SUCCESSION PLAN AND DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES: A FOCUS ON NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study was carried out to examine how succession plan and democratic experiment operated in third world countries with a focus on Nigeria. The study found out that democracy is an alien system of government in Africa and hence troublesome in its leadership succession plan. The study identified five types of leadership succession. These included assassination and displacement, coup d' etat, abdication, resignation and election or constitutional procedures, but the study mostly focused on constitutional procedures as this is what is in vogue in contemporary world order. The aim of every good succession plan in any democratic society is to get the best men and women for the job of political governance. This can only be done through the conduct of free, fair and credible elections to bring in new sets of political leaders into power. Thus, the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) play decisive role in bringing in new set of leaders into governance. EMBs therefore have to be firm but fair in discharging their functions in order to bring into power credible, acceptable and legitimate set of leaders into political governance. The study also noted that the processes of changing government from first Republic till now have been marked by irregularities to the extent that the legitimacy of the emerged government was always questioned and the real winners of such presidential or gubernatorial elections are almost always determined by the supreme court of the country. The study concluded that credible leadership succession plan in any democratic society was always hinged on fair, credible and transparent electoral system. The following recommendations were made among others that Nigeria needed to build strong institutions, not necessarily strong individuals, as strong institutions are the drivers of any true succession plan the world over and the need to close the widening gap between the rich and the poor as this has always impeded sustainable succession plan through vote buying.

Keywords: *Succession, Election, Plan, Constitutional Procedure, Institutions, Democracy, Leadership, Credible Election.*

Introduction

It was William Shakespeare in one of the most famous speeches in 'As you like it' that says" All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players, they have their exits and their entrances. And one man in his time plays many parts". Like human beings, all governments also have entrances and exits as well as players or actors. They all play their roles and act their parts but when the curtain falls they all exit the stage and willy-nilly hand over the baton to another as governance is a continuum.

In Africa, five types of leadership succession have been identified, namely assassination and displacement, coup d'état, abdication, resignation and election or constitutional procedures (Anise, 1974) and Goldsmith (2000). According to Goldsmith (2000) since Nigeria got her political independence in 1960, three of the above mentioned political succession types have been dominant. These include assassination, coup d'état and election or constitutional procedure. But the focus of this paper is on election or constitutional procedures. In a constitutional procedure of leadership succession, democracy as a form of government and leadership change become a beautiful bride the world over that appeal to many countries as suitors.

One of the essential features of democracy that makes it the preferred system of government in contemporary times is that it guarantees citizens the freedom to choose or replace their political leaders or representatives through elections (Ezeh, 2016, Edenowo and Udoka (2018). Therefore, elections ought to be organized in a free, fair and orderly manner such that the emergent leadership through the process will be accepted as legitimate representatives of the people. More so, in choosing democracy as a form of government, the people voluntarily relinquish and surrender their rights and privileges to their elected representatives who now custody and manage the resources collectively owned on behalf of every citizen.

This is known as indirect democracy and is in vogue in many parts of the world as direct democracy is hampered by large population of people. Indeed, these elected representatives hold their respective positions in trust for everybody in society. Thus, they are expected to serve the people to the best of their ability with sincerity and dedication. Democracy therefore operates on the principle that the leaders and the led are in a contract with the condition that the people who are the governed have a say in the succession plan of those who are to lead them through periodic elections (Ekang, 2024). This is the fundamental principle of the Nigerian constitutional democracy as enunciated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended. It is to be noted that the Constitution of the Federal Republic Nigeria only recognizes constitutional procedures as epitomized in a democratic form of governance as the only authentic and genuine way of changing government. Thus, any succession plan outside democratic elections is unacceptable and unconstitutional in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, therefore, periodic election is a very fundamental process of leadership succession in Nigeria. But the question remains: is succession plan in Nigeria always free, fair and credible? This is the question this paper seeks to explore.

The Importance of Succession Plan in the Advancement of Democratic Culture

A plan is a detailed proposal for doing or achieving something. It is an intention or decision about what one is going to do. Webster Dictionary (Online) defines “succession” as the order or condition under which one person after another succeeds to a property, dignity, title or throne. For the reason of better delineation of the subject matter, what we mean here is political succession to a ‘throne’ or office.

Thus, we can say that every position of public interest, especially in political leadership of a nation where progression is inherent, succession from one person to another is inevitable. Political successions as defined by Alan Brier in Anyim (2021) are ways in which political power passes or is transferred from one government or regime to another. Put differently, it refers to orderly arrangements for the transfer of tenure of important offices within a state, which makes allowance at the same time for change and continuity. Therefore, the key elements of succession include:
There must be a legal framework detailing qualification for the position, selection process, tenure; task /duties and responsibilities and powers and limits of such power as well as succession procedures (Ekang and Otukonyong, 2015).

