

## AN EVALUATION OF CIVILIAN RULE IN NIGERIA FROM 1999 - 2007

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### **ABSTRACT**

*For much of its existence, Nigeria was governed by the military. From 1960 to 2007, a total of forty-seven years, the military ruled for twenty-nine years. The remaining eighteen years was taken up by civilian rule. The federal Government of Nigeria was confronted with important nation-building challenges between 1999 and 2007. Some of these nation-building challenges are those of democracy, corruption, federalism and aggressive ethno-regionalism. By 1999, when Nigeria's Fourth Republic was inaugurated, most of these nation-building challenges were yet to be resolved. When Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became the first civilian president in the Fourth Republic in 1999, he was confronted with the task of creating a functional and cohesive Nigerian polity.*

**Keywords:** Evaluation, Civilian, Military and Nigeria

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria became an independent state in 1960. At independence, the country contained about 250 ethnic groups with over 350 spoken languages (Almond, et al., 2004). This ethno-cultural heterogeneity has made the task of building a viable, functional and cohesive polity an uphill task for the different administrations that has ruled the country since 1960. From 1960 to 2007, a period of some forty-seven years, the different Nigerian administrations had been confronted with the following nation-building challenges: federalism, corruption, democracy, governance, aggressive ethno-regionalism and religion. The inability of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to effectively resolve these challenges has impacted negatively on the nation-building process in the country. About four decades of military rule, no doubt, created disruptions in the nation's development trajectory. Olaniyonu (2009:88) explains the disruption that military rule created when he posited that 'the military did more damage to our national unity and the nurturing of other national institutions than anybody can imagine'. It was obvious that Nigeria was subjected to large-scale tyranny under Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. This probably explains why the transition to civil rule and formal military disengagement in 1999 automatically heralded expectations of progress and a deepening of democratic development in Nigeria. Maduekwe (2008:55) rightly observed that;

*Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, after many years of military rule with a renewed determination to not only deepen democracy, but also promote the culture of rule keeping, protection of our citizens rights in any part of the world, confront corruption, and reform various state institutions for better performance, and to deliver on expectations of democracy.*

## **CHIEF OLUSEGUN OBASANJO'S CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION, 1999-2007: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

On May 29, 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became Nigeria's second elected executive president following the successful transition programme of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. This hand-over effectively marked the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Olurode and Anifowoshe, 2004). Olusegun Obasanjo was the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate. Obasanjo also rode to a second term presidency in 2003 on the back of the same political party (Anifowoshe and Babawale, 2003). Obasanjo's eight years tenure as president has been the longest civilian rule in Nigeria's history, yet. The Obasanjo administration conducted two federal elections between 1999 and 2007. The first was conducted in 2003, at the end of which Obasanjo was reelected on the platform of the PDP as Nigeria's president. The second was conducted in 2007 and Umaru Yar'adua, the PDP presidential candidate, was elected as Nigeria's president. The two federal elections conducted were mired in controversy. This is because there was rigging on an unprecedented scale in Nigeria's electoral history was widespread intimidation, fraud, corruption and political assassinations during the campaigns leading up to both elections. The conduct of the two elections and the flawed results produced blighted the administration's legacy. And, it ensured that the unresolved challenges of democracy, governance, federalism and aggressive ethno-regionalism, which were a holdover from the country's military interregnum, impacted negatively on the state's efforts in building a able, democratic and functional Nigeria.

Although, more than thirty political parties registered to contest the 2003 presidential elections, the elections itself was a two-man contest. Nation-building Initiatives of the Olusegun Obasanjo Administration in the Fourth Republic, 1999-2007.

At the end of the elections, IN EC declared Chief Olusegun Obasanjo the winner. Buhari refused to accept the results and headed for the courts (Abubakar, 2007). It took the intervention of the Nigerian Supreme Court before Obasanjo's administration could be legitimated (Isa and Zakari, 2008). The same scenario was played out during the 2007 presidential elections. In spite of the more than forty political parties that participated in the elections, it was essentially a two-party race between the PDP and the ANPP. The 2007 presidential elections were also characterized with massive vote rigging and various electoral malfeasances. At the end of the presidential polls, some international observers even adjured it to be the worst in Nigeria's electoral history (Campbell, 2011). Just as he did at the end of the 2003 presidential elections, Buhari litigated. It took the intervention of the supreme court of Nigeria before Umaru Yar' Adua's election could be validated as be authentic.

