

Public Opinion and Democratic Decision Making in Nigeria

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Introduction

While “Public” referred to *common interest* and *common good*, it is also used interchangeably to explain Public Opinion in democratic decision. Therefore, the term “Public” from the Latin word *Publicus* meaning “the people”. In other words, it could be referred to “*common access*” with area open to the general population deemed public (Habermas, 1962, 1989 cited in the Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research 2007). Opinion was first considered as popular concept in democratic decision in the work of Jeremy Bentham. Bentham then was much concerned with people’s reaction to government policy with *utmost benefits derivation*. This writing is synonymous to Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill. And these sets of analysts also believe that certain people’s interests were more important to other in the society. The major concerned area of our discussion focused on how to design workable preferences for able representation to triumph in the process of reliable policies that reflect the popular interest of citizen. In his discussion of descriptive representation, Stuart and Christopher narrowed down the contestable clauses of public opinion to some explicit adjectives while further stressing the focus of research on representative characters, such as the extent to which representative resemble the represented, in terms of demographic characteristics, *race, ethnicity, gender, language, sexual orientation and added to these in Nigeria is the experience of colonialism that loom large*. A number of theories according to Stuart and Christopher referred to this type of representation as “microcosmic representation” cited Birth 1971, 2001.

Public Opinion and democratic decision making in Nigeria governance and administration principally involved all the units, size, population and structure that composed federal government. The resources which serve as the life wire of the country are naturally available in abundance, such as limestone, coal, tin, columbite, iron, ore Gold, silver and zinc. The country also has natural gas and it is one of the world’s major producers of petroleum. Agricultural products also flourish well in most part of the country in relation to the types of crop and vegetable applicable to such environment, this explain why groundnut, beans, maize are well found in the North and firm product like palm oil, cocoa and coffee are also more available in the Southern part of Nigeria. The climates are of two distinct seasons, the dry season and the rainy season. In essence, the climate is equatorial in the South, tropical in the center and arid in the North of the Country.

The country (Nigeria) of about 923,768 square kilometers is surrounded by or shared boundaries with five major countries with Cameroon (1690km) and Chad (87km) to the east, Benin (773km) to the west, Niger (1,496km) to the North and the Atlantic Ocean (853km) to the South. The country’s typical outlook and its natural characteristics had obviously conditioned its social and political stratification. Worthy of mention are about 250 different ethnic groups identified on the basis of distinct languages in the country of close to 20 million populations. The Hausa – Fulani in the northern part of the country are about 29 percent, the Yoruba in the West are 21 percent and the Igbo in the eastern part are 18 percent of the total population.

Among these ethnic cleavages, there is religious interlude of predominantly Muslims among the Hausa – Fulani reside with exception of Middle belt in the north that are mixed up with Christians. The Yoruba in the South – West are comprised of Muslims and Christians while Igbo in the South – East are predominantly Christians. In a nutshell, 50 percent of the country are Muslims, 40 percent are Christians and the remaining 10 percent are traditional believers. Much of their public interest could be viewed on geographical contingencies: social, religion, economic and political affinity. Political administrative set up involved three major levels of government which are Federal, State, and Local Government. The States in Nigeria comprises 36, with 774 Local Governments as well as 8,810 political wards within the ethnic groups aforementioned. In the aspect of power classification between the three levels of government i.e. Federal, State and Local Government, about 66 items were specified for Exclusive list, (meant for the Federal Government to legislate), 44 are concurrent meant for both Federal and State. The fiscal power sharing mechanisms which should guarantee the smooth and orderly running of government is frequently changing at the will and caprices of Federal Government discretion.

