

Influences of Regional Diffusion of Democratic Strategies in Nigeria from Neighbouring African States

Ruqayya Aminu Gar^{1,2*}, Mohammed Nuru Umar¹, Murtala Muhammad³

¹Department of Political Science, Bauchi State University, PMB 65, Gadau, Itas/Gadau, Nigeria. ²Department of International and Strategic Studies, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. ³Department of Public Administration, School of Business Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, Nigeria.

*All correspondence should be addressed to: ruqayyagar@gmail.com

Abstract

Regional imitation is a propensity aimed at neighbouring nations to meet toward a common level of democratic political development. One can understand how such a propensity exists by concentrating on a diffusion element that analyses the hypothetically anticipated outcome of electoral management policies in these neighbouring nations. Research on Nigeria's democracy exist however, concentrated exclusively on domestic phenomenon and factors such as socio-cultural cleavages, overlooking the likely external influence of international norms, and regional diffusion of democratic strategies from neighbouring African states. This study examines the influences of regional diffusion of democratic strategies on Nigeria's democratic development, through a qualitative process of data collection and analysis. The study concludes that, regional diffusion of democratic strategies from successful wave of democratic transition to opposition parties against the then incumbent ruling political parties in African countries, such as Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi and Mali has motivated people and institutions in Nigeria to emulate the development there. Particularly, strong adherence to the rule of law by political actors, independence and integrity of the legal system, and provision of efficient civic and voter

education have greatly motivated and influenced the change in Nigeria's democratic development strategies.

Keywords: Regional; Diffusion; Democratic; Strategies; Nigeria; African States.

Introduction

Diffusion defines “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.”¹ The central assumption is that states are compensated when their governments are alike to those of their regions or neighbours. The rewards could be of divergent kinds: peace, electoral management reforms, mutual security, trade, investment, comfort of communication, and so forth. For instance, the democratic peace literature recommends that democracies infrequently, if ever, go to war against other democracies. Even virtuously domestic actors can be influenced by events in neighbouring countries. Opinions for imitation may be supported by strong indication or they may be driven by simple imitation. Whatsoever the reason or justification is, what matters is that some influential actors champion government convergence. Each country has its own influence on its neighbours. A moderately democratic nation could have some actors who press for emulation of a more democratic neighbour and other actors who desire to crack down more harshly like a less democratic neighbour.²

¹ Rogers, E. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations* (4th Ed.). New York: Free Press, pp10

² Brinks, D., & Coppedge, M. (2006). Diffusion is no illusion: Neighbour emulation in the third wave of democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 463-489; Most, B. A., & Starr, H. (1990). Theoretical and logical issues in the study of international diffusion. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2(4), 391-412; Doorenspleet, R. (2003). Development, class, and democracy: is there a relationship. In *Development and democracy* (pp. 68-84). Routledge; Starr, H., & Lindborg, C. (2003). Democratic dominoes revisited: The hazards of governmental transitions, 1974-1996. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 47(4), 490-519; Doorenspleet, R. (2004). The structural context of recent transitions to democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(3), 309-335.; Gleditsch, K. S., & Ward, M. D. (2006). Diffusion and the international context of democratization. *International organization*, 60(4), 911-933.; Wejnert, B. (2005). Diffusion, development, and democracy, 1800-1999. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 53-81.

Precisely, the diffusion model stresses four major elements that could be elaborated, first, the innovation, and embracing of an additional or fewer liberal democratic form of administration, like political rights and civil liberties. This idea of diffusion considers the acceptance of a new idea or method, for instance, efficient electoral management systems in the case of Senegal, Mauritius, Malawi, Uganda, Mali, and Ghana, which Nigeria emulates. Studies may look for variations in stages of democratic development in the target nation. The second element is the channel of communication. To identify which behaviours other nations send down the channel of diffusion is modelled as a simple demonstration consequence by regional or neighbouring nations, a world-wide demonstration impact, or a weakening influence in which transformation in the social network causes change.

The more the dissimilarity between the network's average levels of democracy and the potential adopter's level at a time, the greater the subsequent transformation in the adopter. The third element is connected to timing. Diffusion theory recommends that the individual features of potential adopters will affect the degree of acceptance of the innovation. In a connected manner, nations may require specific triggers such as governmental failure;³ economic crisis;⁴ rapid economic growth;⁵ a split in the authoritarian elite;⁶ or the removal or death of leaders;⁷ or to halt the indecisiveness and failures of the existing government and embrace a new structure. This

³ Skocpol, T. (1973, fall). A critical review of Barrington Moore's *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy*, *Politics and Society*, 4, 1-34.

⁴ Przeworski, A., Alvarez, M., Cheibub, J., & Limongi, F. (1996). What makes democracies endure? *Journal of Democracy*, 7(1), 39-55.

