

## DEMOCRATIC WAVES IN WEST AFRICA: NIGERIA AND GHANA AS A CASE IN VIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Since Nigeria, like a substantial number of other African countries, claimed to have subscribed to the practice of democracy as a system that presumably guarantees the satisfaction of people's welfare through their chosen representatives; the challenge of a transparent electoral process through which these representatives emerge is one which is yet to be subdued. The paper argues that the Hobbesian nature characterizing the Nigerian polity which is more pronounced during electioneering processes - largely credited to both the incumbent and their "would-be" successors - are chiefly responsible for this unfortunate situation. Ironically, its African counterparts like Botswana, Senegal, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mali and Ghana seems to be making headway in this direction. Using the method of comparative analysis of electoral processes, Nigeria and Ghana; through their 2007 and 2008 elections, respectively, were reviewed. The paper recommends, **inter alia**, that both the leaders and the led adopt mature political culture through quality political education.

### INTRODUCTION

The wave of democracy traveling through the nooks and crannies of Africa

appears to be more noticeable in the last two decades. Referring to this development, Momoh (2006) says Africa is in another phase of its political life: where most countries have returned to the ballot box after decades of authoritarian/military rule. Since these nations are regarded as developing democracies the focus of the international community has always been on them to measure the intensity of democratic heat in them. In fact countries which for one reason or the other are not part of this league are blacklisted by relevant International Organizations. This treatment was ,in the recent past, meted out to Guinea by the African Union (A.U.) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as the Moussa Camara-led coupists seized power from the erstwhile maximum ruler, Lansa Conte, who was relieved of the position by death (The Nation, Mon. Dec. 29, 2008:15). A similar response welcomed the Togolese coupist recently. This kind of reaction shows that anything short of democracy is not welcomed by the international community- Western World, especially, and other donor/aid-giving countries. This is because good governance regarded as a product of enduring democracy, for Africa, is seen more or less as a tool for aid-bargaining; thereby trivializing Africa's democracy. Arowolo (2010), therefore, aptly described these emerging democracies as artificial, weak and reflexive of external imposition.

The degree of transparency of electoral processes as an integral part of genuine democracy, therefore, present a good yardstick for the determination of a country's smooth growth or retardation, democratically. For Nigeria, conducting a free, fair and transparent election is a problem she is yet to overcome for a combination of factors; chief among which is the inherent Hobbesian nature of the state more pronounced during leadership succession process. In contrast, Ghana, another sub-

regional giant appears to be taking giant strides in this direction to the admiration of the whole world. The paper is thus interested in juxtaposing the two systems through their respective electoral processes with a view to pin-pointing useful lessons to boost democratic growth and overall development of Africa as a whole. To this extent, Nigeria's next attempt at General Elections in 2011 should be an improvement on the previous ones especially in this Fourth Republic.

Following this introductory part is the methodology of analysis. The next section deals with the nature of African state viz-a-viz electoral processes. The juxtaposition of Nigeria's 2007 and Ghana's 2008 Elections is next. Conclusion and recommendations forms the last part of the work.

## **ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY**

The work is basically comparative in nature. Comparison, to Hopkin (cf. Marsh et'al, 2002), brings a sense of perspective to a familiar environment and discourages parochial responses to political issues. The method makes the researcher/readers to be aware of unexpected differences, or even surprising similarities between selected cases. It is crucial to note that observation of the ways in which political problems are addressed in different contexts provides valuable opportunities for policy learning and exposure to new ideas and perspectives. Comparison across several cases, especially countries, enable researcher to assess whether a particular political phenomenon is simply a local issue or a previously unobserved general trend.

Furthermore, comparative method offers a most obvious route to testing theoretical propositions in political science. For instance, propositions such as:

‘elections in developing nations are often problematic’ could be tested by juxtaposing electoral processes in some of the so-called developing nations, to ascertain whether this holds in all cases or not. In the same way, hypothesis such as: ‘democracy thrives where almost everyone involved play the game according to the rules to the extent that the rulers are accountable to the ruled (electorates)’ could also be tested- validated or falsified- using the comparative method.

It should be made obvious that if political science is to generate general propositions about political life, then, comparison is a *sine qua non*. It is also necessary to assess the validity of our interpretation of specific or unique political phenomena (King et’al, in Hopkin, 2002). Although the usefulness of the method cannot be over-emphasized; there are some formidable problems in properly testing political science generalizations in a stubbornly complex world.

