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POLITICS OF REVENGE AND PERSECUTION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC RULE

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Abstract

This paper aims at exposing the technique of counter-revolution of political persecution and its implications for Nigeria's democratic system. To achieve this, the paper briefly makes a conceptual clarification of politics, political persecution, and democracy with its principles. It evaluates the spate of persecution and revenge in Nigeria's political space and detects that Nigeria's politics is no longer in tune with the preferred democratic system of governance as political bullying that manifests in different forms is meted against the perceived enemies of the political actors on the saddle of leadership. Through some glaring pointers to political persecutions and revenge in Nigeria, the paper observes that this cancerous menace has not only questioned Nigeria's democratic dispensation but, also, affected the nation in economic, social, political and developmental growths. The paper without equivocation argues that if this cankerworm is sustained and left unchecked, it will not only weaken and undermine democratic institutions, but also render the process of nation-building in Nigeria difficult, if not impossible. To reverse this ugly situation, the paper recommends that Nigeria needs to strengthen its democratic institutions by ensuring their independence, accountability and impartiality; implement and promote electoral reforms to prevent violence, promote fairness and ensure transparency; respect as well as protect human rights to include freedom of expression, assembly and association. The paper employs the analytic, critical, expository and speculative methods of philosophical research.

Keywords: Politics, Democracy, Democratic Principles, Political Persecution, Nigerian State

Introduction

It is no longer news that politics in today's Nigeria's democratic setting has taken an unfriendly and undemocratic direction. Political vituperation is no longer directed at the candidates of the opposition. Today, Politics and propaganda seek to make more intense use of deep lying forces of greed and envy, fear and hate, to achieve or to prevent social changes of a revolutionary character. Persecution is a veritable tool with which these destructive forces operate. Both its ricocheted self-destructive powers and its general devastation are too great to be ignored. In Nigeria today, political persecution has indeed become the successful technique of counter-

revolution. A closer examination of politicking reveals a pattern of rationalization which is utilized in every sort of divisive political and social debate. Thus, a political party or individuals with a different ideology are attacked by parties or groups in opposition even when the attacked individuals or political circles are working within the framework of national common good. This menace has been used as a weapon by political actors to unleash their venom on the perceived political enemies. This often manifests through harsh policies that are anti-people leading to questioning the government of the day.

Democracy, which is the preferred system of government adopted by Nigeria, is far from being true to its practice. This preferred governance, ideally, gives room for the participation of all Nigerians within the framework of the law. And as such, an attempt to go against its principles is tantamount to betrayal of the system. But the glaring political bullying that manifests in different forms in Nigeria recently, has really propelled one to make a juxtaposition of Nigeria's democracy and democracy adopted and practiced in other climes where citizens with different party inclinations and affiliations freely exercise their fundamental human rights especially the principles of freedom of association and freedom of speech and expression. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to unpack the cankerworm that is eating deep into the fabric of the nation's democratic space especially as it questions the democratic principles of freedom of speech and association. This is done with the hope that when the impending destructive forces endangering the system are nipped in the bud, the risks associated with it will be exposed for caution while the desired democratic environmental decorum would be maximally achieved in the nation.

Clarification of Concepts

The paper, for ease understanding, makes conceptual clarifications of the following: Politics, Democracy, Democratic Principles and Political Persecution.

Politics

According to Collins dictionary, "politics are the actions or activities concerned with achieving and using power in a country or society" ("Politics", n.d.). Unfortunately, the above definition lacks clarity being that politics is only concerned with the use of power, but, it does not clarify whether the power can be used at one's will and for selfish end or for the common good of the people. The Greek philosophers on the other hand considered politics as dealing with all the activities and affairs of the city state (polis). Politics, for them, is an all-inclusive term that makes no distinction between the state and the government. For them, it is the total study of man, society, morality, state, and so on. In this sense, politics is not restricted to mere institution of governance, but, also, a mechanism for achieving societal goals. Hence, politics is a societal platform which advances the promotion of good living and orderliness for the purpose of achieving a healthy and sustainable society.

