

# Political Leadership: A Taxonomy of Political Participation and Nigeria Democratic Governance

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## Abstract

Whether it is civil or military rule, it is axiomatic that credible and productive political leadership is a Sinequanon for the peace, stability, growth and development of the super and the substructures of the contemporary Nigerian society. Hence, the participation of the citizens in the democratic process for the emergence of such leadership is germane. The paper argued that lack of inclusivity in the democratic process from intraparty to interparty levels snowballed to the short supply in the desired political Leadership as hitherto experience. Thus, the paper interrogated the Struggle for the soul of Nigeria which is the common wealth of the nation between the power wielders of the Nationalist and the Reformist groups who's stuck in trade is the capturing and taking Charge of any emerging government machinery from one democratic dispensation to the other. The capture theory of politics was used as an analytical facility for the study. Methodologically, the qualitative research was adopted as the option A-4 leadership recruitment was recommended among others.

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### **Background to the Study**

The challenge of political leadership in Africa which Nigeria is a microcosm has provoked a circumlocutory debate amongst political analyst, scholars and Political Scientists in particular. This scenario prompted Achebe (1983, p.13) to state that “Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership; a basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers, a tendency to pious materialistic wooliness and self-centered pedestrianism”. However, if anthropological studies are anything to go by, the challenge of political leadership has been reoccurring in each election circle since the post-independence era. These challenges have manifested in all forms of gerrymandering that involves vote buying, thuggery, killing, kidnapping of political opponents and arson, culminating into electoral subversion. This malaise has been exacerbated with the introduction of information communication technology (ICT) into the electoral process considering the hitherto energy challenge in the country with the rural areas mostly affected by electricity supply, participation in the democratic process becomes a huge challenge given that the Nigeria's democracy is a carbon copy of the American presidential model which considers election as a veritable tool for the consummation of democracy as the electorate choose their leaders when conducted within the constitutional provisions that governs democratic practice.

In view of the above, the onus of fashioning a model for an inclusive and effective participation of the electorate at all levels in the democratic process should be within the ambit of the rule of law. To further consummate effective participation, political education by a skilled custodian of the process through training like a political scientist whose primary interest in the behavioral sciences lies within such parameters conducted among members of the same political parties to be presented to the electorate for the general elections is hinge. The emergence of any leader must be in tandem with the leader's level of political currency among the electorate which includes both the elite and the masses. It is on this note democratic governance is largely deemed the world over as the most civilized way of governing a people considering its ingredient of inclusiveness when and where its tenets are observed is germane. Hence, the efficacy of any democratic process hinged on the transparent nature of the selection of credible political leaders from party primaries for presentation as candidate in the general elections. To unravel the problem under study, the paper is structured under the following sub teams; the struggle for the soul of Nigeria, elections, political participants and participators, levels of political participation, civil society and election monitoring etc. In the final analysis, the study made some prescriptions that are devoid of occident remedies for the treatment of Nigeria's political malady.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts the Capture theory of politics as an analytical facility considering its explanatory and predictive ingredients. Hence, the capture theory as espoused by Onuoha (2008), is develop by George Stigler. Scholars like Duncan Black (1965), James Buchannam and Gorden Tullock (1962), Mancure Olsons (1965) as well as Rise and decline of Nations (1982), among other contributed to its expansion. The scholars used the theory to explain the reason for the collapse of the economy of states. However, the capture theory of politics

with regard to power struggle is popularized by Onuoha (2008), who gave a graphic account of political gerrymandering amongst the wielders who in other words are referred to as political god fathers. These classes of people have been contending for the soul of Nigeria (the common wealth) since independence by deciding who takes charge of the government machinery. Hence, the power game has been between two major groups, which are the Nationalist and the Reformist in capturing the machinery of government. To their own advantage while the remainder of the populace continue to live in squalor and misery.