According to Anyim (2021), the overriding aim of succession plan is to get the best man for the job. Once the wrong persons step into position of authority, the organization or nation is bound to experience retrogression. The absence of a succession plan has the potential to undermine a country’s development and its socio-economic sustainability. Succession plan is important for nation building and also very essential for building institutions along the lines of equity, equality, fairness, a common sense of purpose, shared destiny as well as collective imagination of togetherness and inclusion.

Udo, Udom and Willie (2024) investigated effects of selected public administration policies on Nigerian economy. The study adopted descriptive and ex post facto design. The techniques adopted include the Augmented Dickey Fuller (ADF) test, and Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model for the data analysis. The study used an ex post facto research design and collected data from the World Bank Development Indicators, Central Bank of Nigeria, Transparency International and National Bureau of Statistics of various years. The study found that selected public administration policies in this study proxied by effective governance index, corruption control index, quality budgetary and financial management index and public administration index, has not significantly impacted GDP growth rate to enhance economic growth and hence development in Nigeria. The study equally revealed that some of the policies have a non-significant impact on economic growth in Nigeria.

The study also found that corruption has significantly impeded economic growth in Nigeria though with a weak transmission effect through foreign direct investment, domestic investment, and government spending in Nigeria. Based on the above findings, the study recommended that sound micro and macroeconomic policies should be provided in Nigeria and these policies will direct both fiscal and monetary policies positively, as this is noted to have positive impact on government expenditures and hence on economic growth. The study also recommended that for corruption to be reduced, good, discipline and moral driven leaders who are honest with integrity should be appointed or elected to hold sensitive offices.

Determinants of Political Succession in a Democratic Nation

Ideally, democratic politics regards periodic election as an instrumental value that must be institutionalized in the body-polity for regular change of governmental power. This is because without elections being held regularly and seen to be conducted in a transparently free and fair manner, democracy and by extension, constitutional change of government remains a sham (Enogo, 2010). Free and fair elections promote accountability in elected officials, socialize political activities and expand citizen's involvement in the democratic process. Democracy guarantees a stable polity, reduces conflicts and restores confidence in the government and the state (Ijim-Agbor, 2004). The requirements for the conduct of a free and fair election should be within the State's capacity to handle. In a situation where the State is weak, the hope of conducting an election that will ensure an orderly succession plan becomes contestable and a distant dream.

The State power, according to Johari (1987) is said to consist of the following five elements, namely, monopoly of the coercive power of society, that is, control of the instruments of coercion; the right to impose taxes and collect revenue; the power to make laws; sovereignty over territory; and control of the institutions of the State. All these elements constitute the major pillars upon which orderly succession plan rests.

In setting out the requirements for an orderly change of government, Ekang and Otukonyong (2015) argue that effective functioning of a competitive electoral system requires the following:

i. An independent judiciary to interpret the electoral laws in case of conflicts or disagreements between or among competing parties.

ii. An honest, competent, non-partisan body to organize the elections.

iii. A well-developed system of political parties organized to put their policies and teams of candidates before the electorates.

iv. A general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game and the desire to comply with such rules, often through the signing of undertakings.

Almond and Verba (1963) posit that facilitating factors are the norms, traditions and attitudes of social cooperation and interpersonal trust and high levels of consensus which must permeate the political process. Thus, Aaron in Anifowose (2003) declares that what is necessary for competition between parties is that two different parties should accept the rules of the game, that they should have the feelings that the unity of the nation is good in itself, which should be maintained and the assurance that whoever wins an election will be allowed to assume office. Outcomes of elections must therefore be sacrosanct under a democracy except such outcomes are overturned by a court of competent jurisdiction.

Election Institutions and Electoral Processes

The importance of electoral governance, defined as the wider set of activities that create and maintain the broad institutional framework in which voting and electoral competition take place, to democratic transition and consolidation cannot be over-emphasized.

Electoral governance is a comprehensive and multi-tasked activity, involving the three levels of rules making, rule application, and rule adjudication. Rulemaking involves designing the basic rules of the electoral game; rule application deals with implementing these rules to specifications to organize the electoral game, and rule adjudication entails resolving disputes arising from the game (Ekang and Otukonyong, 2015).

