

Levitsky on how Democracies Die: Is Nigeria's Democracy Dead?

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Abstract

*Democratic governance is considered a system of government in which power resides with the citizens, either directly or indirectly, through elected representatives. Nigeria has had uninterrupted civilian governance since 1999. Nevertheless, this period has been characterised by the deterioration of democratic standards, as state institutions have been politicised, dissent suppressed, the judiciary compromised, electoral malpractices have increased, and political parties have weakened considerably. Political parties have enabled such a decline by failing to provide ideologically based opposition. Thus, this paper examined the health status and resilience of democratic practice in Nigeria, vis-à-vis Levitsky and Ziblatt's classic, *How Democracies Die*. Through an empirical evaluation of adherence to democratic principles in Nigeria, the authors sought to ascertain whether Nigeria's democracy is consolidating or weakening. The qualitative method was adopted, with data collected mainly from secondary sources. Findings revealed that Nigeria's democracy is not dead, rather, it is critically weakened by political parties, mainly due to party members switching allegiances for personal aggrandisement. The study recommended, among other things, strict enforcement of laws requiring elected officials to forfeit their positions if they defect from the party that sponsored their election. It concluded that Nigeria's democracy is on life support and risks collapse if political parties do not adopt and commit to clear ideological foundations as a defining feature of their formation and membership.*

Keywords: Democracy, election, governance, political party, state.

Introduction

Democratic government thrives on the mandate of the people, and decisions are reached based on consensus, an indication that it is people-oriented. This feature distinguishes democracy from other governmental practices. Democracy will begin to erode when these features diminish in practice. Traditionally, democracy has been known to erode through a form of fascism, communism and most prominently via military rule. All these in recent times have been seen to have given way and have become rare as violent seizures of power are no longer fashionable among state power brokers.

Notwithstanding, democracy in the contemporary world still dies but through new means. Dating back to the end of the Cold War, the majority of democratic collapses have been caused not by military leaders (coup) but by the elected and unelected government officials. Similar to Chávez in Venezuela, elected officials have undermined democratic institutions in Georgia, Hungary, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and

Ukraine. Therefore, current democratic backsliding commences at the electoral process; the ballot box (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018)

Democracy, and by extension, democratic governance, as popular as they are, especially since the turn of the 20th century that heralded the ‘third wave of democracy’ (Huntington, 1991), can, and do die. Unlike living organisms, however, there is nothing like a natural death for democracy. In other words, while death is considered an inevitable end for humans, for instance, such inevitability does not apply to a democracy. Rather, if/when a democracy dies, such a death is considered unnatural simply because it must have been orchestrated by anti-democratic actors through deliberate actions and inactions. In the book, *How Democracies Die*, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p.2) succinctly observed that:

Democracies may die at the hands not of generals but of elected leaders – presidents or prime ministers who subvert the very process that brought them to power. Some of these leaders dismantle democracy quickly, as Hitler did in the wake of the 1933 Reichstag fire in Germany. More often, though, democracies erode slowly, in barely visible steps.

Deducible from the excerpt is the fact that a democracy can be killed through gradual subversion of the democratic process. Again, this death can either be quick or slow. Thus, it could be averred that the life and death of democracy depend on the democratic process.

Another vital observation made is that previously, democracies died as a consequence of military intervention in politics, or as rightly captured by Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p.2), at the hands of men with guns. Presently, even though within the past decade some democracies have died through military coups (e.g., Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger Republic), others can be rightly considered dead. The process of democratic backsliding now originates from the very core and distinct tenet of democracy, which is the casting of a vote (the ballot box). The electoral route to breakdown is deceptive. A classic coup d'état, like the one in Chile under Pinochet, causes the downfall of a democracy in an instant and is glaringly apparent to all. Flames engulf the presidential palace. Execution, incarceration, or exile are the possible outcomes for the president. Either the constitution is being dissolved or suspended. None of these things occurs during campaigns. The streets are devoid of tanks. There are still constitutions and other institutions that claim to be democratic. Voting continues. Elected despots (autocrats) maintain a democratic facade while the essence of democracy is slaughtered (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Even though democracy in the United States (US) was the major focus of Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018), the foregoing premises appear incontrovertibly applicable to Nigeria and several other states in the Global South. In the case of Nigeria, although the credibility of elections in the Fourth Republic (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 & 2023) have remained debatable, the 2015, 2019 and 2023 general elections appear to be the most controversial not just because of the process that brought the presidents to power, but mainly as a result of their proficiency in bastardising democratic norms, institutions, and repeated violation of constitutionally recognised fundamental human rights.

