



Assessing the Feasibility of Prosperity and Development under a Western Form of Democracy in Nigeria.

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Abstract: Despite the adoption and practices of western forms of democracy in many African countries, including Nigeria, insecurity, poverty, unemployment, conflict, high costs of living, and many other vices of underdevelopment are synonymous with Nigeria. This research, therefore, sought answers by raising questions on the development impact of the practices of western forms of democracy in Nigeria. A cross-section of politicians, university lecturers, and university students were interviewed on the matter. The analysis revealed yearnings for an indigenous democracy, especially from students and lecturers. While the politicians are comfortable with the system as it is. The research therefore concluded by suggesting that the country should innovate and experiment with an indigenous political system for the purpose of creating democracy and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Assessing, democracy, feasibility, prosperity, development.*

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INTRODUCTION

It is pertinent to begin this discussion with the question of whether the adoption and practice of Western democracy have ushered prosperity and development in the practicing countries. Or how is the Western form of democracy impacting development, especially in Africa? In most colonized parts of the world, including Nigeria, the liberal form of democracy came about through the option of a controlled plan strategy, i.e., a kind of systemic indoctrination of Western norms and values by the British imperialists. The existing institutions of education, military, healthcare, and executive arms of government were tactically assimilated to conform to and accommodate the norms and values of liberal democracies (Fage, 2002). This explains why most of the struggle for political independence was only recognized through the democratic platforms of party politics. Today, many parts of the world have become champions of democracy and democratic practices. In the 1999 transition, the American Envoy to West Africa, Jessey Jackson, observed that "Nigeria had gone from midnight to daybreak, and now morning has come" in his message for the support of a return to democracy from military rule in Nigeria (Emegwa, 2023).

On the continent of Africa, Nigeria is purportedly the largest democracy because of its population size. Moreso, many parts of the world today are advocates of liberal democracy because the system is claimed to be associated with

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prosperity and development in all its ramifications. That is why the most developed parts of Europe and America are called democracies based on the popular assumption that the democratic political system is responsible for the advancement of such societies. Oftentimes, the use of the term democracies by the Western world connotes development (Akinola, 2020). Interestingly, before the advent of the hypothesis of liberal democracy as a model for development, historical accounts show with concrete facts how many other societies developed using their own indigenous political systems. Many of such development instances can be cited in books like **The Muqaddima: An Introduction to History, the Classic Islamic History of the World** by Ibn-Khaldun, **How Europe Under-Developed Africa** by Shenton (1975), **A Revolution in History: the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio** by Ibrahim Sulaiman, and more recently, **Why Nations Fail: the Origin of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty** by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012). So, if these were the cases in the past, why then opt for liberal democracy as a model for development? At the same time, it is true that the liberal democracies of Europe and the United States of America (USA) have also proven to be good models for development in their own enclaves (Nwozor, Okidu, & Adedire, 2021). As observed by Khatab (2006), the United States of America (USA) is a good example as far as development is concerned. On the contrary, countries like Russia, China, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Libya (before the fall of Gaddafi) have demonstrated significant development greater than that of Western democracies in some quarters, despite using different political models and strategies in modern times. It is thus worrisome and mind-boggling to look at how the liberal democracies of the USA and Europe are progressing while other parts of Africa are claiming to be practicing liberal democracy through periodic elections, privatizing, women's inclusion, freedom of speech, and adopting International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic decisions at all costs are yet progressively underdeveloped (Omeje, 2021).

Recent records of the 2023 Nigerian macro-economic outlook by Proshare (2023) show that the welfare of the average Nigerian has deteriorated in the past years with a significant rise in the cost of clothing, housing, and food without a corresponding upward adjustment in wages. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 63% of Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor, indicating 133 million of the total population, estimated at 211 million, fell into the poverty net (Baba & Ahmed, 2021). The gap between the rich and poor has grown bigger with the high deprivation of basic amenities in the country. Only eighty-three million (83,000,000.00) people had access to healthcare, education, and housing, as opposed to one hundred and thirty-three million (133,000,000.00) poor individuals (Ubi & Ibonye, 2019). As a result, most Nigerian households were deprived of clean energy sources, quality healthcare, clean sanitation, and water as the cost of basic amenities doubled, making seven (7) out of ten (10) Nigerians living in rural areas and four (4) out of ten (10) in urban areas fall below the poverty line. The data confirms that the cost of living spiked compared to the pre-COVID period, when the monetary poverty rate was forty percent (40%), with about eighty-two point nine million (82.9) people being poor, according to the Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 20182019 data. Similarly, data trends show that per capita income has dropped from a peak of US\$3201 in 2014 to US\$25757.46 in 2016 due to the recession, and the 2020 recession gave a further dip to US\$2396. Corruption and government inelasticity to people's needs further compounded the level of insecurity created by IPOB in southeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, and the activities of bandits in northwestern Nigeria, religious/tribal conflicts in north-central Nigeria.