On the whole, electoral governance involves the interaction of constitutional, legal and institutional rules and organizational practices that determine the basic rules for election procedures and electoral competition; organize campaigns, voter's registration, collation and computation of election results, and resolve disputes and certify results. In these processes, the interplay of power structures and processes are central to electoral outcomes.

As such, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are part of a set of institutions and rules that together determine the probity of electoral processes, and in emerging democracies, where administrative processes are weak and distrust across political actors are high, their role at the centre of electoral processes tends to be more visible (Frank, 2012).

Thus, whether electoral governance will contribute to democratic consolidation or regression will depend on the independence and professionalism of electoral institutions, particularly the EMBs, because institutional structures that promote a level playing field at each stage of the electoral process will enhance the extent to which voters perceive their elections to be fair (Frank, 2012).

Winners and losers can accept electoral processes and results as binding provided elections are effectively administered, but effective administration is only possible if the EMBs have autonomy, measured basically in terms of its structure, composition, funding and capability. This is why one of the hallmarks of a mature democracy is professional, independent, non-partisan election administration. However, other relevant institutions like political parties, mass media, the security agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs) are also required to play their own roles effectively, including the provision of logistic support, which is vital to the operate of the electoral body. The oversight functions of the legislature and that of the judiciary are also crucial to the success of any election.

In Nigeria, the primary responsibility of election administration rests with an EMB called Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), that has undergone several changes in nomenclature under different regimes and have taken different 'baptismal names' as well. To be sure, between 1959 and 1999, the Electoral Management Body (EMB) was renamed six times. Ekang & Otukonyong

(2015). Before the civil war, it was named the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN), 1959-1963; then the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), 1963-1966. In the latter part of the 1970s, it was renamed the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), 1976-1979. During the Babangida's regime (1986-1993), it was again renamed the National Electoral Commission (NEC). General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) replaced the NEC with the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), while General Abdulsalami Abubakar, Abacha's successor (1998-1999), rechristened it the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It has been reconstituted endlessly, in 1958, twice in 1963, and again in 1964, 1977, 1981, 1987, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2000, and 2004 (Ekang and Otukonyong, 2015).

Despite these changes, the EMB has not been able to administer elections effectively, and its autonomy and capacity over the years has been suspect. According to Frank (2012), three major indicators of lack of autonomy by EMB are identifiable. The first is its composition, which is the prerogative of the President. Since 1999, INEC has been composed of a chairman, 12 national commissioners and 37 Resident Electoral Commissioners, one each for the 36 States of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, all of whom are appointed by the federal government. This arguably makes INEC easily susceptible to avoidable temptation and manipulation by the President and the federal authorities. The oversight role expected of the legislature in the screening of presidential nominees for INEC positions is rendered impotent by the fact that the president's party has a legislative majority sufficient to secure its wishes in parliament.(Ekang & Otukonyong, 2015).

The second indicator relates to the insecure tenure of the INEC Chairman and Commissioners. Job security generally increases the stakes officials have in the electoral process, if they mess up the process, they may lose their positions. Nigerian electoral officers statutorily occupy office for five years, they can however, are removed by the president on 'poor performance' or on flimsy or trumped-up reason(s).

The third issue relates to the funding of the electoral body. Ordinarily, an independent EMB would require a Consolidated Revenue Account (CRA), where a specified amount of federation revenue will be domiciled in that account and under the accessibility and control of INEC. In Nigeria, however, this is not yet the case. Under the current administration, INEC does not have an independent budget or source of funding but rather depends almost entirely on the federal government for funding. And if it is true that he who pays the piper dictates the tune, then INEC should not be blamed for dancing helplessly to the rhythm of music played to it by the Presidency.

An Overview of Democratic Experiments in Nigeria

The process of changing government right from the First Republic was marked by irregularities to the extent that the legitimacy of the emerged government was questioned. For instance, the election conducted in 1964 at both federal and regional levels were extremely controversial; parties and some key political leaders hired thugs to beat up the people and intimidate them; kidnapped and murdered opponents (Iyaji, 2007). Dudley (1982) and Mboho, and Effiong, (2024), report that the electoral officers were terrorized into absconding from their offices once they received the nomination papers from the candidates of the ruling party. This led to boycott of election in some parts of the country. At the end, Nigeria had a constitutional crisis to the extent that for three days, there was no Head of Government as the then President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe found it difficult to appoint Abubakar Tafewa Balewa as Prime Minister to form the new government.(Ekang & Otukonyong, 2015).