Obasanjo carried-out extensive socio-economic and political programmes during the life of his administration oetv.een 1999 and 2007. Obasanjo's political policies were designed to broszen and deepen Nigeria's democracy. The administration's existence was conditioned on the 1999 Constitution that has within it such concepts as federalism, rule of law, accountability, good governance, transparency and due process. The administration set out from the outset to tackle the myriad of structural problems that afflicted Nigeria's federal political system. Obasanjo's major aim was to create political institutions that will strengthen Nigeria's democratic base and ensure its sustenance in the longer term. This was the rationale behind the administration's use of the constitutional provisions, such as the federal character principle and principle of fiscal federalism; and, the use of the concepts of zoning, rotational presidency and power-sharing. These are all tools the administration used between 1999 and 2007 to ensure that the inherent structural and institutional defects in Nigeria's federalism are corrected. For example, the concepts of zoning, federal character principle and power-sharing characterized the Obasanjo's administration between 1999 and 2007. These Principle apportioned major political posts within the federation to specific individual. Abubakar as vice-presidential candidate, David Mark as senate president, and Dimeji Bankole as the speaker of the House of Representatives in the second term of Obasanjo's presidency between 2003 and 2007. Indeed, it was the principle of rotational presidency, another plank of the Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007, that ensured the emergence of Shehu Musa Yar' Adua as the presidential candidate of the PDP in 2007 (Campbell, 2011). In trying to ensure Nigeria's economic survival and tackle the challenge of corrupt the administration launched National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS). The three concepts formed the bridgehead of the administration's socio-economic reform package between 2003 and 2007 (Rustad, 2008). NEEDS was a hydra-headed concept meant to tackle the challenges of corruption, self-sufficiency, poverty, privatization and deregulation. For example, the administration used the NEEDS concepts to increase the telephone base in the country from below one million in 1999 to over thirty-eight million by 2007. Under the NEEDS

initiative, the Nigerian banking sector that was going moribund was giving a lease of life with the successful consolidation exercise of the administration in 2005. More importantly, the administration paid off a substantial portion of the foreign debt Nigeria owed to the Paris Club in 2006 (Chiakwelu, 2012).

Moreover, corruption was the bane of the Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007. Official corruption at the federal, state and local government levels defined the administration ample, it was during Obasanjo's administration that Tafa Balogun, the former inspector general of police, Patricia Etteh, one time leader of the House of Representative, Adolphus Wabara, the president of the senate and even Obasanjo's Vice-president Atiku Abubakar, were accused of one form of official corruption or the other. To tackle the high incidences of corruption in his administration, Obasanjo created two important institutions, the ICPC and EFCC in 2000 and 2004 respectively (Nwankwu, 2008). These two institutions, especially the EFCC, played crucial roles throughout the lifespan of the Obasanjo administration. Though, it must be remarked that the EFCC was ideals within the six geo-political zones. This was seen, not as an impartial corruption fighting unit, but as a tool the Obasanjo administration used to muzzle and silence every form of political opposition and dissent to the administration (Campbell, 2011). Instances of the abuse of the power of the EFCC abound throughout Obasanjo's administration between 1999 and 2007. Indeed, it was effectively used to intimidate politicians, both from the PDP and the opposition political parties, who were against Obasanjo's Third Term project as from 2006. As a matter of fact, Obasanjo used the EFCC to destroy Atiku Abubakar's chances of succeeding him as president in the 2007 presidential election (Campbell, 2011). Abubakar, Obasanjo's vice-president opposed his self-succession bid. Religious tensions remained high throughout Obasanjo's term. The Sharia controversy was a good example of this. In 1999, Zamfara state governor, Alhaji Ahmed Yerima introduced Sharia, the Islamic law code, into the state. Other northern states followed Zamfara's example in quick succession. This action created two important dilemmas for the Obasanjo administration. The first was the unconstitutionality of using a religious law to govern some of the states in a secular Nigeria. The second was how to establish the status of Christians living in northern states now using the Sharia. The president was constrained to act because he is a Christian from the southern part of Nigeria. An important consequence of the failure of the administration to effectively spell-out the place of Sharia in a secular Nigerian polity led to the relocation from Abuja to London of the Miss World Beauty Pageant in 2002 (Korieh and Nwokedi, 2000). Obasanjo was unable to defuse religious tensions in his eight years as president (Korieh and Nwokedi, 2000).

