

# **Nigeria's Democracy in the Fourth Republic and Challenges of Development: A Critical Appraisal**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is about critical appraisal of the challenges of development in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. During the military rule, Nigerians from many walks of life (civil society organizations, the media, academia, and other professionals) fought in their respective capacities for return of democracy. All of them hinged their reasons around democracy being the best form of government that could accelerate the economic development of the country. However, has Nigeria developed commensurate with the time and resources expended since 1999 and as envisioned by the Nigerian citizens? It is on this premise that the paper attempts to investigate the progress that Nigeria has made so far. Therefore, the paper takes a look at the ideals of liberal democracy to see if Nigeria is indeed toeing the line of ideal democracy or is practicing its own variant, an assessment is done on the issues in Nigeria's democracy, and the question of development where attention is paid on whether Nigeria has made giant stride in addressing human capital development challenges in the country. The paper discovers that, Socio-economic development witnessed in the country since 1999 is below peoples' expectations and therefore needs to be improved.*

*Keywords: Nigeria, Fourth Republic, democracy, development*

## **Introduction**

Before the military handed over to civilians in 1999, there were many agitations from civil society organizations, human rights groups, journalists, academics and some international agencies, calling on Nigeria, or the

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military specifically, to return to civilian rule. The transition from military to civilian administration which took place on the 29th May, 1999 was the second of its type since Nigeria's independence, as the first one took place twenty years before, that was in 1979. However, the 1979 transition from military to civilian was short lived. It was truncated by the military on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1983. Since then, Nigeria continued to wallow under the military regimes until 1999. The period, 1999-2019, was unique in Nigeria's political history. First, for the first time Nigeria witnessed uninterrupted democratic government for twenty years. Second, there was handing over from one civilian government to another. Third, the ruling party was defeated and the opposition took over.

Within the period of 1999 to 2019, six general elections took place. Opinions differ on whether Nigeria has actually taken the path of development as outcome of these elections or not. One of the perspectives is, Nigeria's democracy has improved the standard of living of Nigerians. The second perspective says Nigeria's democracy has not done up to expectation but should be tolerated because it is still at the level of infancy. The third perspective is Nigeria's democracy is a failure. These expressions are made in an atmosphere whereby critical study of the history of Nigeria's fourth republic has so far not been done (Abba, 2019). This paper, therefore, attempts an appraisal of Nigeria's democracy from 1999 to 2019. The essence is to examine how Nigeria's politics is conducted, how it affects development in the country and how the feature would be improved. The work is divided into sections; introduction, ideals of democracy, issues in Nigeria's politics, democracy and question of development in Nigeria, and finally, conclusion.

### **On the Ideals of Democracy**

With the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, the capitalist assumed victorious as liberal democracy felt relief from the challenges of the communist world. Democracy, thus, became much more pronounced in almost all the continents (Diamond, 1991). In an ideal democracy, accountability and rule of law exist, including civil rights, civil liberties,

equality, freedom of press and speech, and so on—all these for the progress of mankind. Democracy generally evolves after series of intense struggle against absolutism and dictatorship which, in some cases, transmute to revolution. In addition, the philosophers of the enlightenment who castigated dictatorship and exploitation, advocated for freedom, liberty, fraternity and the sayings that sovereignty rests with people and not with king or any particular individual (Guerard, 1987). All these contributed to development of democracy. The modern-day democracy is different from the ancient *demos Kratein* as practiced in the city states of the ancient Greece and Rome where people who enjoyed suffrage converged in assembly to take decision collectively. In contemporary time, people elect and send representatives on their behalf, a rise of representative government. The expectation is a representative simply conveys messages of his constituency. In fact, a representative in a democracy reflects, directly, the ascertained views of his constituents, and even subordinating his own personal judgment (Richard, 2009). This, therefore, makes democracy a system with accountability which main object is the promotion of peoples' welfare and establishment of enabling environment where peace and tranquility reigns.

However, democracy is not without criticism, leading to arguments and counter arguments about it. The predominant criticism is merely an elitist rule which perceives democracy as a system whereby minority rule rather than the majority. Democracy, according to this view, is simply a system whereby a class of minority establish and perpetuate their predominance over the majority (Garba & Akuva, 2019). The minority class who constitutes the elite, use state's instruments of coercion to achieve their egoistical ambition which is in conflict with, and inimical to, the overall interest of the majority. The opponents of this view, however, identify problems in world democracies not in the ideals of democracy per se, for such ideals are sacrosanct, but from those who implement them. The advocates of democracy, therefore, perceive its superiority to other forms of governments, say hereditary monarchy, fascism and communism owing to the presence of liberty and equality in democracy. This argument

continues that as a result of twin principles of democracy, “liberty and equality,” which mankind has sought throughout history, democracy may constitute the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and thus the final form of human government (Fukuyama, 1992).

