

# Impact of Underdevelopment on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The Nigerian democratic project starting from the fourth Republic in 1999 has witnessed a lot of changes cum development as evidenced in the absence of military interregnum. The fact made above, notwithstanding, many factors which constitute the nature, character and features of underdevelopment still mitigate effective and efficient democratic consolidation in Nigeria. These factors include; dependency or the character of the Nigerian state, general poverty, poor technology, illiteracy, lack of finance, poor planning and implementation, endemic corruption, nature of the electoral body, dependent judiciary, thuggery occasioned by high unemployment, poor security and/or politicization of the security apparatus. These, no doubt, is a bane on democratic consolidation in Nigeria as cases of politics of acrimony, clashes, electoral malpractices such as under age voting, outright stealing and manipulation of electoral materials, intimidation of electoral officers, corruption, unacceptance of election results by political actors and ensuing demonstrations cum riots and unending litigations, dependence on international observers, etc. abound. Employing both the descriptive and analytical method on secondary data, this study shows that Nigeria has thus far attained a level of democratic consolidation, but lacks in great details some major indices of democratic consolidation, occasioned by the country's level of development.*

**Keywords:** Development, Underdevelopment, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Nigeria

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There was great hope, expectations and enthusiasm when Nigeria returned to multi-party politics and civilian rule in 1999. Two decades later, there has not been a case for military hijack of the established civilian rule, but despite the conduct of six consecutive general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019) some major indices of democratic consolidation as encapsulated by Ogunjobi (2007) are still lacking in the body politics of the state; thereby faltering the hope and expectations of the masses in the democratic process. As argued by Gunther et al. (1995), democratization process has three phases: the fall of the authoritarian regime, consolidation, and enduring democracy. The process in Nigeria has only so far witnessed the collapse of authoritarian military regimes while consolidating on that has become a challenge. Achieving a consolidated democracy requires good governance by democratic administrations. It also demands upholding democratic values of popular participation, respect for the rule of law, free and fair elections and the independence of the judiciary. Good governance essentially promotes improved welfare of the people, transparency and accountability by public managers in the conduct of state affairs and reduces corruption to the barest minimum. These correlates of democracy are some of the daunting challenges faced by the Nigerian state.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### 2.1 Development

The term development conjures up shades of desperate connotations. It is an all embracing concept which transcends economic, social and political changes. Okeke (2006) asserts that the concept of development is as old as the creation of man; with the emergence of man's consciousness of his environment after creation, it became very obvious to him that his immediate secular environment possesses a crude nature. For man to take care of his basic needs, namely; food, shelter and clothing, he must take care of his environment.

In its most basic sense, development means progress, it presupposes change for the better. Development involves a transformation or change from a position or condition that is hitherto unfavourable or less favourable to one that enables man to feel his social, political and economic needs and promote the growth and progress of society at large. Such change transcends a lot of variables or aspects of life and circumstances and thus giving rise to multi-angular definition in intellectual circles.

For instance, Todaro (1997) observes that development must be conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. Traditionally, development meant the capacity of a national economy, whose initial economic condition has been more or less static for a long time, to generate and sustain an annual increase in its Gross National Product (GNP) at rates perhaps 5% to 7% or more (Todaro and

Smith 2003). Development within this perspective was seen almost as purely an economic phenomenon, thus the major index of development has been a growth of income per capita or per capita GNP. It was believed that the benefits of growth will invariably extend to all segments of society. This process is referred to as 'trickle-down effect'. Furthermore, development has been defined as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to provide higher per capita incomes and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization Obi and Chukwuemeka (2006).

The definitions above despite providing good insights into the concepts of development, equates development with only an aspect of development. As noted earlier, development is an all-encompassing concept and transcends the economy. Development is just not all about growth, but all about people. It is making sure that the benefits of growth are redistributed to enhance a better quality of life for all. Hence, development is thus the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values (Ake 2001). It must therefore be conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty. It must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better (Todaro and Smith 2003).

In his own analysis, Rodney (1972) sees development both from the level of the individual and that of the society as a whole. At the level of the individual, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. On the level of the society, development cannot be seen purely as an economic affair, but rather as an overall social process which is dependent upon the outcome of man's efforts to deal with his natural environment. Development therefore, must be seen to be the nexus/engine to catapult the society to a greater height. Man is the reason cum epicentre of governmental activities; and government exists in order to bring about development in all areas of human existence.

