

## Political Culture and Ideal Democracy in Nigeria

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### Abstract:

*Many West African countries usually experience one form of intra-state wars, political violence, electoral malpractices and sometimes democratic conflict and breakdown of law and order due to the effects of political culture that undermines an ideal democratic system. In Nigeria, the ethnic political cleavage, religious and cultural affiliation and recycling of a particular political elites into the nations political system becomes the major determinants of the success of the political system. Such issues usually result to political violence, electoral malpractices, political thuggery, and falsification of electoral result, social insecurity, democratic deficits and other associated political challenges.*

*The paper therefore discussed political culture, democracy and ideal democracy. it also discussed some democratic deficits the country has experienced since independence and various measures to be embarked upon to correct the menace in order to achieve the democratic dividends.*

*The paper used a secondary source of information for the work and recommends an immediate change of the country's political ideology and re-orientation of Nigerians towards their political culture, beliefs, political values and practices.*

**Key words:** Political culture, democracy, ideal democracy and democratic deficit

## **INTRODUCTION**

The political culture of any given country determines the outcome of democratic privileged to be enjoyed by the citizens. Nigeria contains different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. These group(s) of people have different principles, ideology, belief and practices which affects their reasoning, character, and behavior politically and otherwise. Though they have different ethnic and religious differences, they still exist as a nation bound by the same geographical boundary and political entity. This way of life and manner of thought of Nigerians affect virtually everything they do in life including academics, business, behavior, reasoning and even attitudes towards the political system. The culture of ethnic consciousness, religious cleavage and cultural affiliation has not been separated from the political system of Nigeria since independence in 1960. Political culture in itself is defined as a patterned orientation to political action which represents the pool of ideas, goals and means that constitute the roots of consensus in polity (Almond and Verba, 1965: p. 50)

In another development, an encyclopedia described political culture to be a set of sentiments, attitudes, belief that gives order and meaning to political process and which provides underlying assumptions and rules that governs behavior in the political system.

Every country has its particular culture, thus, political culture usually reflects in a nation's political ideology, attitudes towards the political leaders and in the duties of the citizens. In the conduct and style of political activity, and in what is considered political and what is not, Nwabueze and Mueller (1988 p 60). There are three major components of political culture which affect the African politics. These include:

- a) Empirical beliefs/ knowledge (cognitive)
- b) Affective (responses) and
- c) Value preferences, and evaluation , Ranny (1975:80)

The empirical beliefs are what people understand about how things are and what people understand about how things are in the political world. It therefore involves the knowledge and beliefs people have regarding the various characteristics of political system.

The affective component refers to the favourable or unfavourable emotions toward perceived political system, which involves the way people feel about the various characteristics of political systems. This includes the disposition of people, loyalty or patriotism and appreciation of political system and political leaders.

The value preferences of political culture here is beliefs about public goals that should be maximized by government action.

The major determinants of the political cultures in Nigeria are ethnic and religious cleavages, cultural affiliation and political elitism syndrome.

There is a general belief that an emerged political leader from any ethnic group gives a greater consideration in development to the area where he comes from. This gives the impression that every ethnic group should do everything possible within their reach during election to install somebody from their region in order to attract regional development and not national development. This became an endemic political culture existing in the country. This attitude does not give rise for a good leader with good leadership quality and potentiality to operate or emerge, Achebe (1983 p8).

The culture of electoral violence, use of political thugs to win election by all means, falsification of election result and rigging becomes the other of the day. They use intimidation and kidnapping of political opponents, use fowl languages against some political opponents, elimination of political opponents in other to win by all means, campaigning against the ethnic and religious group and use of false accusation on political opponents in other to ruin the political career of such person.

They also involve themselves in unpatriotism and lack of respect to their fellow politician. The culture of regional marginalization by a leader from one ethnic group to other frustrates ideal democracy. Culture been peoples way of life, practices, belief and knowledge as seen by E.B. Tylor, political culture is the people's way of carrying out their political business in order to achieve their goals.

Ethnicity is a kind of geographical, religious and cultural bound holding a particular group of people in a particular environment. Ethnic politics is a principle or ideology of this group of people to support their ethnic brother in political leadership.

