Poverty, Inequality and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This paper argues that in spite of Nigeria's rich human and abundant mineral resources (particularly oil), a disproportionately highly number of its population lives in abject with over 50% of the wealth concentrated in less than 10% of the total population. Utilizing content analysis spiced with empirical facts and with the aid of Marxist tool of analysis, the paper contends that liberal democracy cannot survive under certain level of national poverty. Thus, the widespread prevalence of poverty in Nigeria has placed major constraints on the country's capacity to consolidate its emerging democracy leading to plethora of challenges. These challenges include: crisis of legitimacy and the rise of militant sub-nationalist agitations, ethno-religious and identity conflicts, corruption and institutional failures, crime and electoral violence, insecurity, injustice and political apathy with far reaching implications for the survival of the democratic system. The paper concludes by aligning its findings with one of the long standing assumption that democracy do not strive in a poverty infested environment and thus attributes the major challenges facing the present democratic experiment in Nigeria to the existence of poverty on a large scale. Therefore, to sustain Nigeria's nascent democracy, the political class must embrace good governance through prudent use of available resources, provision of critical infrastructures and social amenities, conduct of free and fair elections, and the promotion of accountability, transparency and the rule of law.

Key Words: *Poverty, Inequality, Democracy, Democratic consolidation, Challenge*

Introduction

Nigeria is a West African country with about 170 million people (ploch, 2012). It is by far the most populous country in the whole of Africa (Ucha, 2010:48) and host about "one-sixth of the black population in the world" (Chukwuemeka, 2009:405). It is a country that is highly endowed with human and natural resources. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2004 reports that Nigeria's "crude oil reserves were estimated at 24 billion barrels in 2001" (USAID, 2007:1), and it has the 8th largest deposit of natural gas in the world (Chukwuemeka, 2009:405). By 2002, agriculture comprised 30 percent, mining and quarrying 37 percent, services 29 percent and manufacturing 4 percent of GDP (USAID, 2007:1), with over $500 billion in petroleum export since independence (Lewis, 2006).

In spite of the great endowments in both human and natural resources, particularly, the huge oil wealth and revenues, Nigeria still remain a poor country with per capita income average of $350 as at 2003 (USAID, 2007). In the words of Nwaobi, "Nigeria presents a paradox" (Oshewolo, 2010:264) owing to the fact that since independence, majority of its population has remained poor in the midst of abundance. The UNDP has classified the country as 141 poorest nations on human development index. In its report, Nigeria is considered one of the 20th poorest countries in the world with 70% of the population classified as poor and 54.4% living in absolute poverty (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2009:849). Similarly, about 70.2 percent of the Nigerian population lives on less than $1 a day, while 90.8 percent lives on less than $2 a day (Oshewolo, 2010:267). The state poverty in Nigeria is often compounded by the widening inequality between the rich and the poor as "up to 95 percent of this great wealth is controlled by about .01 percent of the population" (Oshewolo, 2010:265). This situation has been clearly highlighted by Oshewolo (2010:267) that the total income earned by the richest 20 percent of the population is 55.7 percent, while the total income earned by the poorest 20 percent is 4.4 percent.

Amis and Rakodi rightly observed that the major impediment to democracy in Africa is poverty. Masses are easily cornered, brainwashed and their right of choices manipulated to a point that some of them are susceptible to bribery and can be used as political thugs to cause confusion, harassment or intimidate an opponent during elections (Maiangwa, 2009:349). Poverty decreases both participation in democratic life and popular support for democracy (Mattes, et al, 2003:35). Since the return to multi-party democracy in 1999, the political space has been the exclusive preserve of the elite as majority of the population have been excluded from the political process. While there seems to be a general consensus that mass poverty could cast a shadow on democratic consolidation, "precisely why poverty undermines democracy, however, has been much less clear" (Mattes, et al 2003:1). Thus, the main focus of this paper is to interrogate the subject of poverty, inequality and the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Conceptual Clarifications

Poverty: the concept of poverty defies a single universally accepted definition. It has come to mean different things to different people; it has been define variously as a humiliating dependence (Narayan et al., 2000:30), lack of multiple resources that lead to hunger and physical deprivation (Eze, 2009:446), "moneylessness" and "powerlessness" (Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010:192), levels of income that are inadequate for well-being (NDRI, 2009:2) among others. However, in recent times attempts have been made to broaden the concept in order to capture its cross-cultural nature as classically demonstrated in the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995:

> Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illnesses; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life… Absolute poverty is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services (Mattes et al, 2003:2).

