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INTRODUCTION

Democracy was once described by Abraham Lincoln, a former President of the United States of America, as government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

It is a system of government in which important public decisions on issues of law and policy depend, directly or indirectly, upon public opinion formally expressed by citizens of the community all of whom have equal political rights.

As can be seen from the definition above, in a democracy government policy depends in some formal and regular way on the state of public opinion. From the definition which I have given above, it becomes crystal clear that opinion should serve as a source of political authority. Thus, in a democracy every decision that a government takes must reflect public opinion or be based on it. That is, in a democracy public policy must always reflect public opinion or be based on it and, for this reason, if we come across a system of government in which public choices do not totally depend on public opinion, then we should not regard such a system as democratic. This is so because sovereignty belongs to the people and those in political power are merely holding it in trust for the people. That clearly explains why it has been said that it is illegal for anybody to rule a people without their consent or express permission.

In Nigeria, federal law-makers, that is, Senators and the Members of the Federal House of Representatives, are required by law to have offices in their constituencies, and they are supposed to be going there regularly or from time to time to make consultations with those they represent in order to find out their opinions on important national issues and they are expected to go back to the floor of the Senate and the House in Abuja and try to bring them to the notice of their colleagues and, if possible, lobby them so that the people they represent will get what they want. But, unfortunately, most members of the National Assembly in Nigeria do not do this. They even collect money for this purpose. It is called constituency allowance. They are supposed to use it to set up offices in their constituencies and employ staff but they usually keep the money for themselves or divert it to other uses and they are not called upon to account for it. So, you can see that in a country like Nigeria, the laws are there, but implementation is the problem; the rules are there but there are infractions here and there.

It is worthy of note that my definition of democracy recognizes the need for equality of political rights among all the citizens which is a requirement of inclusiveness. Therefore, if a political system deprives women of the right to vote, then it is not democratic, even if there is a high level of participation among men in political decision-making.

There are many conceptions, definitions, and types of democracy but this paper will be restricted to liberal democracy and one of the major reasons for this restriction is that apart from arguing the thesis that democracy is a facilitator of economic development, this paper also argues the thesis that liberty is the foundation of democracy, and, as you know, the type of democracy that goes well with freedom is liberal democracy.

By liberty, I mean, primarily, a condition which is characterized by absence of coercion or constraints imposed by another person, which is in the liberal sense of the term. This means that there are many conceptions of liberty. I have said that liberty refers primarily to a condition which is marked by the absence of coercion or constraints imposed by another person; a human being is said to be free or at liberty in so far as he or she can choose his or her own goals or course of conduct, can choose between alternatives available to him or her, and is not forced to act as he or she would not himself or herself choose to act, or prevented from acting as he or she would otherwise choose to act, by the will of another man, of the state, or of any other authority. It has to do with an area of conduct within which

each individual chooses his or her own course and is protected from compulsion or restraint. If I am to speak matter-of-factly, I would say that J. S. Mill's essay on liberty is probably the best-known expression in English of this individualistic and liberal conception of liberty. As I have already said, the type of democracy that goes well with freedom is liberal democracy and this clearly explains why this paper is restricted to that type of democracy.

However, I shall also argue that there can be no absolute freedom or liberty in any society, for it will lead to anarchy, lawlessness or breakdown of law and order, and absence of government. This can disturb the peace and security of the society which can, in turn, lead to low economic development.

Also, I shall show that democracy is supposed to ensure that there is majority rule, constitutional protection of ethnic, religious, and political minorities, human rights protection, independent and effective judiciary, and recognition of opposition.

Finally, I shall argue that what we have in Nigeria today is nominal democracy, not real or substantial democracy and that there is a link between Nigeria's inability to generate rapid economic development and the failure of her successive governments to recognize and respect the basic features and principles of democracy and to meet its minimum requirements.

LIBERAL OR BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY:

Norman P. Barry defines liberal or bourgeois democracy as "a political system in which individual rights are given special constitutional protection against majority."¹ Also, Robert Dahl defined it as "the continuing responsiveness of government to the preferences of its citizens – considered as political equals."² Its major features include the following: First, there has to be popular participation in the decisions that shape the lives of individuals in the society. Second, there has to be government by majority rule, with recognition of the rights of minorities to try to become majorities.