Public Opinion, A Decimal Point of Democratic Decision

There exist, a symbolic correlation in the lateral meaning of “*Publicus*” and “*Demo*” as both referred to in Latin words as “the people”. Some researchers believe that opinion is inter-changeably refer to interest, while *Kratain* in Latin word is government. Hence, public opinion and democracy (in relation to this topic) could reasonably be referred to as “*The people’s interest in governance*”. In this circumstance, a large number of characteristics kept salient and continuously militating against the progressive functioning of true democratic governance. Public Opinion is viewed in different perspective by analysts, and despite the preferential description of this topic. Many of them still arrived at the conclusion that public opinion formed the bedrock consolidation of democracy

in an enviable representative governance of the contemporary world (Robert Matters and Michael Bratton 2007, Edmund Burke, Stuart Mill and Subaru,1991). It is in this regard, that conclusion was made that, attitude of people towards government policy as a function of “good delivery” be considered for possible evaluation. At such, people believe in the onward improvement of their material welfare under a regime presented as democratic government. Therefore, such enduring consolidation of democracy which is widely announced as a consequential capacity of political institution as in the writings of Colomer, 2001, Fukuyama 2005, Grindle 2000, Rose and Shin 2000 cited from Robert Matters and Michael B. Leader’s activities may not only be restricted by constitutional authority but equally be regulated by periodic electoral threat of popular mandate. The Nigeria recent experience on the returning of power to the North is witnessing series of political traumatic upheavals in the area of social organization, political grouping (confrontation between the ruling party Peoples Democratic Party, P.D.P and the New P.D.P had finally led the G7 Governors declare their support to the strong opposition), inefficient in the security of life and property (activities of Boko Haram and some other ethnic conflicts). Most of these problems led to elite fragmentation and disloyalty in which former President Obasanjo recently alleged Mr President of in-depth secret planning to eliminate many prominent Nigerians personalities (members of the opposition parties) in order to perpetuate his political hegemony beyond 2015. With these lingering persistence Nigeriapolitical problems, one may be right to conclude that these and many more amount to electoral threat to deny Mr. President’s popular mandate which may also hinder government processing of public policy for public preferences (the presentation of country annual budget to the National Assembly for 2014 has being delayed) and limited his mandate to 2015.

Democracy becomes consolidated in the face of true, free and fair process of Political legitimacy. It is in this form that large number of citizen perceives democracy as the ultimate game in the realms of governance and public administration of ideal society. In any political setting, it is the functionalism of political institutions that process and produce an acceptable degree of democracy lead to effective “good delivery” in democracy. A government that fails to deliver is not the government of the people. The characteristics of leading figures: the setting of political leaders that set to mid-weaving for ideal political organization, and the effective management of information and activities of security personnel at all time; the judicial interpretation of law and its enforcement by the government of the day without delay are regarded by the large number of literatures as a democratic state. The recent judgment against the present ruling party in Nigeria; the Peoples Democratic Party to reinstate the embattled Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola to Office as the General Secretary of the party is a typical example of democratic value. But the consequential negative reaction by the ruling party as the party refuses court order is inimical to a decent young growing democracy. According to Ayoade J. A.A, it is human unpredictability that is predictable. This assertion seems true in connection with the statement of the P.D.P chairman (*that the action of the faction is unexpected, in London on 27th November, 2013* when the embattled faction of the P.D.P declare their support for the strong opposition, All Progressive Congress (A.P.C) on 26th November, 2013). In this situation, we made to believe that, *the medicine of democracy is in itself*. There must be openness and acceptable criticisms on government policy. The press should consider their constitutional assignment as a matter of serious concern to defend public interest in unbiased epoch dimension, so that situation could be more permissible for citizen to influence the policy of government.

Public Preferences and Public Policy

The existence of wide gap between the public preference and public policy is one of the critical components of representative democracy. Stuart N. Sovoka and Christopher Wlezienna buttressed their points while designing a meeting point with a model called “**thermostatic**”. The model is described as smoothly working when “*the actual temperature meet with the preferred temperature*” inform of changing in multi-dimensional way at different circumstances. The model is designed for a workable demand and supply of social goods. The proponent of the theory had explained to us how the *good* is supplied to the people through the authoritative allocation of scarce resource as explained in David Eston system Model of political analysis.