While most of these manifestations of poverty are rife in Nigeria, there are also compelling evidence to show that the trends are on the rise. Estimates have indicated that about 70% of Nigerians live in absolute poverty (about 84 million people) (AFRODAD, 2005:3). Similarly, Ogwumike and the World Bank 1999-2005 reports clearly shows a rising profile of Nigerian population living below poverty line from 43% in 1994; 66% in 1996 to over 70% in 2004 (Eze, 2009). According to Anger (2010:140) the severity of poverty in Nigeria is equally glaring when other indicators of services and development are considered. The Vision 2010 Committee Report reveals that:
- 50% of Nigerians live below the poverty line.
- Only about 40% have access to safe drinking water;
- About 85% of the urban population lives in single houses with more than 7 occupants on the average.
- Only about 62% of Nigerians have access to primary health care.
- Most Nigerians take less than one-third of the minimum required protein and vitamins (Anger, 2010:140).

In this paper, poverty shall mean a debilitating circumstance in which individuals or groups are socially and economically denied the capacity to meet their basic existential needs in such a manner that not only encumbers them from making meaningful contribution to the socio-economic development of their immediate community, but also disenfranchises them from the political process.

Democratic Consolidation: To fully appreciate the term democratic consolidation particularly in the context in which it is used in this paper, it is necessary to begin first by defining what democracy is all about. The term democracy has not been amenable to a single universally accepted definition. So many people have defined democracy in a way that reflects their experience, culture and value. Even liberal democracy which is the dominant form of democratic practice did not escape this challenge. However to give effective meaning to the term, it is pertinent to approach it from a historical purview. The term democracy is derived from the Greek word "democratia" defined variously as "a political arrangement in which political power is vested in the majority of the citizen" (Asamoa 2004:23); popular power (Adejumobi, 2004:12) among other. However, a more incisive definition was offered by Osaghae:

> as an on-going process influenced by past politico-institutional history of the democratizing society and whose survival depends on its consequence for the people, on how much it is able to better their material conditions in terms of literacy, security of life and property, better health, employment, food security, portable water and rural development, as well as ensure political stability (Olarinmoye, 2010:84).

Having attempted a definition of democracy, it is also pertinent to conceptualize democratic consolidation. According to Beetham, democratic consolidation entails the challenge of making new democracies secure; of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term; and making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression and of building dams against eventual reverse waves (Azeez, 2006:112). Therefore, for democracy to be consolidated it must satisfy certain conditions specified by Omotola as follows:

> popular legitimization, diffusion of democratic values, neutralization of anti-system actors, civilian supremacy over the military, elimination of authoritarian enclaves, party building, organization of functional interest, stabilization of electoral rules, routinization of politics, decentralization of state power, introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, alleviation of poverty and economic stabilization (Nwanegbo and Alumona, 2011:127).

Be that as it may, it suffices to say that democratic consolidation shall in this paper mean, the deliberate and conscious effort by leaders and citizens of a country to develop and build a new democracy to the extent that such democracy satisfy the material, psychological and spiritual needs of a greater number of the concerned population.

Theorizing Poverty and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

To examine the impact of poverty on democracy, it is pertinent to contextualize the study from the framework of certain theoretical formulations. Accordingly, Marxist explanation of capitalism as the main source of poverty and its effects on the political system/superstructure is relevant.

