

# POLITICAL ISSUES IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Democracy is a system where people exercise power of governing through representatives, popularly and periodically elected by the people themselves. The achievement of a durable democracy and sustainable political stability has been the single concern of most Nigerians. This paper discusses the necessary political issues indispensable in achieving sustainable democracy and political stability. Recommendations for the achievement of enviable democracy and political stability were highlighted.

## INTRODUCTION

Much has been said about democracy and political stability. Much is still being said about democracy and political stability, yet much will further be said about democracy and political stability.

Nigeria is a heterogeneous country, and it has many diverse political institutions, which are only similar in few aspects. The differences in the political institutions of these various groups contribute to the difficulties experienced in efforts to achieve sustainable democracy and political stability.

The word democracy comes from the Greek words for rule of the people. The Greek idea of democracy was based on full participation of all the people in every aspect of government. This idea of Greek democracy (direct democracy) is no longer possible in modern states due to increase in population and increase in the size of the area to be governed. Consequently, representative democracy evolved, whereby all the citizens exercise equal rights through their representatives who are periodically elected. These representatives exercise their power within a constitutional framework in order to guarantee the rights of the minority. In the opinion of the *Oxford African Encyclopedia* (1974), democracy is a political system which allows all voters an equal part in choosing their government. In a democracy, people should all have informed opinion so that they can make a good choice from the alternative candidates and policies offered to them.

*The Encyclopedia Americana* International Edition (1974) sees democracy as a form of government in which the major decisions of government or the direction of policy behind these decisions rest directly or indirectly on the freely given consent of a majority of the adults governed. This means that democracy in its widest sense is not just voting to elect government as the first definition presupposes but also include a process whereby people can have a say in the decisions which shape their destinies. Sustainable democracy refer to the maintenance of democratic processes which ensure the involvement of citizens in the decisions which influence their well being.

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1974) explains the word "stable" as firmly established situation not likely to fall or change. Benhart, et al (1979) see stability as the capacity to remain in positive; ability to resist being dislodged or overturned or otherwise unsettled or upset; the stage of being fixed in position, firmness of position and the capacity to resist destruction. Political stability refers to a situation when the political madness for the administration of a state is devoid of frequent and forceful change. Political stability presupposes the continuity of political office holders and sometime top career civil servants. This ensures continuity in national policy making and its implementation.

Sustainable democracy and political stability is therefore concerned with situations in which each nation achieves the maintenance of democratic processes and ensures the firmness and continuity of the political institutions for high productive, activities, efficient participation of the citizens in the political process and fairness in the distribution of the nation's resources for over-all benefit of the citizenry.

In political issues for achieving sustainable democracy and political stability, this paper

will examine the following range of issues: (i) Mass education for sustainable political development; (ii.) Mass mobilization of the citizenry; (iii) A virile and free (iv) Good leadership and followership; (v) Independent Judiciary; (vi) Free and fair election.

This paper now examines how they assist the sustenance of democracy and political stability in Nigeria.

### **MASS POLITICAL EDUCATION**

Mass education is a veritable tool for the achievement of sustainable democracy and political stability. In the opinion of Nyerere and Frierire in Braimoh (1990), education is the only weapon that could be used to fight oppression. Individuals need political education and competence that will motivate, conscientize and mobilize them to change their attitude in a desired way that will ensure free and fair elections. The concept of power, its usage and functions, its limits, merits and demerits are all important factors in the leadership and government of any state. The understanding of this concept and its operations is indispensable for effective participation of the citizens in the political process of their country. Mass political education to the citizens is very essential for the improvement and the updating of their political knowledge. This helps to ensure participation in the democratic process and in social interaction thereby facilitating social justice, equity and fair-play, essential ingredients of democracy and political stability.

### **MASS MOBILISATION OF THE CITIZENRY**

In Nigeria, there exists societal indiscipline such as election malpractices, census crisis and poor leadership and followership. The existence of these societal vices has forced successive Nigerian Heads of State to devise national mobilisation strategies to control them. Hence, the evolution of mass mobilisation programme. Mass mobilisation in the opinion of National Teacher Institute (NTI: 1990) is a process of involving the national in taking part actively in discussion and decision of issues affecting their general welfare. It is the act of pooling together, harnessing human resources for the purpose of development.

There is information gap between the leader and the generality of the people in understanding the problems of this country and the need for immediate solution to them. There is little understanding between the government and the governed. Government policies are hardly properly articulated not to talk of their being understood. Effective mobilisation of Nigerians is very indispensable to spur them to participate actively in the political process of their country. Nigerians need to be mobilised to improve their understanding of power and power contests; ensure impartial conduct of elections by electoral officials; and ensure adequate provision of all electoral materials and human resources at the right hour.

