

Two Decades of Nigeria's Nascent Democracy: An Assessment

Emmanuel O. Ojo^{[a],*}; 'Wale Sadeeq^[b]

^[a] PhD, Professor, Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, P.M.B. 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

^[b] PhD, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, News Agency of Nigeria, Abuja and an Independent Researcher.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Two decades of democracy in Nigeria makes it sufficiently matured for an assessment. This paper takes a cursory look at the performance of democracy in the last two decades to determine whether it is moving towards sustenance and consolidation. A number of barometers were considered which are critical to well-known canons of democracy. The paper however infers that governing elites need to do more if the masses of the people will be a catalyst to democratic sustenance and consolidation as the performance of democracy vis-à-vis development in all ramifications is nothing to write home about for now in the country.

Key words: Democracy; Economy; Legislature; Media; Security

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1. INTRODUCTION

May 29, 2020 marked the two decades of Nigeria's nascent democracy. It is remarkable in the sense that since her 'flag independence' on 1st October 1960, Nigeria has never been governed consistently under civil rule for twenty consecutive solid years. The primary reason as rightly noted by Welch (1995, pp.593-594), is not

unconnected with incessant military interventions in government and politics of the country (see, Ojo, 2009b & Ojo, 2006a), leading to both political and governmental instabilities. In his words, "the Armed Forces of Nigeria find themselves caught in mire, largely of their own making...were the Armed Forces of Nigeria to disengage, they would, in fact, be equally likely to hasten back" (Welch, 1995). The polity has now proven to be deviant to Welch's postulations with efforts at sustaining democracy. Aside from military coups and counter-coups; event in Africa took scholars by surprise, since most doubted Africa could move towards democratic sustenance, not to talk of consolidation (Decalo, 1992, p.7). Chabal (1980, p.5) assumed that "to have expected democracy to flourish would have been historical blindness".

It is against this background that scholars became too pessimistic about the ability of Nigeria to nurture democracy for, at least, two decades (see, Baker, 2000, pp.9-34; May, 2000, pp.178-180; Suberu, 2001, p.207; Ojo and Adebayo, 2009, pp.1-25). Thus, despite the doubt and skepticism openly expressed by scholars, Nigeria, like several other African countries, has sustained democracy for decades, even if it is in its bastardised forms. While we cannot lose sight of the fact that there is no consensus among scholars vis-à-vis the ideal conceptualization of the word 'democracy', it has been asserted that one can find as many as three hundred definitions of democracy, most of which are at odds with each other (cited in Harris, 1970;35). The working definition of democracy for us for the purposes of this paper is associated with an over-simplified 'one-man-one-vote'.

The thrust of this paper, therefore, is an assessment of the performance of 'democracy' in the last two decades in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, this paper is divided into few sections. With the above introductory remarks, the second part takes a cursory look at the criteria for measuring democratic utility/dividend vis-à-vis the functions of the state which forms the fulcrum

of the framework of analysis for this work. Part three of the paper addressed the substantive issues that aid our assessment of democracy in Nigeria. Four of such barometers are highlighted in this paper viz: (a) strength of the economy (b) National Security (c) the legislature and good governance and (d) the media in the nascent democracy and the manifestations of corruption in the last two decades of the country's democratic experience. While the aforementioned are not exhaustive of the basic criteria for assessing democratic performance, but for space constraints, other critical issues include: Nigeria's struggle against corruption, conduct of elections and the high rate of electoral violence, amongst others that deserve full length paper.

2. SETTING THE FRAMEWORK: MEASURING DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE

A brief discussion of what the traditional and constitutional functions of the state should be will aid our understanding of the political balance sheet of Nigeria's democracy in the last two decades. In the words of Daniel Wit (1953, pp.6-8) '...in all forms of government, democratic and non-democratic, we must have certain objectives' – these objectives, as shall be highlighted in this section, are used to measure governmental performance vis-à-vis good governance and it is how well they are discharged that is taken to be good governance and concomitant development that should accompany the practice of democracy. Where a supposedly democratic polity is incapable of discharging those functions effectively, far better than a dictatorial one, the whole essence of democracy is defeated. If democratic polity cannot better the lots of the citizenry; in such a situation, development becomes not only retarded but 'arrested' and the beauty of democracy is lost. Put differently, an in-depth examination of the basic functions of government will assist us in determining dividends of democracy in Nigeria (Ojo, 2009c, p.151).

Be that as it may, in the extant literature, the first necessity of government is to guarantee security both within the state, including irredentist claims and without, to ward-off external aggressors or else, such a state may go into extinction (see, Osaghae, 2002). No government, democratic or otherwise, can afford to ignore the value of security; in this case, security in all its ramifications. It has become glaring to scholars and researchers in the field that for a nation to be secure, security must be seen from a holistic or comprehensive viewpoint. In this sense, bad press, bad laws, food insecurity, bad government, lack of transparency and public accountability, unemployment, hunger, poverty, among others become critical elements in the security calculus of a nation-state, as potential threats (Kazir 2010, pp.5,6). This is in line with Barry

Buzan's conception of national security, with five basic dimensions, viz: (a) military security (b) political security (c) economic security (d) societal security and (e) environmental security (cited in Kazir 2010, pp. 7, 8). In measuring democracy vis-à-vis national security, Nwolise (2002 and 2009), extends the list to fifteen (15) by introducing physical security, psychological security, spiritual security, technological security, national image security, territorial security, legal security, treasury security, people's security and global security. It is not surprising, therefore, that recently, a national daily, in a high flung editorial, noted that more than anything else, 'the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the pervasive insecurity of lives and property, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, assassinations, ethnic and religious conflict, coupled with the seeming helplessness of security agencies to handle criminality (cited in Ojo, 2006d, p.368).