Capitalism for Marx has two dimensions: the first is the use of wage labour which arises only when the owners of the means of production and subsistence meet in the market with the free labour selling his labour. The second has to do with private ownership of means of production, which is different from personal property (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 2007). Marx believes that ownership of means of production is the crucial feature of capitalism which is restricted to the few. The majority of the people who do not own means of production are forced to sell their labour power and thus become wage earners. Marx observed that:

> the man who possess no other property than his labour power must in all conditions of society and culture, be slave of other men, who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can work only with their permission, hence live only with their permission (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:360).

The outcome of this relation of production is the reproduction of poverty and even when the means of production is owned by the state, wage labour will still subsist. An important logic of Marx argument that is relevant to this paper is that capitalism whether local or international inherently breeds poverty: "the existence even in prosperous time of chronic technological unemployment, the destruction of the skilled crafts by new machines, the displacing of skilled by unskilled labour, the sweating of non-industrialized trades …the growth of an unemployable slum-proletariat" (Sabine and Thorson, 1973:713) and the assembling in cities where they had become dependent on starvation wages (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:362) are all building blocks of poverty.

Furthermore, as Marx argues, when the masses become poorer and numerous, the capitalists become fewer and control greater concentration of the means of production (Mbah, 2006:34). The consequence of this pattern of development is the rise of conflict which Marx's himself described as "inherent self-contradiction" that would lead the system to self-destruction (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). This contradiction is usually characterized by conflicts and antagonistic relationships between different segments of the society as germane in Nigeria since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. In Nigeria, poverty and inequality have created immense social tension not only at the horizontal level of 'rich' versus 'poor' but also at the vertical level (between and among the poor themselves) culminating in motley of armed conflicts and political instability.

Poverty and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Crisis of Legitimacy and the Rise of Militant Sub-nationalist Agitations

The return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, after 30 years of military dictatorship and the acceleration of poverty occasioned by the implementation of Structural Adjustment measures in the early 1980s presented an opportunity to test the age long hypotheses that says "democracy does not thrive well in a poverty ridden environment" in Nigeria.

The heady expectation that greeted Nigeria's return to democracy was short-lived as the high expectations placed on the new 'democratic government' of then President Olusegun Obasanjo to reverse or correct the increasing levels of poverty in the country withered with the increasing inability of the government to deliver on the dividends of democracy. The first noticeable element of challenge this presented to the new democracy was the rise in crisis of legitimacy on the new government. Consequently, this created the room for the citizens not only to openly challenge the authority of the ruling elite and the viability of the Nigerian state, but also opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethnic demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule (Metumara, 2010:92).

According to Gurr the process of transition creates threatening uncertainties for some groups and opens up a range of transitory political opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs (Omotola, 2008:55). This situation in Nigeria has led to the proliferation and strengthening of sub-nationalist and militant groups that find expression in such phenomenon as the various faction of militant insurgency in the Niger Delta region, the renewed demand for Biafra spearheaded by the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the incessant ethnic clashes in the middle belt region, the frequent religious disturbances and Sharia-instigated riots in the north…, the increasing notoriety of the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the west (Metumara, 2010:92-3) and the recurring violent attacks by Boko Haran (fundamentalist Islamic militant) in the north resulting in widespread violence across the country. Ginifer and Ismail, (2005:5) puts the number of armed violence outbreaks recorded between 1999 and 2003 at over 50, with Lagos accounting for at least 15 cases of armed violence. Similarly, it has been estimated that between 14,000 and 15,000 Nigerians have died from localized clashes since 1999 (Ploch 2013; U.S. CIRF, 2012). It is to be noted that the activities of these new ethnic militia organizations challenge the legitimacy of the state (Metumara, 2010:96).

