

DEMOCRACY WITHOUT THE PEOPLE: THE PRESENT-DAY NIGERIAN SITUATION

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Abstract

This article critically examines the state of democracy in Nigeria, focusing on the disconnection between the democratic ideals and the lived experiences of its citizens. It also examines the present-day Nigerian situation and the challenges it faces in achieving a true democracy that represents the interests and aspirations of its people. Despite being touted as a democratic nation, Nigeria faces numerous challenges that undermine the core principles of democracy, such as popular participation, inclusiveness, and accountability. This article explores the historical context of democracy in Nigeria, analyses the factors contributing to the current situation, and the factors contributing to this democratic deficit, including corruption, electoral malpractice, political apathy, and social inequality. Drawing on philosophical perspectives, the article explores the implications of this situation for Nigerian society and offers insights into potential remedies to bridge the gap between democracy and the people.

Introduction

Man, says Aristotle, "is by nature a political animal". By this he means that man is intended by nature to live in a political society and not that man is by nature a politician. Democracy, as a system of governance, is often celebrated as a means to empower citizens, protect their rights, and foster inclusive decision-making. Democracy is built on the principles of popular sovereignty and citizen participation. However, in many countries, including Nigeria, the reality falls short of these democratic ideals. In Nigeria, concerns are mounting about the extent to which these democratic ideals are being upheld. The present-day Nigerian situation raises questions about the efficacy of democracy without meaningful involvement and representation of the people. The people as it relates to democracy are qualified citizens of a state who are eligible to vote or be voted for, who can participate in electoral process by age qualification. The people are the masses or the majority in a political system. Harrison et al opine that citizens are "members of the polity who, through birth or naturalization, enjoy the right, privilege, and responsibilities attached to membership in a given nation". Democracy is incomplete without the input of the people. Harrison et al also noted that democracy is "government in which supreme powers of governance lies in the hands of its citizens". This article delves into the Nigerian situation, where democracy appears to exist without the active participation and meaningful engagement of the people. By critically examining the factors contributing to this democratic deficit, we aim to shed light on the challenges faced by Nigeria and provide insights into potential solutions. It will also explore the challenges faced by Nigeria in ensuring active citizen participation and references credible sources to shed light on the issue.

Background

Nigeria, located in West Africa, is the most populous country on the continent and has a diverse population comprising numerous ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. Nigeria so far has experienced a turbulent history in its pursuit of democracy. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria has since experienced a complex and evolving journey towards democratic governance. It has undergone periods of military rule, political instability, and ethnic and religious tensions. The worst being the civil war between 1967 and 1970, the Nigerian, Biafra war. While Nigeria is officially a democratic nation, it faces numerous challenges in achieving a true democracy that represents the interests and aspirations of its people.

Objectives

The objectives of this discussion are to examine the historical context of democracy in Nigeria, starting from the pre-colonial era to the present day. Specifically, we will explore Nigeria's political landscape during the pre-colonial period, the impact of colonial rule and the struggle for independence, as well as the subsequent periods of military rule and the transition to democracy. By understanding this historical context, we can better grasp the challenges facing our young democracy and the process that can enhance the progress of democracy in Nigeria.

Historical Context Of Democracy In Nigeria

Pre-colonial Nigeria: Before the arrival of European colonial powers, Nigeria was home to various indigenous societies and kingdoms with diverse political structures and governance system, each with its own system of governance. These pre-colonial societies had diverse political structures, ranging from centralized monarchies to decentralized systems based on kinship and communal decision-making.

Colonial Era and Independence: The advent of British colonial rule in the late 19th century significantly impacted Nigeria's political landscape. The British established indirect rule, whereby they governed through traditional rulers and imposed their own administrative structures. This disrupted pre-existing political systems and contributed to the centralization of power in the hands of a few traditional elites.

The struggle for independence in the mid-20th century was characterized by the emergence of nationalist movements advocating for self-rule and democratic governance. Notable figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello played crucial roles in mobilizing Nigerians against colonial oppression and calling for democratic governance. Nigeria gained independence from Britain on October 1, 1960, marking a significant milestone in its democratic aspirations.

Military Rule and Transition to Democracy: Following independence in 1960, Nigeria faced a series of military coups and periods of military rule. It was not until 1999 that Nigeria made a successful transition to civilian rule, marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic. However, military interference and the legacy of authoritarian rule continued to impact the country's democratic progress.