A similar scenario played out at the regional levels where the process of changing government was characterized with series of violence and counter violence. These crises finally culminated in the first

military coup of January 15, 1966. This set in motion chains of other coups that brought in Gowon as the military Head of State and later Murtala Muhammed. With the assassination of General Mutala Muhammed by Colonel Buka Suka Dimka on February 13, 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo who was the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters succeeded him and completed his plan for an orderly transfer of power to civilian rule by handing over power to Shehu Shagari on October 1, 1979 as the first elected Executive President of Nigeria.

The 1979 transition programme produced the so-called two-third ($^2/_3$) controversy. Given the fact that the military supervised the transition programme, there was not much violence, but the result of the election attracted criticisms as the Supreme Court delivered a controversial judgment on the winner of that election (Iyaji, 2007). Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) had dragged the winner of the 1979 presidential election Shehu Shagari to the Supreme court for the supreme court to interpret two third of Nineteen States. The 1979 constitution had said that the winner of the Presidential election should win two thirds of Nineteen States which was 12.6 but the winner of that Presidential election had won in 12 States. The UPN candidate had insisted that 12.6 should have been 13 states. But the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari of National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

However, the second stage of the crisis was seen during civilian to civilian transition in 1983 where the results of the elections were allegedly distorted in many parts of the country in favour of the ruling party led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari of NPN. The results of the elections were rejected by the parties and the crisis that ensued provided an opportunity for the military to stage yet another coup on 31stDecember, 1983 and this time led by General Muhammadu Buhari.

The aborted third Republic witnessed what one would call transition without end in Nigeria though the government organized what most people described as the most secured, peaceful, free and fair elections in the history of the country. Open Ballot System (OBS) was adopted due to past election history and experiences in the country. The OBS required voters to queue behind the candidates or his posters as the Electoral officers counted the voters directly on the queue. At the end of the day, President Ibrahim Babangida annulled that Presidential election adjudged to be the fairest in the history of Nigeria. (Ekang and Otukonyong, 2015).

Again in 1999, because the military oversaw the transition, there was little violence despite irregularities recorded during the election which brought Chief Olusegun Obansanjo to power in May 1999. This was attributed to determination of both the people and politicians to end military rule in Nigeria. The preceding 2023 general elections which were conducted under civilian government were said to be characterized by fraud. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) 2003 reported that as the voters waited to cast their votes in the polling stations, the political class and political parties had different ideas. The voters wanted their votes to determine winners of the elections, while the political class wanted to corrupt the process and rig their way into power.

That election both at Federal and State levels were characterized by assassinations such as the popular case of the Late Bola Ige assassinated on 23 December, 2001. There were also several threats of assassination of political opponents. Strangely, some political candidates who did not stand for elections were returned as winners of the election. These irregularities were accompanied by multiple ghost and underage voting, violence, intimidation, harassment, stolen ballot boxes, vote buying, destruction of polling boxes, absence of electoral officers, etc. (Ekang & Otukonyong, 2015).
Iyayi (2007) maintained that since inception of democracy in 1999 through 2007, the government in power and the politicians have had their own designs and have generally perpetrated and maintained a culture of electoral violence and warfare; that all conducted elections are not free of tension and controversy before, during and after elections.

During the 2015 Presidential election, the same scenario re-enacted itself such that election results were disputed in various parts of the country, though Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was declared the winner of the Presidential election. Preceding 2015 general elections, the entire country was soaked in political tension. Violence rhetoric rented the air, but Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief when before the final declaration of the winner of the election, the then incumbent President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan called the would-be winner General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) and conceded defeat.

That spared the country premeditated expected bloodbath that would have dragged Nigeria to political precipice as was predicted by some foreign organizations. In fact, this was the only time that Nigeria's Presidential election result was not contested in the law court. From 2019 election to the recent 2023 general elections, all were marred with tension, disputes, controversies and irregularities. In almost all our Presidential elections, it is the courts that determined the winner. Also, Peter Obi of Labour Party (LP) and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) have dragged the winner of the 2023 Presidential election, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu to court so that the court would determine the actual winner of the 2023 Presidential election.

It can be seen from the foregoing that Nigeria's democratic experiment and succession plan is fraught with tension, violence, controversies, fraud, insincerity and these have consequently undermined the political development of the country.

Challenges of Political Succession in Nigeria

There is no gainsaying the fact that political succession problems are a common feature in developing countries democracy, including Nigeria. The reason being that in third world countries, leaders tend to copy and enjoy the glamour and benefits of public officies without the responsibilities attached thereto. In developing countries where access to wealth and fame is largely through public offices, the lure and lucre of public office will no doubt present a temptation to seek avenues to perpetuate oneself in office or at least install a surrogate leader by breaking all known rules and regulations as well as manipulating the process to favour the chosen and the anointed candidate(s). in other words, the fear of losing one's political office and the financial benefits accruing to the positions as well as the political influence becomes the beginning of wisdom.

