
Patterns of Political Culture and The Paradox of Political Participation in Nigeria: An analytical Evaluation

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Abstract: *In any democratic political system, the prevailing political culture determines the level citizens' participation in the electoral and governance processes. This paper evaluated the patterns of political culture and the paradox of political participation in Nigeria. The paper analytically explored the published opinions of scholars on the issues of political culture and participation as applicable to the Nigerian situation. The paper posited that there is a direct relationship between political culture and political participation in the Nigerian political landscape. The paper observed that Nigeria has not yet developed a stable political culture nor satisfied the minimum conditions required for a democratic election as no election in Nigeria has ever been free and fair, and held in atmosphere devoid of fraud, intimidation and massive rigging. This as the paper noted is engendered by fragmented nature of the Nigerian polity and the prevalent parochial-subject political culture. Moreover, it was revealed that the citizens' low and minimal participation in the electoral process in Nigeria is a product of multiple factors such as absence of stable democratic culture, low level of political discourse, political thuggery, ineffective accountability, weakened political socialization processes and structures and absence of politics of new breedism. Consequently, the paper suggested among others that political and social programmes to educate and enlighten the Nigerian politicians and the entire electorate should be carried out with focus on the contents of democratic culture and the benefits of orderly electoral process and stable democracy.*

Keywords: Democracy, election, governance, political culture, political participation.

Introduction

One of the common impressions among social scientists and anthropologists is that a country's politics is a reflection of its culture. This implies that different countries have different political cultures because of differences in their national history and national character. It is also true that the prevailing political culture in any country determines the extent of political participation in that country. It is discernible that one political system is distinguished from another not only in terms of its structure, but also in respect of the political culture in which it lays embedded. Deriving from this is the fact that

political culture shapes the beliefs, orientations and attitudes of the citizens towards the political system which gives order and meaning to their overall participation in the democratic process.

Democracy is the type of government in which the people have both explicit and implicit rights of participation. This participation could be in the form of direct involvement of the citizens in the governing process, for instance, as ward councillors, local government chairmen, members of the various legislative houses, governors or president. It also involves the right of the people to choose their representatives since everyone cannot participate directly in the governing process. For this reason, modern democracies operate as representative governments because citizens select people to represent them in government. The rationale is that the representatives act on behalf of the people; they must represent their wishes and aspirations. On the other hand, the citizens are supposed to hold their representatives to account for their actions. This expresses the political culture of the society.

In the light of the above understanding, this paper set out to evaluate the patterns of political culture and the paradox of political participation in Nigeria. In this context, the paper raised pertinent questions such as: What is the nature of the operating political culture in Nigeria? How has this prevailing political culture affected the pattern of political participation in the country over the years? In an attempt to address these questions, the paper analyzed opinions of some classical scholars and political analysts on the subjects of political culture and political participation as they apply to the Nigerian situation.

Conceptual Issues

Political Culture

Political culture represents the system of empirical beliefs, expressions, symbols and values which defines the situation in which political actions take place. It involves the governed awareness of the institutions that govern them, the top officials and their roles and the major decisions of government that affect their life chances. Given this knowledge of awareness, political culture involves how the governed feel about their government. Given such feelings, it involves the judgments and opinions which they hold about their government (Anam-Ndu, 1998). In the same vein, Shively (2001) asserted that political culture consists of all attitudes and beliefs held communally by the people which form the basis for their political behaviour.

According to Almond and Verba (1963:12) political culture is defined as:

The specific political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and the attitudes towards the role of the self in the system....

When we speak of the political culture of a society, we refer to political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings and evaluations of its population.

Consequently, Almond and Verba (1963) postulated that political culture falls into three model classifications and other sub-types which are various combinations of the three models. The first is the Parochial Political Culture. This exists where the individual hardly relates himself to politics and government; in fact he is unaware, or aware in a dim sort of way, of the existence of government. The citizen does not have a specialized role in the political system, he is tended more or less towards his immediate local environment and politics is considered in terms of ethnic loyalty and primordial

sentiments which cannot be differentiated from the socio-economic or religious system. Here majority of the populace are illiterates, poor and unexposed, and have little knowledge of political system beyond their localities. Their orientation towards the political system is negative and has not internalized any norms to regulate relations with others. Little or nothing is expected from politics or government, and he does not make any demand on the political system. Political participation in a parochial system is therefore very minimal.

The second is the Subject Political Culture. Here the citizen has passive, apathetic or obedient relationship to the political system. He is aware of the outputs of government welfare programmes, but he plays no part in the input process; the citizen is marginalized, he does not take part in the initiation of demands, he believes he has no influence on the government. In this type of political culture, the government expects obedience and conformity to its directives without questioning by the citizens. The subject (citizen) is aware of specialized governmental authority and is actively oriented to it as legitimate or as not, but he does not see himself as an active participant, rather his attitude towards politics and government is indifference.