Nigeria's early years of independence were marked by political instability, ethnic tensions, and a series of military coups. The first military intervention occurred in 1966, leading to a series of military regimes that alternated with short-lived civilian governments.

Military rule, characterized by authoritarianism, corruption, and human rights abuses, lasted for several decades. However, the desire for democracy remained strong among Nigerians, and pressure from civil society organizations, pro-democracy activists, and international actors eventually led to a transition to civilian rule in 1999.

Since 1999, Nigeria has experienced a series of democratic elections and transitions of power. While progress has been made, challenges persist, including corruption, political instability, election irregularities, ethnic and religious divisions, God-fatherism, and low voter turnout. Efforts to consolidate democratic institutions, promote good governance, and address socio-economic inequalities are ongoing as Nigeria continues its democratic journey.

Thus, understanding the historical context of democracy in Nigeria provides valuable insights into the challenges, achievements, and aspirations of the country. From the pre-colonial era to the present day, Nigeria has experienced a complex path towards democratic governance. By examining this trajectory, we can better appreciate the significance of democratic institutions and the ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy in Nigeria.

The Concept of Democracy

Democracy as a concept can be used in many ways by different individuals and societies on the right note and on the wrong note just to win an argument. Thus, democracy has so many definitions but there are few definitions that captured the real meaning of democracy.

The Webster New Encyclopaedic Dictionary defines democracy as a government in which supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through representation. According to Lindell, and Scott (1999), the term originates from the Greek word *demokratia* "rule of the people" which was coined from *demos* "people" and *kratos* "power" or "rule" in the 5th century B.C.

According to Ukana Blankson, any meaningful attempt at understanding democracy must proceed from the ancient definition of democracy as peoples' rule. The Greek words *demos* and *kratia* mean people and rule or authority respectively. Thus, democracy refers to 'rule by the people'. This began in the first half of the 5th century B.C. among the Greeks thus beginning what Robert Dahl calls the transformation from rule by the few to rule by the many. During the French Revolution (1789-1799), the French lawyer and political leader, Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), defined democracy as a "state in which the people, as sovereign, guided by laws of its own making, does for itself all that it can do well". This definition implies that there are things 'the people' may be unable to do or cannot do well. The questions then are: what are these things? Who then do such things? In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln gave what has since become the most famous definition of democracy. In the Address, delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers'

National Cemetery on 19 November 1863 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Lincoln asserted that 'all men are created equal' and defined democracy as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Thus, this definition makes the people the subject and object of democracy or what Nkolika Ebele terms 'the *raison d'être* of governance'. This definition has many merits; although, like any other, it has its limitations. Hence, the definition stresses the principle of equality since all men are supposedly created equal. Harold Laski defines equality as the absence of special privilege. Consequently, a democratic state is often said to be one wherein the citizens have equal access to basic life amenities such as justice, job, power, privilege, etc. Indeed, Andrew Gamble describes a democratic state as the 'republic of equals'. This is because democracy implies that there should be a substantial degree of equality among men both in the sense that all the adult members of a society ought to have, so far as is possible, equal influence on those decisions which affect important aspects of the life of the society; and in the sense that inequalities of wealth, social status, access to education and knowledge, etc, should not be so considerable as to result in the permanent subordination of some groups of men to others. Robert Dahl opined that, in every democratic state, the citizens are 'political equals'. This is because, as Bottomore has pointed out, all human beings are remarkably alike in some fundamental respects – they have similar physical, emotional and intellectual needs. In 1646, in an article entitled *An Arrow Against All Tyrants*, Richard Overton wrote “For by nature, all men are equal...even so we are to live everyone equally”. Undeniably, in virtually all his major works, Alexis de Tocqueville insisted that history, the story of mankind, is synonymous with equality.

Equality is yet another principle of democracy which is based on human and natural law. Every man is equal before the law. According to Acharya, “yet, as human, we believe, and rightly so, that we are essentially equal and possess equal worth especially when it comes to realizing the ideal in social, economic and political structures of our society”. In a democratic setting, equality is sacrosanct. By nature, all were born equal, as such, are equal before the law. Each individual has an equal chance of existing like the other. This gives credence to the fact that participation is fundamental in democracy. Hence, partaking in either to rule and be ruled which leads to the method of selecting a leader, is a process must be trusted, reliable and dependable to foster the will of the entire people. This means that the institution, organization or body responsible to coordinate and organize elections must be credible and legitimate.

