



Democracy and the Challenges of the Imbalance of the Minority Group in the Democratic Plural Nigeria

Ogboji Samuel Chidi, *Nwaoha Chimaroke Chizoba & Ejiaga Constance Onyekwere

Department of History/International Studies

Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education

Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

***Email of Corresponding Author: nwaohachima@yahoo.com**

ABSTRACT

Democracy is a procedure of competition by which individuals/groups within a society make preference for their leaders and also choice of policies during decision making. Initially in a plural society, the voice of the majority speaks volume in the election of political leaders, representations in the parliament and in the entire decision making of the society more than the voice of the minority group. The implication of this in a multi-ethnic society, given Nigeria as example, is the suppression of the good will of the minority group. Thus, the majority groups determines the fate of the minority groups politically and economically as well as to a large extent dictate the survival of this minority group within the society. Democracy in this setting, gives room for prejudice, ethnic loyalty, nepotism, tribalism, sentiments, discrimination, in the management of the affairs of this given society. Democratic dividends in this political arena are frequently distributed unequally and appointments into juicy political positions as well as employment quotas are made with strong consideration of the majority group. This paper puts that democracy is synonymous with majority rule and implies suppression of the voice of the minority to advance their will. The paper opines that democracy vest so much power on the majority as decision makers and as determinant of political and economic conditions of the minority in a plural society especially in Africa. This paper thinks that democracy in most modern African states should be practiced with emphasis on the people than the majority; on social equality than social imbalance and on equal representation. This is because these individuals that make-up of this given political organization have different socio-economic conditions within their geographic confinement. The paper therefore concludes that equity should reign supreme in any democratic society. By so doing opportunities will be created for the deprived group.

Keywords: Democracy, Plural Society, Ethnicism, Population

INTRODUCTION

Democracy, a derivative of Greek word 'Demo' (implying Public or Citizens agitation), is a system of government whose origin and practice dates from the era of ancient Greek city-state. It is a political system through which the will of the majority takes precedence over the will of the minority in determining who the mantle of leadership rest on and the process of governance.¹ Thus, the people who live together under some form of political organization are vested with the power to choose their leader(s) who are seen as symbol(s) of peoples will. Nweke (2004) opines that the system looks at the people or members of the society as the will and decision makers.² This expression of choice for leader(s) by these people in a given political organization is determined through simple majority. By implication, the will of the majority is supreme over the will and power of the minority in deciding who governs and also during other decision making exercise. Mc Lean (1996) in his view states that Democracy as a descriptive term may be regarded as synonymous with majority rule since the people that make up the polity are rarely

unanimous.³ democracy by this view, supports competition or tussle for political power and struggle for supremacy of will between the majority group and the minority group.

Idachaba (2006), puts it that democracy seeks to set up justifiable and firm political institutions and civil liberties that allow for meaningful competition for political power and broad participation in the selection of leader(s) and policies.⁴

In a democratic plural society of African setting, the theory and practice of democracy can be understood from the relationship that exists between cleavages that make up the society. This divide can be ethnic, or religious, or ideological, linguistic, etc and have no equal numerical strength. According to Barth (2000), it is a society combining ethnic contracts ... who do mix but do not combine.⁵ Each group holds to its own religion, its own culture, and language, its own ideas and ways. Thus, there exist the people or group categorized as majority and those categorized as minority group. Democracy by implication identifies by recognition the voice of the majority in this political setting more than the voice of the minority.

Due to reliance on elections, democracies have as their default principle the concept of majority rule... they are uniformly characterized by competitive elections.⁶ This competition for political power breeds unhealthy situations for this form of political circle and at times implies suppression of will in a plural society which is more culturally and ethnically divided society with extremely deep cleavages Arend (1977) believes that the difficulty to achieve and maintain stable democratic government In a plural society is a well-established proposition in political science... to him, social homogeneity and political consensus for stable democracy. He concludes that deep social division and political difference within plural societies are held responsible for instability and breakdown in democracies.⁷