Commonsensibly, the assumption is that the aging of a liberal political system should be proportionate to development, especially for African countries specifically Nigeria, which has abundant human and natural resources. History has shown that Western liberal democracies achieve development as they grow in age. For a very long time, adherents of liberal democracy in Nigeria have been pretending and claiming that the system is young. That is, "we are in the learning process". Obafemi Awolowo the then-president (1954) of Nigeria once said that the worst form of democracy is better than the best form of military government.

Thus, the aim of this research is to get answers to questions such as:

- Does democracy exist in its true sense as perceived by Nigerians?
- The possibility of attaining meaningful development with democracy.
- Whether we need to evolve an ingenious form of democracy based on our shared beliefs?

The answers to these questions will guide the understanding of the dividends of democracy in the context of development and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contending Views on Democracy and Development

Democracy has a long history of intellectual and theoretical recognition, yet like most concepts within the discipline of social science, it has not been amenable to easy conceptualization. Beginning from the 3rd century BC to the 19th century AD, democracy underwent considerable attention and metamorphosis (Coleman, 1958);citeKoelble2008. However, in spite of the divergent views, most scholars will want to proceed from its often-cited two Greek-word origins, namely *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (the rule). As first coined by Herodotus (447 BC), it refers to an arrangement whereby all the people in a political setting come together from time to time to deliberate on issues that affect them. It is worthy of note that this definition captures the essence of political arrangement through direct participation. (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012) expresses a similar view that democracy is a system of community government in which by and large the members of the community participate or may participate directly in the making of decisions, which affects them all. This form of government was, however, rejected by Aristotle and Plato as inappropriate and unacceptable because it does not include a mixture of different types of powers in society. It does not include elements of monarchy, aristocracy, or rule by the people. Thus, a great majority of people (masses) are subject to manipulation and control by a few demagogues. Despite its criticism, the idea of democracy received attention as an ideal form of government. Abraham Lincoln defined it as the government of the people by the people for the people. M. L. Jhingan (2022) posits that it is an institutional arrangement that seeks to realize the common good by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals to assemble in order to carry out their will. Embodied in the above definition is the centrality of elections; without them, the whole edifice of democracy will collapse. Contextually, it means that a society is democratic inasmuch as it plays a role in managing its affairs (Ekeh, 1998). Przeworski (1988) observed that democracy involves both the provision of means to pursue the representation of diverse interests in government and the institutionalization of mechanisms to hold rulers accountable to the public will, including mechanisms that allow for the peaceful change of government from power. Ayima (2009) defines democracy as a means for realizing those ends that lie within the domain of human relationships and the ultimate growth of the individual personality. In essence, it is conceived as a way of life because the functioning of democracy depends on individuals, groups, and institutions. Arguably, according to Przeworski (1995), there are certain basic elements central to democracy, and these include citizen involvement, equality, liberty or freedom, representations, the rule of law, the electoral system, and education (Kacowicz, 1998).

Therefore, from a commonsensical viewpoint, the practice of democracy by a state is expected to translate into development. As observed by Srinivasan (2000), he sees development from the perspective of enhancing individual freedom. Accordingly, he emphasized that freedom is the primary objective of development and the principal means of development because it determines individual initiative and social effectiveness. Therefore, he advocates government intervention in five types of freedom, namely: political, economic, social, transparency, and security freedom. Similarly, Shenton (1975) views development as a many-sided process from the individual level to increased skills, capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being. At the level of social groups, it implies an increased capacity to regulate both internal and external relations. This means that society develops economically when its members jointly increase their capacity for dealing with the environment. Similarly, the classical economist sees development in the existence of an automatic free market in a perfectly competitive economy. The expansion of individual freedom is seen as maximizing national income for the common good. Although (Okolie, Nnamani, Ezirim, Enyiazu, & Ozor, 2021) observed that development can be attained with a 'big push' by mobilizing the required resources and investment for specific development programs, Thus, indivisibilities and external economies flowing from a minimum quantum are required for less developed countries like Nigeria. He further noted the need for monetary expansion in order to break the vicious circle of poverty by working on the supply and demand side of an economy. The aim is to achieve balanced economic growth. Ogundiya (2010) defines development as a discontinuous process and spontaneous change in the stationary state that forever alters and displaces the previously existing equilibrium. It connotes departure or a kind of transition to a more desirable state of affairs. Leftwich (2005) conceived development to mean more output and changes in the technical and institutional arrangements by which it is produced and distributed. This entails the aggressive use of information and communication technology, mostly celebrated as the fourth industrial revolution. Closely related to the development of the fourth industrial revolution is the understanding of M. Jhingan (1997) that it is an innovative process leading to structural transformation of the social

system. On the whole, the attainment of development is tied to the state, or more precisely, the political framework responsible for policy formulation and implementation.

