

## **Democracy, Good Governance and Press Freedom in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria**

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The relationship amongst Democracy, good governance, and Press freedom cannot be over emphasized. This is because they are inter-related as the practice of one brings about the effectiveness of the other. In Nigeria, precisely in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is however unfortunate that Democracy is not practiced in a practical manner and its seen as being a theoretical phenomenon. When democracy is not properly practiced, there won't be room for good governance freedom of the press and through press freedom the excesses of government can be checkmated. Using qualitative sources of data, the paper reveals that democracy has even in advanced countries not been practiced freely and fairly, though it is not dominated by many flaws as it is the case in Nigeria. This has prevented good governance from taking place. The paper established the link between, Democracy, Good governance and Press freedom in Nigeria and is of the opinion that good governance ensures democratic norms and practices while democracy offers the best prospects for good governance. However, democratic governance does not imply press freedom and good governance. It however, follows that good governance and press freedom is enhanced by democracy. The paper clearly demonstrates that efforts to attain good governance and freedom of the press in Nigeria has failed and concludes by way of recommendation that all the apparatus that can be used to promote good governance and press freedom be employed towards a lasting and effective democracy.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Good Governance, Press Freedom, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Nigeria

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### **Introduction**

The relationship between Democracy, Good Governance and Press freedom cannot be overemphasized as all three are interrelated because the existence of one brings about the establishment of the other and thus the achievement of the third variable. Here the variables in question are then explained sequentially being that democracy will bring about good governance and that governance will bring about freedom of the press. Though in some cases the reverse is the case in the sense that with the existence of press freedom, good governance can be achieved through the applauding of projects carried out by positive governments and the exposing of uncompleted

projects or projects that are mentioned to only exist on paper by negative governments. This will make positive governments do more and discourage negative governments from carrying out their actions, hence the achievement of good governance.

Democracy, good governance and press freedom are in a state of anarchy especially among the underdeveloped Countries, though a few developed countries are not left out. The manner by which the leaders carry out government activities is very discouraging and does not allow people participate in the process of governance. Abraham Lincoln defined “Democracy as a government of the people, by the people and for the people” but unfortunately the opposite is the case in the case of third world countries such as Nigeria. Indeed, the global thought on Africa especially as rained by western media and practitioners is one of a political dungeon: a tale of chaos, anarchy, genocide and wars. The stereotype constructed is that Africa is a region that works through a reverse logic of political disorder and irrationality, where politics is about barefaced stealing and a game of the belly, where political motion is of oscillation and retreat, rather than any advance or progress, and where the law of the „jungle? subsists, the dictates of the constitution. (Thomson, 2004)

Press freedom has become one of the major challenges of Journalism practice in the world today most especially in Africa and specifically in Nigeria. Press freedom is the right of the mass media to communicate ideas, opinions and information. It has to do with the right of the media to criticize the political, economic and social institution of the country (Asemah, 2011).

The paper thus examines the concepts of Democracy, Good governance and Press freedom considering their various challenges; the relationship amongst the concepts; theoretical framework; a summary, conclusion and recommendations.

### **The Concept of Democracy**

Abraham Lincoln has defined Democracy as the Government of the people for the people and by the people. Unfortunately, that definition is not practicably applicable in the activities carried out in Africa, most specifically, Nigeria. The major characteristics of democracy include the existence of freedom of political, social and economic choice and stability in the political system where periodic elections are held. The presence of a free and fair election is thus inevitable. That an election is 'free' if people are allowed to vote their choices without any hindrance, oppression or influence and it is 'fair' when the voices of the majority emerges he winner when the results are announced. This then means that people's opinion matters in a democracy and it is in fact the determining factor in any true democracy. Many countries of the world now practice democracy as it is seen as the best form of governance. unfortunately, its practice is in theory as most governments only do as they wish without following processes and as such rule their subjects instead of leading them. The practice of dictatorship has now become rampant in democratic states. Democracy cannot be enhanced and the various arms of government adequately work well considering the high

level of witch-hunting of the legislature by the executive through frequent removal of members of the legislature. (Waldt, 2001).