The rising tide of militancy and sub-nationalist agitations by different segments of the Nigerian society tend to give credence to one of the clearest findings of empirical political science …that the prospects for sustaining democratic government in a poor society are far lower than in a relatively wealthy one (Mattes et al, 2003:iv). Indeed, Sachs confirm this findings when he avers that democracy cannot thrive in an impoverished country where people live below $1 per day and where stresses of diseases, famine and climatic shock are pervasive (Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010:191). "Civilian population in many parts of the country live in constant state of fear due to" the diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) among various segments of the Nigerian population "including the young, students, vigilantes, militias, armed groups, politicians, and religious movements" (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:2). The crisis of legitimacy rocking the Nigerian state and the growing lack of confidence in the institutions of the state particularly the police and the judiciary has informed the growing numbers of vigilante groups across the country like the Bakassi Boys in the South-east, the OPC in the South-west,

the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) in Borno State among others that are effectively taking over the role of the police and the courts. This dwindling confidence in state institutions has increase the resort to self-help and other informal means of conflict resolution that has made the Nigerian state highly unruly. These tendencies have frustrated socio-economic development, stunted industrialization and foreign investment and undermined democratic consolidation.

Ethno-religious and Identity Conflicts

It is important to note that "poverty creates divisive socio-economic competition. The net effect of this competition is insecurity associated with limited job opportunities and social services" (Metumara, 2010:96). Since Nigeria achieved independence in 1960, it economy has remained largely dualistic and monolithic, [depending] on one primary product for export (Ogunlela, and Ogungbile, 2006:2). This situation has stunted the development of productive forces reinforced by economic wastage, mismanagement and lack of creative use of resources by the political class. Mono-culturalism and the predominant role of the state in development, reduced the country's competitive advantage vis-à-vis other countries of the world, particularly Western nations. The increasing rents and revenues of over $231 billion which accrued to the Nigerian state from 1970-1999 (Ross, 2003:2; Nna and Igwe, 2010:133) as well as the predominance of the state as the "main employer, provider and distributor of resources" (Akokpari, 2008:90) made the control of state power a highly lucrative enterprise. The neo-patrimonial network and prebendalism which flow from this system made the struggle for the control of state power "a do-or-die affair". Ethnic identity is thus transformed into a mobilizing element not only for contesting access to state and oil power within a context of competing and conflicting ethnicity, but also a modality for organizing social forces to resist alienation, extraction and exclusion by the hegemonic coalition of the ethnic elite (Obi, 2001:13).

Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 ethnic conflicts and violence has taken the centre stage in Nigerian politics. Inter and intra-group competition for the highly priced state power and resources made the "forces of identity, particularly ethnicity and religion, became appealing" (Omotola, 2008a:59). This has often resulted in the outbreak of violent conflicts in which many lives have been lost and properties worth millions of Naira (Nigerian currency) destroyed. Some of these conflicts includes the Sagamu crisis in 1999; Ife-Modakeke war in 2000; communal clash over the location of Local Government Headquarter in Agyaragu in 2000; ethnic violence between the Tiv and the Azara origin in Nasarawa State in 2001; the Tiv-Jukun crisis in 2001; the recurrent blood bath between Hausa-Fulani settlers and indigenous people in Plateau State; and the religious imbroglio of 4th May 2004 in Yelwaq, Bauchi State. This orgy of violence has become a permanent feature in the northern states (Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009:12).

The recurrence of ethno-religious violence has remained a fundamental challenge to the Nigerian democratic experiment which can be explained by the relative poverty of the Nigerian elite, leading it to depend on the state and on foreign capital for accumulation purposes (Obi, 2001:14). Their desire to continue to remain in power has often led them to incite conflict by manipulating divisive tendencies like ethnicity and religion for their personal gains.

Social Injustice and Political Apathy

The high level of poverty in Nigeria has promoted in the same measure a high level of inequality, social injustice and consequent political apathy. The rising levels of poverty in Nigeria has been underscored by the National Bureau of Statistics (2007:38) that the number of

people living in poverty increased from 39.07million in 1992 to 70million in 2004. Similarly, the UNDP states that about 83.9 per cent of Nigerians live below two US Dollars a day (Nna & Igwe, 2010: 133). This poverty profile is further complicated by staggering and alarming levels of inequality as highlighted by Oshewolo (2010:267) that 70.2 percent of the Nigerian population lives on less than $1 a day, while 90.8 percent lives on less than $2 a day. The total income earned by the richest 20 percent of the population is 55.7 percent, while the total income earned by the poorest 20 percent is 4.4 percent.

