



THE RECURRENCE OF DEMOCRATIC HOKUM IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL HISTORY SINCE 1979: ITS PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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ARTICLE HISTORY

RECEIVED

25-07-2026

ACCEPTED

28-07-2026

PUBLISHED

06-08-2026

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Abstract

This study takes a look at the lingering problems that have plagued Nigerian democracy since 1979, when the nation began her first democratic experiment after thirteen years of military rule. The lingering problems, as contends by the study, influenced Nigeria's democracy into becoming a mere hokum devoid of basic principles of democratic governance. This democratic hokum is said to have increased impunity among the political leadership class, encouraged corruption in governance, trashed human rights and the rule of law, condoned arbitrary arrest, detention and victimization of citizens, suppressed opposition parties and gagged the press, thereby impinging greatly on national development in Nigeria. This study, which adopted a combination of historical and sociological approaches to qualitatively examine the above democratic hokum in Nigerian political history since 1979, contends that the situation is associated with inherit pedagogic implications. Among such pedagogical implications include the fact that democracy seems not to be working efficiently and effectively in Nigeria because of the crop of politicians we have in the country, who lack the required rational and intellectual capacities for grasping the tenets, basic principles and operational methods of true democratic institutions.

It concludes by stressing the need to reform the current democracy in Nigeria to ensure it conforms to the globally accepted standard of democratic practices that can afford Nigerian citizens the opportunity to enjoy dividends of democracy like their counterparts in other parts of the globe. The study recommends, among others, that Nigerians should cultivate the habit of tolerating opposition parties, constructive criticisms, dissenting political views and human right actions as well as accommodate political pluralism.

Keywords: Democracy, democratic hokum, politics, political history, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria began to lay foundation for democratic governance in 1979 when she returned power to democratically elected civilian government after thirteen (13) years of military rule. The country has since then, passed through a motley array of chequered political history which contributed tremendously to shaping the contour of its present day socio-economic and political development. Though the above foundation was shortlived and could not be consolidated, given the supervention of military coup of 1983 which ousted the government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and brought in General Muhammadu Buhari military government, it provided a trajectory for Nigeria's gallant journey toward democratization process in the future. The military rule lasted until 1999 when the military decided to hand over power to civilian government. The 1999 general election which culminated in the emergence of president Olusegun Obasanjo government, enlisted Nigeria into the group of Pro-democracy Nations. Nigeria like her counterparts in other parts of the globe started giving adequate attention to democratic politics as the best form of administrative techniques and qualities (Abdullahi, 2016). Both political leaders and the led became very much aware of the inherent political value and global esteem accorded to democracy as a form of government and consequently began to clamour for it in our own political setting but at the same time show a nauseating unwillingness to pay the necessary sacrifice for the attainment of democratization process. This unwillingness manifests in the form of utter disregard for electoral rules, unwillingness to shun electoral violence, voters intimidation, vote trading, ballot snatching, ballot stuffing, alteration and forging of election results. They also show unwillingness to adhere to tenets and principles of democratic politics, such as political accountability, rule of law, respect for human rights and constitutional provisions, respect for judicial verdicts, transparency and tolerance of opposition parties as well as constructive criticisms. The above are not only necessary for the healthy growth of democracy but also fundamental for the flourishing of good governance in Nigeria (Oji, 2024). No nation can achieve good governance outside the realm of consolidated democratic politics.

As observed by Hoffmann and Patel (2022), democracy in Nigeria has struggled to be fully consolidated due to the country complex political landscape and its entrenched corrupt political class. This corrupt political class, have remained a serious clog in the wheel of democratic governance. The essence of democratic governance is to ensure that individuals and their varied opinions are truly represented, their fundamental rights safeguarded and transition of political power from one political actor to the other peaceful, free and fair, as well as ensure equitable development of the 3 nations. Democracy gives the majority and the minority favourable opportunities to assert themselves, guarantees the wellbeing of every individual by providing certain privileges of individuals within the frame work of the law (Ugwulebo, 2023). It is saddening and disappointing that Nigerian democratic space since 1999 has been dominated by unscrupulous politicians who consistently violate fundamental principles of democratic politics, such as competitive elections, the rule of law, respect for human rights and political freedom (Okoi & Iwara, 2021). Democracy as a system of government is associated with freedom, good governance rule of law and personal liberty (Oke & Ariyo, 2018). In Nigeria's situation, the contrary is the case because there is a perceived absence of freedom of expression, political freedom, social freedom, economic freedom and good governance in our society.

