

Review

Disorder and democratic development: The political instrumentalization of patronage and violence in Nigeria

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Nigeria's fourth transition to civil rule on May 29, 1999, no doubt gave the hope of democratic, economic and social development for the nation. It was with joyous mood that it was received with seemingly overall and overwhelming conviction of 'a final stop to military rule'. As Nigeria's democracy gradually grows, it seems to strive within the precincts of disorder as patronage and violence becomes its hallmark. Whereas these are vices that democracy is supposed to check, this paper examines the instrumentalization of patronage and violence in Nigeria's democratic structure and its possible implication for development. Data for the study were collected through oral interviews with political actors that cut across the 3 main political parties including Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) and Action Congress (AC).

Key words: Disorder, democratic development, political instrumentalization, patronage, violence, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the commencement of Nigeria's Fourth Republic on 29 May 1999, democracy was viewed as the „vehicle“ which would take the country to the „promised land“. This was because long years of military rule had rather brought economic depression, widespread corruption and bastardization of Nigeria's identity especially under General Abacha, when Nigeria was considered a pariah state in the international community (Abubakar, 2001; Egwaikhide and Isumonah, 2001).

Indeed, patronage and violence are not peculiar to Nigeria's democracy alone. For example in the case of patronage, Golden (2003) attributed maladministration in Italy between 1948 and 1994 to patronage which de-emphasizes merit and people's welfare and prioritizes the exchange of goods to clients for loyalty for the sustenance of politicians in offices. Likewise, Taylor (2004) posits that clientelism (that is, patronage) takes superior position to citizenship and welfare in Latin America, Bolivia (Lazar, 2004) while Zappala (1998) submits that patronage persists in Australia because it is an avenue through which the underprivileged class accesses state resources. In the case of Africa, patronage has often been described as the cause of patrimonialism, corruption and other vices even as Africa finds it difficult to dissociate itself from it (Gloster-Coates and Quest, 2005;

Anderson, 2004; Randall and Svasand, 2002; Joseph, 1991).

Likewise, literature is replete with instances of political violence especially in the Third World. According to Pereira and Davies (2000) for example, the military and the police alongside outlawed groups such as drug traffickers and guerilla groups are able to utilize violence for political reasons in Latin America. Also in Africa, political violence has often come in nature of civil strifes, civil wars and riots among others (Nolte, 2004; Kalyvas, 2003; Mueller, 2003) ultimately to the political interest of certain groups. It was because of the obviously disorderly nature of politics and democratic development in Africa that Chabal and Daloz (1999) described disorder as political instrument in Africa because of the non-emancipation of the state from the society. Thus according to them:

The failure of the state to be emancipated from society has profoundly limited the scope for „good government“ in sub-Saharan Africa. Equally, such a poorly institutionalized state has not had the means seriously to spur sustainable economic growth on the continent. Nevertheless, the very weakness and inefficiency of the state has been profitable to the African political elites... Hence, according to Chabal and Daloz (1999), what persist in

African political systems are violence, patrimonialism, religion, witchcraft and perverse civil society, all of which work in the interest of the political elite as they keep a large array of clients.

In view of this, this paper sought to (1) find out perception about democratic development in Nigeria, (2) examine the instrumentalization of patronage and (3) assess the instrumentalization of violence in Nigeria's democratic process. Data for the study were collected through oral interviews with political actors that cut across the 3 main political parties in Nigeria including the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) and Action Congress (AC). Data collected were subjected to content analysis.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Though Nigeria's democracy is quite young, emerging trends in political circles presents it as a system stifled by corruption and with little hope for the common man. One may even wonder whether autocracy will be better for the nation provided the leader will be sincere, strong and be committed to the development of the nation. However, data collected presents democracy as the preferred option in spite of the vices associated with it. They seem to be seen only as teething problems. According to an interviewee:

"Democracy is better than military rule. Our democracy is growing. It is not that all aspects of our democracy are bad. We can still see some few political figures who are trying to do things aright although they are not being encouraged by their fellow colleagues in the political circles. However, our democracy will be better if everybody realizes that it is the masses that matter...Until the people in power realize that the masses must be given all their rights and provided with social amenities such that everyone would know that it is not until you get into power that you can survive, it is only then that this country will be a better place to live in".

