

MASS MEDIA AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Study "Mass Media and Political Culture in Nigeria" investigated the performance of the Mass Media in the evolution of a sustainable and enduring political culture. The study adopted Participatory and Action Learning Research (PALR). The instruments used in the analysis were the Delphi technique and Preference Ranking and scoring Technique. Our investigations revealed that the mass media made significant contributions on political culture in their coverage. However, that the media should do more by reporting on those aspects that would guarantee a dominant political culture and de-emphasize ethnicity and regionalism which appears to be the order of the day was recommended among others.

Keywords: *Mass media, political culture, participatory, ethnicity*

INTRODUCTION

Political culture is not divorced from a culture in the widest social sense. According to Gray and Brown (1976) political culture is not divorced from a culture in the widest social sense. On the contrary, it is related to culture values and orientations of people. It focuses attention however, on the part of culture, which bears relevance to politics. Beer and Ulam (1958) in Babawale (2005) define political culture as one of the four variables, crucial to the analysis of political systems. According to him the components of the culture are values, beliefs and emotional attitudes about how government ought to be conducted and also about what it should do. A nation's political culture is to Pye and Verba (1965) as a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provides the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system. It encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity.

Taking their lead from the sociological perspectives (Persons and Skills), Almond and Verba (1963) in the study of political culture of Britain, the United States, Germany, Italy and Mexico provide a comprehensive definition of political culture. According to them, political culture is specifically the pattern of individual political orientations, the attitudes towards the political system and its various parts and the role of self in the political system. It is the subjective realm which underlines and gives meaning to political activities. Political culture is talked about just as economic culture, or religious culture. It is a set of attitudes towards a special set of political objects and processes. The political culture of a nation is the particular distribution of patterns of orientations or popular attitudes towards political objects among the members of that nation. A nation's political culture, hence, involves the

political style, values, norms, emotions, beliefs and symbolic attachment that are dominant among a population. Thus broadly, we can conceive political culture as a shorthand expression to denote the emotional and attitudinal environment within which the political systems operate. It is the popular patterns of orientations in which every political system is embedded. Corroborating the above view, Almond and Vebra (1963) have classified political culture into three main types. The classifications are based upon whether members of society take an active role in the political process or whether they are in - active. The first type is parochial culture in this type there are no specialized political roles. The political system is not differentiated from the socio-economic or religious system. People have little knowledge of the political system beyond what happens in their immediate local environment. Politics is permeated by ethnic loyalty and primordial sentiments.

In addition, there is little expectation on the part of the members of the political community that significant changes in their lives can be made through politics. A parochial citizen does not expect anything from the political system; he makes no demand on it. This type is found in many traditional societies. The second type is a subject political culture. A subject orientation is essentially a passive one. The citizen is aware of the outputs of the government - welfare programmes, coercive measures or tax legislation, but plays no part in the inputs. He does not participate and believes he has no influence on the government. In this kind of political culture, the government expects obedience from the people and conformity to its directive without questioning.

The third is the participatory political culture. This type is characterized by a citizenry which is aware of both the inputs and outputs of government. The citizens believe in their ability to influence their government. They are encouraged to participate actively in the decision-making process. The British, American and Scandinavian political systems best represent this ideal. Looking at the above classifications, it is obvious that Nigeria belongs to the traditional political system. In this type of system dominant values may indicate that the majority of the people are unable or incompetent to participate in politics. Government may be treated as a mystery, understandable only by the high born, the highly educated society may be pyramidally or hierarchically organized, the major injunction is to obey the law and be loyal: do not question: do not participate. In Northern Nigeria, for example, women were denied political participation particularly voting until 1979.

In a developed democratic political system, dominant values may emphasize participation, the idea is that common people are rational and intelligent enough to participate, that they can trust other citizens that interest groups are legitimate and the governors gain their privilege of governing and decision making only from the consent of the governed. These kinds of values set limits to government and spell out relations between the governed and the governors. This may not exist in traditional political culture like ours. Political culture affects politics; it provides the link between micro-politics and macro-politics. It constitutes a structure of orientations, values and norms, which helps to ensure coherence in the operation of institutions and organizations. Powell and Almond (1966) submit that the kinds of orientations, which

exist in a population, will have a sufficient influence on the ways in which the political systems works. The demands made upon the system, the response to laws and appeals for support and the conduct of individuals in their political roles will also be shaped by the common orientation patterns. To Ake (1967) political culture is the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place. According to Wiseman (1966):

Scholars are agreed that one political system is distinguished from another and only by its structures but also by the political culture in which the structures are found.