⁵ Huntington, S. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

⁶ O'Donnell, G., & Schmitter, P. (1986). *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain transitions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

⁷ Londregan, J., & Poole, K. (1996, October). Does high income promote democracy? *World Politics*, 49, 1-30

means that irrespective of diffusion and other pressures for adoption of a specific democratic political behaviour, the potential adopter must first be well informed about the change.

The fourth element recognised is the social system, which in this context is a network of nations. Networks need not be grounded on proximity; they may be connected or detached nations that shared colonial, racial, economic, or political bonds. Certainly, it is expected that nations that interrelate more regularly have a greater influence on one other. In addition, one major assumption of the diffusion model is that all neighbours are similar and inspire one other. However, it is believed that occasionally it is more probable that some nations are more influential compared others. The enthusiasm from the sending state requires not be the democracy gap between sending and receiving states; it might be an average democracy level, democratic strategies targeted at improving electoral reforms and political involvement or a count of the number of changes over time, and so on.⁸

It is within these important considerations that the victory of opposition parties in Senegal, Mauritius, Malawi, and Mali against the then incumbents, especially Ghana's electoral management reform successes, influenced people's political behaviours by inspiring more political motivations in them, as presented in the analysis of interviews of this study.

Methodology

⁸ Rogers, E. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations* (4th Ed.). New York: Free Press; Starr, H. (1991, June). Democratic dominoes: Diffusion approaches to the spread of democracy in the international system. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35, 356-381; Brinks, D., & Coppedge, M. (2006). Diffusion is no illusion: Neighbour emulation in the third wave of democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 463-489.

Qualitative technique allows a researcher to understand, describe and analyse peoples' views through discourse analysis with observed evidences and facts. Some characteristic of social life, experiences, and attitudes of people, by means of verbal expression or discussions with varying methodological practices⁹.The study uses a qualitative means in its data collection and analysis.

Democratic norms in Ghana, Senegal, Mauritius, Malawi, and Mali

Therefore, to begin with, it is quite significant to note that democracy came to be the prevailing and most desired system of government across the world after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the breakdown of communism and the end of the Cold War. These global changes have been appropriately captured as the victory of democracy and the most outstanding contemporary political ideology. This global conquest by democracy has shown a preferable path to change. In the last two decades, democracy has grown strong roots in Africa. Between 1983 and 1985, only four African countries held regular multiparty elections. But the number of electoral democracies in Africa skyrocketed from four to 10 in 1992/93, then to 18 in 1994/95 and to 24 in 2005/06.¹⁰

Similarly, 42 of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa conducted multiparty elections between 1990 and 2002. This demonstrates that elections that were formerly so infrequent are now becoming a convention. Interestingly, between 2000 and 2002 ruling parties in four African countries (Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana and Mali) peacefully handed over power to victorious opposition parties. In addition, the ratio of African countries categorized as dominated by tyranny

⁹ McCusker and Gunaydin, (2015); Gough and Lyons, (2016)

¹⁰ Buhari, M. (2015). Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Nigeria's Transition. *Chatham House, London*, 26.

without freedom for their citizens declined from 59 percent in 1983 to 35 percent in 2003. This shows that Africa has been part of the recent worldwide wave of democratization. Even though the growth of democracy on the continent has been uneven because the number of electoral democracies in Africa fell from 24 in 2007/08 to 19 in 2011/12, the percentage of countries categorized as ‘not free’ increased from 35 percent in 2003 to 41 percent in 2013. In addition, there have been some reversals at different times in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea- Bissau, Lesotho, Mali, Madagascar, Mauritania and Togo.¹¹

Opposition’s victory in Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana, Malawi and Mali

Therefore, as part of formal political participation in the analysis of changing political behaviours, free and fair elections are a very important element of consolidating representative democracy. Many African countries nowadays hold regular elections resulting in the victory of opposition parties due to the failure of incumbent parties to consolidate democracy, as demonstrated by Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana, Malawi and Mali. The victory of these opposition parties has regionally diffused to other African countries such as Nigeria, in particular, where for the very first time since transition to civil rule in 1999 the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) faced its stiffest opposition, All Progressives Congress (APC). Though Nigeria once had about 50 political parties, however, there was no real competition. The recent transitioning from a dominant party system to a competitive electoral polity is a prominent sign towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

¹¹“Ibid” Buhari, M. (2015). Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Nigeria’s Transition. *Chatham House, London*, 26.

Findings

Ghana has been frequently mentioned by participants of this study on Nigeria. This element operationalizes the anticipated extent and bearing of the emulation for the achievements of electoral management policies exerted by neighbours such as Senegal, Mauritius, Uganda, Malawi, and Mali on Nigeria in the West African region from 1999 to 2016. The diffusion electoral management success enables this study to understand how this policies and political behaviour of the people from these neighbouring states play important role in political behavioural change, particularly voting behaviour. Specifically, this variable allows the study to test for the influence of regional neighbouring states on democratic principles thereby influencing political behaviour alongside other vital domestic factors.

