

A DECADE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA, 1999-2009

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the historical trends and praxis in Nigeria's political history with particular reference to a decade of democratic governance in Nigeria (1999-2009). This study discusses retrospectively various transition programmes of the military regimes that emerged prior to the period under study so as to provide basic knowledge for one to appreciate the unbroken years of civil rule that followed. The return to democratic civil rule in Nigeria in 1999 was a long awaited dream comes true, thus its survival for a decade makes for an interesting study.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a former British colony gained her independence on 1st October, 1960. Nigeria became an independent sovereign state within the commonwealth¹. The political leaders of this new sovereign state and its citizens were optimistic about the future and few people imagined any political incongruity or anomaly that will truncate this serene political situation, and therefore, tremendous political, economic and social transformations were anticipated. But unimaginably, these aspirations soon became a mirage as the democratic government in power was toppled in a military coup on 15th January, 1966². This development of course, plunged the Nigerian state into another realm in its political history, a situation that was going to breed many obstacles to true nation building in Nigeria. The advent of the military in government in Nigeria and many other African countries in the years that followed had indeed undermined political and democratic culture and in most cases made the citizens to become docile and inactive in governance as power was within the corridors of the military that are 'traditionally supposed to be apolitical or insulated from governance'³. Frantic efforts though, were made to return the government to the civilians by successive military regimes, and when some of these programmes succeed, they were sometimes scuttled premeditatedly or otherwise.

This is premised on the fact that there are no democratic ideals and therefore wrong measures are always adopted for democratisation and democracy in Nigeria. One of the major problems in the transition to democracy in Nigeria is the absence of a viable and strong democratic institution and civil culture, which of course are products of long decades of military intervention in politics i.e. military rule. This has led to a situation where many Nigerians see democracy as synonymous to elections, such that citizens have been conditioned to become passive and denied the right to experience how democratic system works and the right to hold government elected representatives accountable. The consequence had been that citizens are unable to take advantage of the democratic process to influence their priorities to improve their social and economic condition (wellbeing). This had been a major hindrance to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Be that as it may, the period 1999 – 2009 has witnessed ten unbroken years of democracy in Nigeria, which is unprecedented and a

paradigm shift in the political history of the country. Accordingly, this study shall observe the Nigerian state within this period and look at key challenges and prospects for the nation in her democratic experience. However, Nigeria's political history shall be looked at in brief retrospectively, and efforts by successive national governments to democratize governance in Nigeria.

Nigeria in Brief: Retrospect

Nigeria gained her independence in 1960 October, 1, thus marking a new dawn in the history of the country. Nigeria, officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, became a Republic in 1963. Independence was ushered in with great enthusiasm, hopes, and rosy expectations as the nationalist leaders in their struggle made Nigerians to believe that with independence, all the problems of colonialism would have been dropped at the door of the colonialists. All the wrongs of colonialism would have been righted, thereby bringing about an egalitarian society. The independence was an 'eldorado' so to say; a new land of milk and honey⁴. The task of building a new nation had begun.

The First Republic and Its Collapse

Nigeria at independence had a coalition government formed between the mainly Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The mainly western Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo was in opposition. The coalition government was led by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the NPC deputy leader and the first Federal Prime Minister. In November 1960, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leader of the NCNC, became the first Nigerian Governor-General⁵. The coalition was desirable as none of the parties won an absolute majority in the preceding Federal elections. Nigerians have taken the captainship of the Nigerian-ship on the path to building a nation. Be that as it may, at independence, the seed of discord has been sown during the colonial period through such colonial policies such as divide and rule, centre-periphery policy, to mention but a few. Nigerians, therefore, inherited a disunited nation. The united struggle for independence was mainly to fight a common enemy – the colonialists. What is more, independence appears to provide a fertile environment for this seed of discord to thrive⁶. Regionalism and the ethnic nature of politics soon become the order of the day, and for apparent lack of ideology patented by Nigerian leaders themselves on national political life and true nation building, rather than being altruistic and nationalistic, became sentimental and parochial and barely five years of independence, the nation was in turmoil that culminated in civil war.

In a bid for the political parties and their leaders to benefit from the spoil of independence in the form of participation in the government at the centre, the coalition between the NPC and the NCNC was formed. Eluwa, *et al*, gave three reasons for the NPC and NCNC rather than the AG and either of the other two forming a coalition government. Firstly, the Igbo and Yoruba elites seem to have been too jealous of each other to unite. Secondly, the NCNC appears to have believed it could reduce the dangerous divisions between north and south by such a coalition. Thirdly, both the NPC and NCNC seem to have been unhappy about the considerable support the AG won among the minorities of the Northern and Eastern regions⁷. In this regard, therefore, ethnic consciousness preponderantly dominates national political life in every calculation. Any political decisions and actions taken have regional and ethnic colouration. The three major political parties (NPC, NCNC, AG) dominated politics in their various regions – north, east, and south respectively, and were all impervious of opposition from other parties, worst still, the minority groups or parties became victims of annihilation.