Therefore, in the context of Nigeria, it is apt to study where the issues lie with the country’s democracy. Is Nigeria really practicing democracy? Are the ideals of democracy impetus for Nigeria’s development? Are there crises in Nigeria’s democracy? Are the politics of Nigeria that of principles? For two decades Nigeria, has been practicing uninterrupted democracy, for the first time in its history. It is therefore time for critical reflection for the promotion of democratic ideals and good governance in the country.

### **Issues in Nigeria’s Politics**

For two decades, that is, from 1999 to 2019, Nigeria has witnessed the rise and fall of series of political parties. This is quite astounding in an uninterrupted democracy. It was unlike in other democracies, particularly Europe and America where political parties survive for more than a century. There is need therefore to diagnose Nigerian political parties, from processes for their formation to objectives and pattern of internal democracies. Ideally, a political party is an organized group of people who have the same ideology, or who, otherwise, have the same political positions, and who field candidates for elections, in attempt to get them elected and thereby implement the party’s agenda (Appadorai, 1982). A political party is, thus, expected to have a clearly stated political platform, its ideals and positions. Some of the basic features of a political party include, but not limited to the following:

- i. Political party agree on some policies and programmes for the society with a view to promoting the collective.
- ii. It seeks to implement these policies by winning popular support through elections.
- iii. Thus, a party is known by which part it stands for,

which policies it supports, and whose interests it upholds.

Nigerian political parties, however, are mostly founded without any clearly stated ideology for the interest of the country, apart from having access to power. This might be the reason why cross carpeting from one party to another has been common in Nigerian politics. In most cases, politicians simply moved to parties where they could have chances of being giving ticket to run for election. The ultimate aim is to capture power. This is why, still, as typical for where voter illiteracy is common, colour and emblems continued to be the means of identification of political parties in Nigeria rather than ideology and issues raised in public debates. This is not in any way surprising considering the fact that there have been problems in aspect of internal democracy, right from the election of party officials to the conduct of primary elections (Ahom, 2018). One of the lacunae leading to this is failure to make party ideology as parts of the constitutional requirements for registration by the National electoral body. This partly contributed to politics without principle, politics to serve individuals rather than collective development. On illiteracy as impediment to survival of democracy, Malian music legend Salif Keita (2019) says, “to have a democracy, people have to understand democracy, and how can people understand when (they) . . . cannot read and write.”

This partly explains why godfathers have access to manipulate Nigerian politics. However, godfathers have been able to play role because of the central role of money in Nigerian democracy. Illiteracy and poverty have been pervasive among Nigerians which godfathers have been seriously exploiting. On many occasions, godfathers financed the electioneering of their godsons and also assist them in vote buying (Abdullahi & Olawale, 2005). This has been the feature of Nigeria’s election over the years. Politics has now become a profitable field of investment for godfathers and some very few wealthy individuals. This becomes so manifest in the 2019 election where the use of dollar instead of naira became common in order to lure delegates in primary elections. Thus, the reason why presence

of individual rather than peoples' support in most cases determine the feature and successes or otherwise of political party which is inimical to the sustainability of democracy. Over the years, local and international observers have been making comments about the general conducts of elections in Nigeria. Some of the observations that are apparent in the reports include the following;

failure to display the voter register; inadequate supplies of voting materials; ballot papers that did not include all the candidates; inadequate facilities for voting and collation; lack of secrecy of voting; disenfranchisement due to errors in the voter register; and underage voting, among others. Improper conduct by security agents, the stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation of voters by party agents and vote buying. (NDI Report, 2012)

The above are some of the reasons why Nic Cheeseman Professor of Democracy at Birmingham University describes Nigeria as one of the countries with defective democracy, contrary to healthy democracy. A healthy democracy is characterized by universal suffrage, free and fair elections on a recurring basis, more than one ruling political party, multiple sources of information in the country, existing rights for all people, and the voters' decision-making process being unhindered by country's elites or external influencing figures. These elements have to work together to ensure smooth running of democratic government. A democracy is defective if it is found wanting in some of these elements. Contrarily, for a democracy to thrive, there has to be unbiased umpire that would conduct the elections.