Political actor/AC/June 17, 2007

An interviewee states:

"The long break in democratic development, with long term military rule rubbished the experience that we might have gathered on democracy. So it is like we have to start all over again. That is why democracy seems alien to us as if it is not part of our culture. If the military will not truncate it again, we will be improving with time. Definitely, democracy is preferred to military rule by all standards. This is

because of the ideals it eschews. For example, see the position of the judiciary so far which has not been in line with the expectation of the central power. This would not have been possible under the military."

Political actor/PDP (a)/June 25, 2007

The responses of the interviewees previously simply summarize the views of others. Democracy is indeed preferred and viewed as the right channel to development even though there may be lapses here and there. But unlike the situation during the First, Second and even Third Republics when the populace and the political class alike clamoured for military intervention, the views now is that Nigeria's democracy can be improved. In fact, interviewees see the seeming backwardness of Nigeria's democratic development as a consequence of military rule. Provided this democracy will be sustained, thus, Nigeria will experience progress and development; making the socio-economic/political environment conducive to live in.

The position of respondents cannot but be, considering Nigeria's experience under military rule in the late 1980s and 1990s especially under the regimes of Generals Babangida (1985-1993) and Abacha (1993-1998), under whom Nigeria grossly retrogressed; with high rate corruption and collapse of public infrastructure; leading to the impoverishment of more than 70% of Nigerians who dropped into absolute poverty. Thus democracy does not have to be truncated again. The experience of military rule in the past has not paid off. All it requires is improvement as Nigeria learns to tread the democratic path and climbs up the scales of democratic transition. However, in spite of the hope of the possibility of improving Nigeria's democracy with time, it is pertinent to note the political instrumentalization of two of the phenomena that are often seen as misnomer in ideal democratic structures. These are patronage and violence. These we now turn to, one after the other.

THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF PATRONAGE IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE

Just like the case in other emerging democracies, patronage remains inherent in Nigeria's political structure. Even though it is often described as a bane to democratic, social and economic development, it has however remained instrumental in the hands of the political class to gain loyalty from the clients in exchange for access to state resources. In the words of a respondent:

"Patronage serves as a link between the government and the governed. This is in line with our

culture wherein every quarter had a representative in the town's council. The system now, only affords the people the opportunity to have leaders who may represent them to the government. But patrons are too overbearing, their roles become counter-productive. I see patronage more on the positive side. This is because; at least there is a channel through which people can link up with the government. Though it may be at benefit to patrons, but it will only become counter-productive when it becomes exploitative."

Political actor/PDP (a)/June 25, 2007

In addition another interviewee puts it this way:

"There is no political platform that does not have an origin. It is even in our tradition. For example if you built a new house, courtesy demands that you go to other landlords who had been in the neighbourhood before you to introduce yourself to them and pay homage...And so it goes for politics. Anybody coming into politics anew will be asked who his godfather is. Over the years, some people have assumed these positions and people are paying homage to them. It is a protocol that they have been observing. The godfathers too passed through some people before they became godfathers...But the problem is that godfathers want to have their ways all the time now. They want to be alpha and omega. If you want to have a political position, there are certain people you have to pay homage to. There are certain people you must give money to, and so certainly you are not going there to serve people again, but the godfathers who put you on that platform. This is just because the godfathers have the machinery to rig elections irrespective of public outcry."

Political actor/AC/June 17, 2007

Yet another interviewee stated:

"You need to understand the political culture of people and their socio-economic being before you can understand the role of patronage in the system. For example if Yerima can use religious sentiments to secure patronage in Zamfara State, Tinubu cannot do the same in Lagos State because of the diversity of consciousness. Patronage alleviates the condition of the poor, but at the long run, they are shortchanged as they are not allowed to develop. Patronage is like Kwashiorkor."

Political actor/PDP (b)/June 15, 2007

Still another described patronage thus:

Godfathers are „o fun ni ni adiye sin, o gba odidi omo lowo eni" (meaning: he has given a chicken to tend, but he has snatched a whole child in return). They are sets of people that should be eradicated. Democracy can exist without godfatherism. It is rather a destroyer. It is the bane of development of democracy in Nigeria.