Though Nigeria has different socio-cultural, political and economic settings, democracy as practiced in the country sharply contrast with

what is obtained in developed societies of the world such as U.S.A. Britain, France and Canada. In corroboration of the above, Ebebe and Onyenze (2025) contend that since the formal incorporation of principles of democracy in the Nigeria's constitution in 1999, it has remained drawn into the vortex of ethno-religious crises, political instability, nepotism, leadership crisis, political corruption, insecurity, obnoxious economic policies, human rights abuses and electoral irregularities which tremendously undermine its survival, growth and smooth operation in Nigeria as a form of government. This situation is worsened by the attitude of Nigerian leadership class towards democratic politics. They see politics as "a do or die affair and are therefore set to achieve electoral victory by hook or crook. They forge academic certificates, age and paternity, kill and eliminate perceived strong political opponents, enter into terrible covenant and alliance with powerful juju or deities and swear oaths with juju, Bible or Quran to political godfathers, affirming that they would be releasing to them periodically certain percentage of the National or State revenue as a reward for helping them to achieve electoral victory. All these actions make nonsense of democracy and jeopardize the possibility of good governance and related dividends of democracy in Nigeria. In line with the above, Nkwocha and Offor (2018) remarked that Nigerian political class does not conceive of democracy as an ideal to be cherished, struggled for and defended for the common good.

Today, a lot of evidence abounds to prove that our contemporary political class wears despotic face and handles administrative cum political affairs with imperial and oppressive hands that keep democracy at the bay of our political square. This underlies the reason many concerned Nigerians and rational thinkers alike lament over their conclusion that there is no scintilla of democracy in Nigeria, let alone the concomitant dividends. The current practice is a deceit and a hokum that sharply contrast with the whole panoply of democratic ideals and principles. Our sincere, thoughtful and critical examination of the whole scenario, embody Pedagogical implications for all wellmeaning Nigerians, especially the political class.

A Peep into Nigeria's efforts Towards Democratic Governance Since 1979

Democracy in Nigeria since 1979 has been characterized by an admixture of success and failure. As its structure has remained largely rickety and fragile, it has failed to take a firm foothold on Nigeria political landscape. After thirteen (13) years of military rule (1966 – 1979), a general election was conducted to elect a civilian president in 1979. This general election which led to the emergence of Alhaji Shelu Shagari as the first democratically elected civilian president of Nigeria was the earliest effort towards democratic experimentation in the country. The government of president Shagari, elected under the platform of National Party of Nigeria (NPN), though was short-lived, tried to replicate the American executive presidential model. It marked Nigerian second republic which lasted from 1979 to 1983. The government was eventually aborted by the military coup of 31 December, 1983 (Abdullahi, 2016).

The military coup of 31 December 1983, which brought in the military government of Major General Muhammadu Buhari opened the door for another prolonged period of military rule in Nigeria. His government lasted from 31 December 1983 to August 1985, when he was ousted by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. He made a failed attempt to usher Nigeria into the Third Republic by organizing a general election in June 1993. The election which was won by Chief M.K.O Abiola under the platform of Social Democratic Party (SDP) was annulled by General Babangida on 12 June 1993. The

annulment truncated what would have been Nigeria's third Republic (Ashindorbe & Danjibo, 2022).

Consequent upon the crisis that followed the annulment of the June election, Babangida handed power over to Chief Ernest Shonekan, head of the interim National government on August 1993 under the guise of what he called "stepping aside". The interim National government merely lasted three months and General Sani Abacha brought it to an abrupt end, as he forced Chief Shonekan to surrender power to him. As General Abacha seized power, he ruled from 1993 till his sudden death in 1998 (Chatam house, 2022). General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who took over power following the sudden death of Abacha, initiated a transition to democratic civilian governance. This led to drafting of a new constitution for Nigeria as well as general election in 1999 that marked the beginning of the forth republic (Chatam House, 2022).