The poverty situation since the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999 included a dimension of powerlessness. This is characterized by dependence on others, and a lack of voice and options. More precisely, analysts conclude that poor people lack information about and access to government (especially the police and courts) and that they see the state as ineffective, irrelevant and corrupt (Mattes, et al, 2003:35). Similarly, Mattes, et al, (2003:35) argues that the poor "are regularly victimized by public officials and encounter higher levels of crime. As a consequence, they are forced to rely on informal networks and associations" for survival. As the state constantly violates the right of the citizen, and denies them social justice including economic opportunity, the people have come to perceive the state as predatory and evil that most be avoided and feared. Thus, Ihonvbere (1994: 43) avers that …the masses in Africa, relate to the state as an exploitative, coercive and alien structure (whose) custodians lack credibility and legitimacy and are thus incapable of mobilizing or leading the people. This underscores the high level of political apathy by significant segments of the Nigerian population and confirms the assertion that poverty decreases both participation in democratic life and popular support for democracy …Given the imperative to satisfy basic survival needs, poor people may have little reason to worry about satisfying supposedly "higher order" needs like self-government, freedom and equality that democracy fulfils" (Mattes, et al, 2003:35).

The implications of limited participation of the people in democracy removes such a system from the realm of true democracy and prevents it from engineering people's centered development as well as the loss of its essence and meaning. Such democratic regime can also easily transform or relapse into autocracy and dictatorship. This is not to talk of other implications for violence, conflicts that are already germane in Nigeria since 1999. In addition, political apathy arising from mass poverty in Nigeria has also hindered and contributed to the stifling of the growth and development of vibrant civil societies as well as the cultivation and growth of democratic value and civic culture.

Corruption and Institutional Failures
Poverty in Nigeria has promoted and encouraged political and other forms of corruption. "The deepening of contradictions under" SAP …"contributed to worsening poverty, unemployment, and hunger" (Obi, 2001:49) and created the need for people to meet their daily existential needs through other means other than the societal acceptable channels. The unbundling of the political space following the exit of the military in 1999, push the gale for people to regain the lost of the decades of military dictatorship in terms of material well being as Obi (2001:49) rightly argues this "fed into the intensification of ethnicity and ethnic struggles over shrinking resources, power and the means of material reproduction".

Public knowledge of the pervasive and subsisting level of corruption and abuse of office in public life (Olorode, 2006:5) in Nigeria is embarrassingly rampant. Kwese, have persuasively argued that corruption and the desire for self advantage have overwhelmed the

ideal of public service and turned public institutions into crucibles of sloth, avarice and mediocrity. Poor leadership, shaggy government policies and poverty continue to expose public servants to control, manipulation and corrupt practices (Oko, 2008:33). Since the dominant source of private wealth is public treasury, looting public treasury will be, and had become, a major way of promoting privatization (Olorode, 2006:5). It will be recalled that in 2003 following the re-election of then President Obasanjo, for a second term, Mr. El Rufai, who became Obasanjo's FCT Minister, accused some members of the National Assembly of demanding bribe from him to facilitate his confirmation as Minister (Olorode, 2006:6). In the same vein, recently, some former state Governors like Alamieyeseigha of Bayelsa State, Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State, Joshua Dariye of Plateau State, Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State, and Idris Abubakar of Kogi State, were arrested and charged to court by EFCC (Eze 2009:448) for various acts of corruption while in office. The long term effect of corruption is the massive weakening and decay of public institutions "through the diffusion of a culture of impunity" (Bach, 2004:2).

