



## *RESEARCH ARTICLE*

### **POLITICAL CULTURE AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

**PERPETUA O. EZEJI**

Department of Social Studies and Civic Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of  
Education, Owerri, Nigeria

#### **ABSTRACT**

Contrary to what can be observed in other established democracies, every election cycle in Nigeria seems to be marred with irregularities and followed by acrimony. This is further shown by the litany of election-related matters that are brought to the courts and election tribunals. This situation makes it necessary to interrogate the nature of political culture in the country and the process of political socialization that is practised. The paper therefore sought to establish a general understanding of political culture, and apply this to determine if Nigeria has a political culture; if it did, what type of culture this was. Equally, the process of political socialization in the Nigerian context was examined. From the investigations, it can be deduced that whereas a democratic political system (the type Nigeria purports to practice) requires a political culture that encourages political participation, the process of political socialization discourages active participation. There is therefore the need for the leading political actors to encourage political participation. This can be done by pursuing multiculturalism and nation-building instead of devolving to tribal and ethnic camps. Equally, a movement towards true fiscal federalism by giving more autonomy/ resources to the states so that each can develop at their own pace will increase the sense of ownership of the nation and its political processes.

**Keywords:** Political culture, political participation, political socialization, nation-building

#### *Corresponding Author*

Perpetua O. Ezeji

Email Address: [perpetua.ezeji@alvanikoku.edu.ng](mailto:perpetua.ezeji@alvanikoku.edu.ng)

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## **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

After sixty-three years of self-rule, Nigeria is still struggling to successfully carry out key political activities like democratic elections in a manner that the majority of her populace can acclaim to be free, fair and credible. Contrary to what can be observed in other established democracies, every election seems to be marred with irregularities and followed by acrimony. This is further evidenced by the litany of election-related matters that are brought in each election cycle to the courts and election tribunals. This situation makes it necessary to interrogate the nature of political culture in the country and the process of political socialization that is practiced.

## **2.0. THEORITICAL FOUNDATION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Almond and Verba's theory of political culture, which classifies political orientations into parochial, subject, and participant categories (Almond & Verba, 1963). These categories help explain the political behavior and attitudes prevalent within different segments of society. Additionally, the study draws from the structural-functionalist perspective, which posits that political culture is integral to maintaining social order and system stability. Durkheim's sociological theory and Berger and Luckman's social constructionism further support the argument that social norms, transmitted through political socialization, shape individual and collective behavior. These theories provide the analytical tools for understanding how cultural and historical legacies shape Nigeria's current political realities.

### **2.2. CONCEPTUALISATIONS**

#### **Political culture**

Politics as defined by Harold Laswell (1968) in an attempt to explain the power and manipulation of elites and counter-elites is a game of who gets what, when and how. David Easton (1965) defined it as the 'authoritative allocation of values'. Political, economic and social system of every nation takes its characteristics from value allocation of such state. Value allocation has been the primary factor that determines attitude of the citizenry towards



the affairs of the state and how they interact among themselves on any background (Nwagbo & Abaneme, 2019). Likewise, culture has been defined as shared beliefs, values and practices that participants in a society must learn. According to Kroeber and Kluckhorn (1952), culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts. The essential core of culture consists of traditional (historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditional elements of future action. Schwartz (1992) opines that “culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organised, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries or formed by individuals)”. Hofstede (1994) simply defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category from another. Matsumoto (1996) categorizes culture as “the set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours shared by a group of people, but different for each individual and communicated from one generation to the next”.

Also, the American Sociological Association defines culture as “the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environment meaningful. Meanwhile, Spencer-Oatey (2008) views culture as the fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence ( but don't determine) each member's behaviour and his interpretations of the “meaning” of other people's behaviour. Conversely, Edward Tyler in his work on primitive culture, which drew extensively from Lewis Henry Morgan's schema, defines culture as a quality possessed by all people in all social groups. He opined that culture could be arrayed on an evolutionary continuum from savagery to barbarism to civilisation.

