



Political Culture, Democracy and Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Democracy and development (particularly in the jurisdiction of emerging socio-political and economic systems) have continued to attract some mainstream social science attention. In what dimensions are there relationships between these two variables? What is the position of political culture in the possible linkages between democracy and development, principally in the Nigerian situation? These are the central research questions of the current study. The general objective of the paper therefore is to examine the relationships among political culture, democracy and development in (contemporary) Nigeria. The methodology of the study is logical argumentation. It is concluded in the work that in development paradigms Nigeria's political culture is indeed leading the country to some undesirable destinations. The paper reechoes the call for the convocation of a sovereign national conference, which would create a road-map for coexistence among the people of Nigeria, in order to democratize development in the country.*

KEYWORDS: *Democracy, Politics, Culture, Political Culture, Development*

INTRODUCTION

According to Udo (2017), former Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor, Chukwuma Soludo, had taken an unflattering assessment of the state of the Nigerian economy, saying the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) size had dropped by half (in dollar terms) in less than two years of the Buhari administration. The regime came into office in May, 2015. Hence, from about \$575 billion in the month of the government's inauguration, Mr. Soludo said, the size of Nigeria's GDP dropped to between \$354 and \$232, with the country losing the first and second positions in Africa's GDP ranking. At the interbank rate of about N375 per dollar, he said, the GDP was about \$288 billion, while at the parallel market rate of about N465; the figure was closer to \$357 billion. Mr. Soludo said the country's economy was accordingly not only in a recession (in domestic currency terms) but has suffered "massive compression" in dollar terms. The Professor of Economics (Soludo) further posited that although the Buhari administration inherited a bad economy, it had only won selected micro economic battles, while losing the major war on the macro economy. He further opined that the previous Jonathan administration (2010-2015) actually undertook an unprecedented rate of debt accumulation, at a time of unprecedented oil boom in the country (Udo, 2017).

Consequently, the research instincts that informed this study emanated from the foregoing egregious disclosures, bordering on democracy and development in Nigeria. When the GDP size of a national economy is in the reverse gear, the state of affairs in the country can be anything but hardly development. If the national fate of this country had also oscillated between democracy and military despotism, as was the (mis)fortune of the Nigerian state, between 1960 (the year of her independence) and 1999 when the military seemed to have finally ceded powers to civilians, the occasioning democratic worries could become

accentuated. What is the position of political culture in the possible linkages between democracy and development / underdevelopment in this nation?

Conceptualizing political culture

An appropriate conceptualization of political culture must take the route of a fundamental understanding of the meaning of culture, an appreciation of its basic connotations. Culture has therefore been described as an omnibus terminology which can mean a variety of things, depending on the context in which it is used (Mkpa, 2001, 111). But we can also see culture as a process, a space, as well as an institutionalized instrument of defining oneself in relation to others and the world in general (Adebanwi, 2005; Onuoha, 2013; Okeke, 2015). What then is political culture, an apparently simple terminology? It has indeed been argued, that despite its surface simplicity, political culture has presented surprisingly complex conceptual problems (Chilton, 1988, 419). Therefore, according to Weil (1994, 65) political culture is one of the renegade concepts of contemporary social science. Theorists, argues Weils, have not provided a persuasive picture of its causal role and analysts have not been able to do without it in explaining empirical outcomes. But Weils (1994, 67) sees political culture as that part of culture relevant to politics. It thus includes political symbols, values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, expectations, goals, and so on. The critical questions here however, as implied in Weils (1994, 65) are: does political culture play a major role in determining political structures and regime outcomes or does it simply derive from the structures and institutions of given regimes?

Almond and Verba (1965, 13) also saw the political culture of a nation as a particular distribution toward political objects among members of the nation. Subsequently, Silver & Dowley (2000) interpreted it (political culture) as a subjective mass phenomenon that consists of orientations toward key objects of the political system and toward the individual's role in it. It is consequently the subjective realm which underlies and gives meaning to political actions (Iovan, 2015, 29). But political culture is also understood to be, in general terms, the values, standards and attitudes of citizens in the process of constructing the democracy of a country (Macias et al., 2010, xxxiii). Political culture in our estimation therefore refers to the means and methodologies of politics that are associated with a given people, their common attitudes to partisan politics and political institutions.

The concept of democracy

The truth is that democracy is increasingly becoming a disoriented political philosophy. Hence in global perspectives, democracy is currently in decline (Willige, 2017). Strong men in emerging democracies, populists and demagogues (in the other cases) have succeeded in unleashing such governance attacks on this system of government, so much that its natural movement has become with the reverse gear. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define democracy.