The third is the Participant Political Culture. The citizens in this type have developed a high level of awareness and are positively oriented towards participating actively in the political process. Citizens' orientations are towards activist role in the political process. It is characterized by citizenry awareness of both inputs and outputs processes of government; the citizens are comprehensively, explicitly and actively oriented to the political system and are encouraged to participate actively in decision making process, for example, becoming party members, contesting and voting at elections.

However, it is worth noting that the parochial, subject and participant political cultures are pure types which are not likely to be found in modern political systems (Eminue, 2005). The classification is therefore theoretical; hence, it is impossible to have all the members of any political system display only parochial, subject or participant political culture. Thus, we can speak of parochial-subject, subject-participant, and parochial-participant political cultures. These mixed cultures result to what Almond and Verba (1963) termed the 'civic culture' which shows a balance between activities and passivities, and power and responsiveness (Anama Ndu, 1998). The relative prevalence of each type, though, determines the kind of political culture that exists in a nation.

It is within this context that O'Neil (2004) conceived political culture as the basic norms for political activity in a society and a determining factor in what ideologies will dominate a country's political regime; it is unique to a given country or group of people. But Green and Leuhamann (2010) has asserted that to say that a group of people share a particular political culture does not mean that they agree on all the important issues of politics and governance. Rather it means that they are likely to share a common perspective about their public surroundings, including their political leaders, governmental structures and the enduring symbols and values of public life. It includes citizens' general feelings towards government including their desire (or lack thereof) to participate in political issues. It also captures a sense of people's understanding of the decision making process, including attitudes about its merits.

On the Concept of Political Participation

Political participation is fundamental to the concept and practice of democracy universally. No matter the perspective from which democracy is conceptualized: citizen, elitist, representative, majoritarian, and so on, for the system to be democratic, the citizens must have a way of participating in the political process even if this is restricted to choosing political leaders at elections. Political participation encompasses the many activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate, the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs, and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government (Kaase and Marsh, 1972). Political participation extends beyond parties, however. Individuals can also become involved in certain aspects of the electoral process through independent action particularly at the local level and by joining civil society organizations. Professional networks, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and the media can all provide avenues for political participation.

Broadly speaking, whatever citizens of any country do with the sole aim of influencing the choice of political leaders in power and the policies of government of that country constitute political participation. Such activities could be either legal or illegal. However, it is proper for empirical study of political participation to focus on legal activities. Hence, according to Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978:1), political participation comprises “those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take”. By restricting political participation to only “legal acts” conducted through “regular legal political channels”, and directed only toward “election”, the authors seemed to exclude even legal activities such as protests and demonstrations (Ikpe, 2000). In an attempt to expand the definition, Booth and Seligson (1978:6) defined political participation as “behaviour influencing or attempting to influence the distribution of public goods”, including security of lives and property and infrastructural and social amenities such as roads, schools, health centres and other services provided by the government.

Flowing from these definitions, Conge (1988) identified the broad categories of debate about the meaning of political participation, as:

- Active versus passive form: should political participation be defined only in terms of action – voting, campaigning for a political party – or should it include passive forms – a feeling of patriotism, and awareness of political issues?
- Aggressive versus non-aggressive behaviour: should a definition of political participation embrace civil disobedience and political violence or should it be limited to more ‘conventional’ activities?
- Structural versus non-structural objects: should efforts to change or maintain the form of government be included in a definition of political participation or should the definition be limited to changing or maintaining government authorities and/or their decisions?

- Governmental versus non-governmental aims: should political participation be limited to behaviour directed towards government authorities, policies and/or institutions or should it include phenomena outside the realm of government?
- Mobilised versus voluntary action: should behaviour sponsored and guided by the government to enhance its welfare be called political participation or should the term be confined to behaviour initiated by citizens in pursuit of their interests?
- Intended versus unintended outcomes: should behaviour that has an unintended consequence for a government be defined as political participation?

Certainly, the above salient but contentious issues cannot easily be disregarded when discussing political participation (Omotola and Aiyedogbon, 2011). Consequently, and guided by the dual requirements of generality and precision, Conge (1988:247) offered a more nuanced definition of political participation, that is neither too general nor too narrow, as: “individual or collective action at the national or local level that supports or opposes state structures, authorities, and/or decisions regarding allocation of public goods The action can be verbal or written ...violent or non-violent ... can be of any intensity”.

A more inclusive definition by Conway (1991) sees participation as those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies of government. These activities may be supportive of the existing policies, authorities, or structures; or they may seek to change any or all of these. Political participation also includes passive kinds of involvement, such as attending state ceremonies, supportive activities, or paying attention to what is happening in government or policies generally. The fact that the activities of citizens are sometimes not supportive of the existing policies, authorities, or structures, or that they may seek to change any or all of them makes protest behaviour part and parcel of political participation.