Thus, the thrust of this paper is to critically examine the health status of democracy in Nigeria. This will be done by ascertaining whether democracy in Nigeria is alive and well, or otherwise. To do this effectively, Levitsky and Ziblatt's core theses on the demise of democracy will be critically examined vis-à-vis verifiable evidence from Nigeria in the Fourth Republic.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of democracy is quite contentious. This is because in terms of its meaning, content, variance and scope, there is no consensus among scholars. Democracy is mostly understood, based on the original Greek usage of the words *demos* and *kratos*, as rule by the people. Heywood (2015) noted that the fundamental concept of 'government by the people' is ambiguous and has been interpreted in numerous ways; therefore, democracy can be regarded as a 'contested' virtue or represent various systems.

Deducible from Abraham Lincoln's November 19, 1863, Gettysburg Address (from where the definition of democracy as the government of the people, for the people and by the people was derived), are 3 core attributes of democracy (Heywood, 2015). These include *the people* (implying political equality, an equal distribution of political power and influence); *government 'by' the people* (emphasising the importance of popular participation); and, *government 'for' the people* (highlighting the fact that democracy entails ruling in the public interest). To have such power rests on the people, directly or indirectly.

To Igwe (2002), Lincoln's definition of democracy is comprehensive only in political terms (p.109). This is so because it met all the standards of electoral and legal democracy, only implied on social and racial, but said almost nothing explicitly on economic rights (p.109). Thus, Igwe averred that democracy is, in theory, one of the finest examples of a working human contrivance whose basic objective is to promote human life and society (p.10). From this perspective, therefore, any form of government that fails to promote human life and society should not be referred to as a democracy.

It should be noted that Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) understood democracy from the perspective of majority rule (rule by the many) as well. However, Aristotle feared that such a rule stands the risk of degenerating into mob rule. Thus, majority rule – as signified by democracy – ought to be kept within the confines of norms of civilised society.

From the liberal perspective, Fukuyama (2014) explained that in a democracy, majority rule ought to be combined with constitutional protection of minority/individual rights. In other words, the constitutional rights of everyone should matter in a democracy. This notion, however, is in contrast to what Nwaorgu (2014) described as 'cabalcracy'. He noted that the sham (artificial appearance) of democracy prevalent in many developing states, notably in Africa and specifically in Nigeria, is simply governance by a cabal (cabalcracy'). The Cabal consists of opportunists, self-serving individuals whose collective function is distant from nation-building. The self-proclaimed political encyclopaedia (experts) mistakenly believe that they, inside their limited circle, possess all the knowledge necessary to govern state matters, completely disregarding the populace.

In contrast to the idea that democracy has to do with popular rule, Nwaorgu's idea is that Nigerian democracy is an aberration as it is the rule of a cabal – a small group of people – by the cabal, and for the sole interests of the cabal. The centrality of power and primitive appropriation of commonwealth in a cabalcracy led Ekekwe (2015) to ask where the people are between power, parties and principalities. In other words, governance ought to be people-centred in an ideal democratic setting.

Earlier, in his book, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ake (2001) emphasised that democracy is essential to development. He went further to analyse that if, in reality, the people are the end product of development goals, then the well-being of the people will only constitute the supreme law of development if they possess a degree of decision-making authority. It is feasible for someone to exercise decision-making authority for the advantage of others. However, one method to guarantee social transformation which aligns with the welfare of the populace is to establish democracy (Ake, 2001).

Ake was interested in ascertaining the feasibility of democracy in Africa, having described liberal democracy as crude and impoverished (p.129). This, he did, by criticising

some popular schools of thought and theoretical approaches. According to Ake (2001), liberal democracy, even at its best, is opposed to the idea of popular decision-making power. Abolition of popular authority and replacement of popular sovereignty with the rule of law is the very essence of liberal democracy. Global political elites and mainstream social scientists, who appeared even more wary of democracy than political elites, put pressure on liberal democracy's democratic components, which included public participation, government accountability, and consent from the governed. As a result, liberal democracy became less democratic over time. Western social science has continually reinterpreted democracy, under the guise of elucidating its meaning, but at the expense of its democratic principles.