The minority parties included the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Bornu Youth Movement (BYM), Kano Peoples Party (KPP), Midwest Democratic Front (MDF), and the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU)⁸, all of which suffered annihilation in the various regions that they were located. Accordingly, in their quest for power, Nigeria was not a centre of discussion of these parties but their ethnic ambition. Ethnicity permeated all national life. The Republic and the unity of the entire nation were being threatened. The attempt by each party to undermine the power and influence of the other has led to rift among the various political parties. The NPC-NCNC coalition was hostile to the AG opposition which it tried to destroy. Firstly, a motion was passed in the Federal House of Representatives which called for the creation of a Mid-West state out of the minority area of the Western Region, but nothing of such was done in the Northern and Eastern regions. That state was created in 1963. Secondly, a special Tribunal was set up to make enquiry into the affairs of the AG-sponsored National Bank, though this action was later declared illegal by the Federal Supreme Court⁹.

The crisis within the leadership of AG-between Obafemi Awolowo who wished to continue opposition till the day they would win Federal power, and S.L. Akintola, deputy leader and Premier of the Western Region, who wished to be part of the Federal Government with the hopes that the AG and the region would share in the fruits of independence, was taken advantage of by the Federal Government coalition. Following Akintola's removal from office as premier as a disciplinary measure by the AG party conference summoned in May 1962, and replaced by Alhaji S.A. Adegbenro, loyal to the party leader Chief Awolowo, eventuated a riot in the Western House of Assembly between Akintola's supporters and the other groups. The Federal Government seized that opportunity to impose a state of emergency on the West. The Coker Commission of Enquiry set up to investigate the crisis charged Awolowo with treason and was sentenced to ten later seven years of imprisonment following an appeal. Chief Anthony Enahoro was tried and sentenced to fifteen later ten years of imprisonment¹⁰. The government that was meant to weld Nigeria into a united body polity, a true nation, became an instrument of division. This of course, meant that the wishes of the people does not matter in the calculation of the government, it was rather pure parochial considerations. Another contentious issue in the First Republic that perhaps, was the most critical was the census controversy which soured the NPC-NCNC coalition, and deepened the crises in the nation. The census was of crucial importance since the allocation of seats in the Federal House of Representative was based on population. The 1962 census sharpened regional rivalries¹¹.

The result of the census gave the north a voting force that was big enough to dominate the Federal parliament. The AG and NCNC were dissatisfied as the figures were believed to have been manipulated. The result had to be cancelled following the controversies which they generated. A fresh census was conducted in 1963, which did not enjoy a unanimous approval. The controversy on the figures centred on the attempt by one region to dominate the others¹². The North's dominant position in the parliament was now confirmed. The East and the Mid-West rejected the census results while the North and Akintola's West accepted them. The census result created a crisis¹³. This crisis culminated in other crises that followed. The 1964 Federal election was marred with massive irregularities. Two main coalitions contested this election: the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) made up of the NPC and some other minor parties; and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) comprising the NCNC, AG, NEPU, and UMBC. The campaigns by this coalition generated much bitterness and violence, especially in the West. The election was rigged through different means: electoral officers were harassed, and candidates were return unopposed even in constituencies where it was

clear that they would never have won. The NCNC on its own prevented elections in the East¹⁴. The people were denied the right to choose their leaders. The election revealed the fragility of the Republic. The organs of government revealed weaknesses rather than strength, and those who controlled them were only interested in personal gains. There was the Tiv riot in 1964, protesting the imposition of inefficient and corrupt local government authority. There was also industrial action (workers' strike) by Joint Action Committee of the Nigerian Trade Unions agitating for the implementation of increase in basic salaries of workers as recommended by the Morgan's Commission¹⁵.

In October, 1965, the election into the regional assembly in the West became the last straw that broke the camel's back. Through massive rigging, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) floated by S.L. Akintola, won the election. Disaster followed. There was widespread violence in the West. In January 1966, the military put an end to the First Republic¹⁶, in a coup d'état. In this coup led by Majors Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Adewale Ademoyega, Chris Anuforo and Donathus Okafor, resulted in the assassination of the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, S.L. Akintola, Festus Okotie-Eboh¹⁷, *et al.* The coup was foiled by General Aguiyi-Ironsi and his loyalists. General Aguiyi-Ironsi was handed over power. In a counter-coup of July 29, 1966, Ironsi was killed and Colonel later General Yakubu Gowon became the new Head of State and Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces¹⁸. The unfolding events culminated into the Nigeria-Biafran war otherwise known as Nigerian civil war.

