

Journal of Political Studies

Vol. 30, No.2, July–December, Winter 2023, pp. 1–16

Perceptions of Public Accountability and its Impacts on Democratic Stability in Nigeria: Observations from Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT

The manner at which public officials manipulates and won elections in Nigeria deeply depreciates the political value of the electorate and embolden such officials to refuse to be accountable to the masses. Thus, democracy in Nigeria has been profoundly endangered since Nigeria returned to democratic system of government in 1999 as a result of undemocratic practices, chiefly, the aspects that relates to elections and public accountability. At the center of these democratic misdemeanors in Nigeria is inherent lack of transparency and accountability of public leaders. This study therefore investigates perceptions of public accountability and its impacts on democratic stability in Nigeria with observations from Akwa Ibom State. The study articulated four objectives which translated into four research questions and four hypotheses. The Social Contract Theory was adopted for this study. The study also adopted descriptive research design and chi-square statistical technique to analyze the data collected. Research questionnaire was distributed to sample of 200 participants randomly selected from each of the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State, totaling 600, which the researcher only retrieved 570 of it. The findings revealed among others that citizens' views about the electoral processes influence their perceptions of democratic stability. The study recommended among others that the electoral processes should be very transparent to all citizens to enlist their trust and confidence in the political system.

Received:
August 28,
2023

Revised:
September 13,
2023

Published:
December 15,
2023

Keywords: *Democracy, Election, Public accountability, Public officials
Transparency.*

Introduction

The debate on the functions, range and routine of the public institutions and organizations have been intensified in the past two decades (Hookana, 2011). Thus, efficiency, effectiveness and success became the essential terms used in evaluating

and assessing the routine of public institutions or establishments (Mouzas, 2006). Consequently, there have been growing agitations for public officials in emerging countries such as Nigeria to deliver excellence public services that meet the desires of its peoples, being more answerable and responsible for its decisions, actions and inactions in cautiously managing available resources. Therefore, accountability and performance of public institutions as well as public officials are the fundamental worries of modern-day administration.

In Nigeria, the level of public accountability on the part of public institutions and its officials from Nigeria's independence till today is highly discouraging. A much prominence is placed on it, the more worrying it turn out to be (Thovoithin, 2003). The Nigeria post-independence socio-economic and political practices appropriately offer more adequate resources to demonstrate the above detail that public accountability built on performance accountability assessment has not been very strong since the independence of Nigeria in 1960. The level to which public officials are accountable in Nigeria has steadily dropped particularly under the current democratic system. The continuous decline in the level of accountability among institutions and public officials in Nigeria shows that the adoption of multi-party system has not enhance or promote good governance or make leaders accountable (Thovoithin, 2003).

In Akwa Ibom State, there are many contentious issues which concern the poor state of public accountability. Where public officials are perceived to pursue their personal gains and interests excessively rather than that of the entire citizens, they become disenchanted and thus, bring to question the legitimacy of those public officials in the state and even the legality of the procedure or process that made them. This could no doubt cause a significant distortion to democratic stability. It is on this background that this study examines the perceptions of public accountability and its impacts on democratic stability in Nigeria, with observations from Akwa Ibom State. The study, however, posed the following questions:

1. Do citizens' views about the electoral processes influence democratic stability?
2. Does democracy thrive on accountability and transparency?
3. Are government officials accountable in their responsibilities?
4. Do public perceptions of accountability directly affect democratic stability?

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine if citizens' views about the electoral processes influence democratic stability.
2. To examine if democracy thrives on accountability and transparency.
3. To investigate if government officials are accountable in their responsibilities.
4. To determine if public perceptions of accountability directly affect democratic stability.

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Hypotheses

1. Citizens views about the electoral process tends to influence democratic stability.
2. Democracy tends to thrive on accountability and transparency.
3. Government officials tends to be accountable in their responsibilities.
4. Public perceptions of accountability directly affect democratic stability.

