

## Democratic Transition in Nigeria: Towards Understanding the Disguise of International Dynamics Challenging the Fourth Republic Consolidation

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### Abstract

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Several scholars have contributed towards understanding the trends as well as the impact of Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, their arguments for the fourth republic transition centred on internal and international dynamics. This paper uses phenomenal explanation to describe the role and challenges of international dynamics to the fourth republic. It is an attempt to critically examine the hidden objectives of the international promoters of democracy in Nigeria like in many third world or emerging democracies. Thus the paper calls for restructuring of disguising policies of international promoters of democracy which could translate to effective consolidation of democratic transition.

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**Keywords:** Democratic transition; international dynamics; fourth republic; consolidation; Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the countries that experienced a democratic transition during the Third wave, yet find it difficult to consolidate democratic structure. This is why it is so important to understand what kind of challenges the country faces and what needs to be done to make its democratic structures responsive to consolidation. This paper is an attempt to explain the challenges the country faces as result of the hidden objectives from the international dynamic dimension. Nevertheless the effort to describe the nature of democratic transition in Nigeria like in other African country, either from internal or international dynamics in this context must involve historical and critical approach.



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However from either side of the argument, it is certain that there are challenges which hampers consolidation of the transition process.

## **2. Methodology**

Using mainly secondary data, qualitative research design is adopted. It focuses on the complex and nuanced process of the creation and maintenance of meanings that cannot be easily provided by other methods (Creswell, 2007). It is considered suitable for understanding challenges of the disguise of international promoters of democracy in Nigeria. It is “how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world” (Atieno, 2009:3).

## **3. Fourth republic**

Refers to the period within which democratic system of government is practiced for the fourth time. While the first attempt from 1960 was disrupted by military in 1966, the second attempt from 1979 was toppled by the military in 1984; 1993 attempt was aborted at cancellation of Presidential election also by the military. The fourth republic began from 1999 to date.

## **4. Democratic transition**

Essentially Nigeria’s transition particularly the fourth republic transition can be viewed as the spread of democracy from Europe and America to Africa and Nigeria in particular; a way of transferring power from the military to civilians; an instrument for bringing about social, political and economic improvements. Still others perceived the transition to democracy essentially as an arrangement or pact among the elite (IIDEA, 2001). Scholars describe the past four decades as a period of increasing global democratic change (Eichengreen, 2006, Huntington, 1993 and Diamond, 1992). “Third wave Democratization” is first of the two (economic globalization and third wave democratization) stands out aspects of International relations that have experienced increasing transformation (Milner, 2009). Scholars explain internal dynamics as well as international or external dynamics that were responsible for transition to democracy. However to begin with meaning of democratic transition, the “notion implies a passage from non-democratic to a democratic situation” (Ibrahim, 2005: 1). It is in other words democratization, which leads to a more open, more participatory, less authoritarian society. It refers to the “transformation process from a non-democratic regime to a procedural democracy to a substantive democracy, either as the first government in a newly independent country or by replacing authoritarian in an older one” (Diamond, 1992).

While some of the literature discusses the influence of external dynamics in facilitating transitions, several scholarly works on democratic transitions focuses on the internal dynamics that have made these transitions possible. Both discussions have been concerned with how and why democratic transition happened, some are also concerned about the consolidation of democratic structure after the transition. While some countries have made transition to democracy and hold regular interval elections, they have been unable to consolidate the effective democratic governance. “Whereas most studies of democratization have focused on Latin America and southern Europe and latterly on Eastern Europe, Africa has received less attention” (Bratton and walle, 2004; 453).

Following the global spread of democracy around the world, scholars and institutions for democratic assistance (Codeseria, Freedom House, Carter Centre, Overseas Development Institute, Centre for Democracy and Development and Irish Aid etcetera) described how different countries make transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes. They explained how each transition manifest under specific conditions. While others contributed to the understanding of democratic transition and democratic consolidation, some others distinguished democratic government and democratic regime. However while in a generalizing term democratization in Latin America is a reaction to social disintegration, in African context it is attributed to reincarnation of diffusion of modernization (Lechner, 1991; O'Donnell, and Schmitter, 1986 cited in Ibeanu 2007).