Aside from security of life and property, the very survival of the state is also linked to the ability of its economy to meet the material demands of both people and government (see Ojo, 2012, p.16 and Ojo, & Adebayo 2009; Ojo). In the words of Wit (1953), 'welfare constitutes a third objective of modern government'. One must turn to the feudalistic and hence medieval nations of the Arab World or of portions of South East Asia to discover any appropriation of the non-welfare government in the existing world. That welfare is an objective of all modern nation-states is a fact comparable to their common pursuit of a national economic well-being. This is why Kapur (2006, p.715) averred that the promotion of individual welfare and the realization of the collective ends of society is perhaps the ultimate aim of states' existence.

No doubt, it is the primary responsibility of the state to be able to perform the aforementioned functions and equally be able to provide basic infrastructure that will make life more abundant for the citizenry within its jurisdiction. Amenities such as pipe borne water, electricity, care of the aged, health facility, food security and motorable roads along with quality education are essential elements of good living, which are all regarded as 'dividends' of democracy in contemporary Nigeria. The snag, however, as empirical data on substantive issues shall reveal, is that the performance of Nigeria as a state on these basic functions of the state are far below expectations in the first two decades of democracy. We now move to the substantive issues before we draw our conclusions and make few recommendations, if the nascent democracy will not suffer reversal and eventually be consolidated.

3. SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

3.1 Strength of the Economy and Democracy

You know the mentality of our people. If democracy does not produce clean water, if democracy does not produce good roads,

transform agriculture, cultivate industrial development, sanitise society, give us power supply, democracy will lose credibility and they may say, *Na democracy we go chop?* (Jerry Gana, May 12, 2000, p.1 – *The Guardian, Lagos*).

The above quotation by one-time Information Minister in this democratic dispensation, no doubt, emphasizes the nexus between democracy and the economy, most especially in developing societies. Quantitative cross-national research on the economic development is associated positively and strongly with the extent to which the political systems manifest properties of democracy (see, Ojo 2006d, p.9). Moreover, in multivariate models that take into account numerous economic and non-economic factors, such as level of economic development (as measured by GNP, energy consumption, or per capita income), typically is the single important explanatory variable (Diamond, 1992, p.100). As proposed by Lipset (1959, pp.69-105) long time ago, the explanation from the positive effect of economic development, on the likelihood of a country establishing and maintaining democracy emphasizes two inter-related intervening variables, political culture and social structure. Also, scholars like Dahl (1989, p.25) and Huntington (1991, p.135), agree with Lipset.

However, the debate over the nexus between economic development and democracy seems to have been conducted in terms of 'compatibility' and 'conflict' perspectives (Healey and Robinson, 1994, p.95), conflict in the sense that there are few exceptions to the rule which Huntington (1991) "retrogrades".

In spite of the Indian situation which has long baffled theorists of democracy, poverty, widespread illiteracy and a deeply hierarchical social structure are inhospitable conditions for the functioning of democracy (see, Varshney, 1998, p.36). But the historical novelty of Indian democracy in the face of incongruent environment is indeed amazing, as noted by Moore thus:

Economically, (India) remains the pre-industrial age...But as a political species, it does belong to the modern world. At the time of Nehru's death in 1964, political democracy had existed for seventeen years. If imperfect, the democracy was no more sham...Political democracy may seem strange, both in an Asian setting and one without an industrial revolution (Moore, 1996, p.324).

Despite the afore-stated condition, democracy thrives in India, making the polity an exception sort-of. But the data on Nigeria's economy in the last two decades of democracy is indeed less cheering when juxtaposed with economic indicators of democratic sustenance and consolidation.

Nigeria, like so many countries in Africa, is patently not a developed country. It is assumed to be developing. However, its people are far worse off now than they were twenty years ago. The data on the economy speak for themselves. Despite billions of dollars in export revenues since the discovery of oil in the late 1950s, at least more than half of the population lives in abject poverty

without access to clean water. Literacy is below that of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Maier, 2000, pp.23-35). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person is lower now than it was before the inauguration of democracy. Recently, the World Bank declared Nigeria as the world's capital of poverty.

Perhaps the best way to measure performance of the economy beyond the official statement of the government is the price index. A recent survey by these authors revealed that in the last eight years, Nigerians have never found it so hard in terms of economic hardship. For instance, the exchange rate of US dollar to Naira, the nation's currency, was N190 to a dollar in 2015 but N740 in 2023; fuel per litre was N87 in 2015 but now N350. Kerosene was sold for N150 per litre in 2015 but N1,000 in 2023; Diesel for industrial consumption was N155 per litre in 2015 but N900 in 2023; Cooking gas for domestic cooking was N180 per kilo in 2015 but N850 per kilo in 2023; a bag of rice was N8,000 in 2015 but N46,000 in 2023. To compound the situation, the volume of external debt in 2015 was 9.7 billion dollars but it had reached 98.6 billion dollars in 2023 and it is still rising.

Meanwhile, it is amazing to note that despite this poverty, in addition to brazen corruption that has not abated, the country has enormous human and material resources which the democratic government has not demonstrated sufficient capacity to maximize for the benefit of the polity. The natural resources include petroleum, natural gas, tin, columbite, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead and zinc. Her agricultural products also include cocoa, palm oil, groundnuts and cotton; industry includes textile, cement, food products and footwear (Ojo, 2006d, p.10).