Generally, states tend to emulate their immediate geographic neighbours over time. Although democratic diffusion could take many forms, this is a form of the selective (decisional) representations of diffusion. That is to say, a model in which actors in one state make a transformation that is related in nature to a transformation occurring in other regional or neighbouring countries.¹²

Thus, regional diffusion, the peaceful alternation of power through competitive elections which happened in Ghana, Senegal, Malawi and Mauritius in recent times and other democratic strategies such as electoral management reforms with civic voter awareness, has externally motivated and influenced change of political behaviour in Nigeria and added to the political process of change of

¹² Most, B., & Starr, H. (1990). Theoretical and logical issues in the study of international diffusion. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2, 391-412.;

political behaviours of Nigerians in Bauchi and the Nigerian transition to opposition in general. This is coupled with the internal challenging issues of huge security, economic and social uncertainties in Nigeria as discussed in the fourth chapter of this study. On insecurity issues, there is a genuine cause for worry, both within and outside Nigeria because, apart from the civil war era, at no other time in history has Nigeria been this insecure. Boko Haram has sadly put Nigeria on the terrorism map, killing more than 13,000 Nigerians, displacing millions internally and externally, and at a time holding on to some parts of Northern Nigeria equal to the size of Belgium.¹³

Thus, in order to consolidate democracy, there is the need to hold a series of free and fair elections to peacefully alternate power among parties and more importantly to deliver on the promise of choice, freedom, security of lives and property, transparency and accountability, rule of law, good governance and shared prosperity. These are all issues of priority concerns for a better life of the generality of the people capable of influencing their political behaviours due to the important links that exist between these issues and the people's standard of living. These should be delivered to meet the people's interest and demands for consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and Bauchi State specifically. Respondent's #AC1, #CSR3 and #CRS4 mention theme of regional diffusion as one of the external factors that motivated political behavioural change among Nigerians and Nigeria's electoral management. According to them, Ghana's electoral management success story, especially in the conduct of its general election in 2012, created more awareness and motivation among the people of Nigeria and Bauchi State in particular. Some of the respondents

¹³ "Ibid" Buhari, M. (2015). Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Nigeria's Transition. *Chatham House, London*, 26. Pp. 4

refer to Ghana as one of the best democracies in Africa with a good electoral management process.¹⁴ This is due to the country's ability to hold satisfactory and peaceful elections since its return to multiparty democracy in 1992. The country remains applauded for its success in sustenance of representative democracy with a good electoral management in the African continent, considering its relentless progresses in the performance of political institutions, particularly, the judiciary, the civil societies, the media, and the Electoral Commission (EC).

Respondents respondent #AC3 on explains how the development and success of many elections conducted by the Ghanaian electoral management have created more public confidence in the electoral system locally and internationally as revealed in continued upsurge in voter turnout and citizens' participation in decision making processes and other political activities in the country. This has made Ghana a champion of democracy in West Africa and set the example for countries like Nigeria to emulate. Consequently, the Ghanaian electoral commission collaborated with Nigeria's INEC to build sound electoral process for the consolidation of democratic process in both countries.¹⁵

The findings of Abdullahi, Burnell, Jonckers et al.; Bofo-Arthur, Gyimah-Boadi and Morrison reveal that Ghana is one of the success stories of representative democracy in West Africa. They further associate the advancement made by Ghana in democratic consolidation to three main factors: adherence to the rule of law by the political actors, the independence and integrity of the legal system, and effective electoral management system. The studies show that voters' turnout in

¹⁴ Interviews with respondents #AC1 on 3 April 2016; #CSR3 on 5 April 2017; and #CRS4 on 28 May 2017 respectively, in Bauchi Nigeria.

¹⁵ Interview with respondent #AC3 on 11 April 2016, in Bauchi Nigeria.

Ghana has improved from 29 percent in the 1992 polls to 78.2 percent in 1996; it reached up to 80.01 per cent in the 2012 general elections. Since then, the percentage keeps rising.¹⁶ This shows how public confidence has continued to be built in the electoral management in Ghana for a long time, and it, at the same time, demonstrates important reasons why Ghana's experience has inspired other African countries like Nigeria to learn from.