In order to accomplish this, the word "independent" was therefore added to Nigeria's electoral body, calling it the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Since its establishment, INEC has really improved the standard of election in Nigeria, especially under the chairmanship of Attahiru Jega. This was also confirmed by various journalists, civil society organizations, and local and international observers (International Republican Institute, (IRI) 2004). The credibility of INEC rose during the

2015 election when it was said that INEC conducted the election without allowing itself to be lured by the Federal Government. In fact, scholars are of the view that, the management of elections by INEC and use of smart card readers contributed in making the election successful. However, still, there are issues on the extent to which INEC is independent. This leads to question on how independent is Independent National Electoral Commission?

The Nigeria's Constitution (1999 as amended) states that "in exercising its powers to make appointment or to exercise disciplinary control over persons, the Independent National Electoral Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority" (Hadejia, 2018). Similarly, section six of the INEC Act states "in the discharge of its functions under this Act, the Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority" (Olagunju, 2018). However, in some cases, there have been attempts to compromise these constitutional mandates. For instance, opposition parties, researchers and observers of Nigeria's politics have always been criticising the ruling party of abusing section 154 (1) which guaranteed the appointment and removal of INEC Chairman by the President subject to the confirmation by Senate. Instances were also cited on when the Senate summoned Attahiru Jega, the INEC Chairman, for interrogation simply because he exercised his right of speech as envisaged in section 39 of Nigeria's constitution. There are also issues pertaining funding. The INEC solely rely on Federal Government on funding its programmes. In some cases, especially at state level, the state governors provide accommodation and vehicles for state Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs). This has serious implication on the credibility of elections (Sunday, 2018). In one way or the other, political class attempt to interfere in INEC's schedules, such as in the organization of calendar for elections and so forth.

With regard to the logistics plane in the 2019 General elections, the INEC attempted to deploy materials to its 119,973 polling units in the country through its Operation and Logistics Unit. Generally, the number of registered voters in 2019 General Election surpassed that of 2015 by

about 15 million. While in 2015 the number of voters stood at 64 million, in 2019 there were about 84 million registered voters. In fact, the number of candidates running for President also increased from 14 in 2015 to 72 in 2019. In order to discharge its duties diligently, in the 2019 general election, INEC created additional 57, 023 voting points in various states of the country. The creation of voting points was done in polling units with more than 700 voters. Although INEC prepared the Calendar for the conduct of election in Nigeria from 2019 up to 2055, even 2019 election was rescheduled just some hours to election due mainly to logistics challenges (Ajayi, 2018).

According to observation by YIAGA, despite the postponement of election by a week, by 7:30 of the rescheduled date, only 31% of polling units received electoral materials, and by 12:00 pm, only 74% of polling units in the country had election materials. Observers confirmed that in some polling units, voters joined the queue waiting for the late arrival of INEC ad hoc staff (Ajayi, 2018). Delay in the commencement of election might open room for some other issues that may temper the credibility of the election. For instance, some voters might not endure the stress, election might extend to night and hoodlums might use that as opportunity to engage in ballot box snatching and other criminal related activities. Besides, politics had usually played role in the delay of the passage of bill for the approval of INEC budget especially at the National Assembly.

Relating to financing, INEC is the financing of electioneering by political parties. Of course, a political party needs finance to carry out its responsibilities such as advertising their manifesto, helping in voter education, and opening branches across different parts of the country. However, political parties, in some occasion, use money in their coffer to buy votes. The ruling parties usually spend much than any of the opposition parties. For instance, in 2011, all the opposition parties spent N2.04 billion in their expenditure, while the ruling Peoples Democratic Party spent N5.01 billion. In 2015, all the opposition parties spent N2.91 billion while PDP spent N8.74 billion (Olorunmola, 2011). This shows indications of the abuse of the power of incumbency in financing elections. All these, the organization of political parties, the conducts of politicians, role of



security agencies and INEC, determine the credibility of election which, in the long run, also determine country's development.

### **The Question of Development**

The history of transition from military to civilian rule involved series of struggles. The advocates of democracy considered it as the system that guarantees freedom as avenue through which Nigeria can attain development. From 1999 to 2019, a period of twenty years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria for the first time in its history, the country passed through different terrains of socio-economic and political challenges that really deserve scholarly attention. But the question is why so much yearning for democratic government: what benefit did the country gain under democratic government and what is the relation between democracy and development in the context of Nigeria's 1999-2019 democratic dispensation? This segment attempts to examine this within the contexts of social, economic and political angles.

