

# Political Entrepreneurization and the Challenges of Institutionalizing Democracy: The Nigerian Experience

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**Abstract:** - The underlying literary endeavor set out to investigate the existence of a plausible theoretical interplay between political entrepreneurization and the challenges of democratic institutionalization (consolidation). Hinging on the pedestals of the elite theory the study claims the persistence of career politicians and their do or die political ideology has grievous implications for institutionalizing democracy in Nigeria. The monopolization of political authority by a selected crop of permanent political class has largely undermined the capacity of democratic institutions to effectively carry out their functions without interference. In lieu, the study proposes the urgent need for constitutional overhaul, as the 1999 constitution as amended is near obsolete considering it was borrowed from the colonial powers upon independence. Hence, it particularly remains unsuccessful in its bid to strengthen institutions of liberal democracy. Furthermore, the study also suggest the need for a fiscal driven federalism, as this it thought will not only further accountability and responsiveness but will also bring governance closer to the majority as opposed to what is currently in play.

**Keywords:** Political Entrepreneurs, Elite Politics, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation and Personalist Regimes.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The wave of democratic transitions that swept the African continent in the 1990s did not only presuppose the inevitable decline of authoritarianism and personalist regimes, it also ushered in the burgeoning prospects of regular multi-party elections across the continent. Amongst other outcomes; the wave reaffirms the place of democracy or at the least its properties as the most desirable institution of governance in the contemporary world. Albeit it's numerous challenges, liberal democracy or its embodiment commands far reaching social acceptance as compared to other forms of government. Accordingly, Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 and preceding transitions spreading over two decades cements its place as Africa's most populous democracy. Weighing on the argument Cyril (2008, p. 8) suggests democracy in Africa has become the only game in town, with states, non-state and regional actors devoting a lot of resources and energy harnessed towards ordaining and preserving it. Substantively, the intervention by the African in the political crises in Guinea Bissau, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Zimbabwe and most recently The Gambia in a bid to ensure that democracy is preserved in these countries.

As laudable as this feat, democracy in Nigeria is not without its challenges and ineffacies. In amongst others facades democracy serves as an umbrella for regimes without any genuine commitment either to it or its pristine, values or content. While it might have brought about relative political opening in Nigeria, the fragility of its sustenance and practice remains particularly evident as the outcome of the underlying openings are shrouded in uncertainty. Of the numerous challenges bewildering democracy, the study sets out to explore the interplay between widespread careerization of politics by political entrepreneur and the prospect of institutionalizing democracy in the fourth republic.

In his seminal publication *Politik als Beruf*, Max Weber focused on the specificities of politics, a domain in which political entrepreneurs strive for power either as a means to achieve certain objectives, ideal or egoistic, or merely as power for power's sake, this he claims is to bask in the prestige that accompanies power Weber (1959, p.113). In abstract terms an entrepreneur is someone who controls the means of production, in the political realm however it denotes persons or group who control state apparatus. In locating an entrepreneur within the context of power, this study concludes it to mean individuals who seek power for egoistic and self-seeking reason. The average political entrepreneur cares a lot less about providing public goods or services or representing the interest of their constituents, rather he or she is preoccupied with the need to remain in power regardless. This assumption is buttressed by Ibrahim (2014, p. 272) who claims in Plato's Academy, Aristotle opines that man by nature is a political animal. Furthermore, the likes of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau in their accounts of social contract hold that men are moved to action not by intellect or reasoning, but by appetite, desire and passion. In a seeming display of power drunkenness, the then President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007 desperately attempted to induce the legislature into amending constitutional provisions on presidential term limit to enable him run for a third term in office. Like the then president, political entrepreneurs are more than willing to go the any length to remain in the corridors of power. Relatedly, Lynch & Crawford (2011) observed that setbacks trail African democracies. They highlighted seven areas of progress and setbacks in African democracy as follows:

Increasingly illegitimate, but ongoing military intervention; regular elections and occasional transfers of power, but realities of democratic rollback and hybrid regimes; democratic institutionalization but ongoing presidentialism and endemic corruption; institutionalization of political parties, but widespread ethnic voting and the rise in exclusionary (and often violent) politics of belonging; increasingly dense civil societies but local realities of incivility, violence and insecurity; new political freedoms and economic growth, but extensive political controls and uneven development; and the donor community's mixed commitment to, and at times perverse impact on democratic promotion (Lynch & Crawford, 2011:275).

Against the perennial inefficacies and uncertainties associated with the practice of democracy in Nigeria, the ongoing literary endeavor set out to examine the implications of entrepreneurization of politics on the probability of institutionalizing democracy.

