SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY THROUGH FUNCTIONAL POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE NIGERIAN FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT
This paper through the use of Almond and Verba’s Conception of Political Culture unfolds the impact of poor political culture on the Nigerian democratic culture. The paper argues that although political culture is not static but transformational, the Nigerian Political Culture to a great extent has manifested a subject type which has snowballed into fragile political institutions and poor political attitudes on the part of electorate, the political office aspirants/candidates and office holders. This is coupled with the non-integrative nature of political participation which is threatening democratic stability in the Nigerian Fourth Republic; thus, the need to reform political behavior through reforming the party system, the structures and laws governing the acquisition and workings of political offices.

Key words: Minimal elitist, Integrative political, Massive political, Participation, Subject, Stability.

INTRODUCTION
Political culture no doubt constitutes a major ingredient and support mechanism for the survival of democratic governance. On observational basis, it also serves as an index through which political systems could be compared. Thus, the classification of political culture as parochial, subject and participant, and the manifestation of participant culture as that which is visible in developed State while parochial and subject as traits of new and emergent States of the third world or States that lack effective integration (1).

While it could be argued whether the present democratic experiment in the Nigerian State is moving towards a participant culture considering the awareness created by the survival of the democratic system which is barely a decade, coupled with the poor state of the economy with the visible problem of unemployment, under-employment, corruption among others which has made politics to be so attractive to the people. Conversely, the questions that come to mind are: (1) do political participation especially in term of vote cast count in Nigeria? (2) If participation in form of voting does not count, could it be viewed as an in-built regulatory mechanism which aid in checking against capability or system breakdown? (3) What level of political participation could be accommodated by the political system?

In order to effectively answer these questions and unfold the mechanism for sustainable democracy in Nigeria through functional political culture, the paper in addition to the background is sectionalized into the followings: theoretical framework, the nature of political culture, political culture and democratic stability, towards democratic consolidation and concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework
The framework of analysis is anchored on Almond and Verba’s conception of political culture (2). This is not only because of the perspective in which they viewed the concept as part of a general culture which has to do with the political orientation of the people, but also in the utility or perception of non-static and transformational process from one typology to the other.
This shows that nation States are dynamic political entities which could either grow or degenerate from one stage to the other. As a result Almond and Verba discussed the following typologies of political culture.

(i) **Parochial Political Culture** – By parochial political culture, the conception is that, there is poor political socialization in the system in that the citizens may not only be unaware of the existence of government, its structures and functions, but that even when such awareness exist, it is in a cloudy form. Thus, the citizens tend to have a negative perception of governance, the implication of which is poor political participation on the part of the people.

(ii) **Subject Political Culture** – In this classification, political orientation is such that, though the people are aware of the existence of the structures of government and the expected functions, but the perception is such that the understanding of governance on the part of the citizens is a divide between government and subject, thus hampering active political participation by the masses.

(iii) **Participant Political Culture** – Participant political culture on the other hand, unlike parochial and subject which focuses on functional orientation of the people which is geared towards active participation of the citizens in government (3).

From the above background therefore, one could state that the above classification are not mutually exclusive in that there could be an upward and downward movement in terms of categories depending on the orientation and attitude of the people at a point in time. That is, a State could transform positively from parochial to subject or participant culture, just the same way transformation could be negative, from participant to subject or parochial culture, either of which could truncate or consolidate democracy. This shows that the framework is no doubt indispensable as a tool for analysis as regard unfolding the nature of political culture that exist in a State vis-à-vis political stability.

**The Nature of Political Culture**

The focus here is to view political culture as a function of regime type taken cognizance of the Nigerian environment. In order to vividly understand the discourse, political regimes are classified into two broad classifications: (1) Dictatorship (2) Democracy.

Under dictatorship, two major forms existed in the Nigerian political environment: (i) Colonial dictatorship (ii) Military dictatorship. As regard colonialism, the focus was to basically exploit the resources of Nigeria to serve the interest of the British (4-5). And in order for the British to achieve this principal objective, they opted for colonial domination that distorted the indigenous political developments of the local people; thus, distorting the political culture of the people.

Closely related to this is the issue of functional political culture which could be defined as the magnitude of political participation that the system was prepared to accommodate. This of course was defined and determined by the colonialist to be restrictive, first to the traditional rulers, and later to encompass the educated elites (6), in that active political participation by the majority would be antithetical to their interest.

The implication is that in the earliest part of colonial domination, political culture could be said to be a parochial one, in that the local people had a dim conception of the political system based on the cosmetical approach to governance by the British in which political decisions though emanated from them, the people were made to believe that they emanated from the local traditional institutions. In the later stage of the involvement of the political elites, the political culture moved from parochial to subject based on the sensitization effort of the educated/political elites geared towards the attainment of political independence. As a matter of fact, the local people were made to believe that there was a distinction between them as subjects and the British officials as governors and they therefore needed to institute an indigenous democratic government that would be responsible and responsive to the local people (7).