Nevertheless, more germane to this study is a combination of specific forms of comparative explanatory tools. The ‘method of concomitant variables’ which seeks to identify variables which seem to move more or less contemporaneously in the hypothesized direction is the most relevant here. For example, in the instant case, if Ghana can without much electoral hullabaloo conduct relatively transparent elections and thereby inches towards democratic stability, Nigeria, her sub-Saharan African neighbour, co-developing nation and democratizing society like her, all things being equal, should be able to exhibit similar feat. However, if Nigeria remains an exception to this proposition, then relevant variables should be compared to pin-point the area of divergence. To do this, the ‘most similar’ method is employed. In this method, cases with similar features are chosen so that most variables are held constant and cannot be adduced as strictly responsible for the differences between them. This narrows down the number of variables and

facilitates the empirical checking of explanations. In the case under review, variables such as developing economy, presidential system, first-past-the –post electoral laws, and multi-party system e.t.c. are common to both states. Comparing these variables makes clearer what accounts for the difference between the two- why one is making headway as far as democratic sustainability is concerned and the other remaining stagnant within the same period of democratic experiment. The method further seeks to explain political phenomena by identifying the combination of causal conditions present in cases where the phenomenon is verified. Rather than searching for the frequency with which a particular causal relationship can be detected, the approach proceeds by identifying conditions which are present in every available case of the phenomenon being investigated (necessary condition). It then compares the cases in order to establish whether there is any one factor which produces the phenomenon on its own (a sufficient condition).

Going by the above, therefore, the Hobbesian nature of the Nigerian politics as amplified by the prevailing leadership style is observed as being a condition making the glaring difference between the two systems being examined. It is one thing for procedures to be put in place; it is another for such to be so faithfully implemented to the extent that leaders are seen to lead by good examples in accordance with the acceptable ways of doing things. In other words, the leadership problem has always been a stumbling block in the way of Nigeria's attempts at overcoming the perennial problems bedeviling her electoral processes.

## **NATURE OF AFRICAN STATE AND ELECTORAL PROCESS**

Dahl's (1988) conceptualization of democracy as a system of government that

provides for a meaningful and periodic competition for positions of government power, high level of political participation in the selection of leaders, and policies, and adherence to the rule of law as the guarantee of Fundamental Human Rights; appears to be more germane to this discourse given the relatively wide attention enjoyed by the concept.

The above basically suggests that governmental power supposedly belong to people who invest same in their representatives, on trust. They (the leaders) are in turn, responsible to the people (Lawal, 2004:151). Putting it more succinctly, Dickson (2001: in Lawal, 2004), submitted that power belong to the people who are also at liberty to review the social contract- either renewing or terminating it altogether. In this connection, the main instrument through which the renewal or termination of the said contract is effected is election. This is to say that election is the defining characteristic of modern democracy (Rokkan, 1970). By implication, therefore, the electoral process that delivers periodic and genuine election is a crucial starting point for the existence and consolidation of democracy, and a responsible government (Olaitan, 2004:14-15).

Generally-speaking, after decades of independence, good democratic practice still elude Africa due to bad leadership (Esekumemu, 2009), and the nature of African state. These, inter alia, have been observed to be a hindrance to the growth of democracy on the continent. Rather than contributing positively to the sustenance of democracy, this nature makes the electoral process remain a major factor in truncating democratic rule. This is because the African state is an entity that is not only set apart from the people, but exercise enormous and unchecked power over the people, apart from being entirely on its own as far as the organization and functioning is concerned. In words of Uadiale (2010),

*Plagued by a host of intra-state instabilities, lawlessness, criminality, civil wars, ethnic clashes, recurrent coups d'état, armed insurgencies, factional fighting, military disloyalty, and ideational conflicts; the African continent exemplifies manifold form of non-state violence and declared absence of the state.*

It, therefore, remains a predatory state; one that exist for the oppression and the exploitation of its own people. This simply means the state is not well institutionalized and does not enjoy a meaningful relationship with its people. There exist, therefore, a chasm between the state and the people.

Buttressing the above, Ake (1996:6-7) aptly observed that since the state function to exploit the people, the people gradually distance themselves from its workings. This makes elections in Africa (but for a few exceptional cases) meaningless for their outcomes are not always in congruent with people's wishes. Subsequently, people generally exhibit political apathy. Going by the attitude of leaders bent on retaining their seats or handing over to their party bearers, using all means possible, it becomes a risk of life to attempt exercising one's franchise not to talk of sticking out one's neck to protect the electorate's mandate.

