

Challenges of Democratic Consolidation In Nigeria (1999-2023)

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Abstract: *The main thrust of this paper is to examine challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria from 1999 - 2023. Interestingly, democracy has become the most dominant political movement in the world today. The viability and preference of democracy as a form of government above others is predicated on the unique prominence, relevance and opportunity it affords for popular participation. The popularity of this political practice has been a worldwide trend over the years. Even though Nigeria has experienced over twenty-four years of uninterrupted democratic practice since 1999, howbeit, there are various challenges confronting Nigeria's democracy which has restrained it from progressing. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine why democracy is not yet consolidated in Nigeria. The study adopted the qualitative method of research, utilizes secondary sources and relies on content analysis as its method of data analysis. To achieve this, the researcher sourced for information from published textbooks, magazines, and journal articles, online materials and other relevant publications. This paper therefore addresses the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria with key emphasis in the ongoing democratic republic. The study observed that the nature of competition for political power, election rigging, ethno-religious and identity conflicts, pervasive poverty, the godfather syndrome, corruption, and weak enforcement agencies among others are some of the factors which limit democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper recommends that for democracy to thrive in the country there should be a complete revitalization of democratic practice in Nigeria in such a manner that would leverage the potentials for democratic consolidation. This is because true democracy entails strict adherence to the rule of law, respect for human rights and the protection of life and property. Nigeria's electoral system should be strengthened, politicians should avoid rigging of election, and citizens should be allowed to elect leaders of their choice.*

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Democratic Consolidation, Challenges, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is a West African country with about 170 million people (Ploch, 2012). It is by far the most populous country in the whole of Africa (Ucha, 2010, p.48) and host about "one-sixth of the black population in the world" (Chukwuemeka, 2009, p.405). It is a country that is highly endowed with human and natural resources. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2004 reports that Nigeria's "crude oil reserves were estimated at 24 billion barrels in 2001" (USAID, 2007, p.1), and it has the 8th largest deposit of natural gas in the world (Chukwuemeka, 2009, p.405). By 2002, agriculture comprised 30 percent, mining and quarrying 37 percent, services 29 percent and manufacturing 4 percent of GDP (USAID, 2007:1), with over \$500 billion in petroleum export since independence (Lewis, 2006).

Democracy has been described as government by persons freely chosen by the governed who also hold them accountable and responsible for their actions while in government (Gana, 1996, p.12). A democratic system is one where rulers are held accountable to the ruled by means of a variety of political arrangements. Such arrangements include but are necessarily conterminous with, competitive multi-party elections held at regular intervals (Oronsaye, 1995, p.1). However, the main attribute of democracy is that, those holding political office do not have automatic security of tenure but can be challenged and even displaced in accordance with the will of the people through a wide range of institutional mechanism. Thus, the core ideas and ingredients defining democracy are participation and accountability; that the people determine who govern them, and that those who govern give account of their stewardship through periodic election is one of the most important mechanisms for the realization of the objectives of democratization. It is also important to note that, elections are not only meant to ensure, confirm or re-affirm the legitimacy of the governors through a regular consent, but also to provide a fertile ground for democracy to thrive (Ogundiya and Baba, 2007).

Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, political analysts, the academics and civil society groups have paid serious attention to the practice of democracy in Nigeria and are much more concerned about its consolidation. Twenty-four years down the line, the political landscape of Nigeria is yet to show clear evidence of democratic consolidation. Political scholars, analysts and social scientists alike have been unable to authoritatively rate Nigeria's democracy among nations heading towards democratic consolidation. Human rights abuses, corruption, political thuggery, anti-party activities, god-fatherism, violence, ethnic and religious conflicts continue unabated. The frequency of these crimes and societal anomalies backed by the lackadaisical attitude of the political elites to restore sanity into the system makes one wonder if Nigeria's democracy would ever be consolidated. Suffice to assert that democratic consolidation cannot be attained in Nigeria however until stability is restored. It is evident that though under the present democratic dispensation, Nigeria is still striving for consolidation.

Democratic consolidation literally refers to the deliberate political process in a polity by which democracy is broadly legitimized among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down (Ouyang, 2009). It means a democratic stay that cannot come to an end suddenly or abruptly through unconstitutional acts such as military coups or dictatorships. It implies established stability in governance. A consolidated democratic system would mean the existence of an enhanced economic development, developed

democratic culture, stable party system and a well refined political process that ensures continuous democratic practices. Gunther, Diamandourous and Puhle (1995) outlined three stages involved for a nation to achieve consolidated democracy: 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 serious challenge. Achieving a consolidated democracy requires good governance by democratic regimes. 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.

Elections have continued to be held in Nigeria since 1999 and new governments inaugurated at different levels of government, from the federal, state to local government levels. By some readings, the embedded processes constitute democratic consolidation. In some interpretations also it is even the very incidence of an unbroken cycle of elections that is describable as democratic consolidation. But elections are not ends in themselves. An election is a means to an end. Hence, it is not the very act of an election that confers legitimacy on democracy; it is the quality of the election. Then one of the critical indicators of quality in the elections that characterize democracy is competitiveness. Devoid of competitiveness, election will not be different from selection, and that would be when the shortcomings of the process are mildly stated. Elections that are lacking in competitiveness are impositions and there is nothing democratic about impositions. Competitiveness of elections is an allusion to the expectation of free and fair elections. But above everything else, competitiveness implies that the winner of an election is not predetermined.

Incidentally, winners of elections in Nigeria are now predetermined. Anytime results are announced contrary to the predetermination of the power elite, suggesting competitiveness, the germane actors use the law courts to upturn and invalidate the previously announced results. On the other hand, when the results are orchestrated to conform to the prearrangement of the power elite, no law court can invalidate the same result. Consequently, to challenge the result of a presidential election in Nigeria up to the nation's Supreme Court is a mere academic exercise. In the country's Imo State in 2019, after the governorship election results had been announced by the electoral umpire - the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Mr Emeka Ihedioha sworn in as Governor of the State on May 29, 2019, he was removed from office on January 15th 2020 by the country's Supreme Court (the highest court of law in the land). Mr. Hope Uzodimma who took the fourth position as earlier announced by INEC was declared winner and sworn in as the Governor of the state. Salihu (2020, p.101) describes the verdict of the Supreme Court as "an obviously bad judgment". The insinuation is that Governor Uzodimma has been imposed on the people, not elected, because he had been consecrated to win by the power elite. The process was not designed to be competitive.