### **The Concept of Good Governance**

The concept of governance is one that cannot be overemphasized when it comes to Democracy and press freedom. It seems to have a way of linking the two together. It is a determining factor for measurement of the performance of the other two concepts. Governance has links with participatory development, human rights and democratization. As a policy framework, good governance imposes demands on policy makers in their exercise of power. According to (Boeninger, 1991) it comprises of; An effective state, i.e, one that possesses an enabling political and legal environment for economic growth and equitable distribution; Civil societies and communities that is present in the policy making process, with the state facilitating political and social interaction, and fostering societal cohesion and stability and a private sector that is allowed to play an independent role in the economy. Some scholars are of the opinion that governance can be subsumed into two broad categories. On the one hand are those who view governance in a technical sense. In this case, the concept borrows directly from its usage in the corporate world. It implies the efficient management of state institutions. Issues of public accountability, transparency in government procedures of rule of law, and public sector management are emphasized. This is the restricted view of governance adopted by the World Bank (Adejumbi, 2004). The essence of this approach to governance is to instill discipline in the state and its institutions for economic purposes. The second perspective to governance is a holistic one that transcends the state and its institutions. Governance is seen as the process of steering state and society towards the realization of collective goals. It points to the dynamic but problematic and often times, contradictory relationship between the state and society (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

### **The Concept of Press Freedom**

The freedom of the press is one of the major pillars of a long and lasting democracy. It is a prerequisite for the success of democratic practice. The ability to allow for free flow of genuine information is what I term as press freedom. It has however been defined by other scholars in several ways. For instance, According to (Sambe and Ikoni, 2004), “press freedom focuses its attention on the unrestrained liberty to write or publish information for the consumption of the public”. (Agee et al 1979) define press freedom as “freedom to print without prior restraint”. This implies that press freedom is the liberty given to a journalist to be free to write without fear or favour. Many wrongly believe that press freedom is all about introverted freedom of journalists to print or air whatever pleases them. But that is not so the real situation is that journalist are professionals saddled with the responsibility of gathering, analysing and presenting of news of the day to the people. Therefore, Journalists require commendation and a bit of respect.

### **Democracy, Good Governance and Press Freedom in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria**

The terms democracy, good governance and press freedom have become universal terms used to explain the issues concerning democratic movements in Nigeria. According to (Ake 2000) Democracy is a concept that is uncharacteristically precise. It simply connotes popular power. It is not about delegated authority, or representative governance, but about popular expression of power by the people.

Democracy being the best form of government as considered by majority of human beings is actually the opposite of what it states, most especially in Nigeria. For a developing country such as Nigeria, democracy seems to be difficult to manage considering what it has given birth to in terms of negative impacts in the society such as high rate of corruption, embezzlement, devaluation of the nation's currency, high rate of poverty etc. These issues are so prevalent in Nigeria so much so that even though it is said that the worst democracy is better than the best military dictatorship, the reverse is the case. Democracy, however is like a plant that needs time and commitment to grow to full active capacity in expressing the real views of what it entails.

Good governance is a term always used to indicate the positive impacts of democracy. The question now is whether or not democracy is similar to good governance. The answer to this question is certainly, yes. Democracy certainly will lead to good governance and good governance leads to democratic values being attained. The problem however is that the reverse is the case in a country like Nigeria. We have no regards for democratic processes and as such cannot attain good governance. Take for instance, the recently concluded election was marred by a lot of abnormalities that does not portray democratic principles and values.