But a particularly valid name for democracy is a people-centered system of government. This centrality is however often misconceived again by misguided politicians (mainly in emerging democracies) as being election-supremacy. Once the elections are over, the strong-men politicians would begin to greedily personify democracy and chose to dictate what happens in the polity and in their shenanigans, succeed in dominating the political space in the name of democracy. However, a democratic system of government ideally ensures that the government in power is accountable to the people and that such a regime and its personnel obey the laws of the land (Egharevba & Chiazor, 2013, 18).

As a matter of fact, accountability is a central tenet of democracy. And it is equally important that democracy guarantees the well-being of the people who subscribe to its practice(s) in their nation-state. Where a despotic and unaccountable regime engenders development and the democratic equivalent of such government becomes the harbinger of developmental retardation, then democracy is on trial in such a

community. The meaning of democracy therefore is more appropriately locatable in its empirical relevance and realities. How does it (democracy) affect the lives of the people? Are the impacts in the positive or negative regards? And when they are seemingly in the negative trajectories, of what use then is the immensely eulogized political philosophy of democracy? How does it relate with development? But let us also take a look at the concept of development.

What is development?

The definition of development is indeed, both dicey and incidentally, highly democratized. Hence, all scholars and lay writers alike would have some seemingly valid trajectories to the conceptualization of development. In the process however, we end up dealing with relativities, subjectivities and what must sometimes become describable as outright implausibility. A certain contributor might for instance, conceive development in measures of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), another may base the assessment on the institutionalization of moral and ethical issues in a community, yet another, on the quantum of epicurean opportunities in a given socio-economic setting. In these schemata therefore, development comes with a multiplicity of variations – national, personal, social, political, economic, and psychological, and so on.

In any case, does the absence of development amount to underdevelopment? Scholars of variant persuasions have continued to engage in the occasioning debates. Hence in the apparent polemics that ensues, it is often argued that underdevelopment is not the absence of development because every people have developed in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent (Rodney, 1972, 22; Ashaver, 2013, 35). Inversely denoted therefore, the absence of development should not constitute underdevelopment. Jackson and Madaki (2014, 11) however squarely posit that the opposite of development is underdevelopment. The truth although is that as human beings (the stability of our mental states being guaranteed) we do not require dressing mirrors to see the bracelets worn around our own wrists. When we see development we know. When underdevelopment is the reality on ground we also recognize it. And above everything else, it is theoretically and empirically settled that development is about people. It begins with people and ends with them.

But according to the United Nations (1986) development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom. Accordingly, the human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development (United Nations, 1986). Thus, the objective of development is to produce sustained improvements in human well-being (Pritchett & Kenny, 2013, 1). Furthermore, Pritchett and Kenny have identified what they perceive as two fundamentally distinct uses of the word, development. One use of the word, they argue, takes the fundamental unit as a human being and defines development as a better quality of life. The other common use of development to these scholars, takes the features of the society - usually but not necessarily a nation-state, as the fundamental unit and the individual in this case is a participant in this broader whole.

It is the stand of this study however, that the above dichotomy is only useful for analytical purposes. Development is squarely about the individual citizen, his concerns and conditions. Ajaebili (2013, vi) further argues that development involves improvement in the totality of the individual in his/her economic, political, psychological, social and cultural relations, among others. The ultimate purpose of development therefore, is sustainable positive change in the quality of life of citizens who inhabit a certain social space, usually a nation state. The focus of this study is accordingly on national development, which possesses social, political and economic trajectories.

The democracy-political culture nexus in the Nigerian nation

Culture has the power to transform entire societies, foster inclusiveness, while also forging a sense of identity and belongingness for people of all ages (Nwankwo, Okechi, Nweke & Onyishi, 2015). This definitional hue does not of course exclude political culture. Culture is accordingly not a concourse of antique assemblages. It is a depiction of the specializations of a people (Okeke, 2015, 130). Culture may therefore be an omnibus terminology which can mean a variety of things, depending on the context in which it is used. But many people would however appreciate it as the configuration of people 's learned behavior that is transmitted from one generation to another (Mkpa, 2001; Okeke, 2015, 128). What then are the specializations that the Nigerian political culture of hooliganism and electoral brigandage brought to the democracy-political culture nexus in the country? What learned behaviour has democracy introduced to the paradigms of development in Nigeria? The Nigerian national budget has certainly not ceased to be the governance ritual that it became under the military dispensations. Culture (inclusive of its political variant) can be learned, borrowed or transferred from one group to another (Mkpa, 2001, 113). What has the Nigerian political culture learned, borrowed or transferred to other peoples and the county's citizens?