Ethnic tensions also ran high in the country during Obasanjo's administration. Ethnic militias became very active during Obasanjo's administration. In the southeast, Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which was founded by Ralph Uwazuruike in 1999, campaigned actively for the reassertion of the state of Biafra (Ukiwo, 2009). MASSOB believed that the Igbos is yet to be fully reintegrated into the Nigerian state and thus secession was the only option to ensure their survival. In the southwest, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) became a political torn in the side of the what led to the emergence of Obasanjo as the presidential candidate, Atiku administration. Throughout Obasanjo's administration, the OPC had an adversarial relationship with it. Part of the reason was the perception of the OPC that Obasanjo's policies were never designed to favour the Yoruba race (UNHCR, Canada, 2000). The refusal of the administration to post-humously recognize Chief Moshood Abiola as an important figure in the country's democratization process and its refusal to also recognize June 12, 1993 as democracy day alienated the OPC from the administration.

The third-term project defined the last term of the Obasanjo administration. Starting from late 2005, the administration began a series of political maneuverings that would have culminated in the eventual elongation of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure into a third term. Obasanjo tried to achieve this by altering the specific provisions of the 1999 Constitution that placed a two-term limit on the presidency (Campbell, 2011) When the plans of the administration became known, Civil Society Groups (CSGs), opposition political parties, members of the senate and house of representatives, and even Obasanjo's vice-president, Atiku Abubakar, all opposed the move. On May 16, 2006, when the motion for the amendment of the Constitution was tabled at the senate, it was defeated (Campbell, 2011). Thus, since Obasanjo could not obtain the constitutional backing necessary for his tenure elongation, there was no way he could then run for the presidency. By 2007, Obasanjo conducted the second federal elections of his presidency. The PDP presidential candidate, Umaru Yar'Adua emerged the winner. Umaru Yar'Adua was duly sworn-in as the second civilian president in the Fourth Republic in May 2007.

## **INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM USED BY THE OBASANJO ADMINISTRATION IN THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS**

The following institutions were set up by the Obasanjo's administration to tackle some of the nation-building challenges that faced Nigeria between 1999 and 2007.

- i. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)
- ii. Niger Delta development Commission (NDDC)
- iii. National Political Reform Conference (NPRC)

### **Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)**

In tackling the challenge of corruption in Nigeria during the Fourth republic, the Obasanjo administration established the EFCC and ICPC between 2000 and 2004. Corruption is an important bane of the various nation-building efforts in Nigeria since 1967. The need to eradicate corruption, for instance, featured prominently as a reason for General Murtala Mohammed's coup in 1975; it pervaded and consequently led to the destruction of the Second Republic; and ran unchecked and unhindered during General Sanni Abacha's regime between 1993 and 1998. At the inception of the democratic administration, President Obasanjo declared: Corruption, the greatest single bane of our society today will be tackled head on at all levels and stamped out (Owolabi, 2007).

In furtherance of this drive, the state enacted the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act in 2000 under the umbrella of the ICPC; and the EFCC Act 2002. These Acts served as the tools for identifying, investigating and convicting offenders. These Acts also empowered the two agencies to seize assets, freeze accounts and set-up specialized autonomous anticorruption agencies apart from the federal police (Bola, 2006). The particular facets of corruption that the two agencies were designed to tackle include advance fee fraud also known as '419'; embezzlement of public funds, economic frauds, misappropriation of public funds, and political corruption (Sardan, 1999). Political corruption was highly prevalent during Obasanjo's administration. It relates, among others, to the misuse of authority, the use of governmental powers for illegitimate private gain and conflict of interest. The Obasanjo administration effectively used the two agencies, especially the EFCC, to bring the issues of corruption to the public sphere. The activities of the EFCC demonstrated the efforts of the state toward building a functional and viable polity through the impactful activities of the Institution.