Based on these definitions, culture is associated with the transmission of values and normative behaviour. From Morgan's schema, cultures evolve and are categorised from the starting point of savagery to the endpoint of civilisation. Terry Eagleton posits that culture is



a question of values. Thus civilisation is the height of man's ability to transcend his negative tendencies to attain the lofty heights of selflessness or as John Stuart Mills alludes,

*Civilisation involves the multiplication of physical comforts, of knowledge, the decay of superstition; the facilities of mutual intercourse; the softening of manners; the decline of war and conflict; the progressive limitation of the tyranny of the strong over the weak, the great works accomplished throughout the world by the cooperation of multitudes... Mills adduces that civilisation covers the whole gamut of moral, material, social, political and intellectual domains of human existence in terms of fact and value.*

Thus culture can be seen as a measure of civilisation. How cultured a people is, is relative to their level of civilisation or the level to which they have imbibed and transmitted the proper values that connote civilisation over time. Thus culture has tended to reflect the life of a nation, region, social class or ethnic group (Eagleton, 2008). Eagleton further argues that the term culture developed as a definition for civilisation as well as a critique of civilisation. Culture therefore constitutes a critique of instrumental reason. Therefore, associating culture with wrong behaviour is described by Eagleton as an oxymoron as culture is based on the creation and transmission of values which involve moral judgement. Culture therefore is both a neutral and judgemental term. This is in contrast to cultural relativism which denies universal truths or values but rather sees all claims including moral ones as relative to a specific context and form of life. Karl Marx however argued that culture is what makes man recognised as a "species being." Thus culture attributes universal morality to humanity which should be aspired to or in the words of John Stuart Mills,

*"We're accustomed to calling a country civilized if we think it more improved; more eminent in the best characteristics of man and society; further advanced in the road to perfection; happier; nobler; wiser. This is one sense of the word civilisation. But in another sense, it stands for that kind of improvement which distinguishes a wealthy and powerful nation from savages and barbarians".*

According to Winkler (2023), political culture can be defined as "the political psychology of a country or nation (sub-group thereof)". It exposes the deep-seated values held by a group rather than their ephemeral attitudes towards specific issues. Lucien Pye regarded political culture as a set of beliefs and attitudes orienting political life and providing the rules intended to regulate political behaviour (Morlino et al., 2017). It involves both the political ideals and



the norms within which the political activity operates. Allan Ball opines that political culture is generally composed of attitudes, beliefs, emotions and reality values linked to political life (Ball, 1988). Y. Schemeil a French political scientist preferred the term political cultures as it entailed cultural plurality within a collectivity (Iovan, 2015). These definitions allude to the fact that politics is subjective and stems from the psychological orientation of the individual and the collective.

Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba explained this in greater detail in what they defined as parochial, subordination and participative political culture (Almond & Verba, 1963). According to them, parochial political culture is specific to traditional societies and communities that are lacking in awareness of national and world issues, and have no interest in the values and mechanisms of the national political system. This type of political culture operates in villages, ethnic groups, regions etc. where the school, the town hall and the church are key institutions from which knowledge, feelings and value judgements are derived. A political culture of submission or subordination operates in communities regulated by national values. In these societies, though the agents of political action are aware of the existence of a political system, they adopt a passive attitude to politics and the decision-making process. This is derived from their belief that the political system is built to protect their lives and personalities without their input. The system will work well because it is built to serve the interests of the citizens who live in conformity to its ethics.

A participative political culture on the other hand corresponds to a democratic system. This type of political culture is developed through the educational process as well as a highly organised socio-political system. Citizens possess several subjective means and abilities, skills and dexterities for using them rationally to influence decision-making, the progress of political events, representations and stopping those administrative decisions that will negatively affect their interests.

All these three types of political culture co-exist in a political system and mutually influence the political outcomes in the society. K. G. Schwarzenberg added another dimension to the discourse on political culture by drawing from the post-modernist writings of Jean Baudrillard (Iovan, 2015). In what he termed the "spectacle" political culture, he iterates that this political culture ensures professed dominance and open violence. It is nothing but



simulation, artifice or parody. It is a deceptive representation of democracy; a simulacrum of participative culture. Individuals believe themselves to be free, active and influential. They believe themselves actors of the political system but are mere spectators deceived and deluded by the "game of politics" that is played on the TV screen, and behind the voting booth curtain. The spectacle culture seeks to replace the participative culture and the political spectacle replaces democracy resulting in political alienation. This is exactly what we see in present-day Nigerian politics where elections are just a sham, results are written before the elections are conducted and the courts are used to legalise illegality and fraudulent election results resulting in apathy and loss of interest in the political process.