Kalu has argued that democracy in Africa is unstable and this is mainly because of absence or weakness of institutions rather than the state (Ojakorotu, 2009:161). Poverty makes it difficult for countries to afford or maintain "state institutions such as quality electoral machinery and a well-resourced legislature …societal institutions such as effective political parties …independent news media and a vibrant web of civil society organizations" (Mattes et al, 2003:38). Since its return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria's democratic institutions "such as the civil society organizations, the judiciary, political parties", and electoral management body have "remained essentially weak in terms of response to the political, economic and social needs of citizens. For instance, electoral institutions created to manage elections have been unable to permit substantial involvement of citizens in the electoral process" (Ojakorotu, 2009:162) as underscored by the massive electoral fraud that characterized the 2003/2004, and the 2007 general elections variously described by both local and international observers as inadequate and below accepted democratic standard.

Institutional weakness and failure has led to high level of disregard for constitutionalism, flagrant abuses of citizens' rights, and the rule by law, not of law (Omotola, 2008b:53). It is dysfunctional institutional that makes it possible for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC's) "attempted to illegally disqualify Abubakar Atiku from contesting the 2007 elections at the instance of the presidency" (Omotola, 2008a:66) as well as the successful disqualification of "some opposition candidates" by INEC "in several states, including Kogi and Adamawa states" (Omotola, 2008a:66-7). It must be noted that institutional failure has also accounted for the proliferation of plethora of ethno-religious intolerance and violent conflicts. It is in obvious recognition of this fact that Allen argues that "it is this weak state that produces politics that makes violence a prime means of political action in Nigeria" (Metumara, 2010:99). These weak state institutions have correspondingly failed to contain rising incidence of violence since 1999.

Furthermore, the monumental failure of the police as state institution to ensure security and maintain law and order across the country is evident by the proliferation of vigilante groups which are effectively taking over the important state role of law enforcement, adjudication and 'dispensation of justice' and at the same time "protect and extort from local communities" (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:2). The persistence of such intractable institutional inadequacies in Nigeria and by extension Africa which Nzongola-Ntalaja described as "malfunctioning of

democracy" (Omotola, 2008b:55) informed the view by a section of Western scholarship "that Africa is not 'mature' for democracy" (Omotola, 2008b: 46.).

Accordingly, Obi (2001:49) has observed that these factors themselves raise fresh problems for the state, especially in the areas of legitimacy and governance and present a formidable challenge to the Nigerian democracy. As Bach (2004:3) painfully notes, the institutions of the Fourth Republic has been unable to cope successfully with the multiplication of violent conflicts across the country. On the whole, corruption and "low degree of political institutionalization has been accompanied by the corresponding erosion of vertical and horizontal accountability ...Not even the resurgence of oversight institutions, such as the parliament, civil society, and the mass media, among others, has been able to "discipline" the democratization processes and the political actors" (Omotola, 2008b:54). Worse still, major political actors hardly operate within the limit of constitutional provisions, as they employ extra-constitutional mechanisms to pursue their selfish interests, including the struggle for power elongation and abuse of power of incumbency to frustrate opposition forces (Omotola, 2008a:58).

Crime, Electoral Violence and Insecurity
Since the return to democracy in 1999, the Nigerian state has retreated from "economy and welfare" provision that "further reduces the limited resources that could be used to address the growing social crises in a context where there are no safety nets" (Obi, 2004:12) in what Olorode (2006:4) described as crisis of poverty and social instability engendered by the Structural Adjustment Programs (now re-christened "economic reforms"). This resulted in what Ojakorotu (2009:163) call personal economic circumstances of unemployment, shortage of food, public safety, lack of clean water, inadequate health care, poor income level, and more, were on the sky high, negative on citizens. While their material conditions have worsened, social and economic advancement which democracy promises have been elusive (Ojakorotu, 2009:171). This has led to high level of frustration because meaningful democracy goes beyond electoralism to include the improvement of the material conditions of the people and the fulfillment of their expectations (Jozana, 1999:1). This resulted into increased "social misery, violence and crime". While "the political class …re-arms its war chest for the next elections" (Obi, 2004:12). Thus, A gun culture and impunity has increasingly been established in Nigeria since 1999, particularly among the young (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:2). SALW are freely available and both regional and state controls are minimal (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:2) leading to a surge in the wave of armed robbery, Kidnapping, abduction, assassination as well as the intensification of armed violence by the different factions of militant in the creeks of the Niger Delta among other forms of social vices. Apart from life lost to arm robbers, recent ethnic militias like the Odua People's Congress, Egbesu Boys, most of which are currently banned, are involved in killing of criminals and opponents in the most gruesome ways (Aduba, 2004:12). These in many cases have resulted in counter-violence by the state in order to "contain mounting social unrest and escalating conflicts" (Obi, 2004:12).