There are two main dimensions of political participation, namely, conventional and unconventional participation (Conway, 1991). Conventional participation refers to those activities that are accepted as appropriate by the dominant political culture: Voting, seeking elective office, working for a candidate or political party, writing letters to public officials – these are examples of conventional forms of political behaviour. On the other hand, unconventional political participation or behaviour, according to Conway (1991), can be viewed as a continuum ranging from participating in peaceful protest march to engaging in terrorist violence or civil war. Unconventional forms of participation are not accepted as appropriate by the dominant political culture, although they may be legal, for instance, peaceful march through the city by students protesting the withdrawal of book subsidies by the government. Some forms of political participation, however, are both unconventional and illegal. For example terrorist groups planting bombs in public buildings to kill citizens as a mark of opposition to the government in power.

Given the foregoing conceptualizations, it is discernible that political participation is central to democracy. Moreover, mass political mobilization efforts by the government or its agencies can boost political awareness and consequently motivate political participation. It entails all those voluntary

activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formulation of public policy. Political participation, therefore, could be seen as the opposite of political apathy which refers to a state of withdrawal from, or indifference to, political activities.

Election, Electoral Process and the Patterns of Participation in Nigeria

The administration and conduct of election can serve to encourage or discourage citizens' participation in the electoral process. An electoral process that is free and fair gives the voter the confidence that his/her vote will be relevant in determining the electoral outcome. In other words, his/her perception of a fair process increases the voter's political involvement and efficacy. On the other hand, if the citizens believe that election results will be manipulated to give advantage to a particular party, the urge to participate will be low. For instance, in Nigeria's First Republic, politicians could boast openly and made good such boasts, that whether they were voted for or not, they would win the election (Dudley, 1981). And in the Second Republic, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) connived with the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to rig elections in the latter's favour (Joseph, 1987). The situation is not different in the Forth Republic as politicians engage in election as if it is a war with the notion that winning election is a do-or-die affair; that their party must win at all cost and by all means. Though it could be said that the 1999 elections witness a low or minimal electoral malpractices, the magnitude of rigging in the 2003 elections which gave victory to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) over its main rival, the All Nigerian People Party (ANPP) exceeded all previous records in the history of electoral malpractices in Nigeria.

As observed by Chikendu (2003), Nigeria has never satisfied the minimum conditions required for a democratic election. That is, no election in Nigeria has ever been free and fair, and held in atmosphere devoid of fraud, intimidation and massive violence. Election in Nigeria is usually seen as a deadly serious business, which is perceived in zero-sum terms. Hence, contestants must win elections at all cost using every imaginable strategy. In the First Republic, rigging, thuggery, and other types of electoral fraud, including the manipulation of the electoral system were widely used. The level of violence during political campaigns and voting was very high; also cases of intimidation of both rival candidates and voters were the order of the day. Because of fraudulent elections, the emerging government lost its legitimacy and Nigeria sank into a deep mire of political crisis between 1966 and 1979.

The Second Republic began in 1979 after thirteen years of military rule, yet the politicians did not learn anything. As elections to constitute democratic governance commenced, electoral malpractices also emerged. Ikpe (2004) noted that all the old tricks used by politicians in the First Republic resurfaced while new ones were manufactured. However, violence and fraud were kept low in 1979 elections because of the presence of the military. But in 1983 when the soldiers were no longer around, full-scale violence, fraud and other malpractices returned to Nigerian elections. This election began the direct use of state power through state agencies to support the party in government to win election. In the First Republic, although there was active use of state power against opposition, the blatant intimidation with which the NPN government handled the business of election was simply novel. This election was heavily fraud-ridden such that the government that was very unpopular was returned

to power even when its legitimacy was at the lowest ebb. Again, this triggered off the military coup, which terminated the life of the Second Republic on 31 December 1983.

There were several elections within the transition programmes from 1986 to 1999. They were all fraudulent at the local government, state and federal levels. Even the much-orchestrated June 12, 1993 presidential election was fraudulent although the level was much lower than in previous elections. The politicians wanted to present the military regime headed by General Ibrahim Babangida with no excuse to terminate the transition process as in the past, so they behaved better at the polls. But the mendacious military ruler still went ahead to annul the election.

The Fourth Republic began in 1999. Just like the 1979 elections, because of the military presence, the levels of fraud and violence were low. But the military in 1999 was not as resolute as the one in 1979, and so the politicians were emboldened to perpetrate large-scale fraud and some violence in the election. In this election, all types of known electoral malpractices were employed, and in 2003 and 2007 elections, the levels of fraud and malpractices escalated in addition to newly invented strategies. Commenting on the founding 1999 and 2003 elections, Omelle (2005:4) noted that:

Both the 1999, but more atrociously the 2003 and 2004 elections were 'carry go, no bus stop'. To call the 2003/2004 electoral motions 'elections' is to brutalize the English language. This brutalization of the white man's language is brought about by the brazen assaults on the basic principle of democratic process-the election.

