Political Culture and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the relationship between political culture and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The objective of doing the study centers around the reality that Nigeria still faces serious legitimacy problems not just with the outcomes of polls, but with the actual performance of government. In carrying out this research the study employed the mixed political culture approach as espoused by Almond and Verba and essentially relied on secondary sources of data. At the end it established that while democracy is being nourished and made to take roots in other climes, it is being manipulated and malnourished in Nigeria essentially because the extant political culture is such that smacks of corruption, patrimonialism, godfatherism, waste, and the negation of governance central thrust of meeting the basic expectations of the people. This situation it contends has led to an entrenchment of a corrupt attitude even among the citizenry thereby making the phenomenon of corruption pervasive and almost permanent. It thus recommended that there should be a conscious reformation of the present party system in the Nigerian State in such a way that the people would be able to make functional inputs into the party structure through functional contributions to the running of parties, policy decisions among others, thereby enriching the political education of members and also enhancing participatory democracy; and the need for everyone to see politics or democracy as a means to an end and not an end in itself. This could be achieved by de-monetizing the electoral process – that is, financial benefits associated with political offices or the huge financial requirements for seeking political offices especially in poor States such as ours; providing enabling laws for checking political office holders – such as the freedom to information law as regard the running of public offices or functions.

Keywords: Culture, Political Culture, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Corruption

Introduction

Since Nigeria became independent in 1960, the country has swung from military dictatorship to civilian administration with manifest effects on the processes of political culture formation and socialization among the citizenry. The re-introduction of democratic governance in 1999 has made this reality more palpable. Political culture no doubt constitutes a major ingredient and support mechanism for the survival of democratic governance. On observational basis, it also serves as an index through which political systems could be compared. Thus, the classification of political culture as parochial, subject and participant, and the manifestation of participant culture as that which is visible in developed State while parochial and subject as traits of new and emergent States of the third world or States that lack effective integration.

While it could be argued whether the present democratic experiment in the Nigerian State is moving towards a participant culture considering the awareness created by the survival of the democratic system which is barely less than two decades old, coupled with the poor state of the economy with the visible problem of unemployment, under-employment, corruption among others which has made politics to be so attractive to the people. Conversely, the questions that come to mind are: (1) do political participation especially in term of vote cast count in Nigeria? (2) If participation in form of voting does not count, could it be viewed as an in-built regulatory mechanism which aid in checking against capability or system breakdown? (3) What level of political participation could be accommodated by the political system? It was in order to effectively answer these questions and unfold the mechanism for democratic consolidation in Nigeria through functional political culture that this research was undertaken.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of analysis is anchored on Almond and Verba's conception of mixed political culture. The mixed political culture perspective notes that in every polity there is often the presence of the variables or manifestations of parochial, subject and participant political cultures with one being the dominant type. The strength of the polity therefore is rooted in the character of the dominant one. This theoretical perspective important in this research work essentially because the scholars not only view the concept of political culture as part of a general culture which has to do with the political orientation of the people, but also in the utility or perception of non-static and transformational process from one typology to the other. Political entities which could either grow or degenerate from one stage to the other. As a result Almond and Verba discussed the following typologies of political culture:

(i) ***Parochial Political Culture*** – By parochial political culture, the conception is that, there is poor political socialization in the system in that the citizens may not only be unaware of the existence of government, its structures and functions, but that even when such awareness exists, it is in a cloudy form. Thus, the citizens tend to have a negative perception of governance, the implication of which is poor political participation on the part of the people.

(ii) ***Subject Political Culture*** – In this classification, political orientation is such that, though the people are aware of the existence of the structures of government and the expected functions, but the perception is such that the understanding of governance on the part of the citizens is a divide between government and subject, thus hampering active political participation by the masses.

(iii) ***Participant Political Culture*** – Participant political culture on the other hand, unlike parochial and subject which focuses on functional orientation of the people which is geared towards active participation of the citizens in government.

From the above background therefore, one could state that the above classification are not mutually exclusive in that there could be an upward and downward movement in terms of categories depending on the orientation and attitude of the people at a point in time. That is, a State could transform positively from parochial to subject or participant culture, just the same way transformation could be negative, from participant to subject or parochial culture, either of which could truncate or consolidate democracy. This shows that the framework is no doubt indispensable as a tool for analysis as regard unfolding the nature of political culture that exist in a State vis-à-vis political stability.