This analysis portray democracy as a non-viable form of government if not modified especially in a deeply divided societies (plural society). To Patrick, ... there is ongoing tension between the contradictory factors of majority rule and minority will ... public officials in the institutions of representative government must make authoritative decision about two questions – when and under what conditions should the rule of the majority be curtailed in order to protect the will of the minority and conversely when and under what condition must the will of the minority be restrained in order to prevent the subversion of majority rule.⁸ Majority rule should be limited in order to protect minority rights, because if it were unchecked, it probably would be used to oppress persons holding unpopular views.⁹ Nadia (2009), in consonance with the above view concludes that a basic principle of democracy is majority rule and the protection of individual and minority rights, which are the very foundation of democratic government.

The practice of democracy in plural societies especially in contemporary Africa where there is existence of deep ethnic cleavages, has given room for suppression of the good will of one group, usually the minority group and adopting the view and will of the majority group in ‘majority takes all’. Thus, democracy is insensitive to the will and at times the plight of the minority group which culminate in most case (in Africa) into prejudice, sentiments, sectionalism in the political, economic and social affairs of this given political formation. Democracy vests so much power on the majority which places them in a position of determining the fate and survival of the other group especially the group whose member forms the minority.

In Nigeria for example, there exist over 250 ethnic groups with distinct cultural, religious and social background. In this political formation, there is a clear distinction of majority ethnic group made up of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo groups, and other minority ethnic nationals made up of Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Urobo, Tiv, Igala Edo etc. These cleavages are further divided with the creation of regions and states along ethnic lines and thus, greater portion of land and good number of state are given to this larger or majority ethnic groups more than the minority ones. For instance the region of northern Nigeria occupied mainly by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group is larger than those of the other nationals and this has given them good number of states more than the other smaller group to compare. The implication of this is that during elections/voting in this plural society democracy recognizes the voice and choice which the majority group makes against the will and choice of the minority group. This has given room for imbalance and domineering influence of the majority and their votes decides who governs. They also

influence decision in the parliament during parliamentary voting and other policies that affects the makeup of the society.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Democracy

Democracy, which derives from the Greek words ‘demos’ or ‘people’ is defined basically as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people (New web encyclopedia, 1995). It is a political system by which people exercise their will by choosing their political leader or deciding their position in a particular view. In this political system, it is the people who have the right or mandate to decide. According to Lindell (1999), the term originated from the Greek word “demokratia” meaning rule of the people, which was coined from “demos” people and “kratos” meaning power or rule...

Democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders or groups and organization defines the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision making process. (Schattschneider 1960). Robert (2021) in consonance to the above definition state that leadership, and major undertakings of a state or other a small group historically constituted by a majority. In a democratic system, the emphasis is on the people who possess the will power to make decisions. Thus, democracy is a game of number by which the people will take precedence in any decision making. The people’s voice in this political arrangement is determined by simple majority where by the common opinion of those greater in number supersedes or dominates those common opinion that are smaller in number. Thus, the views of the majority always prevail. Nadi (2018) observes that the basic principle of democracy is majority rule. All democracies are systems in which citizens freely make political decision by majority rule. (New Webster encyclopaedia, 1995) Azikiwe (1979) defines this political system as the rule of a people by its majority...

By recognizing the voice of the majority, democracy fails to consider the good will of the minority especially in a heterogeneous society. According to Daily Nation (2014), the majority rule is the way to go in the western democracy. It however creates oppression for the minority since their will cannot be realized. Democracy in the prints of Daily Nation (2014) has introduced “tyranny of numbers”.

This is evident in the character of the majority group who see themselves as opinion molders and decision makers due essentially to their large member. This tyranny of member concept has placed the minority group in a position where by their needs or opinion cannot be articulated in a successful way.

Josephine (2016), states that if a bill is brought up by a member of the minority team to be considered, however, much as this bill could assist people in a marginalized community, chances are there that it will be opposed in the parliament and fail to go through; that is if the majority who have tyranny of numbers are not the ones proposing the bill. Josephine is of the view that in most cases the bill will be opposed not because it is not right but because the tyranny of numbers (the majority) wants to prove its power in all decision made in the parliament sittings. Thus, resource allocations tend to favour only individuals from the minority who showed support to their will during the election or during parliamentary sittings.