Over the years, several strategies to effect electoral fraud and malpractices popularly known as rigging have been devised by politicians in Nigeria. These according to Ikpe (2004) could be divided into two categories. First, malpractices derived from manipulation of the electoral process outside direct election (voting) which includes:

- Over registration of voters with fictitious names or multiple registrations of real people in the voters register.
- Procurement of counterfeit ballot papers, voter's cards and other election materials.
- Getting party members, agents and sympathizers to be employed as electoral officers.
- Buying the support of law enforcement officers and electoral officers.
- Constructing illegal polling centres.

Without securing this first category, the second will be difficult and so the chances of 'winning' the election will be slim. The second category as catalogued by Ikpe (2000; 2004) consists of strategies to deploy the first effectively. These include:

- **Rigging at source:** Ensuring that only party loyalties are found in the voters register.
- **Camping:** Arriving at election venue the night before so that very early in the morning, the party supporters can gain control of the venue before others arrive.
- **Lock-outs:** Using law enforcement agents to close voting at the centre earlier than the stipulated time.
- **Double counting:** Counting the votes of a candidate twice and recording the double votes.
- **Intimidation:** Causing confusion with guns or machetes to scare opponents away.

- **Advance papers:** With the cooperation of the electoral officer on duty, original result sheets are given in advance to a candidate who fills what he wishes while the fake one is kept at the voting centre and discarded after election. The result of the original (advance paper) is announced by the electoral umpire.
- **Inflation:** This is the most fantastic strategy, for instance, 306 suddenly becomes 90,306 or 10,306.
- **Direct assault:** Giving money to voters on the queue to cause them to change their choice.
- **Ambush:** Giving money to prospective voters some distance away from the voting centre to persuade supporters of rival candidates, or to gratify sure bankers, to go ahead and vote.
- **Foreign invasion:** Hiring non-Nigerians and arming them with voters' cards.
- **Sandwich:** A loaf of bread is sliced open and stuffed with crisp notes and handed to voters in opponents' queues to cause them to decamp.

During the 2003 elections new strategies were introduced. These were:

- **Diversion:** Election materials meant for some polling units are diverted to private houses by party supporters acting as drivers or hired drivers bribed by party chieftains.
- **Executive kidnapping:** Party supporters initiate violence at the collation centre and the safety of the Returning Officer is threatened; the party agents acting as security men or security men in the payroll of that party "smuggle" the returning officer to a place safe enough for him to 'enter' the scores.
- **Secure and cancel:** Using electoral officers to void opponents' votes by putting second thumbprint on the ballot papers to invalidate the ballot.
- **Great escape:** When electoral officers and voters are relaxed and unsuspecting strong and good runners suddenly snatch the ballot boxes and ballot papers and escape to where they can fill whatever they want and smuggle them in through an ally who is either an electoral officer or a law enforcement agent.

From the above description of the various strategies of electoral malpractices, it is perceptible that Nigerian politicians see electoral rules and process as something to be manipulated to promote the interest of the individual politician or party; not something to promote the welfare and stability of the democratic system. Electoral process is often perverted and subverted without compunction. Politics is totally stripped of novel principles such as justice, equity and fair play; as such the electoral process is not conceived as a regulatory mechanism. On the contrary, it is merely conceptualized as a channel through which the strong, rich, and powerful in the society could manipulate to gain access to power. In the process, nothing else counts, whether it is the law, citizens' rights, or democratic culture; all that counts is winning election to attain power. This leads to politicians being involved in massive rigging and thuggery at elections. Voters are intimidated and manipulated with offer of bribes and all manners of threats. Politicians in Nigerian democracy could openly declare at election campaigns that they would win elections whether or not they were voted for by the people. Often, they win as they had boasted, and without the people voting for them.

The patterns of participation discussed above do not augur well for democratic governance and its sustenance in Nigeria. In the first place, because of their contemptuous regard for the people,

accountability becomes decrepit or non-existent. The government and the politicians become unresponsive to the wishes and aspirations of the ordinary citizens, while representatives cease to represent the electorate but concentrate on gratifying themselves from the resources of their respective offices. Because of the struggle for wealth accumulation, governance is neglected while corruption and violence escalate geometrically in the society. There is widespread official lawlessness; government officials disrespect the rule of law, fundamental human rights, court rulings and other moral precepts consistent with conduct in civilized societies. These are the non-institutional, seemingly petty, devious factors which make the existence of democracy tenuous in Nigeria.

