

ELECTORAL DYNAMICS, PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Abstract

Public accountability and good governance have remained central issues in the current social science discourses. This study has consequently examined the relationship among electoral dynamics, public accountability and good governance (in Nigeria). The study was conducted actually on the eve of the Muhammadu Buhari-led All Progressives Congress (APC) government's inauguration in Nigeria. The study found that it is the unpredictability of the interplay among the electoral process, voting behaviour and electoral volatility that generically gives rise to electoral dynamics. It arrived at the conclusion that public accountability and good governance are largely dependent on good public policies. And that invariably, electoral dynamics necessitate the presentation and implementation of such sturdy policies by every representative government. In the context of electoral dynamics therefore, the study recommends the envisioning of a larger picture, to the incoming APC government, whereby it will not need to see who initiated the subsisting economic programmes in the country but who benefits from such initiatives – the voters.

Keywords: Electoral Dynamics, Electoral Process, Voting Behaviour, Electoral Volatility, Public Accountability, Good Governance, Systems Theory

Introduction

Public accountability and good governance have remained central issues in the current social science discourses. How does electoral dynamics relate with these two variables? Actually, it is the uncertainties of electoral dynamics that make this relationship worth strategic scholarly examination. The broad objective of the study therefore, is to examine the relationship among electoral dynamics, public accountability and good governance (in Nigeria). The specific objectives include (i) to examine the relationship between electoral dynamics and public accountability (ii) establish a linkage between electoral dynamics and public accountability (iii) make recommendations on how a positive relationship between electoral dynamics and public accountability may lead to good governance in the current political dispensation in Nigeria. The focus of the paper is on the incoming All Progressives Congress (APC) government in Nigeria, under Muhammadu Buhari as President. The study has adopted a deductive methodology. The theoretical framework is the systems theory.

Conceptual Issues

Electoral Dynamics

To properly conceptualize the term, “electoral dynamics’, there are three other complementary concepts that must be taken into account. These are: the electoral process, voting behaviour and electoral volatility. Hence, according to Elekwa (2008) cited in Idike (2014) the election process (electoral process) relates to the entire cycle, ranging from the provision of voter education to the dissolution of the National Assembly. Furthermore, INEC (2006) in Elekwa (2008) deposes that the different phases of the electoral process include the following:

- (i) Delimitation of electoral boundaries (ii) Registration of voters (iii) Notice of elections (iv) Nomination of candidates (v) Election campaigns (vi) Elections, announcement of results and completion of tribunal sittings (vii) Participation of other organizations and (viii) Resolution of electoral conflicts resulting from the participation of other organizations, people, groups, etc (Idike, 2014).

The electoral process is therefore a complex process that encompasses the good intentions and undesirable outcomes of election administration, particularly in emerging democracies where general elections are often marred by culturally hued electoral malpractices. In the Nigerian case, the electoral process is characterized immensely by a culture of electoral malpractices. Electoral malpractices refer to illegalities committed by government officials responsible for the conduct of elections, political parties, groups or individuals with sinister intention to influence an election, in favour of a candidate or candidates (Ezeani, 2004). Intense electoral malpractices often lead to electoral violence, which in every polity must be considered undesirable ([www. ajhss.org](http://www.ajhss.org)), even as they constitute part of the electoral process (Idike, 2014).

Thus, in conceptual and empirical terms, an electoral process should be distinct from an electoral system, even when their proper conceptualizations actually create the chicken and egg situation. Reynolds, et al (2005) posit that at the most basic level, electoral systems translate the votes cast in a general election into seats won by parties and candidates. The truth is that the electoral process also leads to the same destination. In the opinion of this paper however, the electoral process commences with the announcement of intention to conduct elections, until the elections have been won, and invariably lost (Idike, 2014)

According to Butler and Stokes (1974), quoted in Patel, et al (2014), voting behaviour is a form of political behaviour, characterized at its most basic level as an attempt by the voting public, to use the ballot to achieve things it cares about. Thus, voting behaviour is not determined by the propaganda of government’s apologists. It is not a matter of what government cares about or what the political party in power cares about. Determinants of voting behaviour may be speculated upon and on the bases of

certain precedents largely assumed to be possible in certain directions, but it is the voter, when he beholds the ballot, who says what he cares about.

Electoral volatility is understood as the change in vote shares for individual parties across consecutive elections (Tavits, 2005). It is usually a function of voting behaviour. It is an output of the electoral process. Electoral volatility is not peculiar to any electoral system and is not usually influenced by the level of maturity of the entire political system. It is an inherent attribute of electoral democracy.