Public Accountability and Democracy: The Nexus

Accountability assumes that an official or person in position of responsibility should be held responsible for his/her actions and the consequences actions or inactions emanating from him or her. Takaya (1989, p.61) defined accountability as “an official personal obligation to carry out assigned duties or activities and be responsible for results or outcomes”. Adegbite (2009, p.33) conceptualized accountability as “the obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted in accordance with agreed rules and regulations and/or standard and the officer reports fairly and accurately on performance result”. The implication of the above definition relates to the crucial functions of due process, openness and response mechanism in the attainment of accountability and responsibility.

Public accountability remains the trademark of modern democratic governance. Democracy remains a literal concept if those in power or public offices cannot be held accountable to the public for their activities and blunders in their decisions, policies and expenses. Within this context, public accountability can be said to complements pubic management. Thus, accountability starts by holding public institutions and their managers answerable, putting in place machineries to conform with the terms of democratic accountability. Hence, transparently reporting on performance constitute the foundational doctrines for democratic survival. Accountability represents the necessary bases through which government exercises power in the society. The implication of the above is that if a government is accountable and responsible, such government is bound to enjoy the support and legitimacy from the citizens. Thus, if dishonesty becomes the greatest harmful and destructive ailment that any organization must tackle in order to advance, then accountability and transparency becomes the major cures for ineffective, inefficient and unstable democracy.

In administration, the drive for accountability is to defend core and fundamental democratic codes, such as public interests, public trusts, rule of law, fundamental human right and good governance. It outlines the anticipations of the public relating to matters such as financial integrity in government, the behavioral honesty of public officials and the safeguarding of the less-privilege. This implies that if a public office holder is not carrying out his or her duties properly, the application of punishments enthusiastically becomes the only remedy.

Public accountability defines how authority is circulated in the administrative system and how individuals holding such authority are held responsible and accountable. The idea of good governance identifies a number of generally acceptable values such as openness, transparency and accountability which facilitates the participation of the citizens in the process of decision-making.

Democracy itself represent a government in the citizens participate in policy formulation, implementation as well as decision-making. Therefore, the principle of openness signifies governments listening to the citizens and taking their ideas into consideration when planning and executing public policies so as to enhance democratic sustainability.

Practically, accountability signifies that government should be operated in such a transparent and open way so as to boost participation of citizens such as the transparent/competitive tendering of government contracts, appointments, recruitment and appointments into position of responsibilities. The success of public governance is assessed by the citizens, not by those in government. It is the citizens who are requesting for greater transparency and accountability from government as well as greater public involvement in formulating and implementing public policies that affect their lives. Also, the concept of democratic governance and the battle against corruption need to be taken seriously if the process of accountability and transparency is to be instilled in public institutions. They represent the answers for successful public sector reforms that can facilitate the equitable and sustainable development (Olowu, 1995). Accountability is crucial to the preservation of fundamental human rights, strengthening of judicial and legislative institutions, rule of law as well as other agencies of government in a bid to hold them accountable. Thus, democratic governance thrives on accountability of public sector institutions and public officials, strong civil society organizations and the independent mass media.

However, within the social sciences and mainly in political science, democracy connotes the organization of the society in such a manner that the citizens determine who leads them as well as have the right to hold those leaders accountable where necessary (Akindele, 1992, 1993; Akindele & Olaopa, 1995 and 1997 and Akindele & Obiyan, 1996). Democracy remained the most generally acceptable system of government in the world. According to Dahl (1971), elections of leaders represent the only avenue through which citizens can exert considerable influence on the elected leaders. Thus, the competition for citizens' votes during elections make leaders to be accountable and responsive to the people because the citizens may shift his or her support from one leader to another if such leader is not accountable and responsive (Dahl, 1971; Ikpe, 2000). Within this context, democracy is identified and sustained through how leaders ascended or acquired political power and how accountable and responsive they are in their actions. Clampham (1993), submits that democracy encompasses as its inherent features, accountability based on clearly defined procedures which are generally accepted by the leaders and binding on them. However, the degree of democracy varies across societies with the intensity of passion for accountability and its effective enforcement (Sklar, 1986).

According to Linz and Stepan (1996), all actors in the state in a democratic government must be held answerable and becomes rooted in the rule of law. Therefore, from the accountability-responsibility axis, the state and its leaders are responsible for maintaining law and order, while the citizens hold leaders accountable.