The main thrust of this study is that from Nigeria's post-independence government, to the protracted military period and the current democratic dispensation in the country, the same breeds of power elite have continued to be in charge, but elections are currently being regularly held, it is contradictory to interpret the surrounding positions as democratic consolidation. In other words, what amounts to democratic consolidation can only occur when electoral choices are continuously made in sacrosanctity by the people under self-evident competitiveness? For Nigeria to achieve a consolidated democracy, so much more needs to be done.

In view of the above, this paper seeks to examine why democracy in Nigeria is not yet fully consolidated.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Democracy

There is no universally accepted definition of the term democracy. That is to say, the term has been defined by different scholars from different perspectives and each of these definitions in one way or the other reflects the experiences, cultures and values of the authors. Apart from being a subject of global concern, the concept democracy is particularly sensitive to the current socioeconomic and political circumstances of nations striving for international identity and developmental posture as well as liberality and good governance.

As an over-flogged concept, the idea as enunciated by the ancient Greeks means "demos cratos", which is literally translates into "people's power or rule" (Sarabjit, 2002, p.2). That goes to show that democracy has its root in Greek where individuals in a poll have an opportunity of taken part in decision making. The position explains democracy as a universal principle of governance that upholds high moral imperatives, accord the citizenry the right to participate in decision making that adheres to their collective will and interest, as opined by Ntalaja (2000). The concept can therefore be regarded as a governmental system that involves the widest spectrum of participation, either through elections or through the administration of the accepted policies. It is a government founded on the principle of rule of law which is against arbitrariness, highhandedness, dictatorship and also antithesis to military regime. According to Huntington (1968), 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 Hermet (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. Importantly, 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). He 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). Noteworthy, the best form of governance is democratic (see, Apter, 1977; Lijphart, 1977; Whitehead, 1996; Onokerhoraye and Omuta, 2005). The contentious issue is how to consolidate democratic principles in practice as obtains in theory, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. Nascent fledgling democracies in Africa contribute to democratic institutionalization, whose attributes include the establishment and promotion of proactive, pragmatic, rational and functional democratic institutions that facilitate democratic processes such as conduct of free, fair, credible and peaceful elections.

For the purpose of this study however, democracy is seen as “a political arrangement in which political power is vested in the majority of the citizens” (Asamoah, 2004, p.23); popular power (Adejumobi, 2004, p.12) among others. It is also seen as an on-going process influenced by past politico-institutional history of the democratizing society and whose survival depends on its consequence for the people, on how much it is able to better their material conditions in terms of literacy, security of life and property, better health, employment, food security, portable water and rural development, as well as ensure political stability (Olarinmoye, 2010, p.84).

Democratic Consolidation

Like every other concept in social sciences, the term democratic consolidation did not lend itself to a particular definition. Democratic consolidation is a crucial concept in the study of democratization and political development. It refers to the process by which a newly established or transitional democracy stabilizes and becomes deeply rooted in the political system, ensuring the protection of democratic values, institutions, and practices over time. The term “democratic consolidation” was first introduced by Guillermo O'Donnell in the 1970s and has since been a subject of extensive research and analysis in political science and comparative politics. Democratic consolidation involves the establishment of democratic norms, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, as well as the development of stable political institutions and mechanisms for peaceful political competition (O'Donnell, 1992). One of the most influential definitions was provided by Linz and Stepan. According to them, a democratically consolidated regime is “a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become in a phrase, ‘the only game in town’” (Linz and Stepan, 1996, pp.13-14). They further assert that democratic consolidation is a particular, institutionalized form of democracy and a procedural system with the following characteristics: (i) open political competition (ii) several freely competing parties and (iii) an array of civil and political rights guaranteed by law. Political accountability is critical and functions principally through the relationship between voters and their elected representatives (Haynes, 2003, p.50). Therefore, democratic consolidation goes beyond election and electoral results but a democracy is consolidated when it becomes the only game in town in three dimensions. These dimensions are behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional.

Behaviourally, a democracy is considered as the only game in town “when no significant political group seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic regime or to promote domestic or international violence in order to secede from the state.” Attitudinally, a democracy is said to have become the only game in town “when, even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedures.” Constitutionally, a democracy becomes the only game in town, “when all the actors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict within the state will be resolved according to the established norms, and that violations of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly” (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p.15).

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. According to Diamond (1999), democratic consolidation is the process of achieving broad and deep legitimization such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other realistic alternative. Achieving this legitimization would mean total reduction in the possibility of breakdown in the system to the point where democracy can be said that it will persist. While according to Oni (2014) 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 enthrone of a stable, institutional and enduring democracy. Therefore, achieving democratic consolidation calls for the enthrone 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.

According to Valenzuela cited in Okeke (2015) the construction of a consolidated democracy incorporates, in particular, an affirmation and strengthening of specific institutions, such as the electoral system, revitalized or newly created parties, judicial independence and respect for human rights, which have been created or recreated during the course of the transition. In this case, democratic consolidation becomes a post-transitional condition, curiously akin to some developmental fixity (Okeke, 2015). Moreover, democratic consolidation is a dynamic and ongoing process that can be influenced by various internal and external factors. For instance, economic development, social cohesion, and the presence of strong democratic norms can facilitate the consolidation

process (Diamond, 1999). On the other hand, challenges such as corruption, political polarization, and weak institutional capacity may hinder consolidation efforts (Levitsky and Way, 2002). Additionally, external factors, such as international organizations and neighbouring countries, can also impact the trajectory of democratic consolidation through support or interference (Moshood and Orunbon, 2024).

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 noteworthy that democratic consolidation in this study is viewed as a deliberate and meticulous efforts by the political elites and the citizens of a given country to develop and nurture a civil rule to a point that such regime meets the yearnings and aspirations of the subjects such as the socio-economic, political, psychological and cultural needs which can lead to greatest happiness for greatest number. It manifest under enhanced economic development, developed democratic culture, stable party system, suffices to assert that this cannot be attained in Nigeria until stability is attained. This therefore shows that though under democratic regime, Nigeria is striving for consolidation.

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 socioeconomic and political platform upon which it operates. Such conditions as postulated by Bankole, (2009, p.23) are as follows:

- a) Popular participation and promotion of equality: An important element of democratic consolidation is the promotion of equality of opportunity to vote, be voted for, and hold political and other public offices based on meritocratic principles in the main, with few isolated exceptional cases (Imhanlahimi and Ajiteru, 2023).
- b) Guaranteeing peace, security and containing conflict: A crucial democratic consolidation element is respect for the sanctity of the human life and right to live within the ambits of the law and uninhibited by those who operate above the law, promoting insecurity and taking advantage of weak public institutions. 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.
- c) 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.
- d) 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 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 (Nduba, Akam and Ayogu, 2020).
- e) 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.
- f) Equally important, is the promotion of civil liberties which represent a broad spectrum of freedoms, including those of opinion and speech as well as the promotion of competing political parties giving alternative platforms to the electorate for comparison and choice of government regularly (Appadorai, 2000). Democratic consolidation can contribute to shoring up of weak public institutions in Africa, particularly Nigeria, by promoting positive aspects discussed above as well as plurality and sustainable development.