Bedrocks of Depreciated Democratic Value in Nigeria

The preceding sections of this paper have highlighted the sordid attitudes and behaviour of Nigerians towards participation in the electoral process as well as their contorted strategies. But it is even more pertinent to understand the reason for this wreckful attitudes and how they could be ejected from the political system. Political analysts and students of Nigerian politics have located the attitudes of politicians in two factors: the political culture and the political economy of Nigeria. Nigeria has not yet developed a stable political culture. Indeed, a large number of Nigerians seem not to be able to differentiate democracy from other modes of governance. Hence, they have very little regards for it. All they want is effective governance with facilities for education, health and other social welfare fairly available. Any government that can offer these, democratic or otherwise, is supported. In the creation of the Nigerian state by the colonial powers, democratic rule was so de-emphasized. Meaningful democratic process only began with the 1951 Macpherson Constitution. Thus effective democratic politics existed in Nigeria for only nine years before she became independent. Nine years was not enough for the politicians and the people to learn and imbibe the democratic culture. Hence, the democratic process was viewed only as a process for acquisition of power, and for that reason, coupled with the absence of democratic culture, strategies that could ensure success despite their illegality flourished with impunity (Post and Vickers, 1973; Ikpe, 2004).

Again, in Nigeria, democracy and all its institutions and processes was a gift from the colonial rulers. The people did not struggle for it; they did not fight a civil war; and they did not initiate a revolution, as were the cases in America, England, and South Africa among others. The cost of democracy increased and sustained the value for democracy in these countries. But the ease, with which the vote was attained in Nigeria when the vast majority of the citizens did not understand its meaning, has led to its depreciated value, convoluted estimation and corrupted practice.

Why do Nigerians stick to this pervasive political culture? Surely, though Nigerians now cherish democracy more than in the past, yet the value of democracy appears not to appreciate and the democratic political culture still appears weak and fractious. The answer to this problem is located in the country's political economy. Precisely this refers to how wealth is produced, distributed and consumed in Nigeria, and how it is used by the wealthy to attain political power. Nigeria is not a productive economy, that is, the source of wealth for the wealthy is not located in manufacturing of goods. The most viable productive ventures in the country are owned by the multinationals. The wealthy in Nigeria accumulate wealth by allying with the state. Thus, in Nigeria, the state is the biggest and the most

effective source of wealth accumulation. To accumulate this wealth, one needs to acquire state power or ally with those holding the key positions of power in the state. Everybody cannot hold these powerful positions as such the contest for these offices must be tempestuous and normless. Because of the zero sum nature of the juicy prize, every despicable strategy, as mentioned already, is used.

It is the political economy factor which gives live and vitality to ethnicity, a very dangerous cancer of Nigerian politics. Politicians in contest for state power often mobilize their communal/ethnic groups for support. The people are made to see such politicians as their groups' champions in struggle with other groups for their own share of the national cake. What the people have failed to realize over the years is the fact that when the pieces of cake are distributed eventually, the politicians eat them without remembering the people. But then, the seeds of ethnicity have been planted and the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian state helps it to grow; it is strengthened by the greed of politicians anxious to mobilize ethnic support to gain power. The result is frequent mutual suspicions and conflicts, which makes it insalubrious for democracy to survive.

Thus, the political culture and political economy explain why elections are violent and ruthlessly contested in Nigeria; why politicians resort to unscrupulous methods for success at the polls; why they subvert the legally established electoral process, and why democratic rule has a depreciated value in Nigeria.

The Paradox of Political Participation in Nigeria

One of the simplest ways of measuring political participation in the public affairs of the state is to examine the level of mass involvement in the general elections of that country, and in this case Nigeria. Election is one singular aspect in which the masses chose, select or express their choice over individuals who should occupy public offices and represent the people. Consequently, election provides the most direct means for the masses to periodically influence the trend of public policy (Alapiki, 2010).

Thus an analysis of general elections in Nigeria from 1979 is hereby presented with a view to pointing out the levels of political participation against apathy. This periodization is appropriate because 1979 general elections was the first time in the political history of Nigeria that all citizens both males and females of voting age exercised their franchise. Again, it marked the first time all Nigerians voted in a general election at the same time, on the same day and for a particular office – the office of President.

Analysis of the 1979 general elections show that with a total population of 77,841,000, the Electoral Commission succeeded in registering a total of 48,846,633 voters. This means that in 1979, a total of 62.77 percent of the country's population registered for the general elections. In the election proper, however, the actual total votes cast for the presidential election was 17,098,267. This amounted to a total turnout of 35.00 percent. When measured against the country's population at the time, the voters' turnout amounted 21.96 percent. By 1983 the population of Nigeria was estimated to be 79,729,310. The Electoral Commission registered a total 65,304,818. This means that in the 1983 general elections, a total of 81.90 percent of the country's population was registered for the elections. The total vote cast at the elections was 25,430,096, which amounted to a total voters' turnout of 38.94 percent. When measured against the country's population, the voters' turnout amounted to 31.89 percent (African Elections Database, 2011).