Some other political cultural practices affecting the Nigerian political democratic system includes:

- A. Failure of the political party system to evolve credible policy options to foster and sustain the practice of democracy and the inability to successfully organize periodic and orderly free and fair elections.
- B. Violation of fundamental human rights by political parties.
- C. Attitudinal pro-activities of political actors and elite to intolerance, selfishness and disrespect for the rule of law.
- D. The culture of political corruption.
- E. Absence of cohesion-inducing situation to produce transcendent national leadership, insufficient political socialization that will create trust and confidence among the nation.

Close to ethnicity problem is religion sentiment. Religion is a culture that portrays people's way of belief and worship in their environment for social and spiritual security.

A socialist (clenn Vernon 1962:55) defined religion as:

That part of culture composed of share  
Beliefs and practices which will not only identify  
Or define the supernatural and scared and

Man's relationship thereto, but which  
Relates them to the known world in such a  
Way that the group is provided with moral  
Definitions as to what is good with supernatural

This definition was given as an interactive nature of the society.

Ekwunife (1992:1) said that religion has to do with peoples ideology of worship, in human society through belief, worship, ethnical or natural behavior in a particular environment or society to reach the supernatural, have entered into the political arena of the country.

Nigeria is a country that is made up of different segment, group or religion which has different religious practices, languages, ideologies, culture and attitude to life.

The northern regions dominated with Islam as Hausa/Fulani Muslims, while the southern people are predominantly Christians.

The Nigerian colonial master sowed seeds of discord between Christianity and Islam which are the two major religious bodies that held national life. Kalu (2000: 40) pointed out a true picture of scenario created by the British imperialist which laud the foundation to suspicious and rivalry among the ethnic nationalities and religious groups in Nigeria when he observed that:

A contrary wind blew in the north as the root of Islamic fundamentalism was sowed. This became a challenge to Christians during the independent era. This later had its attachment to the regional polity.

The ethno-religious plurality has not been for the interest of Nigeria as it has been the basis for conflict in Nigeria polity.

Nigeria as a nation-state has "witnessed unprecedented upsurge of religious disturbance, that affected the polity and governance in Nigeria since independence. (Anugwom and Orji 2003:43).

Religious riot has remained a constant threat to peace in Nigeria and has continued to threaten the continued co-existence and habitation of the different ethnic nationalities that make up the country.

One of the major religious crises ever witnessed in Nigeria on a large disturbing scale is the maitisne religious riot which took place in Kano in 1980s, (okwuez:2003:14) in Jimetsyola 1984, in Gombe former Bauchi state 1985.

Others that followed were the religious disturbances in Ilorin in 1986, in Bauchi 1991, Kano 1990 and Zango- Kataf 1992. Thir were other Sharia riots in 2000 in many parts of the north such as Zanfara, Kaduna, Kano and the reprisal attack in the east. For the time in Nigeria history, religious disturbances occurred in Aba, Owerri, Umuahia and Uyo in Akwaibom state, in 200s period (Anuogwom and Orji 2003).

Religion in Nigeria functions as a means for the preparation of violence, fueling ethnic consciousness and solidarity, socio-economic gains, massive killing and the wanton destruction of live and vandalizing of property of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religious. This traced to the acrimony between the dominant religions Islam and Christianity. The religious clashed often result in the struggle for power and supremacy and human right abuses.

These African political cultures such as ethnic and religious sentiment are serious challenges to the democratic system in Africa\*. Ethnicity has to do with where one comes from in particular. The culture of such group of people or individual, the identity and ownership of land and other things in a particular community or society. Ethnicity and democratic principles and practices are two different things that should exist independently in order to achieve a common goal of democratic system.

## **ELITE POLITICAL CULTURE**

Elite political culture is another interesting matter that affects African politics. Elite polity is a system where some important people in the society dominate the country's political arena as their birth right. This is done as a result of their position, family background or the ethnic group which they belong in the society.

In some places, a group of people or family may decide to continue to occupy their country's leadership position as their birth right, such attitude gives rise to bourgeois class that controls the economic and political affairs of their country - (Agi,1998:50). Such people usually use their position for political gain. Consequently, such actors usually use their position in life to violate the democratic rules and principles in their various political domain.

## **DEMOCRACY**

Democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens are meant to participate equally either directly or through the elected representatives or indirectly in the proposal, development and establishment of the law and order by which their society is run (Momoh, 2006:40).