Democracy

Etymologically, the term 'democracy' comes from the ancient Greek which combines 'demo' which means 'the people' with 'kratos' meaning 'rule', 'power' or 'strength'. When put together literally means 'rule by the people'. Marx and Engels on the other hand describe democracy as the 'dictatorship of the proletariats' (Kautsky, 1918). By this description, democracy is seen as a system the ruling class uses in exploiting the masses. This as a matter of fact led to their refusal that democracy is a system of government run by the people. But Abraham Lincoln, a one-time American President, in 1863, following the Greek origin of the concept, faulted the uncensored description of democracy by Marx and Engels, and makes bold to define democracy as "the

government of the people, by the people, and for the people” (“What is Democracy”, 2017). A critical examination of the later, according to Asira E. Asira (2010), “government of the people would mean government run on behalf of the people; government by the people would mean government run by the bona fide citizens of the country in question; while government for the people would imply government in the best interest of the people” (p. 19). From the above expression one can deduce that democracy favours an equal participatory involvement of people in decision-making process (whether directly or indirectly) through representation in the best interest of the people.

Democracy, therefore, exists in an environment where efficient and effective electoral body, registration of eligible voters, conduct of free, fair, credible and periodic elections, provisions of social services and maintenance of existing infrastructure and amenities, employment and sound education are wholly piloted by the people. It is an environment where the general or public good overrides personal interest. Therefore, democracy as a form of government has its principles that distinguished it from other forms of government.

Highlights of Democratic Principles

Democracy as pointed out earlier is a form of government characterized by some principles that distinguish it from other systems of government. These unique principles that are people-centred make for its preference over other systems by many countries including Nigeria.

The Principle of Equality: This is a fundamental ingredient of democracy. It denotes identical condition of people in society; and implies that equal treatment should be given to everyone in the same or similar condition. In practical terms, what is given to Mr. A should not be at variance with what Mr. B should receive as far as they are in the same and similar condition. Therefore, in identical conditions, equals should be treated equally regardless of age, gender, ethnic cleavage and the like. Equality, here, does not mean that all should be treated equally with no recourse to their needs rather equality in this parlance, implies equality of opportunity.

The Principle of Majority or Popular Consultation: This connotes the idea that popular desires should be pursued at all times. This implies that any policy that will be made should have the approval of the people. In other words, the will of the people should prevail over the will of the government. Hence, no policy should be made by the governing body without due consultation and approval of, if not the whole people, but the majority. Democracy is therefore, synonymous with “majority rule”.

Majority Rule and Minority Rights: Democracy otherwise known as majority rule acknowledges opinions of the majority in any decision-making. The opinion of the majority is taken as the will of the masses on the grounds that in the decision-making process the majority carries the vote. Be that as it may, that does not mean that the minority group should be looked down upon or denied their legitimate rights. It also implies that irrespective of the majority rule, minority rights should be considered for proportional representation.

The Principle of the Rule of Law: This principle simply implies equality before the law. In other words, no one is above the law. This principle promotes fair hearing, trial and defense by an accused citizen before he/she is declared guilty or not guilty. It bridges the gap between the leaders and the masses on legal matters. Further, it is the idea that the law is not made for a particular set of people, but rather for all within a particular geographical area irrespective of one’s political, social or economic standing. Conversely, it prevents victimization, deprivation of citizens’ rights and tyranny of the leaders.

The Principle of Freedom: This is one of the fundamental human rights. It simply means absence of restraint. Not freedom to do as one likes even when one’s action is an infringement into another’s freedom or an infringement into

government's constitutional laws. It categorically implies freedom with responsibility. Some of its kinds include:

- a. Freedom of Speech/Expression: Citizens are guaranteed freedom to express their opinions. They are made to enjoy the freedom of expressing what affects them as citizens and stakeholders of their country. The advantage of this freedom is that not only that it helps the government to know the plights of the citizenry, but also, it helps the government to know where they are erring in their governance. This gives citizens the sense of involvement and belonging that the government is for them and under their control.
- b. Freedom of Association: Citizens are by this principle, at liberty to join associations and political parties of their choice, and also have the freedom to form associations within the framework of the law. This freedom goes with undue influence or force from anybody.
- c. Freedom of Movement: Citizens in a democratic government could move from one part of a given country to another without any form of molestation, restriction or intimidation. They can equally transit from their places of origin to another part of the same country for settlement without any discrimination.

From the foregoing, one can deduce that democracy has rules and principles that regulate and guide its operations. Hence, for the system of democracy to have its true test and uniqueness, and serve the purpose for which it is made, the principles inherent in it must be observed, respected and adhered to by all within the democratic environment irrespective of one's status in all spheres of human and national existences.

