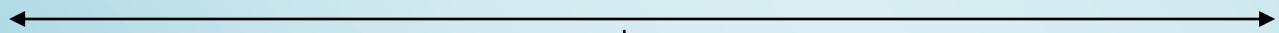


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BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY VIS A VIS KARL POPPER'S DEMOCRATIC MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is the system of government that permits or allows the citizens to participate in governance and it remains the best among all the systems of government. It is paradoxical that despite centuries of democratic governance in various parts of the globe, there is currently no perfect democracy in many countries and the scholars of democracy (Minimalist and Maximalist) have engaged themselves in critical debate on the way forward. The paper examines their positions and argues in conclusion that minimalist scholars especially Karl Popper has contributed much for sustainable democracy and his ideas remain relevant for democratic culture in Nigeria.

THE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

Democracy is a system of government that permits or allows the citizens to participate in governance. Theoretically, democracy has to do with the governance system by the people for the people, as opposed to rule by one despot (Autocracy), or a few (Oligarchy). It was known that Athens in particular "is widely taken or known as the birthplace of Western democracy",¹. It is paradoxical that despite centuries of democratic governance in various parts of the globe,, there is currently no perfect democracy in many countries and the scholars of democracy have engaged themselves in critical debate on the way forward.

Considering the minimalist democratic theory drawn from several thinkers such as Przeworski, Joseph Schumpeter, Karl Popper, William Riker and Russell Hardin, these scholars contributed much for democracy. Przeworski considered minimalist democracy as "a system in which parties lose elections".² For him the value of election centres on the peaceful transfer of power enacted through regular elections. Then Schumpeter argued critically that democracy does not entail rule by the people but it is "a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a competitive struggle for the votes of the citizens".³ For Popper, democracies centre on a system wherein one administration can be replaced by another without bloodshed through proper and genuine elections and the idea of critical vigilance. He advocated for elections

rather than sovereignty, stressing that the imperfections and uncertainties of elections are preferable to the prospect of tyranny found within sovereignty.

The above views have been challenged by maximalists. So in criticizing the minimalist conception, it is argued critically that without effective guarantees of civil liberties, elections do not constitute democracy and that a procedural minimum of understanding democracy must include not only elections but reasonably wider guarantees of basic civil rights like the freedom of association, speech and assembly. Beyond the procedural electoral minimum, maximalist scholars of democracy have identified more characteristics that must be present for these basic procedures to meaningfully constitute a democracy. For the well functioning of multiparty democracy, Robert Dahl advocated for three essential conditions:

(A) Extensive competition by political candidates and their groups or parties. (B) Political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections and (C) Civil and political liberties that enable citizens to express themselves without fear of punishment.⁴

Larry Diamond a maximalist saw democracy as encompassing that:

Not only a civilian, constitutional, multiparty regime, with regular free and fair elections and universal suffrage but organizational and informational pluralism; extensive civil liberties (freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations). Effective power for elected officials; and functional autonomy for legislative, executive and judicial organs of government⁵

Though despite the differences be it in minimalists or maximalist, be it in terms of institutions, processes or outcomes, one can argue that there are two basic assumptions of democracy that all people are equal and that all people are free (liberty). It is evident that certain minimum conditions must be met in order that a system would be taken as democratic. These include, among others and in no particular order, respect for human rights and the rule of law; collective deliberation, choice and participation; representative and accountable government. Democracy emphasizes much that values should not be forced upon any people, and stipulates and affirms liberty, the separation of powers, majority rule and the sovereignty of the people. It is very important to note that economic condition of the state can grow when governance is sufficiently democratic.

Democracy is functional when there are transparent and accountable institutions (electoral bodies, parliaments, human rights institutions and the judiciary) national and local capacity to formulate people - centered policies and legal and regulatory frameworks. Free, fair and regular elections are the basis of political legitimacy. Transparent legal and regulatory frameworks are necessary conditions for functional democracy. Democratic governance with all these necessary conditions enhances economic growth. Democracy holds more potential for enhancing and promoting human development than any other system of government.

Democracy paves opportunities for common good and enhances capabilities of the poor and underprivileged. It has intrinsic human development value. Democratic governance has three distinct advantages over authoritarian regimes. Firstly, democracies are better able to manage conflicts and avoid violent political change because they provide opportunities for the people to participate in the political process of the country. Secondly, democracies are better able to forestall threats to human survival because of the checks by the opposition parties, uncensored criticism of public policies and the fear of being voted out of office. Thirdly, democracies lead to greater awareness of social development concerns, including health care and the rights of women and minorities. Human development performance can be enhanced through the quality of a democracy including devolution of power and resources, protection of human rights, removal of corruption and speeding up of justice.⁶

Among the types of democracy, liberal democracy is regarded as the best. Francis Fukuyama represents a Universalist position on liberal democracy as the model of democratic government practicable anywhere and in fact the most desirable to embrace. With the collapse of communism and the "victorious" emergence of the United States of America from the Cold War, Fukuyama declared the liberal state as universally victorious⁷. The Universalist thinking that liberal democracy is the best implies that Nigeria cannot but adopt liberal democracy. Many countries have failed in their democratic governance due to imperfect institutions.

