

## Nigerian Political Behaviour and Democratic Consolidation: An Empirical Assessment of Nigeria Political Behavior

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a study of Nigeria political behavior and democratic consolidation. We have been able to highlight the basic behavioural orientation and attitudinal patterns of Nigerians especially the politicians. We observed that most Nigerians now have erroneous conception of democracy arising from their mangled experiences in the electoral process and in represent We Find, out that the high incidence of poverty and the desperate quest to survive have vitiated the moral base of most Nigerians' re-tooled their mental apparatus and psychic motor to a very dangerous channel. These have impinged on the principles of most Nigerian as they resort to money – worshipping and mundane and innocuous unwholesome practices for survival. Therefore the ranging assault on the moral principles of an average Nigerian defined the structure of their personality. The idiosyncratic disposition they exhibit and their reactions to societal events. The study recommended that all Nigerian peoples party is to appreciate the shortcoming democracy as ideology and rekindling the hope of the average Nigerian in the political process.

**Keywords:** Nigerian Political Behaviour, Democratic Consolidation, Empirical Assessment, Nigeria Political Behavior.

### 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 [1].

Obianu [2] noted that 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 iii 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.

Ejiofor [3] noted that a Living political system is a changing system, structures, principles and mantfestoes, let alone, do noe 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.

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 geopolitical terrain.

By political culture, we refer to "the pattern of distribution of orientations members of a political community have towards politics [4]. This patterned collectivity of orientations influence the structure, operation, and stability of political life [5]. It expresses a wide range of orientational values of society such as beliefs; ideology, responsibilities, rule of law, extent of structural and role differentiations.

Almond and Powell [6] stated that political culture refers to the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among the members of a political system. Such individual orientations involve:

- 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.
- 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.
- Evaluative Orientations: Judgments and opinions about political objects, which usually involve applying value standards to political objects and events.

The foregoing analysis denotes, inter alia 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 influenced 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.

In this paper, we shall explore the theoretical and practical meaning of democracy; uphold the basic principles underlying political behaviour of Nigerians and then explore the synergy between political behaviour of Nigerians and democratic consolidation in a world of change.

### **Explanatory Binoculars of the Problematique**

We shall attempt a clear understanding of the problematique of the study by relying on a conscionable blend of the behavioural approach with some basic proposition emanating from the Marxist political economy paradigm.

The behavioural approach is an attempt to improve our understanding of politics by seeking to explain the empirical aspects of political elite by means of methods, theories, and criteria of proof that are acceptable according to the canons, conventions, and

assumptions of modern empirical science. It focuses on the political participant in the political system as individuals who have the emotions, prejudices and predispositions of human beings as we know them in our daily lives. Basically, behaviouralism emphasis on:

- systematic investigation of social phenomenon
- empiricism
- quantification of data

Again, the focus is on individual decision maker and indeed demonstrates how attitudes, values, orientations, experiences, interpersonal relation of individuals could explain the following:

- the role of the state and decision-making;
- voting and election patterns;
- wars, conflicts and conflict management;
- the constitutions and laws; and
- the role of ideology, beliefs, race, tribalism in political behaviour etc [1].

Indeed, the approach enhances our appreciation of the primary target of political activities but stops short at illuminating the material factors/forces that impel them to predetermined course of political action. This lacuna was bridged by some of the basic prepositions of the Marxist political economy paradigm. The political economy family of approaches centers upon theoretical conceptions of the state and its structural relations with the economy within which it is embedded. The approach has two distinguishing features in terms of orientation:

- It stresses the dynamic character of social reality
- It assumes the relatedness of the different and complex elements of society.

Moreover, in terms of focus, it highlights the primacy of material conditions of life [7]. Hence, Ekekwe [8] correctly remarked that “in the periphery of 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 consolidation in Nigeria.

### **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” [9]. This extracts from the foremost definition given by Abraham Lincoln the former President of the United States of America [12]. 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 [10]. 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) [11].

The concept of democracy should be examined from two points of view, that is, ideology and as politics. Democracy, as ideology, is the philosophy of governance which sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, the rule of law, right to property, the free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. On the other hand,- democracy as politics, is concerned with the institutions and procedures of governance. These institutions and processes of governance that they elicit tend to foster

consensus whilst simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for the ideology of democracy.

Based on the foregoing, they defined democracy as, “a way and system of governance whether in an organized setting or otherwise, based on the following essential elements:

- Right of choice
- Freedom from ignorance and want
- Empowerment and capability
- Respect for the rule of law and equality before the law
- Promotion and defense of human rights
- Creation of appropriate political machinery
- Sustained political communication to create trust and confidence amongst leaders and the populace
- Accountability of the leadership to the follower ship
- Decentralization of political power and authority
- Periodic and orderly succession through secret ballot.

Therefore, for democracy as a system of government to have firm root, it must derive from democracy as ideology. The ideological content naturally gives focus and orientation to the former. The basic problem of democracy as a system of conducting governance (rooted on the thinking and feelings of the “people”) is that if such system lack ideological content, it will assume the character and feature bestowed by desperate politicians. This explains why democratic practices in Nigeria largely serve the interest of few economic notables who appropriate the structures and institutions of the state and use same to commit acts of criminality in governance and bestial prebendalism.