## 2.2 Underdevelopment

Underdevelopment doesn't really mean absence of development. This is because, every country has a given level of economic, political and technological growth. The concept of underdevelopment was derived from a

comparison in the degree of development between one state and another or among countries in the global system. Underdevelopment is commonly ascribed to the third world countries that predominantly reside in the Southern hemisphere (Okeke 2006). They are also called 'less developed countries' or developing countries.

Some of the fundamental characteristics of underdevelopment include; weak position in international trade and diplomacy, economic, financial, technological and cultural dependency, import substitution industries that depend on external resources, marginalization of some groups in national affairs, predominance of the comprador bourgeoisie over national bourgeoisie, monopoly capitalism, mono culture economy, enclave economy, poverty of ideology, etc (Okeke 2006).

Dependency theorists believe that third world underdevelopment is a consequence of the exploitative contact between the West and these countries. Thus, Offiong (1980) argues that underdevelopment is not an original state as modernization theorists would want us to believe. The beginnings of African underdevelopment can be traced to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, abandoning of that trade in favour of 'legitimate trade' and the eventual partition of Africa (Obi and Chukwuemeka 2006). Dependency simply states that crucial economic decisions are made not by the countries that are being 'developed' but by foreigners whose interests are carefully safe guarded, thereby, engendering underdevelopment.

## 2.3 Democracy

Democracy like other concepts in social sciences suffers from the problem of universally accepted definition. Ezeani (2010) conceives democracy as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or indirectly through representatives periodically elected by them. The latter is called representative democracy. Thus, a state may be regarded as a democracy, according to Appadorai (1975, p.137) "if it provides institutions for the expression and, in the last analysis, the supremacy of the popular will on the basic questions of social direction and policy."

According to Huntington (1970), democracy exists where the principal leaders of a political system are selected by a competitive election in which the bulk of the population has the opportunity to participate. This definition simply implies that election is a sine qua non of democracy. This view is corroborated by Herment (1991) as he observes that democracy means first and foremost, the real possibility for those who are governed of choosing and unseating, peacefully at regular intervals those who govern them.

The essential features or characteristics of modern democracy as noted by Ezeani (2010, p.114) include; the

equal rights of all normal adults to vote and be voted for in elections, periodic elections, and equal eligibility for executive and judicial office, and freedom of speech, publication and association. In conclusion, democracy has indeed captured the political imagination of the world population. Today, democracy is a highly cherished value. Even societies that are clearly different in their politics claim it (Nnoli 2011). Nnoli (2011) further stressed that for a long time, it was part of the propaganda arsenal of both the East and West in their ideological struggle for world supremacy.

Democracy is particularly appealing to the oppressed peoples of the world whose yearnings for freedom, equality and justice are daily being frustrated. In fact, its propaganda value is so high that practically, every regime, even the most brutal, oppressive and unjust, wishes to justify its actions on democratic grounds. Probably for the first time in history, democracy is claimed as the proper ideal description of all systems of political and social organization advocated by influential politicians (Nnoli 2011).

#### 2.4 Democratic Consolidation

Literally, the concept 'democratic consolidation' means an identifiable phase in the transition from authoritarian rule to civil rule and by extension, democratic system that are germane and fundamental to the establishment and enthronelement of a stable, institutional and enduring democracy (Oni, 2014). Therefore, achieving democratic consolidation calls for the enthronelement of democracy as a system of organizing both the society and government and thereafter creates concomitant institutions, culture, ethics, support system and the will that are crucial in making it stable, efficient and responsive. Essentially, arriving at a consolidated democracy requires nurturing democratic values and ethos, principles and institutions in a matured sense that prevents a reversal to a hitherto authoritarian and/or semi-authoritarian regime. It also rests upon a strong and dynamic civil society whose responsibility it is to check repeated abuses of power and hold public officials accountable for their actions and inactions in the management of public resources and also serves to mitigate political conflicts.

How do we identify a democracy that is consolidated? First, there is the 'two election test' or put differently, the peaceful 'transfer of power' test. This criterion questions the attitude of political actors when defeated in an electoral contest. The second is the 'simple longevity' or 'generation test'. The import of this criterion is that twenty years of regular competitive elections devoid of electoral malpractices and violence should be sufficient enough to adjudge a democracy consolidated (Oni, 2014).

It is pertinent to note that democratic consolidation is an unending process rather than an end. All democracies

are at certain times subject to attacks at its structures and principles; democratic consolidation is the process at sustaining and retaining democratic principles and structures. Democratic consolidation is therefore the consistent and sustained practice of democratic principles, ethos and tenets.