Nigeria Political History, Electoral Politics, Political Instability and the Return to Democratic Rule in 1999

Nigeria as a nation came into existence in 1914 when the Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated under Sir Fredrick Lugard as the Governor-general, thus becoming a colony of Britain. Nigeria gained political independence from Britain 46 years later on October 1st 1960. Since then, Nigeria has been in one form of experiment or the other with democracy. The first experiment with democracy (1960-1966) was not easy as it was bedeviled by a myriad of problems. At independence, the young nation was handed over to an ill-prepared and ill-trained leadership. Under this circumstance, it became a matter of grappling with ideas and methods, which bred chaos that led to military intervention in January 1966. The president was not an executive president but a ceremonial one, and could not take important decisions on his own, because the actual power resided with the prime minister. Even in the face of emergencies, the president could not act (Epelle and Enyekit, 2013).

Howbeit, the First Republic was the republican government of Nigeria between 1963 and 1966 governed by the first republican constitution. The country's government was based on a federal form of the Westminster system. The country was split into three geopolitical regions - Western region, Eastern region and Northern region and its political parties took on the identities and ideologies of each region. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) represented the interests of the predominantly Hausa/Fulani Northern region, the National Council of Nigeria citizens represented the predominantly Igbo Eastern Region and the Action Group (AG) dominated the Yoruba Western region. The NPC took control of the federal parliament and formed a coalition government with the NCNC. Ahmadu Bello, leader of the NPC, was poised to become the prime minister, but instead he chose to become the Premier of the Northern region, and supported his Deputy Tafawa Balewa's candidacy for Prime Minister. This raised suspicions amongst the Southern politicians, who resented the idea of a federal government controlled by a regional leader through his designated proxy. In the end, Tafawa Balewa of NPC was named Prime Minister and Head of Government, and Nnamdi Azikiwe of NCNC was named President.

At Nigeria's independence, the Northern region gained more seats in parliament than both Eastern and Western regions combined; this would cement Northern dominance in Nigerian politics for years to come. Resentment amongst Southern politicians precipitated into political chaos in the country. Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of Western region, was charged with sedition and convicted in a controversial trial. With incarceration of Awolowo, Samuel Akintola was elected as the Premier of Western region. Akintola was widely seen as a tool of the North, and he presided over the most chaotic era in Western region one which earned it the nickname "the Wild-Wild West". This forced the Balewa government to crackdown on lawlessness in the West using military might. There was monumental corruption in high and low places. One prospect that this administration made to the effort of consolidating the Nigerian democracy was the decentralization of the centre. Regions were given autonomy, creating a strong peripheral government. The political unrest during the mid-sixties culminated into Nigeria's First military coup d'etat. On 15 January 1966, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and his fellow rebel soldiers led by Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna (mostly of Southern extraction) in the Nigerian Army, executed a bloody takeover of all institutions of government, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, was assassinated along with the Premier of Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello, and the Finance Minister, Festus Okolie Eboh. Major General Johnson Aguiyi - Ironsi took control as the first head of the federal military government of Nigeria on January 16, 1966.

The Second Republic was the republican government of Nigeria between 1979 and 1983 governed by the second republican constitution. Following the assassination of Nigerian military Head of State General Murtala Mohammed in 1976, his successor General Olusegun Obasanjo initiated the transition process to terminate military rule in 1979. A new constitution was drafted, which saw the Westminster system of government (previously used in the First Republic) jettisoned for an American presidential system. The 1979 constitution mandated that political parties and cabinet positions reflect the "Federal character" of the nation. Political parties were required to produce at least one cabinet member. Onyeka (2002) offers an apt description of the 1979 General Elections in Nigeria. According to him, the 1979 elections were fairly smoother than those of 1964. The elections contested by the five (5) registered political parties namely: The Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The election also recorded some basic malpractice for which Nigerian elections were known -rigging, thuggery and violence. Most of them were school dropouts, university students, thugs and hoodlums. The greatest bone of contention in the 1979 General elections was interpretation of the $\frac{2}{3}$ rd of the 19 states. The widely monitored 1979 election saw the election of Alhaji Shehu Shagari on the NPN platform. On October 1, 1979, Shehu Shagari was sworn in as the First President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Shagari administration was ejected from power on New Year's Eve 1983. General Muhammadu Buhari, the leader of the rebellion, cited charges of corruption and administrative incompetence as reasons for military intervention. During the 1983 elections, charges of electoral fraud were replete and pervasive. With the "landslide victory" slogan, attempts were made by the NPN to continue holding unto power at both federal and state levels. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was indicted by the commission of inquiry headed by Babalakin. In response to this ugly development, FEDECO was dissolved, while the National Electoral Commission (NEC) came on board.

The problem of consolidating democracy in the Second Republic (1979-1983) under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari was no less difficult than that of the First Republic. The problems that infested the democratic process were numerous among which are corruption, ethnicity, tribalism and lack of vision etc. The administration continued on the visionless path of the previous republic. FEDECO (the electoral body) that was being used to conduct elections was appointed by the previous military government. The Shagari administration funded and used it, which should not be. The judicial system was such that "he who pays the piper dictates the tune". Judges were directly and secretly controlled by the executives. Obedience and allegiance of the judges was first to the

government and not to the rule of law. The National Assembly of the era was unable to provide the nation with proper political direction in more areas than one. Under this administration, militancy and thuggery gained ground as witnessed in the case of Akin Omoboriowo in the West and Ikemba Odumegwu Ojukwu/Jim Nwobodo in the Eastern parts of Nigeria. There were no programme put in place in economic, social services, transport and educational sectors. Education was in fact destroyed as this period witnessed the non-payments of the teachers' salaries, strikes and shutdown of schools. Ethnicity and ethnic nationalities was promoted to a disgraceful proportion as appointments into public offices and employment into the civil service was not on merit but based on where one comes from. The economy remained a mono-product (oil) one. The administration lacked the will to diversify into other areas. This led to over dependence on the one product that the nation produces- crude oil.