## II. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

A year short of two decades, democracy as practiced in Nigeria has largely failed in its numerous fronts, from growing inequality gap, higher poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and poor health and social infrastructures. Resultantly, the average Nigerian feel estranged and out of place in the areas of political representation and good governance. The average political entrepreneur is preoccupied with building a career out of politics, amassing wealth and tirelessly working for re-election as opposed to public service. The present crop of permanent political class in Nigeria has arguably morphed into political entrepreneurs in their numerous bids to get and keep power for egoistic and self-seeking cause.

James (2010) in a similar argument claims present crops of political elites in Nigeria have incessantly validated their lack of interest in institutionalizing democracy; rather they concern themselves with primitive accumulation of wealth and preservation of political power. The tendency of the average post-colonial state to prioritize the act of protecting integrity of the state and seat of power, against growth, development, inclusion and representation has arguably deepened instances of political entrepreneurization.

## III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section aims as complement the introductory prologue of the on-going literary endeavor by operationalizing the concepts of entrepreneur, democracy and democratization as they are applied in this context. This will not only aid in a systematic structuring of the arguments put forth but will also define the under listed concepts as conceived and applied within the context of this research.

### *Political Entrepreneur*

In Nigeria's political landscape entrepreneurs and their teeming followership fight for control and access to position of power, societal prominence and resources amongst other pros that comes with occupying high profile political office. For McCaffrey and Salerno (2011) the entrepreneur is first and foremost an owner, particularly of means of production. An actor who exerts decisive control over resources may be said to own them in the economic context, hence, birthing the need to explore the inherency of economic ownership in the business of governance. Should we accept that governments are entities with a comparative advantage in violence, extending over a geographical area whose boundaries are determined by its power to tax constituents North (1981).

Resultantly, within the state apparatus there are individuals who exercise unprecedented control, making them owners or custodians of a sort. In furtherance, all resources accrued the state must in the end be under the direction of some individual or group. In most cases the executive and legislative tiers of the state (peculiar to democracy) normally determine who exactly the ultimate resource owner(s) is (are).

### *Democracy*

Arguably the chattels of democracy can only be arrived at preceding a sufficient and thorough elucidation of the concept of democracy itself. The difficulty associated with universalizing the concept has created opportunities for non-democrats to hide under the guise of democracy to further self-seeking interests. Perhaps the foremost attempt could be to define the concept based on certain features of specific countries commonly conceived as democracies. By doing so, we may fail to capture the contextual dynamics of democracy as practiced in specific states. Against this backdrop, a general definition of democracy will be adopted based on the core values of individualism, representation, responsiveness, accountability, transparency, freedom of association and adherence to the rule of law.

Accordingly, Elaigwu (2015, p. 214) lists some salient physiognomies of democracy to comprise; authority, rule of law, legitimacy, choice and accountability. Dahl (1971) places more emphasis on contestation and participation. Ibagere and Omoera (2010) assert a definite feature of a democratic system is the supremacy of national or common interest, which must all times, supersedes individual or group interest. For Yakubu and Maigari (2018) democracy as a form of government derives its mandate from the outcome of a free electoral process, and puts the interest of all above any in the course of discharging its statutory functions.

### *Democratic Consolidation*

Although consolidation is a contested notion, it can be understood as the process by which democracy becomes the only game in town, a development that cannot be easily reversed (Przeworski 1991: 26). In Africa, this describes only a handful of countries.

Despite the fact that there are emerging democracies in Africa, it is subtly worrying to assess its consolidation. The fallacy of electoralism ascribed to countries that hold elections describes their becoming democratic yet consolidation is beyond that. This could be easily looked as electoral democracy and such democracy is in form and not in substance. Democratic consolidation portrays how secured the democracy is and if missing features are being supplied.

Consolidation of democracy is the certainty by all political actors that democracy is the only option to attain power (Linz, 1990: 156). Here, the attitude of political actors is viewed as the determining factor on which consolidation is assessed and built upon. But for Mainwaring (1992), institutionalization is another invaluable factor in the equation that determines democratic consolidation beside the role of political actors. As such, the level and degree of which determines how consolidated the democracy is. Opining democratic consolidation, as 'the only game in town' rises some significant questions; who calls that shot, is it the citizens or the elites in the society or is it rather a combination of the two? If for instance, it is the elites among the common citizens then it is contrary to what Bratton and Mattes (1999) opined. Either way, the answer determines whether citizens are reduced to mere spectators else the system is "democratic elitism" in which citizens' participation is not adequately involved.