Therefore, it is the unpredictability of the interplay among the electoral process, voting behaviour and electoral volatility that generically gives rise to electoral dynamics. According to Kumar (n.d), election these days is more of arithmetic than the electoral chemistry. Electoral arithmetic is dynamic, electoral chemistry is static. In electoral arithmetic, when you add “plus” to “plus” it may simply give you no vote. Hence, the concept of electoral dynamics alludes to the assumption that voters’ preferences for parties change stochastically over time. The idea behind this assumption is that the emergence of new issues at either the national or the local level (a diplomatic crisis, emergence of a new technology with social implications, closure of a local factory, environmental problems, etc.) may shift the voters’ party identification and partisanship (Battaglini, 2014). As Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) put it, political scientists have long recognized that party identification has a dynamic component (Battaglini, 2014).

Public Accountability

In the common or ordinary sense, accountability presupposes that an official or person who has been assigned duties should be held responsible for his/her actions and the consequences emanating from them (Ibietan, 2013). The concept of accountability refers to the relations of power between the conferee and the conferred. Accountability concerns relations of power, since it seeks to establish an obligation by those who hold power, to render account to those on whose account it is held (Friedman and Edigheji, 2006). According to Kwaghga (2012), the concept of accountability carries an undertone of stewardship. Hence one of the most commonplace biblical injunctions is “From whom much is given, much is expected.” Thus, our various roles as people entrusted with one form of societal responsibility or the other entails rendering regular accounts to God of our stewardship on earth. To this extent, accountability is imminent in the social responsibilities of mankind. This represents the generic sense of the term, accountability.

Now, continues Kwaghga (2012), what is accountability in reference to the realm of public authority and/or administration? To begin with, in this instance, the term is usually prefixed with the epithet public; in which case, we define the term public accountability as the firm recognition and acceptance of the act that all public servants (i.e., lesser persons or authority) owe and hold their positions, and everything associated with those positions as trusts for the people who are their masters (higher persons or authority). Those who are expected to render services must account to the people for their successes and failures; and those who are entrusted with the custody and disbursement of public funds must appropriately account to the people for their use (Kwaghga, 2012). Furthermore, Agbodike (2015) highlights that public accountability is the hallmark of

modern democratic governance. Essentially, therefore, public accountability is an ingredient of good governance.

Good Governance

According to Nwokeaku (2014), good governance is a difficult concept, as it is not always easy to define. Hence, it is amenable to different definitions, depending on the perception of the person. Nwokeaku however, further posits:

Generally, the social contract theory, believes that the terrible, violent, unsecured and unpredictable state of nature compelled men to come together, under a social contract, and surrendered their rights to security of personal lives and property to the state. The state is expected to protect the personal lives and property of the citizens, as well as their general welfare. The state, as an amorphous entity, cedes this power to a smaller and proactive agency called the government. Good governance, therefore, includes the processes and products of the government towards the fulfillment of the social contract it has with the people.

Specifically, continues Nwokeaku (2014):

Good governance involves the enthronement of a democratic government, which guarantees equal participation of all citizens in governance, provision, promotion and sustenance of the rule of law; provision and protection of the constitution; promotion and protection of the citizens' fundamental human rights; provision and sustenance of freedom of the press; availability of a transparent, accountable and participatory governance at all levels of government; regular, free and fair elections; as well as provision of basic amenities, such as, portable water, electricity, qualitative education, healthcare delivery, good roads, among others.

According to Chopra (1997), cited in Hossen and Anwar (2011), good governance is a system of governance that is able to identify unambiguously, the basic values of the society, where such values are economic, political and socio-cultural issues, including human rights and pursue these values through an accountable and honest administration. In a general sense therefore, good governance means an ideal governing system that is inevitable for political, economic, social and cultural development of a country. Ideal governing system means the ideal orientation of a state that works best to achieve self-reliance, sustainable development and social justice and the ideal functioning of government that operates most efficiently. The true test of "good" governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (Hossen and Anwar, 2011, fr.slideshare.net). In effect, governance is either good governance or classifiable as negative to the governed.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Systems Theory

Das and Choudhary (1997) cited in Mbah (2014) have explained that the writings of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), a biologist, on the general systems analysis have been of considerable importance in the development of the systems theory. Thus, the abstract part of the systems theory is generally traced to the natural sciences, especially to biology. The theory in its operational part in social sciences is said to have been developed first in anthropology. Consequently, social anthropologists have made significant contribution to the theoretical development of the systems theory. However, the leading political scientists who contributed to the development of this theory are David Easton, Gabriel Almond, William C. Mitchell and Morton A. Kaplan. While Easton and Almond concentrated on its application in the field of national politics, Kaplan applied it in the field of international politics.