Starting from the 1999 general elections, out of a total population of 108,258,350 million people, only a population of 57,938,945 million people registered for the elections. However, out of the 57,938,945 million registered voters only 30,280,052 million people actually voted. In 2003 elections, out of an increased population of 129,934,910 million, the number of registered voters increased to 60,823,022 million and quite impressive the number of votes cast increased to 42,081,735 million. But in the 2007 elections, regardless of both the increase in the total population and the number of registered voters, the total votes cast dropped significantly. With a population of 131,859,730 million people, a number of 65,567,036 million registered voters were recorded but the total votes cast declined to 35,397,627 million. This same phenomenon befell the 2011 elections, as with the population of 155,215,570 million and a total number of registered voters as 73,528,040 million, only 39,469,484 million total votes were cast. In the 2015 elections, which of course went down as the most historical election in the history of the country since 1999, a great level of apathy was recorded. Out of 181,562,052 million Nigerians, 67,422,005 million registered voters were recorded, while just 29,432,083 million total votes were recorded; the lowest ever since 1999.

The greatest decline in 2015 occurred regardless of the overwhelming effects of the elections. The huge sum of money spent on campaigning; money spent on sponsoring hateful documentaries and so on, were unable to revive both political and voting participation of the people. With the matchless decline in voters' turnout in the 2015 Presidential election, it is therefore self-evident that more than any other time in the history of the country, a great chunk of Nigerians harboured the feeling of apathy. Voter apathy is now apparently a cancer that has eaten deep into the Nigerian elections fabric, so much that if nothing is done, what looks like democratic systematization in the country might totally fall to pieces.

The low turnout recorded in the 2015 Presidential election can still be proven by analyzing the decline in all the geo-political zones in the country. The purpose of this analysis is to illuminate the level of apathy shared across the country regionally. Compared to the 2011 outcome, it is obvious that all the geo-political zones except the South-West region experienced major decline in the voter turnout of the 2015 election (Fagunwa, 2015). This is a clear indication of the general apathy felt by many Nigerians towards the most expensive elections in the history of the African continent.

Table 1: Showing the decline of voter turnout in all the geopolitical zones except South West in the 2015 election with comparison to the 2011 election

Nigeria Presidential election: regional voter turnout		
Zones	2015	2011 approximate
North-Central	43.47%	49.00%
North-East	45.22%	56.00%
North-West	55.09%	56.00%
South-East	40.52%	63.00%
South-South	57.81%	62.00%
South-West	40.26%	32.00%

Source: Fagunwa, 2015.

The table above is a further indication of voter apathy during the 2015 Presidential election, as the level of voter turnout geo-politically experienced a major decline, except the South-West zone. As the table shows, the North-Central zone experienced a decline from 49% in voter turnout during the 2011 Presidential election to 43.47% in the 2015 election. In the North- East zone, voter turnout fell from 56% in 2011 to 45.22% in 2015, in North-West zone from 56% to 55.09%, and in South-East zone it decreased from 63% to 40.52%. As represented in the table, the general low voter turnout also affected the South-South zone, as a decline from 62% to 57.81% in 2015 was recorded. However, the only increase in voter turnout experienced was in the South-West zone, a zone that ironically recorded the lowest turnout in the 2011 elections. Although, in the 2015 election the zone is second in the list of the lowest voter turnout, coming after the South East zone yet, it recorded an increase from 32% in 2011 to 40.26% in 2015. Table 2 below presents more interesting and analytical data than the previous table. First, it provides an additional turnout figure – Voting Age Population and Voting Age Population Turnout (VAPT). The figure is actually less impressive than the turnout of those who registered. The voting age population is the total population of those who are eligible to vote but for various reasons did not even register to vote. The turnout of 32.11 % is dismal. This is clearly an area of responsibility of the Electoral body to go after all eligible voters and make sure that a high proportion of them register to vote. In the absence of compulsory voting in Nigeria, INEC should use all resources for this purpose. Although the president was duly elected, but it means that those who voted for him were a fraction of the 32% of the voting age. There should be programmes to increase the number to make the task of democratic consolidation easier for the regimes (Mahmud, 2015).

Another important fact from table 2 is the falling rates of voter turnout since 1999. The overall voter turnout was in the 50 and 60 percentiles between 1999 and 2011 but down to 43.65% in 2015. Although the credibility of the elections and reliability of the figures may be in question in those other years, the figure is not impressive. As for the voting age population, it has been increasing since 1999 from 52.7 million to 91 million in 2015 but the voting age turnout has been decreasing. This does not augur well for the country's young democracy.