The Muritala Muhammed/Obasanjo Regime's Transition Programme

General Yakubu Gowon after prosecuting a civil war promised to hand over power to an elected civilian president. But he kept on shifting the date of his transition programme and in addition his lieutenants were corrupt and indisciplined, and it appears the problems of Nigeria are insoluble¹⁹, and by July 27, 1975, Brigadier later General Muritala Mohammed led a coup that toppled General Gowon. General Muritala was a disciplined and purposeful leader. He had a transition programme well spelt out to terminate on October 1, 1979. Though, he was regrettably assassinated in a failed coup. His deputy Olusegun Obasanjo was handed over the mantle of leadership and kept faith with the transition programme which was completed and Alhaji Shehu Shagari became the first elected Executive President of Nigeria on October 1, 1979, after thirteen years of military rule²⁰.

The Second Republic and Its Collapse

The second republic was welcomed with high hopes and for the first time after the January 15, 1966 military coup d'état, Nigerians can demand for their rights which the military has denied them by suspending the constitution and replacing it with military decrees after decrees²¹. The second republic was patterned after the American system as against the first republic which took the British style. Shehu Shagari's election was not without dust raising as it was believed to have been backed up by a military cabal, who condoned the electoral malpractice that was alleged by opposition parties and observers²². President Shagari began with promises to run a government that will consider the interest of the common people in respect to co-urban workers and rural farmers who work from sun rise to sun set with little to show for their effort. He identified food security as important which informed his Green Revolution programme²³. He promised low cost housing, revamping the economy which was down turning before he came to office. The performance of his government was abysmal, and the situation of the nation was no better and corruption greatly increased and widened the gap

between the rich and the poor, hunger was prevalent and there was no social security for the citizenry. The citizens were disenfranchised and there was seemingly no difference between the khaki boys and the agbada wearing politicians. O.N. Njoku, observed that Shagari's administration was one of the most naive, inept and corrupt Nigeria had passed through. His administration paid only lip service to the idea of G.R., despite billions of naira budgeted for agriculture during his four-year rule²⁴. Nigeria was over 20 billion naira in debt by the time that government was removed from office²⁵. These issues of mismanagement of the national economy and personal ambition of military boys led to a coup. On December 31, 1983, Shagari's government was toppled in coup d'état led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari. By August 27, 1985, another coup d'état led by Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) toppled the Buhari/Idiagbon administration²⁶, adjudged by most Nigerians as the most dictatorial ever before the Abacha's regime.

The Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's Transition Programme

When IBB came to power he took the title of a President, thus he became the first military president of Nigeria. He was more liberal and democratic compared to the Buhari administration²⁷. He enunciated a transition programme which was to terminate in 1992. In this regard, there was a Constitutional Assembly that drew up a constitution which was supposed to guide the formation of democratic governance. The Armed Forces Ruling Council, however, has the final say. Accordingly, the principal components were in many cases either modified or expunged as it suited military caprices²⁸. What is more, to facilitate this transition, IBB's government inaugurated the National Electoral Commission (NEC) chairman, Professor H.N. Nwosu to register political parties and organize elections²⁹. In the light of the above, many political parties sought to be registered, but two were eventually registered which included the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Alhaji Tofa Abubakar emerged presidential flag bearer of the NRC, while Chief Basorun M.K.O. Abiola was the presidential candidate of the SDP. Elections were conducted into the local and state governments, and the National Assembly. IBB's transition programme which was to terminate by 1992, finally materialized (after several shifting of goalposts while the game is on to prevent the transition from military to civilian rule) in 1993 with the June 12, 1993 presidential election which was adjudged by most commentators and international observers as the freest and fairest election in the history of the nation³⁰.

The election was annulled and that plunged the nation into another darkest moment in the history of Nigeria. The Nigeria entity was threatened as protests and civil unrests agitating for the implementation of June 12, 1993 election engulfed the nation. It was in this circumstance that IBB decided to step aside. Some commentators have argued that, IBB stepped aside thinking he could manoeuvre his way back to power, when tension has doused down³¹. When he left office, Nigeria was in turmoil. The annulled 12 June 1993 presidential election, beyond the facade of military rascality, had a colouring of ethnic tension and suspicion, which suggested domination by a particular group. This informed vehement opposition from such groups as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and its dare-devil Radio Kudirat, led by Pa Anthony Enahoro, and prominent scholars like Professor Wole Soyinka, who were akin on exposing the stinking under-belly of the crumbling political military establishment in Nigeria. All the problems he inherited at the beginning of his administration have doubled or rather worsened and corruption and poverty has greatly increased among other socio-economic and political problems.

The Sani Abacha's Transition Programme

An Interim National Government was put in place August, 1993 by IBB under the chairmanship of Chief Earnest Shonekan. Commentators have posited that his coming to power as chairman was to assuage the Yoruba, whom their kinsman Chief M.K.O. Abiola, was believed to be the winner of the annulled June 12, 1993, presidential election³². Sooner than he came to power, in about three months, he was shown the way out in a gentleman coup d'état led by Sani Abacha which informed Chief Ernest Shonekan's resignation on November 17, 1993. Thus, the Interim National Government of Chief Shonekan was toppled. More chaos, more uncertainty gripped the nation. National calamity looms. General Sani Abacha described his administration as "a child of necessity"³³ following the political crisis that engulfed the country since the annulment of the June 12, 1993, election. On assumption of office he disbanded all the existing political parties and political structures throughout the country even down to the local government level, and instituted another transition programme which will hand over power to the civilians on 1st October, 1998³⁴.

