

# African States, Democracy and Political Indicators of Development: The Nigerian Scorecard

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses African states, democracy and the political indicators of development while laying emphases on the Nigerian scorecard. The purpose of the modern African state is indeed still highly confounding and the embedded puzzle is largely attributable to democracy discontents. There was the supposition that democracy would lead to development on the continent. However, it is the position of this paper that this assumption is becoming increasingly misled. The paper adopted the documentary method of research which entails the use of textbooks, journals, internet and other documented materials and subsequently interrogates the linkages between democracy and development among African states with specific focus on Nigeria. It tables the political indicators of development and assesses the performance of the Nigerian state against the background of these indications. The thesis of the work is that as long as the political indicators of development are in deficiencies in Nigeria, democracy and development will remain immensely disarticulated. Relying on elite theory, the study concludes that elitist personification of the state and its institutions remains the major impediment to the linking of democracy with development in Nigeria. It recommends reforms of the institutions of the state to serve as catalyst for development in the country.*

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**KEYWORDS:** *African states, Democracy in Africa, Democracy discontents, Democracy and development, political indicators of development*

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## INTRODUCTION

The origins of modern African states are traceable to the Scramble for Africa. It was after the major European powers invaded Africa and divided up the continent among themselves that the boundaries of the modern African states emerged. In other words, ‘pre-colonial Africa was not organized into the nation-states we see today, with fixed boundaries and a nominal national identity. Rather there were kingdoms and empires with rulers and subjects, and numerous smaller political entities’ (Campbell, 2019).<sup>1</sup> However, the nation-states have lasted long enough to begin to establish credible identities as entities for social mobilization and human emancipation. They have lasted long enough to begin to deliver the goods. Democracy (Western-style democracy in specificity) was presented as the definitive vehicle for the African emancipation-journey to the land of development. The inopportune assumption here is that Africa was not developed before the coming of the Europeans. Hence, the foreigners came to teach the natives how to develop and democracy was added as the engine house of the developmental prototype.

It was not plausible to dismiss the pristine African systems in wholesale dimensions as undemocratic. Yet Africans were persuaded to accept liberal (Western democracy) as the modern paradigm of development. The emergent African states then acknowledged development as the *summum bonum* of democracy. But what is democracy? The Lincolnian viewpoint of democracy is applicable to this study. It unmask democracy of all complicated theorizations and simply denotes the concept as government of the people for the people and by the people. Then what is development? Devoid of all technical, disciplinary and esoteric nuances, development in this study (in the context of nation states) means inclusive national progress and improvement. How then has democracy led to development in Africa (among African states)? What have been the linkages between democracy and development in these states? What are the political indicators of development? These are the central research questions of this contribution. The paper is framed on the elite theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This presentation is anchored on the elite theory. Social science research is most appositely framed on existing theories within which the intended contributions are made. The elite theory owes its origin to the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert

Michels (1876-1936) (Okonofua, 2013). The definitive articulation of the elite theory is locatable in the *Power Elite* (Connors, 2020). In this work Mills (1956) drew attention to the complex and intricate interests of the heads of the political, corporate and military elements in the American society. Mills suggested that the ordinary citizens were relatively powerless subjects of exploitation by these leaders. He essentially demonstrated that under America’s power structure ‘the democratic doctrine of the separation and balance of power is an ideal with no specific counterpart in reality. He argued that America is controlled by power elite that commands the resources of the most powerful bureaucratic organizations, and thus, dominate the American society and its populations. Then over time, these bureaucracies have enlarged and become centralized, and the circles of those who control them have narrowed considerably’ (Okereke & Ekpe, 2022).

The thesis of Mills was originally situated within an American context. Even at that, it still had its fair share of disputations. However, it still seems to be a theory of immense universal applicability.

The elite are found in every society. They are even found in different segments of every society.

They are locatable in politics as the political elite who actually in Mills' articulations constitute parts of the power elite. Invariably, there is the elite dimension to Nigerian affairs, inclusive of political and leadership issues. In the application of the elite theory to this study therefore, the role of the elite in the relationship between democracy and development in the country is investigated.