The newly drafted constitution of 1999 was ingrained with key democratic features that aid good governance, socio-economic well being of citizens, civil liberty and political accountability in the country. Such key democratic features include, the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution, periodic elections and sundry electoral laws, 5 sovereignty of electorates, judicial independence, separation of powers, well defined federal structure and intergovernmental relationships, checks and balances and so on (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011).

The 1999 constitution in sections 33, 46 also spelt out fundamental rights of citizens, such as freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom of association, freedom to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria, right to life, respect and personal dignity and right to personal liberty (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011). When the 1999 presidential election was conducted on 27 February, it was won by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party. He ruled Nigeria for a period of eight years, 1999–2007, as a result of his re-election in 2003.

In 2007 another general elections were conducted in Nigeria, which produced president Umar Musa Yar'Adua. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), from 1999 consistently controlled the seat of power as Obasanjo was able to transfer power to Yar'Adua, a PDP candidate, in 2007, though the general elections of 2003 and 2007 were described as flawed. President Yar'Adua was said to have publicly acknowledged that the 2007 elections that brought him to power were flawed, and this, according to Abdullahi (2016) prompted him to inaugurate a committee in the National Assembly that would reform the electoral process. Unfortunately, president Yar'Adua died as a result of ill health on May, 2010 and this made the mantle of leadership to fall into the hands of his vice, Mr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who did not relent in continuing from where his deceased predecessor stopped. After completion of the inherited tenure of late Yar'Adua in 2011, Mr Jonathan contested for presidency in the 2011 general elections and won. His winning implied that power was made to remain in the hands of PDP which has continued to rule the country since 1999. President Goodluck Jonathan ruled for four years (from 2011 to 2015) and lost his second term bid to Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2015 general elections. The 2015 general elections were described as the only most peaceful and credible elections conducted in Nigeria since 1999. President Buhari under the All Progressive Congress secured a second tenure in office in 2019 against Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the People's Democratic Party's flag bearer (Alozie, 2023). Buhari's administration introduced a lot of electoral reforms under the Electoral Act of 2022. Through the electoral Act Amendment, there was a reduction of age limits for

presidency, governorships and legislative positions to increase the participation of youths in politics, smart card Readers were introduced for voter accreditation (Bimodal voter Accreditation System, BVAS). This is a biometric verification of voters identities at polling units via facial recognition and finger prints reading which go on simultaneously in different polling units across the country.

Similar to the above, was the introduction of Results Viewing Portal (IREV) which make it possible for the public to view results as they are being uploaded from different 6 polling units. All these technological applications were meant to reduce electoral irregularities and enhance transparency. (BBC News Pidgin, 2022). Despite the above electoral reforms, the administration of Buhari introduced a bad legacy of disregard for the principle of the rule of law, autocratic leadership style and lack of respect for judicial verdicts (Adenuga & Akingbulu, 2023). Political elites that served in his government manifested high level corruption and saw state policies and power as avenues for primitive accumulation of wealth (Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2019). In the general elections of February 25, 2023, the All Progressive Congress Flag bearer, Alhaji Bola Ahmed Tinubu won the presidential seat with Alhaji Shetima, former Governor of Borno state as the vice president amid the much heated controversy of Muslim-Muslim ticket (Alozie, 2023). Tinubu on assumption of office in May 29 2023, rashly announced the withdrawal of oil subsidy without alternative arrangements and due consultations. The aftermath of the oil subsidy withdrawal, which is economic pains and wide spread poverty, have continued to plague the masses and Nigeria's nascent democratic politics till the present year, 2025.

Nigeria's Failed Efforts Towards Achieving Democratic Governance

Admittedly Nigeria has made several efforts and created diverse institutions to strengthen democracy and build a nation that works for all citizens but all those efforts and institutions were democratic experiments that could not yield the much expected dividends. Nigeria political leaders, especially since the fourth republic, have engaged themselves in undue competition either to gain access to political power or retain such through overt and covert means so as to use such to authoritatively allocate state resources (Alozie, 2023). The fierce struggle for power among Nigeria political leaders of various classes has made Nigerian politics become more violent and undemocratic as these leaders hold the views that whosoever controls the power machinery controls every other thing in society. Democracy in Nigeria has been emasculated by political recklessness and desperation of the nation's political gladiators who see winning elective position as "do or die affairs".