No doubt, what the above data on the economy tells us is that there is pervasive level of poverty in Nigeria. This is the state of being extremely poor and lacking the means to exist adequately. Poverty is itself a crisis that is habitual and it conveys the message of hardship, difficult to deny because it speaks publicly on grounds of visible misery, persisting destitution, endemic hunger or starvation and visible malnutrition. Studies have shown that there are two forms of poverty in Nigeria. These are absolute and relative. By way of definition, absolute poverty is a condition of life, characterized with the inability to meet the basic needs of life. Those who fall into this category are the people who are hungry. Although they know, it cannot provide for their food needs. To redress the reality of poverty in Nigeria, there were a number of few programmes put in place by the government at all levels but the wide gap between intents and actual practices have made nonsense of the programmes.

It is apt to conclude this section with the view of Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001), that:

...many new democracies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa will probably break down in the medium to long run unless they can reduce their often appalling levels of poverty, inequality, and social injustice, and through market-oriented reforms lay the basis for sustainable growth.

No doubt, in the face of excruciating poverty, citizens may not be good catalysts to democratic sustenance and consolidation.

3.2 Sustainable Democracy and National Security

More than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the pervasive insecurity of lives and property, as evidenced by the spate of armed robbery attacks, assassinations, ethnic and religious conflicts, coupled with the seeming haplessness of security agencies to handle criminal acts. The increasing number of unemployed Nigerians, some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities, worsens the situation (see, *Nigerian Tribune*, January 5, 2000 p. 10, also cited in Ojo, 2006d, p.368).

The quotation above was from a high-flung editorial comment from a national daily in 2000. It should be noted that ever since the statement, the tempo and intensity of violence and terrorism are more deafening than the picture painted in the editorial comment. The new wave of insecurity has become a regular thing that the nascent democracy cannot curtail. As noted by Nwolise (2006, p.348) in a perceptive work, 'more crucial is the fact that Nigeria today is being overwhelmed by general insecurity, which threatens the nation's democracy, especially with the high spate of armed robbery, political assassinations, ethnic conflicts and separatist agitations'. These are now compounded with unprecedented rate of banditry and kidnappings.

For the typologies of insecurity in Nigeria since 1999 that democracy was inaugurated manifested in terms of ethno-religious conflicts; Boko-Haram insurgency; kidnappings; heinous crimes and attacks on security operatives, among others Ever since, successive elections have also emerged as sources and triggers of conflicts and instability that often presage more complex problems of insecurity in Nigeria. In the words of Osaghae (2021, p.33), elections, especially presidential ones, are approached in zero sum and warlike terms that deepen centrifugal forces.

It is appalling that Nigeria's contemporary security environment is beset with diverse threats across the six geo-political zones. The North-East is today the most volatile and intense security environment in Nigeria. It is also one of the largest, most ethnically, religiously, linguistically and geographically diverse geo-political zone in the country. The socio-economic indices of the North-East reveal high level of poverty, infrastructural decay, lack of development, poor governance, unfavourable climatic conditions and differences in religious cultures. All these have made the zone a harbinger of insecurity. The activities of Boko-Haram/ISWAP terrorists have led to the destruction of communities, killing of thousands of people as well as loss of farmlands and other means of livelihood (Irabor, 2002, pp.8-11) The North-West geo-political zone has some of the richest states in Northern Nigeria. However, poverty, poor governance, cultural

and political inadequacies, low literacy rate coupled with large unemployed youth population have combined to create a precarious security environment in the zone. Other prevailing violent crimes in the North-West zone include rising cases of cattle rustling, activities of violent religious groups, such as Ansaru, IMN and other sundry crimes. All these negative security indices have combined to redefine the security environment in the zone to transform a hitherto peaceful security environment into a haven of bandits and terrorists. The North-Central zone is not exempted from the menace of insecurity. Conflicts in this zone have been aggravated by increase in communal violence, ethno-religious conflicts and farmers-herders clashes, amongst other drivers of violence. Farmer-herder conflicts are often driven by attacks and reprisal attacks by herders and farmers. These acts of violence often leave in their wake large-scale destruction of farmlands and force relocation of vulnerable communities from their ancestral homes into IDP camps in many states in the zone. The South-West is estimated to be the most relatively peaceful and perhaps the most economically viable zone, with expectedly the highest literacy rate in the country. Across a range of poverty measures, the zone performs relatively well when compared with other parts of the country. Meanwhile, the South-West zone is not completely immune from the scourge of insecurity. The main security challenges in the zone include armed robbery, kidnapping, political thuggery as well as violent activities of ethnic militias and cult groups. Others are cyber and financial fraud, weapon trafficking, some form of ethnic violence, sea robbery, cross-border crimes and other sundry crimes associated with urbanized areas, including oil theft and pipeline vandalism.

Also, the South-East and South-South zones share similar geographical affinities and by extension, similar security threats. In this regard, the prevailing security environment is characterised by militancy, ethnic violence, communal conflicts, separatist agitations, environmental degradation, political violence, drug abuse/trafficking, oil theft and vandalism as well as other crimes occasioned by the existence of large populations of unemployed youths. Prominent threat groups in the South-East and South-South zones include the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Eastern Security Network (ESN) and a myriad of militants and sea pirates that constantly pose security threats along the numerous inland waterways that criss-cross that part of the country. In the case of South-South zone in particular, the security landscape is characterised by rising cases of oil theft and pipeline vandalism which have impacted negatively on revenue generation by government while also aggravating environmental degradation across the zones (Irabor, 2002). From the above, Nigeria's democratic state has demonstrated crass incompetence in managing security.

