

## ***Informal Education and Political Cognition: Towards the Actualisation of Nigeria's Socio-Democratic Aspirations***

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### **Abstract**

*The position of this paper is that Nigeria's inability to employ informal aspect of education to actualise its social aspirations constitute a barrier to the actualisation of Nigeria's social aspirations. Adopting Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba's classification of political culture and that of Daniel Elazar to determine the political culture of Nigerians, this paper avers that political culture of Nigerians is detrimental to the well-being of the Nigerian state. Major agents of socialisation such as family, media and religion are playing significant roles in this process, as they propel ethnic identity and blind religious loyalty to the detriment of national allegiance. This paper then suggests that the only salvific solution is to design a national ideology from the point of convergence of the diverse polities within the country, else this problem will continue to persist at the disadvantage of the state.*

**Keywords:** political, culture, attitude, socialisation, participation

### **Introduction**

The interplay of social institutions is such that one cannot function optimally without the input of others. Family's primary role, for instance, is to recruit new members through the process of procreation into the society. Education, in its different forms, en-roots and equips this new members. The quality of education then determines the quality of manpower, which automatically determines the level of the society's economic prosperity. Furthermore, education shapes the recipients' orientation, especially towards the state and its ideologies. As such, every social institution stands independently and permeates itself in the rest.

Education, particularly, stands independently in form of schooling and permeates itself in its informal form through the media, religious teachings and family upbringing of the child. This explains why section 1 subsection 2, article A and subsection 6 articles A and D of the Nigeria's National Policy on Education recognize education as the medium through which Nigeria intends to actualise its socio-democratic aspirations - unity, patriotism and national consciousness (FRN, 2014). In essence, the Nigerian state understands that its well-being heavily rests on the conceptualisation and opinions every citizen has formed concerning its existence; this is largely driven by the nature of their education. Despite Nigeria's illiteracy level being at 31% (Erunke, 2022; Suleiman,

2022), the citizenry have always been divided along tribal and religious lines (Umar, 2013). Recent secessionist movements have enjoyed support in South-West and the South-East regions of the country. In the Northern region, religious extremism has manifested in form of armed and violent attacks, jungle justice and so on. Studies (Oboh, 2017; Adamo, 2018; Agbhor, 2019) have shown that tribal devotion and religious attachment have always influenced electoral outcomes in the country.

Does this imply that education is not a right tool? Does this mean that it has failed? Certainly not, the issue is that the informal aspect of learning has not been apportioned its right of place and the requisite significance in educational policy making (Quinn, 2018); whereas, it serves as the base to develop desirable attitude (Eraut, 2000; Latchem, 2013). It is meant to complement the school's effort, where the aim is to tilt the recipient's orientation towards the reverence of the State? How then are these social-concerns preserved and transmitted?

### **Informal education and its significance to Nigeria's socio-democratic aspirations**

Contacted literatures (Fafunwa, 1974; Obanya, 2007; Akinsanya, 2015) did not equate schooling to education. Also, classical studies (Skinner, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1983; Bandura, 1986) that have shaped perception on learning never limited learning capacities and activities to formal settings. Vygotsky (1978) in particular, stressed on social interaction. That is, learners are bound to learn from the other social actors. As such, within the family, the child's first point of contact, the media and religious houses, the child learns and shapes self, especially in the area of national orientation. Family, particularly, introduces the child to the pre-Nigerian customs, the essentialities of the people, their age-long realities, which include political organisation, political culture and so on. For Piaget (1983), physical growth is significantly related to mental development. As such, the more the child grows physically, the more his/her understanding and orientation towards the state. It would not be an aberration to assume that the family, the media and religious leaders contribute significantly as regards to national orientation as the child grows. Bandura's (1986) position is that imitation and observation play a major role in learning. As such, by watching others, a typical learner can pick a behaviour (Kumar, 2018), especially behaviour of political nature. For Skinner (1971), reinforcement plays a major role.