The citizenry must remain alert and interested in what their representatives in government are doing in their name. Democracy and political stability can elude the people when representation cease to be accountable to those who elect them. It is not unknown that legislators in the past administrations in a bid to remain in office sometimes resort to serving other interests different from those of their constituents. This failure in representation is often the fault of the citizenry. Through lack of interest, lack of education, and unwillingness to be informed on complex issues, the citizens abdicate their responsibilities and turn them over to officials and party leaders. Oftentime, this state of affairs will lead to credibility gap between the government and the governed, thereby undermining democracy and political stability. A vigilant citizenry is the strongest bulwark against such failure. Making his own contribution, Agbede (1999) asserts that what will guarantee stability and sustainable democracy is the will of the people to resist coups. He also advocated signing a defence pact with United States of America and Britain to make sure we preserve our young, fragile democracy.

## **GOOD LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWERSHIP**

A good and acceptable leadership is enviable factors for sustainable democracy and political stability. This has eluded Nigeria since independence. Nigerian leadership is characterized with selfishness, greed, tendency to hold on to power for ever and at all costs, misplaced priorities in public policy and tendency to personalise power (Eze, 1997). The leadership class has negative orientation to power and power positions. The winner takes all approach is the order of the leadership contest. In the opinion of Achebe (1983);

the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness of inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

Also commenting on the nature of leadership in this country, Ikwuemesi (1999) asserts that the Nigerian politicians do not believe in losing graciously. He simply has to win, and at all costs, for that matter. Once he fails, he raises a leg like a dog and urinates on the entire system, or least, he finds solace in inveighing against the winners. The practice and development of democracy is very difficult in this country for these obvious reasons.

Sustainable democracy and political stability can only be achieved in a country where selfless, incorrupt, tolerant, truthful, responsive and responsible leadership exists. A good leader should in all his actions consider the feeling and welfare of his people. The writer is convinced that; "RIGHT LEADERSHIP", a leader with a clear vision, one who is a listening leader is about the only solution to the problem of a durable democracy and political stability in this country. Sincerely speaking, Nigeria is entitled to a right leader because leadership is the bane of our problem, moreso, because our salvation is in our own hands (Abiodim, 1998).

Since leadership assumes followership, there can be no leaders without followers. It is logical to reason that leaders would often reflect the type of followers existing in a given society. The generality of followership in Nigeria is poor, dishonest, corrupt, greedy and uncommitted to the national cause. Many of the followers do not only engage in all kinds of sabotage against the nation but contribute in making the leaders to adopt obnoxious policies which do not promote political harmony and national progress, ingredients for sustainable democracy and political stability. Many of the citizenry in this country are opportunist and hero worshippers whose insincerity and irresponsibility provide fertile ground for poor leadership. The roles of Nigerian followers with regard to the annulled June 12 presidential election, 1993 and the late General Sani Abacha's self-succession bid were not to write home about.

In Nigeria, both our leaders and their followers need proper and complete re-orientation towards good leadership and good followership qualities. Nigerians should be educated to shun corruption, greed, dishonesty, pathological love for money and general indiscipline. Without proper and complete re-orientation and rehabilitation of our minds, true democracy and political stability will continue to be a mirage in this country. Therefore, sustainable democracy and political stability can be achieved only if according to the prayer of Josiah Gilbert of Holland; God give us men with gift of insight and all other germs of leadership and followership.

For the achievement of sustainable democracy and political stability, our method of election must be changed. Violence at polls, electoral irregularity, such as denial of access to voting materials, falsification of results and terrorism by opponents when genuine winners are made. All these evils make our elections more of a war than a real political contest. Free and fair elections are important political issues for sustainable democracy and political stability.

## **A FREE, VIRILE AND DYNAMIC PRESS**

In the opinion of Denedo (1999); more than election and the electioneering process, the most vital ingredient for the healthy growth and sustenance of democracy is a free, virile and

dynamic press answerable not to government but to the citizens of the country. Efficient and free press is no doubt indispensable in the electoral process and other activities, which facilitate the enthronement and durability of people's government. Press freedom is needed to disseminate information on choice of candidates' activities of political parties and electoral laws. A responsible media is very essential for the people's effective education and mobilisation. Free press is a source of public opinion. Public opinion is the beliefs, values and attitudes, which are commonly held and expressed by the majority of the people on a given issue. Any government, which cannot obtain reliable information on the needs, demands and aspirations of the people, will find it difficult to achieve its goals. The media educate the citizens on government policies. Where, the government policies receive negative reaction from the citizens particularly they conflict with their interests, the press at times intervene by either influencing both parties to reach a compromise if such policies are worth trying or by making government to reconsider its decisions.