On the other hand, liberty is another fundamental tenet of democracy. Liberty as it is, is double sided, that is. freedom from government interference in personal lives and individual freedom to pursue happiness. What gives uttermost benefit to man in terms of liberty is what John Stuart Mills holds forth. Therefore, man has the liberty to seek happiness as long as it is within the ambit of the law and does not interfere with the rights of other fellows. As it relates to democracy, liberty is supreme embedded in the rule of law, freedom of speech and expression, without fear of molestation and violence.

Challenges to Nigerian Democracy

Corruption and Political Patronage: One of the major challenges to Nigerian democracy is the pervasive issue of corruption, which undermines good governance,

erodes public trust, and hinders socioeconomic development. Political patronage and the misuse of public resources contribute to the perpetuation of corrupt practices. As a rule, Nigerian chief executives – president, governors or even local government chairmen – see themselves as imperial lords and are not subject to or accountable to anyone, not even the citizens from whom they claim to derive their legitimacy. They often see the push for accountability even by equal and co-ordinate branches of government as an affront and they move quickly to eliminate or neutralise the threat(s).

Corruption and political patronage pose significant challenges to Nigerian democracy. Corruption, both petty and grand, permeates various levels of society and undermines the rule of law, accountability, and transparency. It corrodes public trust in government institutions and hampers the effective delivery of public services.

Political patronage, whereby politicians distribute resources and favours to secure loyalty and support, further exacerbates corruption. It fosters a culture of clientelism and undermines merit-based decision-making processes. Rather than focusing on the needs and welfare of the people, politicians often prioritize personal gain and the interests of their loyalists.

To combat corruption and political patronage, Nigeria needs stronger anti-corruption mechanisms, such as independent anti-corruption agencies, effective whistleblower protection, and transparent financial systems. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, enforcing existing laws, and promoting a culture of integrity and transparency are essential to address this challenge.

Political Instability and Ethnic Tensions: Nigeria has experienced periods of political instability, including coups, political violence, and power struggles. Ethnic and regional divisions have often been exploited for political gain, leading to tensions and conflicts that threaten the stability of democratic governance.

Political instability and ethnic tensions in Nigeria pose significant challenges to building a stable and inclusive democracy. Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own cultural, social, and political identities. These diversities, if not managed effectively, can lead to political tensions and conflicts.

Ethnic divisions often manifest in political contests, with politicians exploiting ethnic fault lines for their own gain. This exacerbates polarization, undermines national unity, and weakens democratic institutions. The winner-takes-all nature of Nigerian politics further heightens tensions, as political power often becomes a zero-sum game.

These ethnic and religious voting patterns have heightened tensions in more heterogeneous states, such as Lagos, where no one community holds a 'natural' majority and competition is high. Subsequent gubernatorial elections, held on 18 March 2023, saw significant voter intimidation, suppression, and violence in Lagos, where Mr. Peter Obi, of the Labour Party, narrowly triumphed during the presidential polls.

Moreover, the geographic distribution of votes points to the increasing salience of ethno-religious identities in Nigerian politics. Where previously voting patterns had been defined by cross-cutting identity markers – notably along generational lines, with younger and older voters gravitating towards different candidates – in 2023 those voters that did turn out were concentrated in the 'home' communities of the leading candidates.

This is a worrying trend, that both the government and the political class in general need to reflect upon – there is an urgent need to improve the quality and relevance of Nigerian democracy.

To address political instability and ethnic tensions, Nigeria needs to foster inclusive governance and promote dialogue and reconciliation among different ethnic and religious groups. Encouraging political parties to be more representative and inclusive, implementing power-sharing arrangements, and promoting inter-ethnic cooperation can help mitigate these challenges.

Thus, according to Èniolá Ànúolúwapó Şóyemí, only a deep participatory politics could make communal reconciliation and agreement possible. This would be necessary in most African countries where Independence had been enforced by making socio-economic competitors out of previously politically distinct ethno-linguistic groups. It is obvious that democracy in Nigeria is formed on the bases of regions created before and after independence by the colonialists. The formation has continued to exist till date based on region, tribal and ethnic inclinations. Loyalty is more to the region and not to the federal government.

Religious Divisions and Extremism: Religious divisions, particularly between the Muslim-majority north and the Christian-majority south, have at times resulted in intercommunal violence and extremism. This poses a significant challenge to the peaceful coexistence and democratic inclusivity of diverse religious communities.

Religious divisions and extremism pose challenges to Nigerian democracy, particularly in the northern regions of the country. Nigeria is divided between a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south, with religious differences often becoming a source of conflict.