Informal education is therefore a typical day-to-day learning-triggered activities, whose contents mostly comprised of "*age-long realities*" of a people, that often takes place outside a structured setting, and whose norms and practises that govern it account for the quality of knowledge, nature of character, perception and understanding that the recipients possess. Then, of what importance is it in Nigeria's socio-democratic aspirations? Scholars (Ocitti, 1973; Fafunwa, 1974; Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2002; Okpalike, 2014) have meticulously explained how Africans, prior to colonialism, have employed education to preserve their realities. These realities are still much alive today and interestingly, they are still being preserved through informal aspect of the educational system. If not, how can the preservation of Africa's cultural identities despite colonialism be explained? Therefore, informal education is of great significance in the socialization process of the Nigerian citizens. As such, patriotism and democratic principles that the

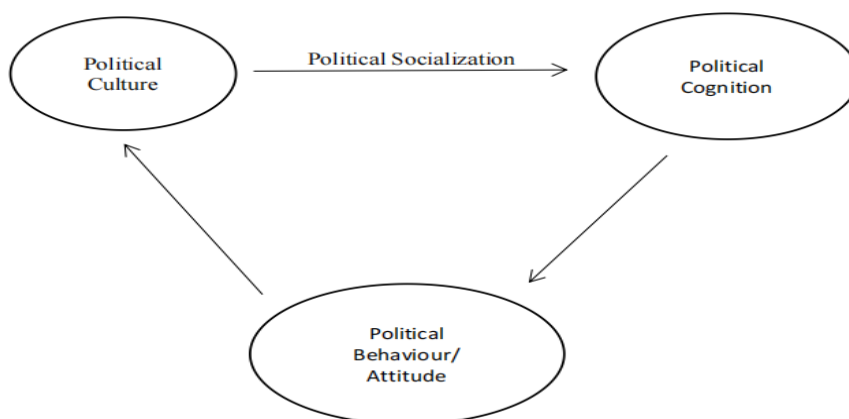
Nigeria state aims to embed in the characters of the citizens would continue to be a mission impossible without the effective and strategic use of the informal education; which is an integral aspect of the Nigerian pre-colonial societal realities.

### **Political cognition: A question for Nigeria**

Classical works of various scholars in the field of psychology have given insight about cognition over the years. For example, Jean Piaget conceptualized cognitive development in a sequential order (Davis, 2014), with age as a determinant. Bandura (1986), and Vygostky and Cole (1978) acknowledged the role of social actors in cognitive development. While the latter highlighted observation and modelling, the former stressed more on the role of language (Noormohamadi, 2008). As modified by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), Bloom, like Piaget, described cognitive process in sequence; cognition starts from remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating to creating. A synthesis of these scholars' positions is that cognition is a mental process that involves acquisition, retention, application or usage of knowledge. In this sense, political cognition involves constructing beliefs (that is, knowledge) about the State or any other political entities based on the information one is fed with, which determines one's attitude towards them. Social actors in form of parents and other members of the society, especially clergy, newsmen, social media influencers, social commentators, political aspirants and so on would feed the recipients information which he or she will process. Put differently, political cognition involves mental activities through which an individual arrives at political understanding and belief.

The afore-explained gives a clear-cut distinction between political cognition and related concepts such as political socialization, political culture, and political behaviour. While political socialization involves the integration of an individual into a people's political culture (Biswas, 2022); political culture, itself, is the totality of the political beliefs, customs, values, and attitudes of a people. Put differently, their age-long political characteristics, practices and modus operandi sum up a political culture. Better still, it is a pattern of internalisation which include: "*cognition, feeling and judgement*" of the political system of a people (Almond & Verba, 2015). "*Cognition*" and "*judgement*" succinct to say, the mental aspect of political culture. That is, political culture projects the psychological and mental components of politics (Wilson, 2000; Roudgar, 2021). This would mean that, political cognition is the mental aspect of political culture. Political cognition then sits at the very core of the individual's political behaviour; the actions, deeds and activities of political nature the individual's actions are involved in (Turan & Tiras, 2017).

Put differently, the interplay is such that socialization is the medium through which culture is in-putted into the mind; the process this inputs go through within the internal universe (the mind) is cognition, the output (product) is the attitude. Attitude, when it continues overtime, it becomes culture. The diagram in Figure 1 captures this explanation.