Conceptual Clarification:

Culture

Going by the positions of authorities like Edward B. Taylor, culture as a concept is a complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, skills, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. It simply means the ways of life of the people and/or the ways people do their own things. These ways reflect in the people's life styles and are interconnected in the proper functioning of every socio-institutional structure in which politics in done. Politics is the act of governance. It has its own culture or methodology. This differs from society to society.

Culture in totality speaks of people in a given society. It is a reflection of an existing behavioural pattern that is unique to a people and varies from one society to another. This means that others may not appreciate what others appreciate as their guiding principles.

The variations of these behavioural patterns are determined by the existing values, beliefs, philosophies, principles and norms of the people. Hence, we need to admit that every individual is a product of his/her culture. It defines our attitudes, values and every aspect of our lives. Culture exerts pressure on us subject to the limit imposed by inheritance and socio-political conditions. The elements that are found in culture determine our personalities and levels of our political interest. It is interesting to note here that every individual is expected to conform to the provisions of his/her culture. Conformity at this level is rewarded while non-conformity is punished.

Political Culture

At this level of our discussion, we may begin to ask ourselves what is political culture. The definition of political culture is not radically different from what we regard as culture. Dare and others (1987) argues that political culture is the product of history of both the political system and the individual members of the society. They believe that the experiences of both the individual and the community interact to produce an aggregate pattern, which is regarded as culture. Political culture therefore is an aspect of the large culture. It is an overall distribution of citizen's orientations to political objects that have to do with government, the regime and the political community. The position of Nwankwo (1990) is similar to that of Dare et- al. He sees political culture as made up of attitudes, beliefs, emotions and values of society that relate to the political system and to political issues. It is therefore potent to agree that the political culture of a nation consist of the ideas, traditions, assumptions and accepted rules of the game that make up the framework within which the political system functions. The political culture of a nation deals with the network of processes, methods, patterns and problems associated with governance. This means that Nigeria as a nation has her own political culture, which is radically unique to the people and varies from that of other nations whether in the continent of Africa or in another.

Democratic Consolidation

Scholars have used different definitions of democratic consolidation. These definitions are based on two conceptions of democracy. One is a "minimalist conception," emphasizing procedural or formal democracy. The other is a "maximalist conception," focusing on the outcomes of politics, such as institutionalization of political institutions, social justice, and economic equality (Lee, 2007: 103). Schmitter defines the minimalist conception of a consolidated democratic regime as "the process of transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and contingent solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of cooperation and competition that are reliably known, regularly

practiced, and voluntarily accepted by those persons or collectives that participate in democratic governance (Schmitter, 1992: 424)."

In his own contribution Linz (1978: 158) asserts that: a consolidated democracy is one in which "none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider (s) that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and that no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers. To put it simply democracy must be seen as 'the only game in town.' Democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game (Ogundiya, 2009).

Diamond (1995:171) was poignant in his analysis. He contends that: democratic consolidation means the quality, depth, and authenticity of democracy in its various dimensions has been improved: "political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent."Several of the newly emerging democratic regimes are far from consolidated. They are merely surviving without consolidating. In particular, in the less developed regions of the world, these fragile democratic regimes have experienced significant uncertainty over the rules of the game, due to their terrible economic conditions and other social problems. Although many Third-World countries (which Nigeria belongs) have experienced transitions to procedural democracy, such as free elections with few barriers to mass participation and meaningful party competition, this democratic change definitely does not guarantee democratic stability (Lee, 2007: 103). Democracy can be said to be consolidated when it can avoid democratic breakdown and erosion by 'eliminating, neutralizing, or converting disloyal players' (Schedler, 1998), and moving a step further towards completing and deepening democracy, measured by high 'expectations of regime continuity'(Schedler, 1998). For Diamond (1996:7):

> *Democratic consolidation is obstructed by or destroyed causally by the effects of institutional shallowness and decay. If they are to become consolidated, therefore, electoral democracies must become deeper and more liberal. This will require greater executive (and military) accountability to both the law and the scrutiny of other branches of government, as well as the public, the reduction of barriers to political participation and mobilization by marginalized groups; and more effective protection for the political and civil right of all citizens.*

With consolidation, democracy becomes regularized and deeply internalized in social institutional and even psychological life as well as in political calculations for achieving goals (Babatope, 2012). Democratic consolidation "implies the internationalization of democratic culture and the institutionalization of democratic "best practices" by a polity that has successfully embarked on a democratic transition" (Asiwaju 2000).