Extremist groups, such as Boko Haram, killer herdsmen, have emerged and exploited these religious ways to advance their agendas through violence and terrorism. This threatens the stability of the nation and undermines democratic governance. The government's response to extremism has at times been characterized by human rights abuses and heavy-handed tactics, further exacerbating tensions. Despite the challenges of insecurity which Nigeria has been grappling with, efforts still must be made to ensure that the electoral process is not only credible, but increasingly inclusive.

Addressing religious divisions and extremism requires a multifaceted approach. It includes promoting interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and respect for diversity. The government should invest in community-based programs that address the underlying socio-economic grievances that contribute to radicalization. Simultaneously, security forces need to adhere to human rights standards and employ strategies that focus on intelligence gathering, community policing, and countering extremist ideologies.

Disengaged Citizenry and Low Voter Turnout: A significant challenge to Nigerian democracy is the disengagement of citizens from the political process. Low voter turnout and apathy can be attributed to a lack of trust in political institutions, perceived inefficiency, and disillusionment with the democratic system.

A disengaged citizenry and low voter turnout are significant challenges to Nigerian democracy. Many Nigerians feel disconnected from the political process and perceive

that their votes do not make a difference. This lack of engagement can be attributed to a combination of factors, including disillusionment with the political class, a sense of powerlessness, and a lack of trust in the electoral system and the judiciary.

Low voter turnout undermines the legitimacy of elected representatives and weakens democratic institutions. It also perpetuates a cycle where political elites can manipulate the system with impunity, as they are not held accountable by an active and engaged electorate.

Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of people is exercised. In other words, in addition to conducting regular, free, and credible elections, democracy thrives and is regarded to be healthy when citizens can participate in governance, and their voices are heard in everyday decisions that affect their lives.

To address this challenge, efforts should be made to enhance civic education, political awareness, and voter mobilization campaigns. Encouraging citizen participation through grassroots initiatives, promoting transparency in political processes, and providing platforms for citizens to voice their concerns are crucial steps towards fostering an engaged citizenry. Additionally, electoral reforms that address the concerns of marginalized communities and ensure a level playing field can help restore confidence in the electoral system.

Democratic participation in Nigeria is low due to how previous elections were conducted, the lack of fairness and transparency by electoral bodies and government have direct impact on the activities of the masses in participation. Apathy in participation means that true value of democracy cannot be achieved. Interest in participation among the citizens is low, hence the current state of political situation in Nigeria where accountability is low. Minority of the citizens are responsible or saddled with law making responsibilities through the votes of the majority. Where the majority are not interested, the minority law makers will continue to take decisions that will only benefit them and not the majority.

From the foregoing, it is clear as Momoh argues that “Nigeria's politicians do not believe in the concept of the covenant, mandate or popular rule. For them, elections marks the end of the role the people has to play in politics after that, the elected representatives are the Leviathans to whom the people have mortgaged their freedom and rights. Hence, state sovereignty takes the place of popular sovereignty”. This is the essential fallacy of electoralism.

INEC and its technology are not solely responsible for this crisis of confidence in the electoral process in Nigeria. Political parties were guilty of engaging in vote buying — documented by a Chatham House report on the practice in 2022 — which tarnishes the legitimacy of their wins. Others were able to use their control of state governments to engage in targeted voter suppression and intimidation, with incidents of violence against people coming out to vote reported almost nationwide.

Such tactics have a long track record in Nigeria. But the technological innovations introduced by INEC had been heralded as 'game changers', following successful deployment during the off-cycle gubernatorial elections in 2022 (Ekiti and Osun), and had significantly raised popular hopes of a clean process — their failure to live up to these

lofty expectations subsequently may have done more harm than good.

Thus, Nigeria faces various challenges to its democratic process. Addressing corruption, political patronage, political instability, ethnic tensions, religious divisions, disengagement, and low voter turnout requires comprehensive strategies and reforms. By promoting transparency, inclusivity, accountability, and citizen engagement, Nigeria can make significant progress towards a stronger and more vibrant democracy that truly represents the interests and aspirations of its people.

Factors Contributing to Democracy Without the People In Nigeria

Weak Institutions and Rule of Law

Nigeria's democratic progress is hindered by weak institutions, including an inadequate judiciary, ineffective law enforcement, and limited checks and balances. The lack of a strong rule of law undermines accountability, transparency, and the protection of citizens' rights.