### **Political Socialization**

Socialisation has been defined as all the processes through which an individual is constructed or 'formed', 'shaped', 'fashioned', 'manufactured', or 'conditioned', – by the local and global society in which they live. Through this process, they acquire or 'learn', 'internalize', 'incorporate', 'integrate', socially situated ways of acting, thinking and being. Simply defined, socialisation is the way society forms and transforms individuals. It can be divided into primary and secondary socialisation. Primary socialisation is the socialisation that takes place in the family, while secondary socialisation is the one that happens outside the family. Agents of socialisation that facilitate the process of socialisation are family, the peer group, the school, the church and social media (Darmon, 2023).

The family is critical in the socialisation process because they lay the groundwork for what the child will readily accept as right or wrong from the secondary sources of socialisation. Emile Durkheim and Norbert Elias agree that children are easily influenced and initial experience has considerable sway over them. This is a result of their vulnerable position and their dependence on those around them for their development, as Norbert Elias iterates, for the influence of those around them so as not, or no longer, to be animals.

Meanwhile, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman assert that primary socialisation operates within an affective context; this lends primary socialisation its particular tone and effectiveness. Thus primary socialisation becomes the filter through which individuals perceive the outside world (Scheffer, 2024). Onkarrappa (2021), defines socialisation as the





process of transforming the animal instinct in man into a responsible human being or converting the biological being into a social being.

Political socialisation is the process of converting the individual into a political being as political values are imbibed along with social norms. The agents of political socialisation are thus not limited to the traditional agents of family, peer groups, schools, churches media and social media but also include political parties (Darmon, 2023).

### **3.0. METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, drawing on secondary data sources including journal articles, books, government reports, and credible online resources. A thematic content analysis approach was used to examine scholarly interpretations of political culture and socialization, with a particular focus on Nigeria. Historical and comparative analyses were also used to understand the evolution of political culture from colonial to post-colonial Nigeria. This approach enabled the researcher to draw meaningful inferences on the interplay between political socialization agents and the prevailing political behaviors in Nigeria.

### **4.0. DISCOURSES**

#### **4.1. The Nigerian Context**

To understand the political culture and political socialisation in the Nigerian context, there is a need to understand the political system within which the Nigerian political culture exists. Nigeria as a nation came into being with the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914. Before this point, the disparate ethnic nationalities within the geographical entity known as Nigeria lived and operated within territories governed by their traditional norms and values (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Korieh, 2010). This period, also known as the pre-colonial period saw the different nationalities organised along traditional systems such as the emirate system in the northern part of the country, the Obas and chiefs in the western and southern parts of the country and the Igbo acephalous kinship societies in the south-eastern part of Nigeria.



While the North practiced a feudal system headed by the emirate structure, the South, particularly the Southeast practised a system more akin to a republican, democratic system based on communal and kinship ties. This system was based on the equality of individuals and the prominence of titled men in communal decision-making. Thus merit and hard work were a critical part of the core values of the Igbo man. This led to the North being more amenable to British domination while the South, which was comprised more of the educated elite, was significantly resistant to British rule. During the colonial period, the British, for ease of colonial administration, introduced a system of indirect rule (Aladekomo, 2021). This was a system created to facilitate the collection of taxes. This system, though fully successful in the north was only partially successful in the west and southern parts of the country. Within the southeast, indirect rule was a total failure because it imposed a foreign system of governance on the people. The North was used to the principle of taxation as a result of taxation to maintain the emirate system. The south and west operated a form of leadership also sustained by taxation but the southeast was devoid of a centralised leadership system that needed to be sustained by a system of taxation. The British therefore imposed warrant chiefs whose main duty was to collect taxes on behalf of the British. This was alien to the culture of the people and they revolted against this imposition. This also led to the famous 1929 women's war against British taxation by women from the southeast region.