This explains why such political institutions as parliamentary democracy, electoral system and party system, cannot function effectively in the developing countries in the same way as those where they have been developed through several countries. This could be further explained by the fact that the working of the political system is very much affected by the political culture in which such imported institutions function. For example, in Britain, there is widespread acceptance of the belief that socially superior individuals are best suited to political decision making. This is known as the deferential aspect of the British political culture. Deference to authority, an important element of British political culture is an important factor for the effectiveness of the political system as a whole. For the same reason of differences in national political cultures, constitutions are not exportable. The "Westminster model" fail to become radically altered when adopted by Commonwealth Nations outside Britain.

Arising from the above, the key elements of what constitutes a nation's culture according to Babawale (2005) may be summarized as: the degree of social trust or mistrust which prevails in a society; the general attitude of tolerance and interpersonal cooperation permeating political relations among people; Attachment and loyalty of citizens to the national political system; people's attitude towards authority - degree of public recognition of what constitute the legitimate authority; and people's sense of their rights, powers and obligations. Do they feel that they can influence and participate in the decision-making process or is there widespread apathy and political alienation in the political system?

The mass media have crucial roles to play in reaction to the challenges of building especially in moulding a formidable and sustainable political culture in Nigeria. But how, has the media fared in this onerous task is what this study seeks to address. Though this study will limit itself to the pivotal roles the mass media should play in shaping the desired political culture in Nigeria yet, it is aimed at highlighting the areas in which the mass media can intervene in promoting the desired political culture among Nigerians. To this end, what is the performance of the mass media in mobilizing, educating and enlightening Nigerians on a sustainable political culture? What areas of political culture were given prominence?

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY

This study is based on social responsibility theory. In his poignant elucidation Nkwocha (1999) in Sambe (2002) avers that, the press in any country should be responsible to the wishes, yearnings and feelings of the people to create a better society. According to the theory, the basic tasks of the media include:

- (i) Servicing the political systems by providing information for discussion and debate on public affairs.
- (ii) Enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self government.
- (iii) Safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watch dog against government.
- (iv) Servicing the economic system, primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising.
- (v) Providing entertainment.
- (vi) Maintaining its owned self-service so as to be free from the pressures of social interests.

The theory is relevant to the young political experimentation in Nigeria which is yearning for the media that would fertilize evolution of a sustainable and enduring political culture.

POLITICAL CULTURE IN NIGERIA

Kolawole in an article in the Nation (2007: 12th April) Posits that: the press makes very important observable functional contributions to political systems. As a public watchdog, it serves as a behavior regulatory agent on the activities of government and its functionaries. As an educator, it relays the programmes of government to its citizenry thereby enlisting their support. In the modern state the press has assumed a pivotal position that makes it too difficult to be ignored. Government may detest the press but they need it for survival. It is to enlighten the citizenry and, in a way, serves as glue that ties the general citizenry to the programs of government. In political behavior, communication is a vital tool.

According to Elaigwu (2005), the mass media have pivotal roles to play in reaction to the challenges of nation-building which includes political culture. The first of these functions is the ability to disseminate information with high relative objectivity and neutrality. In this role, the mass media basically educate the audience on current issues. One realizes very often that the socio-political and ideological milieu in which the media men operate colour their perspectives and to some extent dictate the style and language used. A few minutes spent listening to the "Voice of America" or "Radio Moscow" reveals the bandying of epithets such as "Communists aggressors" or "Capital imperialists" used to describe each other. Of course, one accepts that all nations need to politically educate and mobilize their citizens. All the same, media men must be able to inform the masses with high relative objectivity of events happening around them and in the whole world to inculcate the desired political culture.

Media men also have another role, that of providing historical contexts and

perspectives to the masses. Feature articles in papers, documentary series on television and radio and others, help to give invaluable historical contexts to current events which take place. This education service is invaluable to members of the society, especially as more have access to media outputs such as Radio/Television, news papers and other printed matters. The building up of a sense of nationhood can only be effectively done in historical contexts, as mistakes of the past become assets of today and successes of today becomes incentives for tomorrow. In all nations there are large groups with the culture of passive political participants. This is true of the United States as much as Britain. This may be as a result of apathy and frustration with existing system, or lack of exposure. For some others, their participation makes no difference; politicians will still behave in the same "dirty ways".