Furthermore, the group theory of politics circumvents the definition of democracy, positing that its core lies in the dynamics of group competition, which inhibits the monopolisation of power and facilitates the incorporation of diverse group interests. The interest group theory of democracy posits that the citizen ceases to be an actual or prospective lawmaker and participant in sovereignty, instead becoming merely a supplicant for favourable policy outcomes aligned with expressed interests. The protective theory of democracy posits that a democratic polity safeguards citizens from the state, primarily through a robust civil society. Sovereignty and participation diminish as individuals opt for security (Ake, 2001).

For the Global South, an unfortunate reality remains that: ... in the hurry to globalise democracy in the wake of the Cold War, democracy has been reduced to the crude simplicity of multiparty elections to the benefit of some of the world's most notorious autocrats...who are now able to parade democratic credentials without reforming their repressive regimes (Ake, 2001, p.130).

These assertions on the crudity of democracy in Africa have remained a truism. This explains why African electorates vote without choosing in periodic elections, and autocrats in democratic garbs retain their tenacious grip on the reins of power. For the purpose of this paper, therefore, democracy is defined as a form of government in which the choice of who governs, and for how long, is the sole prerogative of the electorate. By implication, if the reverse is the case, that democracy is dead on arrival, only existing hypothetically.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws heavily from Levitsky & Ziblatt's (2018) core thesis in the book, *How Democracies Die*. As noted earlier, the authors maintain that the death of democracy is no longer spontaneously orchestrated through military coups and revolutions. Rather, democracies die through a deliberate, systematic, gradual process of weakening – or rather – erosion of democratic norms and institutions. This debilitating process often appears legal and legitimate given that it is perpetuated by public officeholders who acquired power through a legitimate electoral process.

According to Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018), many attempts by the government to undermine democracy are "legal," meaning they have received legislative or judicial approval. Even better, they may be presented as initiatives to strengthen democracy by, for example, streamlining the judicial system, fighting corruption, or improving the integrity of the voting process. Even though they are intimidated or bought out, newspapers continue to publish. People still complain about the government, even though they frequently encounter legal issues, such as taxes. This fosters public confusion. What is happening goes unnoticed for a while. Many people still think they are living in a democracy. Nothing can trigger societal

alarm bells since there is no precise moment; no coup, martial rule declaration, or suspension of the Constitution, when the regime unmistakably 'crosses the line' into dictatorship. Those who speak out against government misconduct risk being written off as being overly dramatic or vocal. For many people, the decline of democracy is hardly noticeable.

Prior to that, political leaders and political parties must have failed in their duty to prevent despots from returning to public power using deceptive democratic cloaks. As noted by Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018), extremist demagogues periodically arise in all societies, including robust democracies. A fundamental criterion for democracies is not the emergence of such figures, but rather the actions of political leaders and parties to inhibit their ascendance to power by excluding them from mainstream party nominations, refraining from endorsements or alliances, and, when necessary, collaborating with adversaries to support democratic candidates. Isolating prominent extremists necessitates political fortitude. However, when fear, opportunism, or misjudgment prompts established parties to integrate extremists into the mainstream, democracy is jeopardised.

Based on Levitsky & Ziblatt's postulations, democracies die at the hands of democratically elected leaders who later turn despotic after acquiring public power. Thus, a good way of preventing this is by preventing such demagogues from being selected as party flag-bearers. This highlights a curious dimension to the Nigerian situation. That many public institutions in Nigeria are basically weak and corrupt is an incontrovertible fact. During the 2023 election cycle in Nigeria, there were a lot of intrigues surrounding the identity of who will finally emerge as the presidential election flag-bearer of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). With then Vice-President Yemi Osibanjo, Chibuike Amaechi, and 11 others in the race for the party ticket, APC, after the June 8 party presidential election primaries in Abuja, declared Bola Ahmed Tinubu as its presidential candidate. Tinubu polled 1,271 votes, and his closest opponent was the former minister of transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, who scored 316 votes.

