

Review of: "Against Jump-Starting Western-Type Democracy on Africa's Socio-Political Tarmac"

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Synopsis:

The author argues that although *Democracy* has been the most celebrated system of government in recent times, its relevance to many African countries leaves much to be desired. This is because it has not been able to improve the well-being of people whose countries adhere to its tenets. The author again challenges the origin of democracy and forcefully makes the case that the practice has been with Africans since precolonial times but attributes the term to the two Greek words "demos" and "kratos". In the author's words "...tracing its birthplace to Greece is nothing true more than the mere etymological origin of the concept". Further, the author questions whether Africans are satisfied with rallying under the umbrella of democracy to make their governments legitimate and ultimately get nothing, or be focused on their unique homegrown systems of government that best adapt to their realities. The specific questions the author seeks to address are as follows: "Must/need we jumpstart the malfunctioning democracy on Africa's political tarmac when we have our 'automatic' functioning political system parked? Should we not rather kick-start ours?" The author then recommends, among others, the substitution of the colonial legacy (Western-type Democracy) with the traditional African system of government, and the dissolution and renegotiation of African boundaries.

Strengths:

The author's manuscript is a wake-up call to all Africans about the need to rethink the Western-type Democratic Political System, which has been accepted as the epitome of governance but which in reality has little to show for its worth. I think the call is timely and relevant.

The author successfully describes the situation in Nigeria to unpack the challenges that Western-type Democracy presents to a multi-ethnic contemporary African country and argues that it has a way of sidelining a significant minority who may have a case and projecting the views of a majority who may be beneficiaries of the system. The author successfully alludes to various African literary and philosophical writings to make his case.

The choice of words is simple and understandable to even the layman. The study is devoid of jargon that may complicate meanings or understanding.

Weaknesses:

The author only hinted in the abstract at the type of methodology adopted. It reads "taking expository and comparative

methodologies...". However, this was not discussed anywhere in the main work. The author should be transparent about the methodology used, particularly the data collection methods, the types of data the study relied on, and how the data collected were analyzed.

The study was not grounded in any theoretical foundation save the conceptualization of democracy. It was somewhere in the manuscript that the author made the following statement: "Scholars have diverse opinions on what should be an enlightened solution to Nigeria's sociopolitical problem. Dominant among these theories are; conservatism, restructuralism, revolutionism, and secessionism" (page 6). I thought the author could have engaged with the extant literature on these.

Also, I think the author should be explicit about what he intended to do right from the beginning. Particularly if Nigeria will be used as a case study, it should reflect in the framing of the problem and even the research questions. It all began with Africa, and then all of a sudden the discussion switches to Nigeria. Again, the "comparative methodology" hinted at in the abstract presupposed relying on cases from different African countries, but this was not seen.

Finally, the author should be more specific and detailed when he recommends the dissolution and renegotiation of African boundaries. This is a recommendation that is politically charged with vested interests, so detailed strategies to accomplish this will not be out of place.

Overall Impression:

I strongly believe that this is the kind of intellectual debate that African scholars and students of African Studies should engage in. A very important aspect of this conversation to me is the question: *How did we get here?* Yes, I agree, we had our semblance of a democratic political system way before the so-called Greek city-states, who are often ascribed as the founders of the democratic system of government, but how did our situation end up like what the author describes? The author provides some answers that I would like to rehash and add to. The author argues that democracy has refused to work in Africa because of two main reasons: the first is that many African countries (e.g., Nigeria) are composed of many ethnic groups with incompatible differences but are forced to live together. Secondly, the style of government bequeathed to Africa (e.g., Nigeria) does not conform to the realities in Africa. Additionally, the author uses the metaphor of a kid elephant who was chained for some time, and even when released, did not recognize that it had been freed. Also, the fact that many Africans owe allegiance to their tribes first before their countries is significant.

To a large extent, I agree with the author on the above reasons and observations of the African plight. However, I still think that even with the current Western-type Democratic Governance, we can still make incremental progress and improve the well-being of our citizenry if the following ills are addressed:

- The self-centeredness and greed of African political elites and their cronies.
- Weak and dysfunctional institutions.
- High illiteracy rates due to lack of access and inability to afford quality education.
- Excessive partisanship leading to polarization among the populace.

- Rating partisan political loyalty over and above competence.
- Lack of consensus on a development agenda for the State to be implemented and committed to by all Governments, no matter their political ideological inclinations.
- The erosion of moral values in our society that encourages fellow-feeling, responsiveness, resilience, accountability, transparency, modesty, kindness, sacrifice, and hard work.