What is the opposition's attitude to the government / the party in power and how do the men in power see the opposition? It would be wrong to conclude that a political culture of national consensus (cast on stone) is a requisite condition for the flourishing of democracy and development in any polity. But national attitudes are of essence. Democracy does not depend on agreement on fundamentals (Weils. 1994, 104). It is on the other hand a process of continuing alternatives. The opposition's attitude in canvassing the alternatives is as critical as how the government in power perceives the opposition. In the Nigerian political culture, it is common knowledge that with political office come the spoils where the practice of using public office for private gain is seen as normal, despite the existence of anti-corruption agencies or institutions (Egharevba & Chiazor, 2013, 18). Between the regime in power and the opposition therefore, it has been the same decadent political culture of greed.

To what extent therefore is it plausible to talk about the Nigerian political culture in its generic terms? It is the position of this study that such a characterization is immensely plausible. Hence, in its summative trajectories, the Nigerian political culture is describable as a self-denigrating type, bordering on corporate damage and national euthanasia. In contradistinction, the British political culture is conservative and preservative. Culture is unarguably dynamic (political culture inclusive). Consequently, the American political culture might have (in its dynamism) bordered on self-extension in the past and currently tending toward self-preservation. Let us however return to the corporate destructive thesis of this study as the defining feature of the Nigerian broad political culture. In this regard, we posit that the overall Nigerian template of political culture still possesses the following as subcultures: political corruption, electoral malfeasance, electioneering hooliganisms, ethnic bigotry and elite coldness (that is as pathological as it is wide-ranging).

To the above list must be added in very clear terms, leadership irresponsibility as a strand of the political culture in Nigeria. Then the leadership rascality could be subdivided further to obtain god-fatherism, national cabalism and the mentality of winner-takes-all. The culture of a people is undoubtedly the summation of how they behave. Ipso facto, their political culture would border on how they behave in politics. Thus, a people that behave in the foregoing regards in politics must be engaging in self-denigration or corporate devastation (as political culture).

According to Olanrewaju (2015, 13) therefore, the political culture of Nigeria is still primitive and undeveloped. Nigeria he continues, seems not at the present to have any national political solution. No political agenda for creating a *New Nigeria*. So they waste their time with irrelevant political theories. Again, he argues, the economy of Nigeria is so underdeveloped that Nigeria seems not to have any economic solution. No economic agenda for creating a *New Nigeria* (Olanrewaju, 2015, 13). The contentions of

Olanrewaju may indeed not be as highfalutin as one might think. And we posit further that the overarching colour of political culture in the Nigerian environment is smeared by an incomprehensible level of corruption. Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, thus discloses that public treasury looters in the country have resorted to burying stolen funds in their backyards, deep forests and burial grounds to evade the recovery of such monies by government (Premium Times, 2017).

The development dimension: the conundrum and the centrality of corruption

At the root of what has been denoted as the development conundrum in this study is this question: why has the leadership class in the country continued to believe that the current developmental trajectories and bewildering politico-economic management designs in the Nigerian nation are leading to any good destination? Parekh (2005) in Ebingbo & Okoye (2015) sees culture as a historically inherited system of meaning and significance in terms of which a group of people understand and structure their individual and collective lives. And it is further opined here that this understanding and structuring should impact positively on these individual and collective lives, thereby leading to development. It appears however as if Nigeria's political culture presents development as if the country is developing for others (probably Nigeria's former colonial masters) and not for Nigerians.

Hence, central to the issue of political culture in the country is the question of corruption (Egharevba & Chiazor, 2013). Nye (1978) in Egharevba & Chiazor (2013, 19) sees corruption as a behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status-gain; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding behaviour. To be elected / appointed into public office in Nigeria has easily become a means of elite gangsterism in looting the public treasury. From the local government official to the government personnel at the central level, the name of the game is sleaze. Corruption accordingly retards development. It privatizes the resources that would have been ploughed into developmental nationalism. Hence, political corruption and privatization of the state are symmetrical tendencies in Nigeria. And they lead to a development conundrum.

There used to be this universal cliché that corruption usually fights back. But it is no longer in Nigeria, an issue of fire for fire between the terrifying behemoth and the Nigerian state. On the other hand, the malignant socio-political and economic tumor is increasingly emerging victorious in the various ding-dong battles between the harmful monster and the Nigerian government. Corruption indeed currently defeats the Nigerian government in the nation's law courts (with unprecedented rapidity). Ezeamalu (2017) enumerates the most recent cases of such victories recorded against the Nigerian government by the heinous ogre called corruption. Meanwhile, poverty has continued to pummel a vast majority of Nigerian citizens as evidenced by low standards of living. The Nigerian hoi polloi currently go uninvited to the various occasions where the corrupt elite display their weltanschauungs of opulent consumption. These disadvantaged members of the society scout for such occasions on daily / weekly bases in search of free food for their aching stomachs.