Unfortunately, Nigeria typifies this ugly picture and yet finds it difficult to cross the hurdle. Alluding to this, Ihonvbere (in Onyeoziri, 2005:7), reiterated how the character of the Nigerian state, especially its authoritarian and unitarian tendencies discourage the practice of good governance. For instance, as a leader of both the party and the Nigerian state the statement credited to former President Olusegun Obasanjo (NIIA:7) that the 2007 General Elections were going to be a do-or-die affair for the ruling party, is unimaginable and detrimental to transparent leadership succession process. Mbaku, et'al ( in Onyeoziri, 2005), in the same

vein, opined that when the institutions of the state are too weak to enforce fairness, justice and the rule of law, thus allowing crude power politics to reign, then, there is no end in sight yet as far as electoral misfortune is concerned. This weakness disallows the state from thriving, democratically. The major headache is located in crude electoral processes which is a reflection of the character of the Nigerian state.

The above, however, does not suggest that all African states share the same pedigree of such electoral cruelty, particularly going by the indices of fairness, justice, and rule of law. This, therefore, underscore the need for juxtaposition of ‘democratic’ societies in Africa. Ghana, for instance, seems to be blazing the trail in the attempt to subdue this nature and, therefore, an exception to the generalization. It is in the light of this contradiction that the paper juxtaposes the 2007 and 2008 Elections in Nigeria and Ghana, respectively, with a view to seeing if Nigeria (and of course the entire continent) could borrow a leaf from Ghana’s “magic wand” and perhaps pass the litmus test for once.

## **JUXTAPOSING NIGERIA’S 2007 AND GHANA’S 2008 ELECTIONS**

### ***The Nigerian Experience:***

As substantiated elsewhere, more than three years after the conduct of the last General Elections in Nigeria, the last has not been heard as far as its worldwide condemnation and internal problems, that is, litigations arising from its outcome



are concerned. Problems such as incompetence and deliberate bungling by the INEC, widespread use of thugs and security agents against voters, and the flagrant abuse of the powers of incumbency combined together to give the condemnable outcome. The loss of opportunity to transfer power from one civilian to another civilian regime, for the first time in the history of Nigeria without such overwhelming attendant electoral shenanigans, makes the INEC woeful performance more painful (Oladipupo, 2007:106-113; Nigerian Compass, Mon. Jan. 5, 2009:6-7).

For the fact that the process was fraught with malpractices and was seen as not credible, a legion of cases sprang up at the various Election Petition Tribunals as attested to by the table below.

**Table 1.**

**Tribunal Cases Arising from the 2007 National Elections**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF CASES</b>
<b>Presidential</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Governorship</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Senate</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>House of Representatives</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>State House of Assembly</b>	<b>656</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1250</b>

**Source:** Adopted from Fabiyi (2007: 11)

In the course of the tribunals' discharge of their assignments, a number of reversals of fate have been recorded, including seven "INEC-ordained" governors, as at the last count (Nigerian Tribune, 24 Feb., 2009). As a matter of fact, a four-to-three judgment of the Supreme Court had to save the face of the president, having occupied the seat for almost two years without being sure of his fate. In certain cases where re-run elections were ordered the sitting governors won again and got sworn in afresh. This implies that elections would no longer be held concurrently in all the states of the federation. This is to say the least in reference to the state of confusion Nigeria has found itself as a result of the charade tagged the General Elections, 2007.

### *Lessons from Ghana:*

The success record of Ghana's 2008 elections is a challenge for every serious-minded state on the continent of Africa. To Ghana's credit, the latest transition process in question marked the third in the series, preceded by the 1992 and the 2000 editions, respectively. This, no doubt, is an exhibition of a worthy form of political discipline and rigorous high standard of electioneering, balloting and judicial high-handedness (The Nation, Sun. 11, 2009:56). The "magic wand" for Ghana can be seen in the following factors.