#### 2.5 Conditions for Consolidating Democracy

Democracy is one of the strongest pillars of actualizing a lasting development in the post-colonial states in Africa. Hence, Ogunjobi, (2007), postulates that it does not exist nor vibrantly operate in a vacuum; there are certain conditions that copiously embellish its operational mechanism and attendant stability in expected areas of human development. These conditions, however, are sharply different from the basic characteristic features of a true democracy. The implication of this however, is that these conditions, if taking into considerations, enhance the harmonious stability of democracy, vis-a-vis the socio-economic and political platform upon which it operates. Such conditions as postulated by Bankole, (2009, p.23) are as follows:

- Facilitating economic growth: Consolidation of fundamental democratic infrastructure is largely dependent on the ability of the government to improve the economic condition through economic growth, investment in the productive sector, provide equal opportunities to its citizens, and provide employment opportunities within a globalizing world. In this regards, the government is committed to fostering a new economic order that will provide the necessary support for consolidation of democracy in the country.
- Globalization: Any discussion of economic growth today and investment drive has to take into account the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization, as observed by some scholars, is the intensification of the integration of the world economy, accentuated by the growth of global financial market; the cessation of the cold war; the growth of corporate activities of multinational companies, information, communication and transportation technology revolutions; internationalization of environmental problems; increasing intervention of the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organization (WTO) in national and regional economic and trade crises; and the assertiveness of the UN in resolving world political, social and economic problems. The world economy is completely integrated. With globalization, national economic policies are largely determined by outside institutions, namely IMF, World Bank and WTO that are taking keen interest in national policies and are very forceful in their prescriptions. In most cases, agenda of these institutions or their focus on micro and

macroeconomic policies does not take into account residual social policies, which might have serious political consequences for the body politic. For instance, is the withdrawal of oil subsidy by Nigerian government on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2012. This policy generated a tumultuous scenario such as general mass protests across the country, nationwide strike by the Nigerian Labour Congress, arson, looting, to mention but a few. However, Nigeria, which is the least beneficiary of globalization, can, with entrenched democratic values and improved investment climate, participate fruitfully in the globalization process.

- **Guaranteeing peace, security and containing conflict:** Peace and security are fundamental for consolidating democracy. These two pillars of any development process have been of serious concern to any government of the day. Soon after the establishment of democracy in the country, religious and ethnic crises began to re-emerge with intensity. Religious and sectarian crises emerged in Kaduna, Jos, Kano, Adamawa, Niger, Kebbi, Gombe, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Borno and Benin. Ethnic crises in Lagos, Benue and Taraba while restiveness continued in Niger Delta. The magnitude and intensity of the clashes were unprecedented. Although the clashes are seen to be either ethnic or religious, they are in reality political, promoted by various forces and interests. So far approaches to containing ethnic crises have been using either the military or the traditional and community rulers to intervene - another approach which seems to be promising is investing in democracy. It has been observed that the situation of conflict in Nigeria can only be contained with entrenchment of democracy in the country.
- **Professionalizing the military:** In its effort to professionalize the military in Nigeria, the civilian government first retired 93 senior officers who had held political appointments during the previous military regimes, whose continued retention in the services was considered not conducive to the grooming of a new and truly professional armed forces. Many of the retired officers served as ministers or as military governors of the 36 states. Furthermore, in 2001, three service chiefs were retired and replaced with Major Gen. Ogomudia as Chief of Army Staff; Rear Admiral Samuel Afolayan as Chief of Naval Staff and Air Vice Marshal Jonas Wuyep as Chief of Air Force. Between 2001 and 2011, the office of the president- Commander in Chief of Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, has appointed and retired other service chiefs and top military officers with Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika, Gen. Azazi, etc as some current service chiefs. Again, all legitimate professional needs of the military,

notably adequate funding, proper equipment and training on the use of modern weapons are given special attention. By this, the military is expected to limit itself to its constitutional role of defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. All these, is to make a stronger situation for the military to accord legitimacy to the democratic government of the day, other than plotting coups to topple the government of the day.