Abacha lifted the ban on political activities and inaugurated another electoral body known as The National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) under the chairmanship of Chief Dagojo Jack³⁵. Consequently, in accordance with the guidelines of the electoral commission, political parties were formed and were registered. They included Committee for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), Justice Party (JP)³⁶. This was followed by election into the local government councils, followed by state and the federal elections. Interestingly, and funny too, Abacha had planned to transform himself into the civilian government which of course led to the clamour by political jokers and profiteers to ask him to stay on. Almost all the parties adopted him as their sole candidate led by the UNCP and the phony Million March for Abacha and the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAP) campaign. But fate did not allow him see the end of the transition, as he died suddenly on June 8, 1998. The baton of Head of state then fell on General Abdulsalami Abubakar on 9 June, 1998.

The Abdulsalami Abubakar's Transition Programme

On 9 June 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar became Nigeria's 9th military ruler since independence following the sudden demise of General Sani Abacha on 8 June, 1998. Abubakar was a Major General, who had served as Chief of Defense Staff under General Sani Abacha's regime. He was promoted to the rank of full General during the ceremony when he was appointed as Nigeria's new Head of State by the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC), the country's highest governing body at that time³⁷. He disbanded the existing political structure and promised to hand over on May 29, 1999 as against the October 1, 1998, earlier promised by General Sani Abacha. In August 1998, General A.A. Abubakar, went to South Africa on his first official visit abroad where he assured the South African government of his commitment to democratic reforms. In the gathering of the Heads of States of Non-Allied Nations in South Africa in September, 1998, and at the opening of the UN General Assembly in New York, General A.A. Abubakar succeeded in convincing and indeed charming fellow Heads of States especially in his programme of transition to civil rule³⁸. Accordingly, both at home and abroad, a new dawn was imminent in the annals of Nigerian history again, most importantly with the intolerance to democratic ideals, flagrant abuse of human rights and brutality of the immediate past regime. In the spirit of his regime's commitment to transition to civil rule, a transition programme was put in place to terminate

on 29 May, 1999, just less than one year of his stay in office. What is more, different groups formed themselves into political parties in readiness for election, which took place in April, 1999. He established Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), which was the umpire in the election. Three political parties were registered out of the many that sought registration. The parties are Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria Peoples Party (APP), and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Chief Olu Falae was AD presidential flag bearer, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.) was APP presidential flag bearer, and General (Chief) Olusegun Obasanjo was PDP presidential candidate. His transition programme was completed on May 29, 1999 with the handing over of power to elected president in the person of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who won the April, 1999 presidential election under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), marking the end of protracted military rule in Nigeria.

Nigeria Returns to Civil Rule

Nigeria's troubled journey to building a true nation has been a chequered political history. Barely five years after independence had civil rule become an interregnum; while military rule, which ought to be the natural interregnum, became the norm. The collapse of civil democratic rule and institutions after independence in January 1966, was followed by thirteen years of military rule. Civil rule resumed for four years (1979-1983) after hand-over on October 1, 1979, only to prove another brief civil interregnum, to be followed by sixteen straight years of harsh military rule ever in the history of the country. With failed transition to civil rule programme by the later group of khaki men who ruled especially, the one that introduced into the Nigerian political dictionary – June 12, Nigerians again, sought for a civil rule. On 9 June, 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar out of sheer good fate became Nigeria's 9th military ruler since independence following the sudden demise of General Sani Abacha on 8 June, 1998. He initiated a transition programme which was completed on May 29, 1999 with the handing over of power to elected president in the person of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who won the April, 1999 presidential election under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), thus, marking the end of protracted military rule in Nigeria.

The Olusegun Obasanjo's Regime

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was elected president under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and sworn-in on the 29 May, 1999. Due to the nature of military rule characterized by arbitrariness and high handedness, a lot of hopes and expectation was put in the new civilian administration that has come on board. No doubt, the Obasanjo administration inherited myriad of problems on domestic and international fronts. Suffice, to say that, Nigeria had become a pariah state under the General Sani Abacha regime which left the regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar and the Obasanjo administration with enormous challenges to tackle on the foreign scene. On the home front, there were worse human right records, debilitating or rather fragile socio-political-cum-economic conditions. The nation was bizarred. This was the circumstance in which Olusegun Obasanjo took over power in 1999. Obasanjo began with promises for a better Nigeria. In his maiden Independence Anniversary broadcast (39th Independence Anniversary of the country), he acknowledged the many problems facing the nation just as the author has earlier highlighted *inter-alia*. He talked so much of selfless service in the leadership of the country, and a shift from a government that is allied to or obligated to any group be it political, religious, ethnic, geographical, sectional or linguistic interest group. We are resolutely committed to fairness and justice as the basis for dealing with all issues affecting the lives of Nigerians³⁹. The ship