The aborted Third Republic (1991-1993) period witnessed a mock attempt to install a democratically elected government by the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. The constitution of the Third Republic was drafted in 1989, when General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB), the military Head of state, promised to terminate military rule by 1990, a date which was subsequently pushed back to 1993. IBB lifted the ban on political activity in the spring of 1989, and his government established two political parties, the center-right National Republican Convention (NRC) and the center-left Social Democratic Party (SDP). Gubernatorial and state legislative elections were conducted in December 1991, while the presidential election was postponed till 12 June 1993, due to political unrest. The Presidential election of June 12, 1993 saw Chief M.K.O. Abiola, a Yoruba, won a decisive victory on the SDP platform, and was seen as the neatest election ever held in Nigeria. Under the guidelines, the results collated at state level could not be announced elsewhere except Abuja. When the results from about 16 states has been announced, a pro-government organization known as the Association for Better Nigerian (ABN) secured an order that forestalled the announcement of the entire result. The NEC boss, Professor Humphrey Nwosu was compelled by the then President Ibrahim Babangida to comply with the order hence the genesis of the June 12, 1993 annulment, and this threw the country into chaos, IBB eventually bowed to pressures from his inner circle and resigned from office on 23 August 1993. Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba businessman, and the head of IBB's transition team, assumed the office of the presidency as the head of the Interim National Government. Shonekan was unable to manage the political turmoil which ensued in the post IBB months. His caretaker government was quietly removed from office, by the minister of Defense, General Sani Abacha on 17 November 1993. On 11 June 1994, president elects Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola declared himself president and went into hiding. The Abacha administration hunted Abiola down and arrested him for treason. Abiola remained in prison until his death in 1998.

Abacha's transition programme kicked off in March, 1996 with non-party local government election to select councilors and council chairman through an electoral college. A second election scheduled for December on Party basis was put off. Only five of the thirty associations that applied for registration as political parties were registered; the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) schemed off the three most viable parties that ought to be registered. These associations were the: All Nigerian Congress, the Socialist People's Party and the People's Progressive Party. The registered political parties were the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM). These were seen as parties set up mechanically to declare General Abacha a consensus candidate. In the rescheduled local government election that held on 15th March, 1997, under party basis, the UNCP, supposedly government favoured party gained majority of the council seats. The election was massively rigged. Other parties were transparently rigged off. The transition programme that was initially billed to end on October 1, 1997 was postponed. It was then clear that General Sani Abacha was serious with his self-succession bid as earlier speculated. Abacha eventually kicked the bucket thereby putting his transition programme to rest. Following the death of Military dictator and de facto ruler of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha in 1998, his successor General Abdusalami Abubakar initiated the transition which heralded Nigerian's return to democratic rule in 1999. The ban on political activities was lifted, and political prisoners were released from detention facilities. The constitution was styled after the ill fated Second Republic which saw the Westminster system of government jettisoned for an American Presidential system. Political parties were formed (PDP, ANPP, and AD), and elections were set for April 1999. The widely monitored 1999 election saw the election of former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo on the PDP platform,

The Fourth Republic began on 29 May 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The State and Failure of Nigeria's Democratization (1999-2023)

The importance of fostering democracy in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and a nation of vast natural and human resources. It is also a nation of greatly unrealized potential, plagued for decades by financial mismanagement, widespread corruption, and explosive ethnic tensions. Successive military and civilian governments have plundered the public coffers and allowed the nation's infrastructure and productive capacity to fall apart. Nigeria is one of the developing countries where democratization took place in several stages. The new democratic dispensation in Nigeria was launched again in 1999 leading to the emergence of the Fourth Republic (Adagbabiri, 2015). This came after a long time of despotic military rule in the country. Immense hopes and expectations greeted the return to multi-party politics in 1998 and consequently civil rule in 1999 (Oni, 2014). Democracy was highly embraced by all, with expected hope that it would deliver good dividends and socioeconomic development. However, this process did not occur, it was accompanied by many challenges, namely: lack of political discipline, conflict and violence, corruption, poverty which lead to mass unemployment, gender issues and so on. These challenges have a

strong impact on democratic stability and consolidation in Nigeria. The source and nature of transition in 1999 was later found to constitute threat to the foundation of democracy and obliterates the current efforts at consolidating democracy.

Since restoration of democratic rule in the country, change of government has been orderly while elections have been periodic. Between 1999 and 2023, there have been seven successive transitions from civilian government to another (Obasanjo Administration, 1999-2003; 2003-2007; Yar'adua/Jonathan Administration, 2007-2011; Jonathan Administration, 2011-2015; Buhari Administration, 2015-2019; 2019-2023) and the present administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu which began in 2023. This is also applicable to the legislature. Since 1999, the country has successfully passed through seven legislative houses both at the centre and the component units. Elections have continued to be held in Nigeria since 1999 and new governments inaugurated at different levels of government, from the federal, state to local government levels. By some readings, the embedded processes constitute democratic consolidation. In some interpretations also it is even the very incidence of an unbroken cycle of elections that is describable as democratic consolidation. But elections are not ends in themselves. An election is a means to an end. Hence, it is not the very act of an election that confers legitimacy on democracy; it is the quality of the election. Then one of the critical indicators of quality in the elections that characterize democracy is competitiveness. Devoid of competitiveness, election will not be different from selection, and that would be when the shortcomings of the process are mildly stated. Elections that are lacking in competitiveness are impositions and there is nothing democratic about impositions (Okeke and Muoneke, 2022).

There were four rounds of elections - Local government election on 5th December 1998, State and gubernatorial elections on 9th January 1999; National Assembly and State Legislature election on 20th February 1999, and Presidential elections on 27th February 1999. These were the first elections since the 1993 military coup, and the first elections of the Fourth Nigerian Republic. Thus, Osaghae (1999) noted that after a prolonged military rule characterized by the wanton violation and repression of the political, economic, and social rights of the people, the redemocratization process began in 1999 elicited renewed expectations for the consolidation of democracy in the country. Noteworthy, the 1999 General elections to finally disengage the military from politics were also rigged like previous elections in Nigeria. There were allegations on shortage of electoral materials at the polling centres, thumb printing of ballot papers outside polling centres, about voting returns bearing little resemblance to the poor turnout of voters, etc (Ojukwu, Okoye, Okeke and Umeh, 2023). The All Peoples Party (APP)/Action for Democracy (AD) alliance went to court to challenge the declaration of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Olusegun Obasanjo as the winner. Since the restoration of civil rule, attempts have not been made by politicians to deepen and strengthen democracy. Instead, Nigeria has only added to its history of fraudulent and violent elections.