The History of Nigeria's Political Culture: Colonial, Military and Civilian Eras

The focus here is to view political culture as a function of regime type taken cognizance of the Nigerian environment. In order to vividly understand the discourse, political regimes are classified into two broad classifications: (1) Dictatorship (2) Democracy. Under dictatorship, two major forms existed in the Nigerian political environment: (i) Colonial dictatorship (ii) Military dictatorship. As regard colonialism, the focus was to basically exploit the resources of Nigeria to serve the interest of the British. And in order for the British to achieve this principal objective, they opted for colonial domination that distorted the indigenous political developments of the local people; thus, distorting the political culture of the people.

Closely related to this is the issue of functional political culture which could be defined as the magnitude of political participation that the system was prepared to accommodate. This of course was defined and determined by the colonialist to be restrictive, first to the traditional rulers, and later to encompass the educated elites, in that active political participation by the majority would be antithetical to their interest.

The implication is that in the earliest part of colonial domination, political culture could be said to be a parochial one, in that the local people had a dim conception of the political system based on the cosmetic approach to governance by the British in which political decisions though emanated from them, the people were made to believe that they emanated from the local traditional institutions.

In the later stage of the involvement of the political elites, the political culture moved from parochial to subject based on the sensitization effort of the educated/political elites geared towards the attainment of political independence. As a matter of fact, the local people were made to believe that there was a distinction between them as subjects and the British officials as governors and they therefore needed to institute an indigenous democratic government that would be responsible and responsive to the local people.

Military dictatorship on the other hand is that which existed in the post-colonial Nigerian State which culminated into the birth of the present Fourth Republic. Based on the

attributes of military government as one which seizes political power through the use of force and also consolidate power through the same means – the curtailment of civil liberties, restriction in the emergence of public policies on the part of the people among others, it could be stated that the type of political culture that is always associated with the regime type is a subject political culture.

This is because while the awareness of government and its institutions are often created through public policy making, implementation and adjudication process which is anchored on the use of force, the people to a large extent (even when there is a justification for a coup d'état) always tend to view such a government as a divide between them and the governors as a result of the restricted channel for political participation especially as regard input into the policy making process.

Conversely, in democratic regimes, the scenario is such that though there is enhanced political participation, but the fact is that the input of the people do not count to a great extent in term of determining who get what, when and how through vote cast, thus bringing about a subject political culture that is often hygienic for political instability.

From the above discourse, it could be understood that the political culture as a support ingredient is quite essential for democratic stability or in undermining the process depending on the orientation of the people. This no doubt explains for the persistent state of obfuscation associated with democratic experiments in the Nigerian project which often snowball into political instability. As regard political culture serving as a vanguard for democratic stability especially in the present democratic dispensation of the Nigerian Fourth Republic. The questions that come to mind are: (i) to what extent are Nigerians functionally oriented to participate in the political process? (ii) What level of political participation could be said to be functional in the Nigerian process? (ii) What could be done to achieve functionality in political participation in order to sustain the present democratic process? Starting from the first question: to what extent are Nigerians functionally oriented to participate in the political process?

Ecologically speaking, be it political, social or economic, one could say that Nigerians are not positively oriented to participate functionally in the political process. Politically, the long years of military dictatorship in the Nigerian body-politic no doubt has metamorphosized into the militarization of the democratic process not only by military regimes during political transitions from military to a civilian government, but also by civilian governments in terms of undermining organized opposition either from the media or political parties.

This has created scenarios where political representation were called to question as a result of the process falling short of free and fair electoral standard either at the intra party or inter party level. Thus, the conception is that party candidates do not need the support of the people to emerge; neither do they need their support to be in office. On the part of the masses, they are forced to believe that their votes do not count. This no doubt creates fragile political institutions and processes that could persistently be inviting or hygienic for military take-over.

In order to effectively answer the second question, the levels of political participation are classified as: (i) Minimal elitist participation (ii) Massive political participation (iii) Integrative political participation.

(i) ***Minimal Elitist Participation*** – By minimal elitist political participation, the understanding here is that form of political participation which is largely restrictive to elites and exclusive of the masses in terms of determining who governs and making inputs into the policy process. This classification is mostly compatible with the political systems of the third world in that even in civilian democratic regimes such a process tend to be cosmetic and determined by the political elites as regard who get what, when and how.

(ii) ***Massive Political Participation*** – This classification views political participation as a function of the choice of the masses. This was effectively practiced in the Athenian City State and was also linked to democratic practice of some African societies before colonialism.

