

LARRY DIAMOND'S DEMOCRATIC RECESSION AND THE NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The act of harnessing the dividend of democracy in most democratic states has been poor over the years, due to ineffective democratic practices. Democracy is a system of government by which power is either held by elected representatives, or directly by the people themselves. The supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or their elected agents under a free electoral system. Despite the adoption of democracy by many countries, Larry Diamond believes that there is a global decline in democratic institutions' practices and values, marked by democratic backsliding, this enables the rise of authoritarianism and weaken support for liberal democracy, this he considers as democratic recession. Hence, what are the resilience in a democratic systems and the factors contributing to their vulnerability? The analytic method of research were employed in this study. Using the above research method unravels that for democratic structures to endure in a given society, the government must listen to the voice of their citizens, engage their participation, tolerate their protests, protect their freedoms, and respond to their needs.

Keywords: Democracy, Recession, Nigerian, Philosophy.

Introduction

The thoughts about Democracy and all that it entails, especially in the Western World have made me juxtapose and question its practice in Africa, especially Nigeria. Evidence has shown that there have been some inconsistencies in the practice of Democracy in Africa. When one sees what Democracy is like in Africa, especially Nigeria, one wonders if it actually mirrors that of the United State of America (USA) that they copied from. To capture this, Paul Haaga laments that the Democracy we now witness is “pluralistic dictatorship in which selfish and unscrupulous tyrants ride on their subjects in order to defend their personal interest.”¹ Bad leadership is the reason why democracy is unstable for a very long time; hence something should be done to arrest the ugly situations of democratic instability in order to have a sane society.

While pondering on these challenges of democratic instability, I thought of how best to recover Democracy from its dearth in the places it is not doing well as expected. My mind went back to an interaction with a lecturer about a Philosopher called Larry Diamond, who wrote an article titled “Democratic Recession”. For Diamond, the World has been in a mild but protracted democratic recession since about 2006, due to lack of improvement and the modest erosion of global levels of democracy and freedom.² Other causes of concern are First, there have been a significant and, in fact, accelerating rate of democratic breakdown., such as

inversion of judicial institution. Secondly, the quality or stability of democracy has been declining in a large and strategically mainly in conducting of free and fair elections, and this Diamond calls “swing state”. Thirdly, authoritarianism has been deepening including in big and strategically important countries. And fourth, the established democracies, beginning with the United States, increasingly seem to be performing poorly and to lack the will and self-confidence to promote democracy effectively abroad. Democracy must improve where it already existed if not it would decline and the society suffers what he calls “Democratic Recession”. These are basically the background which this research will be anchored. In recent years, the world has witnessed a concerning decline in the quality and stability of democratic governance, a trend political scientist Larry Diamond refers to as a “democratic recession.” This phenomenon is characterized by the erosion of democratic norms, increasing authoritarianism, weakened rule of law, suppression of civil liberties, and declining public trust in democratic institutions. Despite the global spread of democracy in the late 20th century, many democracies today are experiencing institutional backsliding, electoral manipulation, and the rise of populist or illiberal leaders who undermine democratic accountability.

This trend raises urgent questions such as, to what extent can Diamond’s position on democratic recession be curbed? What are the fundamental components in a democratic systems? And the role of citizens, media, civil society, and international actors in either enabling or resisting democratic decline? Without addressing these challenges, there is a real risk of further deterioration, not only in a fragile democracies but also in a long standing ones, threatening political stability, human rights, and global cooperation.

Additionally, ineffective democratic dispensation has been a problem to democracy globally, this is necessitated due to democratic breakdown caused by bad governance and lack of respect to the rule of law.

Larry Diamond has many works and articles on divergent Democratic issues, but this research work will dwell mainly on his concept on democratic recession, implicitly Nigerian experience and then draw out the messages, it is passing across, and further make recommendations for future politicians for national development and to understand where, how, and to what degree democracy has weakened around the world in recent years, as this is within the purview of political philosophy

This study will be based on library research through deployment of the method of analysis and other philosophical tools to examine, and analyze the subject matters in this research. By critical analyzing the principles behind the democratic recession in Larry Diamond and the Nigeria experience. The study exposed the history of democracy and when it started to decline, causes and how to improve on it.

In a practical terms, the method of data collection is library-based and analytical in presentation. It involves reading, interpreting both primary and secondary sources.

The research shall be in five chapters. Chapter one deals with Introduction, chapter two of the research is saddle with the review of literatures, while chapter three will be an exposition of Larry Diamond on democratic recession, chapter four is concerned with the concept of democratic recession to the Nigerian experience while chapter five of the research is concerned with evaluation and conclusions.