Weak institutions have always constituted a serious problem to the realization of acceptable succession plan in Africa, nay Nigeria. A onetime American President, Barack Obama once said, and it is difficult to disagree with him that African countries need strong institutions, not strong leaders. Nigeria is bereft of strong institutions such as the judiciary, the police force, INEC, Department of State Service (DSS) among others. A strong leader can actually achieve little or nothing within a weak institution. This is one albatross of our political odysseys in Nigeria. Weak institutions cannot enforce accountability. Institutions such as judiciary, INEC, law enforcement and security agencies, all play critical roles during political successions in Nigeria's democratic succession plan. However, over time, political leaders have rendered these institutions weak such that these institutions are unable to effectively discharge their responsibilities and ensure that the rules of the game are rigorously and religiously enforced, rule of law upheld, leaders held accountable and principles of separation of power observed (Ekang, 2023).

According to Ajibola (2022), poor leadership and all its consequences undermine succession plan in Nigeria's democracy. Poor leadership breeds nepotism, encourages mediocrity in governance which are clear signs of lack of commitment to the State. Poor leadership affects continuity plan, destroys the institutional framework of the nation, and truncates continuity of government policies among others. It leads to violation of laws, rules and procedures and breeds lawlessness. It also leads to

corruption, creates instability and insecurity, erodes fundamental freedom and liberties, discourages patriotism on the part of the citizens and stunt national growth and development and culminates in the failure of the State to fulfil its obligations to the citizens. It may also lead to threat of succession, endless litigation and coup d' etat in the days' coups were fashionable and attractive in Africa. But coup is now a bad business. It is an ugly bride that looks unattractive all over the world. It will even attract serious reprimand and condemnation and even threat from world security organizations such as the United Nations Organization (UNO) to back out of the coup or be forced to do so.

Conclusion

The importance of an efficient, fair, transparent and equitable political or leadership succession plan in any democratic nation cannot be over-emphasized. To strengthen democracy in third world countries and particularly in Nigeria, we must as a people continue to strengthen our justice and governance institutions and democratic ideals as fundamental elements of our political succession processes towards building a prosperous nation. As noted by the United Nations in (Anya, 2000), weak institutions, poor governance structure, lack of awareness and docility on the part of the people are major contributors to poor political succession and under development of any nation.

We therefore must strive hard as a nation through collective engagement and sincerity of purpose to ensure that these debilitating factors that are inimical to democratic development are eradicated from our socio-political space for the good of all Nigerians.

Recommendations

To ensure a seamless succession plan in our democratic experiment, the following recommendations are made:

i. Developing nations including Nigeria should build strong institutions. Institutions are the main drivers of nation building in any society. This is because institutions sustain the democratic process by promoting and maintaining orderly procedures through which succession is attained and power is transferred from one government or individual to the other and dividends of democracy are delivered to the people.

ii. Poverty and the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor have impeded sustainable succession plan and democratic experiment in Nigeria. There cannot be sustainable push towards democratic development without genuine effort at eradicating poverty and ignorance. Poverty and ignorance do not only breed corruption, distrust vote buying, rat-race struggle for political office and many other vices that are inimical to democracy but breed underdevelopment. Poverty and ignorance also constitute a major cause of serious conflicts and insurgency such as the Boko Haram menace, banditry, and kidnapping, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and unknown gunmen, violent attack in the South Eastern part of Nigeria which are all detrimental to Nigeria's democratic experiment. Therefore, all actions necessary for the socio-economic upliftment of the people including the provision of social security, employment, health institutions, education, shelter, etc should be put in place, as these will mitigate the urge for corruption and attempt to derail our democratic experiment.

iii. The middle-class represents a fundamental component in any nation. They constitute a strong group of individuals, experts, civil societies, etc whose major role in the country's democratic development is to promote foresighted policies and to make government work well because their socio-economic fate is tied to the quality of government in place. The middle class in Nigeria is almost non-existing, or they are considerably weak. What we have now is the rich and the poor. Therefore, as

part of our effort towards democratic development and enthroning a political succession model that we can all be proud of, we must build back the middle class by ensuring that all the incentives that are needed for its growth and sustenance are put in place. Anything to the contrary will be a remedy worse than a malady.

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