(iii) ***Integrative Political Participation*** – This form of political culture is that which encompasses both the elites and the masses. In this form the elites need the masses just as the masses need the elites for effective political participation in the democratic process. This form is mostly obtainable in such western States as Britain and United States where there are well established political institutions and secondary groups which though established by elites but need the support of the masses to survive and where the electoral process is largely seen as free and fair. Based on the above background, a functional level of political participation therefore is such that does not exist at the two extremes but which stand at the midpoint of minimal elitist and massive participation in that it is integrative of both attributes.

Nigeria's Political Culture Of Waste, Corruption And Patrimonialism

Although, democracy is a universal concept, its practise differs from one place to another with regard to acquisition of (and disposition to) power and institutional arrangements.

Hence, one can talk of American democracy, British democracy, Irish democracy, Canadian democracy and so on. It has been pointed out above that the concept of egalitarianism has more theoretical connotations than practical application. There is nowhere in the world where democracy is a republic of equals. Thus, socio-economic and political inequality is a prominent and permanent feature of democracy particularly in Nigeria where democracy has widened the gap between those who have access to power and public funds and those who do not. Since democracy is said to be government of the people by the people and for the people, it is therefore generally assumed that democracy is the most suitable form of government at least as far as the delivery of Ronald's 'political goods' is concerned. It is therefore generally taken for granted that the pursuit of the welfare of the generality of the people is the epicentre of democracy wherever it is practised. While this may be so in some democracies, the reverse is the case in others: while democracy is synonymous with holistic development and aggregated growth in some climes; it is the representation of betrayal and inhuman deprivation in others. Nigeria probably personifies the latter. While some countries aspire to and do indeed practise democracy for the socio-economic benefit of the generality of the people or at least as many people as possible; others, like Nigeria, make their own brand of democracy government of the few by the few and for the socio-economic benefit of the few. Indeed, the most outstanding feature of Nigerian democracy is mind boggling and unpardonable waste of public funds on the comfort of a few Nigerians. The democracy of waste practised in Nigeria invests, first and foremost, in the comfort of officials rather than in human and material resources. For example, in the 2012 national budget, about ₦176 million was allocated to the extension of the gates of the Aso Rock Villa (the official residence of the President) apart from the ₦280 million allocated to the purchase of two bullet proof vehicles. In addition, about ₦36 million was allocated to the extension of power supply to the State House Centre Store while ₦52.4 million went into the provision of uninterruptible power supply to the Presidential Guest House. Moreover, ₦127.5 million was allocated to the overhauling of two generating sets in the Presidential Lodge. Furthermore, ₦512.54 million was allocated to the renovation and refurbishing of the family wing of the President's main residence while ₦101.67 million was allocated to the rehabilitation of the transformer sub-station in the Villa. Finally, ₦97.95 million was allocated to the extension of the Villa's car parks. In all, about ₦1.5 billion was allocated to all kinds of upgrades and renovations in and around the President's residence.

From available evidence, it is obvious that Nigeria has one of the largest Presidential Air Fleets (PAF) in the world. While Ghana and Algeria each has only one aircraft in their Presidential Air Fleets and Japan and the Netherlands each has two, Nigeria has ten. The cost of the aircrafts in the PAF, which is larger than those of three Nigerian airlines

combined, is estimated at about $390.5m (₦60.53b). Furthermore, it is estimated that about $58.5m (₦9.08b) is spent annually on running the aircrafts in the Nigerian PAF.