3.3 The Legislature and Good Governance

In any democracy world over, particularly in a presidential system, the need for frequent interactions among the three organs of government, namely: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary cannot be over-emphasised. This is not only to instill sanity into the system but also, to ensure good governance. In Nigeria, the relationship among the three arms of government and particularly, between the executive and the legislature, has been one targeted at ensuring that the rights of citizens are adequately protected. The duties, functions and responsibilities of each arm of government have also been clearly spelt out in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Even though the three arms are expected to be autonomous in their respective operations, each of them is expected to serve as check on the other, in accordance with the principle of separation of powers. This, according to the spirit and letters of the principle, is to ensure collaboration among the three institutions, prevent undue interference, guide against dictatorship and the exercise of excessive power by one arm over the other as well as promote healthy relationship (Oni and Sadeeq, 2018, pp. 106-137). Basse (2006, pp.128-139) posits that in a highly politicised and segmented society such as Nigeria, the peril of political instability arising from "vote of no confidence" on one hand, and the risk of constitutional despotism, on the other, inherent in the parliamentary system, the dual principles of "separation of powers" and "checks and balances" is highly commended, stressing that under the presidential system, both the legislature and the executive are independent of each other and the existence and continuity of one does not depend on the other. Therefore, for a polity to qualify as democratic, there must be separation of powers to enhance good governance (see, Montesquieu, 1748 cited in Ojo, 2018, p.49).

The legislature and executive are two very important political institutions in a presidential democratic system like Nigeria, with the two arms having very critical roles to play in promoting good governance. Momodu and Matudi (2013), however, opine that the performance of the roles is dependent on whether the relationship that exists between these institutions is constructive or conflictive. For instance, they state that in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the relationship between the executive and legislature has been characterised more by dysfunctional conflicts which often deadlocks the policy making and implementation process, ultimately inhibiting good governance. More worrisome, according to them, is the fact that even after several years of democratisation in the country, the political players have refused to wean themselves off from the culture of impunity and flagrant disregard to the rule of law, which are the twin evil introduced into the country's body politics by the military. Arising from this, therefore, are fears that these and others factors might

have contributed immensely to the political conflicts being witnessed between the executive and the legislative arms of government, with its attendant implication on good governance in the country. Nwosu (1998) points out the effects of executive-legislative conflicts on previous republics in Nigeria, stressing that they collapsed largely not because the constitutions were bad but because of the inability of the governing elites to comply with the basic rules of the game. What is, however, shocking, according to Momodu and Matudi (2013) is the growing culture of impunity and flagrant disregard to the rule of law noticeable among members of the executives and the legislature, both at the national and state levels in Nigeria since the commencement of the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999 till date, pointing out that this has consequently heightened confrontations between the institutions to such an extent that the quest for good governance in the country has been affected negatively.

Indeed, the executive-legislative relations in the fourth republic are said to be both collaborative and conflictive. For instance, year 2001 witnessed some conflicts between the executive and the National Assembly, the major effect of which was the impeachment of key actors in the two arms of government, such as Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Governors, among others. The conflicts were so intense to the extent that it was widely feared that the fourth republic might come to an abrupt end. The situation forced Soyinka (2010) to call on Nigerians to rescue the country from those he christened reprobate gangsters, extortionists and political murderers, while Utomi (Cited in Benson, Olaniyi and Lamidi, 2009) declared that the only thing that could save the country was the upholding of the constitution and respect for the rule of law. All these notwithstanding, Momodu and Matudi (2013) are of the view that the relationship between the two arms of government has also preserved the fourth republic from collapse, citing the role of the legislature during the power vacuum crisis which occurred in 2010 after the demise of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, culminating in the adoption of the doctrine of necessity which saw Dr. Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan, who was Yar'Adua's Vice-President being sworn in as the substantive President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, after remaining the Vice-President for few months after Yar'Adua's demise.

Speaking on why members of the National Assembly were aggrieved with former President Olusegun Obasanjo and were hell bent on removing him, former President of the Senate and one-time Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, said it was not unconnected with the executive-legislature tango over the selection of the leadership of the Fourth National Assembly. He said, "In quick succession, this challenge delivered three Presidents of the Senate in the Fourth Senate, the last of whom was my humble self. I had to

struggle to the very end to hold on to the seat of the Senate President and administer the office to the best of my ability. At about the same period, there was also a change of Speaker in the House of Representatives, though in circumstances not similar and not as controversial as those of the Senate.” Continuing, Anyim stated that the Fifth Senate also witnessed a change of a presiding officer, recalling how a former Head of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon (rtd.) led the body of former Heads of State to persuade the then leadership of the National Assembly not to impeach Obasanjo. “During our meeting with the former Heads of State,” he said, “we shared one concern with them, that is, that a situation where the impeachment of a presiding officer is regarded as democracy in action and, on the other hand, impeachment of a chief executive (president) is regarded as democracy under threat, was not acceptable (Anyim, 2019).

The situation during the President Muhammadu Buhari administration was also not different in term of the relationship between the executive and legislative arms of government. Essentially, the relationship between the two institutions, particularly during Buhari’s first term between 2015 and 2019, could be described as ‘rocky’. It was characterised by frosty relationships, open confrontations, accusations and counter-accusations, allegations of budget padding, delay in budget passage and general love lust, with all having adverse effects on the business of governance.

No wonder, Buhari had, few days before his inauguration in May 2019, reflected on the relationship between the executive arm of government and the outgoing Eighth National Assembly, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Bukola Saraki, concluded that it was not the best, thus hoping for a more harmonious relationship between his administration and the Ninth National Assembly (*Premium Times*, July 12, 2019). Therefore, the relationship between the executive and legislative arms of government was essentially defined by their initial friendly disposition, occasioned by what was largely seen as the inputs of the president on the emergence of the leadership of the National Assembly, under the Chairmanship of Senator Ahmed Lawan.