On 12th April, 2003 another Parliamentary elections were held in Nigeria while Presidential and gubernatorial elections were held on 19th April 2003. The result was a victory for the ruling People's Democratic Party, which won 76 of the 109 Senate seats and 223 of the 360 House of Representatives seats. The 2003 elections were significant for Nigeria as the country's first sustained transition from one civilian government to another. However, the 2003 elections were more pervasively and openly rigged than the flawed 1999 polls, and far more bloody. In April and May 2003, at least one hundred people were killed and many more injured during federal and state elections in Nigeria. The majority of serious abuses were perpetrated by members or supporters of the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In a number of locations, elections simply did not take place as groups of armed thugs linked to political parties and candidates intimidated and threatened voters in order to falsify results. The violence and climate of intimidation facilitated widespread fraud, invalidating the results of the elections in many areas. Unfortunately, the elections were hailed as peaceful by Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was re-elected, and were widely praised by foreign governments, including Nigeria's key foreign allies (Ojukwu, Okoye, Okeke and Umeh, 2023).

Another general election was held in Nigeria on 21st April 2007 to elect the President, Vice President and members of the Senate and House of Representatives while Governorship and State Assembly elections were held on 14 April, 2007. Umaru Yar'Adua of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the highly controversial presidential election, and was sworn in on 29th May, 2007. The ruling PDP won 26 of the 32 states, according to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), including Kaduna state and Katsina state, where the results were contested by the local population. The 2007 elections were the third to be held since the reintroduction of democracy in 1999. The elections were considered to be very critical because, apart from providing a platform to test the commitment of the Nigerian authorities to the strengthening and consolidation of democracy, it was also the second time that power would be transferred from one civilian president to another, after the botched transfer in 1983, when General Buhari and his supporters removed Shehu Shagari through the 31st December coup d'état. The 2007 election in particular, severely dented Nigeria's democratic credentials due to the national and international condemnation they elicited. However, on a rather positive note, the election led to a great deal of soul-searching among the Nigerian leadership. The President at the time, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, publicly acknowledged that the election that brought him to office was fundamentally flawed (Ojukwu, Mbah and Maduekwe, 2019). He therefore set up the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) to suggest measures that could improve the conduct of elections; restore electoral integrity and strengthen democracy in Nigeria. Some of the Electoral Reform Committee's recommendations were reviewed and adopted as amendments to the constitution and Electoral Act. The government also tried to restore the integrity of elections in the country by appointing credible leadership to the INEC. For its part, the INEC adopted series of internal measures aimed at restoring public confidence in the electoral process (Kuris, 2012).

Parliamentary elections were held on 9th April, 2011 while Presidential and gubernatorial elections were held in Nigeria on 16th April 2003. The election followed controversy as to whether a Muslim or Christian should be allowed to become president given

the tradition of rotating the top office between the religions and following the death of Umaru Musa Yar'adua, who was a Muslim, and Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, assuming the interim presidency. Nevertheless, the 2011 General elections in Nigeria were not free from crisis. These strategies of causing electoral crisis were used predominantly by the incumbent party and were deployed most vigorously where the electoral contest was expected to be particularly tight. Although, electoral crises have not been the exclusive preserve of the ruling party, candidates and supporters of the larger opposition parties also carried out the acts of violence in the pursuit of electoral victory. Furthermore, whenever crisis was instigated by supporters of one party whether ruling or the opposition, their opponents usually do not hesitate to respond (Lawal, 2014; (Ojukwu, Okoye, Okeke and Umeh, 2023).

The 2015 General elections were held in Nigeria on 28th March to elect the President, Vice President and members of the Senate and House of Representatives while Governorship and State Assembly elections were held on 11th April, 2015. General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress emerged as the winner of the presidential elections and was sworn-in on 29 May 2015. The General elections in 2015, which featured Nigeria's first ever opposition victory at the presidential level, only appeared to deepen the trend of INEC's improving public legitimacy and increased embrace of technology. Stewarded by Attahiru Jega, the commission's pre-election preparations featured a cleaned-up voter database, with the previous register of 73.5 million voters reduced to 67.4 million based on the institutions uncovering of duplicate, fictitious or deceased individuals on the voter register. INEC likewise introduced electronic card readers at polling units, allowing only registered voters to cast a ballot, and removing the possibility that vote numbers could be locally padded. The Buhari administration promised to tackle security issues, particularly the persistent threat posed by Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), in the Northeast (Aina, 2023). Other promises which won over the hearts and minds of Nigerians at the time included fighting corruption and prioritizing the economy. While Nigeria has made some significant progress in degrading Boko Haram and ISWAP, former President Buhari's claim that the insurgency was 'technically defeated' has been disputed in several quarters, including among policy analysts and commentators (Aina, 2023). Similarly, the fight against corruption has mostly been perceived as 'selective' and politically motivated. In addition, the country has not made much progress on the economic front in the past years, with a high debt profile and a consistent rise in inflation. This has brought significant economic hardship on Nigerians.

The 2019 General elections were held in Nigeria on 2nd March to elect the President, Vice President and members of the Senate and House of Representatives while Governorship and State Assembly elections were held on 9th March, 2019. President Muhammadu Buhari was re-elected for another four-year term. The 2019 Nigerian General election suffered from unique issues and challenges and also enjoyed successes that had not been witnessed in the previous five elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The 2019 General election was characterized by previous challenges and similar shortcomings that affected the past elections in Nigeria. These include recorded violence, vote buying, and opening of polling units lately. These challenges did not compromise the credibility or acceptability of the election by the voters and observers but the country failed to use the opportunity to improve on its election conduct and improve its quality. The voters' turnout declined from that of 2015 and 2011 to 39.09% in comparison with that of the 2015 of 46.5%. This is in spite of the highest voters' registration and Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) collection prior to 2019 (Yiaga Africa, 2019).

General elections were held in Nigeria on 25th February 2023 to elect the President and Vice President and members of the Senate and House of Representatives while Governorship and State Assembly elections were held on 18th March. The 2023 General election is the seventh consecutive general election since Nigeria re-established its democracy in 1999. The elections mark 24 years of uninterrupted democracy—the longest span in Nigeria's history. Nigeria's 2023 General election was one of the most keenly contested elections in the country's history and also, was seen as the tightest race since the end of military rule in 1999. Interestingly, the 2023 General Election was the first nationwide elections conducted within the framework of the new Electoral Act, which President Buhari signed into law in February 2022. Continuing Nigeria's reputation for using advanced technology in elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) utilized two technological innovations to improve the integrity and transparency of the electoral process. The Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) verifies and authenticates voters, and the INEC Results Viewing Portal is a public-facing voter tabulation system that the INEC deployed nationwide. Mr Tinubu's victory in 2023 Presidential election marks one of the lowest thresholds secured by any elected president in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which began in 1999. The former Lagos governor secured 37 percent of the total votes cast in the election. No other president-elect scored less than 50 percent of the votes cast (Premium Times, March 4, 2023).

