CP004

Parochial Political Culture and the Squabbles for National Agenda Setting in Nigeria: A Theoretical Overview

Usman Abbo[*a], Adamu Bashir[b],

[a]Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Science, Bayero University Kano
[b]School of Business and Management Technology Department of Public Administration Federal Polytechnic Mubi Adamawa Nigeria
[*]Corresponding author e-mail: shagari59@yahoo.com

Abstract

The setting of agenda is the first and critical step in the policy cycle, outlining key issues that attract government attention. Which has a vital impact on their policy process 's entire trajectory. Activities in this initial phase will decide if the government can fix a problem or abandon it at a later point. However, in Nigeria the type of political culture practiced has invariably accounted for lack of interest and commitment on the part of the people to setting national agenda. This is because Nigeria is one of the world's most divided nations, with a very sharp dichotomy primarily along religious and ethnic lines that overlap. These lines of demarcations continue to form and influence political action in the country where most Nigerians think of themselves as Nigerians in some way, but their ethnic identity matters more as a source of pride and more importantly as a source of government policy likes and dislikes. This paper argued that Nigerians' lack of emotional attachment to the national agenda has denied the country a sustainable national development. The leaders capitalize on the parochial attitudes of the citizen toward national agenda to deny the country a systemic and sustainable development where instead of pursuing development policy goals they are busy amassing wealth for their personal benefit, and this accounts for the high level of corruption, ineptitude and lack of political direction that has hindered the growth and development of the country. With over reliance on secondary data obtained through content analysis the paper argues that in order to achieve Nigeria's developmental objectives there is a strong need for a deep mental change among the citizens so as to do away with vices such as ethnicity and regionalism that are currently taken a toll on the country's drive toward maturity.

Keywords: National Agenda, Parochial Political Culture, Public Policy, Nigeria

1.   INTRODUCTION

Nigerian political culture has not been extensively examined, as with most third world countries, even though most analysts are convinced that it is one of the most significant causes of its complex, chaotic politics (Orlin, 2019). It is important to note that there is nothing about their political system that most Nigerians like. Nigerians have become more pessimistic and cynical about governance and politics. Part of the issue is that Nigeria is one of the most divided countries in the world, where religious and ethnic differences converge to a large degree. Some analysts believed that soon after independence, ethnic

identity would give way to a national one in Nigeria (Okeke, 2017). That has not been the case. If anything, ethnicity has become more not less, important in the country.

The limited observable evidence shows that most Nigerians think of themselves as Nigerians in some way. Their ethnic identity, however, is more important as a source of pride and, more importantly, as a source of likes and dislikes. The three major communities i.e. Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba. have practically little in common politically, socially, or traditionally. The vast majority of Nigerians speak their "mother" tongue only, and it is invariably English and not one of the other indigenous languages if they learn any. Either in their traditional regions or in ethnic enclaves in the few towns that are ethnically mixed, the various communities live separately (Seiyefa, 2017).

Religion is a near counterpart to ethnicity. In most of the South, where, for example, Yoruba Muslims appear to behave politically as Yorubas more often than as Muslims, religion is nowhere near as important as ethnicity. In the north, however, the influence of religion and ethnicity is difficult to disentangle since so much of Hausa-Fulani culture is characterized along Islamic lines. Many northerners are afraid their way of life will be disrupted by southern cultural traditions and economic practices. By comparison, Southerners fear that a northern majority will seize power and leave them with a permanent and aggrieved minority. Nigeria is by no means the only nation divided along these lines; other nations are far more fractured, and some have a similar pattern of overlapping cleavages, like the Netherlands, but have spared the damaging controversies plaguing Nigerian politics. (Hurlbut, 2018). The issue is that Nigeria is not only divided, it is also fractured. Even the best of situations, it is impossible for individuals to decide on these kinds of problems to find a way to do so.

The development of a parochial political culture, not least of which has been the collapse of national agenda settings, has magnified the value of this alienation. Most Nigerians live in abject poverty; one of the few things most Nigerians share is, in fact, poverty. In addition, there has been a drastic increase in the difference between rich and poor, particularly because the corrupt political class has siphoned off public funds to sustain their luxurious lifestyle. Nigeria would have found itself in a stronger position if economic problems had been more relevant in determining fundamental values and assumptions about public policies. Reactions to this popular poverty may have crossed ethnic, religious, and regional lines, setting the tune for the national agenda to emerge.