The authors of the model, Stuart and Christopher then explain further that there is an increase on the public policy, when the policy temperature is reduced in the signal for change in the circumstance. In view of this, the capacity of citizens to comprehend the activities of government and the expected quality of governance shall reciprocate mutual relationships between the ruler and the ruled. The electorate sometimes perceives goal getting as one of the easiest assignment of government to fulfill their promises while they are uninformed of *insufficient economic resources, necessity of good governance and the international economic influence* whether it is favorable or not in the actualization of public interest. This demand is mandated and sanctioned by the threat of electoral participation and support for good governance. To some extent, the goals may not amount to social and economic development in terms of legacy and goodwill that leaders for example in the Southern Part and some other progressive states in Nigeria focus their attention. To this end, laudable projects, ranging from quality road network, improvement on Agricultural production, free health care and qualitative education. In Osun State series of awards had been given to the state government especially on e-leaning project for Senior Secondary Schools

and Airport project in Osun. The South West and some other All Progressive Congress (A.P.C) controlled states are seriously demonstrating development on capital project in their various states.

The programme notwithstanding is a gradual process that is aiming to industrialize states on future benefits derivation. Invariably, the goal at the beginning seems so rough, the capacity to accommodate little hardship (if any) may be difficult to bear by citizen because of the perceived previous political historical antecedents of the past politicians in terms of mutual sharing of *public cake*, *might is right*, *executive lawlessness*, *god-fatherism* and *do-or-die* political affair that were propagated by the historical epoch of both the military depoticism of 1966 – 1976, 1976 – 1979 and 1983 – 1999; and autocratic representatives governance in Nigeria. In this situation, positive re-orientation of citizen could be an alternative way to move Nigeria forward. Attempt on such positive re-orientation was moved during the regime of former President Obasanjo, but his inability to enact policy to back-up such action led to its short-lived. A similitude of this policy could be found in South West Nigeria, Osun State by the present government.

Democratic Governance

The historical antecedents of democracy according to Adigun Agbaje was that, around 14th century in the Greek Ancient city state. A population of about 400 inhabitants emerged to engage in social political discussion that would promote their society and guarantee political security. At a point, population became increasingly explosive and the meeting could not accommodate large number of people any more. The question of representative governance emerged. The participation of all the people in the country, which is the necessary ingredient required for democracy to function is in doubt as direct representatives no longer possible. But the classical definition of democracy remains the same from the Latin word "*Demo-Kratain*" means *people, government*. The two words all together referred to as people's government literarily mean that government in the interest of the people. At this point, "people", "government" and "interest" look vague. In the sense that, who are the people? Are these people referring to the whole population or their representatives? If it is their representative, therefore such an interest may not reflect the exact interest of the large populace. Then do the people actually know their interest? And what is the quality or the preferred quality of leader who is to represent such interest? These and many more had been constantly been posing challenges to analysts of politics throughout the world.

The idea of democratic governance in the modern political era had being exposed to so manythings in the polity. There is a conventional agreement by the political analysts that government constitutional duty is to represent the interest of the people. That suggests to us the importance of considering **e-governance** as a major way of spreading dividend of democracy as onward improvement in the life of citizenry all over the globe. Over the next decade, e-democracy efforts will start to bear long-awaited fruit. But this won't happen without reasoning and deliberate action of a visionary leader, that hold on to popular mandate.

Attributes of Democracy

One of the attributes of democracy is that democracy must provide political choice through a multi-party system, the government and the kind of policy they want the elected government to pursue. A government in one party is not a democratic, it is a government of dominating; a totalitarian government. A military government is not a democratic government. Paradoxically there is a tendency that a democratically elected government may equally turn to autocratic dictatorship. Everybody must have opportunity to get into the position of government, so that it could become a general affair to decide that kind of government or people they want. It is by so doing, that their rulers can generate obedience and confidence of those who are governed. The relationship between government and the people is that, there must be a "*feedback*" process in between them, that mutual interaction is an essential ingredient of democracy. The feedback process symbolizes a cycle process that goes round. There must be free periodic election based on universal franchise, all adult citizen (18 years and above) are eligible to vote in Nigeria. The election must be conducted freely and openly. There is no need to employ thugs or operate voting in the night or privately to manipulate election, it is illegal. The result must be released accordingly and must not be delayed.