Thirdly, in a place like Nigeria with mass illiteracy and very low-level of political culture, the role of the mass media, in articulation of perceived interests of the masses, becomes more crucial than ever. Very often, the unpoliticised masses look up to the media to champion their interests, such as environmental sanitation, roads, water and electric power supply, health services and other basic necessities of life. In community development efforts the mass media are looked up to as a great effort mobilizing agencies. Fourthly, the press has the function of helping to socialize our younger ones and politically, educating the adults. The mass media houses in all countries embark on these functions to provide societal continuity in values and to create greater political awareness.

The mass media can promote homogeneity in the political culture of the nation. Presently, the various ethnic groups namely: Hausa, Ibo, Tiv, Yoruba, Ibibio etc seem to be promoting the interests of their various sub-cultural groups instead of a genuine attachment to the national unit called Nigeria. In an article by Aliyu Tilde in Daily Independent October 13, 2010 Page 34 on Nigeria at 50: Primitivism or civilization he has this to say:

...we still succumb to individualism at the expense of the collective, as did our primitive ancestors. The education acquired from other Civilizations - Arab and Europeans of recent has failed to moderate the influence of crude "selfish gene" in most Africans.

Today, in Nigeria, there is a widespread apathy and alienation in the political culture. Most Nigerians do not have confidence in the electoral system and the government at various levels, federal, state and local levels as well. The 2011 elections are by the corner and yet most Nigerians do not have faith in what would happen at the polls. To some, there is even no need to vote because even if they vote, their votes may not count, as elections would be rigged. The media can conscientise Nigerians by building faith in them on the elections and the nation as a whole. Corroborating the above view, Chima Ibeneche in an article filed in Daily Independent, October 14, 2010 page 34 has this to say:

We carved out our country into tribes and demographic groups- Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Efik, Ijaw, Nupe, majorities and minorities etc often without knowing the boundaries and in doing so have lost the ability to tell a common story about our past or create a common vision of our

future. The fact of our being Nigerians requires that we break out of our narrowness, inspire the country and call on every citizen to recognize our collective independence. That would be inconsonance with the dreams of our founding fathers.

Apart from that, the mass media needs to urgently and aggressively re-orientate Nigerians on some of the negative trends that have permeated our political culture. These negative trends includes, assassinations, violence and wanton destruction of property, dirty campaigns, political corruption, godfatherism in Nigerian political culture, culture of do-or-die in electoral contexts, rigging, harassment and intimidation by security agents etc. Although time and space would not allow us to do justice to all these negative trends in our political culture, we shall attempt to elucidate on assassinations and destructions in Nigeria's socio-economic political culture: there has been persistent re-occurrence of assassinations (or attempted assassination and destructions within the Nigerian polity. The deaths of Mr. Anthony Olufunsho Williams (a Governorship aspirant in Lagos State) on Wednesday, 27th July 2006 and Dr. Ayodele Daramola (a Governorship aspirant in Ekiti State) on 14th August 2006 have helped to reinforce the genuineness of this worry. These deaths are further additions to the litany of yet unresolved (political) assassinations in Nigeria.

Each of these deaths takes a momentary center stage in national discussions and systematically fades away into a relative national sub-consciousness, waiting for another gruesome murder to re-occur. "Security operatives make promises of leaving no stone unturned and bringing the perpetrators to book". Government officials display their prowess of oratory and threats. The citizens gaze in confusion and hope they never happen again. Politicians increase their orders for bulletproof automobiles and request for more security guards. The clouds of un-certainty hangover our heads and there remain more questions than answers. The report of two Nigerian Newspapers Daily Champion September 26, 2006 page 1 and Daily Independent September, 26, 2006 page 1 concerning the beheading of three students in the Osun State Polytechnic Iree, by suspected student cultist groups, is an example of what has almost become common news in Nigerian Universities and Colleges. In an article written by Abiodun Felix with the caption "Cultist behead three students" and published by Daily Champion (2006, September 26) the reporter captured the ugly incident thus: "fear and terror yesterday gripped staff and students of Osun State Polytechnic (OSP), Iree, as suspected cultist beheaded three students of the institution..."