The parochial political culture therefore produces instrumental leadership to this end, in which most politicians are mired at the expense of wider national interests in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals. Because of the kind of political culture practiced in Nigeria, politicians use official power and influence mainly in the pursuit of private objectives. The national agenda is very secondary to the leaders as they are merely worried with how to use the official role to accomplish personal goals. This is probable because the citizenry is not completely aware of the political system's input / output processes. The leaders, however, may not be entirely deficient in social or community responsibilities, but overall more considerations are given to themselves than to societal interest without taking into account the destructive effect (Magbadelo, 2017). "As long as private targets are accomplished, Nigerian leaders like" absolute power "and typically hang on to power (Aliyu, 2020). The common people expect nothing or little from the government because of the kind of political culture in Nigeria, which makes people lack awareness of what the

government can do for them. They are not interested in what happens in the political system, so the leaders are plundering the treasury and making policies for their own gain.

Given this brief overview of the political cultures of Nigeria, we can easily see three problems they pose for any nation seeking to preserve democratic rule. Firstly, the sense of national identity or integration is at most minimal and grudging. Their ethnic and regional affiliations are the principles that matter most to most people in the country, leading them to define who they are politically based on where they stand on certain sub-national, conflicting and polarizing cleavages. Secondly, no Nigerian government has enjoyed absolute legitimacy, without which it is difficult to have any kind of national agenda. Thirdly, individuals and groups across ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries do not have much faith and trust on one another which translate into lack of supports for government policies by those whose ethnic or religious champions are not in poor or are defeated in an election. This paper therefore seeks to examine the effects of parochial political culture on national agenda Setting in Nigeria.

2.   CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

2.1 Political Culture

Political culture can be thought of as a nation's political personality. It encompasses the deep-rooted, well-established political traits that are characteristic of a society (Brown, 2019). Political culture takes into account the attitudes, values, and beliefs that people in a society have about the political system, including standard assumptions about the way that government works (Tachau, 2019). Political culture helps build community and facilitate communication because people share an understanding of how and why political events, actions, and experiences occur in their country (Melville, 2019). Political culture includes formal rules as well as customs and traditions, sometimes referred to as "habits of the heart," that are passed on generationally. People agree to abide by certain formal rules, such as the country's constitution and codified laws (Walker, 2020).

To this end, nation's political personality inevitably affects how its citizens view, feel and act about in relation to Public Policies. The functioning of political institutions reflects the attitudes, norms and expectations of citizens. In times of systematic change, a supportive public can facilitate the development of a new political system, while the lack of public support can destroy the foundation of a political system. In order to understand the tendencies for present and future behavior in a nation, we must examine a country's political culture-the public's attitude toward politics and their role within the political system. It is important to recognize that political culture does not explain everything about politics and that it is not unchangeable. However cultural norms typically change slowly and reflect enduring patterns of political action. This indicates the significance of political culture as a critical element in understanding politics within a nation across a period of time.

2.2 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 clouded by

primordial sentiments (Gad, 2020). The citizens are more preoccupied with their ethnic and primordial enclaves than the central government. Thus, the citizens tend to have a negative perception of Public Policy when it does not correspond with their primordial and parochial narratives, the implication of which is poor national orientation

2.3 Agenda Setting

Agenda could be seen as the collection of problems, understanding of causes, symbols, solutions, and other elements of public problems that come to the attention of members of the public and their governmental officials (Su & Borah, 2019). agenda can be as concrete as bills, but also includes beliefs about what is a problem, how serious a problem is, who should address problem and how.

Agenda setting on the other hand is the process by which problems and alternative solutions gain or lose public and elite attention. Topics for discussion go through several types of agendas before these individuals may move them forward. Types of agendas might include: Systemic agendas. Systemic agendas comprise all issues policy makers deem both worthy of note and in their realm of authority to address. Institutional agendas. These agendas are formed from the content of systemic agendas. Here, policy makers analyze problems and their proposed solutions in a strict amount of time. Discretionary agendas. These agendas address problems chosen by legislators that have not necessarily made it into the agendas mentioned above. Decision agendas. Decision agendas are the finalized list of issues to be moved to the next phase of the policy-making cycle (Lorenz, 2020).