Typical examples of such rights are freedom of speech, freedom of dissent or the right of dissent, freedom to form opposition parties and the freedom to run for public office. There also have to be recognition of, and respect for, the other rights of all individuals in the society. I mean fundamental human rights which are also known as natural rights. They are inalienable and inviolable rights. Third, there has to be commitment to individual dignity and the preservation of the liberal values of life, liberty and property. Lastly, there has to be commitment to equal opportunity for all members of the society to develop their individual capabilities and potentials. Proponents of liberal democracy are of the view that without the liberalization of democracy, it (democracy) cannot be operative. Assisi Asobie has, however, criticized liberal democracy on the basis of its characteristic electoral process, and institutions. He maintains that this produces a medium through which:

The masses are tricked into installing an oppressive minority government whose main concern is to protect the interests of a dominant class.³

He believes that freedom of the masses, which is freedom to sell their labour, ends where capitalist freedom to maximize profit begins.

THE BASIC FEATURES AND PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:

Political Equality: In a democratic country, citizens should have equal political opportunities as well as equal voting power, that is, one man should have one vote.

Alternative Government: Citizens in a democratic country should have an opportunity to select among several choices. Thus, the principle of alternative government "stresses the need for an opportunity to select among several choices."⁴

Periodic Election: It is compulsory to put in place structures and mechanisms through which mandates could be renewed and fresh ones undertaken. A government should have a fixed term of office and at the end of the term of office, another election must be conducted to renew the mandate of the people in

government if they are still qualified to contest and if the electorate still want them or to vote in new people entirely.

The electorate should also have what is called recall power. For example, if a law-maker who has a four-year mandate has spent only one year and is doing so badly and the members of his constituency feel that they cannot tolerate him and his excesses for another three years, they should have the power and the right to recall him, that is, they will officially tell him to come back and stop representing them. In that case, a bye-election has to be conducted to elect another person who will replace him.

Majority Rule: Under a democratic government, government decisions must reflect the wishes and desires of the majority.

The Rule of Law: This says that there should be strict observance of the fundamental laws of the land. Nobody should be above the law and all citizens, both the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled, should be under the same set of laws.

Individual Freedom: Citizens in a democratic country should have freedom to do whatever they want to do as far as they do not infringe on the rights of other citizens and as far as they do not violate the provisions of the constitution. There can be no absolute freedom in a society but fundamental human rights of citizens must be respected and recognized. If the fundamental human rights of citizens are respected and recognized in a country, it will help to prevent military intervention in politics.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHECKS ON MAJORITY RULE:

I have said that under a democratic government, government decisions must reflect the wishes and desires of the majority. But it is very necessary to have constitutional checks on the majority rule. I know that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. If there are no constitutional checks on the majority rule, government officials may be doing things that are contrary to the provisions of the constitution. That explains why we have the principle of separation of powers. Under the principle of separation of powers, the executive is charged with the responsibility of executing or implementing laws, the legislature is charged with the responsibility of making or enacting laws, whereas the judiciary is charged with the responsibility of interpreting laws. No arm or organ of government has the right to interfere in the functions of another and there are, usually, checks and balances. They are to work together for the common good of all. In other words, they are complementary but each one of them is expected to serve as a check on the other and ensure that no one does anything beyond its powers. If an arm of government goes beyond its powers, its action will be declared ultra vires, in which case it will be null and void and of no effect whatsoever. The legislature, for example, has what is called an oversight function under which it is expected to force the executive to do things in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. For example, it is the duty of the legislature to make sure that the money earmarked for any project is used for that particular purpose. If the president who has sworn to defend the constitution at all times, for example, is not doing so, the legislature can start impeachment proceedings against him. In fact, he can be removed from office through impeachment if he violates the provisions of the constitution. A president can commit what are technically referred to as “impeachable offences” and these can lead to his removal from office.