Perceptions of Public Accountability and Democratic Stability

Public accountability is central to good governance and democratic stability. It is not only governmental institutions that must be accountable and responsible to the

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public and other institutional stakeholders but also the non-governmental groups, private and civil society organizations. The concept of accountability varies depending on whether decisions or action taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. Generally, an institution or organization is accountable to those that are likely to be influenced by their actions and decisions. Public accountability cannot be applied without rule of law and transparency. In many countries, the deterioration in public trust and confidence in government is driven by high profile of moral failure in the private and public sectors. Thus, confidence or trust cannot be affirmed, call for or enacted, rather, it must be gotten through validated process of responsibility (Young, 2011).

Public accountability is one of the foundations of good governance. Accountability subsists when there is a relationship such that an individual or institution perform certain task and responsibility in a transparent and open manner. In many cases, lack of accountability has contributed to the democratic instability in Nigeria and at this point it could be seen categorically that public accountability has negative influence on democratic stability in Nigeria. For instance, various military coup leaders while announcing their take over in Nigeria always cites corruption and lack of responsibility and accountability on the part of public office holders. This is manifested through poor leadership, poor government policies, non-independent of the judiciary, ethnicity, tribalism, among others.

However, one of the utmost formidable challenges which have inhibited the growth of democracy in Nigeria is the absence of obedience to ethics, rule of law and the constitution. For more than 62 years after independence, it has been difficult for Nigeria to achieve democratic stability in spite of efforts by previous administrations to achieve this deed. Various elections held in Nigeria since independence has always been disputed as not being free and fair and studies on election-related challenges in Nigeria have always revealed that citizens' expectations are not met. It is a misfortune of regrettable percentage that Nigeria, in spite of its enormous human and material resources, it has only just existed on paper as the "Giant of Africa" not in democratic advancement or accountable. These are, in no way visible developmental pointers to validate its consistent ambitions for global acknowledgement.

The simple understanding of democracy entails the fact that power is resided with the people. Though, its potency as the best form of government has not be realized because the political leaders are not accountable and responsible to the masses. Violation of the laws, disobedience court orders, disdain to due process and gross abuse of fundamental human rights by government and its agents has been the order of the day. Therefore, the supremacy of the constitution is in doubt as the citizens' participation in the process of governing themselves is not in any way considered. As such, the equality of all citizens before the law becomes a mere political slogan. Elections are not free and fair as the electoral processes are always accompanied by massive rigging and violence. Elections have been incapable of engendering accountability because emphasis placed on political power triggered political competition to be normless, brutal and ruthless. Consequently, electoral politics in Nigeria is generally viewed as a game of winner-takes-all and the electorate are manipulated to the whims and caprices of the politicians (Ikpe, 2000).

In a report by Edidiong Udobia in (Premium Times, November 5, 2021, p.1-3), a civil society organization, Policy Alert, had lampooned the Akwa Ibom State Governor, Udom Emmanuel of refusing to unveil the N171.2 billion derivation refund (excess crude account) and N78 billion being the refund of money spent by Akwa Ibom State government on federal roads in the state his administration received from the federal government in 2021. These issues raised dust in the minds of many Akwa Ibom citizens as they see the government as being insincere, unaccountable and irresponsible in their actions and behaviour. The perceptions of public accountability tend to suggest that it can distort democratic stability, because once the citizen lost confidence in government, instability of the democratic system becomes inevitable. For example, the current revolts and waves of military take overs in African continent arose as a result of citizens' loss of confidence and trust in government ability to carry them along in the democratic processes. Within the past one year, there has been tidal wave of military coups from Sudan, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso to Chad, with some countries having attempted coups, all centering on failure of the democratic leaders and processes.