The election suffered from logistical and technological shortcomings, as well as reports of staff misconduct. In many areas, tallies for the presidential election were not uploaded from polling stations to INEC's electronic portal for several days after voting was over, and even after the commission had declared Tinubu the winner, despite pre-election promises that the results would appear online in real time. There were disparities in the conduct of the polls and credibility of results among various locations, some even within the same area, have led to intense disputes between winners, who claim the polls were free and fair, and others who reject the results as irredeemably flawed. For instance, there were allegations in some quarters that the IReV and BVAS technologies were deliberately disrupted in collusion with internal saboteurs in INEC whose aim was to circumvent and manipulate the presidential election process. The fact that some Senatorial and Federal House of Representatives elections were uploaded, but not the presidential results, also fuelled rumours of vote manipulation. Despite optimism from both INEC and citizens that technology could be a game changer in Nigeria's elections, the manner the technology was deployed during results transmission stage has weakened the public perception of transparency and accountability of the electoral process. Election violence and insecurity significantly affected the

2023 elections, particularly in the pre-election period. The lead-up to the election was more violent than the equivalent period in 2019, and the overall 2023 election cycle saw significantly more fatalities and incidents of election violence, in significantly more LGAs, when compared to the 2019 election cycle.

An overview of the principle of democracy reveals the pursuit of public interest as a cardinal feature of democracy and this underscore the general understanding and its conception as 'the government of the people by the people and for the people'. The underlining expression in the principle of election during any democratic process is the art of entrusting into the hands of the elected political leaders, the citizen's rights and freedom, which are to be managed by the elected leaders. It marked off the connection between the citizens and their leaders. As a matter of fact, the connection was more of a contract. The democratically elected leaders are representatives of the people. It is therefore expected that decisions that will be made, policies that would be formulated and implemented must be in the interest of the people and not the individual interest. But, the opposite is the case in Nigerian democracy. Decisions were taken without respect to people's opinion. After swearing-in on May 29, 2024, President Bola Tinubu reviewed upward the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) by over 70% in the name of oil subsidy removal without any form of consultation. Meanwhile, with the hardship that the masses of Nigerians are facing, the National Assembly members have carted home N160 million brand new Toyota Land cruiser jeeps each. What an absurdity!

Having celebrated twenty-four years of unbroken democratic system in Nigeria, how much of this unbroken democracy has translated into security, employment, food security, constant electricity supply and affordable healthcare? Finding shows that Nigeria democracy is under-consolidated. Behaviourally, there are all kinds of protest over skewed appointments, agitations for secession by some groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which has now been proscribed (Adesomoju, 2018). Attitudinally too, it is oblivious that most groups and individual has little faith in most democratic institutions like INEC, security agencies, and others as they accused them of bias and always acting in the interests of some influential individuals and groups. Just like it has become a common practice of having elections INEC declared winners being canceled and some others upturn, all are creating more problems of trust in the institutions. Constitutionally, several court judgments have been disobeyed mostly by the government, e.g., Sambo Dasuki and Comrade Omoyele Sowore (Okakwu, 2019). These are indications that democracy is yet to be consolidated as some government and their agents take directive from a government official and not following court ruling as at and when due.

Manifestation of consolidated democracy in Nigeria will mean that political actors will no longer use violent means to gain power or military overthrowing civilian administration, but rather, legal means are used. Such must be one that will give a fair judgment. Similarly, consolidation of democracy should be able to manifest in how issues of national importance/ interest are resolved, unlike presently when they are viewed from the religious and ethnic lines (Ashindorbe, 2018). Put differently, as Linz and Stepan will say, democracy must be as "the only game in town. However, the truth remains that no democracy is entirely perfect, as the above indication does not necessarily mean there is no consolidation of democracy. However, when it becomes frequent like in our case, it calls for worries and need to address it to have working and functional institutions, to achieve the associated benefits of a democratic government.

Democracy and the Challenges of Consolidation in Nigeria

Electoral Process and Power Transition Debacle

Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic may best be described as precarious, a situation that has left many Nigerians shun the polling booths on many electoral occasions. Since the inception of the present republic, seven general elections have been concluded. The seven general elections have been conducted under unfertile atmosphere because of the absence of enabling conditions for democratic participation which of course is the greatest obstacle to democracy as Ake (1996, p.11) argued. The Prebendal and predating nature of Nigerian politics (Joseph, 1991) has turned electoral competition into warfare among political elites which can no longer be regulated by the constitutive rules of the game. The soft and weak nature and character of the Nigerian state has reduced electoral contests to the battle of the strongest and the potentialities of who holds the instruments of the state. The state became a tool in the hands of political elites to achieve sectional and particularist interests. Politicians have tagged elections a "do or die affair" going by the words of former President Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 2007. All sorts of dastardly acts are perpetrated by Nigerian politicians in order to win elections at all cost. Ashiru Dele (2009, p.101) aptly summarized the electoral process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic thus: "Apart from the violent nature of our electoral competition, the contestants for state power also try to undo or outdo one another using all shades of electoral malpractices such as recruiting juvenile to vote, detaching ballot booklets, duplicating ballot papers, vandalizing voter materials, stuffing of ballot boxes, and outright intimidation of opponents as well as falsification of electoral results". It is instructive to state that these anti-democratic behaviours exhibited by politicians before, during and after elections in Nigerian vitiate the sanctity of the elections and also blemish the democratization process. What the above implies is that the legitimacy of democracy as the best form of governance has been corroded.

Election rigging

Credible periodic elections are a crucial factor in the survival of any political system and the conduct of free and fair election is the beauty of a democratic structure. This is because it makes electoral activities meaningful and the interest of the electorates represented. But in Nigeria especially in this Fourth Republic, elections have become a tool for promoting the interest of the aristocrat rather than the electorates. The philosophical basis and fundamental ethos of democracy are being swept under the carpet making

the Nigerian electorates to lose faith in the electoral process and the government. Analytically, the 2003, 2007, 2011, 2019 and 2023 General elections were adjudged to be worst elections in the history of Fourth Republic. This is because the elections were characterized by; massive rigging, monetization factor, assassination, political thuggery, sentiments, corrupt practices of electoral officers, judicial injustice, deliberate disfranchisement of the populace, discountenancing of the electorate's vote, outright disregard for the rule of law etc. Electoral practices that are antithetical to democracy are often promoted in Nigeria, calling to question the basic tenets of democracy including free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria. Elections, we should note, are free when they are not characterized by violence and disruption of any kind and when there is peaceful and orderly environment conducive for all participants in the process. Elections are also free when electorates are independently allowed to choose candidates of their choice without any fear of intimidation or harassment. Elections are regarded as fair only when the umpire, the electoral body treats all contestants with equality and also provide a level – playing ground for all to compete. However, experiences in Nigeria have shown that election credibility has no correlation with legitimacy. Election rigging has dealt a huge blow to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It has promoted the imposition of unqualified and corrupt individuals on Nigerians who have no regard and respect for the principle of democracy.