of the nation's democracy was set to sail again and Nigerians were hoping indeed, for a better future and building an enduring democratic institution and Nigeria that can be called their own. The nation was faced with an endemic cankerworm in the body polity which has rendered almost all institutions ineffective – the cankerworm of corruption. Obasanjo observed that, corruption is not only illegal. It is bad because it corrupts the very soul of our community. In practical terms, it makes nonsense of all planning and budgeting. It is wasteful and depletes our inadequate resources. It breeds cynicism. It promotes inequality, it renders it almost impossible for us to address the objective of equity and justice in our society with seriousness. And in the end it destroys the social fabric of our society, leaving each individual on his own, to do only whatever is best for himself. Corruption corrupts, destroys and kills⁴⁰. In the light of the above, a campaign for national rebirth was introduced through the National Orientation Agency, which was intended to emphasize not only the obligation of government to diligently seek to improve the total conditions of citizens, but to consciously make citizens accept it as a routine principle of conduct that everyone is an indispensable participant in the great project of transforming our country for the challenges of the coming century and beyond⁴¹.

Corruption as it were by this time has eaten-deep into every facet of society and the Nigerian society and Nigerians are dreaded by expatriates within and outside the shores of Nigeria by those who nurse business idea or investment in Nigeria as high level of corruption pervades the society. Accordingly, the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo introduced a bill on combating corruption to the National Assembly. The Bill seeks to create an anti-corruption commission with sweeping powers of search and seizure that would effectively fight against endemic corruption in Nigeria⁴². Be that as it may, the arbitrariness of the power of the commission might open the gates to the abuse of power and the erosion of the rule of law, despite that it was seen as a very useful instrument in the fight against corruption⁴³. However, there were widely reported cases in the press of corrupt practices by a good number of political office holders. The press has reported such cases of money laundering, bribery, sharp practices, ten percent kick backs from award of contracts, inflation of contract cost, *inter-alia*, which indicted governors of states, ministers, National Assembly members (senators and representatives), heads of agencies and parastatals, among others, some of which lost their positions and were tried and others are still standing trials. According to Africa Today's report, there is compelling evidence of monumental rot in the system despite efforts by Obasanjo to tackle corruption⁴⁴. It may be interesting to know that in some cases, after arrest and being charged to court there were no further details of prosecution not to even talk about its outcome, which would have of course served as deterrents.

Again, this fight against corruption was widely criticized in the press to be lopsided because of the double standard that was adopted. Looking at the Obasanjo years (1999-2007), Jide Ajani wrote, "War on Corruption: One Standard for Obasanjo's Friends, another for his Foes". He revealed many of the corrupt practices and some that were swept under the carpet. Some even insisted that the war against corruption was vindictive and selective⁴⁵, but this matter is left for another discussion. Obasanjo talked so much about righting the wrongs done for so long to the Niger-Delta region which he alleged for many years suffered from official neglect⁴⁶. But little was achieved in this regard. The military option he took to combat youth restiveness, rather worsen the situation of things in the region. He also promised freedom to all law abiding citizens in the effort to building the country, but even law abiding citizens are never free as the peaceful protest which he acknowledged is fundamental to democracy, dialogue which is also basic, were never tolerated during the Obasanjo's administration. Obasanjo asserts that, we have sworn to and are determined to obey the constitution and the

law of our country; but beyond this, we take the values of justice, equity, fairness, accountability and transparency as fundamental tenets of our creed, because I believe it is the surest way we can build the country and the community of our dream⁴⁷. Again, in practice, the Obasanjo administration was far from obeying the constitution in most cases. In fact, he can be said to have ran a military administration in a ‘democracy’. Better put, during the Obasanjo years, Nigeria had practiced ‘militarized democracy’. Every facet of institution that represents democracy were subsumed and made inactive, and rules or democratic etiquettes or tenets were subverted explicitly. Obasanjo had declared state of emergencies in Plateau and Ekiti states respectively, before he sent the bills to the National Assembly for ratification. These actions breached constitutional procedures. The extra value which he emphasized and captioned as ‘compassion’ was a farce as far as his regime was concerned. Obasanjo characteristically in his reform programme exposed Nigerians to austerity measures, and the incessant increase in fuel pump price which was always challenged by Nigerians led by Nigerian Labour Congress and affiliated or amalgamated Trade Unions, put many Nigerians in harsh economic and social conditions. He practically severed dialogue.