Until African Political System become less majoritarian and do a better job of protecting the rights and interests of the minorities, the true benefits of democratic government are unlikely to be realized (Scott, 2017). Africa democracy according to Lucas (2017) is “Undoubtedly characterized by forms of political exclusion of which minority exclusion is common. A good example is the exclusion of the indigenous San community from the political process in Botswana. This political exclusion as a feature of African democracy has also paved way for rising economic development inequality resulting to huge gap between the majority group and the minority group in a given African society. In the words of Lucas (2017), “the combination of political and economic exclusion in Africa is important for intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Intrinsically democracy is failing to deliver if it is not helping the worst as much as the best off. He concludes that the combination of economic and political exclusion increases the risk that political grievances will develop into instability. Democracy features exclusive political arrangement while making it difficult for the minorities (who forms the opposition) to get selected or elected into elective positions.

Plural Society

Plural Society is a term believed to have been carried by Dr. J.S. Furriwall to describe a society comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side within the name political unit. (Furriwall, 1984); it is defined by Fedrik Barth as a society, combining ethnic contrasts. (Wikipedia,19).

It is an association of different ethnic, religious, linguistic groups who are fused together to form a political union. Okon (2016) describe plural society as a compound word that suggests complexity in operation and nature. To him, it is an organized group of persons associated together for religious, economic, cultural, scientific, political, patriotic or other diverse purpose which entails different people living together in organized community with shared laws, and values. Thus, a plural society is a socio-political formation that recognizes the existence (by inclusion) of diverse ethnic nationals who have distinct cultural background, in a defined common political. According to prerng (2017), it is simply the word that means the integration of different communities who practice different culture, languages, and beliefs.

The Origin of plural societies in modern political African states is traceable to the advent of colonial rule in Africa, specifically the Berlin African conference of 1884/1885. Following the discovery of Africa by the European explorers and traders; the desire of these Europeans to trade with Africans grew. The Europeans, whom were limited to the coast of Africa while carrying out these commercial activities, began to develop interest in moving into the interior of Africa, in order to access Africa hinterland was forcefully achieved by these Europeans who later on began to scramble among themselves for African territories. This scramble for Africa led to the partition of Africa in the celebrated Berlin African conference of 1884/1885, held in Berlin and was organized by German Chancellor Otton Von Bismark. In this conference, African territories were partitioned among the European powers on a round table, using map of Africa. This conference gave legal support to the activities of European colonialists in Africa and also encouraged the Europeans to have effective occupation of their occupation of the irrespective territories. Odoh (2005), submits that the famous Berlin conference which took place between 15th November 1884 and 30th January 1885 ceded African territories to the Europeans.

These Europeans, having established themselves in African soil, fused together without consideration, divers ethnic groups for colonial administrative convince. Thus, at independence, these colonies of European creation regained political freedom under socio-political condition and a system left behind by the European power. Omeje (2005) stated that the African territories which have attained independence and political sovereignty cannot in a strict sense be regarded as national states... they do not embrace one with common culture.

He further stated that the manner in which European nations descended on Africa during the closing years of the 19th century; in their scramble for territories was bound to leave a heritage of artificially contrived borderlines which now demarcate the emergent African state. Within each state, there is a multitude of ethnic and linguistic groups some of which are separated from their kith and kin by international boundaries.

The above was also a situation in Nigeria when Ijomah (2011), stated that the British government did not create a Nation but a geographical expressions in which the interaction that existed was sufficient only for the colonial administrative purpose. It was only after independence that people realized that in spite of the fragmentary bonds of unity the divisive factors were many and little understood. Omeje (2005) concludes that the federation of Nigeria as a political unit has never really been one homogenous entity for its widely differing peoples and tribes are yet to find a basis for true unity. This unfortunate yet obvious fact (according to him) notwithstanding the former colonial authority had to keep the country one in order to effectively control vital economic interest, concentrated mainly in the more advanced and political unreliable Southern Nigeria. Thus for administrative convenience, Northern and Southern Nigeria became amalgamated in 1914.