The Historical view of Democratic Recession

Accordingly to Diamond, the year 2014 marked the fortieth anniversary of Portugal's Revolution on the Carnations, which inaugurated what Sammy P Huntington dubbed the third wave, of global democratization. Anny assessment of the state of global democracy today must begin to recognizing an even marveling at the durability of this historical transformation. When the third wave began in 1974, only about 30 percent of the World's Independent states met the criteria of electoral democracy. Democracy been a system of government by which citizens, through universal suffrage, can choose and replace their leaders in regular, free, fair and meaningful elections⁷.

However, at that time, there were only 46 democracies in the World. Most of those were the liberal democracies of the rich West, along with the number of small island states that had been British colonies. Only a few other developing democracies existed principally, India, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Columbia, Venezuela, Israel and Turkey. In the subsequent three decades, democracy has a remarkable global run, as the number of democracies essentially held steady or expanded every year from 1975 until 2007. Nothing like this continuous growth in the democracy had ever been seen before in the history of the world. While a number of these new “democracies” we are quite illiberal in some cases, so much that Steven Kevistky and Lucan Way regarded them as “competitive authoritarianism” regimes⁸. In 1974, the average level of freedom in the world stood at 4.38, on the two point scales, where 1 is most free and 7 is the most repressive. It then gradually improved during the 1970s and 1980s. Though it did not cross below the 4.0 midpoint until the fall of Berlin Wall, after which it improved to 3.85 in 1990. In 25 of the 35 years between 1974 and 2005 average freedom levels improved in the world, peaking at 3.22 in 2005.

Then, around 2006, the expression of freedom and democracy in the world came to the prolonged halt. Since 2006, there has been no net expansion in the number of electoral democracies, which has oscillated between 114 and 119, and 60 percent of world states. The number of both electoral and liberal democracies began to decline after 2006 and then flattened out⁹. Since 2006, the average level of freedom in the world has also deteriorated slightly, leveling off at about 3.30

There are other ways to view this empirical trends. One is to see them as constituting a period of equilibrium, freedom and democracy have not continued gaining, but neither have they experience net declines. One could even celebrate this as an expression of the remarkable and unexpected durability of the democratic wave. Given that democracy expanded to a number of countries where the objective conditions for sustaining it are unfavorable, due either to poverty for instance, in Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone , or to strategic pressures, for example Georgia and Mongolia. It is impressive that reasonably open and competitive political systems have survived or revived in so many places.

Alternatively, one can view the last decade as a period of at least incipient decline in democracy, according to Diamond, we need to examine not only the instability and stagnation of democracies, but also the incremental decline of democracies¹⁰, the deepening authoritarianism in the non-democracies, and the decline in the functioning and self-confidence of the World's established, rich democracies and what Diamond seeks to tackle in this exposition.

The debate about whether they have been a decline in the democracy turns to some extent on how we count it. It is one of the great and probably ironies of scholarly research that the boom in comparative democratic studies has been accompanied by significant disagreement over how to define and measure democracy. Most scholars of democracy have agreed that it makes sense to classify regimes categorically and thus, to determine which regimes are the democracies and which are not.

For Diamond democracy is in many ways a continuous variable. Its key components, such as freedom of multiple parties and candidates to campaign and contest: opposition access to mass media and campaign finances; inclusiveness of suffrage, fairness and neutrality of electoral administration, and the extent to which electoral victors have meaningful power to rule, vary on a continuum as do other dimensions of quality of democracy, such as civil liberties, rule of law, control of corruption, vigor of civil society, and so on.

This continuous variation forces coders to make difficult judgment about how to classify regimes that fall into the gray zone of ambiguity, where multiparty competition is perfectly fair and open. Some multiparty electoral system clearly do not meet the text of democracy. Others have serious defects that nevertheless do not negate their overall democratic character. Thus hard decisions must be made about how to weight imperfections and where to draw the line.

It is very worthy to note that most approaches to Classifying regimes as democracies or not relay on continuous measurement of key variables, such as political rights, in the case of polity scale, or both political rights and civil liberties, along with a somewhat arbitrary cut off point for separating democracies from non-democracies. Diamond's own method has been to accept the Freedom house coding decisions except where he finds persuasive contradictory evidence. This has led to his counting two to five fewer democracies than freedom house does for most years since 1989; for some years the discrepancy party is much larger¹¹.