Theoretical Framework

The aim of this section is to understand development from different perspectives because the causes of development and underdevelopment are viewed from many different perspectives. Therefore, this research illustrates briefly the understanding of the theories of geography, culture, ignorance, and institution.

The geography theory is advocated by scholars like [Cursaru \(2018\)](#). The principal argument of this theory is that geographical differences created a great divide between poor and rich countries. Poor countries are located between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, while rich countries are located in temperate latitudes. Montesquieu claimed that countries located in tropical climates are poor and associated with economic failures. People living in such countries are claimed to be lazy, lack inquisitiveness, and lack innovation, and oftentimes they are ruled by despotic leaders. As a result, it becomes hard for people to fight poverty. However, the theory is claimed to be unhelpful in explaining development based on the arguments that underdevelopment is sometimes attributed to colonial history, citing examples of the prosperity of the people of India, China, Latin America, and other African countries before the advent of Western colonial imperialism.

The theory of culture, in its own part, relates prosperity to culture; it stresses the importance and effects of beliefs, values, and ethics on development. It maintained that many people believed that Africans were poor because they lacked good work ethics and believed in witchcraft and magic. The theory also claimed that the superiority of Western European cultures in terms of work ethics and outlook on life explains why people of European descent are most prosperous. The USA, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa are prosperous because they have a European legacy. To a certain extent, the theory explains the difference in prosperity between nations, but it is criticized on the grounds of the selfish propagation of Western European values against other cultures.

Equally important in explaining development and underdevelopment is the ignorant theory held by economists such as Lion Robinson (1935), which claims that the rulers of poor countries do not know how to make their countries rich due to their inability to utilize scarce resources to meet social ends. As such, it creates market failures in poor countries. The theory maintained that poor countries have a lot of market failures, and because economists and policymakers do not know how to get rid of market failures in economic recessions, the country deepens into depression. Although the theory rules supreme among most economists and in Western policymaking circles like the IMF and the World Bank, Like every other theory, it is also dismissed as a theory that doesn't work. Looking at the underdevelopment of many African and Latin American countries despite their subscriptions to IMF and World Bank policies.

The Theory of Institutions by [Acemoglu and Robinson \(2012\)](#) and [Robbins \(1935\)](#) Both scholars are of the opinion that countries differ in their economic success because of their different institutions. They observed that institutions are classified into two categories: inclusive and extractive political institutions; and inclusive and extractive economic institutions. There exists an inherent dependable relationship between these two types of institutions. Inclusive political institutions are characterized by plurality, democracy, adequate power distribution, an unbiased system of law, etc. Thus, creating an inclusive economic institution that allows competitive participation in economic activities, the use of talents and skills, private ownership, freedom to choose an occupation, a high level of education, and technology appreciation as seen in the United States of America, Japan, South Korea, and other western democracies. In contrast, extractive political institutions are characterized by repression, force, a high level of centralization of power, a lack of rule of law, etc., thus creating an extractive economic institution characterized by a low level of creativity and innovation, poor opportunities, repressive tax systems, and poor entrepreneurship due to the lack of public enterprise. The theorist maintained that combining extractive and inclusive institutions produces unstable outcomes and may likely not survive. This research adopts the institution theory for its specific peculiarity in Nigeria, despite its criticism and bias in promoting the USA and its allies as models for development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research adopts a survey design with a mixed-approach technique. Qualitative and quantitative data were generated using focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and structured questions. The variables under study were triangulated in order to have a different perception of the problem for more insightful purposes. Based on the sampling

techniques, the research has three categories of respondents. Students, university staff, and politicians.

Population of the Study

The population is derived from a class of four hundred (400) level students in the 2021/2022 academic session of Gombe State University studying democratic studies. Academic staff of the same university, and a cross-section of politicians within the northeastern region of Nigeria who are into active politics. The sampling size will be based on the categories of respondents: Respondent Population: Students, 130 university Staff, 1,500 Politicians, unknown. Total Population: 1,630.

Sampling Technique:

The first category of respondents, who are students, were purposely chosen, and focus group discussion was used to generate the primary data. The second category of respondents, who are university staff, were then systematically selected, given reference to their discipline of study. While the third category, who are politicians, were conveniently selected and interviewed, The responses based on the variables were thematized and analyzed accordingly.