Also, the judiciary serves as a check on both the executive and the legislature because it is constitutionally empowered to interpret the constitution. If the executive or the legislature does anything that is inconsistent with the provisions of the constitution, the judiciary, through the courts, must declare it illegal, null and void and of no effect whatsoever. When this happens, such executive or legislative action will not have the force of law. If it is a piece of legislation or a law enacted by the legislature and due process is not followed in its enactment, it cannot be binding on the citizens.

HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION, INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE JUDICIARY AND RECOGNITION OF OPPOSITION:

Fundamental human rights are also called natural rights. As Prof. Omoregbe has rightly pointed out, a right is a justifiable claim to anything, any privilege or immunity to which one is entitled. “The concepts of right, duty, justice and law are all linked together, with law being at the centre.”⁵

Firstly, rights and duties are correlative terms, since one implies the other. Both of them derive from law which imposes duties and at the same time grants rights. For instance, if the law grants me the right to do anything, it at the same time imposes on you the obligation to respect that right and to do nothing to prevent me from exercising it. Therefore, everybody has a duty to respect the rights of other people. "There are no rights without duties, and there are no duties without rights."⁶

D. D. Raphael supports this view when he says that "a system of duties which all men have is at the same time a system of rights which all men have against others."⁷

As I have already said, another name for fundamental human rights is natural rights. They are basic to human existence and necessary for man's self-fulfilment and happiness. Fundamental human rights include the following: (1) The right to live (the right to exist): This right is violated by the acts of murder, suicide, and unjustifiable abortion. An unjustified abortion is that which is carried out and the purpose of which is not to save the endangered life of the mother. (2) The right to happiness: This right is violated by any action that constitutes an impediment to the happiness of another man. (3) The right to peace: This right is violated by any action that disturbs the peace of another man. (4) The right to bodily integrity: This right is violated by any act of assault or any injury deliberately inflicted on another person. (5) The right to the respect due to human dignity: This right is violated by any form of degradation of human dignity in the person of anybody, by such acts as torture, trial by ordeal, cruelty, slavery, rape, or any other form of inhuman treatment (6) The right to self-determination (the right to freedom). This right is violated by any act that deprives another person of the opportunity of exercising his freedom, such as slavery, servitude, colonization, to mention but a few. Everybody is free to do whatever he likes with himself as far as what he does is not harmful to the peace and security of the society and does not infringe on the rights of others. Nobody has the right to take his own life since he is not the author of his life. So, suicide is condemnable. (7) The right to self-expression (freedom of speech): This right is violated by any action, law, or policy which is meant to prevent anybody from expressing his opinions on any issue. (8) The right to own property within certain limits, without infringing on the rights of others to their own fair share of the goods of the community.

Prof. Omoregbe has rightly pointed out that:

The situation in which a few selfish and greedy individuals a mass to themselves most of the wealth of the society as their "private property", at the expense of the vast majority of the people who in consequence live in abject poverty, is immoral. This is not an exercise of the right to own property.⁸

As a matter of fact, it is, instead, an abuse of the right to own private property. As Prof. Omoregbe has rightly observed:

The society belongs to all its members, and not only to a few greedy and selfish individuals. Every member of the society has both the duty to contribute his own quota to the wealth of the society through labour, as well as the right to a fair share of this wealth.⁹

(9) The right to marry: This right is violated by any action or law that prevents a person from getting married. (10) The right to have children: This right is violated by any action or law that prevents a person from having children. (11) The right to education: This right is violated by any action, law, or decree which prevents anybody, particularly children from acquiring education. (12) The right to a just wages for one's labour: This right is violated by the exploitation and under-payment of workers by their employers. (13) The right to good name: This right is violated by any act of libel. (14) The right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty: This right is violated by the acts of detention, imprisonment, or punishment without trial. An accused person must be presumed innocent until he is proved guilty and he must be given a fair trial. He must be given the right to legal representation. (15) The right to a fair hearing: This right is violated by any act of hasty trial or imprisonment without trial. (16) The right to seek justice or the redress of miscarried justice: This right is violated by any act intended to prevent a person from going to court to seek justice if he feels that he has been denied justice. (17) The right to form, or belong to, any association as far as such an association does not