For example, the efforts of the EFCC had resulted in the return of over five billion naira in stolen funds back to the Nigerian state and the prosecution of over eighty individuals for corruption charges by 2006 (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Over the course of 2006, four state governors, Rashidi Ladoja of Oyo State, Ayo Fayose of Ekiti state, Joshua Dariye of Plateau state and Peter Obi of Anambra were impeached by their state legislatures over allegations of corruption by the EFCC (Economist, 2007; Zero Tolerance, 2006). The former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun, was dismissed from office, prosecuted, tried and jailed for corruption in 2005 through the efforts of the EFCC (Vanguard, 2005). And in May 2007, the United States removed Nigeria from its money laundering watch list. However, the EFCC, ICPC and other anti-corruption agencies failed to make appreciable progress against corruption towards the tail end of the administration because, among other things, the state personalized and de-institutionalized the anti-corruption programme. More crippling, the constitutional protection, the immunity clause of the 1999 Constitution, made it impossible for the agencies to pursue a vigorous anti-corruption initiative against some elected public officials.

### **(ii) Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) 2000**

The NDDC was particularly established to tackle the challenge of aggressive ethno-regionalism in the south-eastern region during the Fourth Republic. It was created by the Obasanjo administration in June 2000 to review and prescribe ways in which the federal government could economically develop the Niger Delta (Falola and Geneva, 2009). The state built infrastructures and encouraged investments in the region through various schemes located within the NDDC. NDDC was also established to tackle the problem of youth restiveness in the region. Youth restiveness in the region had not only threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria, but it further impacted negatively on the oil-extracting and exporting activities of the multi-national corporations in the region between 1999 and 2007. This assumed a dangerous dimension with the formation of ethnic militias that threatened the very existence of the Nigerian state. Such ethnic militias include

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF). This then was the backdrop to the establishment of the NDCC.

(iii) **Power-Sharing**

The concept of power sharing implies a consensual arrangement in which candidates for political offices are chosen by the community without much regard for experience, competence and continuity in office (Inuwa, 2010). It means a geographical location of political leadership in such a way that enhances the possibility of different geo-political entities that made up the country the chance of occupying a political office (Jacob, 2006). The concept has within it such other concepts as rotational presidency, rotational governor, rotational ministers and rotational commissioners. Power-sharing is not only an ethnic balancing formula, but also a region-equilibrating medium. Although, the idea of power sharing predates the Fourth Republic, it was a political arrangement the Obasanjo administration used extensively to tackle the challenges of democracy and federalism. With the distribution of the federation into geo-political zones during the Fourth Republic, the administration ensured that access to political offices, especially at the central or federal level was based on the principles of power-sharing. For example, toward the tail end of his second-term presidency, president Obasanjo ensured based on the principle of power-sharing, that the presidential political office was given to the north-west, that of the vice- presidency to the south-south and the presidency of the senate to the north- central (middle-belt). This was what led to the emergence of the presidency of Umaru YarAdua and Goodluck Jonathan 2007.

(iv) **Zoning**

Zoning, which is an element of power-sharing, is an informal arrangement in which the states in Nigeria are aggregated into zones or regions for the purpose of allocating office (Jacob, 2006). The process also corresponds to consociationalism, elite coalition and proportional representation (Orji, 2008). The goal of all these measures is to ensure that persons from a few states or ethno-regional group do not dominate the government and that the president enjoy broad support. In the case of Nigeria, it connotes the division of political offices to the six geographical zones (Tamuno, 2003). The main purpose of zoning is to make sure that the different offices are rotated amongst the regions. And, also that power would shift from one region to another thereby hindering one region from dominating in terms of power (Rustad, 2008). This was the idea that informed the official recognition of the six geo-political zones by the Obasanjo's administration. The zones are south-west, south-east, south-south, north-central, north-east and north-west. NEEDS, that was launched at the beginning of the second-term of the Obasanjo's administration in 2003, was an important plank of the administration's reform programmes. NEEDS was multifaceted. It was designed to tackle the challenges of autarky, distribution and that of corruption (Adejumobi, 2011). NEEDS was conceived by the administration as Nigeria's home grown poverty reduction strategy (Ifamose, 2010). The four key areas that the programme focused on included value re-orientation, poverty reduction, employment generation and wealth creation (NPC, 2004). NEEDS had four subgroups.