ETHNIC PLURALISM AND THE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Nigeria as a sovereign state is a British colonial creation and cannot be strictly referred to as a Nation State. This is due to diverse groups of people with distinct cultural background that make up this political formation. There is within this political creation multitude of ethnic cleavages numbering in an estimation of Two hundred and fifty (250) Thus, Nigeria is referred to as a multi-ethnic society or a plural society due to its heterogeneity.

Nigeria as a plural society began with the amalgamation of colony of Lagos and protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906; and the amalgamation of the protectorate of Northern region and the southern region in 1914 by then British colonial administration headed by its Governor General, Lord Fredrick Lugard. These British colonial amalgamations saw the fusion of over 250 ethnic groups to form a political entity referred before this amalgamation existed as distinct political units who had flourished politically, economically and socially and also possessed attributes of modern states respectively. The reason for this political integration was simply for convenient colonial administrative purpose. Ijomah (2011) puts that British Government did not create a nation but a geographical expression in which the interaction that existed was sufficient only for the colonial administrative purpose. This fragmentary bond of different ethnic nationals resulted to a political formation that defines Nigeria as a plural society. To Ijomah (2011)... the colonial situation brought people of different cultures under a common situation where new pattern of interaction had to be developed. To him, he puts;

Prior to the advent of the British colonialist, Nigeria as a socio-political entity was neither In existence nor contemplated; the territories that now make up Nigeria existed in fragments. They were the Benin Empire, the Lower Niger kingdoms, the Fulani Empire of Sokoto and the Kanem-Borno Empire. There were also the Oduduwa empire of the Yoruba, and the Arochukwu empire of the Igbo. There was the Agbor Empire that sprang from the Benin Empire. There was no systematic contact between one Empire and the other. There were however isolated trade contacts particularly among the people of the lower Nigeria kingdom and the Benin Kingdom. Different names had been use for the territories now incorporated in Nigeria.

In the words of Tafawa Belewa in 1948 Legislative council debate in Lagos, “since 1914, the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious belief and customs...

In Nigeria, the society is characterized by different ethnic groups, some of which were large enough before the amalgamation to have formed a centralized political system. Ethnic groups in this class are the Hausa/Fulani, the Yoruba, the people of Nupe, the Edo etc. other ethnic group who are rather smaller than the afore mentioned ethnic group hitherto the amalgamation formed a decentralized type of political system characterized by village democracy. Such within this category are the Igbo, Ijaw Ibibio, Efik, Anang, etc. Awolowo (1966) noted thus:

It has been estimated that there are about 250 national or ethnic groups in the country-each with its own distinct language. In any case, there are 10 principal national groups in Nigeria which constituted about 80 percent of the entire population.

Ademola (1999) states that since 1964, the population of course has increased tremendously... of particular relevance and importance is the recognition that there are about 250 diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria, though the 10 ethnic groups identified above remain dominant in the country. The need for maintaining ethnic balance led to the division and subdivision of Nigeria into regions and later into states, in order to allay the fears of the minority groups (Yakubu, 1999). Yakubu continued that Nigeria was first

divided into (North, West, East) regions, it was later increase to four region with the creation of the mid-west... the regional formations gave way to the creation of 12 states in 1967 and was further divided into 19 states in 1976, 21 states in 1987, 30 states in 1991 and 36 states in 1996.

This issue of minority question was an unresolved discourse in Nigeria prior to the attainment of independence.

Politically at independence Nigeria adopted Western (Parliamentary) democracy as its political system as the country turned into Republic in 1963 (though interrupted by military intervention in political administration) Okoro (2005) states that the 1960 constitution had however, enshrined the British type Parliamentary system of government for Nigeria. In his words, Okoro puts;

This political system provided for the creation of the office of a Federal Prime Minister who was the leader of the party with majority of seats at the Federal/Parliament. There were also largely autonomous regional government made up of governors and bi-cameral government made up of governors and bi-cameral legislators with residual legislative powers. (Okoro, 2005).