As expected, the relationship between the two institutions started on a harmonious note, manifesting first in the screening of 43 ministerial nominees in July 2019. The Senate, which was expected to take the nominees through a rigorous screening process before taking a final stand on who to approve and who to disqualify, based on individual performances and other ancillary factors, however, made a u-turn. The Upper Legislative Chamber, which had earlier vowed that there would no ‘take a bow and go’ for former senators and members of House of Representatives, contradicted itself when it decided to apply it for some of the ministerial nominees, including former Senate Minority Leaders,

Senators George Akume of Benue State and Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom State; former Deputy Minority Whip, Senator Olorunnimbe Mamora, and a serving House of Representatives member on the platform of Accord, Emeka Nwajiuba, from Imo State. Another ministerial nominee who also enjoyed the ‘bow and go’ privilege was a former Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed. Even though he was neither a former senator nor a former member of House of Representatives, he was, nevertheless, asked to take a bow and go as a way of “compensating” him for his hard work and loyalty to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and President Muhammadu Buhari, and for being ‘a brilliant man, journalist and lawyer’. Likewise, all the seven ministerial nominees, sent to the Upper Legislative Chamber by the President on 21st June, 2022 to replace the ministers, who had earlier resigned to contest the APC presidential primary election, were all screened and confirmed. (*Daily Trust*, December 26, 2021). Other manifestations of the harmonious relationship were the frequent and unguarded approval of foreign and local borrowing plans by the National Assembly which some analysts however described as unsustainable, arguing that it was taking between 95 and 97 per cent of annual revenue generated to service. **Even in the face of the concerns raised by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in January 2019 as well as the President’s Chief Economic Adviser, Professor Doyin Salami, coupled with the Chief Executive Officer of Financial Derivatives Company (FDC), Mr. Bismarck Rewane, over the external debt increase, the federal legislature has continued to have handshakes with the executive arm in what experts have regarded as the unwavering debt accumulation venture considered to be suicidal for the continued economic survival of the country.**

The honeymoon between the two arms of government was, however, halted in their subsequent relationships. For example, there was a face-off between the Presidency and the National Assembly over the jerking up of the N13.33 trillion 2020 budget presented by the president to the joint sitting of the federal legislature on 17th October, 2019. When the budget was passed on 5th December, 2019, it had been increased by N263.936, thus bringing the total budget to N10.59 trillion. The same thing went for the 2021 budget, as it was said to have been ‘padded’ by the National Assembly with over N500 billion, thus bringing the total budget passed to N13.6 trillion from the initial N13.08 trillion budget presented to the legislators by the president. (*Premium Times*, January 31, 2021). Regarding the oversight activities of the National Assembly, although they are said to have improved tremendously, they, however, appear not to have been effective in reducing corruption and ensuring effective budget performances by ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs).

The screening of the immediate past service chiefs as ambassadors was another sour point in the unguarded relationship with the executive arm of government by the National Assembly. Former Chief of Defence Staff, Gabriel Olonisakin; former Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Buratai; former Chief of Air Staff, Ibok Ibas; and former Chief of Naval Staff, Abubakar Sadique, were forwarded by President Muhammadu Buhari to the Senate for screening as non-career ambassadors barely a week after their resignation. Following the protests that greeted the nomination by prominent Nigerians who called on the lawmakers to save the country the embarrassment of rewarding mediocrity, the National Assembly, via resolutions, had asked Buhari to do away with the service chiefs, who, it said, had reached their wits' end, as reflected in their inability to arrest the worsening insecurity that had engulfed the country. Rather than removing them, Buhari went ahead to nominate the former service chiefs in a move that apparently shocked Nigerians and asked the National Assembly to treat their confirmation "as a matter of national urgency." Speculations were even rife that the former service chiefs were nominated as ambassadors so as to shield them from trial by the International Criminal Court (ICC). But, the Presidency would have none of that, as it faulted the opposing views, insisting that the transition of the retired military chiefs to ambassadors was normal in decent democratic societies. Notwithstanding the public outrage, the federal legislators approved the nominations of the former service chiefs as ambassadors, thus further walking into the typecast of the National Assembly as a "parliament of eunuchs." (*News Coven*, July 13, 2022).

There were also instances of rowdy sessions by the National Assembly, particularly in 2021. First, the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) was passed amidst rancour and divisions among the federal legislators. Second, the Electoral Bill also pitted them against state governors, with both sides flexing muscles on the direct primary provision contained in the draft bill. The lawmakers were also locked in a heated debate before stepping down the Armed Forces Service Commission Bill, sponsored by Senate Minority Leader, Enyinnaya Abaribe. Besides, the anti-media bill also generated outrage, not only from media practitioners, but also from media proprietors, civil society organisations and other stakeholders, while the federal legislature also came under heavy attack over its move to scrap the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), established by the General Yakubu Gowon regime in 1973 (*Daily Trust*, December 26, 2021). Above all, the Executive arm has been beleaguered over the legislature. The ideal power separation could not obtain in the nascent democracy.

3.4 The Media in Nigeria's Nascent Democracy

There is no gainsaying the fact that the traditional and digital media play critical roles in governance and the political development of any country. Indeed, in

democracies, citizens exercise the liberty of information, discussion and preferences which are effectively communicated through media channels. They provide information, education, entertainment, integration and social interaction in any country by giving insight into the happenings in the society and helping with the development of a nation. The media is also seen as an agent of change instilling new values and behaviours in the society (Nwaolikpe, 2018).