The rule of law is a liberty-centred constitutional concept which stipulates that everything must be done in accordance with the law. It encapsulates such ideals as government according to the law, equality before the law, independence and autonomy of the judiciary among others. The rule of law is fundamental and a paramount prerequisite in a democratic system of government. It is the pillar of constitutional democracy. It serves as a blueprint for designing an ideal legal system. There is almost the absence of the rule of law in military rule. Military rule is marked with autocracy and rule by force. The people are denied civil liberties which conflict with the dictator's will. The decree is the supreme law of the land in military dispensation.

However, in democratic dispensation, constitutionalism and rule of law are supposed to be sacrosanct. Thus, there is that need to examine the ideal place of rule of law in governance vis-à-vis the Nigerian experience under democratic governance.

One of the major factors contributing to democracy without the people in Nigeria is the presence of weak institutions and a lack of adherence to the rule of law. Strong democratic institutions, including an independent judiciary, a free press, and a robust civil society, are essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy. However, in Nigeria, these institutions have been weakened by years of political interference, corruption, and lack of accountability.

The judiciary, which is meant to be the guardian of the rule of law and protector of citizens' rights, has faced challenges in maintaining its independence. Political influence, bribery, and corruption have undermined the credibility of the judiciary, eroding public trust in the judicial system. This has resulted in a situation where justice is often delayed or denied, and powerful individuals can act with impunity.

According to the statement, by Mr. Ike Ekweremadu in 2016 at a dinner organised by the International Law Institute (ILI), Washington DC, for its alumni in Nigeria. He noted that no country could experience meaningful development without the rule of law. He said:

Democracy becomes gravely imperilled if the powers of the judiciary to enforce compliance with the rule of law are subjected

to legal, extra-legal, and sociological limitations. Our task as an emerging democracy is to continue to build a society where government agencies as well as individuals and private entities must be subjected to and accountable under the law. We must ensure that the process by which laws are enacted, administered, and enforced is accessible, fair and efficient. We must ensure that justice is delivered according to established laws, timeously, competently, ethically and independently. I hold the opinion and fervently so that the principle of the rule of law is at the heart of the survival of democracy. A democracy without the rule of law is like salt that has lost its saltiness.

The Senator noted then that the World Bank had indicated that economic growth, political modernisation, protection of human rights and other worthy objectives, were hinged on the rule of law. He expressed concern that developing nations, which were in dire need of development, lacked the rule of law to a large extent. He attributed the situation to lack of strong democratic institutions, lack of independence of the judiciary and political instability.

Similarly, a free and independent press is crucial for a well-informed citizenry and holding the government accountable. However, media organizations in Nigeria often face threats, harassment, and censorship by the government of the day, limiting their ability to report objectively and critically on political matters. This lack of media freedom hampers the dissemination of information, perpetuating a climate of misinformation and disinformation.

Furthermore, civil society organizations, which play a vital role in advocating for citizens' rights and monitoring the government's actions, have also struggled to operate freely. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face burdensome regulations and restrictions, making it difficult for them to engage in meaningful civic participation and advocacy.

Electoral Malpractices and Voter Suppression

Another significant factor contributing to democracy without the people in Nigeria is the prevalence of electoral malpractices and voter suppression. Nigeria has faced challenges related to electoral malpractices, such as voter intimidation, rigging, and manipulation of election results. Voter suppression, including barriers to voter registration and the disenfranchisement of certain groups, further undermines the democratic process.

Elections are a fundamental aspect of democratic governance, providing citizens with the opportunity to choose their leaders and shape the direction of their country. However, in Nigeria, elections have often been marred by irregularities, fraud, and violence.

Instances of voter intimidation, ballot box stuffing, falsification of results, and manipulation of electoral processes have been reported in various elections. These malpractices undermine the integrity of the electoral system and erode public trust in the democratic process. When citizens perceive that their votes do not count and that the outcomes are predetermined, they become disillusioned and disengaged from the political process.

Voter suppression, including the deliberate disenfranchisement of certain groups, is another challenge to democracy in Nigeria. Discriminatory voter registration processes, inadequate distribution of polling stations in certain areas, and violence during elections have disproportionately affected marginalized communities, such as ethnic and religious minorities. These practices undermine the principle of equal representation and restrict the ability of all citizens to participate fully in the democratic process.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) responsible for conducting free and fair elections in Nigeria is not impeccable. However, it reflects the society it serves. It is unreasonable to expect INEC to magically transform our elections into paragons of democracy if we continue to allow a culture of violence, voter intimidation, and election tampering. While it is easy to blame the referee when our team is losing, we should focus more on the players' competence and the fairness of the game.