Today, Nigeria's democracy has failed to exude the typical flavor for which democracy is known globally because of behavioural dispositions and orientations of Nigerian political leadership which are diametrically opposed to democratic principles and ideals (Ogbulafor, Iwundu, Okoroafor, Chima & Bello, 2018). Since 1999, when the present democratic dispensation began, Nigeria has not been fortunate to get political leaders who are sincerely committed to the pursuit of democratic consolidation, free, fair and credible elections, fiscal federalism, inclusive governance, constitutionalism, rule of law, effective and efficient management of public resources, independence of the judiciary, freedom of press and other ideals of democracy. In corroborating the above, Ogbulafor, Iwundu, Okoroafor, Chima and Bello (2018), observe that from 1999 till date, 7 various governments that ruled the country have not indicated any commitment to democracy and national development. Daily news was replete with cases of hate speeches, corruption, the formation of paralleled organizations, agitations against marginalization,

secession bid and so on. There was an egregious structural vacuum in Nigeria's federal structure created by absence of fiscal federalism. Fiscal federalism is one of the bedrocks of true federalism and a functional democracy. Fiscal federalism, according to Ewatu in Egwuogu and Uhuegbu (2018), demands that each level of government should have adequate resources to perform its functions without appealing to the other levels of government for financial assistance. It explains the fiscal relations between central and lower levels of government (states and local government areas). The persistently worrisome absence of fiscal federalism in Nigeria's democratic politics enfeebles our democratic federalism and makes it unfavourable for grassroots development. This problem, which has lingered till today, paints an ugly picture of Nigeria's democracy as a popular form of government.

Coupled to the above problems is the fact that the elections that produced most of our political leaders at all levels of governance were marred with colossal irregularities (election of president Obasanjo 1999 2003; Yar'Adua 2007; Goodluck, 2011, Buhari 2015, 2019; Tinubu 2023). Failed elections are, no doubt, signs of failed democracy. It is widely held that the linkage between elections and democracy is clear as no better method has been found for the selection of the leadership of a democratically governed society (Yagboyaju, 2015). Elections in Nigeria's democracy have not actually given the electorates the opportunity to determine who will rule over them. Nigerian politicians foist themselves on the electorates through rigging regardless of whether they are accepted or not. Incumbent governments or political leaders with marked poor performance and low democratic credentials do not fear the power of ballot or sovereignty of electorates as the push for their second term bid because of the widely held views that votes do not count in Nigeria. It does not require the services of a prophet or a recondite general survey to know that votes do not count in Nigeria, popular will, choice or ballot power of the electorates are irrelevant in determining who wins in an election in Nigeria's democracy. He, who offers the highest money to INEC and its adhoc staff carries the day, at the tribunal or law court, the highest bidder or the one who offers the biggest bribes to the judges is declared the actual winner of an election. When this happens, the whole struggle and tongue wagging at polling units becomes exercise in futility. When votes fail to count democracy has automatically failed because credible free and fair elections are the soul of democracy.

There is today judicial lawlessness, lack of regard and respect for the constitutional supremacy enshrined in the 1999 constitution. This, no doubt, undermines the rule of law, triggers democratic futility and absurdity as well as promotes constitutional criminality in Nigeria.

The Emergence of Nigerian Brand of Democracy

Nigeria's failed efforts at instituting democratic governance resulted to the emergence of a made-in-Nigeria democracy that sharply contrasts with the popular democracy that is globally adjudged the best form of government because of its inherent benign principles. In fact, it is only a blind man that will fail to quickly discover the current disconnect that exists between the western model of democracy which formed our paradigm and democracy as practiced in Nigerian society today, which lacks the capacity to promote freedom, political pluralism, good governance, national development, accountability and transparency. In corroborating the above, Uhuegbu (2017) remarks that one who begins to assess democracy in Nigeria might begin to doubt the reality of its operation in Nigeria because of the extent to which its ideals have been perverted in the country. Uhuegbu (2017) is right because what is happening currently in our political arena does not in any way lend