infringe on the right of other people and is not a threat to the peace and security of the society. This right is violated by any act that is meant to prevent the formation of a free, harmless, and peaceful association that does not infringe on the rights of other people and is not a threat to the peace and security of the society. It must be pointed out that the proscription of such an association by law or decree is also a violation of this right. (18) The right to belong to any religion of one's choice (freedom of worship): This right is violated by any act of religious discrimination or persecution. Also, it is violated by any attempt to force a person to belong to a particular religion. (19) The right of equality of races: This right is violated by acts of racial discrimination: A good example of this is the apartheid policy of South Africa. (20) The right to self-preservation or self-defence: Any act that prevents a person from protecting or defending himself is a violation of this right. (21) The right to resist oppression in any form: This right entitles citizens to resist an oppressive government, an oppressive law or an oppressive policy. (22) The right of a people to choose their rulers: This right is violated by the overthrow of duly-elected governments by military officers via coup d'états.

These rights are sacred, natural, imprescriptible and inalienable. In fact, socio-political problems as well as the corruption of governments are caused by the violation of these natural rights either out of ignorance or sheer contempt. Also, respect for these rights is the foundation of peace in the world, and their violation results in barbarous acts which are outrageous to the conscience of mankind. Quite frankly, since these rights are based on human nature, they constitute the foundation of peaceful co-existence and happiness of mankind. Wars, conflicts, and social unrests are always traceable to the violation of these rights. No government has a right to violate these rights by legislation. As G. W. Paton has rightly pointed out, the natural rights "are beyond the powers of the state."¹⁰

Therefore, in a democratic government, human rights should be recognized, respected, and protected. Also, it is important for the judiciary in a democracy to be independent and effective: As I have already said, the judiciary is the arm of government charged with the responsibility of interpreting laws. Judges and magistrates should be able to interpret the law without fear or favour and judgements of courts should be respected by all citizens, including the rulers. By effective judiciary, we mean a situation whereby there is quick dispensation of justice. Justice delayed, they say, is justice denied. There is also the need to recognize the opposition. Citizens must be given the right of dissent and nobody should be punished for holding a contrary view. But those in the opposition should always ensure that they engage in constructive criticisms, and their views should be taken into consideration by those in government when making decisions on important national issues. What is important is that citizens should be free to exercise their rights within the confines of law. It can, therefore, be argued that liberty is the foundation of democracy.

DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

There are some arguments that have sustained democracy for too long. According to Owolabi,

Historically, the idea of a system of government that shall involve all rational men was motivated by the ultimate aim of social philosophy, that is, the attainment of development which is basically the good life for the individuals that constitute that polity.¹¹

There is a general belief that this ideal can only be realised if every citizen is allowed to participate in the process of decision-making. "Since an individual knows his interests more than anybody else, he will be able to articulate and defend them against other contending interest."¹² Apart from that, "democracy has been promoted because it will promote consultations and consensus through popular participation."¹³

These are some of the reasons why democracy is been celebrated and embraced all over the world. Those who support and defend democracy argue or believe that it fosters economic development which Africa is in dire need of. There are certain reasons why it is believed that democracy is capable of fostering economic development. First, it has the ability to encourage individual autonomy and initiatives and this fosters creativity which is an essential pre-requisite for economic development. Second, it gives all members of the society a feeling of ownership of the democratic polity and this is capable of encouraging them to work very hard to increase national productivity. Third, the public officials are supervised regularly by all, directly or indirectly, and this is capable of reducing to the

barest minimum such negative vices as mismanagement, abuse of office, and corruption. Fourth, when democracy creates the right or conducive atmosphere for the reconciliation of divergent interests, via the participation of all the people, all of them are likely to unite for improvement of their quality of living.

LIBERTY AS THE FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY

What is Liberty?

Another name for liberty is freedom. It can also be equated with autonomy. We intend to begin with a conception of liberty that has been central in the tradition of European individualism and liberalism. According to this conception, liberty refers primarily to a condition which is marked by the absence of coercion or constraints imposed by another person; a man is said to be at liberty to the extent that he can choose his own goals or course of conduct, can choose between alternatives available to him, and is not forced to act as he would not himself choose to act, or prevented from acting as he would otherwise choose to act, by the will of another man, of the state, or of any other authority.