Political Persecution

This is a systematic oppression and suppression of individuals or groups with dissenting views or criticisms against the ruling political regime or administration, often resulting in censorship restrictions on cultural production, and punishment for those who oppose the established ideology ("Political Persecution", 2019). From the above, one will easily deduce that this political wave excludes any possibility of open criticism against the ideologies or policies of the leading party as well as engender discrimination that leads to the denial or infringement of fundamental rights, violent actions to include police brutality, surveillance abuse, extrajudicial approaches, and so on.

Pointers to Political Persecution in Nigeria's Democracy

As earlier said, political persecution has been an endemic feature of some developing countries inclusive of Nigeria. Remarkably, Nigeria embraced democracy as her preferred system of government and gained independence when this ugly wave with its concomitance has not reached a dangerous dimension. What appears unbelievable today in Nigeria is the level at which this menace has taken the stage in Nigeria's political arena. Following this scenario, some questions begging for answers include: who are the main target of this undemocratic move? What do the employers of this mechanism wish to achieve? This obviously involves a systematic mistreatment of individuals or groups based on their political beliefs or activities. It is without a legitimate legal basis or through the misuse of laws to target political opponents, which frequently involves violations of fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression or assembly (Yarovyi, 2024). This political mechanism as it were, serves as a tool for political repression and control. It also envelops a wide range of human rights violations in different faces aimed at silencing opposition and instilling fear. This played out between Col. Sambo Dasuki (rtd.), the former National Security Adviser (NSA) and Buhari. Using Lawal Daura, who was the Director General of the Department of State Services (DSS), Buhari was shooting

randomly at those he perceived as his enemies (Handel, 2015). As dumbfounding as the above claim appears, one is left with utter wonder as to the reason Buhari was after incriminating Dasuki. But Handel further clarified that it was Col. Dasuki who arrested Buhari when he was overthrown in 1985 as the Military Head of State. He played a key role in the coup that ousted Buhari. The conclusion then was that Buhari, 30 years after, was still nursing ill feelings against Dasuki (Handel, 2015).

In the same vein of suspicion to political persecution which turned out to be so devastating not only to the perceived enemy but also to innocent citizens of Niger State was the scenario of neglect to the cries of Niger State. Vasta, who was a former Commissioner for Information, Culture and Tourism in Niger State, made bold to say, that because of Buhari's grudge against General Ibrahim Babangida of Niger State, for eight years, Buhari did not pay any serious official visit to Niger state and no single federal project was executed in the state. The 'Baro Port Project', which recently generated some political heat in the state, was abandoned by Buhari including all the federal projects across the state. The people of state were made to pay for sin they knew nothing about. It was the case of when two Elephants fight, the grass suffers. He sidelined the state just because of the sin of one person (Hassan, 2025). Digging further into the above perceived persecution, Buhari's absence in Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's book launch, Vasta as recorded, was unreserved to what he considered as the undeniable fact that the memory of the 'mother of all betrayal' and his subsequent detention by General Babangida, denying him the lifetime opportunity to bid his late mother farewell after death was yet to leave him (Hassan, 2025). Away from Buhari whose broad daylight persecuting approach was not hidden during his administration, allegations of persecution is equally noticed among political parties in Nigeria in a bid to annihilate the opposition. This is made evident when Nasir El-Rufai, the former governor of Kaduna State and one of the founding members of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) reveals in his statement as recorded, that the PDP which is the oldest political party in this Republic is targeted for destruction, it is a matter of time. There are internal machineries in the PDP that have been hired, paid, or otherwise motivated to destroy the party. So the party is on its way to the grave (Iniobong, 2025). If the above claim is true, this is political immaturity to say the least as politics in Nigeria appears to take a destructive direction where characters are assassinated, parties endangered while opposition party adherents are emotionally, psychologically and even physically tortured.

Going further, the case between Dele Farotimi and Afe Babalola (SAN) is evidently another publicly perceived act of political persecution. Farotimi, a lawyer and human right activist who drew attention to the complexities and perceived flaws within the Nigerian legal system was directly accused and charged to court by Afe Babalola. This unfortunate scenario led to trying him in two different courts, and bails of 50 million and 30 million naira were granted by the High Court and Magistrate Court respectively with additional stipulations of surrendering his travel passport on the charges of cyber crime and criminal defamation. The height of it says it all when even as the bail was granted Farotimi, he remained in detention for weeks until the court sluggishly finalized his bail formalities. But the doubts of the public was laid to rest when it was exposed that the legal battle between Farotimi and Afe Babalola underscores the potential for political influence in the legal system. Farotimi, a vocal critic of the Nigerian government and its institutions, has long been involved in human rights advocacy, and his arrest is seen by many as an attempt to silence dissent (Reuben, 2024). The above leaves one to wonder what the motive behind the prolonged adjudication of Farotimi's case was as it was between him and his colleague, Babalola. The case equally confronts the role of Nigeria's legal system in protecting the rights of citizens that challenge the status quo. The legal system that should be an impartial