Of particular interest is the challenge of electoral violence to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Omotola (2008a:61) have lamented that "Africa's 'new' democracies have been seriously violated in many ways". He contended that "one outstanding area" of this violation "is the deepening crisis of electoral governance partly reflected in the phenomenon of electoral violence". Lehoucq posits that electoral violence is a form, perhaps the most deadly

form, of electoral fraud, which has been defined as 'clandestine efforts to shape election results' (Omotola, 2008a:56). Electoral violence often stem from electoral fraud and flawed electoral processes as Dahl argued "Africa's bold democratic aspirations are often marred by electoral fraud and other irregularities that deny citizens the right to choose and control their leaders" (Oko, 2008:16). These, apart from eroding "public trust and support for the government" (Oko, 2008:16) have often resulted in large scale violence in Nigeria.

Ojakorotu (2009:181) observes that elections have been badly conducted and managed in Nigeria. Rigging, brigandage and violence are easily identified features of the election process. Electoral violence is prevalent in Nigeria because it is a context where elections are transformed into highly competitive zero sum games (Olarinmoye, 2008:67). Recent manifestations of electoral violence include physical, psychological and structural dimensions, all with the central motive of influencing the electoral process in favour of the perpetrators of the violence (Omotola, 2008:61). However the one that is common in Nigeria is the physical elements which "include assassination of political opponents, arson, looting, shooting, kidnapping and hostage taking, forceful disruption of campaign rallies, armed raids on voting and collating centres, including snatching of ballot papers and boxes at gun point" (Omotola, 2008:55-6). All this have been recorded in the recent elections conducted since 1999. The 2003/2004 as well as the 2007 elections were all marred by irregularities. It has been widely reported how incumbent leaders use state security agents to intimidate voters in order to gain electoral advantage. Similarly, tale of politicians arming the youth to the teeth in order to perpetrate all form of electoral violence in Nigeria has been well documented. In fact, the 2011 general elections adjudged by local and international observers as the most credible, free and fair elections to be conducted in Nigeria and by any civilian regime were not entirely free of irregularities and violence. Electoral fraud and violence have prevented the development of the necessary democratic values and civil culture necessary for democratic consolidation and promoted what Lindberg called "electoral authoritarian regime," where there is limited or no space for opposition parties and activists to operate (Omotola, 2008b:53).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of poverty and inequality in Nigeria is not of recent origin; its history is as old as the history of the inhabitant or people. But its modern manifestations have been tied mostly to the history of Western imperialism. There seems to be a consensus that democracy does not thrive well in an environment infested with poverty but the opportunity to test this hypothesis did not present itself quick enough in Nigeria's history until recently with the reintroduction of democracy in 1999 after three decades of military dictatorship. However, the findings in this paper lend credence to the long standing assumption that democracy do not flourish well in an environment like Nigeria where the rate of poverty is high. So far, India, remain perhaps the only country where this thesis have been proven otherwise with varying degree of challenges. In Nigeria the challenge of poverty to the survival of its nascent democracy has been monumental raising fear of the possibility of democratic reversal if urgent measures are not taken. Therefore, for Nigeria to consolidate its nascent democracy the political class must embrace good governance through prudent use of available resources, provision of social amenities and critical infrastructures, ensure free and fair elections, and promote accountability, transparency and the rule of law.

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