RESULTS

Chart 1 The existence of a democratic political structure Source

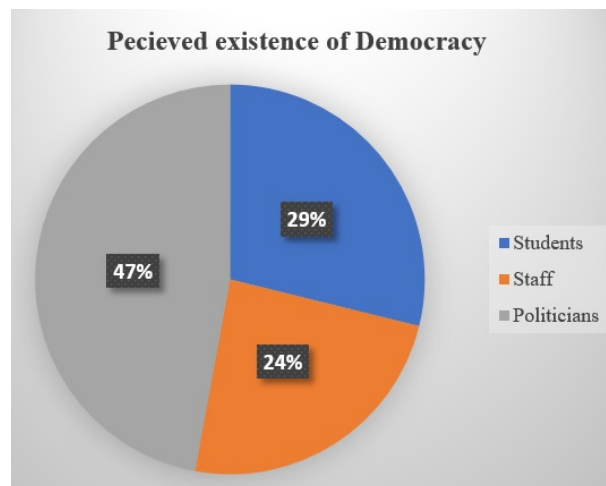


Figure 1 *Fieldwork October 2023*

The chart above is an attempt to elicit responses based on the psycho-imaginative understanding based on prevailing circumstances as to whether the political system is democratic and inclusive in terms of freedom of speech, free and fair elections, separation of powers, and working government institutions. The response shows that the majority of the politicians believed that the system was democratic. Their response may be attributed to their positions as the primary stakeholders or the major beneficiaries (political leaders) of the system. The students responded with a higher percentage compared to the university staff, which may indicate their readiness to join politics in the future as an avenue for easy access to wealth and power and not as a means for developing the country. While the university staff responded with the lowest percentages due to their knowledge of the features of a working government, citing references to government responses in education, security, healthcare, etc., staff are probably hopeless due to government responses, particularly on the issue of education.

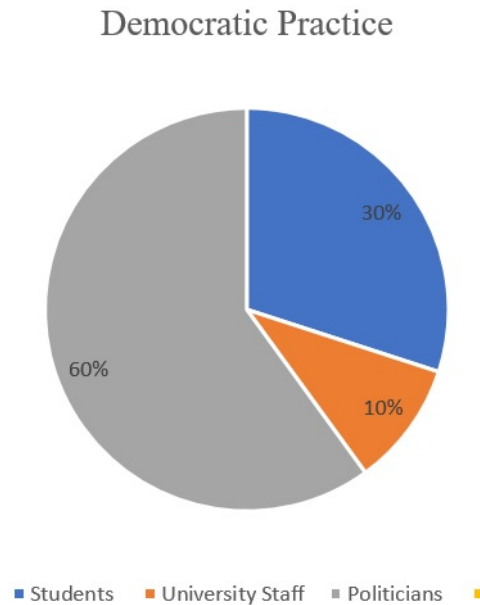
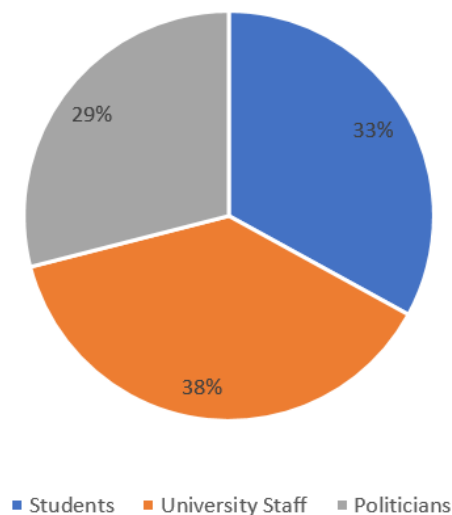
Chart 2. Responses on the possibility of practicing liberal democracy in Nigeria Source:Figure 2 *Fieldwork October 2023*

Chart two (2) is a follow-up question to the preceding chart using the same variables. The aim is to further understand the reasons why individual responses were not 100 percent in the previous chart. The reasons for the gaps are explained here. It shows the majority of the politicians agree with the possibility of practicing liberal democracy in the future, despite the hurdles of underdevelopment. While the student's position stands at 30%, The university staff responded most negatively, with 10%. Their response may be attributed to their experience with the way and manner in which the government is responding to the needs of both students and lecturers in tertiary institutions. Other problems are issues of security, poverty, corruption, etc.