TYPES OF LIBERTY:

We have two major kinds of liberty. They are:

(1) Restricted Liberty:

The liberty or freedom which individuals in a society enjoy is usually restricted. This is so because where a citizen's rights stop is where another citizen's own rights begin. If liberty or freedom is not restricted, citizens will be behaving anyhow and this can lead to anarchy, lawlessness, or absence of government. Therefore, unrestricted liberty can disturb the peace and security of the society.

(2) Absolute Liberty:

Liberty has to do with freedom which individuals have in a particular society. Any political system that does not guarantee freedom/liberty for the members of the society cannot be said to be democratic. This concept of freedom is one of the distinguishing differences between democracy and authoritarianism, dictatorship or tyranny. For a system to be truly democratic, it must grant individuals the right, the liberty, or the freedom to do whatever they wish to do, provided, of course, they do not infringe on the rights of other members of the society. They, thus, must operate within the law. What this simply means is that there is nothing like absolute liberty in any society. We have absolute freedom in principle but not in practice. Absolute liberty is, therefore, an utopia. It is an idea that exists only in the mind. The freedom or liberty of one individual in a society stops where another individual's own begins. This explains why, for example, we have laws governing the behaviour of people in a society. There is, usually, freedom of expression, for example. But a member of a society where there is freedom of expression should not misuse this freedom/liberty by telling lies about somebody, either by speech or by writing, with the sole purpose of tarnishing his image for no just cause. If he does, he may be charged to court or arraigned in a court of law for libel, sedition or slander as the case may be and he may be sentenced to a term of imprisonment..

Liberty as the Foundation of Democracy:

There is no gain-saying the fact that liberty is the foundation of democracy. If a political system fails to guarantee freedom/liberty, it cannot be said to be democratic because democracy has to do with citizens' freedom to make choices.

Citizens in a democratic country should have the freedom or liberty to choose those who are to represent them. It is, also, vitally important that decisions about public policy reflect the wishes and desires of the people. So, it is what the people want that happens. Therefore in a democracy, public opinion must be gauged at all times and it must be respected.

Liberty And Constitutional Provisions: The laws of libel, sedition, and slander:

As I have said before, despite the granting of freedom or liberty to citizens or individuals in a democratic system, the laws of the land must be obeyed always. The constitution of any country is

supreme and superior to any other law. It is the grand norm. There are, usually, laws against libel, sedition, and slander in all countries. Libel is an act of writing or printing untrue statements about someone so that other people are likely to have a bad opinion about him. Sedition, on the other hand, refers to speech, writing, or actions intended to encourage people to disobey a government. We also have what, in law, is called slander which is a false spoken statement about someone that is intended to damage the good opinion that people have about him.

Irrespective of the granting of liberty or freedom to citizens in a democracy, if they do anything that is contrary to constitutional provisions by, say, engaging in acts of libel, sedition, or slander, they may face court action or litigation and may be imprisoned or jailed.

Absolute Liberty And Anarchy:

I have said that no country can grant absolute liberty to its citizens. This is so because it leads to anarchy, lawlessness, and absence of government. If absolute liberty is granted to citizens, they will trample on the rights of their fellow citizens and this will result in conflicts and the absence of peace and security. This, in turn, will lead to low economic development. Absolute liberty can make citizens to behave anyhow, since their behaviour is not regulated and it can take us back to the Hobbesian state of nature in which the life of man was nasty, brutish and short. Citizens of any country should, therefore, not be encouraged or empowered to violate the rights of their fellow citizens and this seems to be the direct consequence of the granting of absolute liberty to citizens.

CRITICAL EXAMINATION:

As I have already said, the principles of democracy include political equality, alternative government, periodic elections, respect for the rule of law, and individual freedom. All these principles of democracy must be present, recognized, and respected in any country that wishes to be described as truly democratic.