Conclusion

Regional diffusion of democratic strategies from successful wave of democratic transition to opposition parties against the then incumbent ruling political parties in African countries, such as Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi and Mali has motivated people and institutions in Nigeria to emulate the development there. Particularly, strong adherence to the rule of law by political actors, independence and integrity of the legal system, and provision of efficient civic and voter education have greatly motivated and influenced the change in the political behaviour of Bauchi people by actively becoming more involved in political processes with a view to facilitating the process of accomplishing sustainable democracy and developments like Ghana. All these have boosted the capacity effectiveness of the electoral management body INEC, and created more confidence, awareness, motivations and important relationship in understanding the relevance of the contributions of these external forces. Particularly, strong adherence to the rule of law by political actors, independence and integrity of the legal system, and provision of efficient civic and

¹⁶ Abdulai, A. G. (2009). Political Context Study–Ghana. Leeds and Accra: Human Rights, Power and Civic Action Research Project. Burnell, P., Rakner, L., & Randall, V. (Eds.). (2017). Politics in the developing world. Oxford University Press.; Bofo-Arthur, K. (2008). Democracy and stability in West Africa: the Ghanaian experience. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University; Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2009). Another step forward for Ghana. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(2), 138-152.; Jockers, H., Kohnert, D., & Nugent, P. (2010). The successful Ghana election of 2008: a convenient myth? *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 48(1), 95-115.; Morrison, M. K. (2004). Political parties in Ghana through four republics: a path to democratic consolidation. *Comparative Politics*, 421-442.

voter education have greatly motivated and influenced the change in Nigeria's democratic development strategies.

Acknowledgment

This study was supported by Nigeria's TETFund (NEED Assessment fund) and Bauchi state university staff fellowship scheme under NEEDS Assessment Intervention Fund.

Author Contributions

R. A. G designed and analysed the data and draft the manuscript. M.N.U. and M.M. contributed in the manuscript draft and data curation. All authors reviewed and edited the manuscript.

Competing Interest

The authors affirm no competing interest.

References

- Abdulai, A. G. (2009). Political Context Study–Ghana. Leeds and Accra: Human Rights, Power and Civic Action Research Project. Burnell, P., Rakner, L., & Randall, V. (Eds.). (2017). Politics in the developing world. Oxford University Press.;
- Boafo-Arthur, K. (2008). Democracy and stability in West Africa: the Ghanaian experience. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University;
- Brinks, D., & Coppedge, M. (2006). Diffusion is no illusion: Neighbour emulation in the third wave of democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 463-489;
- Brinks, D., & Coppedge, M. (2006). Diffusion is no illusion: Neighbour emulation in the third wave of democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 463-489.
- Buhari, M. (2015). Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Nigeria's Transition. *Chatham House, London*, 26.
- Buhari, M. (2015). Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Nigeria's Transition. *Chatham House, London*, 26.
- Buhari, M. (2015). Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Nigeria's Transition. *Chatham House, London*, 26. Pp. 4
- Doorenspleet, R. (2003). Development, class, and democracy: is there a relationship. In *Development and democracy* (pp. 68-84). Routledge;
- Doorenspleet, R. (2004). The structural context of recent transitions to democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(3), 309-335.;
- Gleditsch, K. S., & Ward, M. D. (2006). Diffusion and the international context of democratization. *International organization*, 60(4), 911-933.;
- Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2009). Another step forward for Ghana. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(2), 138-152.;
- Huntington, S. (1968). Political order in changing societies. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Interview with respondent #AC3 on 11 April 2016, in Bauchi Nigeria.
- Interviews with respondents #AC1 on 3 April 2016; #CSR3 on 5 April 2017; and #CRS4 on 28 May 2017 respectively, in Bauchi Nigeria.
- Jockers, H., Kohnert, D., & Nugent, P. (2010). The successful Ghana election of 2008: a convenient myth? *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 48(1), 95-115.;
- Londregan, J., & Poole, K. (1996, October). Does high income promote democracy? *World Politics*, 49, 1-30
- Morrison, M. K. (2004). Political parties in Ghana through four republics: a path to democratic consolidation. *Comparative Politics*, 421-442.
- Most, B. A., & Starr, H. (1990). Theoretical and logical issues in the study of international diffusion. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2(4), 391-412.;
- Most, B., & Starr, H. (1990). Theoretical and logical issues in the study of international diffusion. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2, 391-412.;
- O'Donnell, G., & Schmitter, P. (1986). Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain transitions. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Przeworski, A., Alvarez, M., Cheibub, J., & Limongi, F. (1996). What makes democracies endure? *Journal of Democracy*, 7(1), 39-55.

- Rogers, E. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations* (4th Ed.). New York: Free Press, pp10
- Rogers, E. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations* (4th Ed.). New York: Free Press;
- Skocpol, T. (1973, fall). A critical review of Barrington Moore's *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy*, *Politics and Society*, 4, 1-34.
- Starr, H. (1991, June). Democratic dominoes: Diffusion approaches to the spread of democracy in the international system. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35, 356-381;
- Starr, H., & Lindborg, C. (2003). Democratic dominoes revisited: The hazards of governmental transitions, 1974-1996. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 47(4), 490-519.;
- Wejnert, B. (2005). Diffusion, development, and democracy, 1800-1999. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 53-81.