If we consider constitutionalism as an indispensable factor in democratization as to gauge consolidation of democracy, then we may as well share Mattes and Bratton's condition for democratic consolidation. The duo maintained that democracy is a system of rules and procedures on a platform that affords and enables parties to engage and compete in gaining power through elections, carried out freely and fairly by free and equal people to make collective and binding decisions. Democratic consolidation hence requires such system to flourish into permanent, consistent and autonomous institutions ruled by fair regulations.

On the other hand, Gunther (1995) and others took a different stand, to them, there must be some attributes to describe consolidation of democracy other than focusing on the political actors; elites or citizens and institutionalization. To them, alternation in power between former rivals; continued stability in times of economic hardship; successful defeat and punishment of a handful of strategically placed rebels' stability in the face of a 'radical restructuring of the system'; and the absence of politically significant anti-system parties or movements are the yardsticks to measure consolidation.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elites are defined as "persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially", or alternatively, "all those persons capable, if they wish, of making substantial

political trouble for high officials... without being promptly repressed" (Cammack, 1990, p. 416).

As Marcus (1983, p. 25) points out, elite theory has the great advantage of being the only macro-theory in political sociology that operates on a "small-group, personal level of conceptualization", focusing on small numbers of people who can plausibly be viewed as sources of political continuity and change, who possess some important degree of internal organization, and who can often be described in considerable detail (Marcus, 1983. p. 25).

The concentration and rotation of state power among a selected clique of persons within the wider populace is itself not a reflection of inclusive politics as democracy requires. Elites have formed a clique to rotate state power among themselves due to their economic status and social influence, what Hornby (2001) refers to as elite. The concentration and rotation of state power within a clique of persons due to their economic status and social influence have resulted in exclusive and elite politics in states across the sub-Saharan region of Africa. With recourse to the ongoing discussion, elite influence remains particularly dominant and constitutes of the major prerequisites for career politicians. In their bid to cling on to power, either directly or by proxy, political elites or entrepreneurs have overtime cultivated the habit of employing and appropriating state resources for personal gains. Resultantly, this trends affects the probability of consolidating state institutions that may in turn foster or usher in the process of consolidating democracy

Elites rule and politics is, in practice, rule on behalf of the vested interests of elites. It is not a justification of majority principle. As argued by Mosca, Pareto and Plato, elites rule and politics in democracy do not reflect a true protection of majority interest because it is a product of elitism which believes that government ought in principle, always and everywhere, to be confined to elites. Some commentators regard majority principle as self-evidently the appropriate way of determining law or policy of state rather than resulting to personal views selected persons usually known as elites. Legitimate political authority expresses the will of the majority (McLean and McMillan, 2003).

The modern state, for practical purposes, consists of a relatively small number of persons who issue and execute orders which affect a larger number in whom they are themselves include; and it is the essence of its character that, within its allotted territory, all citizens are legally bound by those orders (Laski, 1982). This relative minority has amassed wealth and established networks that make it difficult for state institutions to functions without interference. In lieu, it is of the view of this literary endeavor that, political elites do not only avert democracy as obtained in theory, they have also succeeded in personification of state apparatus, thus like Nigeria, a predominant part of the developing world portray outside signs of democracy while in actual terms they are largely personalistic states.

States in Africa are modern from all aspects and ramifications. Both the smaller and larger number of persons who execute and obey orders are all citizens of the state. Therefore, laws made and obeyed must be in the common interest of the state and of all its citizens but not of few or smaller number who issue and execute such laws. The small and larger number of persons as Laski (1982) posits can be referred to as the elites and non-elite citizens.

In Africa, democracy seems to be drifting away from the normal norm of equal participation. By virtue of economic status and social influence, both the elites and masses can vote but on the other hand, the financial implication attached to standing as candidate for election has excluded the masses from enjoying such rights and made it a sort of politically reserve right of the elites (Baba, 2014). In assent, it can further be espoused that the inherent monopoly of political authority and state resources by a few as abounds in Nigeria remains highly detrimental to the prospect of consolidating Africa's most populous democracy.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Haven attempted to theoretically establish the existence of a negative correlation between the prevalence of career politicians and democratic consolidation in Nigeria; the study proposes the need for a constitutional amendment that will in amongst other factors check the centralization of power in the middle. This is thought to be so because federalism as obtained in Nigeria, grants the centre government overbearing reach throughout the society. The underlying concentration of power has accorded a relative few the avenues to amass wealth and create networks through which institutions are undermined. Furthermore, the need for a fiscal driven federalism cannot be over emphasized as it will not only accord federating units the autonomy to explore resources and carry out indigenous developmental project and policies, it will likely to also foster accountability and promote responsiveness.

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