Minimum Requirements of Democracy:

Apart from the above principles of democracy, there are other minimum requirements of democracy and they include the following: majority rule; constitutional checks on majority rule; protection of ethnic, religious, and political minorities; human rights protection; independent and effective judiciary; and recognition of opposition. These are the minimum requirements of democracy and in a country like Nigeria where most of these are absent, what is practised there is nominal democracy, if not pseudo-democracy. Thus, there is no real or substantial democracy in Nigeria yet due to the refusal or failure by successive governments to recognize and respect the principles of democracy and to meet its minimum requirements.

Nigeria's Democratic Experiment:

I have already mentioned or identified the principles of democracy and the minimum requirements of democracy and I have pointed out the fact that before a country can be said to be truly democratic, it must recognize and respect the principles of democracy and meet the minimum requirements of it. I also pointed out the fact that most of the principles of democracy are absent in Nigeria and that successive governments in Nigeria have failed or refused to meet the minimum requirements of democracy. For example, there are still cases of human rights violations in Nigeria and even though periodic elections are conducted in Nigeria, such elections are hardly free and fair. The incidence of corruption, bribery and rigging is still very high. If there are cases of electoral fraud and manipulation in an election in a country, the candidates preferred by the electorate may not be given the opportunity to rule or lead them and this is a rape on democracy.

Since successive governments in Nigeria have failed to recognize and respect the principles of democracy and to meet its minimum requirements, I cannot properly and appropriately refer to Nigeria as a truly democratic country. This is so because it is the principles of democracy and the minimum requirements of it that make a country a democracy. In a democracy, nobody should govern a people without their consent. That is one of the distinguishing differences between democracy and dictatorship or tyrannical rule. Military governments are dictatorial regimes because they take over

political power and overthrow duly-elected governments through the barrel of the gun, instead of through the ballot which is the accepted norm all over the world. A military officer who has taken over political power by force or through the barrel of the gun cannot be responsible to the people and he is likely to rule the country arbitrarily. To me, any politician who rigs an election to acquire political power and rule against the wishes of the people or the electorate is not significantly different from a coup-plotter.

Also, the principle of democracy which has to do with alternative government is not recognized and respected in Nigeria. This is so because the ruling political party (the party in government) has been making serious attempts to emasculate the opposition parties by causing crises in them. That is not how it should be. Opposition parties should be encouraged in a democracy and their views should be taken into consideration in the making and implementation of national policies and they, on their own part, should criticize the government constructively and not destructively. So, constructive criticisms from the opposition parties are very important in a democratic country. Democracy has to do with the continuing responsiveness of government to the preferences of its citizens who are regarded and treated as political equals. Thus, in a democracy, public policy or important public decision or choice is supposed to depend on public opinion. That is, it is what the people want that happens. If the government is planning to increase the pump price of petroleum products, for example, and the people say that they do not want it, the government is supposed to drop or jettison the idea immediately in the interest of the people and the nation. So, sovereignty belongs to the people, and not to the government or the president. Furthermore, on the issue of the rule of law, it is very clear that the rule of law is not respected in Nigeria. It is common in Nigeria for governments or those in government to disobey court orders and reject court verdicts, even those from the Supreme Court which is the highest court in the land. For example, the Supreme Court in Nigeria once handed down a judgement in which it clearly stated that the federal government has no right to withhold the funds meant for or allocated to a state. It, accordingly, ordered the federal government of Nigeria to release the funds meant for local governments in Lagos State but the federal government bluntly refused to obey that court order. This sort of attitude can derail our democratic experiment. It is not healthy for democracy and it can scuttle our nascent democracy, for it can lead to military intervention in politics in Nigeria. So, you can see that the judiciary in Nigeria is not effective and independent. If it were, governments or the executive arm of government cannot disobey its orders with impunity and, yet, independent and effective judiciary is one of the minimum requirements of democracy. It is, therefore, apparent that Nigeria is not yet a truly democratic country.

The Universality of Democratic Principles:

It is generally believed that man has the right to self-determination. This right to self-determination appears to have led some people to propose a variant of democracy which is called “home-grown” democracy. “Home-grown” democracy has to do with the localization of democracy without taking its basic principles into consideration. Proponents of “home-grown” democracy believe that democracy as an ideal should not be introduced into a society without moderation and/or alterations. Therefore, they believe that we should de-Europeanize western democracy to give it an African or Nigerian orientation. The fear is that having tried other western ideas with negative consequences, positive adulteration is necessary for productivity and relevance.