High cost of nomination fees

Then there is the mercantilist factor in the sale and purchase of the expression of interest and nomination forms of the major political parties in the country. In this regard, Itodo (2022) reports that for the 2023 General elections “the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) fixed the cost of nomination forms for President at N100 million (\$240,884), Governorship at N50 million (\$85,470), Senate at N20 million (\$34,188), House of Representatives at N10 million (\$17,094) and State Assembly at N2 million (\$3,418)”. Then “the leading opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) pegged N40 million (\$68,376) as the cost for presidential nomination forms, N21 million (\$35,897) for governorship, N3.5 million (\$5,982) for senate, N2.5 million (\$4,273) for the House of Representatives and N1.5 million (\$2,564) for state house of assembly” (Itodo, 2022). This only translates to competitiveness in the purchase of the forms, not in the elections. The nation's power elite uses such excessive charges to debar credible but non-members of their class from standing for election. The resultant scenario rather smacks of exclusivity in place of competitiveness in general elections.

Ethno-religious and Identity Conflicts

This remains one of the forces that have contributed greatly to socio-political instability in the country. The latest sectarian turbulence in the country and the clamour for the presidency by the varied ethnic groups indicate that the society is still balkanized by tribal and religious sentiments (Victor, 2002). Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 ethnic conflicts and violence has taken the centre stage in Nigerian politics. Inter and intra-group competition for the highly priced state power and resources made the “forces of identity, particularly ethnicity and religion, became appealing” (Omotola, 2008a, p.59). This has often resulted in the outbreak of violent conflicts in which many lives have been lost and properties worth millions of Naira (Nigerian currency) destroyed. Some of these conflicts include the Sagamu crisis in 1999; Ife-Modakeke war in 2000; ethnic violence between the Tiv and the Azara origin in Nasarawa state in 2001; the Tiv-Jukun crisis in 2001; the recurrent blood bath between Hausa-Fulani settlers and indigenous people in Plateau state; and the religious imbroglio of 4th May 2004 in Yelwaq, Bauchi state. This orgy of violence has become a permanent feature in the Northern states (Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009, p.12). In addition, they make the creation of a common identity problematic, thereby exacerbating the difficulty in attaining a true democracy in the society. Another spin-off from ethnic conflicts and religious differences is the spate of attacks on innocent farmers by people alleged to be Fulani herdsmen. Failure by government security forces to stop brazen attacks of one ethnic group over others is a ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

The Absence of True Federalism

Lack of true federal structure in Nigeria is a stumbling block to the nation's ongoing democratic enterprise. The federal government is very overbearing as it controls about 80% of the country's resources leaving state and local governments at its mercy. Where regions, states or geographical zones have the power to control their resources and to have access to the necessary funds for community development programmes, democracy thrives. ‘In fact, it is only true federalism that can guarantee fairness and justice in the society. More importantly, it enables each locality to progress according to the aspiration of the people. A durable and enforceable people's constitution is an indispensable tool to make this feasible, as the constitution protects the people and determines socio-political activities in a society. As noted in the philosophy of Aristotle “we can decide the identity of a state only by examining the form (and contents) of its constitution”. In Nigeria we lack the reality of such a federal constitution and true federal state (Awuodu, 2012).

Pervasive Poverty

Continued poverty, reinforced by mass unemployment is a barrier to Nigeria's quest for consolidating her democracy. A society of beggars, parasites and bandits cannot develop. It cannot know peace or stability and cannot be democratic (Ake, 1996). This shows that any individual deprived of the basic wherewithal cannot participate effectively in a democratic process. A poor

person is therefore not a full-fledged social individual, as he/she lacks the basic freedom to engage in the life he/she enjoys. One can safely argue that poverty is a hindrance to democratic consolidation since economic chaos can topple democratic institutions. The problems of poverty and injustice are good part of Nigeria, and the citizens do not seem to understand what is in their culture preventing them from achieving a just, prosperous-dignified life and true democracy. It is essential to note that about 70% of the Nigerian populations are estimated poor. Is there any wonder why the society is chaotic? (Victor, 2002). The consequence of the above estimation substantiates how the masses in Nigeria are easily brainwashed and their right of choice terribly manipulated making an objective choice seldom to consideration. And more often than not, various forms of inducements and gratification which provide very temporary relief from the scourge of poverty are given central attention in making democratic choices.

The Godfather Syndrome

Another great impediment to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is the phenomenon of godfatherism which has been dominating the political scene of the country. It is a game where political kingmakers and gladiators manipulate the political system to enthrone their crowned political stewards. The godfather syndrome has made putative elections non-competitive in Nigeria. The person the godfather had earlier consecrated must emerge the winner. Ogundiya (2010, p.237) asserts that Godfatherism is both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together permeates the political process in Nigeria. Public officials who owe their positions to the efforts of a political godfather incur a debt that they are expected to repay without end throughout their tenure in office. They control state resources and policies not minding the corporate existence of the state. In fact their activities help frustrate the basic democratic values in society and block the democratic process by obstructing selection of good and qualified candidates for elective posts thereby making the rise of true democracy a hard nut.

The Incumbency Factor

In political parlance, incumbency refers to holders of political office who enjoy certain privileges (such as wider media coverage and security) which are not available to other contestants in the electoral contest. These privileges create some electoral margin for the incumbent running for re-election leading to an incumbency abuse factor. In Nigeria, this factor promotes appointment of corrupt and or compromised electoral officers, manipulation of the electoral law and the constitution, manipulation of the electoral tribunals to protest stolen mandates, use of state security forces and apparatus to intimidate opposition parties, denial of access to state owned media houses etc to ensure they regain or elongate their tenure against popular will (Jaja and Alumona, 2011, p.125). This is purely anti democracy.