In the viewpoint of Szirmai (2005, 1) the low standard of living of the mass of the population in developing countries is singled out as the key issue in development. When referring to a society or to a socio-economic system therefore, development usually means improvement, either in the general situation of the system, or in some of its constituent elements (Bellu, 2011, 2). Hence, implicit in almost every use of the term 'development' is the notion that some countries and regions of the world are extremely poor, whereas other countries, representing a relatively small fraction of the world population, are very prosperous (Szirmai, 2005, 6). Nigeria's development conundrum thus further hinges on the contradiction that here is a country that is classifiable as being prosperous but in the midst of the ostensible prosperity there is poverty everywhere, as induced by the greed of the elite and the accompanying phenomenon of debilitating corruption. Hence, neither in the general situation of the Nigerian system nor in some of its constituent

elements (Bellu, 2011) is there development in objective terms. But development is a human right that is impossible to take away (United Nations, 1986).

Development entails economic, political and cultural transformation (Awojobi, 2014, 151). Development in other words presupposes the transformation of political culture for economic realities to be in the positive regards. Corruption may be a by-product of underdevelopment (Awojobi, 2014, 154). The stand of this study however is that corruption (its specie that is political corruption) which is a component of the political culture in Nigeria, impedes the process of development. Despite all the development plans by the Nigerian government therefore, a lot of setbacks have been encountered in the developmental process (Adah & Abasilim, 2015, 276). But to properly situate the issue of developmental conundrum, we return to the thesis of self-deprecation and corporate defamation as political culture and now wonder if this is how this cow with a big bad leg will be trekking till it gets to the capital territory. At this pace, when will it get to that destination?

According to the United Nations (1986), all human beings have a responsibility for development, individually and collectively, taking into account the need for full respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as their duties to the community, which alone can ensure the free and complete fulfillment of the human being. And they should therefore promote and protect an appropriate political, social and economic order for development. The development conundrum thus places the responsibility for development in the hands of the leaders and the led. But corruption (political corruption) erodes all the plausible linkages in these regards.

The development process thus covers a complexity of relationships (Soares & Quintella, 2008, 104). Then the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized (United Nations, 1986). Sen (1999) further succinctly sees development as freedom - an integrated process of expansion of substantive freedoms. Economic growth, technological advancement and political change therefore are all to be judged in the light of their contributions to the expansion of human freedoms. Among the most important of these freedoms, he argues, are freedom from famine and malnutrition, freedom from poverty, access to health care and freedom from premature mortality (Szirmai, 2005, 8).

In the Nigerian context however, these freedoms must specifically include freedom from hunger and starvation, freedom from malnutrition, curable diseases, high rate of infant mortality, maternal mortality and freedom from political gangsterism masquerading as democracy. It must include freedom to fully participate in the processes of democracy in the country. But how would these lofty conditions materialize for development to become feasible in the country, in the face undulating corruption?

Conclusion and recommendation(s)

Nigeria's political culture is indeed leading the country to some undesirable destinations. Hence, the disarticulations and weak linkages among political culture, democracy and development in Nigeria is a function of fundamental disunity among the disparate peoples that currently answer Nigerians. The hooliganisms that usually characterize national elections in the country accordingly detract from democracy and subsequently lead to the emergence of the so-called leaders who lack the legitimacy for leading the nation to developmental destinations. Elections and democracy are certainly not synonymous. But a popular, purposeful and valid electoral process revalidates the citizens' electoral choices. Such an election gives legitimacy to office holders, their offices and the actions deriving from such positions. But Nigeria's political culture and her elections have in historical contexts essentially produced only leaders with immense questionable credentials. The relationship between political culture and democracy in the country is thus the

negative type of relationship. Consequently, the negativity continues up to the depressive linkages among the three variables of political culture, democracy and development in the country.

States possess the primary responsibility for the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the realization of the right to development (United Nations, 1986). The right to development in this regard is not a particular national commodity that is either distributed to the nationals or withheld from them at the whims and caprices of the chief servants of the state (the elected officials). The right to development is thus an international product. The Nigerian state must precipitate actions that would make this universal right freely available to the current inhabitants of her national space. It must in this dimension convoke a sovereign national conference that would in the paradigms of political culture create a road map for coexistence among the peoples of Nigeria, in order to democratize development in the country.

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