Meanwhile, as observed by Onuoha (2008, p.10), "in political Science, capture is said to occur when bureaucrats or politicians who are supposed to be acting in public interest, end up acting systematically to favour particular vested interest". In this regard therefore, the Nationalist as mentioned above, could be said to be representing the interest of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) while the Reformists representing the Multinational corporations (MNCs), World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) who are also seen as the liberal economist. It is in line with the above that the capture theory is seen by this study as a practical demonstration or implementation of the decision of the power wielders by the political ruling class who are occupying political position through the instrumentality of the power wielders. Thus, the Capture theory of politics is deemed fit for this study as it best explains the hitherto nature of political power acquisition and succession in Nigeria as it focuses on the dramatis personae (Nationalists and the Reformists) interested in taking control of any emerging government in the country as their puppet.

### **The Struggle for the Soul of Nigeria**

The competition among power wielders of who tacitly controls a government believed to have been elected by popular franchise as seen today in Nigeria has been a tug-of-war between two seemingly irreconcilable competitors who are the Nationalist and the Reformist groups, since the flag in independence in 1960. A cursory look at the emergence of the Nationalist and the Reformist shows that immediately after independence, of the first group of people that emerged as leaders were of the Nationalist school, hence, indigenous elite. Though the major interest of the contending groups is to entrench its self into those in charge of government machinery whether it is in the legislature, executive or the judicial arm and subvert the process of policy formulation and implementation to their advantage and watch the masses languish in misery. For instance, the first republic that was captured by Nationalist saw compradors fronting for their former colonial masters in the sales of their companies produce as marketing agents with cartels formed for the protection of such business interest across the country.

The fall of most government is as a result of the activities of either of the groups that government aligns with. The government of Presidents Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari for instance were captured by the Nationalists who tacitly took charge of the sub and the super structures of the country. Following these trends, the national economy and politics is high jacked by these nationalists who are termed by the government as "Elder statesmen" or party loyalists. In this regard, the institutions of government that are supposedly governed by rules as stipulated by the constitution of the country are completely emasculated as rules are jettisoned and only referred to when there are in favour of the elder statesmen of the party, hence democratic governance becomes a dictatorship of the political ruling class.

The above scenario has contributed to a significant extent to the abysmal performance of government institutions as most of their functions are usurped by the “Elder statesmen” who becomes “powerful” as they whimsically and capriciously allocate the common wealth of the nation to their cronies holding top government offices, both appointed and elected. These patron client relationships affect good governance resulting into political apathy amongst the electorate and the eventual lack of support for the party in government during elections as the essence of government which is for the general welfare and saving life and property of the people is lost. The consistent amplification by the Reformists group on the weaknesses of the government as controlled by the nationalists contributed largely to the ousting of the Jonathan government by the reformists who are more of the multinational organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as International Governmental Organizations. (IGOs) However, the emergence of the Muhammadu Buhari civil administration as orchestrated by the reformists has further given credence to the power game of a zero some proportion for grabbing of the soul of Nigeria (the power to allocate resources from the common wealth) for the benefit of the oligarchy capitalist class.

The point we are driving home is that neither of the irreconcilable competing groups of the Nationalist and the Reformist have the interest of the citizenry. Rather, what has been the order of the day is the continuous recycling of themselves in government for the purposes of filthy Lure. Hence, what the country need as a panacea to this malaise is the projection of an inclusive democratic process for the selections of credible leaders from the grassroots through political education and a protection clause of whistle blowers like the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) enshrine into the constitution. In this regard, the era of strong men would be replaced with strong institutions with global standard of reward and punishment system when and where the need arises.

### **Elections**

To a very large extent, good governance is achieved through democracy which election is one of its critical components and a means of consummating political leadership. On this note, Sobowale (2009), observed that, election is a ritual of democracy to ensure that electorate is given its right to elect those who are supposed to hold power on their behalf. It is a potent instrument and sign of health of any democratic process, if it is flawed, then the wrong people get to power. If it is improper it means people may have been wrongly disenfranchised or cannot vote because of manipulations of the electoral process. (Sunday Independent, May 3, 2009).