In another instance, a Federal High in Abuja in June, 2021, ordered the federal government to pay over 3.3 billion dollars to Rivers and Akwa Ibom State as share of re-calculated oil derivation revenue. The government of Akwa Ibom State received the derivation refund from the federal government during the third quarter of 2021 but failed to disclose this to its citizens. The state government under Udom Emmanuel as Governor also received from the federal government over N40 billion from the Paris Club refund without informing the citizens of the receipt of the money or what it has been appropriated for/expended on. In a press release, Tijah Bolton-Akpan, the Executive Director of Policy Alert, said that the organization was disappointed with the state government for not disclosing the funds to the public. Mr. Bolton-Akpan said that the refusal of the Governor to inform the citizens of the refund leaves a huge gap in transparency, openness, responsiveness and accountability on the part of the state. He further states that:

We are delighted that the federal government have obliged to the refund based on the ruling. This development explains why the state government recently reviewed their expected revenue on exceptional income 13% derivation revenue arrears from N61.1 billion to N193 billion which is a 315.9 percent increase. However, Akwa Ibom people were not informed about this development during the presentation of the supplementary budget even after the state had received the fund (p.1-2).

The controversy surrounding the project of the International Worship Centre in Akwa Ibom State initially budgeted to cost the state N7 billion is another issue of serious concern. Many citizens of Akwa Ibom State had wondered why the state government should embark on such project at a time when available funds should be channeled to other critical and important issues that affect the lives of the people. The project may be relevant religiously but many have questioned the usefulness of the project at the period the state government is owing a lot of retired workers their gratuities and pensions. The state government in an earlier report had claimed the funds for the project was derived from the private sector and friends not from the state fund. However, the state government came up again claiming that the funds for the project was from the state government thereby causing confusion in the minds of the citizens as to the ability of government to judiciously and responsibly utilize the available funds of the state for the good of the entire citizens. The state

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government even went on to budget funds for the project in budgets. This claim seems to be faulty and citizens perceived lack of transparency and accountability because of the conflicting claims of the Akwa Ibom State government. It is imperative to state clearly that once citizens lost public trust in any leadership, questions of public accountability are inevitable, which invariably snowballed to democratic instability. Till date, the controversy and conflicting claims surrounding the accountability of the funds for the execution of the International Worship Center in Akwa Ibom State remains unresolved and government even budgeted again almost N6 billion in the 2022 budget still for that questionable project when previous controversies are yet to be resolved. Cumulatively, the total of about N23.75 billion (2019-2022) have so far been spent on the worship center that has no economic bearing on the lives and economy of Akwa Ibom people (Policy Alert, in Premium Times, 2021). Where funds for such ill-timed project are not well accounted for, then questions are asked by the citizens on the level of accountability and transparency of the government.

According to Premium Times, November 23, 2016, the Akwa Ibom State government sought and obtained the approval of the State House of Assembly to guarantee WIZCHINO CONSTRUCTION COMPANY to borrow N 5 billion from a commercial bank. Just recently, the state government again sought and obtained the approval of the State House of Assembly to guarantee MIMSHAC DIGITAL AUTOMOBILE ASSEMBLY PLANT to borrow \$10 million (about N 4.7 billion) from Zenith bank Plc (The Citizen, January 21, 2022). The state government has failed to disclose the interest of the state in the private companies that led the state to guarantee these companies. The implication is that if the two loans guaranteed by Akwa Ibom State Government are not paid as at when due or not paid at all, the state government will be held responsible for the payment. The questions are: What are the stakes of the state government in guaranteeing these loans? Of what benefits would guaranteeing the loans would yield to the Akwa Ibom people? Of what advantage(s) has Akwa Ibom State and its people in the decision of the state to guarantee the loans? Etc. These questions are begging for answers because the citizens are unaware of the plans, intentions, motives and benefits accruing to the state government or its citizens for guaranteeing private companies to collect loans. A government that lacks accountability, transparency, openness and responsiveness is prone to democratic breakdown or democratic erosion.

Therefore, the support citizens give to democratic institutions invariably determines the survival of such democratic experiment. For instance, in Sudan currently, the citizens are engaging in protest and other violent struggles for transition to democratic rule. This started in November, 2021, when the military tookover power in the country. These sustained protests and quest of the people showed that generally majority of the population have come to terms that democracy represent a government that guarantees accountability, responsiveness and transparency. Therefore, the extent to which the citizens' views and consider accountability on the part of political leaders can make or mar democratic stability. In any human society that respects citizens' views and opinions, democratic stability is very important. For instance, during the 2015 gubernatorial election in Akwa Ibom State which saw Udom Emmanuel emerged as the flag bearer of the People Democratic Party, some citizens' view about the electoral processes went into two different sides. This is