### **Political Indicators of Development**

Political scientists have argued that there is a political angle to change and development. This position is hinged on the contention that the productive process which facilitates progress and change is social in nature. Scholars of this school of thought argue that 'political values are socially reinforced, that the concepts termed 'political values' are accordingly the reflections of individuals' social contexts rather than values governing political behavior' (Mbah, Nwangwu & Edeh, 2007).<sup>7</sup> These political values, which are social in nature, enable production which invariably facilitates change and progress. From this perspective therefore, a number of political indicators of development are identifiable, and they include the following:

- A clearly defined process of power succession
- The level of integration in the national system
- The level of political tolerance and compromise
- The extent to which fundamental human rights are recognized and enforced; and
- The level of mass mobilization and participation in politics (Okereke & Ekpe, 2002)

### **The Nigerian Rating on the Political Indicators of Development**

It stands to reason that a clearly defined and openly operated process of power succession is critical to development. It does not actually count if the government in power is democratic or autocratic. The essential thing on this specific issue borders on the manner of emergence for new government officials.

The point here is that a peaceful method of power succession is an indicator of development. The truth remains that chaos, anarchy, bitter rivalry, electoral brigandage are not indexes of development. It equally remains the truth that development cannot occur under the atmospheres of political instability. So the process of power succession remains the central issue on this matter. But back to democratic paradigms and the specific setting of the Nigerian state. Political succession struggles in the country are actually usually marked by pandemonium (Okereke and A Ekpe, 2002). Election periods in Nigeria are accordingly periods of heightened tensions occasioning assassinations and sundry hooliganisms. It has accordingly been argued that most of

the attendant crises arise from elite struggle for power ‘and in the process potential investors are scared away from the country. On the contrary, the advanced and industrialized countries experience relative political tranquility due to highly organized and acceptable method of succession and this explains their state of development’ (Okereke & Ekpe, 2002). It appears as if the political elite in Nigeria merely seek power for the sake of being in power. The political succession struggles in the country seem to remain attractive to the power elite merely for its own sake and not for developmental purposes. The truth is that such struggles do not conduce for development as development is not a cantankerous phenomenon.

Another political indicator of development is the degree of cohesiveness and level of integration found in the generic political system. The specific reference here is to nation-building which is considered a *sine qua non* to development. Inter-ethnic antagonisms which are the antithesis of nation-building do not engender development.

Hence, ‘if the level of integration is so high that loyalty is shifted from tribal and ethnic-oriented groups to the center, it portends development’ (Okereke and A Ekpe, 2002). Therefore, ‘in a fully integrated society, when the citizens have full participation in the affairs of their nations, disharmony and rivalry will be eliminated’. It consequently stands to reason that:

The absence of integration is underdevelopment. This is so because lack of integration is characterized by fissiparous, centrifugal and cataclysmic tendencies. A country with ethnic cleavages but without some elements of integration is likely to be prone to one form of crises or the other. This has a negative effect on development. It is for this reason that countries with this type of feature are regarded as underdeveloped (Odeyemi, 2014). The political elite in Nigeria have become the vanguards of divisiveness in the country. There is one form of crises or the other in the nation. While inter-ethnic antagonisms reign supreme in different parts of the nation, the political elite are fully concentrating on who becomes what and who wins who in their endless cycles of electoral contests usually presented as democracy. In the process the elite seem to be suggesting that democracy merely means government of the elite by the elite and for the elite. But the essence of democracy is not consummated in electoral contestations.

Nigeria’s rating on the political indicators of development is in acute deficiencies. There is a palpable absence of national integration in Nigeria. Nationbuilding is a gargantuan problem in the country. Several nationbuilding experiments in the Nigerian state have been bedeviled by intraelite bitterness and cataclysmic politics. For instance, the rotational presidency arrangement by Nigerian political parties has never been devoid of inter-ethnic bickering whenever it is time to select presidential candidates by the political parties. In the process of the embedded power struggles what was intended as an integrative mechanism ends up being disintegrative.