credence to the existence of democracy in Nigeria. What is in operation in the country is an ill-fabricated and shabbily fashioned political system falsely regarded as democracy that lacks irreducible principle or characteristics for which real democracy is known. Democracy does not hide itself but is stoutly eloquent, self projecting and intrepid. Among the glaring features of democracy are political competition, periodic and regular free, fair and credible elections, political equality and pluralism, popular consultation, majority decision, respect for human rights, right to dissent, press freedom, popular representation, popular accountability, separation of powers, judicial independence, the rule of law and peoplecentred justice (Uhuegbu, 2017).

One bitter truth to tell about Nigeria's democratic politics today is that its 26 years of undisrupted operation in Nigerian political landscape have been marked by egregious absence most of the features mentioned above. Elections of politicians into diverse governmental positions have failed to be free, fair and credible though periodic and regular any way. Electoral victory had not been on the basis of the sovereignty of electorates but on survival of the fittest. Political power is often gained by violence, thuggery, vote-buying and rigging of elections under the connivance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials, police officers and sometimes army officers. Nigerian politicians as observed by Okoi and Iwara (2021), mainly gain power through nepotism rather than competence and influence votes with food rather than vision, and consolidate power through intimidation or by incentivizing constituents with material gifts which they craftily frame as empowerment, just to win their hearts and make them loyal followers. Electoral malpractices have persisted in Nigeria, undermining the sanctity of elections as veritable means of democratic consolidation (Alozie & Enyiaz, 2021). Democratization process in Nigeria has been constantly besieged by the fundamental problem of lack of free, fair credible and acceptable elections (Olaniyi & Umar 2014).

Similarly, the idea of political equality has remained a mirage as only the party that wins presidential seat at the centre takes the whole political glory and dominates the entire political space. From 1999 to 2015, it was the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that dominated the political scene and all other parties were so emasculated and marginalized that they could not compete favorably with any PDP candidates in any election. Those who succeeded in winning any elective positions under different party platform were made to carpet-cross or defect to PDP, because it was the only political party believed to have a prospect in Nigeria. Hence, the common slogan was "PDP carry go". Opposition parties and their voices were hardly tolerated but were regarded as threats to national unity and the ruling PDP. When the incumbent presidential candidate of PDP (president Jonathan Goodluck) was defeated in the 2015 presidential election by Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC), a party formed by merging of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Alliance for Democracy (AD), Nigeria People's Congress (NPC) and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) to stop the hoity-toity political approach of the PDP, the tide of the political game changed against PDP which now became an opposition party. On assumption of office of the president of Nigeria on 29th May 2015, president Buhari led APC government clamped down on opposition parties more than the out-gone PDP government. His successor, president Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who ascended the presidency on the platform of APC too became desperate to see that all states are ruled by APC governors. This made him to encourage, influence and woo defections of governors from opposition parties to APC. Members of the federal legislatures, senators and house of representative

members are equally influenced and unduly pressurized to join the ruling APC. The same thing is also applicable to states house of assembly members. Criticisms from opposition party members are termed inciting remarks capable of overthrowing the government, in most cases, they are arrested and detained for their critical remarks and dissenting voices against certain programs of Tinubu's government. Example is the former presidential candidate for the African Action Alliance, Omoyele Sowore, who was detained by the Department of State Services (DSS) for his call for "revolution now" protests, which was scheduled for August 5, 2019. He demanded for better governance, provision of security for citizens of Nigeria and eradication of corruption in Nigeria. His actions were construed as plans to overthrow the government of Buhari. After being granted bail by court, the DSS went ahead to arbitrarily arrest him while in court and detain him.