Furthermore, David Easton (Easton, 1965) was the first political scientist who systematically developed a framework on the basis of the systems approach for the study of politics instead of merely adapting it from anthropology and sociology. He selected the political system as the basic unit of analysis. Easton's concept of political life is that of "a system of behaviour embedded in an environment, to the influences of which the political system itself is exposed and in turn reacts. Easton's approach to systems is specifically an attempt to describe political systems and the manner in which they cope with stress, their persistence in the face of changing and stable environments, looked at from the point of view of authoritative value allocations. Consequently, political behaviour consists of interactions between the different parts of the system, acting as members of the system (Mbah, 2014).

The political system is defined by Easton as a set of interactions, abstracted from the totality of social behaviour, through which values are authoritatively allocated for society (Schubert and Ahlers, 2011). According to him, it is that system of interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocation of values are made and implemented ([www. publishyourarticles.net](http://www.publishyourarticles.net)). Das and Choudhary (1997) further assert that Easton's definition thus highlights certain key aspects of a political system. In the first place, the political system is just one among other forms of social systems. Second, the political system allocates values by means of policies. Third, their allocations are authoritative. Finally, its authoritative allocations are binding on society as a whole. Easton points out that the meaning of the word, "authoritative" denotes that a policy is clearly authoritative when the feeling prevails that it must or ought to be obeyed, that policies, whether formal or effective, are accepted as binding (Bang, 1998).

In the application of systems theory to this study, it is strongly held that electoral dynamics, public accountability and good governance are all embedded in the input-output component of the systems theory. Success in governance is accordingly determined by the extent to which the party in power influences the input-output processes.

Some Critical and Current Issues

We therefore highlight these critical and current issues as follows. In the first place, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) may provide a virile opposition to the APC government. Since the return of the Nigerian nation in 1999 to the path of representative governance, after a rather long period of intermittent autocratic occupation by military actors, it is the PDP that has been in power. From 1999 to 2015 therefore, the party was in power for sixteen good years. In opposition, the party will not merely be desperate for power, in order to govern; the opposition commentators will be persons that have been in government for a consecutive period of sixteen years, thus when they speak, they will be expressing insiders' viewpoints that are germane to the daily operations of the political system.

In the parliament, (the National Assembly), the PDP politicians will be like godfathers because of their longstanding acquaintance with the official and unofficial rules of the parliamentary business (the parliamentary system, in the context of systems theory). Therefore, when the PDP opposition men decide to create bottlenecks for the new government, they will not lack methodologies. In addition, the PDP may be justified in mounting relentless opposition against the APC, for that was precisely the brand of opposition the party (PDP), while in government, received from the APC. Thus, an input factor that was introduced to the system by the APC is likely to remain operational in the APC-government dispensation.

Secondly, the different PDP regimes have deeply led the country into economic liberalization. This study has identified electoral volatility as a component of electoral dynamics. Economic issues and electoral volatility are usually, positively correlated. Their correlation is often made manifest in the act of economic voting. Tavits (2005) therefore, further highlights:

The perspective of economic voting assumes that voters punish or reward incumbent parties for their success in managing the economy (Kramer 1971; Lewis-Beck 1988; Tufte 1978). Electoral volatility is the result of these individual-level vote shifts as a response to retrospective evaluations of economic performance. The proposition that economic conditions shape election outcomes in the world's democracies is robust (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Cox (1997) has shown, using individual-level data, that the probability of individuals supporting different parties is a function of shifts in economic evaluation. Tucker (2002) argues that not only incumbents feel the consequences of economic voting but also the vote-share for each party changes as a result of economic shocks. The relationship between economic voting and electoral volatility follows the general reasoning of economic voting: Economic hardship can be expected to increase volatility by increasing anti-incumbent votes, undermining existing party loyalties, or, more relevant in the case of young democracies, preventing these loyalties from emerging and encouraging voters to support not only opposition parties, but entirely

new political alternatives. In a positive economic climate, one would expect the punishing effect to decrease as more people support the status quo. As a result, volatility would decrease. In both cases, electoral volatility would be a linear function of the economic performance (www.ajps.org).