The Decline of Freedom and Rule of Law

Apart from the democratic failure, there has been a trend of declining of freedom in a number of countries and regions since 2005. The most often cited statistics in this regard is the freedom house findings that in each of the eight consecutive years from 2006 through 2013 more countries declined in freedom than improved. In fact, after a post-Cold War period in which the balance was almost a highly favorable with improvers outstripping the decliners by a ratio of two to one (or greater) the balance simply inverted beginning in 2006. But this does not tell the whole story.

Two important elements are noteworthy, and they are both especially visible in Africa. First, the declines have tended to crystallize over time. Thus, if we compare freedom scores at the end of 2005 and the end of 2013, we see that 29 of the 49 Sahara Africa state almost 60 percent decline in freedom, while only fifteen to thirty percent improved and five remain unchanged. Moreover, twenty states in the region saw a decline in political rights, civil liberties or both that we are substantial enough to register on the seven points scales, while only seven states saw such a visible improvement. The larger states in sub- Sahara Africa (those with a population of more than ten million) did a bit better, but not much: Freedom deteriorated in thirteen of the 25 of them, and improved in only eight.

Another problem is that the pace of decay in democratic institutions is not always evident to outside observers. In a number of countries where we take democracy for granted, such as South Africa, we should note, in fact that there is not a single country on the African continent where democracy is firmly consolidated and secure, the way it is, for example, in such-third wave democracies at South Korea, Poland, and Chile. In the global democracy- promotion community, few actors are paying attention to the growing signs of fragility in the more liberal developing democracies, not to mention the more illiberal ones.

Why have freedom and democracy be regressing in many countries? The most important and pervasive answer is, in brief, bad governance. The freedom house measures of political rights and civil liberties both include subcategories that directly relate to the rule of law and transparency including corruption. African states like most others in the world perform considerably worse on the rule of law and transparency than on political rights and civil liberties¹⁵. Moreover, rule of law and political right have both declined perceptibly across sub-Saharan Africa to 2005. While civil liberties have oscillated somewhat more¹⁶, the biggest problem for democracy in Africa is controlling corruption and abuse of power.

The decay in governance has been visible even in the best-governed Africa countries such as South Africa, which suffered a steady decline in its score on rule of law and transparency (from 79 to 63) between 2005 and 2013, and as more and more African states become resource-rich with the onset of second Africa oil boom, the quality of governance with deteriorate further. This has already begun to happen in one of Africa's most liberal and important democracies, Ghana.

The problem is not unique to Africa. Every region of the world scores worse on the standardized scale of transparency and rule of law trail the other two scales even more dramatically in Latin America, post-communist Europe, and Asia than they do in Africa.

Many democracies in Lower- income and even middle or upper-middle income countries, struggle with the resurgence of what Francis Fukuyama calls “neo-patrimonial” tendencies¹⁷. Leaders who think that they can get away with it eroding democratic checks and balances, hollowing out institutions of accountability, overriding the term limits and normative restraints, and accumulating power and wealth for themselves and their families, cronies, clients and parties.

In the process, they demonize, intimidate, and victimize (occasionally even jail or murder) opponents who get in their way. Space for opposition parties, civil society, and the media is shrinking, and international support for them is drying up. Ethics, religious and other identity led cleavages divide many societies that lack well designed democratic institutions to manage cleavages. States structures are too often weak and porous, to secure order, or rise above corrupt, clientele and predatory impulses.

Democratic institutions such as parties and parliament are often poorly developed, and the bureaucracy lacks the policy expertise and, even more so, the independence, neutrality and authority to effectively manage the economy. Weak economic performance and rising inequality worsens the problem of abuse of power, rigging of election, of the democratic rules of the game.

Solution to Democratic Recession

The ultimate quest for any democratic society is to have good leaders that will pilot their affairs and then provide that basic amenities that are so essential to human existence, of which the absence of any of them is an anomaly. In the developed countries of the world like U.K knows how important these things are and they make great effort to ensure that they are provided. But in Africa here , especially in Nigeria, civil servants pray for their salaries and their other entitlements to be paid, our retired senior citizens wait for years for their gratuities, pensions to be paid, some fell ill, and because there is no money to feed, talk more of going to the hospital, thereby rendering them hopeless and they died.

Larry Diamonds asserts in his article “the Resurgence of the predatory state”, that the leverage needed to bring about radical change in democracy will never exist unless the politicians who sits at the helm of affairs come to realize that they have no choice but to reform. Hence, this clarion call is something that should be strictly adhered to, because many of the things we pray for in Africa are things that ought to be provided by our leaders. Bad governance is a cankerworm that has marred the democratic progress in the world, Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Salvatore Veca is of the opinion that we ought to be less satisfied with the practice of the democracy, the reason is derived from the fact that, our elected leaders seem to be ignorant of those principles, promises and ideals which constitute the nucleus of the democratic tradition. According to him, we should be more demanding of our elected representatives to live up to the ideals and principle of the democracy and good governance, or they simply relax¹⁴.