In an ideal democracy, certain standards or qualities are expected from both the rulers and the ruled to be observed. An ideal democracy is a rhetorical phrase meaning either personal qualities or standards of government behavior that are felt to be essential for the continuation of a democratic policy. Advocates for causes across the political spectrum use this phrase in attempting in attempting ...to engage in persuasion, particularly by contrasting some situation which has been allowed to continue for pragmatic or social reasons, but which those advocating action regard as being, wrong in principle.

Advocates for greater equality in the distribution of wealth for example some scholars argue that inequalities create different level of opportunity and that equality is a democratic ideal"

Other times, advocates of one political outlook or another will use the phrase to energize support. Among their constituencies, despite knowing that their political opponents use precisely the same phrase to do precisely the same thing.

Frequently the importance of human rights is listed as a central democratic ideal as well as instilling in military and civilian governmental personnel the attitudes and method which will prevent their actions from infringing on these rights. Democratic ideals are often cited as a reason for patriotism. In every democratic system of government rights of people must be respected in order to achieve democratic dividend.

### **Some Elements of Democracy Are:**

- A. Right of choice
- B. Freedom from ignorance and poverty
- C. Empowerment (Human Capital Development).
- D. Adherence to the principles of rule of law and equality before the law.
- E. Defense of human rights
- F. Devolution of political power and authority
- G. Accountability of the leadership to his subjects
- H. Maintenance of peace and security of life's and property
- I. Defense of the territorial integrity of the nation; the principles of the separation of power.

## **ADVANTAGES OF DEMOCRACY**

### **Protects the interest of the society:**

One of the topmost advantages of democracy is the protection of people's interest. Real power has in the people exercising. It is by means of representatives duly elected by the citizen. It is known that economic, political and social interests of people are best served under the democratic system.



### **Promotes Equality**

Democracy is generally based on the rule of equality. This means that all members of a country or a state are equal in the eyes of laws. Every individual has the right to enjoy and experience equal economic, political and social rights and the state is not allowed to discriminate citizens on the standard of sex, caste, property and religion.

### **Responsibility and Stability in Administration**

Democracy is recognized for its efficiency, firmness and stability. When there is Fixed and elected representatives, a more stable and responsible government is formed. The administration is also conducted and ruled with sense of dedication and responsibility. Individual under a democratic system discuss matters and issues thoroughly in order to come up with reasonable decisions.

### **Helps Make Good Citizens**

Democracy aids in creating ideal environment for the improvement of personality and cultivation of character and good habits. According to experts, democracy seems to be the very first school for good citizenship. This is where individuals learn about their duties and rights starting from their birth until the time of their death.

### **Promotes Change**

Democracy paved way for changes in the government without any form of violence. This makes people feel great and provides them with the ideal sense of involvement and participation.

### **Political Culture and an Ideal Democracy**

Some scholars argue that a political culture orientation affects the smooth running of a democratic system of government in some countries.

Studies of democracy and democratic transition or dispensation place emphasis on the attitudes, values and behavior pattern of ordinary citizens.

This is to say that successful democratization requires not only support for democracy among a significant proportion of a country's population but also, that its citizens possess norms and behavior patterns that are conducive to Democracy. Huntington (1993:10) is of the view that a good political culture orientation promotes democratic dividends in an ideal democratic system. In another development, Rose (1997:14), Schmitter and Karl (1993:98) argue that a good political culture practiced in any given country improves smooth democratic dispensation and strengthens democratic sustainability. It helps to build the commitments and actions of political elites.

Almond and Verba are of the view that the political culture orientation of people in any political arena help to improve the living standard of such group, maintain peace and unity and defend human rights, (Almond and Verba 1963:40, 1980:69). Among the particular orientation is which they explore are obligation to democracy participation, sense of efficacy and level of inter-personal trust. The views of these scholars show that political culture of some countries attributes to democratic dividend in an ideal democratic system. In Nigeria perspective, a different issue affecting their political culture threatens the unity, the growth of their economy and frustrates the democratization system and its dividend in the country. The ethnic/tribal politics, religious sentiment and elite theory determines the strength, power and performance of the political leaders in the democratic system of Nigerian government and thus leads to the under listed democratic deficit.