POPPER'S DEMOCRATIC MODEL

The important point in the concept of democracy in Popper's ideas is the peaceful removal of tyrants and he argued that democracy is not the rule of people over people or the governing of the majority of people over all people rather democracy was a system which prevented damage brought by bad rulers in politics through peaceful changes. Popper's main aim in his own democratic model is to prevent absolute governing, on the one hand, and to maintain liberal democratic government as powerful political system. He advocated for the

government that would prevent dictatorship and absolute power. Popper raised a question: "What is not democracy?". Firstly, he criticized the classic question of politics that was designed by Plato. He argued vehemently that the question "who has to rule?" was a big mistake and could lead us to a bad destiny in politics. Responding to this question is not useful also; the assumption of the questioner is based on the fact that we cannot control government. Based on this, they believe in the absolute power and sovereignty of governments and not believing in controlling governments. Popper was interested in the ways to control rulers. Popper criticized historicism in the political thinking because it leads to social violence. Historians claim that history has the first and final destiny and we can discover and with the historical laws we foresee the future peaceful removal of rulers. He argued that unlimited freedom is against liberty and it has negative consequences which he called a paradox of freedom.

In democracy and politics he formulated these and similar questions and provided an answer to the question: How can the government be made useful?" Moreover, he presented prediction as a scientific work rather than a prophecy as was the usual practice of historicism. Social scientists also have to predict the abuse of power by the politicians and establish social institutions and democratic traditions that would prevent any abuse or guarantee that if abuse cannot be prevented or at least is kept within the minimum limits possible. Furthermore Popper re-structured the old political question to a new one by stating "How can we organize political institutions such that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?". Based on this question we have two assumptions. Firstly, there is a need for a mechanism of checks and balances for the performance of the government. Secondly, politicians in general abuse the political power, therefore we have to check their performance and control them as we can.

The important issue in the democratic concept of Popper's model is that the theory of democracy is not based upon the principle that the majority should rule rather the various equalitarian methods of democratic control such as general elections, critical method and representative government are to be considered as no more than well - tried and in the presence of a widespread traditional distrust of tyranny, reasonably effective institutional safeguards against tyranny, always open to improvement and even providing methods for their improvement.¹⁰

To comply with the liberal democrat's political system, the political system should have more than one political party. For Giddens we can divide democratic systems into three parts in terms of political participation: representative multi-party democracy, one-party representative democracy and participatory or direct democracy.¹¹ Giddens with many liberal thinkers believed that the representative multi-party democratic system

could be taken as liberal democratic system and of the one-party representative system as non-liberal democratic one and then compliance with the liberal democratic political system entails presence of more than one party. The liberal democratic systems may be two-party democratic systems or multi-party democratic ones. Popper advocated or was interested in two-party democratic systems, in contradiction to multi-party democratic systems. In the two-party democratic systems we can do peaceful political changes or peaceful removal of rulers in totality. Popper was interested in making the government to be a responder.

In two-party systems we can see complete peaceful changes and removal of rulers. Popper's aim in democracy was to ginger government to be responsible. The two-party system is more effective than one-party system. According to Popper the law in multi-party system is bad-less bad law while that in the two-party system is good - better law. Therefore, in two-party system we progress step by step to the best and even to further good.

It is very important to note that the two-party system has no choices except to be a responsible government. The main aim of Popper in designing a democratic model was to keep government democratic and powerful. His idea was to prevent the incidence of dictatorship or absolute government. Popper advocated for a night-watchman government which protects people. He devoted attention to creating a theory that is secure, powerful and democratic.

For functional democracy in Nigeria the basic assumption of democracy with the democratic model of Popper has a remarkable capacity to help for Nigeria to be both democratic and powerful. Thus if we normatively move towards the two-party democratic system with Popper's democratic theory evidently Nigerian democracy would be better. Apart from the basic assumptions of democracy, Popper's democratic theory offers the following; equality and voter turnout, political stability, human development and economic growth.

EQUALITY, VOTER TURNOUT AND POLITICAL STABILITY

For Popper, democracy offers equality of persons before the law and not that people are equal in everything on earth. It would offer opportunity for people to participate in decision-making (critical method) and also in election without being marginalized. The issue of equality grants proper turnout of voters during elections. Genuine election radiates the consent of the people and this cannot be if people are not equal. As it offers opportunity for mass participation in decision-making the issue of ethnic and religious conflicts would be resolved. Karl Popper preferred and argued for the peaceful removal of rulers and this reduces political

uncertainty and instability. Through critical method citizens are offered opportunity to change policies and through elections they are given regular chance to change those in power. Furthermore, the idea of political stability which Karl Popper's democracy could offer reduces terrorism, corruption and the issue of refugee and helps for economic and human development.

HUMAN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Democracies especially Karl Popper's democratic theory has the potential to put in place qualitative education and other benefits than dictatorships. It grants freedom and rights of the citizens and then paves way for industrial revolution. For democracy in Nigeria to be functional the following should be appreciated and adopted; the democratic theory of Popper in peaceful changes and removal of rulers and the adoption of genuine election with two-party democratic systems and thirdly, the application of critical rationalism the most critical attitude which indeed is the lifeblood of all rational thought to political and social problems.

CONCLUSION

The democratic model of Popper seems to be logically and empirically the best model. Popper deviated from the classic expectation of democracy, from the rule of majority of people over all people to the new expectation that democracy centres on preventing damage of bad ruler as much as possible by civil society institutions and democratic traditions. He felt that the issue of peaceful removal and changes with the idea of two-party democratic system is better than other political models. The two-party systems is better than the multi-party system because in the two-party system a party would be completely able to dismiss a ruler while in the multi-party system one could just reduce the voting percent of parties in such a way as to make them not any more responders to people.

END NOTES

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