Saliu and Ifejika, in their article entitled "The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and 2011 Election", they raised an alarm that liberty and equity in Nigeria democracy are issues of concern. Liberty and equality of the citizens to participate in electoral process is questionable. They assert as follows:

The electoral umpire Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) shows some bias. INEC should strive to improve its relationship and collaboration with the political parties so as to increase the level of confidence of the parties in the commission. This should also afford INEC the platform to effectively check the parties on the rules of the game in a bit to elicit their contributions in ensuring that elections are free and fair by, conducting their activities in modest democratic manners during campaigns, the elections proper and after the election.

Socio-economic Inequality and Poverty

Socio-economic inequality and widespread poverty contribute to democratic deficits in Nigeria. The concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of a few exacerbates social divisions, limits opportunities for political participation, and undermines the representation of marginalized groups.

Socio-economic inequality and widespread poverty have significant implications for democracy in Nigeria. The country is plagued by high levels of poverty, with a large portion of the population living below the poverty line. Economic disparities create an environment where political power and influence are concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority struggle to meet their basic needs.

In such a context, political elites, who often come from privileged backgrounds, have more resources at their disposal to influence elections and shape public opinion. They can use their wealth to fund campaigns, mobilize support, and manipulate the political system to serve their interests. This leads to a situation where the voices and concerns of the marginalized and economically disadvantaged are often ignored, exacerbating social divisions and further entrenching inequality.

In like manner, we have completely stripped democracy of virtually all its meaning save the dry, periodic conduct of elections that are neither free nor fair. For instance, there's broad agreement by Democracy scholars that modern political democracy, as defined by Schmitter and Karl in 1991, "is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives." The question, however, is: are Nigerian rulers accountable to their citizens, or can their citizens through their representatives in parliament hold their rulers to account?

Moreover, poverty and economic hardship can also make citizens more susceptible to corruption and clientelism. When individuals are struggling to meet their basic needs, they may be more inclined to accept bribes or support politicians who promise immediate, short-term benefits in exchange for their votes. This undermines the long-term development of democratic institutions and processes.

Lack of Civic Education and Political Awareness

A lack of civic education and political awareness among the general population is another factor contributing to democracy without the people in Nigeria. Many citizens, particularly those in rural areas or disadvantaged communities, have limited knowledge about their rights, the functioning of democratic institutions, and the importance of active civic participation.

It hinders active citizen participation and engagement in democratic processes. Limited understanding of democratic principles, rights, and responsibilities undermines the ability of citizens to hold elected officials accountable.

Without a solid understanding of democratic principles, citizens may not fully appreciate the significance of their role in holding elected officials accountable or participating in the electoral process. They may be less likely to engage in meaningful political discussions, demand transparency from their leaders, or actively seek information about candidates and their policies.

Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive civic education in schools means that young people are not adequately prepared to become active and informed citizens. Civic education programs should focus on promoting critical thinking skills, teaching the values of democracy, and fostering a sense of civic responsibility. By equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation, civic education can empower individuals to actively engage in the democratic process and contribute to the development of a vibrant civil society.

Potential Solutions for Strengthening Democracy

Addressing these factors requires a multi-faceted approach that involves comprehensive institutional reforms, electoral reforms, poverty alleviation measures, and investment in civic education and political awareness programs. Strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, and promoting a free and independent press are crucial steps in enhancing the rule of law and accountability.

Electoral reforms should focus on improving the transparency and integrity of the electoral process. This includes measures such as updating voter registration systems, enhancing the security of ballots, and implementing robust mechanisms for monitoring and reporting electoral malpractices. Additionally, efforts should be made to eliminate voter suppression tactics and ensure equal access to the electoral process for all citizens.

To address socioeconomic inequality and poverty, the government should prioritize inclusive economic policies that promote equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. This includes investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and job creation to uplift marginalized communities and reduce poverty rates. Social safety nets and targeted poverty alleviation programs can provide a safety net for the most vulnerable segments of society.

Promoting civic education and political awareness is essential for fostering an engaged and informed citizenry. Education curricula should incorporate civic education from an early age, teaching students about democracy, human rights, and the importance of active citizenship. Adult education programs and community initiatives can also contribute to raising political awareness and encouraging civic participation.

Thus, addressing the factors contributing to democracy without the people in Nigeria requires comprehensive reforms across various dimensions. Strengthening institutions, ensuring electoral integrity, reducing socioeconomic inequality, and promoting civic education are key steps towards bridging the gap between democracy and the people. By fostering an environment where citizens are informed, empowered, and actively participate in democratic processes, Nigeria can move closer to achieving a true democracy that represents the interests and aspirations of its people.