Democratic deficit in its self is the poor level of performance of government to meet the needs and demands of the population adequately during the democratic

**Ideal democracy:** in an ideal democratic system, democratic privileges should be allowed such as freedom of press and speech, social security and dividend of democracy observed, human rights respected, political violent election free observed, immediate release of election result practicalised, provision of social security and public opinion enjoyed, freedom of speech encouraged, free and fair election assured in such nation. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, an ideal political system is difficult to exist with its resultant democratic deficit. Below are some of the democratic deficits observed in a country that is richly blessed with abundance of human and natural resources.

### **Nigeria Political Culture and Democratic Deficit**

This work observed that the nature of the Nigerian political culture affects the ideal democracy in the country and thus, give-rise for political violence, social insecurity and other related social problems. It also results to democratic deficits as stated below:

The monopoly of power to a particular group of people that do not have their country's national interest. Administrative matters and affairs as major items which is contrary to the principles of ideal democracy.

This pattern of political culture does not encourage an evenly distribution of the country's natural resources and other economic gains effectively. This is because leaders from a particular ethnic or religious group give more attention to his ethnic and religious people in economic, social and political development at the detriment of other religious and ethnic groups.

It does not give room for educational improvement, scientific and technological advancement, lack of industrial base and insensitivity to provision of social amenities, security and the neglect of general welfare of the entire citizen.

Furthermore, in an ideal democratic system, the following ought to be observed.

- a. Equal opportunity for citizens to register as members of any political party he or she wants to belong.
- b. An established political party or parties must exist.
- c. Free participation in political parties or activities, public rallies and campaigns
- d. Each vote should count and expression of public matters allowed; Abilekpe and Okolo (2011) pp 427-429

Infrastructural development in all rural or urban centers of the entire nation is often neglected or abused, rather, the attention of the leaders often concentrated at a particular location of their interest based on their relationship with people of that area.

Lack of adequate policy implementation methods has denied the sub-region a systematic and sustainable political, social and economic development. Among other democratic deficit are unnecessary intervention of military in African polity, Social insecurity, inflation, and infrastructural decay, high rate of "unemployment and under employment. Administrative bottleneck in government ministries, parastatals and offices. Over dependency due to increase in poverty and food insecurity, poor standard of education, increase in mass illiteracy, poor health care and services. Slow rate of investment for local production of goods, increase in production of fake products, massive election rigging during election.

Poor strategy for developmental process in Africa is always observed. This poor strategy in economic and political development process usually leads to the following challenges: high dependency ratio, low level of income, low savings, dominance in subsistence agricultural practices, limited technical progress and general economic decay, (Amaechi 2008: 129-130).

In some cases, democratic deficit of some African countries include lack of adequate care for their nations

environment which leads to environmental pollution, degradation and ecological problems.

When the leaders are not sensitive to the needs, demands and yearning of their subjects, it can lead to social unrest, robbery, prostitution, drug abuse, thuggery, ill health, mental disorder, alcoholism, increase in kidnapping business, increase in death rate, beggars and begging assault, poor clothing and shortage of provision shelter and other social vices. The above experiences usually lead to political decay, democratic laps and political failure.

### **Social Contrast Theory**

This theory does not allow a particular group either to intimidate, exploit or cheat another group in any given society. It arises when the subjects or the ruled can no longer bear the exploitative nature of the rulers in the society. This theory usually gives room for violence, war or revolution by the angry masses who feel cheated or exploited from their country's economy by their political leaders.

### **CONCLUSION**

In some countries, their political culture orientation gives room for smooth running of their democratic system of government, Nigerian's case is different. Nigerian's political culture increases their democratic problem. The Ethnic, religious and elites political sentiment needs to be addressed properly in order to enable Nigerians achieve enjoy another democratic dividends. This is to say that the moment a better political cultural orientation in Nigeria polity is adopted, an ideal democratic principle will be observed, this will help to reduce democratic deficit in the country.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Religion, Ethnicity and unfair politics have placed Nigeria on the path of underdevelopment therefore the following measures should be considered for democratic dividend.

- (1) The word state of origin and ethnic sentiment should be abolished in the mind of every Nigeria in order to foster love and unity in the country.
- (2) Different religious leaders in the country should educate their members on the need to separate religion from the Nations polity.
- (3) Nigerians should always elect people that have the country's national interest into country and not the sentimental leaders.
- (4) There is need to re address the leadership crisis and perhaps, the rotatory system be maintained.

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