It is on record during the Obasanjo years, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had gone on strike actions for straight six months in 2002/2003 academic session, and another straight three months in 2006/2007 academic session. Indeed, what a compassionate president, who saw his “children” roam the streets, prostitute, steal, and did all manner of unwholesome and unethical deals to ‘keep soul and body together’. It is indeed not surprising to ask where the dividends of democracy he promised Nigerians are. This reminds one of the writings of Magnus Williams who expressed the view that politicians have to lie to their people to lead them, with the presumption that the bulk of the African people were not in position to distinguish between truth and falsehood⁴⁸. By the time Obasanjo left office in 2007 reluctantly, he achieved little to be desired. Jide articulately puts it that, when he was handing over, the picture had become clearer – the people had been swindled. Not because he did not mean well, but because he did not do well as promised⁴⁹. However, for the sake of fairness the Obasanjo administration did the best that they could. His regime laundered Nigeria’s image abroad, and pursued friendly relations with Nigeria’s traditional allies in the west and other countries. The telecommunication sector witnessed transformation, increased minimum wage for Nigerian workers and a host of other developmental programmes. Although, Obasanjo made haste slowly in building the community of our dream, credit must be given to him for laying the foundation for the building of democracy in Nigeria and the entire African continent.

The 2003 Presidential Election and Transition

The year 2003 was another historical landmark in Nigeria’s political history. The year is significant and at the same time dejavu. The year readily brings to mind the 1983 Nigeria’s experience when the military rudely interrupted the civilian to civilian transition in an election won by the sitting president – Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The question readily on the mind of Nigerians and many observers was whether Nigeria was going to break the jinx of fragile democratic transition. Nigeria really had turbulent moments during the first four years of the Fourth Republic, and this is not farfetched from the fact that Nigeria and Nigerians had long been under military rule and everyone was a stranger to the nascent democratic system. The practitioners in this democratic experience have lost touch with democratic history and were almost all militarized and led by a militarized Executive President – Chief Olusegun Obasanjo; this is because Nigerians are apt to easily forget and what is more, 1993 was far not to even talk about 1983. But it is disheartening that Nigerians especially leaders, learn

nothing from history and that is why history will always repeat itself. Elections time table were released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the end of Obasanjo's tenure was closer. Political parties fielded candidates for the election. The presidential election was held in April, 2003, and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was returned elected and was later sworn-in for a second term in office to terminate by May 29, 2007. The result of this election was widely contested in court. The All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP) presidential candidate in the April election, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd.) was vehement in his argument for the cancellation of the election's result owing to irregularities that attended the conduct of the election. The Supreme Court finally decided the appeal of Buhari and upheld Obasanjo's re-election. Although, the case of legitimacy of Obasanjo's second mandate was established on legal technicalities, but it is open secret that Nigeria's election was below minimum standard in the manner the election was conducted and this was widely reported in the press as local and international observers criticized the conduct of the elections. Be that as it may, Chief Obasanjo continued his second term constitutionally permitted under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. But on the hills to the end of his second term, he clandestinely sought for an 'unholy' third term which he wanted to achieve by altering the provisions of the 1999 Constitution that brought him to power. But this illegal third term failed as the amendment bid did not see the light of the day in the Nigerian National Assembly.

During this period, Obasanjo's estranged deputy Vice-President Atiku Abubakar became the hero of the third term resistance, in the league of anti-third term legislators and Governors⁵⁰. With the death of the 'third term agenda' widely celebrated by many Nigerians as a plus to Nigeria's democracy, Obasanjo was set to leave office in May, 2007. Obasanjo told his ECOWAS colleagues in his valedictory speech at the 31st Ordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of States and Government in Burkinafaso capital Ouagadougou that he was participating in the summit for the last time as president of Nigeria. In the January 2007 meeting he said "hear it from me and forget the rumors. I am leaving office next May"⁵¹ No doubt, Nigerians rejected the malaise of African politics where leaders have sit-tight syndrome and some even died in office; meaning they were life president and that was what Obasanjo would have translated to literally in the final analysis should he have had his way. It is not surprising when former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar asserted in a grand reception in his home town Yola in the north-east Nigeria, "when the constitution is amended, it means Nigeria will have a life president. I urge all Nigerians to strongly and vehemently resist it"⁵². With the death of the third term agenda, another transition was imminent in 2007 and this time from a different individual – Olusegun Obasanjo to another individual yet unknown at that time. The stage was set for another historical landmark – civilian to civilian transition. Will Nigeria cross this historical bridge?

The 2007 Presidential Election and Transition

As the Obasanjo years (1999-2007), draws closer to an end, there was strife between him and his deputy, Vice-President Atiku Abubakar. This acrimony started building up in 2003 when Atiku wanted the president's job but was persuaded by party (PDP) leaders to allow Obasanjo a second term in office. Obasanjo felt humiliated by Atiku's challenge and vowed his deputy would not succeed him. Obasanjo began to withdraw Atiku's responsibilities and on his radio programme, *The President Speaks*, accused him of disloyalty⁵³. Accordingly, many charges were trumped against Atiku. Atiku fought many legal battles and thanks to the judiciary who rescued him from the onslaught and schemes of Obasanjo, who equally used the party (PDP) machinery against Atiku. Albeit, Atiku was denied the PDP presidential ticket, he and others

floated the Action Congress (AC) and Atiku contested on that platform. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua former Kastina state Governor was drafted into the race and won the PDP presidential ticket. Other political parties fielded candidates for the 2007 presidential election and campaign started soonest. President Obasanjo championed the campaign of his ruling party's candidate and his anointed heir, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and his running-mate Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, former Governor of Bayelsa state. Obasanjo's credited statement that 'the 2007 election was a do-or-die affair', makes one to be poised to think 'Obasanjo has a case to answer' if not for anything but for vendetta. Again, one will think of the lost of value and morality on the part of Obasanjo who had not been able to conduct credible election in the past. The Independent National Electoral Commission has been greatly manipulated during the Obasanjo years⁵⁴.