Strengthening Institutions and the Rule of Law

To strengthen democracy in Nigeria, it is crucial to focus on strengthening institutions and upholding the rule of law. This involves ensuring the independence, professionalism, and accountability of key institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, anticorruption bodies and law enforcement agencies. Efforts should be made to enhance their capacity, eliminate political interference, and promote transparency and integrity, and ensuring effective governance.

Additionally, promoting a culture of respect for the rule of law is essential. This can be achieved through public awareness campaigns, training programs for legal professionals, and the establishment of mechanisms to hold public officials accountable for their actions. By strengthening institutions and the rule of law, Nigeria can foster a more robust and effective democratic system.

The rule of law as practised in Nigeria affects the level of democratic participations. Hindrances to the participation of citizens in democracy by actions of government are antithetical to democracy. Freedom of speech and expression is a yardstick to know the extent and level of democratic development. According to Joseph, “a viable Nigerian democracy has to allow considerable room for self-expression and the assertion of group interest.....”.

Electoral Reforms and Voter Education

Comprehensive electoral reforms are needed to address issues of voter suppression, electoral malpractices, and the credibility of the electoral process. Voter education programs can empower citizens with knowledge about their rights, the importance of civic participation, and the mechanics of the electoral system.

Electoral reforms are critical for enhancing the integrity and inclusivity of the electoral process. Nigeria should prioritize reforms that address concerns such as voter suppression, electoral violence, and manipulation of results. Electoral laws should be reviewed and updated to ensure fairness, transparency, and the participation of all eligible citizens.

Voter education is equally important in promoting active citizen participation and informed voting. Efforts should be made to educate citizens on their rights and responsibilities, electoral procedures, and the significance of their votes. This can be done through public awareness campaigns, civic education programs in schools, and community engagement initiatives.

Addressing Socio-economic Inequality

Socio-economic inequality is a major challenge that undermines democracy in Nigeria. To strengthen democracy, it is crucial to address the root causes of inequality and promote inclusive development. This includes implementing policies that promote equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and basic services.

Measures to address socio-economic inequality should be prioritized to ensure equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Poverty alleviation programs, job creation initiatives, and inclusive economic policies can contribute to reducing disparities and promoting inclusive growth, fostering a more inclusive and participatory democracy.

The government should prioritize poverty alleviation programs, job creation initiatives, and investments in infrastructure development, particularly in marginalized communities. By reducing socio-economic disparities and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, Nigeria can create a more inclusive and just democratic society.

Promoting Civic Education and Political Awareness

Investing in civic education programs that promote democratic values, civic engagement, and political literacy is crucial. By increasing citizens' awareness and understanding of democratic processes, human rights, and governance, individuals can actively participate in shaping the democratic future of Nigeria.

Promoting civic education and political awareness is essential for building an engaged and informed citizenry. Nigeria should invest in programs and initiatives that educate citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the workings of democratic governance. This includes educating citizens about the importance of active participation, the role of

civil society, and the significance of holding elected officials accountable.

Promoting political awareness involves creating platforms for dialogue, fostering a culture of political debate, and encouraging citizens to engage with political issues. Civil society organizations, media outlets, and educational institutions play a crucial role in facilitating these discussions and providing accurate and unbiased information.

Thus, strengthening democracy in Nigeria requires a multi-faceted approach. By focusing on strengthening institutions, implementing electoral reforms, addressing socioeconomic inequalities, and promoting civic education and political awareness, Nigeria can make significant progress in building a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient democratic system. These efforts should be supported by the government, civil society, and the international community to ensure the long-term sustainability of democratic governance in Nigeria.

We must create a culture of civic duty to build a robust democracy. This can be achieved by engaging in town hall meetings, participating in community development projects, respecting the rules of law, respecting human rights, and having productive discussions with our elected officials regularly. It is essential to challenge the status quo and demand transparency to improve society.

A safe democracy also requires a high literacy level. Therefore, there must be focus on the education sector. Basic and primary education levels, up to the tertiary level require not only substantial funds from the budget but the teachers' welfare must be improved upon and their dignity restored. This is because a high illiteracy level always affects voter education and use of technology in electioneering. Education will liberate the illiterates from the antics of politicians. This is one sector that can guarantee safe democracy which the government over the years has not paid adequate attention to. For safe democracy to be guaranteed there is a need for restructuring, reorientation and rebuilding.