McNair (2011) highlights five functions of the communication media in an ideal-type democratic society. First, it must inform citizens of what is happening around them (what may be called the surveillance or monitoring functions of the media). Second, it must educate the citizens. Third, the media must provide a platform for public political discourse, thus facilitating the function of public opinion and feeding it back to the public from whence it comes. The fourth function of the media is to give publicity to governmental and political institutions. This is the watch dog role of the media. Finally, the media, in democratic societies, serve as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints. He states further that the evolution of the New Media has entrenched speed and wider horizon of reception and interactions among individuals, groups and nationalities. In essence, the place of the mass media in democracy cannot be over-emphasised. It is, no doubt, central to the development of any democracy and democratic system. This has been generally acknowledged in developed societies to the extent that the media has often been described as the fourth Estate of the Realm.

Nigeria, like other democracies, taking into cognisance the role of the media in the advancement of a progressive society, has gone to the extent of giving constitutional backing to it. The 1999 Constitution (as amended) did not only guarantee every Nigerian freedom of expression and to own, establish and operate any media for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, but also gave the responsibility to the media to monitor governance and hold the government accountable to the people (Ilelah, 2021). In giving constitutional backing to the mass media, Section 39(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) expressly states that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to impart ideas and information without interference". The mass media, therefore, has the constitutional rights to freedom of expression and to provide information to the masses, to shapen public opinion and also impart the right information that could mobilise the people to concentrate their efforts in the direction of national growth and development (Constitutional of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), p.23). Okere (1996) observes that statements made by Nigerian leaders since independence, and even before, clearly indicate that the media are expected to endorse and

support official interpretation of the national unity and economic development. According to him, in line with the constitution, leaders of the country are also of the view that the media should be an agent of national development.

Thus, the media has been playing active roles in instituting democratic structures since the inception of Nigeria as a nation state. It also played significant roles in the country's struggles to free itself from the shackles of colonialism, leading to the flag independence which the country secured on October 1, 1960. Although the country had, at one time or the other, witnessed military incursion into its body polity, the mass media also contributed immensely, in conjunction pro-democracy forces, to ensure the enthronement of democracy. According to Santos and Ogoshi (2016), the media did this through critical criticisms of the military juntas, mobilisation of citizens to participate in entrenching democratic values, exposing cases of corruption and making public officers accountable to the people. All these were, however, not without their attendant implications, including promulgation of obnoxious decrees, flagrant violations of the press freedom, closure of media houses, harassment, intimidation, arrest, imprisonment and sometimes, assassination of media practitioners and general cowing the media into submission to the whims and caprices of the military junta.

It must be emphasised that the relationship between the media and government in Nigeria has historically been conflictual and mutually suspicious. As explained, the media has the responsibility to expose possible corruption, waste, inefficiency and negligence on the part of the authorities. Through investigative journalism, scams and scandals can be unearthed, anti-social activities exposed and implementation of the policies and programmes monitored and pursued. The mass media can thus act as an ombudsman on behalf of the people (Sewant, 2002). While government is said to have lots to conceal, the media, in line with its watchdog roles, has lots to report and expose, thus oftentimes leading to what can be termed as a cat-and-mouse relationship between the two vital institutions. Alozieuwa (2012) is, however, of the opinion that a national desire for disengagement from decades of military dictatorship took away the usually critical edge of the Nigerian media once the democratic dispensation got underway. As Ayoade (2005), succinctly puts it, the problem of a post-authoritarian government is the revolution of expectations which tends to result in the revolution of frustrations. However, as the post-transition euphoria gave way to realism, government and the media relapsed into their old animosity, with the initial indifference to certain undemocratic tendencies setting a new ambience, resulting in government becoming too sensitive to criticisms (Alozieuwa, 2012, pp.377-393). This could be said to form the basis for the high and low experiences of the Nigerian media in the discharge of their functions.

Since part of the role of the media is to ensure the establishment of a democratic culture that extends beyond the political system, it must, therefore, hold the government accountable as a way of enthroning a democratic environment. All these, including surveillance, informative and educational functions, have been exhibited by the media in Nigeria with a view to ensuring that government takes responsibility for what it is constitutionally assigned to do. It is also observed that in terms of fighting corruption and bad governance, the media has been at the forefront of arresting the ugly phenomenon and reducing it to the barest minimum.

One other noticeable preoccupation of the Nigerian media is the building of the spirit of compliance among people at all levels in respect of their opinion or ideology. This, to some extent, has helped in advancing social justice, social responsibility and added value to human rights and good governance (Abaga, 2021). Summing it up, Abu (2023) posits that the media is critical to the sustenance of democracy for many reasons, including, information dissemination, citizen education, both for electoral purposes and human rights information, as a link between the governors and the governed and as a link between political parties and the citizens, among other things. The media, regarded as the fourth estate of the realm, also serves as the watchdog, holding elected persons accountable, while also disseminating educating citizens on various issues, including national, legislative, constitutional and political rights, economic and cultural issues as well as policy issues. While not shirking away from the fact that the media, in the discharge of these duties, has, at one time or the other, faced myriad of challenges in the country, it has remained undauntedly consistent in promoting good governance and ensuring a just and egalitarian society.

3.5 Corruption and Nigeria's Democracy

Another major challenge facing Nigeria, particularly in the Fourth Republic, is the issue of corruption. It is widely believed that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian polity to the extent that it has contributed immensely to the stifling of the country's growth and development. Without necessarily being exaggerative, Chinnah (2020, pp.62-74) says corruption has eaten the nucleus of over 99.9 per cent of Nigerians' heart as seen in all sectors, perpetrated by both the rich and the poor in both public and private enterprises in various degrees. While agreeing that the country is indeed blessed with an abundance of natural and human resources, he is, however, of the view that the level of poverty and underdevelopment is so pathetic, with no significant sign of growth and development, all occasioned by corruption which appears to have been so endemic.