After a general election marred by crass irregularities (Nwankwo & Dode, 2024), Tinubu was declared winner, and his win was expectedly backed up by an election tribunal. One of the most unpopular governments in the history of Nigeria, one of the many excesses of the President is the usurping of a democratically elected government in Rivers State, and replacing it with a retired military administrator, contrary to constitutional provisions. Even though this action translates to a gross constitutional violation, it was not surprising that the National Assembly endorsed it unanimously (Musa, 2025). In Nigeria today, neither the constitution nor the judiciary appears to be respected. The judiciary and the legislative arm, through their actions and inactions, appear to have been mortally weakened, so that opposition to any presidential whim is considered abominable. For instance, the judiciary's capture and compromise have led to conflicting court rulings, an indication of judicial politicisation and erosion of public protest (Abuh, 2025). Therefore, instruments of state repression are deployed at random against perceived threats, thereby cowing a vital part of democratic states' vibrant oppositions – to silence. Given this scenario, it is logical to aver that democracy in Nigeria is comatose.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study. Thus, data were generated mostly from secondary sources like textbooks, journal articles, seminar/conference papers, among others. In analysing data so generated, a content analysis approach was adopted. This involved a thorough analysis in order to establish a logical sequence.

Empirical Analysis: Is Nigeria's Democracy Dying?

Beginning from the Fourth Republic in 1999, there have continued to be concerns about the health of democracy in Nigeria, as multiple indications have revealed a democratic government that is progressively losing track of its foundational strength. Many concerns are raised in critical areas, which include the politicisation of state institutions, suppression of dissent, deterioration of political parties, and the recurrence of electoral malpractices, even during the 2023 general elections. The situation above presents an image which mirrors a decline of Nigerian democracy, raising concerns about the ability of Nigerian elected officials to sustain democratic governance, institutions and projects. For instance, in what many consider to be a signal to judges to act in the interest of the ruling party, the Department of State Police (DSS) invaded the house of Judges without a warrant on the claim of anti-corruption operations (Ediagbonuvie, 2024).

Similarly, owing to the principles of democracy, elections are won through popular support. Thus, it is not the primary assignment of the courts of law to decide election results. However, in recent times in Nigeria, it has been challenging to determine how elected officials emerge. For instance, there was a gubernatorial election in Imo State on March 9, 2019. The election was concluded, and the winner was announced. Afterwards, there was litigation and claims of electoral fraud, particularly allegations regarding the omission of ballots from 388 polling stations. In this regard, the Supreme Court invalidated the results on January 14, 2020, by removing the earlier declared winner, Emeka Ihedioha of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), who polled 38.29% of the total votes cast, and won in total votes in 11 out of the 27 local government areas in the state (Ngwu & Ogiri, 2022). It is important to note here that Uche Nwosu of the Action Alliance (AA) secured 26.66% of the votes, winning in 10 local government areas to secure the second position. Ifeanyi Araraume of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) came third, winning 4 local government areas, and secured 16.06% of the total votes. However, the court installed Hope Uzodinma of the APC, despite being in fourth position, as he had won in only two local governments, obtaining 13.51% of the total votes.

In another instance, following alleged pipeline vandalism, President Bola Tinubu declared emergency rule in an opposition-led Rivers State, suspending the duly elected Governor of the State, Deputy Governor, and members of the State House of Assembly on March 18, 2025 (Vanguard News, 2025). This illustrates the politicisation of state institutions in Nigeria. The apparent explanation was restoring security and protecting critical infrastructure. However, the action was taken to satisfy private interest holders who align with the federal government and, in addition, a move to take direct control of a crucial opposition state. In other words, the action appears politically motivated, especially when contrasted with the federal government's inaction in other conflict zones, such as Benue State (An indication that constitutional powers are selectively used for political rather than for general interest).

The EFCC has also faced criticism for reportedly concentrating its investigations on opposition leaders while ignoring comparable claims made by members of the ruling party. Regulatory organisations, such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), have also come under fire, in addition to security institutions. The decision to penalise Channels Television and Africa Independent Television (AIT) during the #EndSARS protests was generally interpreted as an attempt to suppress dissent and control the narrative (Akinkuotu, 2020; Amnesty International, 2021).