Irving (1977) puts that virtually all African countries entered independence with western parliamentary forms of government. The adoption of western democracy as a political system in Nigeria was fundamental because it would initiate process for resolving issues peacefully while giving room for tolerance and trust among different ethnic divisions. Idachaba (2006) maintains that many points to democratization as key to create these sorts of peace enhancing structures...

A good sign of democracy in Nigeria political system is the fact that elections are conducted where the people are given the opportunity to choose their leaders; and also to a certain level the system allows for freedom of speech. By this, Nigeria as a sovereign state adopts principles of Democracy which according to Wikipedia include; check and balances federalism, individual rights, limited government popular sovereignty, republicanism and separation of power.

CONCLUSION

For equity to be reached in the country and the problem of the minority to addressed, the issue of proper implementation of the meaning and the attributes of democracy need to be considered in the country Nigeria. The right of the minority will not be buried on the cover of number. Democracy is actually an account of the right of all irrespective of the size and the population of the nation involved, therefor the demand and desire of the minority as we know them here in the country cannot be ignored and relegated because they are not more enough in the decision table for proper implementation. Plurality should not be the measure adopted to in the provision of dividend of democracy but based on equity the each and sundry will be beneficial without edging out because of number and population.

REFERENCES

- Nweke, Joshua (2004) "Citizens and Nigeria Political life. The saga of militarism A Revolutionary Approach. Cheston Agency Limited Enugu-Nigeria.
- Iain Mc Lean (1996) "Oxford concise Dictionary of politics Oxford University Press New York.
- Idachaba, E.U. (2006) "The Political, Economy of Peace Building" National Open University of Nigeria Press Lagos.
- John Patrick (2001) "Understanding Democracy, A Hip Pocket Guide. Oxford University Press.
- Nadia Sadiq Majeed (2018) www.researchgate.net
- Arend Lijphant (1977) "Democracy in Plural Societies". Yale University Press.
- Fredrik Barth – www.en.m.wikipedia.org
- Abraham Lincoln (1995) The new Webster encyclopedia Dictionary.
- Lindell, G and Scott, R. (1999) "A Greek English Lexicon" at perseus. www.perseus.tufts.edu
- Schattschneider (1960)

- Robert, A. Dahl (2021) "Democracy and its critics" Yale University Press
- Azikwe Nnamdi (1979) "Ideology for Nigeria Capitalism, Socialism or Welfare. Ibadan McMillian Publishers.
- Obafemi Awolowo (1968) "The People Republic", Ibadan Oxford University Press.
- Aceproject.org/ace-en "The Electoral knowledge Network
- Elijah John Okon (2016) "Plural society and the challenge of Democratic Practice in Nigeria" in Journal of developing Country Studies.
- Eze, J.A. (1997) "Management and Politics of Africa". Enugu Glanic Ventures.
- Daily Nation (February, 2014) Tyranny of Numbers, the curse that will produced 70 countries, Accessed from www.nation.co.ke/news
- Josephine, Wanangwe (2016) "Democracy and Development in Africa", Munich, GRIN verlag, <https://www.grin.com/document>
- Scott Lucass (2017) "The problems of Democracy in Africa", University of Birmigham. Wikipedia.org
- Furriwall J.S. (1984) "Colonial Policy and Practice: A comparative study of Burma and Netherland Cambridge University Press.
- B.I.C Ijomah (2011) "Nigerian Nation and the Problems of Socio political integration" Oluluben Publishers Centre for Policy Studies & Research.
- Tafawa Belewa (1984) Legislative Council Debate, Lagos.
- Uzoigwe (1999) "Assessing the History of Ethnic Religious Relation" in inter-ethnic and Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria Journal: Lexinton Book Maryland U.S.A.
- J.A. Ademola Yakubu (1999) Ethnicity and Nigeria Constitution in inter-ethnic and Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria Journal.
- Perna, Iha (2017) "Plural Society definition and meaning sociological Group, Jai Bhim.