The aforementioned observation as put together by Dayo Sobowale of the Sunday Independent Newspaper portrays how election and the electoral process is being manipulated. The manipulations of the process attest to the struggle between the contending forces which we refer in this study as the Nationalists and the Reformists for the capture of political power. Taking into cognizance that the Nigerian democratic system is a carbon copy of the American presidential model which considers elections as a veritable tool for its consummation, gives the electorate the opportunity to choose who represent them in either the legislative or Executive arms of government.

commonsensically speaking, whenever the word democracy is mentioned especially in less developed countries like Nigeria for instance, what comes to mind is elections and vice versa if opposite is the case. Thus, elections constitute a very vital aspect of democracy and therefore its hallmark. As opined by Shively (2005, p.229), “elections are means by which leaders and sometimes actual policies are chosen by the people”. In other words, the character of the political leadership as stated above, determine to a reasonable extent the prosperity of the people. Heywood (2007, p.264), see elections to be very important for the advancement of the society. He then argued that “at the very least, elections provide the public with its clearest formal opportunity to influence the political process and also help, directly or indirectly to determine who holds governmental powers”. In view of the capture theory, the position of the public to determine following democratic principles of majority on who holds governmental powers have been vitiated putting into context the position of the nationalist and the reformist groups on who is elected into which political office has largely and tacitly too, been done by the political power wielding groups.

However, for the purpose of this study, elections have been defined as a process through which the electorate (voting population) elects their representatives into the legislative and executive arms of government. In view of the forgoing, it has become axiomatic that democratic consolidation can only be achieved through the process of elections, and the election of credible leadership through effective political participation from the party primaries to the general elections.

### **Political Participants and Participators**

These concepts have been instrumental to the consolidation of Nigerians democracy and the production of credible leadership. Political participation appears to have affected the outcome of political leadership in Nigeria as political participation is considered largely only in the area of voting. This is brought to the fore in an attempt to debunk the idea where people see themselves participating in politics whenever they come out to vote in a particular election.

In fortification of the above, Adedokun (2000), maintained that political participation is a situation where by an individual takes part in every political activity taking place in the environment or society. Aligning with the above definition, one could see that voting is the climax of the political processes which determine to a very large extent the quality of leadership following the outcome. The production of effective leadership from a particular election goes beyond voting. Hence Adedokun (2000), went further to identify two categories of voters which includes, political Participants and Participators.

Political participants in this regard could be referred to as the progenitors of the political process. This is because participants are those that have initiation capacity to write to government on what policies and programs that can contribute positively to the wellbeing of the citizenry. The major drawback with this category is that it constitutes of the few elites among the literate population who only participate in all aspect of politics. While the participators on the other hand, only join the participants after they might have studied and evaluate the policies the participants are agitating or supporting to be implemented are for the

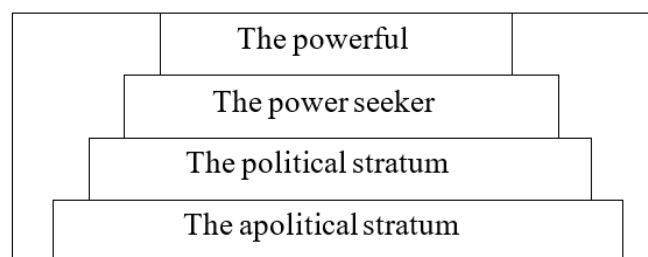


general good of the people, hence, political participators lack policy initiation capacity and ability to interrogate government policies. Meanwhile, one of the vices for the production of a viable political leadership in Nigeria has been the lackadaisical attitude shown on political participation as participants at the embryonic stages of the democratic process before which start with party to select candidate to contest the general elections has been very discouraging because of the undue interference of party leaders in the selection of candidate of their choice vitiating public opinion as a cardinal principle of democratic governance.