Corruption

Corruption in its popular conception is defined as the exploitation of public position, resources and power for private/'selfish gain. For instance, Dobel (1978) defined corruption as "the betrayal of public trust for individual or group gain". According to John Campbell, USA Ambassador to Nigeria; corruption is a clog in the wheel of any nation struggling for the enthronement and consolidation of democracy and good governance (Punch July 7th, 2005). This shows that democracy cannot be predicted on a fragile and unstable political base. Corruption as a devastator has greatly eroded the fundamental values of democracy and its essential principles. According to Ogundiya (2010), events in Nigeria since 1999 have shown that the tidal waves of reversal have been contending with Nigeria's democratic project. Corruption in this country is generally characterized by Looting of funds and wealth kept secretly, i.e. capital flight; misappropriation and mismanagement of public funds; money laundering (acquiring money through fraudulent ways); drug and child trafficking; illegal arms deal; gratification which involves monetary, material or physical favor as a condition or reward for performing official duty, official abuse of office in which an official suppresses and violates an oath of office and nepotism which is granting undeserved favors to one's relations. It have been recorded that, on June 14, 2023 there was suspension of the chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mr. Abdulrasheed Bawa over allegedly demanded \$2 million bribe from the former governor of Zamfara state, Mr. Bello Matawalle. Also, the former CBN governor, Mr. Godwin Emefiele has been accused of abuse of office and irregular allocation of cumulative \$4.5 billion and \$2.8 billion while he was in office. Recently, the former Humanitarian Affairs Minister, Betta Edu was suspended over the controversial approval she gave for payment of about #585 million into a private account. Corruption has reached a high crescendo such that an average Nigerian now possibly associates democracy with it. The consequences of political corruption are potently manifest: cyclical crisis of legitimacy, fragile party structure, institutional decay, chronic economic problem and unemployment, and above all general democratic volatility.

Lack of Respect for Adult Suffrage and Human Rights Violation

Lack of respect for adult suffrage and human rights violation has been a major obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Even though Essis (1994) observed that there is no perfect democracy, she however highlighted three "constants of democracy", which are (i) universal adult suffrage which sets the basis for the legitimacy of power and allows, through free and fair elections for political alternation without which there can be no real democracy; (ii) the legal state which protects the citizens by guaranteeing individual freedom, defines the necessary equilibrium between the different authorities in the state; (iii) the respect for human rights which constitutes a guarantee against all despotic powers. It is evident today in the Nigerian democratic process that

adult suffrage is not important, as the electorate's votes do not count in deciding election outcomes. Violation of human rights is still part of the country's political process.

General Insecurity

Insecurity is simply the very opposite of what we have as security. The level of insecurity in Nigeria is multifaceted as such one cannot accurately categorize the patterns of insecurity. The 2023 elections took place in an environment of widespread insecurity. With growing banditry in the North West, persistent violence driven by the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, the expansion of ISIS into Nigeria's North Central region, the expansion of farmer-herder violence into Southern Nigeria, and the emergence of the IPOB insurgency in the South East. Insecurity paranoia is continuing to haunt all inhabitants of Nigeria as it is already fast dawning on them that government cannot effectively guarantee the security of lives and properties. The state security agents who are saddled with the responsibility for the security of life and property which include- the police, state security agencies, the military, immigration, and prison service have all performed abysmally in the discharge of their duties. The x-ray of the above upheavals will indicate that, our democracy is surely under great challenge making Dauda and Avidime (2007) to argue that the current security situation in the country is a major obstacle to the consolidation of democracy. According to them, "the tense security situation in all parts of the country makes nonsense of whatever efforts has been made to justify the sustenance of our democratic experiment since the environment is unconducive for foreign investments and endangered by bad governance and political instability".

Conclusion and Recommendations

Great hope and expectations greeted Nigeria's return to multi-party politics and civil rule in 1999 but despite the conduct of seven consecutive general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023); the hope expressed by the people in the democratization process is gradually faltering while the expectations are becoming dashed. Political liberalization and not genuine democratic transition can best describe Nigeria's political landscape since 1999 because of the failure of the process to manifest profound evidence of a growing democracy. 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 serious challenge. Achieving a consolidated democracy requires good governance by democratic regimes. 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 democratic governance in Nigeria is yet to resolve. This paper was informed by the need to ascertain why democracy is not yet consolidated in Nigeria. From the study, it was observed that a lot of challenges such as election rigging, ethno-religious and identity conflicts, pervasive poverty, and the godfather syndrome, high cost of nomination fees, corruption, and weak enforcement agencies among others are bedeviling the nation. There should be a complete revitalization of democratic practice in Nigeria in such a manner that would leverage the potentials for democratic consolidation. Democratic practice should be deepened in Nigeria. This is because true democracy entails strict adherence to the rule of law, respect for human rights and the protection of life and property. For democracy and democratic consolidation to thrive in the country, the principles of democracy must be deepened. The study has however sought to address this challenge; it is based on this fact that the following recommendations were put forward:

- 1) Politicians should avoid rigging of election, abide by its parties' rules and regulations and seek the welfare of others. Politicians should also shun every act of betrayal of one another, eradicate killing one another, promote love and unity and encourage development in our states and nation.
- 2) Nigeria's electoral system should be strengthened. Citizens should be allowed to elect leaders of their choice. Elections should be free, fair and credible.
- 3) Leaders and representatives of government should see themselves as leaders of united Nigeria and not to pursue agenda of one or two particular ethnic group. This action and policy direction promote bitterness, disunity and anger among other ethnic nationalities. Both major and minor ethnic group should be carried along in the act of governance. With this, national cohesion, stability and development are achieved. It also helps to reduce tension and conflict, and bring stabilization to the polity. In addition, the practice of plurality of religion in Nigeria should be geared towards attaining sustainable development and political stability. This is essential in being a developed country.
- 4) Nigeria must control corruption by making stealing impossible and prosecution swift and certain. Meanwhile the judiciary must wake-up to the 21st century justice system administration of criminal cases, particularly those that threaten national security, such as corruption; thus, the country must ensure enthronement of transparency and accountability in governance. The government of Nigeria should enforce and mobilize the appropriate anti-graft institutions or agencies with the necessary materials needed to apprehend and recover looted public funds from corrupt public officials. Lawmakers should also pass into law stern measures as punishments to prevent prospective public officials from looting public fund or involving in corrupt practices. Political leaders should see themselves as servants and not masters.

Thus, for democracy in Nigeria to be consolidated, the political elites in particular and bureaucratic agents in general must ensure good governance through the judicious use of societal resources thereby providing social amenities and develop the critical

infrastructures, ensure periodic free, fair and credible elections, promote transparency and accountability and above all, the rule of law must be maintained by all and sundry.

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