**Fig 1:** Conceptual model for political cognition

The afore-explained provokes one to ask that what is the nature of orientation of the Nigerian recipients towards the Nigerian state? That is, what impact does the immediate culture has on the political cognition of the Nigerian citizens?

**Informal education and political cognition: A clear picture of an average Nigerian citizen**

One of the most classical studies concerning political culture has been conducted by Almond and Verba (2015). Having conducted their Study in five countries (the United States, Germany, Mexico, Italy, and the United Kingdom), they categorized political culture into: 1) parochial, 2) subject and 3) participant. Citing Nigeria and Ghana tribesmen as examples, they explained that, parochial citizens might have a knowledge of the existence of a central government, but are not alive to it. In a subject political culture, there is a high degree of cognition, feeling and judgement of the state compared to him/her as a unit and collective force in form of political parties by citizens (Pavone, 2014). In essence, citizens are aware of their basic responsibilities, but their perception of the state may not be favourable to the state. Like subject political culture, cognition, feelings and evaluation are at a high level in participant culture. However, the citizen sees self as an integral part of the society whose obligation and duty is to partake in the day-to-day governance as provided by the law. It is pertinent to note that, participant culture is the propeller of successful democracies. From these types of political cultures, it could be deduced that the state derives its legitimacy from the citizens' subjective reality.

Employing historical approach, Elazar (1972) found that migration from pre-America civilisations shaped the political culture of territories where the migrants settled (Seago, 2022). Consequently, this impacted their political cognition and conception of the American government. He identified 3 types of political culture: 1) moralistic culture, 2) individualistic culture and 3) traditionalistic culture (Seago, 2022). While the moralistic culture perceives the administrative machinery of the state as the mechanism for the general welfare and not a vehicle of corruption; the government is self-serving in individualistic culture; that is self-need supersedes collective needs and general welfare. For the traditionalist culture, the government is a preserving agent of the established social

structure (Seago, 2022); some sort of elitist mentality. Applying this to the Nigerian polity, pre-Nigeria socio-political realities of polities that are referred to as regions and states within the Nigerian today have determined the pattern and nature of political cognition and consequently, political behaviour of people within it. As such, the feudalistic and imperialistic elements in most parts of pre-colonial Northern Nigeria explain their traditional approach; the acephalous nature and kinship order in the Igbo civilisation (Tella, 1989; Afigbo, 1980) and the constitutional monarchy, as it had the elements of checks and balances, of the Yorubas (Oluwole, 2015), explain the Igbos republican nature and the Yorubas liberal democratic modus operandi respectively. Hence, same citizens with contrasting political orientation.

Using this afore-explained submission to answer the initial question, one must note that the unwavering support that secessionist movements have enjoyed, especially on social media platforms, in the south west region, in form of fund raising and in the south east region, in form of sit at home, fund raising; taking up arms against the government in form of insurgence, banditry; who in recent times have attacked a correctional facility and presidential convoy (Aytogo, 2022), and recently, the jungle justice metted out to certain politically exposed personalities in Nigeria, for perceived blasphemy and corruption in different forms at different strata, especially during elections, accentuate that citizens have absolutely disregarded the existence of Nigeria and its institutions, despite their awareness of its existence - subject political culture.

Occurrences that precede the highlighted development, such as the existence of ethnic-orientated political parties in the first republic; figure inflation of the 1962 national census; electoral malpractices of election in 1964; the ethnic-perceived coup and ethnic-inspired counter coup in 1966, the pogrom that swiftly followed these coups and consequently, the civil war; the questionable election that ushered in the second republic (May, 1983; Daniel, 2015); the handicapped parliament of the third republic (Oshun, 1999; Tella, 2022); June 12 saga that followed suit and so on indicate that, this national and democratic disregard is transmitted from generation to generation. It was birthed alongside the Nigerian state, therefore, it evolves as the country evolves. That is, poor political socialisation in Nigeria is a foundational issue. In essence, the Nigerian state enjoys a low volume, if any at all, of legitimacy in the understanding of its citizens. This illegitimacy therefore manifests in ethnic form: Biafran mentality, Odua consciousness, Arewa nationalism; extreme religious orientation; exclusivism and particularism; electoral manipulations and democratic disregard. As such, the Nigerian political culture tilt more towards subject culture in Almond and Verba's (1972) model, as he/she is aware of the government but does not deem it worthy for reverence and regard. This explains Nigeria's democratic epilepsy. If the political culture of Nigerians is subjective, how has the components of informal education been contributing to this?