Another reason usually given for advocating “home-grown” democracy is the fact that due to the multi-ethnic nature of our system, parties cannot be formed along Western style. Rather, government should moderate political ideas and orientation, e.g. formation of two political parties with grass roots base for people to join. This happened in Nigeria during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida.

Also, “home-grown” democracy is an attempt at de-imperializing democracy, according to the proponents. This is so because, according to them, there is no single route to the promised land of democratic government, as long as the participation of the people is pronounced.

Furthermore, proponents of “home-grown” democracy believe that opposition has wrecked the political system in some Western countries. “Home-grown” democracy, they argue, can down-play the need and role of negative opposition in the political system.

If we “positively” adulterate democracy to suit our socio-historical milieu as proponents of “home-grown” democracy recommend, we cannot still properly refer to such a system as democracy. Thus, we cannot compromise democratic principles for relevance and still hold that form of government as democratic.

According to Professor Eskor Toyo,

A government in which some elections are held to constitute those to preside over the administration is an electocracy, such a governmental regime may not be a democracy in the authentic sense. A government regime which actually expresses the government authority or power of exploiters of the people is an exploitocracy.... The Greeks recognized plutocracy as a form of government. Plutocracy means government by the wealthy.¹⁴

Democratic principles are the same everywhere. This tends to cast aspersions on any adulterated version of the concept. Conflict is a necessary feature of any democratic form of government. At every point, individuals in society will have conflicting needs which will inform their demands. That explains why mass participation is a pre-condition for any regime to qualify as a democracy. This is so because it is a government through discussion which seeks to find a common ground to the conflicting demands of citizens. Thus, the idea of consensus without adequate participation of citizens is unwarranted and a negation of democratic principle because “an essential feature of democratic government is that it is government through discussion instead of force.”¹⁵

Any attempt to localize democracy without taking its basic features into cognisance renders such a democracy inauthentic. Differences in socio-historical conditions may warrant some adaptation of degree, but the fundamental principles that recommend democracy as a form of government remain the same. Thus, democratic principles are universal and any attempt to localize democracy is mistaken.

Liberty As the Foundation of Democracy:

As I have already said, there is no gain-saying the fact that liberty is the foundation of democracy. If a political system fails to guarantee freedom/liberty, it cannot be said to be democratic because democracy has to do with citizens’ freedom to make choices. Citizens in a democratic country should have the freedom or liberty to choose those who are to govern or represent them. It is also essential for decisions about public policy to reflect the wishes, desires, and aspirations of the people. Thus, it is what the people want that happens and sovereignty belongs to them. Hence, in a democracy, public opinion must be gauged regularly and it must be respected.

CONCLUSION:

From the foregoing analysis, I have inescapably come to the following conclusions:

First, democracy facilitates economic development. Second, liberty is the foundation of democracy. The reason why I say that liberty is the foundation of democracy is that democracy essentially has to do with citizens’ participation in the electoral and decision-making processes and their freedom to make choices. However, as I have already said, there can be no absolute freedom or liberty in any society, for it will lead to anarchy, lawlessness or breakdown of law and order, and absence of government. This can disturb the peace and security of the society which can, in turn, lead to low economic development. Third, democracy ensures that there is: Majority rule; constitutional checks on majority rule; constitutional protection of ethnic, religious, and political minorities; human rights protection; independent and effective judiciary; and recognition of opposition..

Fourth, what we have in Nigeria today is nominal democracy. Thus, we do not have real or substantial democracy yet. This is so because most of the principles of democracy are still absent in Nigeria. The basic features or principles of democracy are yet to be recognized and respected in Nigeria and the minimum requirements of it have not been met or satisfied. Therefore, Nigeria cannot be said to be practising true democracy.

Finally, I see a necessary nexus, an interface, between Nigeria’s inability to generate rapid economic development and the failure of her successive governments to recognise and respect the basic features and principles of democracy and to meet its minimum requirements.

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