Then relatedly, another political indicator of development is the degree of political tolerance and compromise in the national system. Hence, ‘politically speaking, in a developed political system, public decision-making is to a large extent, a process of give and take. It involves respecting and accommodating competing views and interests. If tolerance exists, it will be possible to decide on most public questions. This will enhance the possibility of modernization and development (Sen,

2000). Furthermore, ‘in countries where political tolerance is absent and where alternative views are ignored and where opposers of the government are punished, such societies are not regarded as modernized. This is because dissident groups will likely go underground and work against government’s interest.

Currently in Nigeria, public decision-making is undertaken by cabals on behalf of the public. Public decision-making in the country is largely devoid of processes of give and take. There is a high degree of political intolerance in the country, alternative views are increasingly ignored and opposers of the government are frequently punished (Alagbe, 2018). Dissident groups are also underground in different parts of the country working against government's interests. The next political indicator of development has to do with liberty and freedom of the individual.

Some scholars have in these regards, even equated development to freedom (Sen, 2000). Obviously, the extent to which the fundamental human rights of individual citizens are respected counts a lot in categorizing countries as developed or non-developed. Countries do not grant absolute freedom to their citizens but there are certainly, constitutionally guaranteed rights in all developed political systems that governments are obligated to availing the citizens. It has further been argued in such regards that:

Virtually all states (except total dictatorships) have entrenched elaborate provisions of fundamental human rights in their constitutions. Some merely copy those rights as contained in the United Nations Charter; but without respecting and protecting those rights. Thus, political systems that scoff at these rights, suppress freedom, arrest and detain people at will, and rule with terror, are considered not modernized. Conversely, those that respect and enforce these rights are deemed modernized (Okereke & Ekpe, 2020).

Modernity and development are not precisely synonymous. However, in the context of the above expositions it is squarely understood in this paper that there is already an allusion to the nexus between freedom and development. Only the elite are guaranteed such freedoms in the Nigerian state (Okereke & Ekpe, 2020). Other citizens maybe maltreated and detained at will, even by law enforcement agents. It was under such dreadful scenarios that the End SARS protests occurred recently in the country (Omonobi & Erunke, 2020).

Ultimately, another notable indicator of development is the level of mass mobilization and participation in a state. Under this scenario, citizens would not need to be induced or coerced to engage in political participation. Strangely enough in Nigeria and other African states, political participation is forced on the citizens. This may be by banning free movement of citizens on election days in order to force them to cast their votes within the vicinities of their residences and go back home. On such voting days, the entire nation would be shut down to enforce political participation. Prior to the voting day, the crowds that attended rallies organized by the campaigning political parties would have been rented by desperate political elites. Renting the crowds that attend political rallies and compelling citizens to vote during elections are not indicators of development. But such untoward tendencies have become the hallmarks of the brand of democracy that the political elite in Nigeria propagate. The consequence of such propagations is the monumental disarticulations between democracy and development in the country.

## CONCLUSION

It has been demonstrated in this study that modern African states still exist at the crossroads of democracy and development. The developmental goods that Western democracy promised to deliver have indeed remained undelivered in the African states. Adopting the documentary method of research which entailed the use of textbooks, journals, internet and other documented materials, the work interrogated the linkages between democracy and development among African states with specific focus on Nigeria. It assessed the performance of the Nigerian state against the background of some stipulated political indicators of development and found a position of disarticulations and deficiencies and discontents. The thesis of the work is that as long as these weaknesses persist, the purpose of the modern African state as represented by the Nigerian nation remains highly confounding. Under its elite theoretical designs, the study concludes that elitist personification of the state and its institutions remains the major impediment to the linking of democracy with development in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATION

On the way forward for democracy and development among African states, with emphases on the Nigerian state, the study recommends fundamental and far-reaching reforms of the institutions of the state to serve as catalyst for development. Reforms which amount to business as usual are lampooned in the study. The study for instance, recommends the conversion of the legislature at the national level in Nigeria into a trim-sized unicameral legislature with widespread representative capacities. This is in contradistinction with the current bicameralism in the nation. The current bicameral arrangement which possesses an ostensibly extensive representative coverage is incidentally geared towards the fortification and safeguard of elitist interests and shenanigans.

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