The adequacy of preparation and umpires' integrity was attested to by the international observers present at the polls (The Guardian, Tue. Dec. 23, 2008:9). The creation of a conducive environment by the incumbent is also worthy of note. The elections were not made a do-or-die affair; rather, it was seen as part of the process for national development. The electioneering process further showed it was an issue-based election- issues regarding the economy, corruption, drug and human

trafficking were addressed by the contestants. Most importantly, Ghanain leaders exhibited genuine traits of leadership. For instance, while the outgoing president made critical and unifying statements, the runner-up personally showed sportsmanship spirit in accepting the results in good faith. High level of education reflecting in the thriving of democratic institutions is yet a major factor to be considered. This means years of investment which eventually paid off in political maturity. The integrity and credentials of contestants, especially, in the presidential race between two professors, of economy and law, respectively, cannot be over-emphasized, also. In sum, the table below shows the electoral scorecards of Nigeria and Ghana on a comparative note.

**Table 2.**

<b>NIGERIA</b>	<b>GHANA</b>
1. Inadequate and problematic preparation.	Adequate and almost problem-free election.
2. Caliber of political office aspirants- most of them lack integrity.	Contestants are mostly men of relative integrity.
3. Election umpires yet to proof their integrity.	Election umpires are relatively tested/proven men of integrity.
4. Very low political education/culture.	High political education/mature political culture.
5. Pending Court cases more than	Elections concluded in record time.

three years after elections.	
6. Institutions are built around individuals.	Institutions are built for societal benefit.
7. Poor leadership.	Relatively good leadership.
8. Lack of patriotism.	High sense of patriotism and national pride.

**Note:** the above list is not exhaustive regarding the electoral scorecards of the two countries under review. Besides, it does not portray the relatively better system as hitch-free. Additionally, it is largely based on the author's observation.

## CONCLUSION

With Ghana recently recording success in her last presidential elections where Atta-Mills, the opposition party presidential candidate polled 4,501,466 votes ( 50.23%) against Akuffor-Addo's 4,478,411 votes (49.77%) (TELL, Jan. 19, 2009:38-39), in a hotly-contested run-off, and the apparent failure of Nigeria to record such a feat about a year ago when it had a similar opportunity, the paper set out to examine the missing link.

Having placed side by side some of the major factors that went into the unmaking and the making of democratic stability in the two countries, respectively, the paper concludes that unless a people, its government, its Electoral Management Body, (i.e. its operators), and other stakeholders are really interested in the democratic process and ready to make the necessary sacrifices, electoral process in

any given state, especially in Africa, will continue to be fraught with diverse kind of problems. This invariably impact negatively on the democratic sustainability on the continent. However, this does not suggest that the whole of Africa is infected. Countries such as Botswana, Mauritius, apart from Ghana have proved to be bastions of good democratic practice in Africa.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The electorate must recognize that it has to stand up and defend its votes/mandate. This is because politicians anywhere in the world would always seek for means, either fair or foul, to hijack people's mandate. In the same vein, the electorate and the entire people should be ready to do things according to the dictates of the rule of law. That is, they should strive to be law-abiding and well-organized in order to boost national image.

Apart from these, the government, especially, the incumbent should endeavour to create enabling environment for periodic elections. Additionally, the power of incumbency should not be used to manipulate electoral processes and results in favour of the ruling party and its candidates. Intending leaders' integrity should always be a major criterion in the consideration of such personalities for leadership positions. Institutions should also be built not around personalities, but, for the benefit of all. In the light of this, the project of qualitative education for the people should not be starved of fund.

For the Electoral Management Bodies like Nigeria's (INEC), states should not shy away from effecting a total overhauling if need be. Expunging certain

salient features from the Uwais- led Electoral Reforms Committee's report, meant to introduce a new lease of life, by the powers that be in Nigeria should be discouraged. Besides, people of sound integrity should be entrusted with the sensitive task of being at the helm of affairs as umpires in elections. Moreover, the judiciary should be empowered and encourage the more so as to make election rigging and other manipulations less attractive.

Politicians must desist from recruiting the youth as thugs to achieve their selfish ambition in a "do-or-die" manner. In this connection, the youth should be engaged in useful and meaningful employment/activities. The politicians should also imbibe the spirit of sportsmanship, knowing full well that election is not a "winner-takes-all", race. In this connection, the youth should also not make themselves available tools in the hands of these bad-intentioned politicians in the name of poverty and unemployment. After all, Nigeria is relatively richer than Ghana where the youth still exhibits that they are cultured.

Lastly, instead of wasting tax payers' money traveling to Europe under the pretence of understudying the workings of the parliaments there, Botswana, Ghana, inter alia, presents a better and cheaper alternative to African politicians.

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