Corruption is a universal problem affecting virtually all countries of the world. However, this problem is more

endemic, particularly in Third World countries, including Nigeria where it is widely believed that it has become institutionalised. To scholars, corruption has penetrated all sectors of the socio-economic and political fabrics of the Nigerian society, thus impeding the advancement and denting the image and reputation of the country, with adverse affect on foreign investment flow into the country (Attah, Baba and Haruna, 2019, pp.62-69). Reinforcing this view, Adelabu (2021, pp.1-14) says that the sad development has left devastating consequences in Nigeria, such as slow economic growth, mass poverty and unemployment, political and social instability, a recycled culture of corruption, diminished national prestige and loss of government legitimacy and national assets.

It should, however, be stated that corruption, as a concept, lacks a universally acceptable definition, as it is viewed by various scholars based on their individual perspectives. Added to this is the fact that what is considered as corruption in a particular society or polity may be seen as a normal way of life in another. For instance, while the World Bank (2009) defines corruption as the abuse of public power for private gain, Transparency International (2006) sees it as the abuse of public office for private gain. Whereas to Sen (1999), it is a violation of established rules for personal gains and profits, whereas Osoba (1996, pp.371-386) believes that corruption is made up of anti-social behaviours conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the authorities' capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens. Corroborating Osoba's view, Ogbunwezeh (2005) opines that corruption is the colonization of fraud and the brazen celebration of impunity which pollutes the ethical hygiene of the society. It is said to have undermined all developmental and strategic plans from 1960 to 2019. In fact, corruption, in the words of Ogundiya (2019), is at the centre of the crisis of governance and legitimacy, the establishment of stable democratic order, rule of law and the welfare of Nigerian citizens, while Umaru (2020, pp.109-132) asserts that it is 'highly responsible' for the problems of poverty, hunger, diseases, insurgency, unemployment, kidnappings, cattle rustling and banditry tormenting Nigeria in the 21st century. Corruption indeed permeates virtually all strata of the society, including politics, bureaucracy, judiciary, the police, military, para-military, the media as well as the informal sector. The public office-centred approach to corruption is provided by Nye (1967, as cited by Jiang, 2017, p.21), stating that it is a behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence. This, he adds, includes such behaviours as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of inscriptive

relationship rather than merit) and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources). Morris (2011) categorises corruption into two broad forms: the 'upper level' and 'lower level' corruption, with the former involving presidents, ministers, members of the legislature and other high-ranking officials and the latter comprising civil/public servants.

The Economic and Financial Commission (EFCC) Act, 2004 categorises the following as corruption: money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, looting and any other form of corrupt practices, illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking and child labour, illegal oil bunkering, illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractices, including counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse and dumping of toxic waste and prohibited goods.

Scholars have also identified possible causes of corruption in Nigeria to include organisational culture, clashing moral values, opportunistic factors, inequality in wealth distribution, the extended family culture, lack of or total disregard for ethical standards in both public and private agencies and poor reward system and greed (Graff, 2007, Osoba, 2010, Arowolo, 2011, both cited in Attah, Baba and Haruna, 2019), while its negative consequences at the international, national and individual levels, according to the Lima Declaration (cited by Igbuzor, 2008), include erosion of the moral fabric of the society, violation of the social and economic rights of the poor and the vulnerable, undermining democracy, subversion of the rule of law, retarding development and denial of the benefits of free and open competition.

Corruption is not without its impacts on the Nigerian society. Indeed, to underscore the depth and pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria, the 2021 Transparency International, in its Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranking saw the country dropping five places from the rank of 149 in 2020, scoring 24 out of 100 points, ranking 154 out of the 180 countries surveyed and placing as the second most corrupt country in West Africa (*Premium Times*, January 25, 2022). Though the country has shown a slight improvement in the CPI, it still scores poorly on the corruption index and cases of corruption are still persistently reported in the country through embezzlement of public funds, award of contracts by public officers to friends and families, bribery, fraud, nepotism, ethnicity, rigging of elections, extortion, manipulation of procurement procedures, misappropriation and diversion of funds through manipulation or falsification of financial records (Adelabu, 2021, pp.1-14).

Although corruption had been with Nigeria right from time immemorial, the outset of the Fourth Republic offered a renewed hope of good governance and socio-economic development through a system that would not only de-emphasise corruption and its manifestations but also suppress the activities of corrupt elements, at least,