Summary of Findings

The historical context of democracy in Nigeria reveals a complex journey marked by periods of pre-colonial governance, British colonial rule, independence struggles, military rule, and the transition to democracy. Nigeria has made progress in establishing democratic institutions and conducting elections, but challenges such as corruption, political instability, socioeconomic inequality, and low voter turnout persist. Nigeria faces significant challenges in achieving a true democracy that represents the interests and aspirations of its people. Corruption, political instability, ethnic and religious tensions, and a disengaged citizenry pose obstacles to democratic consolidation.

To strengthen democracy in Nigeria, several key solutions have been identified. These include:

1. Strengthening Institutions and the Rule of Law: Enhancing the independence, professionalism, and accountability of institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and law enforcement agencies.

2. Electoral Reforms and Voter Education: Implementing reforms to ensure fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the electoral process, as well as educating citizens about

their rights and responsibilities as voters.

3. Addressing Socioeconomic Inequality: Taking steps to reduce disparities and promote equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and basic services.

4. Promoting Civic Education and Political Awareness: Educating citizens about democratic principles, encouraging political dialogue, and fostering an engaged and informed citizenry.

Recommendations for Nigeria'S Democratic Future

To bridge the gap between democracy and the people, Nigeria should prioritize strengthening institutions and the rule of law, implementing electoral reforms, addressing socioeconomic inequality, and promoting civic education and political awareness. Drawing insights from successful democratic models like Botswana and Ghana can provide valuable lessons for Nigeria's democratic future.

By addressing these challenges and implementing effective solutions, Nigeria can work towards a more inclusive, accountable, and participatory democracy that truly represents the interests and aspirations of its people.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen Nigeria's democratic future:

a) **Continued Focus on Institutional Strengthening:** Nigeria should prioritize efforts to enhance the independence, effectiveness, and transparency of democratic institutions. This includes investing in capacity building, reducing political interference, and ensuring accountability.

b) **Comprehensive Electoral Reforms:** Nigeria should undertake comprehensive electoral reforms to address challenges such as voter suppression, electoral violence, and manipulation. This could involve the review of electoral laws, the establishment of an independent electoral commission, and the use of technology to improve the integrity of the electoral process.

c) **Socioeconomic Development and Inclusive Policies:** Nigeria should prioritize inclusive development policies that address socioeconomic disparities and promote equal opportunities for all citizens. This includes poverty alleviation programs, job creation initiatives, and investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, particularly in marginalized communities.

d) **Civic Education and Political Awareness Programs:** Nigeria should invest in civic education programs that promote active citizenship, political awareness, and engagement. This can be accomplished through partnerships with civil society organizations, educational institutions, and media outlets to provide accurate and unbiased information about democratic processes and institutions.

e) **Strengthening International Cooperation:** Nigeria should seek partnerships and support from the international community to strengthen democratic institutions, promote good governance, and address challenges. This includes collaborating with regional organizations, receiving technical assistance, and engaging in knowledge sharing with other countries that have experienced successful democratic transitions.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can strengthen its democratic foundations, enhance citizen participation, and foster a more inclusive and prosperous society.

Conclusion

The present-day Nigerian situation highlights the urgent need for a renewed commitment to democratic principles. Through concerted efforts to combat corruption, promote free and fair elections, and foster inclusivity, Nigeria can rebuild its democratic foundations. By prioritizing the active involvement and representation of the people, Nigeria can create a vibrant democracy that truly reflects the aspirations and needs of its diverse citizenry. Only then can Nigeria realize its full potential and forge a path towards sustainable development and social progress.

It is obvious that Nigeria's democratic system has been facing severe criticism lately due to the country's ongoing democratic struggles. Many people have blamed the politicians, judiciary, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for the breakdown in the democratic process. However, it is crucial that every citizen of this great country takes a moment to reflect on their own responsibilities in this matter. We all must realize that we share the responsibility for the state of our democracy, and we must work towards improving it. We are all responsible for the failing democracy in Nigeria, not INEC, not the judiciary, and not politicians.

The Nigerian situation presents a stark example of democracy existing without the active involvement and meaningful participation of its citizens. This article has critically examined the factors contributing to this democratic deficit, drawing on philosophical perspectives to analyse the implications for Nigerian society. By offering insights into potential remedies, including strengthening democratic institutions, promoting civic education, and addressing social inequality, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on democracy in Nigeria and inspire actions to bridge the gap between democracy and the people.

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