
Nigerian Political Behaviour and Democratic Consolidation

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Introduction:

Political behaviour refers to the behaviour of man in a social system that gives him shelter, sustenance and protection configured in terms of socio-economic conditions of human existence... describes specific type of behaviour namely: that patterns of behaviour in society which relates to power, in order to increase power, to protect power, to modify power or use power in advancing the individual or the collectivity from any already given power position. Such roles are the chief and universal aims and objectives of political man.

Okolie, 2004: 19

Democracy... is all about the decentralization of political power, located first in the individual and then the 'collectivity' through the mandate principle... it is governance in which the people are directly involved in the taking and implementation of decisions that affect their lives, or in which the people are free to choose those to superintend over their affairs.... Paradoxically, what is practical in Nigeria today as democracy lacks this classical democratic content... because of the peculiar character of the state in African social formation and fractious hegemonic class reproduced to manage its affairs.

Obianyo, 2008:87.

...A living political system is a changing system, structures, principles and manifestoes, let alone, do not account for the change. It is the behaviour of citizens that accounts for so much of the inevitable change....when weighed on the scale, man's behaviour is heavier than non-human ingredients in the shaping of the political system and is ultimately, the chief decisive factor in that system.

Ejiofor, 2007:4

The indentations stated above are not only insightful but instructive. The organic nexus between the behaviour of people (citizens of a state) in relation to power and intensity development of participatory governance/accountability can not be underestimated. Indeed the intensity of popular participation in 'public affairs' is inversely implicated in the dominant political culture of the people living in the geo-political terrain.

By political culture, we refer to "the pattern of distribution of orientations members of a political community have towards politics (Almond & Verba, 1963, Chapter 1). This patterned collectivity of orientations influence the structure, operation, and stability of political life (Pye and Verba, 1965). It expresses a wide range of orientational values of society such as beliefs; ideology, responsibilities, rule of law, extent of structural and role differentiations.

As aptly noted by Almond and Powell (1966:50), political culture refers to the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among the members of a political system. Such individual orientations involve:

- a) **Cognitive Orientations:** this refers to the knowledge (accurate or otherwise, of political objects and beliefs); it expresses the feeling of an individual about a political system in terms of its history, size, wealth, power capabilities, alliances and experiences.
- b) **Affective Orientations:** feelings of attachment, involvement, rejection, and the like, about political objects; basically, it refers to how an individual feels about the structures, roles, personnel, decision making and the performances of the political system.
- c) **Evaluative Orientations:** judgments and opinions about political objects, which usually involve applying value standards to political objects and events.

The foregoing analysis denotes, interalia, that political culture is basically the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system. However, the existing political culture is inextricably tied to the prevailing material conditions of the people. Hence the behaviour of man towards the political life is largely influence by factors of survival, self reproduction and self extension. In Nigeria for instance where the major pre-occupation of over 70% of the population is how to eke-out a living; where food, clothing and shelter are beyond the reach of the majority; and where incidence of absolute poverty is escalating; the majority in relation to politics lack decorum, decency and basic principles needed to advance popular rule and participatory democratic culture. Thus the absorbing and unending search for food and material satisfaction characterize political behaviour and influence to a large extent, the content of democratic principles. Hence, democratic practice in Nigeria becomes more of means of **hazarding through poverty** by public office holders.

capitalism, factors which have to do with the level of development of the productive forces make the state, through its several institutions and apparatuses, a direct instrument for accumulation for the dominant class or its elements". Therefore, the instruments of the state are not only the sources of economic power but also mechanisms for escaping poverty through unabashed expropriation, deprivation and outright stealing of public wealth.

Therefore, the prevailing material conditions of the majority of the people in Nigeria reduced them to hapless, and pliable objects for political maneuvering. The malnourished and thoroughly impoverished majority of the citizens over time, limit their power of reasoning to search for food; security and shelter. However these have remained tall dreams as political ties alliances and behaviour are conditioned by absorbing search for survival as illegitimacy is now legitimized. Moreover, public officer holders use various fraudulent and shameful means to cling tenaciously to power. This explains while hitherto Honourable politicians cross-carpet with utmost recklessness, from one party to another, in search of "bread" and "self-preservation". This dastard and shameful act contravene the basic principles of representation and undermines democratic

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Understanding the meaning and principles of democracy

Democracy as a concept, construct and system of managing governmental institutions has acquired a universal application. Following the dismantling of the socialist bloc; as a direct consequence of the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union; capitalist – driven democratic principles and ethos have come to dominate and characterize global political arrangement. Thus contemporary globalization precepts are largely anchored on global movement, expansion and dominance of western –styled capitalism.