In the same vein, Gbenga Faturoti filed a story on the very incident with the title "Cultism: Three Students beheaded in Osun" in Daily Independent (2006, September 26) thus: "three students of Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, Osun State were on Sunday beheaded by student cultists who are now on the run..." How many journalists, student activists and ordinary citizens are brutally beaten up or even killed by Nigerian Security forces (in the guise of stopping demonstrations)? How many people do armed robbers kill while the police (who should protect the people)

glorified themselves in being torturers of innocent citizens and government engage in empty rhetoric? There are different ways of analyzing these incidents. In our own opinion we believe assassinations and killings of innocent citizens in Nigeria are products of a political history, which has continued to broaden its frontiers and has (in the course of time) become a culture and *modus Vivendi*. Our position is that killings and destructions are major legacies (or liabilities) of British colonialism in Nigeria, which has become appropriate as the best way to settle disputes, instill fear in opponents and show who is in charge.

In 1976, the military government of Olusegun Obasanjo ordered the destruction of the musical theatre and personal estate of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a musician, who used his music to criticize the excesses of government. Fela's mother died as a consequence of this rampage. In 1976 also, the military government of Olusegun Obasanjo gave soldiers a shoot-at-sight order against students, who were demonstrating against the government. Many students lost their lives. (Today, the two major actors in the massacre of students in the 1970s remain big political players in Nigerian politics - Obasanjo was immediate president of Nigeria, Ahmadu Ali (then Federal Commissioner for Education) was the national chairman of Peoples Democratic Party, the ruling political party). In 1986, Dele Giwa (a reputed, fearless journalist) was heartlessly murdered by a parcel bomb (suspected to be sent from the military president).

The perpetrators have not yet been unmasked till date and efforts made to bring Ibrahim Babangida and the security officers of his government to answer some questions (in the Oputa Panel) yielded no fruits. Between 1993 and 1999, the military government of Ibrahim Babandiga and Sani Abacha unleashed horror on the oil producing area of Ogoni for daring to question the consequences of oil exploration in their locality. In year 2000, the civilian government of Olusegun Obasanjo ordered soldiers to raze down the village of Odi in Bayelsa State. Since 2000 - 2001 the town of Okwe - Okigwe and the personal properties of Ralph Uwazurike have been subjected to incessant attacks and vandalism for raising discussion on the issue of Biafra and Igbo self determination. In 2001 the area of Zaki-Biam in Benue State was razed and many of its people massacred on the orders of Olusegun Obasanjo's led federal government.

Within such a political culture where human life is almost equated with the life of housefly; where decision making processes are governed more by repressive force than dialogue, where those who kill and maim get elected to (or usurp) public leadership, where hardly none of the real perpetrators and killers of the people have never been held accountable for their reprehensible acts, it should therefore not surprise anyone when gangsterism become a public rule rather than exception. A simple discussion or debate among people, even groups of friends easily end up in shooting on one another or even to physical combat. A simple question of a child to his/her parents or seniors is responded with a hard knock, a slap, a spanking instead of a humane response or clarification. A Christian religious minister (Rev. Emeka Ezeugo King - leader of the Christ Praying Assembly Ajao Estate Lagos was accused

of hitting members of his congregation with iron without restraints and setting fire on some six ladies members of his church because God revealed to him that they were committing fornication). It is in this wise that, The Vanguard (2006, September 27) carried a story tagged "King Charged Afresh before High Court". Part of the story reads thus:

The murder charge against the General Overseer and founder of the Christian Praying Assembly, Emeka Ezeugu also known as Rev. Dr. King got underway yesterday at a Lagos High Court under water tight security. He is now facing a six count charge of attempted murder and murder of one of his church members, Miss Ann Uzor...

There is a general culture of violence, which has come to be accepted as a norm and which has unfortunately come to pervade our entire socio-political consciousness as well as appear to have been canonized. Under this setting, there is the tendency that some people see killing, brutality and intimidation as "normal" ways of living and gaining political power. This is the culture that has created past and present Nigerian political class as well as creating the future political class. Those at the winning side celebrate while those at the losing side mourn and bury their dead. But for how long should we allow this to continue? This is where the intervention of the mass media is needed. According to Afejuku (2010)

Our generation should not be remembered as the do-nothing generation when Nigeria was about to burst. The generation and history we represent must be those that claim affiliation with our huge oneness and un-quivering sensibility as Nigerians.