### **Family and political cognition: Implication to the Nigerian state**

Family is a strong biological tie and the smallest social unit, thereby making it a powerful and a significant agent of socialisation. This gives it the right of entry to the base of the individuals' political being (Tella, 2003). That is, the earliest period of the individual's life, when the individual is understanding and defining self, he/she observes and models family members, who in turn reinforce family values through punishment and reward.

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Attitudes and values learnt in the family may have political consequences (Turan & Tiras, 2017). Citing authoritarianism, they explained that parenting styles have impact on several aspects of an individual's political views and opinions such as political value judgement, socio-political hierarchy and so on. Furthermore, the family plays an essential role in a person's choice of political party. In studies carried out in France and United States, 28% and 82% of respondents identify with their fathers' political parties respectively; as regards the Netherlands, family influenced ideology rather than choice of party (Ventura, 2001; Turan & Tiras, 2017).

Extreme family ties have resulted into low civic engagements and political participation (Banfield, 1958; Putnam, 1993; Alesina & Giuliano, 2011). Extreme family ties in this context would mean that the individual replaces the society/government with his/her family on the other side of social contract. That is, gainful and productive social interaction and connection only exist within the family. This trait is passed-on by parents to the children (Alesina & Giuliano, 2011). Also, socio-economic status and relationship to current government determine the kind of value passed on to the citizenry (Tella, 2003). The danger this poses to genuine democratic continuity cannot be overemphasized. The beliefs and standards within the family mostly mould the political beliefs of many people (Joshua, 2012); he further explained that individuals learn through political discussions in the family.

Unlike Italy, Nigeria, where there is a variety of traditional and indigenous political orientations that stand in sharp contrast to modern democratic principles, ethnic loyalty rather than extreme family ties is reinforced through the family. That is, the family serves as the medium through which the torrent of the political values of the immediate society, not the State itself, flows to the recipients. Hence, the continuous appearance of Odua consciousness, Biafran orientation and Arewa mentality in place of a genuine national consciousness.

### **Religion and political cognition: Impact on the Nigeria polity**

Civilisations have employed religion through what Joshua (2012:253) described as "*calculated sermonization*" to reinforce values and morals. Joshua further explained that, these values have impacts on politics. Put differently, religion has enormous influence on the nature of political culture (Morgan & Watson, 1991; Leckrone, 2013). How is this so? Severe was the impact of religion on political orientation during his time that Karl Marx was provoked to say that "*religion is the opium of the masses.*" By opium, he meant that religion was a pain reliever for the citizenry (Obaje, 2018), some sort of illusion. That is, Christian doctrines were an instrument of oppression of the upper class against the lower class (Omonijo et al., 2016). As a matter of fact, Christian missionary activities in Africa eased European colonial conquests of African continent.

In a study conducted by Akinfenwa et al. (2014) in Ilorin, 43.2% of respondents assessed religious leaders to be corrupt, 27.4% assessed them to be tribal and religiously biased and 17.4% posited that religious leaders are a reflection of the entire society. The implication of this is that the recipients, either by observation and sermonization, learn these society-destroying dispositions from religious leaders, supposedly revered figures

in the society. Furthermore, religion-inspired violent sub-cultures have been birthed (Akinfenwa et al., 2014), challenging the legitimacy of federal government and its institutions (Akinfenwa et al., 2014). The emergence of Boko Haram captures this.