The beauty of democracy is that pressure group and not governmental organization must be allowed in voting period. This assumption is possible using the freedom of association for people to come together formulating different association under the law. And such association should possess legitimate right to be heard, but such association should not break an existing law; this is because breaking a bad law is still an offence against the law, instead one may challenge the law for possible amendment rather than break it. Hence, non-governmental organizations which are established in other organizations be performed the necessary functions of alerting the government on their duties and responsibilities and thereby preventing government from making mistake. In democracy, the expression of opposition is a healthy phenomenon. It is healthy because, all human beings are fallible. There is likely that government make mistakes and needs to be corrected. And this government ability to humbly admit and take to that correction will shape and re-shaping democracy. Yar'Adua and Jonathan

administration subjected to the rule of law as the issue of local government creation in Lagos during the regime of Asiwaju Bola Hammed Tinubu was finally resolved

Another important characteristic of democracy is that, it must guarantee “*Civil liberty*”. People must be allowed to exercise their freedom, if government should give necessary understanding the freedom does not extend to break the existing law, freedom to speak is limited by law of libel, and it is equally important knowing fully that just as citizen are forbidden to break the law, executive lawlessness must not exist. Since government is the “*watch dog of law*” and the guardian of law and that imposes a higher responsibility on government not to break the law by virtue of office held. So, there is no body in any organized society that has the privilege to break law. When disorderliness reigns in the country, unlike the period of annulled June 12 presidential election of Chief M.K.O. Abiola 1993, the state was reduced in value. Lawlessness reign with civil disobedience while the law enforcement agents are unconscious of the order given to them. This is an indication that by every wrong act individual and government reduces their good will. It is important that government must be mindful of his good will at all time.

There must be *separation of powers* to guarantee free and fairness process of government function. The powers of government is normally separated into three: *the executive legislature* and the *judiciary*. There must be distinction so that they can act as check and balance on one another. Legislature can assess the function of the executive, and the judiciary; while judiciary also can make pronouncement on the action of the other two, and with such checks and balances it is assumed that autocratic rule can be prevented. It was the French philosopher, Montesquieu who propounded the theory of separation of power and he says dictatorship results when the same person or institution combines two or three powers.

However, Olagunsoye (2006; 40) cited from Akinjide Osuntokun posited: “... there is a correlation between democracy and development”. For him therefore, “democracy means the rule of law. Laws must be ultimately sovereign apart from the people. It is apparent that there is too much of regional tendencies with shouts of marginalization here and there, leading to centrifugal forces”.

In addition to this, Tunde Adeniran submitted that: “The irreducible minimum elements of a democratic culture must be accepted, institutionalized and sustained”. And if democracy must be of necessity feature, the prevalence of opportunities for political choice and self-actualization, there must be increased efforts of capacity building and the necessary framework for free and effective participation of every sane person in the political process”. He continues ... The constitution should ensure a sincere balance of the interests of all citizens, apart from separating the powers of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary”.

Representative and Delegate

Representative democracy is a government embedded with guided rules and regulations, citizens then participation in government decision as a matter of electoral system. In decision making process, the issue of mandate generates series of questions on whether a member of legislature is a representative or delegate. A representative in the word of Ayoade is a “**Master Voice**” he can only say and do what the electorate wants him to do and say, but delegate which is chosen by the government can only *interact the mood of the time and adjust mandate to suit time and place*. So, if he becomes a delegate then the classical theory of the mandate has changed because the interpretation that can be given to mandate is infinity, it can be anything. It is the delegate who determines his own mandate that is another problem associated with mandate. These issues of representative and delegate were addressed by an English Philosopher, Edmund Burke.

Democracy implies freedom of the process for the formation of government. Wherever that freedom is compromised by money given to the people to cast their voting right (like it happened recently in Nigeria) or compromised by rigging (the recent election in Anambra Nov., 2013) is compromised by dishonest political advertisement, then the choice is not free. Political advertisement does not operate under false pretence. Therefore, democracy will not be able to provide the desirable services, more so, that people came together for the sake of their own welfare and establish the government. As a result, a good government must make sure his subject are secured and they have equal access to government provision, and they all have right to change government that fail to deliver not by coup de tat but by election fairly taken.

Another problem that faced the issue of democracy in decision making is “decrease and number increase and vice versa”. So, the government that is producing is government of compromise, the geniuness do not always have their ways most of the time. The people always deserve the government they have, but this can only be through democracy. The people don’t deserve the election where the election is massively rigged: Nigeria’s election of June 12, 1991 and the subsequent election South West Osun, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo and Ekiti some Northern part like Sokoto and Eastern Part in Anambra 2007 . These acts of mal-practices cause a multiplier effect of injustice, perpetual corruption and massive embezzlement in recent time.