### **Electoral Outcome and its Effect on Political Participation**

The participation of the electorate in political activities is largely hinge on certain indicators that shapes the voting behavior of the electorate. Hence, electoral outcome has been identified as a strong indicator that can make or mar a democratic process causing scholars like Shively (2008), in what he calls the paradox of voting which states that no one who is sensible should vote as the result of the election is nearly certain to be the same whether you vote or not. In other words, why should anyone go to vote and sometime teargas by police and even killed at the polling units. This kind of scenario brings about disillusionment and political apathy amongst the electorate. Hence, “voting looks like a dangerous and unproductive art” (Shively, P.245): disillusionment express by the electorate when the outcome of fails to reflect public opinion during voting.

However, the reduction of electoral confidence among the electorate seemingly originates from the subversion of their electoral choice during the election causing their apolitical disposition in partaking in political activities or the political process when the government in power fails to implement its campaign promises as contained in the manifesto after winning elections and inaugurated. Democratic consolidation could become a mirage in Nigeria if the basic requirement for the emergence of credible political leadership continuous to be at the lowest ebb and prebendal in nature. Going by the theoretical framework adopted by this study, one could realize that political participation has been compartmentalized into different categories as diagrammatically presented by Adedokun (2001), in a lecture series, quoting Robert Dahl as seen below:



**Figure 1.**

- (i) **The Powerful:** as indicated in the diagram constitute the influential in the society who are insignificant in number but have capacity to determine who wins elections to a particular office having captured the institutions of government. In this category belongs the Naturalist and the Reformist group as seen in the paper.

- (ii) **The Power seekers:** on the other hand, are the contending members of the society seeking for political power through sponsorship from the powerful and influential. Meanwhile, it is not every power seeker that receives the favour or the good will of the influential “god father” who are termed here as the powerful.
- (iii) **The Political stratum:** is made up of the enlightened group in the society who engage in active politics in order to achieve certain objectives which to a large extent are to the benefit of the entire populace. This category involves several interest groups in the society which includes Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) like Yiaga Africa committed to the promotion of democratic governance and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as trade and labour unions like the Academic Staff Union of Universities and Colleges of Education, seeking to right the wrongs they have seen in the democratic governance to the society. This class participates in politics through writing of petitions to government in their area of concern about public welfare.
- (iv) **The Apolitical stratum:** this constitute of a sizeable number of citizens who are relatively inactive in politics. However, apolitical in this instance refers to a situation where by an individual does not take part in political activities in his or her society. It is discovered in the course of the study that when people say they are apolitical, they are referring to not voting in a particular general election. Unknown to them, no individual can completely be apolitical as their non-activeness in the aspect of voting does not stop them from responding to the demands of the system such as payment of tax and regulating other rules as put in place by the political leadership they may not have contributed to produce.

In view of the above, democratic consolidation in Nigeria is anchored on active participation of the citizens in all the above categories in the democratic processes which is consummated through enlightenment campaigns by political parties themselves and CSOs as well as religious bodies and social clubs among others. When the political and the apolitical strata are well informed of government obligations and aware of their rights within the ambit of the constitution, the problem of the “powerful” appointing political leadership through clientelism would be reduced if not completely obliterated.

Clientelism as noted by Joseph (1991, p.55), “is a fundamental element of socio-political system, which affect and often determine the allocation of public goods and services in Nigeria. As a fundamental principle of political organization and behavior, clientelism has been responsible for ethnic chauvinism, corruption and marginalization of certain individuals and groups in the nation”. In a clientele environment, individuals must not hope to aspire and acquire something of significance or occupy position of privilege unless such an individual seeks the support and protection of the “powerful” or “god father”. Hence, here lies the fundamental assumptions of the capture theory of state in espousing democratic governance in Nigeria.