Meanwhile, democracy as a concept or a form of government has its root in the 5 century B.C in Athens. It is made up of two Greek words; *demos* which means people and *kratos*, meaning rule by the people. While direct democracy was practiced in the old Greek City State, the burgeoning population of various nations —state necessitated the adoption of indirect democracy. In direct democracy every male citizen belongs to an assembly that meets throughout the year to discuss “peoples affairs” In indirect 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 fundamental 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:

- Indifference, skeptical and cynical to political activities
- Lack of support and cooperation to the political process
- Generally apathetic to political activities
- Low premium attachment to national values, symbols and services to the country
- Manifest low political socialization show to manifest low political socialization
- Most people are at the fringes of subject political culture
- High premium is shown on “distributive” politics

### **The implication of these for democratic consolidations is as follows:**

Nigerian electorates see democracy as a disguised deceptive system that promotes alienation, poverty and criminality. Thus the masses have a tainted and mangled perception that undermines the growth of democratic ideals.

The political class otherwise see politics as money spinning exercise, and hence they throw caution, principles and decorum to the winds and pursue their political activities with utmost recklessness rooted in selfish agenda. This explains why inter-party cross carpeting, especially to the ruling Party has become an illegitimate norm. Indeed cross carpeting is morally impermissible. It is most disheartening that after winning the mandate of the people in ANPP for instance, the public office holder will unscrupulously discard the wishes of the people without consulting the electorates/constituent; and yet move to another party with the same mandate without surrendering the mandate. Mandate is giving to not only the public office holder, but to the party. When the party is discarded, mandate ought to follow suit. A situation whereby the public office holder cross-carpet with the mandate is unacceptable and morally wrong. This practice must be stopped. The root cause of cross-carpeting is greed, and blind pursuit of power.

For democracy in Nigeria to be deepened, cross carpeting must be followed by loss of mandate and blacklisting of the actor involved in such act by the Independent National Electoral Commission.

Directly related to the above is the nagging and vexing issue of anti-party activities. Some members of political parties, in blind and chaotic pursuit of material wealth indulge in various forms of anti-party activities. Such people lack sound moral base, suffer jaundiced and dislocated mental apparatus and psychic motor. They join political parties primarily to loot public treasury; and hence become debased of political harlots who are ever prepared to leak official secrets of their parties to opposing parties in order to make money or gain cheap and shameful advantage. This explains why incidence of indiscipline has characterized party politics in Nigeria. The cumulative effects of this undermine growth and development of democratic principles.

Again, because some Nigerian politicians see power as an end in itself and not as means to an end, they tend to see “migration” to the ruling party at the end of elections as a normal way of life. This practice undermines development of viable 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 attitude 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 vitiate peoples’ confidence in the political process, discourage effective participation and promote 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 devoid of credible opposition parties degenerate to dictatorship. This in turn undermines the cardinal democratic ideals/principles.

The “incumbency factor” as presently played out in Nigeria today questions the credibility of the electoral process. In a situation where an incumbent engages in blatant misrule and yet has the capacity of retaining his office using undemocratic means, is to say the least detrimental to good governance and accountability. This scenario is a direct affront to democratic ideals and tends to increase the incidence of political apathy.

Godfatherism is a cankerworm that destroys the basic fabric of democracy in Nigeria. Political godfathers have reduced intra party election of candidates to mere nomination; and “election of candidates” into “return of candidates”. The basic trappings of democracy are vitiated as survival of the Nigeria state hangs insymphony.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We have been able to highlight the basic behavioural and attitudinal patterns of Nigerians especially the politicians. We observed that most Nigerians now have erroneous conception of democracy arising from their mangled experiences in the electoral process and in representation. We noted, among others, that the high incidence of poverty and the desperate quest to survive have vitiated the moral base of most Nigerians; re-tooled their mental apparatus and psychic motor to a very dangerous channel. These have impinged on the principles of most Nigerians as they resort to money-worshipping and mundane and innocuous unwholesome practices for survival. Therefore the raging assault on the moral principles of an average Nigerian defined the structure of their personality; the idiosyncratic dispositions they exhibit, and their reactions to societal events. Simply put, we noted that the prevailing actions and responses of most Nigerians are largely conditioned by:

- Behaviour developed through social experience
- Behaviour involving choice, ends, and norms based on past experience

Thus most actions of Nigerians towards politics are organized by a structure of need disposition. This enhanced development of personality cults whose roles and activities in our body political vitiates the development of democracy as ideology; for enhancing good governance, accountability and conscionable sustainable human development.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- All Nigerian party is to appreciate the short comings in our national life, work towards entrenching democracy as ideology and rekindling the hope of the average Nigerian in the political process.
- It is arduous oneness but the starting point should be the local government congresses of the party.

- The hour and moment of political re-discovering is now, we must begin by building strong institutions using principled, committed and patriotic members. Are watching who sacrifice and save the nation call Nigeria.

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