There is no doubt that the country has witnessed some level of improvement in terms of infrastructure such as roads and schools. Democratic culture has gradually been deepening and some level of improvement in the aspects of the performance of judiciary and legislative autonomy (Ibrahim, 2019). However, there are quite other issues that still bedevil the country and need more effective measures. One of the expectations of Nigerians under democratic system of government is reduction of poverty in the country. However, poverty has been on the increase on the vast majority of the people from 1999 to 2019. This was despite some measures to reduce poverty such as in the President Yar Adua's Seven Point Agenda whereby one of the points centred on wealth creation (Dode, 2010). The essence was to diversify the economy, generate more wealth and create employment. However, the programme attained limited success and finally died with the death of President Yar'Adua.

Nigeria's poverty has been raising over the years under the Fourth Republic. This was confirmed at the local and international levels (National Bureau of Statistics (NBC), 2012). Income inequality continues to grow in the country and despite its economic potential, millions of

people in the country continue to survive on less than 1 dollar a day. This is a case of extreme poverty. In Nigeria, under the democratic government, citizens find it difficult to possess basic needs, specifically food, shelter and clothing. In fact, in the late 2018, World Poverty Clock stated that Nigeria had more people living in extreme poverty than any country in the world (<https://worldpoverty.io/blog/>). This is an irony as Nigeria is mentioned as giant of Africa and largest producer of oil and gas in the continent (Udosen et al, 2019). The rate of unemployment and under employment is still alarming in the country. In the third quarter of 2017, the rate of unemployment and underemployment among the youth (of 15-34 years) was 52.6%. By the third quarter of 2018, the figure had risen to 55.4% (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2018).

Although Nigerian politicians have actually been found wanting in discharge of their duties, Nigeria’s elections have been described as the most expensive in the world. For instance, with 67 million registered voters, Nigeria spent \$ 625 million in 2015 General election. However, India, with 885 million registered voters, Electoral Commission of India spent \$ 600 million in 2014 Indian general election (Abdallah, 2018). This cost is also to the detriment of other projects such expenditure on education, roads and electricity.

**Table 1: Expenditure on Nigeria’s Election by INEC**

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Expenditure (N)</b>
1	1999	1.5 billion
2	2003	29 billion
3	2007	45.5 billion
4	2011	111 billion
5	2015	87.7 billion
6	2019	242.2 billion

*Source: Abdallah, Na.M. (2018, August 3). 2019 Elections set to be Nigeria’s most expensive. Daily Trust, <https://dailytrust.com/2019-elections-set-to-be-nigeria-s-most-expensive-263938/>*

It seems corruption has been one of the major obstacles to Nigeria's development and a major factor for increasing income inequality in the country (Sanusi, 2010). In fact, some Nigerians are becoming pessimist about the country's democracy. The bulk of wealth taken by Nigerian National Assembly is actually horrible and inimical to the provision of basic infrastructure in the country. It is said that "While each Nigerian Senator earns ₦162 million (\$450,000) annually in allowances, and ₦9 million (\$25,000) as basic salary, the American President, for instance, only earns \$450,000 (including bonus) annually (Busari, 2018). This unnecessary pump of money has contributed to politics of violence, inappropriate campaign spending, godfatherism and widening of income inequality in the country. Also, despite all the allocations to the National Assembly, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) (2018), in its assessment of 8<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, observes that, "huge number of legislative's time was spent in deliberating jumbo pay, budget increase and other unnecessary leadership struggles. Through its session, the Assembly was largely trailed by one controversy or another, making Nigerians to question if its productivity was commensurate with its budget." (Jimoh, 2018). According to Transparency International, National Assembly are at the forefront in terms of corruption among the Nigerian institutions. It states that:

... police topped the list of most corrupt institutions at 69 percent, followed by members of parliament (60) and local government officials (55). Others were government officials (54), judges and magistrates (51), business executives (44), presidency (43), nongovernmental organizations (40), traditional leaders (35) and religious leaders (20) (*The Punch*, 2019).

Democracy has therefore played significant role in widening the scope of corruption in Nigeria. This therefore has contributed in the decline of voter turnout in Nigeria's elections as shown in the elections below. The lower voter turnout has been attributed to some aspects of state failure, as exemplified by incessant insecurity in the northeast, kidnappings,

banditry, and conflicts arising from the snatching of ballot boxes. Other factors contributing to voter apathy include abuse of the power of incumbency and electoral frauds. These have made voters to think that their votes would no longer be counted.