### **Civil Society and Election Monitoring**

Civil society has been of great importance towards the development of a transparent democratic process as a non-political body. Igwe (2007p.65), see civil society organizations

“as the non-political aspects of society which include the religion or belief system, aesthetics, norms and values and other aspects of the material and non-material culture”. Moreover, the political aspect of the society is controlled by the state. The activities of the CSOs influence the process of law making for the good governance of the country through writing of memoranda to government institutions like the National Assembly for the purpose of making amendment in some sections of the constitution or writing a new one as the need arises. In the light of the above, the National Assembly in 2009 called for public hearing for the purpose of amending the 1999 constitution in the sex geo-political zones in Nigeria. The major contributors to this process were the C.S.Os as the amendments dealt on electoral reforms to bring about a more transparent and inclusive democratic participatory process.

### **The Contribution of Civil Society in Nigeria Democracy**

The contribution of civil society organizations in the Nigerian democratic process cannot be over emphasized. Richard Konteh (2006p,272), quoting Ravi Mattu, observed that, “the concept civil society formed by a multiplicity of territorially and functionally based unit has been increasingly linked to the dissolution of authoritarianism and the establishment of political democracy”. A good example of this is the sacrifices made by Civil liberty groups (CLGs) like the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) formed in May, 15<sup>th</sup> 1994 by a broad coalition of Nigerians who fought for the return of democracy in Nigeria, in 1999.

Going by the above observation, civil society organizations must be able to determine their collective interest independently of the state. Such independence however must be within the ambit of the rule of law which further gives the C.S.Os the impetus to check mate government excesses by acting whistle blowers. By so doing, the dominance of the interest of the elite who are interested in capturing the political leadership of any emerging government is curtailed. Despite the contribution of civil society toward the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy, there exist some draw backs affecting their operations due to the activities of some of its leaders who accept appointment into government lucrative offices. The acceptance of such offers by the leaders of these organizations who were whistle blowers on government excesses on the exercise of state power has given credence to the saying that “he who pays the piper detects the tune”. Meanwhile, acknowledging some of the pitfalls of these organizations identified above, they constitute the totality of civil and social organizations or institutions that form the bedrock of a functional democracy. It is on his note Koniteh (2006), submitted that civil society advocate and acts primarily for social development and public interest. Thus, the crux for the formation of these organizations is hinge on public good or welfare.

### **Conclusion**

From the take of point, the paper commenced with the challenges that have bedeviled the Nigerian democratic process and responsible for the short supply of productive and credible political leadership in the country. To address these challenges, sub teams like (a) The struggle for the soul of Nigeria, which is seen in the paper as the commonwealth of the nation which politics is use as a subterfuge to grab. (b) Political participants and participators as a contributory factor toward the dysfunctional political leadership sequel to the level of their participation were discussed. The capture theory of state is used to demonstrate how the



political ruling class control state institution as represented by nationalist and the reformist groups from one administration to another. The process of state capture is profoundly established in the categorization of political participation as seen in the diagram. The C.S.Os as discussed in this study is seen as a remedy or an agency that can contribute in correcting this malady if effectively deploy and work within the boundary of its ethical conduct in respect to election monitoring the world over. Thus, having discovered that one of the major drawbacks of Nigeria's developments is in the short supply of productive political leadership prompted the following prescriptions as a therapy.

### **Recommendations**

1. Considering that, occident democratic ethos is not incongruent with the Nigeria political environment, effective pre-election political participation becomes a serious challenge. This is because the electorate, see voting as the only avenue one can participate in politics. Hence, an effective model according to the Nigeria (African) condition should be projected.
2. The option A-4 system of leadership selection should be adopted while conducting party primaries elections to produce candidates to contest the general elections. This system however is bottom-top-approach that strives to bring about inclusiveness in the process of leadership selection.
3. Civil Society Organization should not be relying on government sponsorship while carrying out most of their programs in order for them to objectively draw the attention government in areas where they may be under performing. In other words, C.S.O members should be as much as possible be discouraged from accepting political appointment from government hence, seen as a watch dog.
4. Regular engagement of the citizen in town hall meeting to see their plights and hear their opinion on local and national issues of importance. These engagements acquaint the citizens with the policies and the workings of government as well as giving them a sense of belongingness and acceptability.

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