institution is now seen in a different picture as machinery used by politicians to witch-hunt their perceived enemies or those who is openly against their policies and government in general. It is disheartening that persecution in politics as it is going on today in Nigeria is a red flag to the preferred democratic system of government. It has not only really punctured the core principles of association and expression among other principles of democracy, exposed some possible consequences that pose some challenges to Nigeria's democratic institutions but also raised some questions whether the current political actors are the right crops of politicians to uphold as well as navigate the preferred democratic system.

Implications of Political Persecution for Nigeria's Democracy

A reflection on the spate of persecution in politics reveals that if this cankerworm is sustained and systematic mistreatment of individual left unchecked, there are obviously some negative effects of it as it will not only weaken the system of government, engender political instability, but also rob the citizens of their fundamental human rights. Arbitrary arrest and detention: this stands out as one of the risks of political persecution. This is the violation of the right to liberty, a deprivation of a person outside of the confines of nationally recognized laws or international standards (Yarovyi, 2024). This as a matter of fact exposes the victims to more human rights violations since they are deprived of the means to defend themselves from extrajudicial actions and degrading treatment. This will be the case where people in authority detain their perceived enemies without cause or due process, even to a point of holding them for a long period without charges.

Unfair Trial: this is another danger of persecution in politics that questions the democracy as practiced in Nigeria. This is a case where in essence, a legal proceeding where the defendant's right to a fair and impartial hearing is compromised, leading to a potentially unjust outcome. Here, the key elements of an unfair trail include violation of due process, lack of impartiality and denial of fundamental rights to counsel, to confront witnesses, to a public trial and to a fair and impartial jury. This as a result, will undermine justice, lead to erosion of trust, violations of human rights, and as well motivate political prosecutions which lack due process with predetermined outcomes and harsh sentences.

Restrictions on Movement: this is also a risk of political persecution that will endanger Nigeria's democracy. This is the case where the intimidated individuals or groups are robbed of their right to movement where in most cases their travelling documents or passports are seized or confiscated, or the victims placed on travel bans. More so, constant threats, monitoring and intimidation are common tactics used to silence dissidents, and in some cases, the perceived enemies may be compelled to flee their homes.

Economic Sabotage: this is no less another risk of political persecution which is a red flag to Nigeria's democracy. Here, opposition politicians or the perceived political enemies and their supporters are targeted with economic sanctions to include, seizure of assets and freezing of bank accounts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper exposes the weapon of political persecution and its implications for Nigeria's democratic system. It briefly makes analyses of the concepts of politics, democracy and its principles, and political persecution. It evaluates the spate of persecution in Nigeria's political space and detects that Nigeria's politics is no longer in tune with the preferred democratic system of governance as political bullying that manifests in different forms is meted against the

perceived enemies of the political actors and their policies. Through some pointers to political persecutions in Nigeria, the paper observes that this cancerous menace has not only questioned Nigeria's system of government but, also, affected the nation in economic, social, political and developmental growths. As such, a reflection on the spate of persecution in politics has informed one that if this cankerworm is sustained and systematic mistreatment of individual left unchecked, there are obviously some negative effects that will not only weaken the system of government, cause political instability, engender arbitrary arrest and detention, promote unfair trial, restrict citizens' rights to freedom of associations, freedom of expression/speech but, also, rob the citizens of their fundamental human rights. Besides, globally, the ugly head of this political abnormality will be more shameful than imagined in the comity of democratic nations. Consequent upon the above challenges, the following recommendations would help to checkmate the risks of political persecution in Nigeria and as well accelerate political, economic, social and developmental growths of the country:

- i. Nigeria needs to strengthen its democratic institutions by ensuring their independence, accountability and impartiality.
- ii. Electoral reforms should be implemented and promoted to prevent violence, promote fairness and ensure transparency.
- iii. Government should respect as well as protect human rights to include freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- iv. Nigeria should promote inclusive politics and encourage participation from diverse groups, including youth, women and the marginalized.

By addressing the above challenges and adhering to the recommendations, Nigeria can strengthen its preferred democratic system of government, promote political stability and ensure that the rights of every citizen are respected and protected.

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