As the first phase in the cycle, agenda setting helps policy makers decide which problems to address on the basis of two important factors which are national interest and the political will of the Government. However, in Nigeria the absence of national consciousness makes it practical difficult to rationally assess problems base on national interest in the sense that the character and orientation of politicking in the country assume the analogy of zero-sum game among the three major regions with a win-lose situation. For instance, a Nigerian from Enugu do not consider the government efforts towards transforming the Almajiri school in the North as a national priority. Similarly, a Kano man tends to condemn the federal government's efforts of constructing the second Niger bridge because it favors the south. This ugly scenario has invariably affect the emergence of National agenda within the Nigerian state.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A stable political culture and orderly political processes have extremely become difficult to be developed and nurtured in Nigeria. Owing to the lack of enduring political orientations and national identity, these have culminated in the absence of a clear-cut national agenda. After independence, Nigerian leaders have impoverished the country so much that its social and economic institutions have essentially collapsed. Because of poor or lack of successful checks and balances by people who prefer to interpret government policies through ethnic lenses, they embezzle public funds through impunity. To bypass the few institutional constraints placed in place to plunder the treasury, Nigerian leaders take undue advantage of these deficiencies via dubious means that they use to bribe their

ways of staying in power for life, they get involved in great corruption and accumulate money. Nigeria has not completely evolved since society has been based on religious and tribal loyalties based on excessive and undeserved regard for public officials and political office holders. Our politicians are deceitful and opportunistic citizens who are so greedy to the detriment of the general national interest. The decayed infrastructure, the stagnation in our economy, political and social tensions and a general lack of growth and sustainability in Nigeria have all resulted for all of the above and more. This section the paper therefore sought to examine the empirical and conceptual effects of parochial political culture on national development in Nigeria and in order to do this the following themes were developed and discussed:

3.1 Ethnic Loyalty

The role of customs and traditions in regulating and directing political life is fully appreciated today (Olasunkanmi, 2019). Political scientists have discovered that not even the best laws and forms of government can thrive against the customs of a people. The customs and manner of a people, not legal structures, determine their political character (Chiamogu, & Chiamogu, 2019).

The Nigerian ethnic customs impede the development of a national political culture which can pave the way for national consciousness. The identification of the Nigerians with their own ethnic groups and symbols makes Nigerian politics a highly emotional and violent affair. Ethnic and political socialization and identification takes place from youth. Each group passes its norms to its members and trains them to assume certain roles and thereby take on the behavior expected of those roles. Ethnicity thus becomes the basic political orientations, which an average Nigerian hold tenaciously and the unwillingness to alter these orientations leads to poor orientation toward policy agenda settings.

This is because ethnic and regional norms serve as standards for assessing Public Policies not national consciousness. The absence of national identification and consciousness thus makes it impossible for national agenda to emerge. In Nigeria the citizens observe politics as a struggle between ethnic groups for power. The question of workable Public Policies is irrelevant in the struggle; the perception of an average Nigerian as that the nation belongs to the religious body or the ethnic group in power. Most adult Nigerian citizens acquired certain basic political attachments to their ethnic groups before Nigeria as an independent nation came into being. They still maintain those parochial orientations and are unwilling to develop new allegiances and primary identifications with the Nigerian nation. The consequence of ethnic self-identification and loyalty is that Nigeria cannot come together to determine policy direction hence the outcome of public policy, even if accepted by many of the citizens, is not understood. The general attitude toward politics is a mixture of emotion, violence, indifference, no reflectiveness, and fatalistic resignation to political events. Ethnic distrust is carried over into policy making arena, with the result that the public cannot set the agenda.

3.2   Deterioration of social cohesion

The crucial problem of social cohesion is not that Nigerians fail to submit to authority, but that the existence of and submission to conflicting authority is based on ethnic and religious loyalties (Abubakar, 2019). Social cohesion requires radical changes of political orientation. It is an attempt to integrate other political groups into the national political

process by changing the basic attachments and identities of the citizens (Joshua, 2019). As long as there is resistance to a change of basic ethnic attachments, social cohesion would be difficult to achieve (Yahaya & Bello, 2019). Legally, democratic Government have been established in Nigeria but citizen's orientations and ethnic attachments have not been brought into line with the new arrangements. Therefore, the national government experiences immense difficulties in reorienting the citizens. The persistence of the previously acquired habit of parochial political behavior frustrates the attempt to bring the citizens to political participation, socialization, and national awareness. The culture for national integration and the sentiment and the emotion to evolve national identification is lacking. Youth learns by imitation, observation, and propaganda (Adamu & Etila, 2019).