This is closely associated with the dwindling space for civic activity and protest. Nigerians have witnessed a troubling trend where administrative persecution and state brutality are used to quell public outrage. Military personnel shot unarmed protesters at Lekki Toll Gate during the 2020 #EndSARS protests, which started as a youth-led movement against police brutality (Amnesty International, 2021). States also invoked the suspension of bank accounts and seized travel documents, both of which blatantly violated constitutional rights.

Recently, treason charges were filed against demonstrators in August 2024 in Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, and other locations. The Nigerian government have accused a minimum of at least 10 nonviolent #EndBadGovernance protesters of treason, a capital offence, for demonstrating against economic adversity. It was pressure from local groups and global human rights bodies that forced the government to drop charges. However, many others are still under legal proceedings, according to a report by Human Rights Watch (2024).

It should be noted that there has been a concerning trend of crackdowns on journalists in Nigeria since Bola Ahmed Tinubu assumed office in May 2023, under vague charges like cybercrime and defamation. For instance, the Nigerian Police Intelligence Response Team (NPIRT) abducted Daniel Ojukwu of the Foundation for Investigative Journalism on May 1, 2024. He was held incommunicado for nearly ten days under the Cybercrime Act and denied access to legal representation until his release around May 10 (Adetayo, 2024; Suleiman, 2024).

According to reports, under the current government, at least 11 to 13 journalists, including Segun Olatunji, Kasarachi Aniagolu, Achadu Gabriel, Godwin Tsa, Precious Eze, Salihi Ayatullahi, Adisa-Jaji Azeez, Saint Mienpamo, Abdulrasaq Babatunde, and Lukman Bolakale, have been subjected to detention, abduction, harassment, or intimidation. Similarly, not less than 37 cases of violations of press freedom were documented by a coalition of media professionals in the first half of the year 2024, while others noted that at least 13 journalists were arrested or assaulted within President Tinubu's first year; these figures underline a persistent climate of hostility towards the press in Nigeria (Suleiman, 2024).

Conventional and in consonance with democratic practice, political parties are conceived to serve as vehicles for intellectual debate and democratic representation, with a clear ideological path for a governmental approach to issues and policy implementation, which makes each party distinct. Unfortunately, Nigerian political parties have evolved into forums for opportunism and elite negotiation. Rather than presenting coherent policy choices or serving as platforms for aggregating citizen interests, Nigerian political parties are mainly reduced to tools for gaining power. Thus, Cheeseman & Ibrahim (2022) argue that the lack of a clear ideological orientation has transformed parties into election-winning organisations centred on individuals rather than programmes grounded in ideology. Strong political parties, according to Levitsky & Ziblatt's thesis, are essential democratic gatekeepers because they prevent authoritarian individuals from seizing power. Political parties in Nigeria lack cohesion and the right ideology to effectively perform this kind of gatekeeping role. The high rate of party defection in Nigeria, especially among elected officials, shows that the party structure is transactional and poorly institutionalised. Many of the politicians share an informal ideology that revolves around plundering public resources and manipulating the political economy for private gain.

The formation of new coalitions, such as the African Democratic Congress (ADC), demonstrates a pattern similar to the 2015 merger that brought the APC to power. They prioritise capturing power over establishing clear policy frameworks that could reform the Nigerian state. As a result, Nigeria continues to experience cycles of party and leadership turnover that do nothing to progress coherent national development objectives. This has consequently made it most difficult for citizens to make clear choices during elections, as they are denied meaningful choices, as elections are not framed around ideological choices but are mostly centred around people and local allegiances and principles.

In addition, electoral malpractices challenge the health of the Nigerian state. Official reports from local and international observers indicated major and serious issues during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. Major incidents were reported in states such as Rivers, Kano, and Lagos during the 2023 governorship election, as security forces were compromised by failing to act professionally. Subsequently, room for electoral fraud and security lapses was

created, allowing hoodlums to hijack the process (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). This reinforced the decline in public trust in the electoral commission and gave backing to allegations of favouring the ruling party against the opposition parties. However, the situation at the state level is also concerning, as ruling parties across states achieve a near-total victory in council elections conducted by the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) in their respective states. This, in turn, excludes the opposition and hinders the development of local democracy.