Contributing further, Afejukwu (2010) counsels the media on forthcoming 2011 elections thus:

I entreat you to do your patriotic duty. Toil like a bull to further the cause of the people. Investigate every investigatable, no matter the odds, no matter the pains, no matter the insults, no matter the humiliations. Expose every exposable to the discomfort and horror of the gangsters.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted Participatory, Learning and Action Method research design. The core process is to enable participants to share their assumptions of a problem, to find common ground and then to engage a variety of people in identifying and testing out some possible solutions. There is a process of shared learning for all concerned. The population of this study comprises professionals like lawyers, political scientists and journalists resident in Abuja. The study area houses about six million inhabitants, mostly civil servants and other professional workers. Since the present study is interested in investigating political culture in Nigeria, a judgmental sampling technique was adopted. Consequently, a sample size of one hundred Abuja residents was selected for the study at the Federal Secretariat, Central Business District Abuja. The assumption was that since the Federal Secretariat is home to many civil servants and other professional workers it was the best place to get people to contribute to the study.

The data collected through Delphi technique were converted to Ranking and scoring technique. Essentially, the Delphi technique involves collecting views from experts in a field, and generating discussions among them to interrogate their views. In analysing the data, firstly, the researcher identified one hundred different professionals namely: lawyers, political scientists and journalists. Each individual was thus asked to generate independently up to three specific research questions in the chosen area. They were asked to provide additional information by giving justification for the questions chosen. The responses from each individual were collected and passed on in un-edited and un-attributed form to all members of the group. The second step involves individuals making comment on other responses, and/or revising their contributions in the light of what others have produced. Thirdly, a resolution or consensus of the responses/replies through preference and Ranking techniques was carried out thus:

Table 1: Evaluation the contributions made by media reportage

Problem	Responses						Total Score	Ranking
	A	B	C	D	E	F		
Evaluation of media reportage on political culture.	15	6	5	6	5	4	40	A
Negative trends in society.	10	3	7	1	1	3	25	B
Objective reportage of political culture	5	4	1	4	3	3	20	C
Media education on attachment and loyalty of citizens to the national political system.	1	3	2	1	2	1	10	D
Level of participation in politics by citizens.	1	1	1	1	1	0	5	E

Source: Fieldwork 2010

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the preference ranking and scoring technique which is a resolution of the replies from the respondents in the Delphi technique earlier employed by the researcher indicates that out of the five problems identified in the study, evaluations of media reportage on political culture scored 40 and ranked the highest with A. This is a clear indication that the media made sufficient contribution in their reportage on political culture issues. The next on the table is, objective reportage on the Nigerian Political culture. Media scored 25 in this area and is ranked second with B. The implication is that the mass media in Nigeria made concerted efforts in reporting objectively on political culture. These are indeed efforts worthy of commendation. The third in ranking is: media reports on the negative trends in the Nigerian political culture. Here, the media scored 20 and is ranked C on the table.

This clearly shows that the mass media in Nigeria only put up an average performance in this area and needed to improve. There are so many negative trends in our political culture that bedevils our country which requires proactive and aggressive coverage by the media. These negative trends includes: assassinations, violence, the culture of dirty campaigns in our polity, political corruption,

godfatherism etc. Closely following the above is: media education on the need for Nigerians to attach and be loyal to the national political system. The performance of the media is appalling and calls for urgent measures. The media scored only 10 and is ranked D. The mass media need to conscientiously report to de-emphasize ethnicity and regionalism which appears to be the order of the day in Nigeria. Last on the table is the level of participation in politics by citizens with a total score of 5 and is ranked E. This explains the inadequacy of media coverage that is tailored at creating awareness on participation of citizens in the politics of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Nigeria of today most people are disenchanted with the political system with the belief that their votes do not matter as politics is regarded as a dirty game meant for charlatans. The media need to discourage this attitude through their continuing coverage and enlightenment. Following the finding in this study it was recommended that although it could be deduced from the finding that the mass media in Nigeria on a general note made significant contributions in orientating Nigerians political culture, the media should do more by preaching for a predominant political culture. The various ethnic groups such as, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo Ijaw, Itshekiri Ibibio, Efik etc., inherently constitute different political sub-cultural groups; they all exhibit cohesive political cultures of their own which are different from each other and which resist amalgamation into a Nigerian whole.

The mass media as a facilitator of political culture should set the pace through their preachments that promotes industrialization, massive investment in education, mass political mobilization (through political parties and democratization process) as well as the creation of symbolic elements such as national heroes and political leadership, lingua franca, national flags and national anthems, national public events and popular national constitutions. All these can foster the spirit of emotional attachment and loyalty to the nation thereby engendering national pride and unity. There are so many negative trends in our political culture that bedevils our country which requires proactive, aggressive and continuing coverage by the media. These negative trends includes: assassinations, violence, the culture of dirty campaigns in our polity, political corruption, godfatherism etc.

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