at all levels, most especially the federal government, should put adequate machinery in place to address the current security challenges because democracy thrives better under a peaceful environment.

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