to a large extent. The republic also ignited the hope of a new democratic dispensation that would promote greater governmental participation and minimise the corrupt activities which were a common phenomenon during the military era. According to Ojo (2006, pp.3-24), with Nigeria's tortuous democratic transition to the fourth republic on May 29, 1999, hopes were high once again about the possibility of the sustenance of democratic values in the country. Upon assumption of office in 1999 as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo showed some enthusiasm towards fighting the menace. In his inaugural speech in on May 29, 1999, Obasanjo had lamented the impact of corruption during the military regime, saying that it had earned the country a very bad image, stressing the need to set Nigeria on a path of accountability and transformation (Enweremadu, 2010; EFCC Annual Report, 2012). In spite of all the promises and assurances, corruption still reared its ugly head, cutting across all strata of the society, but particularly ravaging all the arms of government. For instance, several former governors, ministers and other top government officials were indicted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission for corrupt practices involving embezzlement and diversion of funds, mismanagement and misappropriation of funds and inflation of contracts amongst others. They included for Governors Saminu Turaki (Jigawa), Joshua Dariye (Plateau), Rev. Jolly Nyame (Taraba), Orji Nzor Kalu, James Ibori (Delta), Ayo Fayose (Ekiti), Lucky Igbinedion (Edo), Chimaroke Nnamani (Enugu), Michael Botmang (Plateau), Boni Haruna (Adamawa), adamu Abdullahi (Nasarawa), Atahiru Bafarawa (Sokoto), Muritala Nyako (Adamawa), Diepreye Alamieyeseigha (Bayelsa), Timipre Silva (Bayelsa), Prof. Adenike Grange (former Minister of Health), Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello (former Senator), Gabriel Adukwu (former Minister of Health), Roland Iyayi (former Managing Director of Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria), Kenny Martins (former Chairman of Police Equipment Fund), Femi Fani-Kayode (former Minister of Aviation), Mrs. Cecilia Ibru (former Chief Executive Officer, Oceanic Bank Plc.), Francis Atuche (former Chief Executive Officer, Bank PHB), Jonas Otunla and Ahmed Idris (both former Accountants-General of the Federation), Dr. Bukola Saraki (former Senate President), Mohammed Bello Adoke (former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice), Dr. John Abebe (an in-law to former President Olusegun Obasanjo who bagged seven years imprisonment for forgery and money laundering), among several others. By 2006, 24 governors in the country were already charged with cases of money laundering and award of fraudulent contracts (Cited in Adelabu 2021). The EFCC also unearthed a financial scandal of about N50 million against a former Minister of Education, Professor Fabian Osuji over allocation deals that eventually led to his resignation. Another major case of public corruption in Obasanjo's government was that involving a serving

Inspector-General of Police, Tafa Balogun, resulting in his arrest and arraignment on multiple charges, including using his office to embezzle \$128 million dollars (EFCC Report, 2013). Furthermore, a report of an audit released by the Former Auditor General of Nigeria in 2005 showed loss of about 23 million dollars in the Presidency and National Assembly, with financial frauds that included over-invoicing, payment for jobs not done and inflation of contract figures to release money without approval and due process in 10 major ministries (Adesote and Abimbola, 2012). The judiciary is also not left out of the rampaging corruption. A report by International Commission of Jurists on Nigeria revealed that between 2002 and 2005, no fewer than six judges, including two justices of the Court of Appeal, were removed from office on corruption charges, with a number of other judges still under investigation (International Commission of Jurist in Nigeria, 2007). Interestingly, there had been cases where EFCC chairmen were also alleged of engaging in corrupt practices. In 2012 for instance, the Independent and Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) launched an investigation into the alleged corrupt practices of the controversial former EFCC Chairman, Mrs. Farida Waziri. The ICPC's investigation of Waziri was not unconnected with the several petitions written on her alleged involvement in corrupt practices while in office (*Premium Times*, June 11, 2012). Also in 2020, the Acting Chairman of EFCC, Ibrahim Magu, was arrested by the Department of State Services. The 2016 report of the secret police revealed that Magu was living in a N40 million mansion. Magu was found guilty of action prejudicial to state security – withholding of EFCC files, sabotage, unauthorised removal of EFCC files and acts unbecoming of a police officer (Sahara Reporters, 2020). It is instructive to note that one thing common to all the former EFCC was that controversies trailed either their appointments or performances in office. Curiously, they were all alleged to have abused their office with some doses of corrupt practices. The pioneer chairman of the anti-graft agency, Nuhu Ribadu was not only removed from office but demoted from the rank of Assistant Inspector-General of Police to Commissioner of Police. He was alleged to have been involved in abuse of human rights of suspects, among other things. Instances were cited of the agency under him using a few members of the state Houses of Assembly to impeach Governors Diepreye Alamieyeseigha of Bayelsa State and Joshua Dariye of Plateau State in order to strip them of immunity and pave the way for their prosecution (Ojo, 2020). As regards Ibrahim Lamorde, another EFCC Chairman, it was that one George Uboh had petitioned the Senate, alleging that he failed to remit more than N2.05 trillion, being funds recovered from corrupt leaders. He was also accused of diverting over N1 trillion recovered from the sale of confiscated properties belonging to convicted officials, including the late Diepreye Alamieyeseigha and Tafa

Balogun, a former Inspector-General of Police, although he denied all the allegations (*The Cable*, November 9, 2015, cited in Ojo, 2015).

Nevertheless, added to all these were the cases of monumental corruption at the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). It was revealed during a forensic audit of the commission and subsequent hearing by the House of Representatives the management of NDDC mismanaged the sum of N81.5 billion in five months on frivolous activities such as condolences, community relations, overseas travels, Lassa fever, COVID 19, take home pay, among others. This was in addition to the alleged fraudulent awards of contracts by the commission without any meaningful impact on the people of Nigeria Delta region (Ebiri, 2020, Alkali, 2020). There is no gainsaying the fact that corruption connotes immoral acts. It is also observed that with the endemic nature corruption in Nigeria, the menace appears to have come to stay, with no solution in sight. This is perhaps why Achi (2022) asserts that based on the covert and overt effects of corruption on Nigerians, it is evident that previous methods have failed in checking the scourge, adding, therefore, that since it is in the nature of man to perpetually indulge in material and non-material acquisitions, effective and strong institutional mechanisms should be established and strengthened to enforce codes that will moderate corrupt tendencies within the polity. If the war against corruption must be won, at least, to a large extent, only individuals with proven integrity and unblemished records of public service should be made to lead the fight, while the various anti-graft agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) should be free from bureaucratic encumbrances and undue interference.

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