because the outgoing Governor Godswill Akpabio unilaterally brought Udom Emmanuel to the political limelight and imposed him on the Akwa Ibom State population without proper consultations with the people. However, while some individuals faulted the electoral processes that led to his emergence, others did not. The above actions by Godswill Akpabio can considerably kill democratic spirit among the electorate, thus, endangering democratic stability in the state. In a similar fashion, Udom Emmanuel on Sunday January 30, 2022, announced Mr. Umo Bassey Eno as his preferred candidate for 2023 governorship elections in the state without consultations with the people, and this has elicited serious mixed reactions as to whether the Governor in a supposed democratic system have power to impose leadership on the people. The above action of the Governor constitutes a democratic anathema and has the propensity to hasten democratic breakdown.

An investigation conducted by Accountability Lab in Nigeria, in partnership with Ford Foundation in September, 28, 2021 discovered that absence of political accountability by the public officials has continued to cause underdevelopment in communities in Akwa Ibom State. The program manager, Mrs. Ehi Grace, disclosed this at Town Hall meeting with stakeholders in Akwa Ibom State and concluded that the findings was based on conclusions drawn from Upenekong and Uquo in Ibeno and Esit Eket Local Government Areas of the Akwa Ibom State respectively.

In theory and practice, accountability is a fundamental component of any democratic system, implying that democracy thrives on accountability. The views of many citizens in Akwa Ibom State is that if democracy thrives on accountability why is it difficult for public officials to show some level of accountability? Lansdale (1986) argues that every political system has its own challenges of accountability and ways of achieving it. However, some political systems approach it from a legal, rational and systematic direction, while other systems are largely cynical, unsystematic and personalistic in their approach. In his own view, Sklar (1986) asserts that in modern politics, as a condition, accountability appears to increase with the development and autonomy of the civil society in the state. It is only rational that those to whom the rulers should account must know what accountability entails before demanding it. This demand for accountability wakes democracy from slumber and stabilizes it.

An aspect of governance often neglected in assessment of accountability in many states in Nigeria including Akwa Ibom State is government/official lawlessness. Once state officials are not subject to the law and official lawlessness is overtly or covertly encouraged the people to demand for accountability. Public accountability centers on how those in position of responsibility are held to account for their actions and inactions. The concept of good governance revolves around accountability, transparency and openness that facilitates the involvement of the public in the processes of decision-making. In the process of upholding democratic tenets and norms, it is imperative for the government to pay attention to citizens and take their ideas into consideration while planning and executing public policies (Anna, 2004). This is why Ibe and Afolayan (2018) noted that the inability of the Nigerian masses to hold their leaders to account for their actions and omissions reduce the democratic system to a mere literal concept.

The real fact is that public officers are meant to deliver the dividends of democracy to the people and based on the social contract with the people, they are to be held responsible and accountable for their actions. The present leadership in Akwa Ibom

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State has come under serious criticisms from the citizens for failing to take their opinions and views into account before initiating projects that involve the spending of public funds.

Citizens' expects government to commensurate projects with the amount of funds that comes from Federal Government and that which is internally generated in the state. Sadly, this has not been done, calling to questions the much talk about account as necessary component of democracy. Budgets passed in the state becomes yearly rituals that lack any requisite impact on the citizens and are not properly implemented to touch the lives of the people. Even when the government officials give explanations on some of the issues concerning the budgets or that relates to aspect of accountability and transparency on government spending or award of contracts, citizens become emasculated because of fear of government repression (Ikpe, 2000).

Linz and Alfred (1996) submits that all significant actors in the state in a democratic government must be held accountable. Writing on the impact of distorted perceptions of political accountability on democratic stability in Nigeria, Ikpe (2000) summarized that very little attention is usually paid to the officers' performances in their official duties and this problem have facilitated the underdevelopment of various communities in Nigeria. In view of accountability in Akwa Ibom State, it is argued that some projects were not necessary considering the economic situation of the state, as it has raised a case for poor accountability and transparency. Thus, this could distort democratic stability and the government is therefore liable to give account of public funds based on the social contract it has with the citizens in the process of getting to the public office.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts social contract theory as expanded by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) through his work – *Leviathan* - in reaction to the English Civil War. The theory was updated by other philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) (Manzoor, 2013). The vital point in the social contract theory is to relate it with public accountability and democratic stability in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State using Akwa Ibom State as an example.