The economic liberalization bents of the different PDP regimes, from 1999 to 2005 were in the final analysis meant for the enhancement of the nation's corporate economic value. The assumed potential beneficiaries of the economic liberalization programmes were the voters. Public accountability and good governance are also intended for voters' benefits. Electoral dynamics may punish a government that loses sight of the nexus in all of this. In addition, by his mode of conceding defeat at the elections, (even before the results were formally announced), former President Jonathan had become a political personality with new domestic and international attention. Prior to the announcement of the final results of the polls by the electoral commission, President Jonathan called his major opponent, Retired General Muhammadu Buhari, who was about emerging victorious, and congratulated him on his yet to be announced victory. By this act, the incumbent President was looking at larger political picture for himself and invariably the nation.

Explaining his action, President Jonathan said he was concerned about allowing his personal ambition scuttle a democratic system he helped to nurture, with the likely consequence of a collective tragedy. Mr. Jonathan said that he needed to check his ambition, as the consequences of not doing so may have been dire for not only Nigeria, but also Africa. The ex-President made these remarks during separate meetings with the new ambassadors of France, Senegal and Ethiopia in Nigeria (sunnewsonline.com). He was responding to commendations for his decision to promptly accept defeat after it became clear that General Buhari had won the polls. Democracy has to be nurtured to grow. Strong democratic institutions are the backbone and future of democracy. They must be protected and nurtured. As for me, as a matter of principle, it is always the nation first; Mr. Jonathan said (sunnewsonline.com).

You need to have a nation before you can have an ambition. It should always be the nation first. You don't have to scuttle national progress for personal ambition. Since I assumed duty, I have been involved in quelling political crisis in some African countries and I know what they passed through and what some are still going through. If you scuttle a system for personal ambition, it becomes a collective tragedy; President Jonathan declared (sunnewsonline.com). Mr. Jonathan urged world leaders and international institutions to give their fullest possible support to the incoming administration of Buhari. He also called on all Nigerians to do their utmost best to help the incoming president succeed in leading the country to greater heights of accomplishment ((sunnewsonline.com). The president appealed for patience, understanding and cooperation, which, he said, Mr. Buhari will need to move the country forward to greater heights, peace, security and progress (Jonathan, 2015, www.vanguardngr.com). These are certainly the sentiments of a person who must be given the benefits of the doubts in the context of electoral dynamics.

A critical viewpoint that is canvassed in this paper therefore is that the APC must embrace a systems approach to their responsibilities in governance. In this regard, the party system, its opposition component, the economic system, the foreign relations dimension, the electoral process and all the others, constitute the subsystems that impact on electoral dynamics. The party must not take the behaviour of the Nigerian voter for granted. The new opposition politicians are not foreign nationals. They are also Nigerians. It is these same accountability and good governance, which the APC in opposition promised the voter that the new opposition politicians will be presenting as the aggregation of their own promises. Essentially, when a political system receives garbage from any set of politicians (opposition or non-opposition) it distributes it to all critical stakeholders, inclusive of the party in power.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Public accountability and good governance are therefore largely dependent on good public policies. The scenario occasions an input-output relationship. The demands of electoral dynamics therefore necessitate the presentation and implementation of sturdy public policies. Opposition political parties do not essentially determine public policies. An elected government chooses them (Battaglini, 2014) Elected governments are obligated to the provision of public accountability and good governance. Such governments must accordingly, continuously envision the larger picture. In other words, public accountability and good governance impact positively on electoral dynamics when the party in power continuously envisions the larger political portrait. To guarantee that public accountability and good governance are in place in the Nigerian new dispensation therefore, APC must continuously see the important picture. The party needs to beat President Jonathan at his own game of focusing on this picture.

The APC should not for instance, dismantle the economic liberalization programmes of the PDP. The party should rather bring on board the train of governance, a superior political and administrative work force that would grow and enlarge the contents of the service delivery template of the previous regime. The focus of attention in this regard is accountability. The objective would be to translate the economic liberalization designs of the out-gone government into concrete and verifiable realities. Bojar (2013) has accordingly affirmed that voters, beyond other admittedly important motives, systematically reward good economic performance at the polls. Good economic performance we must highlight is not synonymous with new economic initiatives per regime. In focusing on the larger picture therefore, the APC government will not need to see who initiated the subsisting economic programmes but who benefits from such initiatives – the masses. In the contexts of the larger picture, and electoral dynamics, the ultimate beneficiary of such programmes is the voter.

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