Political actor/ANPP/June 17, 2007

As could be seen in the data aforementioned, patronage serves as the means through which the under-privileged may gain access to resources as they may secure them as goods in exchange for loyalty. The political class understands this so well and tries to keep it alive in order to ensure sustained loyalty from the poor majority. However, as the interviewees pointed out, this system however becomes exploitative of clients such that it is like giving something inconsequential for something of great value. For the clients therefore it ends up as loss at the long-run. As patronage persists the lives of clients are not improved even as they further slip into under-development.

Nevertheless, are there channels of reprieve for them? The answer is in the negative as long as this type of democratic system prevails. Indeed, clients may change from one patron to another; they will however remain subservient to the political elite among whom patrons will be recycled for them (Omobowale and Olutayo, 2007; Omobowale, 2006). Besides, they are largely powerless in view of the ability of the political class/patrons to utilize violence in order to remain relevance. This is further discussed subsequently.

THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE

In spite of the chaotic nature of violence, it has seemingly remained a veritable tool of power acquisition and retention among political elite. It is such that has been a re-occurring experience since the 1950s when political elite utilized violence to secure and retain power (Omobowale and Olutayo, 2007; Tignor, 1993; Post and Jenkins, 1973). This is irrespective of its possible implications on the lives and properties of the citizenry they claim to be „serving". It is as if the hope of a stoppage to political violence is gloomy as a respondent stated:

Violence will still remain in Nigerian politics in as much as people such as Adedibu and Obasanjo are still powerful. But if we can disempower them, this democracy will survive and grow well. Violence is not useful in anyway except for people using it to achieve their goals by killing people, kidnapping candidates, snatching and burning ballot papers that are not favourable to them...

Political actor/ANPP/June 17, 2007

In the views of yet another interviewee:

Violence remains in Nigeria's political system because politicians use it to continue to be in charge and in power; to be relevant and hailed; and not necessarily because of the masses. We are still in trouble. If only people have access to basic needs, they will not go to politicians to collect money and cause violence...When the country improves and people can have access to basic needs and the economy is good, then there will be no need for violence. It is then people will realize going to political offices is to work, and not to swallow money.

Political actor/AC/June 17, 2007

Likewise a PDP interviewee stated:

Unfortunately, violence has always been a tool in the hands of the political class. This is because of joblessness, the attractiveness of political office and political culture which has not submitted to democratic norms. Violence will delay the attainment of democratic ideals, but overtime we will overcome the problem. Our democracy will stand, thrive and give us the best.

Political actor/PDP (a)/June 25, 2007

Indeed Nigeria's democratic structure has violence embedded within its fabrics. It is so, because of the relatively low level position of the nation in democratic transition and thus, power acquisition is still seen as a matter that should be achieved through crude coercive force for personal gains. Hence, as the Nigerian polity is replete with a mass of poor majority, with restricted access to basic needs and survival, the political class therefore has access to a pool of underprivileged human resources, out of which willing individuals may be recruited as „foot soldiers“ to cause violence in order to acquire and sustain power. This was particularly the situation in many places across Nigeria where political violence became the order of the day as the nation prepared for and eventually held the 2007 General Elections.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Of course, Nigeria is indeed a „democratic“ nation. However, Nigeria's democracy is far from the ideal. It is one fueled through social disorder; and particularly patronage and violence. For as long as Nigeria's democracy is sustained via patronage and violence, one cannot really say we have a democracy. Democracy should ensure justice, fair play, equity and improvement of life of the citizenry among other things. What can best describe

what happens in Nigeria now is a system of government hijacked by the political class through violence and patronage. The electorate has little say about who governs them and how their lives and the country as a whole could be improved. Thus Nigeria's democracy as it stands now cannot lead to development except the nation attains the tenets of ideal democracy which unfortunately seems like a mirage.

In order to reverse this ugly trend, it is important for civil society groups, which were pivotal to Nigeria's transition from military rule to come alive once again. The civil society groups need to create democratic consciousness in the population beyond just the caricature of democracy that Nigeria has at present. It would commence through a restructuring of political culture to such that will de-emphasise violence and patronage to that, that will favour the internalization of democratic values and culture in the Nigerian social structure, such that the will of the people will be respected especially in the choice of who governs and how the democratic government is run.

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