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Book Review: Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria. Ibadan: John Archer

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Academic Leadership Journal

Emmanuel O. Ojo (ed), *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: John Archer (Publishers) Limited (978-36421-04-05). Second Impression, 2008, 389pp.

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Ojo's edited book accommodates brilliant essays that focus analytically on the hurdles to Nigeria's democratization process. The book takes the readers into an interesting, but academically cogent, theme, Nigeria's democratization process: the odds and socio-politically expedient coping strategies. The foreword, excellently written by a Nigerian professor of political science, J. A.A. Ayode, will no doubt ignite readers' interest in the book. Apart from projecting Nigeria as a continental and global force, which necessarily elicits great enthusiasm from democracy observers locally and internationally, it also, precisely and concisely, chronicles Nigeria's tortuous march to democratization. In the preface of this twenty-five chapter book, divided into six sections, the editor presents the question that the book seeks to answer, 'how can the current democratic experiment be sustained in a country that was marked by predominantly military rule in the post-colonial era?' (p. ix). This work is very important given the fact that previous hopes for a stable democracy have been monumentally squandered. The editor also performs a fabulous job by providing a succinct recapitulation of each chapter in the book.

The first section, which consists of five chapters, critically examines the issues of governance and economic development in Nigeria. While Ojo's chapter focuses on the imperatives of sustaining democratic values, Abiola and Olaopa present the nexus between economic development and democratic sustenance. Ojo's piece takes a multi-variate approach focusing on analytical levels such as the economy, the mass media, the civil society, and corruption; and their impacts each on democratic sustenance. The rationale for this approach, as quite correctly argued by him, is the believe that 'the sustainability of democracy is a product of many factors or conditions operating together...' (p. 8). Given the overwhelming evidence of poor economic performance, Abiola and Olaopa sound rather pessimistic about the ability of government to deliver dividends of democracy. This pessimism is against the backdrop that nothing significant has been achieved as shown by the various economic indicators, they argue (p. 34). The chapter by Arosanyin examines the relationship between government's economic performance and citizen's support. He focuses on the transport sector as an economic unit of analysis. Arosanyin argues quite intelligently that improvement in the transport sector can enhance the sustainability of the democratic process. The other chapters by Adebayo and Ighodalol periscope the linkages between political parties and democracy on the one hand, and the third tier of government and democracy on the other. To enhance effective impact on the democratization process, the two contributors, in turns, advocate that political parties be ideologically based (p. 71) and the third tier of government be reviewed to enhance its functional capacity (p. 85).

Oyedele's chapter comes first in section two. He endeavours to establish a link between democracy and bureaucracy but points out quite frankly that the elitist nature of Nigeria's bureaucracy with strong class bias may not allow it to serve as instrument for the propagation of democratic values. Mimiko's contribution accurately distills the political intrigues behind population census in Nigeria. According to him, the germane issue that requires attention is how to guarantee the integrity of census data in Nigeria, which is still weighed down by the reality, the pulls and thrills of nation-building.

Section three focuses on the relations between government organs and the impact of such relations on democratic sustenance. The chapters by Bassey and Aiyede explain the precarious issues involved in legislature-executive relations within the Nigerian presidential system. The contribution by Eminue focuses on the budget process. From the gamut of legislature- executive relations, his rationale for focusing on the budget process is the fact that it is the most important aspect of the relations. This argument is perfectly plausible given the fact that the ability of government to deliver dividends of democracy is evidently contingent on the budget process. According to him, budgetary functions have always been characterized by contradictory viewpoints and perennial altercation between the two organs (pp. 172 & 181). Omotola's contribution, perhaps, represents the most critically engaging chapter in the section as it focuses on the most dangerous aspect of the relations, which is the impeachment threat. If the nascent democracy must be nurtured to maturity, he argues rightly that urgent steps must be taken to check the trend of impeachment threat. The other chapters by Egbewole and Alabi explicitly explore the role and performance of the judiciary. While Egbewole's contribution focuses closely on the role of an independent judiciary in the web of legislature-executive relations and in sustaining democratic values, Alabi's contribution focuses on the vertical relations between the federal and state governments. In chapter eight, Ojo accentuates Universal Basic Education as a tool for sustainable democracy, focusing on a specific study of Oyo State Universal Basic Education. Her arguments are well marshaled.