On September 16 2025 the DSS arraigned Sowore in court for posting on August 25, 2025 that president Tinubu went to Brazil and declared that corruption has been eradicated in Nigeria under his watch. Sowore called that "an audacity to be shameless". The government of Tinubu termed his statement false, defamatory and malicious and tended to incite disorder in the country. Besides, Nigeria democracy is a democracy where court order is rarely obeyed by members of the ruling party, political leaders and their agents. There are also arbitrary arrest, detention and punishment of individuals for exercising their fundamental rights. Nigeria operates a democracy where 10 people are constantly intimidated to the extent that they become afraid to speak out or express their individual views on any program of the government. We also have a democracy where a tiny minority known as the cabals rule and influence decision and programs of the government. As observed by Nwaokugha and Abiaku (2017), there is a few political heavy weights in Nigeria and other developing democracies who form the oligarchic nucleus that is responsible for the nation's derailing from the guiding and fundamental principles upon which democracy exists. They seem to be above the law and demonstrate behaviours that project them as being power-drunk and consequently play God in the society. They are killers and destroyers of democratic politics in Nigeria. The above may not be unconnected with the reason behind the existence of autocratic democracy in the country which creates a noticeable disconnect between the leadership class and the masses in terms of responsibility and accountability (Adenuga & Akingbulu, 2023). Autocratic democracy trashes common will and elevates personal will of the elite political leadership, disregards peaceful deliberations and upholds the use of force and threats.

Today, Nigeria has successfully established her own brand of democracy that gags public opinion and expression, democracy that promotes electoral violence, democracy that suppresses political opposition, democracy that fosters one-party system, democracy of electoral rigging, democracy of minority rule and cabals sovereignty, democracy ridden with impunity and democracy of manipulation of social media to project a non-performing government (Amadi & Ekechi, 2019).

While we admit the fact that it takes time for democratic rules to stabilize or develop in a country, it is also pertinent for us to ask how many years will it take a child to grow into full adult or maturity? A child born since 1979 is now a full blown adult with children, all things being equal. Nigeria's democracy being thirty six years old now ought to have been competing favourably with other democracies found in the western world, with majority rule and sovereignty of electorates at its centre.

Nigeria's Brand of Democracy as a Democratic Hokum

The fact that for any form of government to be regarded as democratic, it must meet certain principles or characteristics remains incontrovertible. Outside the realm of some of the scintillating principles or indispensable pillars that define a system of rule and its essence as democratic, which we have briefly examined in one of the subheadings above, a system of government becomes a different thing all together. Any system of government without democratic qualities cannot be called democracy but rather a hokum.

It is worthy of note that amid what could be regarded as years of undisrupted democratic rule in Nigeria, human right abuses, arbitrary arrests and detention of innocent citizens, press gagging as well as suppression of protests against government's non-performance have continued to dominate the nation's political landscape. As observed by Omo-Bare (2025), several developments in Nigeria, since 29 th May, 1999, when. Obasanjo government was officially inaugurated, call to question the government commitment to protecting human rights. Inability to safeguard human rights in any purported democratic setting makes nonsense of that democracy. The case of Odi massacre of 20 th November, 1999. which claimed the lives of over 1000 inhabitants and displaced at least 90 percent of the population of the area is a typical example. The government of Obasanjo neglected democratic approach to the incident of killing of 12 police men by Niger delta militant near Odi, Bayelsa State and resorted to swift use of military to invade the community, killing its defenseless citizens, looting and burning their houses. (Omo-Bare, 2025). The above case and his move for a third term in office portrayed democracy which Obasanjo government so much preached between 1999 and 2007 as a mere democratic hokum. Democratic politics which had prevailed in the nation's political arena since 1999 data does not speak well of our democracy as a giant of Africa. Democracy that endorses disregard for judicial verdicts and injunctions, judicial lawlessness, democracy that promotes elitist impunity, democracy that makes press gagging and suppression of public opinion a norm, democracy that does not tolerate political opposition, dissenting views and peaceful protests are democratic hokum and not real democracies. The presence of democratic hokum is an indicator of the systematic failure in Nigeria's striving for democratic consolidation and good governance system (Okoi & Iwara, 2021). True democracy does not romance with unconstitutionality, illegality and lack of transparency but Nigeria's democracy does and such unholy romance is ensconced within the vortex of democratic hokum.