The subsequent struggle for independence was spearheaded by the nationalists who comprised of educated elites from the south. The British, however, chose to hand over power to the North as they believed the North was more amenable to protecting British interests than the South. As such, the politics of Nigeria became rife with intrigues and manipulations by the British (and the northern oligarchy) whose main objective was to retain control over their former colony. At independence in 1960, Nigeria was free from British colonial domination and could chart a course to full political independence. However, the British had left a legacy that deeply affected the political culture of the new nation. This was the British policy of divide and rule through which it set the various ethnic nationalities against each other in a bid to better exploit them and gain ascendancy over them (Amah, 2017). The British were also more interested in working with the northern emirate system than with the educated elite of southern and eastern extraction whom they saw as a threat to their colonial





interest. Using religion and tribalism as key factors, the British sought to create distrust among the various ethnic nationalities. This resulted in politics being ‘a dirty game’ in Nigerian parlance, as all sorts of intrigues and manipulations were brought to bear to ensure that the north remained in control and the south was kept in check. Thus politics became a do-or-die affair.

Almond and Verba (1963) reiterated the fact that a political system is sustained by a political culture. The Nigerian political system has largely functioned like the Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. Examples of this can be seen from the violent politics of the ‘wild, wild west’ in the 1960s, to the return to democracy of 1999, which saw the entrenchment of rigging, vote buying, and voter intimidation, and the 2023 elections, which resulted in the declaration of a candidate with criminal background as winner in an election in which he did not meet basic requirements such as the issue of 25% win in The Federal capital territory (FCT) and 2/3 win in the 36 states of the federation. This questionable victory which was challenged in the election tribunals was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Almost every election in Nigeria has been characterised by electoral malpractice such as massive rigging, vote buying, and voter intimidation. These have resulted in voter apathy and suppression of the will of the people. Almond and Verba (1963) assert that a successful shift from a subjective to a participant culture involves the diffusion of positive orientations towards a democratic infrastructure, the acceptance of norms of civic obligation and the development of a sense of civic competence among a substantive proportion of the population.

Although civic education is taught in schools, family and religious orientation play a major role in political socialisation and the subsequent development of political culture in Nigeria. Nigeria has not been able to entrench a democratic culture based on the fact that the political culture undergirding the political system is underdeveloped. Based on the understanding that culture is the reinforcement of norms and values, of a society, thuggery, and rigging electoral malpractice cannot be acceptable as the political culture of Nigeria. There is a disconnect between political culture in principle and what pervades the electoral system in Nigeria.



Ojukwu *et al.* (2016) noted that agents of socialisation produced certain effects over time. The 'period effect' affects not just an individual or a group of people but a whole society. Examples of the 'period effect' include the world wars and the great depression in the United States. Another effect of the agents of socialisation is the cohort effect which is a social event that creates a major impact on a specific group of people. Examples include the Biafra War in Nigeria and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the World War.

These effects create a perspective from which political socialisation occurs and political culture is developed. Political culture is also determined by history. The historical development of Nigeria from pre-colonial to post-colonial as well as the Biafran war has created a political system imbued with tribal and religious attachment and little or no commitment to shared national values and orientations. Thus Nigerians are more attached to their tribes and religions than to the country and the only thing that truly seems to unite Nigerians is their love for football.

Almond and Verba (1963) advocated that a democratic political system requires a political culture that encourages political participation. The general political culture in Nigeria is apathy as politics is seen as a dirty game and only corrupt people can survive in the murky waters of Nigerian politics. This is because there have been instances of opposition politicians being eliminated in the political process and huge sums of money are spent to buy both the party machinery and the electoral body that is in charge of conducting free and fair elections. In the end, it becomes a case of the rigger taking it all. This has encouraged voter apathy as statistics from past elections show that less than 20% of the total population comes out to cast their votes because they don't believe their votes count.

## **5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Conclusion.**

Nigeria as a nation was created as a British enterprise. The independence of Nigeria was engineered in such a manner as to enable Britain to retain a foothold in her former colony. This has seriously impeded the development of a political culture as the country is deeply divided along tribal and religious lines. Thus there is no unified system of political



socialisation as people are first of all affectively attached to their tribes and religion rather than to the nation.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

There is a need to seek to forge unity in diversity. After 64 years of independence, Nigeria should pursue multiculturalism and nation-building instead of devolving along tribal and ethnic lines. There is a need to practice true fiscal federalism by giving more autonomy to the states in terms of resource control so that each state will develop at their own pace instead of concentrating so much power at the centre and the resultant neglect of the periphery.

## **Competing Interest**

The author declares that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript

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