- **Capacity building for Bureaucratic Development:** One disturbing observation is the seemingly weak performance of civil service in new democracies in advancing the fight against poverty. This has implications for consolidation of democracy. To this extent, efficient and effective civil service, guided by professionalism and ethical conduct, is necessary for consolidation of democracy. They implement all government policies, including the process of liberalization of the economy and privatization of government parastatals. A weak, corrupt and demoralized civil service cannot cope with the challenges of development. In order to boost the morale of the civil servants and to enhance their financial status to face the challenge of democracy, a democratic government would always deem it necessary to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the working class in Nigeria polity. Hence, the withdrawal of oil subsidy on Jan 1st, 2012, was a sharp misrepresentation of the interest of the working class by government and a total situation of welfarist insensitivity by the so-called democratic administration of Goodluck Jonathan.
3. IMPACT OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT ON DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

Problematizing Nigeria's efforts at democratization would require a re-examination of the historical events that created the Nigerian entity. The 'forceful and thoughtless' marriage of the Northern and Southern protectorates by the British colonial rule had done more damage than good to the Nigerian society even before the granting of independence in 1960. It can be historically sustained that the Nigerian entity did not exist in vacuum before the British conquest of 1861. Different nationalities had existed with their respective and distinguishing values, traditions, cultures, norms, and in fact governmental system (Okeke, Nduba & Akam, 2019; Nduba, Nnamdi & Ofodu, 2020). These nationalities had attained different levels of economic and socio-political developments before colonialism truncated such process (Akinboye & Anifowose 1999, Rodney, 1972, Nduba, Nnamdi & Ofodu, 2020). Therefore, to amalgamate such nationalities in a marriage of inconvenience was to anticipate a failed relationship, a relationship which no doubt has been characterized *inter-alia* by mutual suspicion, hatred, deep animosity, violence, sectionalism and ethnic

chauvinism till date. Any democratization effort based on this strained relationship has, and is still frustrating any meaningful attempt at attaining full democracy.

The nature and character of the Nigerian state has not helped matters since the Nigerian state started out during colonialism. Colonialism in whatever forms, intends to achieve the twin objectives of exploration and exploitation of the colonized territories. As instructively observed by Young (1988), colonial Nigerian state was oppressive and authoritarian in its conduct and was not in a position to bridge its alien and distant nature from the Nigerian people. This, he argued was in line with the general nature of colonial state which sits atop a conquered entity.

Unfortunately, local elites that inherited the post-colonial Nigerian state continued with the authoritarian and alienating nature of the colonial Nigerian state for the one reason that the state did not evolve from the society and/or consensual agreement of the inhabiting nationalities. Because of the fragile nature of the Nigerian state encapsulated in weak institutional capacities to discharge state functions, political *dramatis personae* have over time personalized and usurped state apparatuses to the detriment of democratic practice and sustenance. State institutions and apparatuses including the police, electoral bodies, judiciary and political parties have demonstrated their weaknesses and incapacity in ensuring a virile democratic Nigeria as witnessed in the 1964-65, 1979, 1983, 1993 and 2011 elections.

The character of the Nigerian state has been exploited by the operators of state affairs to achieve particularistic and sectional interests. Managers of state affairs have often times assumed the position of the state thereby rendering the state paralyzed and in fact subjecting it to their whim and caprice (Chukwurah, Nnamani & Nduba, 2020). The situation became more pathetic under military regimes, with their unitary, hierarchical and commanding nature largely affecting the operation of the Nigerian state. Olaitan (1997, p.106-107) lends credence to this in his summation of the Nigerian state and the Babangida military regime: This essential character of the Nigerian state was properly identified and exploited by General Ibrahim Babangida who ruled Nigeria between 1985 and 1993 under an unprecedented regime of military presidency. To be sure, the notion of military presidency is essentially a loaded authoritarian one. Olaitan (1997) concluded that the surviving character of the Nigerian state defined by its lack of autonomy, the immensity of its power, its proneness to abuse and the lack of immunity against it, constitutes a road block to democracy.

In line with the foregoing, political parties are central to democratic consolidation. It is one of the indispensable institutions of democracy. It is perhaps incontrovertible to argue that political parties constitute one