The suspension of Rivers State governor Siminalayi Fubara and Rivers State House of Assembly members on 18 March 2025 by president Tinubu because of political disputes between Fubara and his predecessor, the FCT minister Nyesom Wike and his loyalists, which the federal government claimed, paralyzed governance in the state, was viewed at as a dirty slap on democracy in Nigeria. The federal government instead of exploring other available crises-resolution approaches went ahead to suspend governor Fubara, and treated Nyesom Wike as a sacred cow. The federal government, which claimed to have drawn a constitutional backing from section 305 of the 1999 constitution, was alleged to have been propelled by the desire to hijack the political power of the state from opposition party to which governor Fubara belonged. Ibok Ette Ibas, a retired vice admiral was appointed as a sole administrator of the state during the period of emergence rule in the state. The above action of the federal government which climaxed in September local government election that produced mainly Wike loyalists as L.G chairmen was described by Dalung (2025), as a direct attack on democracy. The election supervised by the sole administrator Ibok

Ette Ibas was criticized as unconstitutional and as such violated the foundation of Nigeria's 12 democratic principles. He argued that rivers states political structure and democratic integrity may have been severely compromised and the fallout could fuel instability, deepen divisions and erode citizens' trust in governance. Dalung stresses that real democracy cannot thrive without legality and transparency (Dalung, 2025).

No doubt, our political arena is replete with actions that undermine democratic principles and a brazen display of authoritarian and capricious tendencies of unconscionable politicians who trash real democracy in favour of democratic hokum which does the nation's political structure more harm than good.

Effects of Nigeria's Brand of Democracy on National Development

One of the fundamental benefits of democracy is its capacity to guarantee good governance system in terms of providing auspicious and salubrious political environment for maximum realization of the general wellbeing of the citizens. The battered, distorted, craftily fabricated and make-shift form of democracy holding sway in Nigeria is devoid of in-built capacity to engender inherent dividends of democracy and national development in a rapidly globalizing world in which we are. The general wellbeing of the citizens is always at stake whenever democracy is compromised or abused by the unscrupulous elitist political class and this ultimately impinges on national development.

True democracy offers the citizens the opportunity to choose their leaders through free, fair and credible elections (Olusegun, 2023), but pseudo-democracy or democratic hokum gives room for electoral manipulations, which produce representatives who do not reflect the interests and choice of the people. The resultant effect of this is the government that will be formed will not be an accurate expression of the peoples' desire. Nothing facilitates national development like transparency and accountability in governance which true democracy encourages by putting in place systems that hold elected officials accountable for their actions (Olusegun, 2025), but unfortunately, Nigeria's brand of democracy is so enfeebled by corruption that it does not guarantee transparency and accountability in governance. Corruption triggers impunity among political actors and undermines national development striving in Nigeria (Uhuegbu, 2017).

Democratic politics as practiced in Nigeria does not promote social and economic progress because it lacks relevant ingredients that are associated with typical democracies. What Nigeria has are weak democratic institutions that do not work efficiently as to enable the government concentrate on developing policies and put programs into place to address issues such as poverty, unemployment, education, health care delivery system, security of lives and properties of the citizens, and infrastructural development for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the 13 citizens (Olusegun, 2023).

Pedagogic Implications of Nigeria's Democratic Experience Since 1979

Nigeria has passed through a chequered democratic experience since forty six years ago when democracy was first introduced to Nigerian political landscape. The above experience has a lot of lessons to communicate to all Nigerian citizens today.

Firstly, democracy seems not to be working efficiently and effectively in Nigeria because of the crop of politicians we have in the country, who lack the required rational and intellectual capacities for grasping the tenets, basic principles and operational methods of

true democratic institutions. They think that democracy is in nomenclature and not in practice.

Secondly, Nigeria has not really demonstrated enough commitment and readiness to pay the necessary sacrifice required for the consolidation of democracy in the country. The nation's rule by elected civilian presidents is not enough to guarantee the presence of a true democracy in the country.

Thirdly, if democratic principles and institutions, according to Uhuegbu (2017), are held in high esteem, sustainable development, rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of press, civil liberties, accountability, transparency and justice will be guaranteed in Nigeria.