Press freedom cannot be discussed without good governance and true democracy. Democracy actually brings about press freedom thus bringing about good governance. As earlier captured, the two are interdependent of each other in the sense that good governance will bring about press freedom as a government that is doing the right thing will always want it captured by the press and as such not give it any form of restrictions. However, a government that is not doing the right thing will make sure that press freedom does not exist so that they don't get exposed. So also, press freedom can bring about good governance in the sense that when the press reports or informs the public of a performing government, it will encourage the government to do more as they are being applauded by their citizens. So also on the other hand when a government is reported by the press to be performing poorly, it may encourage it to buckle up and as such lead to good governance.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria unfortunately does not have any of these terms carried out as it should be. Firstly, democracy is not practiced as it should as the rule of law is not adhered to. The rich are the powerful and always get away with what they want. The issues of embezzlement, corruption, nepotism, insecurity, lack of political freedom etc are the subject of democracy in Nigeria. Secondly, good governance has also not been practiced in Nigeria as one can only record a few rear

cases of good governance carried out either at the level of infrastructure or human capacity. Rear cases such as Governor Babagana Zulum of Borno state in his first tenure depicts dividends of democracy to the people which suggests good governance by the provision of both infrastructural and human capacity building in the state. Lastly, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria does not promote freedom of the press. Cases of journalists being either silenced or locked up for practicing their profession and the general victimization of journalists by the political elites. Today, even the television stations in Nigeria are aligned to either one political setting to another or to one ethnic group or the other. Precisely, one could actually tell amongst the TVC, Channels TV, Arise TV and AIT which political party each had interest on during the last general elections. The lack of objectivity by some journalist in the discharge of their duties has also contributed to lack of press freedom. The idea that suggests they can be bought makes them more vulnerable.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study, we shall make use of the structural functionalist theory in relating the concept of Democracy, good governance and press freedom in the Nigeria. The theory suggests that the structure has to function collaboratively to achieve a whole. Here as single sectors, performance will be enhanced which will lead to specialization. The applicability of the theory to the concepts of democracy, good governance and press freedom will initiate the link that exists between the government and its citizens. There is then differentiation and specialization in the society which will require for integration. For good governance and press freedom in a democratic system to exist, one has to look at the effectiveness of the democratic structures. Structures such as INEC, National Assembly, Judiciary etc have to be coordinated and collaborated to enhance harmony amongst them which will facilitate good governance and good governance ensure press freedom in Nigeria. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, Functionalism is for the bourgeoisies or the elites in the society as in most cases they are seen to be above the law and even the democratic institutions and as such democracy is one-sided. They only enrich themselves and as such whatever policies they initiate is to sooth the ruling class and not the masses. That way, you will realise that good governance cannot be achieved talk more of press freedom. A television station such as NTA for instance can never report anything negative about the Nigerian government because it is owned and thus controlled by the government.

### **Summary**

The paper was able to examine the concepts of democracy, good governance and press freedom and established the link amongst them in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was observed that that does not exist in Nigeria. That the achievement of any one of them to some extent relies on the other. The paper adopted the structural functionalist theory and recommended the collaboration of each of these specialised democratic institutions for the actualisation of good governance and press freedom.

## Conclusion

True democracy when practiced will enhance good governance and press freedom and vice-versa, in the same vein the opposite will be the case if any of this is not allowed to function appropriately. Democratic institutions in harmony can achieve good governance and press freedom. Though there is no part of the world where you have 100% press freedom because there are external and internal bodies which often regulates press activities in Nigeria such as legal, economic, political, secrecy and direct censorship/force restrict the full performance of press in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

- i. Government should apply public resources effectively to generate public goods. This will enhance good governance and press freedom.
- ii. There should be a structure of institutional incentives that rewards discipline and service to the community and nation at large.
- iii. There should be mechanisms that ensure that corrupt practices at all levels should be severely punished. The punishment for embezzlement for instance should be death as practiced in some other countries of the world
- iv. The rule of law should completely be adhered to, to ensure effective adherence to good governance, democracy and press freedom. The three tenets as propounded by Prof. A.V Dicey of supremacy of the law, Equality before the law and Liberty of citizens will enhance the achievement of the three concepts in question.
- v. Since press freedom is granted in the constitution of Nigeria, there should be statutory backup vi. In order not to hinder press freedom, journalist in Nigeria should be allowed to have access to government sources and records.

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