Table 2: The falling rates of voters' turnout since 1979

Year	Voter turnout	Total valid votes	Registration	VAP turnout	Voting age population	Population	Invalid Votes
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,056	181,562,056	2.85%
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573	3.19%
2007	57.49%	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85%	71,004,507	131,859,731	N/A
2003	69.08%	42,018,735	60,823,022	65.33%	64,319,246	129,934,911	6.00%
1999	52.26%	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36%	52,792,781	108,258,359	1.40%
1993	36.64%	14,293,396	39,000,000	27.79%	50,526,720	105,264,000	N/A
1983	38.94%	25,430,096	65,304,818	47.51%	45,729,668	79,729,310	N/A
1979	35.00%	17,098,267	48,846,633	44.83%	38,142,090	77,841,000	2.00%

Sources: International IDEA: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm> and African Elections Database: africanelections.tripod.com.html

Key to Voter Turnout Terms:

1. Voter Turnout: The voter turnout as defined as the percentage of registered voters who actually voted.
2. Total Vote: The total number of votes cast in the relevant election. Total vote includes valid and invalid votes, as well as blank votes in cases where these are separated from invalid votes.
3. Registration: The number of registered voters. The figure represents the number of names on the voters' register at the time that the registration process closed (cut-off date), as reported by the Electoral Management Body.
4. Voting Age Population Turnout (VAPT): The voter turnout as defined as the percentage of the voting age population that actually voted.
5. Voting Age Population (VAP): This includes all citizens from the legal voting age of 18 years.
6. Population: The total population.
7. Invalid Votes: Discarded votes due to wrong thumb printing.

From the foregoing there is no gain-saying the obvious, that the level of mass participation with regards to the exercise of popular franchise is quite low in Nigeria. Evidently, more people discuss politics than vote, and many more vote than join political parties and work in campaigns. Thus, the real active and attentive political public is distinctly a minority; only a small group gives constant attention to politics, a slightly larger group is interested but comparatively passive, while the mass of the citizens are largely indifferent.

Political participation is an ingredient of every polity, large or small. Whether the society is an oligarchy or a democracy, someone must make political decisions and appoint, uphold, and move leaders. Those who fail to participate whether, out of neglect or exclusion, are likely to enjoy less power than those who participate. Although not all who participate possess effective power, those who do not participate cannot exercise or share power. McClosky (1972) observed that the right to participate is an essential element of democratic government, inseparable from such other attributes of democracy as consent, accountability, majority rule, equality, and popular sovereignty. Accordingly, the growth of democratic government is in part measured by the extension of the suffrage and the correlative rights to hold office and to associate for political purposes. Whereas traditional monarchies restricted power and participation largely to the nobility and their agents, democracies have in principle transformed these prerogatives into rights enjoyed by everyone (Alapiki, 2010). It has to be said that participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the ruled. It is also a means for realizing the democratic objectives of equality and freedom by a people in the determination of their own affairs. However, despite its importance to democracy, the right to participate is not exercised by all who possess it. The number of participants and non-participants varies with time, place, and circumstance, and also with the type of participation.

Effects of Political Culture on Political Participation in Nigeria

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In an attempt to categorize the Nigerian national political culture, it is impossible to identify any predominant political culture. The various ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, inherently constitute different political and sub-cultural groups. Thus today we still see the powerful sub-national groups as Northern Elders Forum, Arewa Consultative Forum, Afeniferi, Ohaneze N'digbo, Southern Leaders Forum, Ijaw National Congress, among others. They still exhibit cohesive political cultures of their own which are very different from one another and which resist amalgamation (integration) into a Nigerian whole. The country is thus fragmented and segmented along ethnic groupings.

In Nigeria one of the most crucial and yet least developed democratic institutions is the political party system, as there are currently (2018) about 48 registered political parties in the country, most of which are either personalistic, ethnic/regional, or an assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party platform to acquire political power. This has produced a dominant party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) between 1999 and 2015, and the absence of effective opposition parties due to the fragmentation of opposition parties along ethno-regional lines. The Alliance for Democracy (AD), later transformed into Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and yet again merged with other opposition parties to form the All Progressives Congress (APC), predominates among the Yorubas of the South-West Nigeria. The defunct All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) predominated amongst the Hausa/Fulani, and controlled the government in some Northern States. While All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) predominates amongst the Ibos and controls some States in the South-West of Nigeria (Oladipupo, 2011). Indeed, the opposition parties have been unable to present a common front to challenge the dominant party, due to the regulatory and financial control of the dominant party in government, PDP, over the electoral corruption perpetrated by electoral umpire, INEC, the high level of electoral illiteracy amongst the general populace, and the high incidence of electoral violence during each election in the country.

In view of the above prevailing situation, it is safe to assert that the Nigeria's national culture is located in the parochial-subject political culture considering the fact that, with the exit of the military from the political arena, the political orientations of a substantial proportion of the Nigerian population have shifted from an exclusive focus on diffuse tribal orientations toward the political system in general. However, the individuals do not give up their orientations as subjects or as parochial but maintained them alongside the participant orientations. Thus the Nigerian situation and the political culture do not approximate the civic democratic culture. The norms which favour political participation are not yet well developed in the country.