The 2007 election was another defining moment in the making of Nigeria's political history and democratic experience. The election was conducted in April and Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the ruling PDP was returned elected president. This election was widely criticized by local and international observers to be below international standard. These flaws were apparent and when President Yar'Adua took over power had said that "we acknowledge that our elections had some short comings. Thankfully, we have well-established legal avenues of redress, and I urge anyone aggrieved to pursue them. I also believe that our experiences represent an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Accordingly, I will set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process with a view to ensuring that we raise the quality and standard of our general elections, and thereby deepen our democracy⁵⁵. The 2007 transition was a milestone in the history of Nigerian democracy, as it was indeed a march towards consolidation of Nigeria's democratic experience, despite the many challenges.

The Umar Musa Yar'Adua's Administration

Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua became the third executive president of Nigeria on 29th May, 2007, having won the April presidential election under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). He took over power from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo having completed his second term in office as President, as allowed under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. President Yar'Adua took over amidst daunting challenges of consolidating democracy and delivering democratic dividends to the Nigerian populace. He promised consolidation of the 'gains' of the Obasanjo administration and therefore, put forward a 7-Point Agenda which are:

1. Power and energy,
2. Food security and agriculture,
3. Wealth creation and employment,
4. Transportation,
5. Land reform,
6. Security, and
7. Education⁵⁶.

These agenda rank top most in any government consideration in Nigeria under President Yar'Adua. Other programmes that he pursued have a link with his 7-Point Agenda. At this juncture, it is important to note that the scope of this work covers 1999-2009, which implicitly means that the Yar'Adua administration will last beyond the scope of this research. However, one or two observations shall be made on the administration as it falls in part to the period under study. Accordingly, whatever assessment that shall be done would be in the interim, though emphatic. President Yar'Adua in high spirit began reformation and

restructuring of the major sectors as promised. Key sectors among these strategic 7-Point Agenda began to receive attention. A committee was set up to collate information to reform the electoral process which has threatened the national polity, under a respected Justice, Justice Muhammadu Lawal Uwais, former Chief Justice of Nigeria. The Niger-Delta received attention when Yar'Adua granted amnesty to the Niger-Delta militants in the region. This was strategic and unprecedented since the militants' struggle began in the region, which has led to a state of 'feared society'. In other words, terrorism was let loose and kidnapping of oil company staff became prevalent and destruction of pipelines and other oil installations. Yar'Adua through subtle diplomacy granted amnesty to the militants which led to surrendering of massive weapons by the militants. A rehabilitation and re-integration programme was put in place to accommodate them back into the society. This amnesty programme was the most successful programme ever in the effort of government to tackle the problem of the oil-rich Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Today, Nigeria's petro-naira has greatly increased with the relative peace in the Niger-Delta brought about by the amnesty programme of the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

Alhaji Yar'Adua had promised to be a servant-leader who will listen and do and serve with humility⁵⁷. Indeed, President Yar'Adua during his stint in power had demonstrated to be a servant-leader, who is a listener and a doer and served with humility of purpose. As a person, he did his best, but some bad fellows who served and are serving in the administration may have put him in bad light at some point in time. However, a lot of restructuring went on during his administration. It is worthy to note that towards the end of the period which this paper covers (1999-2009), President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua became very ill and travelled to Saudi Arabia for medical attention which lasted for about three months. He was brought back to the country in a manner that raised many questions among many Nigerians. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua did not survive the illness as he later died on 6th May, 2010. His deputy, Vice-President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who was until this time was acting for him, was sworn-in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 7th May, 2010. Dr. Jonathan continued with the regime's agenda and the regime was still running as at the time this research was completed.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's troubled Journey since independence has been a chequered history. On the political sphere of course which has been fundamental to the development or otherwise of the nation in other areas has been particularly worrisome. Nigeria's experiment with democracy had hit the rock severally which seems to suggest that democratic civil rule was an interregnum as against the military rule which is, supposedly. The return to democratic civil rule in 1999 raised the hopes of many Nigerians as was the case during the independence. It was a new dawn. But one must point out that the problems that characterized the First and Second Republics are still present in the Nigerian society and may have increased. The formation of political parties at the inception had been along ethnic lines as the three political parties of PDP, AD, and APP had some ethnic colouration in their structure and practices. AD holds sway in the south west. The APP won most of the governor's seats in the north. The PDP swept the governors seats in the east and few in the north. However, as the Fourth Republic goes on, the PDP rightly or wrongly has now assumed a national party status. But, worriedly too, the party has increasingly become intolerant to opposition and wants everybody to join the "winning party and the largest party in Africa" forgetting the fact that opposition is one of the beauties of democracy. An attempt of having one party in the country is a reverse to the old order of authoritarianism with its attendant consequences. The proliferation of political