The youth pledge allegiance to the national flag, but what their teachers teach them at school, what their parents teach them at home, what they personally observe in the society are profoundly conflicting and contradictory. In school the pupils recite the names of Nigerian states and capitals, sing the national anthem, praise the moral goodness of some political heroes. However, at home the pupils learn from their parents about how people from other religion should not be trusted, how the Hausa/Fulani are marginalizing other ethnic groups, how the Igbo from the south-east are not trustworthy, how the Yorubas are politically hypocrites and betrayers and how President Muhammadu Buhari is planning to Islamized the country and so on. Their religious leaders who are supposed to teach moral integrity, respect for constituted authority have virtually transform their podiums into an avenue for curse, anti-government campaigns and breeding rancor and acrimony in the minds of the citizens. The universities on the other hand have not failed to produce Nigerian students rooted in their cultural world of thought, rather than qualities of mind and character that could shape all aspects of human development. An average educated Nigerian does not occupy his mind with principles and ideas of development. In fact, he does not even consider them necessary hence, he develops self-contradictory and self-defeating personality, where in one parts he claim to be educated but on the other parts he is still dancing to the tunes of ethnic and religious narratives and sentiments.

3.3   Incongruent Value system

The Nigerian political culture (based largely on ethnic attachments) has negative values in national agenda settings. There is no attitude among the citizens (and even the politicians) that is compatible with the new structural arrangements even though the need for nation building demands such attitude. The Nigerian political leaders could not maintain the old (traditional) political structure because the colonialists destroyed it (Falola, Genova, & Heaton, 2018). They cannot transform it into a national political culture because its ethnic attachments would impede nation-building. They cannot create a new one in the old ethnic background because the previously acquired value system still dominates national politics.

 In the end, Nigeria has borrowed political structure without the citizens identifying themselves with it. They want to create a common political culture that would facilitate nation-building in a nation where such cultural values did not exist. Different ethnic groups have been brought together under one national government but the attempt to create new political loyalties has been frustrating. Those countries that have achieved political stability transmit political orientation from one generation to another without

hiccup. They have developed a value system with implicit political orientation suitable for their political arrangements. Their tasks consist of perpetuating, not of creating new political orientations difficulties (Bamidele, Olaniyan, & Ayodele, 2016). But the Nigerian problem is the creation of value system, orientation, and economic development. The ultimate foundation of a free society is the binding tie of cohesive sentiment. Such a sentiment is fostered by all those agencies of the mind and spirit which may serve to gather up the traditions of a people, transmit them from generation to generation, and thereby, create that community of a treasured common-life which constitutes a civilization (Levan, 2017).

In Nigeria, youth has no political idealism, while the existing political orientation does not affect them. The Nigerian political structure has changed from that military dictatorship to presidential democracy but there is no change in social stratification and no political culture to fit the presidential political arrangement. The introduction of new political norms and orientations in Nigeria has changed the content of the political culture. The vast majority of the elected officials have not transformed politically to operate within the new system, while the masses of people are unaware of what the new system means. Those who occupy the lowest economic ladder, that is the majority of the citizens, could not care less for the freedom of the press, the presidential system, and the squabbles of political party members. They are political and social isolates and have not been integrated into national politics. Nigeria is a political entity and her citizens are members of the same political structure. But there are no common historical experiences, no common language and culture, no common enemy and goal. It is difficult to govern over 250 ethnic groups without common political sentiments and loyalties. Bitter competition and conflict among political figures would have been minimized if there were political integration.

4.   CONCLUSION

The Nigerian public therefore lacks political articulation due to their attitude toward politics, the country's ethnic configuration and loyalties, ignorance of its political rights, and illiteracy. Nigerian politics is predominantly the behavior of some elites and ethnic heroes. The common people have only a sporadic interest in politics when they are called upon to vote for the competitors of political power. They do not go nearer the machinery of their government than the voting booths. So, the attitude of the public reinforces the manner in which Public Policies are conceived and Implemented in the country. The public knows what it wants from the government but the government does not know the wishes of the public. The Nigerian public does not know the policies and programs of their rulers and government officials this is because the Nigerian political situation is enmeshed in complex web of religious and ethnic loyalty.