The effects of this pattern of political culture on political participation in the country are disastrous and devastating. The level of political participation in the country by the general masses is low and minimal. Some Nigerians have come to view politics as a 'dirty game', waste of time and energy. Still, others believe that their efforts will not change anything, that is, the outcome of politics, hence self-deluding, and so do not bother about involving in politics, whatsoever. Indeed, for some marginalized minority groups, who perceive participation as useless, they see withdrawal or non-participation as a way of expressing their contempt for the system. For instance, the Ogonis in Nigeria

refused to participate in the 1993 elections as a result of what they termed their marginalization in, and alienation from, the Nigerian State.

Again, with the prevailing political culture, establishing a stable democratic structure capable of enhancing effective participation becomes difficult. A large number of Nigerians seem not to be able to differentiate democracy from other modes of governance. Hence, they have very little regards for its. All that the people want is effective governance with facilities for education, health and other social welfare fairly available. Any government that can offer these, democratic or otherwise, is supported. Thus, the parochial-subject nature of the Nigerian political culture has not allowed Nigerians to learn and imbibe the civic or democratic culture for a sustained democratic participation and governance in the country. Consequently, the democratic process in the country is viewed only as a process for acquisition of power and wealth and for that reason, coupled with the absence of democratic culture strategies that could ensure success despite their illegality is permissible.

Deriving from the above is the effect of weakened socialization process. Socialization is the process through which individuals incorporate into their own attitudinal structure and behavioural patterns, the ways of their respective social groups and society. But specifically, political socialization refers to the way a society transmits its political culture from generation to generation (Langton, 1969). This signifies that political participation is not automatic, that is, it does not come naturally. It must be obtained through various structures. And through this process, one acquires his/her political views. But in the Nigerian context, the structures for the inculcation of political views in the citizen seem to be weak and incapable of performing this function. Thus, views and orientations about politics in Nigeria become wrongfully acquired. This affects the level of political participation since the citizens hold no positive views or orientations about politics and are often stupefied or confused by political events. At this instance, the level of political discourse is low and left in the hands of non-active participants, and these always centres on corruption and ineffective leadership within the political system.

At the heels of the above is the effect of elite's domination of the political scene. In Nigeria, politics is seen and left in the hands of a few elites who continue to struggle for political power with the acquisition of wealth in view. The politics of 'new breedism' is not encouraged. The political system therefore thrives in chaos as elections in the country are seen as a deadly serious business. The masses, on the other hand, think of their involvement in terms of the immediate material gratification, that is, what they can gain from their on-the-spot involvement in politics, mostly during elections. Moreover, the masses in their great number especially the youth are thus lured and employed as political thugs in the political scene. Participation therefore becomes violent in nature; hence many are scared from participating. All these arise due to the prevailing parochial-subject political culture in the country.

Conclusion: Towards a Democratic Culture and Effective Political Participation in Nigeria

This paper aimed at evaluating the pattern of political culture and the paradox of political participation in Nigeria. From the discussion, the paper has established that the Nigerian state possess a low and minimal level of participation occasioned by the prevailing parochial-subject nature of its political culture. Consequently, these have had deleterious effects on citizens' political participation in the country. Absence of stable democratic culture, low level of political discourse, political thuggery,

weakened political socialization processes and structures and absence of politics of new breedism are amongst the possible effects of the prevailing political culture in the country. It is therefore the opinion of this paper that effective political participation occasioned by improved political culture is a desideratum and that participation in politics in any community is a function of the dominant orientations of its members.

Accordingly, the paper suggests that to improve upon the prevailing political culture and the level of citizens' political participation in Nigeria:

- (i) Political and social programmes to educate and enlighten the Nigerian politicians and the entire electorate should be carried out with the major focus on the contents of democratic culture and the benefits of orderly electoral process and stable democracy.
- (ii) Political office holders in Nigeria are excessively remunerated. It is hard to tell who goes into politics with the mind and desire to serve the people and who is there to reap material benefits for self and cronies only. Hence, the paraphernalia and financial benefits attached to political office in the country should be reduced to make them less attractive, so that people will no longer be desperate to occupy elective positions 'at all cost' and 'by all means'.
- (iii) The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil societies and other stakeholders in the electoral process should be more involved and vigorous in election supervision. The supervisors should concentrate on the polling officers in the field. That is where elections are rigged; that is where electoral officers are bribed; and that is where 'inflation' thrive most. What they bring from the field is what the returning officers collect and record; that is what INEC gets and will declare.
- (iv) The practice of consensus candidate and other forms of uncontested primaries should be discouraged by the Nigeria's electoral umpire, INEC. The reason is that most political parties use this medium to impose unpopular candidates on the people. This leads to the aggrieved candidates and their supporters decamping to other parties and indulging in all kinds of malpractices to disgrace their former parties. These parties, on the other hand, would use every available means and weapons to ensure the success of their candidates, irrespective of unpopularity. In this instance, elections will surely be violent and ruthless, new strategies of rigging will be developed. In the end, free and fair election will continue to elude the country.

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