Fourthly, democracy is always associated with good governance. For the fact that Nigeria democracy has remained problematic and weak since many years of its introduction to Nigeria, our crave for good governance has also remained largely illusory or unachievable. Leadership corruption was identified by Nwokeji-Maria (2017), as the major problem hindering Nigerian democratic politics and national development efforts since her independence in 1960. Awusaku and Ugwulebo (2014), vehemently contended few years ago that corruption has become so rife in Nigeria that many people no longer see it as an evil but as a way of life which is practiced to make ends meet.

Fifthly, good visionary and people-orientated leadership can bring about true democracy in Nigeria with its concomitant dividends. Democratic hokum is the product of bad and selfish leadership.

Finally, Nigerian democratic experiments over the years have continued to yield disappointing results, by producing political leaders who do not reflect the popular will or choice of the electorates, hence true representation has continued to be a mirage in all levels of government in Nigeria.

Electoral manipulations that characterized our democracy has continued to put Nigeria's into the sinister hands of cabals who use her to enrich themselves, families and cronies at the expense of national development. Truly credible, free and fair election will certainly help the masses to take back Nigeria.

The Way Forward

To ensure that Nigeria achieve true democracy and show democratic hokum the way out of the country, the paper puts up the following suggestions as the way forward.

1. Nigerians should cultivate the habit of tolerating opposition parties, constructive criticisms, dissenting political views and human right actions as well as accommodate political pluralism. The government should provide a favourable political environment that supports healthy competitions among different political parties and also encourage registration of new political parties to give electorates a wider opportunity to choose their rightful candidates on the days of elections.
2. The electoral body in charge of conducting elections in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should purge itself of corruption, partiality and compromising tendencies and rise up to the challenge of conducting periodic free, fair and credible elections for our nation, Nigeria. To help guarantee INEC independence and neutrality, the government should begin to pay its staff from the consolidated revenue of the nation.
3. Nigerian citizens should form civil liberty organizations, while the existing ones should increase their activism in

order to mount formidable pressure against any undemocratic policies and actions of the government; and also rally together to put up a robust fight against electoral manipulations and human right abuses in the country.

4. Among the debilitating challenges facing our democracy today are judicial corruption and lawlessness as well as corruption among media practitioners. There is the need to ensure independence of the judiciary and press to save them from being working tools in the hands of desperate and unscrupulous Politicians whose deeds derail our nation's journey towards true democracy.
5. Nigerians should see themselves as one nation irrespective of differences in languages, culture, and ethnic groups and avoid politics of division, politics of ethnic domination, lopsided appointments and politics of Muslim or Christian take all, that impinge greatly on Nigeria's democratic politics.
6. The masses or electorates should unite in vision and purpose and form mass movements that will adopt lawful means, especially protests, industrial actions, peaceful demonstrations, press conferences at local and international media, court actions, different social media platforms and so on, to influence the government to conduct free, fair and widely acceptable elections in which peoples' votes will count and which will truly reflect the choice and interests of the people.

Conclusion

Democracy is generally regarded as the best form of government because of its capacity to promote peace, unity and socio-economic progress in a country. For any government to be regarded as democratic, it must possess certain basic principles such as free, fair credible and periodic elections, respect for human rights, rule of laws, sovereignty of electorates, separation of powers, political equality and pluralism, popular consultations, press freedom, right to dissent, popular representation, popular accountability, majority decision and so on. Democratic experiments in Nigeria which began officially in 1979, have glaringly fallen short of some these principles and this has made democracy problematic, autocratic and oppressive instead of protecting the interests of the masses and fostering national development. The first democratic experiment was brought to an end in 1983, given the military take-over of rule from President Shehu Shagari, the then elected civilian president of Nigeria. The military continued till 1999 when they decided to hand over power to elected civilian government. From 1999 till today, Nigeria has enjoyed twenty six years of uninterrupted rule by elected civilian government. Unfortunately, this period, which supposed to be a period of uninterrupted true democracy with a galaxy of democratic dividends, was characterized by the emergence of Nigeria's brand of democracy which is a democratic hokum devoid of basic principles of democratic governance.

The current practice, which is a hokum and not true democracy, should be reformed to conform to the globally accepted standard of democratic practices so that Nigerian citizens will begin to enjoy dividends of democracy like their counterparts in other parts of the globe.

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