Chart 3. Response on designing an indigenous political system.

indigenous political systems

Figure 3 *Fieldwork October 2023*

If the feasibility of practicing liberal democracy is bleak, then what about building an indigenous political system? From Chart 3 (3), the majority of the university staff have preferred the indigenous democratic system. On the contrary, positive responses from students exceed those of politicians too. Responses from both university staff and students might be due to their intellectual exposure, while politicians seem wary of getting out of their comfort zone. As such, they responded poorly.

Chart 4. Perceived development impact of indigenous political system

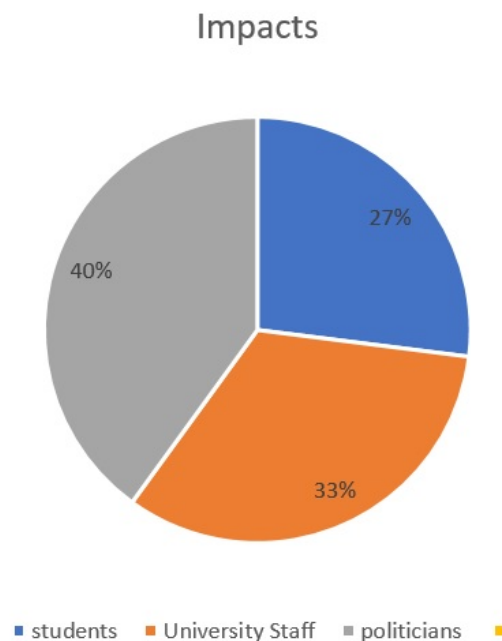


Figure 4 *Fieldwork October 2023*

In Chart 4, the majority believe that the indigenous political system will serve better. Therefore, the next question is about its development impact. Contrary to the student's responses in Chart 3 politicians, with about 33% (27%) believing that it will bring meaningful development, While forty percent (40%) of the responses come from the university staff.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review and the analysis are aimed at corroborating facts regarding whether the practices of democracy will bring prosperity and development, as suggested by some Western and African scholars of the neoliberalist school of thought. The analysis in Chart 2 can be interpreted to mean that democratic institutions enabling freedom, periodic elections, and freedom of speech, especially in the eyes of politicians, exist. However, the mere existence of proclaimed democratic institutions like legislatures, executives, the judiciary, and civil society organizations does not guarantee inclusive economic institutions, as rightly observed by the students' and lecturers' responses in Chat 2. This also confirms the postulates in the theory of institutions. This implies that the institutions are predatory rather than development-oriented. This fact is corroborated with the past and most recent reports on the indices of development in Nigeria as regards the level of poverty, inflation, rate of misery, and insecurity by Proshare (2023). Therefore, what about the possibility of prosperity and development under the atmosphere of predatory political institutions? The answers from the politicians are positive, while those of the students and university staff in Chart 2 indicate their impossibilities, as corroborated by the theories of institutions and ignorance. Because extractive political institutions appoint ignorant political executives in charge of public affairs, Thus, implementing elite-driven projects like subsidy removals on critical goods and services with no corresponding policy alternatives in terms of blocking financial leakages, punishing corrupt government officials, modernizing agricultural practices, and creating opportunities in other private sectors Therefore, since it is impossible to practice liberal western democracy due to the existing contradictions in our democratic institutions, the creation of an indigenous political system is a good alternative, as opined by both

students and university staff in Chart 3. This will have the advantage of rendering it immune from unnecessary foreign interference. The lack of alternatives might explain the reasons why many African countries have a contradictory political economy, often caused by foreign interference. Very recently, from 2020 to 2023, countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Sudan, and Niger have been embroiled in state crises due to a lack of an indigenous democratic system. Such problems will, however, continue to prevail and spread to other parts of the world unless and until there is a reverse engineering of our political system to indigenous ones. The clamor for this yearning can be seen in Chart 4, with a less wide margin of opinion between the politicians and students. However, the unanswered question in this research is: how and when will countries like Nigeria come up with their own local democracy? And what model will be practiced?

CONCLUSION

This research, although not the opinion of all Nigerians but of a section of the country, is an attempt to dig out reasons from a political-economic perspective on the connection between Western democratic politics and development and how a country like Nigeria has fared. Looking at the multi-dimensional problems in Nigeria, this research therefore concludes that it will be difficult for Nigeria to practice a liberal or Western form of democracy with an inclusive political and economic institution. As such, the country will have to innovate an indigenous political model that will work for the prosperity and development of the country.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the data analysis, this research work suggests that in order to have a reasonable sustained development, the country will have to innovate a new democracy that is culture-driven and completely immune from unnecessary external influence from the draconian policies of institutions like the IMF, WB, EU, USA, and UN. etc., or else prosperity and development will be a mirage.

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