Discussion of Findings

In *How Democracies Die*, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt stated that elected politicians erode democratic norms and institutions from within rather than through military coups, which used to be a common method of demise for modern democracies. When looking at the political climate in Nigeria since 1999, this covert dismantling process, which is veiled by constitutional or legal processes, becomes quite apparent. Elections are held regularly, and multiple political parties vie for power in Nigeria. However, democratic norms are gradually eroding, a trend that is reminiscent of the authoritarian decline in countries like Venezuela, Turkey, and Hungary (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023).

The high rate of party defection in Nigeria, especially among elected officials, shows that the party structure is transactional and poorly institutionalised. Rather than doing so out of principle or ideological conviction, politicians often change parties for patronage and strategic access to power. Levitsky and Ziblatt link this tendency to democratic backsliding, which occurs when institutions are led by elite whims rather than democratic principles since it dilutes electoral mandates, disorients voters, and undermines accountability (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023).

As illustrated above, Nigerian courts, INEC, and police show this same pattern of institutional capture and selective deployment of power, echoing Levitsky & Ziblatt's (2023) observations on how democratic facades are used to entrench partisan interests. In this context, the question is: Is Nigeria's Democracy Dead? Using the authoritarianism diagnostic lens proposed by Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018), one may examine the question of the viability of Nigeria's democracy: Is someone plotting to change the laws of democracy? Does one side outrightly reject the other's political legitimacy? Is it accepted or even encouraged to be violent? Does someone think the opposition's civil liberties are in danger?

Although Nigeria's democracy has not completely crumbled, it is undeniably heading in a dangerous direction, with a consistent decline across all these metrics. These problems with Nigeria's electoral process, like those seen in the 2019 and 2023 elections, are similar to Levitsky & Ziblatt's (2018) idea of electoral fascism, in which those in power pretend to be democratic while manipulating the process to stay in power.

In addition, there is much tension in Nigeria when it comes to mutual tolerance, which is defined as the readiness to accept adversaries as legitimate competitors. Inflammatory language, threats, and allegations of betrayal are commonplace in political discourse, particularly during election seasons. There is a steady erosion of popular trust in opposition leaders due to accusations that they are criminals, enemies of the state, or stooges of international actors. These strategies are reminiscent of the warnings issued by Levitsky and Ziblatt, who stated that the rejection of political opponents' legitimacy is an obvious indicator of democratic collapse (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2023).

Furthermore, indirect forms of political violence are still tolerated in Nigeria. Pre-election violence, ballot theft, and post-election turmoil have all been linked to armed thugs who are loyal to politicians. Political godfathers frequently function with complete immunity, and such individuals are seldom ever brought to justice (Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project [SERAP], 2021). A tendency that Levitsky and Ziblatt noted in

declining democracies like Russia and Turkey is the toleration of violence by both state and non-state actors, which undermines democratic norms and increases voter fear and indifference.

As earlier noted in the crackdowns on #EndSARS protesters, there were illegal travel restrictions, bank freezes, and cybercrime cases against journalists; these patterns illustrate precisely how civil liberties come under systematic assault in line with Levitsky & Ziblatt's (2018) warnings on democratic erosion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence from the research shows that although democracy in Nigeria is currently seen as far from dead, it has been deteriorating for some time due to the erosion of institutional protections, the rejection of democratic principles, and the consolidation of zero-sum politics. Elite manipulation and presidential overreach have greatly diminished the efficiency of institutions such as the judiciary and electoral commission, even though these bodies are still operational. Therefore, Nigeria is an example of a competitive authoritarian regime: it maintains a system that gives the impression of democracy but gradually undermines its actual democratic principles. As fundamental democratic institutions, political parties need to change if we are to halt this decline.

In order to foster internal democracy, accountability measures, and ideological clarity, Nigeria has to rethink its party system. In order to maintain the integrity of the party and the trust of the electorate, the current constitutional provisions mandating that elected officials step down from their positions upon defection should be strictly enforced. In addition, influential people in politics should pledge to be patient with one another and with institutions, acknowledging that the other side has valid points and not using them as political weapons.

Because of their vital role as democratic guardians, civil society groups, the media, and the courts must be free from governmental interference. A culture of democratic values is more important than formal institutions for the survival of democracies. In the absence of these gentle constraints, even the most well-crafted constitutions have the potential to be instruments of oppression. The only way to save Nigeria's democracy from certain doom is for the country's political leaders to consciously recommit to democracy with the support of an active populace.

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