While democratic transition can originate through popular demonstration against incumbent authoritarian regime it can also originate through “evolutionary path in which institutional reforms enabled erstwhile authoritarian incumbent and the ruling party to retain power”, such as in Benin and Senegal respectively (Greevy, Ngomo and Vengroff, 2005). The essential attributes of democratic transition included “at the formal level; the establishment of constitutional rule and operation of multi-party system”. At the profound level it “involve socio-political transformation that allows freely elected political rulers and majority of the civil population to impose their supremacy over the ruling oligarchies of the military or civilian ethno-regional cabals”. This is more or less development of internal democratic values which must ensure effective citizenship participation. In other words democratic transition “is about operation and institutionalization of democratic principles, values, structures and processes leading to a fully sustainable democratic form of governance” (Linz and Stephen, 1996). Thus, exhaustibly analyse how democracy can be consolidated after transition. They considered that “democracy is consolidated when it becomes the only game in town”. They discussed consolidation of democracy on three basic issues; attitude, behaviour and constitutionalism. Whereas attitude of the people accept “that democracy is the only better form of government”, behaviourally no group should engage in any serious regime change. Thus constitutionalism included freedom of civil society especially political parties, elections, legislature and judiciary; rule of law, bureaucracy and institutionalized economic society (ibid).

However in the case of Nigeria, Kumar (2005) examines the “transition to civil rule is being dubbed as yet another “pseudo-transition”, that is the incumbent elite responding to pressures for democratization” via promulgation of a number of reforms and even new constitution. He noted the current “transition from military to civilian rule is increasingly viewed as a “patched” one”, just like in the second republic (1979-1983), it is therefore not a process to yield social, political and economic improvements. Meanwhile, Nigerians live the period of ferment, anxiety and uncertainties.

## **5. Internal dynamics of fourth republic democratic transition**

Since idea of democracy is not new to Nigeria, as traced in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. While in the pre-colonial era democracy was not so much in terms of selecting or electing leaders, but in the sense of communal accountability. It has been observed that the country has been in perpetual transition since its amalgamation for British colonial purposes in 1914. The dynamic of colonial era was characterized with nationalists struggle for participation in the running of state

affairs, creation of political parties and the struggle for independence. The post-independence dynamics were thus centred on the expectation to institutionalize the democratic processes, but were however diverted to ethno-religious and regional divides; which consequently led to military rule from 1966-1979 (Obiora, 2005). Even when the 1993 transition was to join the group of third wave countries of the 1990s, it was truncated at cancellation of presidential elections. Nevertheless, the eleven months official program of transition in 1998 which led to the fourth republic was an overwhelming internal consensus and determination of Nigerians to democratize. The internal dynamic of democratization in Nigeria has therefore gone through certain historical and transformational phases.

It is however significant to note that 1993-1999 witnessed an unprecedented military dictatorship leading to the suppression of democratic transition heightened by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections which was presumably and generally believed to be free and fair. Thus Nigerians in their determination to end the military rule and return to democracy strongly opposed to continued military rule and insisted on the country's return to civil democratic rule. This led to arbitrary arrest and detention of politicians some of which have dearly paid with their lives, abuse of human rights, political assassination, extra-judicial killings, closure and seizure of media house and publication. This notwithstanding Nigerians kept their resilience to anti-military and press hard in the struggle for democratic transition. Thus, the political elites in conjunction with the "mass media extensively and effectively employed antimilitary publications and reportage mostly at the risk of losing their lives to expose the evil and misrule of military rule in order to mobilize the civil societies against the military juntas" (Esebonu, 2012: 183). Consequently episodes of mass protest, industrial strife, and civil disturbance across Nigeria by various civil society groups, labour unions and other pro-democracy organizations necessitated transitional programs, which co-incidentally came along side with the death of General Abacha.

## **6. International dynamics of fourth republic democratic transition**

One important international dynamic for transition to democracy is 'snowballing' effects (Huntington, 1993). The transitions to democracy in some countries which often triggers more transition in others particularly within the regions of Eastern Europe and Latin America demonstrated this effect. There is no doubt, Africa has been part of the current global wave of democratization, because the proportion of African countries categorized as not free by Freedom House declined from 59 per cent in 1983 to 35 per cent in 2003 (Buhari, 2015).

One other equally important noticeable international dynamic for democratic transition has been the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, democracy became the dominant and most accepted system of government around the world. That global transition has been aptly captured as the triumph of democracy and the 'most pre-eminent political idea of our time'. The last two decades witnessed growth of strong roots of democracy in Africa. Elections, once so rare, are now so common events. Between 1983 and 1985, only four African countries held regular multiparty elections. But the number of electoral democracies in Africa, according to Freedom House, increased to 10 in 1992/93 then to 18 in 1994/95 and to 24 in

2005/06. According to the *New York Times*, 42 of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa conducted multiparty elections between 1990 and 2002 (ibid).

Promotion of democracy has constituted a formidable part of development assistance since the “late 1980s and early 1990s and the ebbing of the Cold War”. The phenomenon became significant in foreign policy and development assistance of developed democracies to transitional democracies. On this note, the 1990s was characterized with “mushrooming of democracy assistance projects” from the efforts of bilateral and multilateral governments and non-governmental organisations respectively. “However, it is important to note that democracy assistance constitutes only one aspect of a much broader international agenda to support ‘good governance’” (Rakner, Menocal and Fritz, 2007:1).