In section four, Sadiq's chapter constructs a link between the mass media and democracy. Following a critical conceptual and theoretical articulation, he opines that the mass media is travailing in Nigeria's nascent democracy (p. 256). He argues very accurately that there is an urgent need for constitutional amendment by the National Assembly to guarantee the freedom of the press (p. 257). Ajibewa's professorial piece focuses on the corrosive and degrading effect of corruption on democracy, supporting his submission with concrete evidence. In his own contribution, Olojede analyses the corruption of legislature-executive relations in Nigeria, arguing that the acrimony by the legislature and executive in the discharge of their responsibilities has often been characterized by blackmail (p. 276).

Section five, comprising four chapters, focuses on the fiercely debated issues of federalism, resource control and the politics of marginalization. The chapter by Oladeji examines the structural defects inherent in Nigeria's federal structure. He argues quite correctly that the centralization of resources, as enshrined in the 1999 constitution, may deepen fiscal related crises between the federating units. Aghalino, focusing analytically on the Niger Delta struggle for resource control and its implications for the nascent democracy, argues that the devolution of power to the state in form of control of their resources could facilitate ultimate deepening of democratic culture. Danjibo's contribution examines the manifest domination of the Zuru by the Caliphate in Northwestern Nigeria. He argues frankly that 'democracy has to do a lot more to foster the politics of accommodation amongst group identities otherwise conflict becomes inevitable' (p. 314). Lawal and Ojo, in their chapter, explain that there can be no meaningful development if more than half of the population, constituted by women,

is marginalized. Among others, the chapter recommends the Indian solution concerning the integration of a quota for women into the constitution for legal effect.

Issues of national security and democracy constitute the crux of the last section. Given the surge of internal tensions, Nwolise's chapter reveals that Nigeria's democratic experiment is seriously threatened. He argues that to address her security problems, Nigeria needs a new national security policy. On nurturing Nigeria's democracy, Ojo, in chapter twenty-three, notes that the demilitarization of the Nigerian society is a necessity. This is against the background, as he rightly pointed out, that the persistence of military rule over the years has made Nigerian society unduly militarized to the extent of posing grave danger to the nascent democracy. Again, in chapter twenty-four, Ojo presents a survey of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria and its implications for democracy, dotting his submission with mind-boggling instances between 1999 and 2003. In the last chapter, Ojo explores the key question of whether Nigeria's democracy can survive. The chapter harmonizes the various odds and the policy options presented by the different contributors into a broader framework. If Nigeria will not revert to authoritarianism and military absolutism, the editor argues that a congruent political culture is required for entrenched democracy (p. 383).

In all, as silvering as this multi-authored book appears, it may not have not have broken entirely new grounds in African political studies. A major lacuna is the failure to accord importance to prominent issues such as the emerging role of the civil society in the democratization process. Although some of the contributors offer some insights in this regard, a substantive section should have been created to examine the possibilities and impossibilities relating to civil society's involvement in democratic nurturing in Nigeria. Again, the layout of the book is not coherent enough. The chapter on census would have been better placed under section six. Moreover, the conclusion by the editor which harmonizes the major odds and the necessary policy framework should have been accorded a separate section instead of being lumped with the chapters in section six.

Nevertheless, the book has intelligently contributed to the search for a stable political order in Nigeria. Not only is the book appropriately titled, it equally has a rich database. The depth of analysis is strengthened by the critical perspectives around which contributions are built. Methodologically, the use of the historical and analytical approaches abundantly enriches this volume. The theoretical and empirical contributions are quite impressive. I also find the masterly use of simple grammar and limited jargons very appealing. Without any doubt, the book will enjoy wide readership not only in the academic circles but also in government domains in Nigeria and beyond.

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