A responsible press acts as a watchdog both for and against the people and government, when government performs credibly, it receives commendation from the press. The Press lashes the citizens whenever they acted in unpatriotic and dishonest way. The Press also reduces the information gap between the governor and the governed and draws them closer for the achievement of a better society.

An efficient and Free Press serves as an agent of change. Periodic change of government through free and fair election is essential for achieving sustainable democracy and political stability. In Nigeria, the press has contributed in the dethronement of (retired) General Ibrahim Babangida and to the collapse of Late Abacha's dictatorship. Unnecessary government control of the press, censorship and detention of media practitioners are inimical to the achievement of sustainable democracy and political stability. A virile press is *sine-qua-non* for the operation of true democracy and the achievement of political stability in Nigeria.

## **INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY**

Judiciary independence refers to a situation where the court system of a country is free from the absolute control of either the executive or the legislature. In Nigeria, the judicial system in the past enjoyed a lot of glamour and pageantry. Today, the country's legal process is characterised by over-congestion in cases resulting in the inability of the courts to speedily dispose of disputes. Apart from this the declining financial fortunes in the face of rising costs of litigation, the legal system especially in the dwindling economy has contributed to the subjugation of our judiciary. This, it should be noted, is detrimental to sustainable democracy and political stability. Even more fundamental is the lack of procedure for the appointment to the bench which is capable of enthroning mediocrity at the expenses of meritocracy. All these have led to a low quality of judicial personnel, corruption, overburdened infrastructure in the courts, the manipulation of the judicial process and official disregard for its decision which may be as a result of executive recklessness.

The harsh economic conditions in the country have driven many lawyers to unorthodox avenues for earning a living. Many of them have abandoned their traditional agents, personal secretaries to companies and to wealthy businessmen and traders. The more circumspect ones have entered the banks and corporate sectors.

Under this decadence in the judicial arm of government and process which pervades the entire nation, the achievement of sustainable democracy and political stability cannot be guaranteed. In the opinion of Ojo (1995) inefficient judiciary has led to tilting the scales of justice in this country. Efficient and independent judiciary is very essential in a political process for the following reasons:

- (i) It enables judges to execute their duties without fear or favour;
- (ii) It ensures public confidence in the judiciary;
- (iii) It helps to safeguard fundamental human rights;
- (iv) It makes it possible for the judiciary to check the executive and the

legislature.

The judiciary must put away its timidity and make fearless and courageous judgements that every one will be proud of.

## CONCLUSION

In order to achieve sustainable democracy and political stability in Nigeria, the citizens must feel free to hold and discuss different ideas without fear or intimidation. They must be kept informed of public affairs. The radio, newspapers, films, books and television should all be free to give full report of political affairs. There should be no political censorship - the government should not suppress or hide important facts from the people. Adequate political education and mass mobilisation of the citizens are essential to acquaint the people with a good knowledge of the nation's political engineering and democratic ways of life-fairness, honesty, respect for human dignity, tolerance, etc. There must be respect for rule of law and the willingness and common desire among the people for democratic ideas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The writer is of the opinion that sustainable democracy and political stability can be achieved if the following issues are addressed: (i) The electoral process should not only be periodic but it should be devoid of any act of malpractices such as rigging, falsification of results, thuggery and intimidation;

- (ii) There must be a well educated, enlightened and informed electorate for effective popular participation. Political education and mobilisation of the people should aim at maintaining friendship and co-operation with their neighbours, especially people of other ethnic nationalities;
- (iii) The people must be willing to tolerate one another's view and actions irrespective of their political differences;
- (iv) Government must avoid high-handedness and dictatorial tendencies such as intolerant of opposition, insensitivity to public opinion and censorship of media houses. The activities of the government must not be hidden;
- (v) Independence of the judiciary must be guaranteed. Bribery and corruption, party politicking which interferes with government programme, poverty, exploitation, political apathy etc. which hinder democracy and political stability should be addressed.
- (vi) Finally, there must a good and acceptable leadership. While the leaders should be responsive and responsible to the masses, the followers should be respectful, hardworking, educated with high enthusiasms for such virtues as honesty and patriotism.

The writer disagrees with the opinions that our fragile democracy should be preserved by signed defence pact with European countries. Democracy will not be sustained if Nigerians do not want to make it work. Democracy's ultimate survival depends on what all the stake holders do to make it work. The executive must rule firmly, fairly and transparently. It must show genuine concern for the problems that confront the average citizen whether at the federal, state or local council levels. The legislature must as well, do their own bit by making sure they pass laws for the good governance of our country. The judiciary must put away its timidity and make fearless and courageous judgement that everybody will be proud of. A defence pact should be signed if only it will be used to frighten prospective coup makers.

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