The people don’t deserve government where a Major or Lt. Colonel who never greeted the *fellow Nigerian* would come out again only to take over the smooth running of governance. The Nigeria people can only deserve the government where they can freely exercise the right of free choice.

Nigerian Democratic Governance

Following the circumstances of the colonial administration which greatly intensified conflicts rather than the reconciliation for progress and dynamism for different tribes and groups; it is obvious that post-independence Nigeria politics was characterized by ethnicity, uneven – development, social stratification and economic imbalances, with its ruinous effect on sustainable democratic governance and the development of the polity. Notwithstanding, the Nigeria First Republic was dominated by ethnic cleavages which entrenched the reality of ethno-regional politics by affirming regional differences that produced strong fractional institutional based and equally led to the disagreement on the fundamental values and national consensus which endanger the ongoing political system. Therefore, all efforts made by the progressive party to forward-lift the nation was never construed as a national assignment, but viewed as a grand designed by agitator to consolidate their political leadership and hegemony. Thus Nigeria voting pattern has tended to be influenced by ‘the sentiments of kinship and ethnicity as assets exploited by high-status seekers when canvassing for votes’ (Otitte 2000:16).

This is traceable to selfishness, bias, greed and lack of trust implanted by the long experience of colonial rule instigated by the opposition of the motion for the National Government at the Federal Level that existed between 1957 and 1959. It is imperative to note also that the establishment of such government in 1957 contributed to the invocation of a national emergency. The idea behind this proposition was that all the major parties in the country should constitute the government of the federation in order to ensure cooperative effort in the task of obtaining last and durable political institution that would eventually lead to independence from the British.

Immediately after the successful conclusion of the federal elections of December, 1959 which was aimed to hand over power to the democratically elected government. There existed a school of thought in support of the continuity of national government at the federal level to close such rank of ethnic and regional differences for accommodating diverse opinion and suggestions of different political parties. This idea (for whatever reason) did not materialized; instead, it was a government and opposition arrangement that was successfully adopted. This same arrangement was equally maintained at the regional level. In short, the idea of government and opposition within the frame of governance was nurtured and maintained consistently from 1957 until the system collapsed in January 1966. However, the fundamental questions that should be asked in this regard is whether or not there existed in Nigeria the national consensus which is a prerequisite for the smooth functioning of a government and political system.

In essence, our view of Nigeria democratic governance and political participation must agree on the basis of value and norms that set the goal and objectives of Nigeria Administration. More easy than none is declaring goals which had become a constant and frequent political habit of most of Nigeria politicians, but the means and strategies to actualize such goals always becomes problematic. Therefore, it is least exaggeration to say that there is enough evidence to conclude and support the view that the Nigeria First, Second and Third Republic failed because the values and norms appropriate for the successful functioning of the governmental system were either non-existent or not sufficiently shared among the relevant actors in the governance process.

The sobering effect of this assumption premeditated on the premises that the perpetualcankercworm of pervasive corruption, favoritism, nepotism, impunity and executive lawlessness characterized the attitude of Nigeria leaders. These attitude helped them to captivate public interest especially the people already being subjugated and retained in the captive of various obnoxious policies. Hence, a reliable frame-work based on acceptable norms and value that is expected to lubricate for effective locomotion of durable political participation seized to function. This situation without doubt, warrants a serious measure of optimism about partisan ability to hold meaningful policy view. Partisans in Nigeria are rarely exposed to more than meager descriptions of policy.

CONCLUSION

It is our submission in this paper that, the success of public opinion in any representative democracy remains always in the continuity of democratic process throughout the globe. In view of the aforementioned intricacies in the Nigeria democratic decision, conclusion has been made, that this experience contributed to uneven growth in democratic legitimacy with substantial portions of Nigerian citizenries, and the way and manner of resolving issues relating to workers and some other ethnic cleavages harboring reservations about democracy. It's as a result that, all effort to build a robust foundation of legitimacy remains a daunting challenge for the Nigerian government. Whenever the citizen's hope in the attitude and personality of leadership is in question, people's acceptance of democracy in Nigeria as legitimate hinges mostly on whether certain key political institutions command citizen trust.