### **Media and political cognition: The Nigerian angle**

The primary role of the media to disseminate information to members of the public is a sensitive one, as public understanding and perception towards the State (political consciousness), is within the confine of the framework they provide (Oso & Akhagba, 2014). Media activities in Nazi Germany, the spread of the Arab spring (Aliede, 2020; Holocaust Encyclopaedia, 2021), Iwe Iroyin's role in de-colonisation process in Nigeria are relevant examples. Olaniru, et al. (2020) found that 84.9% of respondents access social media, 57.6% have access to radio, 44.7% have access to television and 28.2% have access to newspaper almost on daily basis; 35.3%, 27.1%, 16.5%, 12.9% access television, Radio, newspaper and social media respectively at least once in a week. Tsebee (2010) observed that, media personnel most times do not function outside the prevailing socio-political ideology of their society. Also, ownership might influence the reports in the media (Tella, 2003). This definitely means that media plays a significant role in the actualisation of Nigeria's social aspirations.

In essence, the undemocratic characteristics of the Nigerian recipients towards the Nigerian state is as a result of social input, or social conditioning. That is, these vices are not in-born. While the family lays the foundation for members' political self and input community-motivated political values, religion through *sermonization* and media, through its activities reinforce these values in the recipients later into adulthood. One cannot entirely fault these institutions for performing their basic socialisation duties. That is, they are only preserving the values of the society itself. As such, what needs to change is the value. How can this be?

### **Informal education and political cognition**

The projection of a restrictive composite ethnic mentality, 'war against indiscipline' (during the military era), the recent attempt at social re-orientation campaigns under different tags and so on have all been initiated to actualise a uniform national orientation and consciousness among diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. On the side of the government, regional autonomy (in the first republic), state creation, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, introduction of general course on history of the country to university students (Tella, 1989); Mass Mobilization for Self-reliance, Economic Recovery and Social Justice (MAMSER) (Tella, 2003); replacing parliamentary system with presidential system (in the second republic), introducing quota system, federal character and so on were initiated to this end (Ukiwo, 2005; Edewor et al., 2014). Yet, ill-national and undemocratic dispositions persist since independence. How then can Nigeria re-engineer this disregarding orientation of its citizens towards it?

In a multi-racial state like the United States, citizens hold their economic ideology in high esteem (Serkan, 2018). In fact, America was configured by the idea of the American dream (Bruno, 2019). Despite contrasting political cultures in the USA, the idea of democracy serves as a much-needed glue holding them together. In Brazil, nationality is more important than racial background (Tella, 1989). Such is it that they pride themselves

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to be a racial democracy (Telles, 2022). As such, any genuine effort towards a mental re-adjustment of the Nigerian citizens' political disposition towards the Nigerian state would be to create a national ideology.

While one must admit that creating this ideology will be tasking and demanding, it remains the only salvific solution to Nigeria's socio-democratic woes. This is because, this ideology must be drawn from the point of convergence of all the primordial realities of the societies that make up the Nigerian society. Having done this, the ideology will then fuel the country's social efforts: the educational, political and economic systems and other national integration efforts. As such, this ideology will be one of Nigeria's main philosophies of Education. It is pertinent to note that this ideology can continuously be reinforced through informal education institutions, especially the media until it permeates all aspects of the Nigerian life.

### **Conclusion**

The socio-democratic desires of the Nigerian state is to attach the citizens to it and maintain its unity through democratic principles. Commendably, education has not only been recognised but employed as a means to this end. However, its attention is so much focused on the formal aspect of education, thereby neglecting informal education; whose major components are the pre-colonial Nigerian realities that reflect in the people's political culture, and consequently, their orientation towards the state. Apparently, this is at the detriment of the state, as citizens have displayed disparaging characters towards the state. The only salvific solution is to create a national ideology, from the point of convergence of these pre-Nigerian realities, which will pedal all social activities within the country.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the positions articulated on this paper, the following are hereby recommended:

- 1) A re-packaged national orientation effort, with the point of convergence of all polities that make-up the Nigerian State at its centrepiece, should be immediately embarked on.
- 2) This effort should be pedalled with the employment of key players of informal education and social life such as faith-based organisations, community-based organisations and civil societies.
- 3) The services of the indigenous-language media should also be leveraged in this repackaged national orientation effort.

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