parties that has characterized the period under study from just three in 1999 to over fifty political parties in recent times is not good for Nigeria's democracy. The reason is simple, the proliferation has not improved any situation in the areas of opposition as the ruling PDP has continued to increase her influence in many parts of the country sweeping the opposition into and under the PDP. Political gladiators and aspirants re-group to win election having lost the nomination of the ruling PDP and when they finally achieve their objective of winning election into any political office, sooner than later crossed carpet into the PDP under the pretence of returning back to their "family" or joining the "winning and largest party in Africa". This problem of lack of ideology is a bad omen to Nigeria's democracy in the decade under study. Credible opposition is one of the ingredients of building a strong democracy in any part of the world. During the period under study, poverty has been a major challenge. Until the problem of poverty is critically analyzed, and adequately addressed, the politics of money bags, thuggery, and so on, will remain. Poverty has caused many to lose their conscience and thus would sell their votes to the highest bidder even if he or she was the least qualified to occupy such an office. Again, it has led many youths to become thugs in an effort to get money from politicians and no wonder, Nigeria's election before, during and after has been characterized with violence and sometimes killings of perceived opposition.

It is also observed that conduct of election since 1999 has been from better to worse. The 1999 election was better than the 2003 election, and the 2007 election was bizzarred when compared with the previous one. This implicitly means that the INEC Chairman for the 1999 election performed better than the chairman that conducted the 2003 election. INEC under Professor Maurice Iwu, that conducted the 2007 election did worse than his predecessors; Chief Abel Gubadia in 2003 and Justice Ephraim Apata in 1999. On this note, therefore, the electoral commission should brace up and conduct elections that meet minimum international standard, so as to consolidate Nigeria's democracy. The government on its part has not done very well as it is still faltering in her steps to deliver the dividends of democracy for the common good of all Nigerians. Elected political office holders must as a matter of urgency and necessity deliver on their promises to the Nigerian electorates. The dream of becoming one of twenty world economies by 2020 would be a mirage if the government fails to deliver on its promises to the electorates. The Judiciary has done relatively well but there is room to do better with the Rule of Law being given room to operate. The judiciary is the great anchor and ally at the same time to ensure justice and fairness or fair play in the administration and governance of Nigeria. The judiciary must indeed become the last hope of the common man in Nigeria. The unfolding political scenario in Nigeria needs the judiciary to sustain Nigeria's democracy

RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the researcher recommends the followings as panacea to building an enduring democracy in Nigeria:

- i. The conduct of credible elections has no substitution in a democracy. Election is the life and blood of democracy. Nigeria should strive to live above board by conducting free, fair and credible elections.
- ii. The Rule of Law must be given room to operate without any inhibition. The Rule of Law is what democracy itself is all about. The law must take its course. Therefore, gray areas of the constitution must be reviewed, amended and democratized as against the current militarized 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

- iii. The government (political office holders) must respect the social contract between them and their followers to deliver the dividends of democracy for the common good of the people of Nigeria.
- iv. The political class needs attitudinal change in their operation of the political system or institution. They must respect the law and democratic institutions, which will go a long way to ensure free, fair and credible elections.
- v. Political parties must of necessity ensure internal democracy within the parties and avoid imposition of candidates and such other practices that are anti-democratic.
- vi. Opposition political parties must be allowed to thrive and the recent proliferation of political parties will rather weaken opposition which is one of the beauties of democracy, hence, giving the ruling PDP unparalleled ground to practically make Nigeria a one party state.
- vii. The principle of separation of power must be strengthened to give independence particularly to the judiciary and again, the situation where a serving senator is made a cabinet minister is un-called-for and therefore, not good for Nigeria's democracy that operates a presidential system.
- viii. Aggressive political socialization should be embarked upon to broaden Nigeria's political culture and ensure re-orientation of the citizens for better political participation. There is need for tolerant political culture in Nigeria.
- ix. Citizens, political parties, the government, the mass media, civil society groups, pressure groups, and the electoral commission, must work in collaboration with one another to ensure credible elections so as to strengthen Nigeria's democracy.
- x. Law enforcement agencies must be enlightened to respect the rights of law abiding citizens and be re-oriented to understand democratic and civil policing and security. The military must continue to be professionalized and be taught the rudiments of helping political office holders to deliver good governance. This is because the current security force paraphernalia is not different from the colonial one that was used against the citizens only to ensure obedience

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