**Table 2: Voter turnout in Nigeria’s general election, 1999-2019**

	Year	Registered voters	Voter turnout	Voter turnout (%)
1	1999	57,988,945	30,280,052	52.3
2	2003 general election	60,823,022	42,018,735	69.1
3	2007	61,566,648	35,419,262	57.4
4	2011	73,528,040	39,469,484	53.7
5	2015 general election	67,422,005	29,432,083	43.6
6	2019 general election	<b>82,344,107</b>	<b>28,614,190</b>	35

*Source: Lawal, A M. & Ahmed, I.Y. (Eds.). (2019). Reflections on the 2019 Nigeria General Elections: Essays in Honour of Professor Muhammad Nasiru Maiturare, Aboki Publishers*

Nigeria’s general elections have claimed many lives and properties during the conduct of elections and after the announcement of results. Ochonu (2019) states that “Elections conducted in Nigeria since 1999 have brought with them anxiety, tension, death, violence and dangerous rhetoric, that taken together, have frayed the national political and social fabric” (<http://logosjournal.com/2019/liberal-democracy-is-a-threat-to-nigerias-stability/>). In the aftermath of the 2011 and 2015 General elections, Nigeria witnessed violence that claimed peoples’ lives. Moreover, there were many cases of insecurity in the country such as Boko Haram, Niger-Delta militancy, ethnic conflicts, kidnapping, banditry and so on. In fact, kidnapping for ransom has become a lucrative business in Nigeria (Thurston, 2018). This is despite revenue allocation to security. An indication of how government compromise security to foster its egoistic democratic dream is the case of former chief security adviser, Sambo

Dasuki where it was alleged that about \$ 2 billion voted for security in the north-east was diverted through his office to finance PDP campaign in the 2015 general election.

Education, as a critical sector of development has been bedeviled with crises. Although Nigeria witnessed the expansion of public universities, especially under President Good luck Jonathan, funding is still a major problem, which to some extent, compromise quality. There has been frequent occurrence of strikes due largely to government's inattention to education. Facilities for research and practical in various polytechnics are also grossly inadequate. The basis of the problem is the budget allocated to education, where the government allocates a lower percentage than other sectors. For the past years, Nigeria's government has been allocating 5-7% of its budget to education, which is grossly inadequate (S.M. Lawal & I.Y. Ahmed, Eds., 2019). This is below the international standard. For example, according to United Nations, at least 26% budget should be allocated to education. Even within Africa, Nigeria's allocation to education has been below what obtains in Ghana, South Africa or Egypt. It is therefore not surprising that, under democratic dispensation of the fourth republic, Nigeria witnessed phenomenal increase in out-of-school children. In 2018, statistics indicated that the number of out-of-school had risen from 10.5m to 13.2m, making it one of the highest in the world (Okeke, 2018).

Another critical sector of development is electricity. Nigerian politicians and governments have been making promises on the revitalization of electricity in the country. In fact, under President Obasanjo, the Federal Government claimed to have spent about \$ 16 billion on electricity. However, the country continues to have epileptic power supply with severe consequences on industrialization and employment. It is on this account that Nigeria has become one of the leading importers of generators in the world. In Nigeria, many people, especially those in the rural areas, still, do not have access to the country's electricity. The fluctuating 3,500 to 4, 000 megawatts have been supplied to a country with over 180 million people, though only about 48% of Nigerians have access to electricity. This, in sharp, contrast to South Africa which have supplied about 44, 000

megawatts in a country with less than 60 million people (Victor & Heller, 2007).

Other infrastructures such as roads, clinics and water have continued to be deficient with upsetting effects on the lives and survival of Nigerians. Since the time of Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), Nigeria has not witnessed massive construction of roads, clinics, classes, bridges, drainages and so on. It is worthy to note that, the blame is not simply on the Federal Government, but also on the state and local governments. In the fourth republic, some states, surprisingly, have been unable to even pay salaries to their workers, let alone executing capital projects. The argument, therefore, is that under democracy, Nigeria has witnessed weak institutions. The various arms of government have performed much below expectations. Government officials often get away commit various crimes which made the so-called dividend of democracy and rule of law to remain as mirage.

### **Conclusion**

The thrusts of the discussion above centred on how Nigeria's democracy, or specifically, organization of political parties, actions of politicians and that of INEC influence the course of development in the country. The paper, therefore, maintains that Nigeria's developmental challenges (such as insecurity, infrastructural deficiency, unemployment, and poverty, among others) have strong relation with the politics in the country. For Nigeria to enjoy the fruit of democracy, there has to be free and fair election, INEC must be independent practically, not in theory, politics of votes buying and use of the power of incumbency should be checked. Moreover, civil organizations, election observers and journalists should exercise their roles with utmost degree of impartiality.

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