Military dictatorship on the other hand is that which existed in the post-colonial Nigerian State which culminated into the birth of the present Fourth Republic. Based on the attributes of military government as one which seizes political power through the use of force and also consolidate power through the same means – the curtailment of civil liberties, restriction in the emergence of public policies on the part of the people among others (8-9), it could be stated that the type of political culture
that is always associated with the regime type is a subject political culture.

This is because while the awareness of government and its institutions are often created through public policy making, implementation and adjudication process which is anchored on the use of force, the people to a large extent (even when there is a justification for a coup d’état) always tend to view such a government as a divide between them and the governors as a result of the restricted channel for political participation especially as regard input into the policy making process.

Conversely, in democratic regimes, the scenario is such that though there is enhanced political participation, but the fact is that the input of the people do not count to a great extent in term of determining who get what, when and how through vote cast (10-13), thus bringing about a subject political culture that is often hygienic for political instability.

Political Culture and Democratic Stability

From the above discourse, it could be understood that the political culture as a support ingredient is quite essential for democratic stability or in undermining the process depending on the orientation of the people. This no doubt explains for the persistent state of obfuscation associated with democratic experiments in the Nigerian project which often snowball into political instability.

As regard political culture serving as a vanguard for democratic stability especially in the present democratic dispensation of the Nigerian Fourth Republic. The questions that come to mind are: (i) to what extent are Nigerians functionally oriented to participate in the political process? (ii) What level of political participation could be said to be functional in the Nigerian process? (ii) What could be done to achieve functionality in political participation in order to sustain the present democratic process?

Starting from the first question: to what extent are Nigerians functionally oriented to participate in the political process? Ecologically speaking, be it political, social or economic, one could say that Nigerians are not positively oriented to participate functionally in the political process (14). Politically, the long years of military dictatorship in the Nigerian body-politic no doubt has metamorphosized into the militarization of the democratic process not only by military regimes during political transitions from military to a civilian government, but also by civilian governments in terms of undermining organized opposition either from the media or political parties.

This has created scenarios where political representation were called to question as a result of the process falling short of free and fair electoral standard either at the intra party or inter party level (15). Thus, the conception is that party candidates do not need the support of the people to emerge; neither do they need their support to be in office. On the part of the masses, they are forced to believe that their votes do not count (16). This no doubt creates fragile political institutions and processes that could persistently be inviting or hygienic for military take over.

In order to effectively answer the second question, the levels of political participation are classified as: (i) Minimal elitist participation (ii) Massive political participation (iii) Integrative political participation.

(i) Minimal Elitist Participation – By minimal elitist political participation, the understanding here is that form of political participation which is largely restrictive to elites and exclusive of the masses in terms of determining who governs and making inputs into the policy process. This classification is mostly compatible with the political systems of the third world in that even in civilian democratic regimes such a process tend to be cosmetical and determined by the political elites as regard who get what, when and how.

(ii) Massive Political Participation – This classification views political participation as a function of the choice of the masses. This was effectively practiced in the Athenian City State (17-18) and was also linked to democratic practice of some African societies before colonialism (19).

(iii) Integrative Political Participation – This form of political culture is that which encompasses both the elites and the masses. In this form the elites need the masses just as the masses need the elites for effective political participation in the democratic process. This form is mostly obtainable in such western States as Britain and United States where there are well established political institutions and secondary groups which though established by elites but need the support of the masses to
survive and where the electoral process is largely seen as free and fair.

Based on the above background, a functional level of political participation therefore is such that does not exist at the two extremes but which stand at the midpoint of minimal elitist and massive participation in that it is integrative of both attributes.

Towards Democratic Consolidation
In order to consolidate the democratic process of the present Nigerian fourth Republic, there is need for an integrative political participatory mechanism in which political elites would emerge through the support of the masses rather than through parochial and chauvinistic means. This could be achieved thus:
(i) Reforming the present party system in the Nigerian State in such a way that the people would be able to make functional inputs into the party structure through functional contributions to the running of parties, policy decisions among others, thereby enriching the political education of members and also enhancing participatory democracy.
(ii) The need to see politics or democracy as a means to an end and not an end in itself. This could be achieved by de-monetizing the electoral process – that is, financial benefits associated with political offices or the huge financial requirements for seeking political offices especially in poor States such as ours; providing enabling laws for checking political office holders – such as the freedom to information law as regard the running of public offices or functions.

CONCLUSION
Although no single factor could explain or justify the existence of any social problem. This paper however has basically viewed political culture as a central ingredient for the survival of democracy in Nigeria. This is not only because it defines the quality of political institutions in existence, but also because it defines acceptable political behavior that is needed for the smooth operation and survival of the system.

REFERENCES