Ironically, in Nigeria today, individuals struggle heart and might to provide for themselves those basic social amenities the state should normally provide. Those Nigerians who have the means generate their own power, make personal security arrangements, patronise privately-owned schools and hospitals, etc. On the other hand, the less privileged rural dwellers who are in a clear majority, live in palpable darkness, drink all sorts of contaminated water and contact all kinds of water-borne diseases there from and are regularly harassed, wounded or killed by armed bandits. The Nigeria Police Force is grossly under-funded and under-manned thereby making its task of protecting the lives and properties of Nigerians an uphill one. Malaria fever, which has been permanently 'conquered' in some climes, still kills dozens of hundreds of children whose parents cannot patronise privately-owned hospitals while many indigent school age children are either out of school or learn under the most horrific conditions in state-owned schools. To, as always, Nigeria has more than 10.5 million out-of-school children. Also, report indicates that about 89,700 day-old babies are said to die in Nigeria annually. According to report, Nigeria has the 12th highest rate of first-day deaths in the world and the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. In most parts of Nigeria, power supply is almost exactly nil, potable water is a scarce commodity, health care facilities are either altogether nonexistent or in complete shambles while hundreds of people die in motor accidents annually owing to extremely poor road networks. From all indications, the irreducible fact seems to be that the promotion of the welfare of the masses is neither the primary preoccupation nor the cardinal objective of the anchors of Nigeria's democracy. Unfortunately, a famished, weak and ignorant citizenry can hardly serve as catalyst for the deepening and sustenance of democracy. According to a World Bank report, about 100 million Nigerians live in destitution. This implies that 8.3% of the world's 1.2 million destitute are Nigerians. In a newspaper article entitled 'The Story of Cain, Abel and Nigeria' Ademola Adelakun captures the practise of Nigerian democracy thus: "Today, Nigeria is literally bleeding. There is too much violence. We have bred enough Frankenstein monsters to haunt us. We feed them red meat each time they cry for blood. Those who are not killed by Boko Haram are killed by the Joint Task Force. Those who escape the JTF fall into the hands of mind-bending illiteracy. Those who manage to escape all those are consumed by road accidents. Some die in poorly equipped hospitals. Those lucky to bypass all of the above are either killed by hunger, poverty, or frustration practically turns them to the living dead. It is the curse of Cain. The earth antagonises people who needlessly shed blood. Recently, multiple road accidents claimed almost 100 lives. In a country where life counts, that should have led to a major social change. Sadly, not even a paragraph of official response came from

the government, not even the local government chairmen of the areas the accidents happened. Unfortunately, the government aides who explain away these deaths are the same ones who rush to *Twitter* to console President Barack Obama over the Boston bombing. They are not their own brother's keepers because their brother's life is worthless."

Although, Nigeria has produced nine written constitutions; it is yet to institutionalise the culture of popular democracy. This is because the problem is neither with the makers nor matters of the constitution; but the men who have the responsibility of operating the constitutions. To institutionalise democracy is to develop and strengthen the legal-rational structures that would invariably strengthen and solidify democracy and the rule of law. Decalo defines political institutionalisation as a process through which stable, complex political structures and procedures are put in place, developed and legitimised to create a degree of sub-system autonomy for the purposes of running people-centered governments. In Nigeria, like in most African states, politics and government are mostly personal and so do not always conform to an institutionalised system. This is perhaps the most important singular factor for the frequent failure of democracy and the regular breakdown of democratic structures and regimes in Nigeria and Africa at large. As David Roth and Frank Wilson have pointed out, military coups are frequent in states where democracy is not institutionalised and very rare in those with institutionalised political framework.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted a critical appraisal of the role political culture plays in the consolidation of democracy with special reference to Nigeria. One of the major findings and arguments of the paper is that while democracy is being nourished and made to take roots in other climes, it is being manipulated and malnourished in Nigeria. In his 1962 assessment of the practise of democracy in Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo opined that democracy was "pinning away on its death-bed…it has been mercilessly assaulted and violated…it is already being made to suffer from gross misuse and utter lack of nurture". While it is true that this kind of criticism should normally be expected from a Parliamentary Opposition Leader; Chief Awolowo's assessment was probably an irreducible fact. Regrettably, the situation is worst today. The pace of democracy in Nigeria is everything but progressive – at times it stagnates while at some other times it retards. Nigerian political history is replete with failed electoral processes, a cyclical failure that returns the country to the scratch each time an attempt is made at making democracy get off the ground in the country. This is the case because the extant political culture for now is skewed, patrimonial, corrupt and heavily anti-common sense.

Recommendations

In order to consolidate the democratic process of the present Nigerian fourth Republic, there is need for an integrative political participatory mechanism in which political elites would emerge through the support of the masses rather than through parochial and chauvinistic means. This could be achieved thus:

I. Reforming the present party system in the Nigerian State in such a way that the people would be able to make functional inputs into the party structure through functional contributions to the running of parties, policy decisions among others, thereby enriching the political education of members and also enhancing participatory democracy.

II. The need to see politics or democracy as a means to an end and not an end in itself. This could be achieved by de-monetizing the electoral process – that is, financial benefits associated with political offices or the huge financial requirements for seeking political offices especially in poor States such as ours; providing enabling laws for checking political office holders – such as the freedom to information law as regard the running of public offices or functions.

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