of the major cog in the wheel of democratization and democratic consolidation in Nigeria (Okeke, Nnamani & Nduba, 2019). Indeed, a bulk of literatures on Nigerian government and politics rightly associated the demise of the First and Second Republics to the Party system (Adamolekun, 1985; Agbaje, 1990, 1996; Suberu, 1990; Fawole, 2005; Ogundiya and Baba, 2007). However, various authors differ in terms of emphasis. Some writers lay emphasis on the nature of the party system, party formation, composition (ethnic and religious) and geographical spread, others stressed the conflictual interparty and intraparty relationships. One major development in the recent years is that political parties in Nigeria have become a liability to democratic stability instead of asset. Party procedures for the appointment of candidates are usually scuttled and non-transparent, as political godfathers have taken over the affairs of the parties. Corrupt political financing has adversely affected democracy in two fundamental ways. First, it has generated serious intra party feuds between and among the followers and loyalists of the competing political godfathers resulting in political assassinations and contract killings, outright disqualification of contestants including sitting governors and legislators, etc. Intra party feuds since 1999 have assumed alarming and ludicrous dimension. Between 1999 and 2009 over 100 party stalwarts and thousands of party supporters have been assassinated including: Odunayo Olagbaju (AC party stalwarts in Osun state), Marshal Harry, Dikibo, Funso Williams (PDP Gubernatorial aspirant in Lagos state), Dr. Ayodeji Daramola (PDP stalwarts and Gubernatorial aspirant in Ekiti state) among others. Secondly, corrupt political financing has made ruling political parties at all level of governance reluctant to pass strict laws on political party financing, since some of the funds on which they rely for their survival are obtained from dubious sources and corrupt practices.

This further explains the weak support for anti-corruption posture of the federal government by the political parties. In a study in Kenya, Akivaga (2001) found that the ineffectiveness of the political parties in the crusade against corruption can be attributed to: first, lack of commitment to a national agenda even when it is formulated; second, the pursuit of short term personal interest as opposed to the long term interest of the nation; third, obsession with ethnic considerations as the basis of politics; fourth, lack of leadership with vision, that is, an absence of leaders whose word is their bond, who possess principles and will, and who put integrity and character above wealth. While this is true in the case of Nigeria, it needs be reiterated that political parties in Nigeria are corruptly constituted and as well managed by corrupt past military, bureaucratic and political class. In such situation, political parties, as a democratic institution cannot afford to be an agent of democratic consolidation but rather an agent of democratic decay.

Against this backdrop, technological deficit, poor planning and implementation also impacts negatively on the

consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Nnamani, Nduba & Nwanolue, 2019, Izunwanne & Nduba, 2020). This is evidenced in the malfunctioning and abuse of card readers (meant for verification of voters) for the general election in 2015 and 2019. Furthermore, the nature and character of the electoral body presents a setback to proper cum effective and efficient consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) still continues to be at the whim and caprices of the executive, thereby not allowing the electoral body both the political and financial and/or economic autonomy it deserves in order engender democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

In line with the foregoing, illiteracy, thuggery, snatching of ballot boxes, manipulation of election results to outright rigging, poor security and/or politicization of the security apparatus, has been a recurring decimal in the Nigerian body politics. These no doubt, impacts negatively on Nigeria's democratic consolidation. The recent gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo states were conducted peacefully with isolated incidents of electoral malpractices, intimidations and violent disruptions as well as harassment and assault directed mainly against female voters. Reporting on the Ondo election, Yiaga Africa (an election observer group) in its report states that:

Nigerian elections are signposted with practices that compromise the freedom of choice and undermine political legitimacy. Yiaga Africa notes with great concern the menace of vote-buying and the impunity exhibited by major political actors in procuring votes with huge amounts of cash during the Ondo governorship election. Across several polling units, the secrecy of the ballot was severely compromised despite attempts by polling officials to prevent voters and party agents from showing how ballot papers were marked. On election day, votes traded between N1000 and N7000 at the polling unit. It is Yiaga Africa's opinion that the massive vote buying employed by political actors in the election made it difficult for voters to freely cast their ballots in the polling units where they occurred. It is disappointing that elections are largely defined by the highest bidder and spender (Ewepu 2020, pp.9-10).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the above discussions and analyses that underdevelopment impacts negatively on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Elections are often marred with irregularities to the extent that the outcome usually doesn't reflect the wishes of the greater population. The proposals on evolving an enduring and sustainable democracy in Nigeria are large and growing (Ogundiya, S.I ,2008; Animashaun, M.A 2008; Yagboyaju, 2009, Adefulu 2001; Yagboyaju, 2010, Olaitan, 2001; Ogundiya, Olutayo and Amzat, 2009 etc.). However, this essay advances proposals

that are considered germane in consolidating democracy in the present fourth republic since it is imperative to avoid any reversal to the autocratic military regimes of the past. An important point to note is that the survival of democracy is positively and strongly tied to the strength of the state in coercively manifesting the properties of statehood. There is no denying the fact that the Nigerian state is fragile, weak and/or soft with overdeveloped structures without commensurate functions.

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