In attempt to explain international dynamics of democratic transition in Nigeria we tend to gravitate towards how and to what extent international actors participate in promoting democratic transition in Nigeria’s fourth republic. However, one most salient phenomenon in this respect is the “third wave” factor in conjunction with end of the cold war in 1990. Specifically the end of cold war has accelerated the promotion of democratic transition especially by the US who has been considered as the winner of the war. To understand how and to what the extent the international actors contribute to democratic transition in Nigeria, three main categories of involvements of contributions have been identified. These includes, first multilateral institutions which include UN agencies such as UNDP, especially the World Bank and IMF; OECD, European Union. Secondly are bilateral actors, which has been predominantly the role of USA through USAID; and the United Kingdom through DFID. Thirdly are the role of International NGOs such as the American Foundations (Ford, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Carnegie, George Soros), German NGOs include Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Friedrich Hermann Foundation and Heinrich Boll; French NGOs includes CRELU etcetera (Jega, 2007).

Certainly, democratic transition or democratization era is related to Nigeria in a number of ways, the notable ones;-The ideological hegemony, and outsourcing economic opportunities for the countries and MNC for the North. Most certainly the ideological hegemony attempts to spread and promote the ideals of democracy thereby popularizing the values and ideals of democratic struggle, which culminate to pressure on military regimes to liberalize and ultimately made transition to democracy, however amidst the lack of proper principles for democratic governance. The second way interprets how democratic transition is related to Nigeria through the emergence of transnational corporation, particularly, the increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Whereas foreign investors stay away from investment opportunities during the military regimes, more FDI is witnessed at the beginning of 1999 democratic dispensation onwards. Suffice it to say the role of globalization through liberalization in promoting democratic transition has been a salient feature in this era.

## **7. Disguise of international dynamics to Nigeria’s fourth republic**

Perhaps, there are arguments against the role of international actors in promoting democratic transition. It has been noted while other arguments centre on the use of philanthropy to promote socio-cultural imperialism under the guise of promoting democracy, others centre on scepticism regarding the impact of international assistance towards promoting democratic transition (Jega, ibid).

For instance, despite the fact that several scholars especially “hyper globalist” are concern with the advantages of globalization era as an opportunity for the spread of democracy and economic development; for example, “vast numbers of the world's population have been lifted out of extreme poverty as a result of globalization of trade and information over the past half century” (Mishkin, 2006). But the policies therein could not adequately arrest the problems of imperialism and inequality. Likewise, even the proponents of globalization are critical to its economic aspects, e.g. (Stiglitz, 2002) considers “economic collapse in emerging market economy is as a result of opening up of financial market to foreign capital”. “In Defense of globalization” express scepticism concerning financial globalization, emphasizing that “the claims of enormous benefit from free capital are not persuasive” (Baghawati, 2007). In a similar perception;

the US government, working in the interest of international finance capital used its influence on IMF and World Bank to forge a policy blue print that intensify the contradictions in the world economy, widened the gap between rich and poor countries: retard the development of poor countries and open up their economies and cheapen their assets and reward the accomplices of this policy within these countries by selling to them valuable national assets cheaply in the name of privatization (Lamido, 2014).

What is very clear is the fact that these international promoters of democracy in Nigeria like in other “third wave”, “have clearly defined goals and objectives with their philanthropic and international assistance” for democratic transition. While these donors promote democracy they are as well in the context of globalization promoting free market economy and favourable investment opportunities for their multinational corporations. It is noted that the dramatic turn of events after inauguration of the fourth republic in 1999 (Jega, *ibid*), both USAID and USIA reduced their funding to Nigerian NGOs while increasing to American-based NGOs which opened their offices in the capital of Nigeria. This indicates the hidden fact that international donors were more concern in removal of military rulers who were not ready for business with them, than in facilitating the consolidation of democracy in the country.

## **8. Conclusion**

Following the revelations of how the international dynamics challenges smooth experiment of Nigeria’s fourth republic. The paper recommends that international institutions promoting democracy such as World Bank, IMF, MNCs and powerful countries to restructure harsh liberalization policies that are detrimental to developing world democracies such as Nigeria. Perhaps there should be a call for the establishment of international institute for democracy to regulate anti-democratic excess of transnational organizations as it affects under developed countries. Thus there is need for them to avoid disguising under the pretence of promoting democracy to perpetuate their self-centred business and economic interests. There is need for them to guarantee genuine conditions that would promote peace and democracy.

It is suggested that further studies be carried out to focus on internal dynamics that challenges democratic consolidation in Nigeria’s fourth republic such as corruption and party politics.

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