Thus, it is a known fact that 70 percent of our leaders do not have the interest of the people at heart, every four years Nigeria engages in election to choose its leaders in theory, but in reality what I. N. E. C does is to impose some people the masses never voted for, the presidential election we just had is a true justification of how rotten our democracy is! Over 300 Billion Naira was spent to conduct election, yet I. N. E. C ended up compromising and putting Nigeria Democracy in great jeopardy.

The ancient saying that no man is an island led Aristotle to declare that Man is by nature a political Animal. This does not mean that everyone is a politician but that it is a nature of man to live in a society. In his book the Politics, Aristotle asserted, ‘‘He, who by nature and not by, mere accident is without a state is either a bad man or above humanity. That is, he is a beast or a god’’¹⁵. There has been a dilemma and deficit confronting African democracy and Nigeria in particular, the problem of responsible leadership that has continued to endanger our democracy made it to be experiencing recession. At the Deer runs for running stream that has been the way our heart has been yearning for good governance in a sane society where citizens will beat their chest and say well done to its leaders and not the other way round

Thus, there is a need for a strong democratic culture that should be inculcated and embraced by countries that practices democracy, first, the culture of religion tolerance, as it stands now African seems to be suffering from this kind of democracy where religion plays a vital role, for instance Nigeria democracy is always centered on religious beliefs and culture, and this has done more harm than good towards ensuring is smooth democratic dispensation, this deliberate act has provoked thoughts and is seen as a malicious act that means no well for the future of Nigeria democracy.

Second, Golden Rule, do unto others what you would like them to do unto you, is a scriptural assertion that has a philosophical undertone. Nature abhors vacuum, our democracy is epileptic because the leaders and the followers are still playing the politics of money, tribalism, connection, if you scratch my back today, tomorrow I will scratch yours, thereby neglecting competency, character, capacity and The will power to deliver. All of us witnessed how Buhari's government proved to us that his government is for a certain set of people in his lopsided appointments to various governmental positions. With this kind of scenario no meaningful development will be experienced because the political undertones behind all this are jealousy and hatred. It is only a compassionate, visionary, innovative and cerebral leaders that will have will power to carry everyone along no matter the gender, tribe or religion.

Third, sacrifice our democratic leaders should know from the onset that they are called to serve, because “life of sacrifice without sacrifice is a contradiction” during political campaigns Nigeria politicians will be using many deceptive slogans like “the call to serve”¹⁶, “divine mandate”¹⁷, and so on to deceive us, but in reality they are vying for the positions of power and authority just to loot our common treasury. What a misplacement of priority! Very unfortunate.

Democracy is a self-government of free People, by the people and for the full interest of the general masses,¹⁸ in it is not in praxis but an illusion that some members of our society sees democracy as government of the rich by the rich and for the political class. We are still longing for a democratic society that will transcend from too much talk and promises during campaign, what we Desire now is action, because Ghana that gained their independence in 1957 few years before Nigeria seems to perform far better and their society far more developed than Nigeria

Africa politicians should endeavor to emulate the likes of Zik of Africa; Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Julius Kambaraye Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkruma of Ghana, these great men played politics with human heart and like a pelican they gave everything to their Generation when they were alive

Conclusion

Since democratic recession refers to the global trend of weakening democratic norms, institutions, and right. There are practical recommendations to curb it, such as: strengthen rule of law and independent institutions, ensuring there is checks and balances between executive, legislative, and judicial branches, defending of free and fair elections, protecting media freedom and counter disinformation, revitalizing civil society and civic space, reducing inequality and economic insecurity, promoting democratic norms within political parties, using international pressure and support strategically and investing in civic education and democratic culture.

Conclusively, lack of accountability of government officials is the main reason that breeds corruption, it is like a cankerworm that has gotten deep into the bone marrow of our political consciousness. Hence, it is worthy to note that for democracy to thrive in any society, democratic leaders should endeavor to lead by example, be accountable to the masses, the men of vision with strong political will that will enable them to accomplish their mission. Citizens must show that they want a positive change by the way they think an act. Going by true tenets of democracy if a government is not by the people it is already illegitimate, sustainable democracy gives birth to tremendous development an active civic communities, in which citizens trust one another, interact as political equals.

Therefore, I am advocating for a sense of accountability from world democratic leaders as a way out of political instability, this will go a long way to prevent democratic recession.

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