To achieve political integration, the government should concentrate on the education of youth because it takes at least four generations to create a viable political culture (Rose, Buchta, Gajduschek, Grochowski, & Hubáček, 2019). The entire man is to be seen in the cradle of the child. Youth therefore need to started getting political awareness that transcend the contemporary ethnic narratives they are polluted with. Later, they begin to understand what the nation is and acquire the knowledge of its expectations. As they assume various political roles they develop attitudes towards certain political policies and

programs. Political learning is a cumulative experience. Political orientations which youth acquires in its early years shape its political orientation in later years. Unless youth has an interest in politics it will not be influenced by political events or offer opinions that would shape political actions. If youth does not see political leaders in personal ways except as and opportunists, it will not develop the sentiments necessary for national integration.

References

Abubakar, G. B. (2019). Regional Identity and Political Transformation in Nigeria. *Multidisciplinary*, *47*, 3.

Adamu, A., & Etila, S. M. (2019). National Integration and Democratization Process in Nigeria. *Socialscientia: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *4*(2).

Aliyu, M. K. (2020). Partisan Politics, Political Culture and Restructuring Drive for Good Governance in Nigeria. *Canadian Social Science*, *16*(1), 28-36.

Bamidele, O., Olaniyan, A. O., & Ayodele, B. (2016). Culture, corruption, and anticorruption struggles in Nigeria. *Journal of Developing Societies*, *32*(2), 103-129.

Brown, A. (2019). Ideology and political culture. In *Politics, society, and nationality inside Gorbachev's Russia* (pp. 1-40). Routledge.

Chiamogu, P. A., & Chiamogu, U. P. (2019, July). Ethnic and nepotic issues in Nigeria: Exploring the bane to public sector performance in the fourth republic. In *A paper presented at the International Conference on Social Sciences in the 21st Century between July* (pp. 12-14).

Falola, T., Genova, A., & Heaton, M. M. (2018). *Historical dictionary of Nigeria*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Gad, N. (2020). A "new political culture": The challenges of deliberation in alternativet. *European Political Science*, 1-10.

Hurlbut, D. D. (2018). Moral Economies of Corruption: State Formation and Political Culture in Nigeria. *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Activist Association (Online)*, *41*(1), 179-VII.

Joshua, A. A. (2019). 11. Language, National Integration & the Nigeria Federation. *Four Decades in the Study of Nigerian Languages and Linguistics: A Festschrift for Kay Williamson*, (1), 161.

Levan, A. C. (2017). Civil Society, Conflict Resolution, and Democracy in Nigeria. *Political Science Quarterly*, *132*(3), 575-578.

Lorenz, G. M. (2020). Prioritized interests: Diverse lobbying coalitions and congressional committee agenda setting. *The Journal of Politics*, *82*(1), 225-240.

Magbadelo, J. O. (2017). Moral Economies of Corruption: State Formation and Political Culture in Nigeria. *African Studies Quarterly*, *17*(1), 144.

Melville, A. Y. (2019). An emerging civic culture? Ideology, public attitudes, and political culture in the early 1990s. In *Public Opinion and Regime Change* (pp. 56-68). Routledge.

Okeke, R. C. (2017). Political culture, democracy and development in Nigeria. *Specialty Journal of Politics and Law. Vol. 2 (4). pp. 1*, 9.

Olasunkanmi, A. (2019). Ethnic Identity and Constitutional Reprentative Governance in Nigeria. *Open Access Library Journal*, *6*(07), 1.

Orlin, L. C. (2019). *Private matters and public culture in post-Reformation England.* Cornell University Press.

Rose, L., Buchta, S., Gajduschek, G., Grochowski, M., & Hubáček, O. (2019). Political Culture and Citizen Involvement. In *Local Democracy and The Processes of Transformation In East-central Europe* (pp. 43-104). Routledge.

Seiyefa, E. (2017). Elite Political Culture—A Link to Political Violence: Evidence from Nigeria. *African security*, *10*(2), 103-130.

Su, Y., & Borah, P. (2019). Who is the agenda setter? Examining the intermedia agenda-setting effect between Twitter and newspapers. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *16*(3), 236-249.

Tachau, F. (2019). The Political Culture of Kemalist Turkey. In *Ataturk and the Modernization of Turkey* (pp. 57-76). Routledge.

Walker, S. (2020). *Political culture in later medieval England*. Manchester University Press.

Yahaya, J. U., & Bello, M. M. (2019). An Overview of the Challenges of Peace and National Integration in Nigeria Politics. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, *3*(8), 20-28.