The tenets of the theory centers on the fact that individuals initially had no administrative organization and decide to form an organization which give rise to a State. Therefore, to comprehend its principles, it is vital to realize that the history of the world is traced from the period of pre-institution of the State, where there was no government (Freeman, 2007). In the period before the state institutions emerged, there was no administrative structure and as a result, there was no coercive authority to enforce any law. Hence, individuals lived in a state of nature, and unavoidably were exposed to rules set by nature since there were no established order to articulate as well as enforcing the laws them. After time lapses, individuals agreed to establish administrative systems based on their consent and also agreed to submit to the established authority; and in exchange for the government to be responsible to their yearnings, accountable and protect their interest (Mouritz, 2010).

The impression of the social contract puts the notion that the State only exist to serve the interest of the people. Perhaps, the people own the political power adored by the

State and they may decide to give or withhold this power (Friedman, 1999). In his exposition, John Locke (1632-1704), presented the idea of a social contract by firstly introducing the concept of the State of Nature. In his book: Two Treatises of Government published in 1690, Locke attempts to defend the English Revolution of 1688 (Rawls, 2007). According to Locke, individuals were free and equal in the state of nature since each lived the way he or she likes, although the freedom was not guaranteed (Gaba, 2007). The fact here is that, for Locke, the state of nature was not a state of anarchy as Hobbes contends that life in the state of nature was solitary, nasty, poor, brutish and short. Thus, Hobbes contends that administrative systems came into being as a result of attempt by the people to remedy the problems associated with the state of nature (Juma, 1992; Mouritz, 2010).

Within this context, citizens vote in public officials with the view that they will cater for their well-being by way of putting in place policies and programmes that favour them. This, they do, by casting their votes by surrendering their political rights and consent to the political authority (sovereign), which they believe will use position to effect positive changes in the political system or society that would ultimately address their individual and collective challenges.

Methodology and Discussion of Findings

This study adopted quantitative research design to evaluate the collected data. Sample was collected with the use of the questionnaire distributed in the three senatorial district (Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene) each comprising of 200 persons, making a total of 600 participants. This was achieved by randomly selecting 200 persons from each senatorial district of the state. However, 570 of the questionnaires were retrieved. The study draws its source from both the primary and secondary source. The respondents comprised civil servants, students, teachers, businessmen, etc. However, the chi-square statistical technique was employed to evaluate the hypotheses for empirical confirmation at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: The chi-square analysis for hypothesis one

| Variable | d/f | P | Critical value | χ^2 value | Decision |
|--|-----|------|----------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Citizens' views about the electoral processes tends to influence democratic stability. | 4 | 0.05 | 9.488 | 14.34 | Reject H_0 Accept H_i |

Table 1 showed that the χ^2 value (14.34) is greater than the critical value (9.488). Therefore, the alternative hypotheses which states that citizens' views about the electoral processes tends to influence democratic stability is accepted.

The electoral processes in Akwa Ibom State in particular and Nigeria as a whole is something that is questionable. In recent times, the electoral processes which has produced public officials in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general has received hard knocks. According to Etieno (2017), the electoral processes which has produced many of the government officials into office is questionable. When citizens begin to have negative views about the electoral processes which brought

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these government officials into public offices, it affects their perceptions of democratic system. This supports Ogundiya (2008) submission that said that democratic stability is what an average Nigerian wishes but when the electoral processes that brings public officials into leadership positions is questionable by the citizens, this could negatively influence democratic stability.

Table 2: Chi-square analysis for hypothesis two

| Variable | d/f | P | Critical value | χ^2 value | Decision |
|---|-----|------|----------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Democracy tends to thrive on accountability and transparency. | 4 | 0.05 | 9.488 | 23.47 | Reject Ho Accept H _i |

Table 2 showed that the χ^2 value (23.47) is greater than the critical value (9.488). Therefore, the alternative hypotheses which states that democracy tends to thrive on accountability and transparency is accepted at 0.05 level of significance. This also answers the research question two and the result is validated by Obadan (1998) who opined that democracy have in recent years become progressively more significant for accountability of political leadership. In a related view of Obadan (1998), democracy thrives better on public accountability. Thus, accountability is strongly rooted in democracy.