By democracy we refer to "a form of government organized in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule" (Ranney, 1975: 221). This extracts from the foremost definition given by Abraham Lincoln the former President of the United States of America (1809: 65). According to him, democracy refers to the "government of the people, for the people, and by the people". Thus the "people" not only institute the government but participate in major decisions affecting their lives and state of being. Hence the people are the subject and object of democracy, the *raison d'être* of governance.

This definition derives from the classical Greek notion of democracy which had as its key feature, the direct and immediate participation of the citizens in the deliberation and decisions on public matters in the citizen's assembly (Axtmann, 2001:6). We shall return to etymological conception of the concept of citizen, in our subsequent discussion.

Meanwhile appreciating democracy from only the perceptive prism of governance, the distribution of power within a given socio-cultural and political milieu tantamount to glossing over the foundational and perhaps the critical pillars of the concept. As correctly noted by Obasanjo and Mabogunje (eds) (1992:1):

democracy, minorities are elected to represent the majority or the masses. It is technically called representative democracy.

Although the phenomenon of citizens was restricted in the old Greek city states, the situation has not fundamentally changed in the present day Nigeria. In fact, in consonance with the Western liberal sense, or democracies, individual must be members of the state, must be its national, in order to possess citizenship rights. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, also provides for other ways of acquiring citizenship rights and privileges. Although all men in Nigeria are formerly born free and equal, the excruciating and escalating incidence of poverty has continued to limit the capacity and capability of people to participate in governance. Thus democracy in Nigeria becomes a system of government in which a few economic notables capture state power and use same to institutionalize their dominion, defend their hegemonic positions and appropriate public wealth for the purpose of entrenching oligarchy and prebendalism. The scenario is persisting because of the existing political culture which sustains the unique Nigerian political behaviour.

REFLECTIONS ON NIGERIAN POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

I have to reiterate that political behaviour of Nigeria is largely conditioned by the nature of Nigerian state; the existing poverty situation and perception of political leadership by the citizens. Indeed the interplay of cognitive, evaluation and affective forces combine to condition political behaviour in Nigeria. Generally speaking, Nigerians, (the masses) perceive politics as:

- Dirty game reserved for criminally minded people;
- Major source of stealing public wealth
- An act of governing man-kind by deceiving them
- Avenue for mobilizing criminal elements that masquerade as party thugs
- Source of proliferating poverty
- Exclusive preserve of the dishonest people who exploit various strategies to survive and remain relevant political actors
- A synonym of fraud and bastion of malpractices.
- An exclusive preserve of the rich

Again, the masses generally perceive most politicians as:

- A group of immoral and irresponsible people
- Obstacles to poverty alleviation
- Bastion of corruption and bad leadership
- Diabolical, uncivil and unprincipled
- Violent-prone and opportunists

Based on the foregoing, the behaviour of Nigerians towards politics and politicians can be summarized as follows:

opposition parties that could counterbalance the overbearing influence and power of the ruling party. They erroneously interpret this "migration" as a smart political maneuver. Indeed actors involved in this act are not only unreliable and desperate but are saboteurs and enemies to democratic consolidation.

- In addition to the above, public office holders find it difficult to draw a dividing line between the office they occupy and their political party which served as the vehicle for attaining the political height. In a desperate bid to satisfy their rapacious mentors and party executives, Nigerian politicians who occupy public offices use public wealth to lubricate the party machinery and political godfathers. This equally gives undue advantage to incumbents who see the offices they occupy as their birthrights; and hence commit several criminal acts to appropriate their respective positions.
- Furthermore, Nigerian politicians see politics as zero-sum game; and because very high premium is attached to public offices, they resort to all forms of fraudulent practices to seize and personalize political power. These range from thuggery, assassination, blackmail, character assassination, arson to diabolic/ fetish practices. The scenario paints a picture of politics as exclusive preserve of criminally-minded people; and thereby discourages most "decent" people from participating. The impact of this on democratic consolidation is better imagined.
- Moreover, because of low autonomy of Nigerian state, few economic notables have hijacked the apparatus of the state and use same to dispense political favours to their cohorts and cronies. In desperate move to benefit from these favours, some political neophytes cling to these godfathers, transfer their loyalties to them at the detriment of the state; and hence commit fraudulent acts to satisfy the unending financial demands of these parasitic godfathers. Experiences across some states in Nigeria validate this position. Therefore most political godsons give primary loyalties to their godfathers at the detriment of Nigerian state. This perhaps explains why the level of patriotism exhibited by these politicians is very low; and why "might is right" characterize political life.

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR ON DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: AN OUTLINE

- Promoting cross – carpeting from one party to another with peoples mandate undermines effective representation; stifles participatory democratic culture and truncate the development of resilience democratic culture.
- Anti-party activities rather vitiates peoples' confidence in the political process, discourages effective participation and promotes insecurity among the civil population.
- Destruction of viable opposition by unabashed "migration" into the ruling party portends danger to the growth and development of democracy. A one party state

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