They are public service reforms; economic reforms through macroeconomics stability and accelerated privatization of the economy; institutional reforms and strengthening and social reforms through transparency, accountability and anti-corruption (Alii, 2010). The impact of NEEDS on the Nigerian economy and by extension, socio-economic lives of the country was overwhelming. For example, under its economic and empowerment agenda, NEEDS increased the number of telephones in the country from below 1 million in 1999 to over thirty-eight million by April 2007 (Ifamose, 2010). Moreover, the banking sector was another area touched by NEEDS' reform. In 2005, a consolidation exercise, instigated by NEEDS in the banking sector, led to the merger of Nigeria's 89 banks into 25, each with a minimum capital base of 25 billion naira (Alii, 2010). And more importantly, NEEDS spearheaded the establishment of such agencies as Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU), the due process office in the presidency, the EFCC and ICPC (Adejumobi, 2011). In tackling the challenges of federalism, democracy and aggressive ethnoregionalism, The two mechanisms provided some level of economic and political stability within the Nigerian state in the Fourth Republic. The mechanisms ensured that economic stability was maintained through an equitable distribution and allocation of the federal resources to all the federating units. Besides, political stability was guaranteed by the FCP through th equilibrated distribution of political power and offices among all the states of the federation.

(i) **Federal Character Principle**

According to section 14(3) of the 1979 constitution of Nigeria, the federal character principle was created to ensure that:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conducts of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria.

These provisions were replicated in the same sections of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. The expectation of the federal character principle was that it would pave the way for a federal government that would be all-inclusive of all segments of the federation thereby assuring a stable federal polity. This was the rationale behind the establishment of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) by the Obasanjo administration in 2002 (Muhammad, 2007). The FCC was an executive agency specifically created to implement the federal character principle in the 1963 and 1979 constitutions, respectively. Thus, the federal character principle was aimed at creating a sense of belonging and participation by the diverse ethnic groups and political groupings within the Nigerian polity.

As a nation-building tool, the Obasanjo administration deployed the principle in its efforts to resolve the challenges of federalism, democracy and aggressive ethno-regionalism that confronted the state between 1999 and 2007. The administration used it as the basis for the creation of a more cohesive and purposeful national leadership out of the culturally diverse ethnic groups (Odojin, 2005). This was what characterized the allocation of a number of vacancies into federal institutions in the Fourth Republic. The policy however the state made extensive use of the constitutional provisions of the 1999 Constitution. Two key constitutional mechanisms that were used are:

- i) Federal Character Principles (FCP)
- ii) Principle of Fiscal Federalism

failed to effectively tackle these challenges because, among other things, it was poorly exercised by the state. For example, due to the shoddy implementation of the principle by the FCC, the FCP made Nigerians to be more aware of their communal background than build a common feeling of loyalty to the federation (Nkolika, 2007). Indeed, the political elites shenanigans undermined the potency of the policy in terms of advancing the course of federalism and nation building in Nigeria (Odojin, 2005).

## **CONCLUSION**

The end of military rule in 1999 ushered in the fourth Republic in Nigeria. Prior to this period, the different administrations that ruled Nigeria had tried and failed to turn it into a cohesive and functional political entity. This failure was not due to a lack of commitment on the parts of the administrations. It has a lot more to do with the multi-faceted nation-building challenges that confronted Nigeria because of its socio-cultural heterogeneity. Between 1999 and 2007, the civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo devoted considerable efforts toward the resolution of these nation-building challenges. The study has shown that the administration made extensive use of the constitutional, institutional and conceptual mechanisms in its nation-building efforts. By the end of the administration in 2007, Obasanjo has succeeded in jump-starting the process that this administration believed would eventually culminate in the creation of a viable, functional and cohesive Nigeria.

In trying to create a viable, functional and cohesive Nigeria, the Obasanjo administration was confronted with various nation-building challenges. These include the challenges of distribution, federalism, corruption and autarky. The Administration evolved different strategies to tackle these challenges. It ensured that the strategies it created were tailored to tackle specific nation-building challenges that confronted Nigeria during the lifespan of the administration. This, for instance, was what informed the creation of both the ICPC and EFCC to tackle the challenge of corruption in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. It also informed the creation of NEEDS to tackle the challenge of autarky within the same period.

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