Table 3: Chi-square analysis for hypothesis three

| Variable | d/f | P | Critical value | χ^2 value | Decision |
|--|-----|------|----------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Government officials tends to be accountable in their responsibilities | 4 | 0.05 | 9.488 | 36.45 | Reject Ho Accept H _i |

Table 3 revealed that the χ^2 value (36.45) is greater than the critical value (9.488) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the hypothesis which states that government officials tends to be accountable in their responsibilities is accepted. This result also answers the research question 3. In support of this result in Table 3, Friedman (1999) asserted that the idea of the social contract constitutes a foundational trust that the state exists only to aid the drive of the people and this implies that the state governments are expected to be accountable to the people, serving their interests and protecting their lives, liberties and property(s). As patronage consists of a dual exchange, people will support a patron based on services he provided to the community but to ensure that his contributions are not obfuscated or regarded as an allurements by the community, he must be involved continuously in community development even after leaving office.

This result also reflected the opinion of Sklar (1986) who argued that in modern politics, as a condition, accountability appears to increase with the development and autonomy of the civil society in the state. It is only rational that those to whom the rulers should account must know what accountability entails before demanding it.

This demand for accountability makes democracy wake up from slumber and stabilizes it.

Table 4: Chi-square analysis for hypothesis four

| Variable | d/f | P | Critical value | χ^2 value | Decision |
|--|-----|------|----------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Public perceptions of accountability directly affect democratic stability. | 4 | 0.05 | 9.488 | 35.42 | Reject H_0 Accept H_i |

Table 4 revealed that the χ^2 value (35.42) is greater than the critical value (9.488) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the hypothesis which states that public perceptions of accountability directly affect democratic stability is accepted. The result also answers the research question 4. The more perceptions of people towards accountability, the more it gears up democratic stability. For example, the criticisms of a civil society organization, Policy Alert which criticized the Akwa Ibom State Governor, Udom Emmanuel of refusing to inform the people about the N171.2 billion derivation refund his administration received from the Federal Government raised dust in the minds of many Akwa Ibom citizens. When public perceptions of accountability increase, it is likely to affect democratic stability positively. This fact remains that in any democratic setting, government must be accountable to the people that brought them to power.

Conclusion

Democracy cannot be built on a wobbly political base. When public officials are perceived to be concerned with their personal interests extremely, citizens become disappointed, questioning the legitimacy of the processes that brought such leaders to public office. This may result in democratic instability or democratic erosion. Democratic stability simply assumes that the people have, at any time, the government which they choose, are most likely to support the government which represents and pursue their interests. Though, this does not suggest that public accountability explains everything - ethnicity, religious bigotry, recycling nature of political elites, bad governance, unstable party structure, failing economy, etc.

Public accountability ensures that citizens hold their leaders responsible and accountable for their actions which affects their lives. This study has therefore revealed that democratic stability particularly in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria as a whole anchor more on public officials being accountable in their actions and omissions. This involve the people observing the public officials that are not doing well and constructively questioned them. This action of the citizens wakes democratic stability from slumber and stabilizes it. Transparent, free and fair elections will become an important process which the masses can rely on to change any ineffective and unaccountable governments. The citizens can also abandon one party or candidate for another once they noticed that the former does not entrench accountability and go for a party that recognizes accountability as core part of democracy.

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Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

1. The electoral processes should be made very transparent to all citizens to enlist their trust and confidence in the political system.
2. Since democracy thrive on accountability, citizens should be involving in constructive criticisms whenever they perceive non-accountability of the government in the day-to-day affairs of the state.
3. Citizens should be bold enough to hold their leaders responsible and accountable for their actions and omissions that goes contrary to the social contract they have between them.
4. Public accountability should be ensured through continuous awareness programmes if democracy is to be stable in the state and country as a whole.

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