To lay a good foundation of public opinion in democratic decision: leaders must have a focus and also need to understand the importance of **e-democracy** in their role as statement in digital world E-democracy should be one of those driving forces. Technology infrastructure should be regarded as the enabling foundation for internal government transformations and a vehicle to provide government services to citizens.

Therefore, effective redistribution of social benefits to citizenry and direct energy on how the dividends of

democracy be readily accessible to the Nigerian people in line with *acceptable Federal character principle in the Nigerian constitution*. Government of the day could boost economic capacity of citizen by embarking on large form of industrializations. Economic performance which is a major factor in democratic consolidation will be improved and thereby reduced the poverty indices of the country. It's twice helper in the area of power sector needs to be improved upon; so that infant industries be spared from imminent closure. There must be plan to help ensure the security of life and property, impunity and executive lawlessness, corruption from the top ranking statement be stopped by a discipline minded leader.

This could be done by reliable constitutional profile and supremacy of institutional control guided by the rules and regulations. Such institution must ensure quick service delivery with free and fair processes. Government of Nigeria should endeavor to provide for rebuilding strong institutions and strategies for effective delivery of social goods.

Government should plan for quick policy implementation and citizens should be sensitized by social mobilization towards the importance of government policies and its implementation. Through this, the activities of banking and financial institutions that defraud will be overcome by establishing an independent Anti-Corruption agent that stays clear of government or godfather intervention; All citizens should be free to challenge the activities of government and seeks for their rights in the law court. For this reason, justice shall not be delayed. An un-interrupted independent Electoral Commission must be chosen. Independent Electoral Tribunal is also charged with the responsibility to preside on the case so related.

Government should improve on educational quality to withstand normal standard in the world. To provide essential materials needed teachers' salary and condition should be improved. Also, imposition of sanctions for service delivery is necessary

Government may therefore engage on agricultural mechanization to increase in the production of food security and to promote adequate nutrition for every Nigerian. Free interest loan with all necessary facilities to Agricultural Cooperative Society to enhance the promotion of Agro-industries.

The Nigerian government needs to substantially improve the provision of adequate health care, especially to rural and poor neighborhoods in urban centers; government needs to strengthen environmental laws and its ability to enforce them

There is need for prompt and adequate political education by both government and non-governmental agencies. All citizens and leaders in the state should be made to strictly adhere to the intrinsic principles of federalism in the relationships of the various tiers of Government.

The essential feature of democracy therefore, will be assured only if the government is able to deal successfully with the issues. It now seems to ignore or inadequately deal with, that is, protection of interest of the minority, justice and equity; alleviation of poverty and re-distribution of wealth. In this wise, activities of vibrant civil society should not be over-emphasized.

Although the prerequisites stated above are crucial, nevertheless, the most critical of them all is *political leadership or statesmanship* at the appropriate time. A person can influence other through idea alone and the style of leadership shows the dimensional ways of exercising influence in different kinds of relationship.

The essential quality of leadership style that this research work proposes for Nigeria is that such a potential leader will be expected to respect public opinion in democratic decision and;

- (i) should be above board in aspiring and possessed adequate knowledge and wisdom to govern the diverse element of multi-national state.
- (ii) should have international recognition and support so as to enable him radiate love within the diverse units of the country and be confident to do the right thing at the right time and be firm in decision taken.
- (iii) such a leader should possess certain disciplinary character to entice the attraction of other diverse units and political opponents.
- (iv) leadership could therefore, establish a democratic culture that will cut across the diverse units of the country at large. This is leadership by example.

Odojin A. Peter suggested that, the most fundamental tragedy of federal experimentation in Nigeria was the failure of Nigerian federalism to generate her own pragmatic and great federalists of the caliber and vision of George Washington, James Wilson, Jay and Madison and Benjamin Franklin of U.S.A and J. A. Macdonald, Alexander Galt and George E. Career of Canada and so on who nurtured and developed the federal characteristics of their respective societies.

At this juncture, it is in our suggestion in this research findings that various policies and decisions fail in Nigeria and African countries at large at the level of implementation owing to the personality of leadership in question due to personal interest to extend their tenure of office.

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