

## Political Culture and Democracy in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper understudies the importance of political culture and its effects on democracy in Nigeria. The study was achieved by examining the core issues surrounding democracy in Nigeria, such as ethno-religious gimmicks, patrimonialism, and godfatherism, which hindered the realization of core democratic values like liberty, justice, and equality. The qualitative research design is adopted for this study, leveraging secondary sources of data generated from academic Journal articles, periodicals and media accounts. Content and thematic analysis is adopted for effective analysis of this qualitative data. All these were considered based on the objective of the study, which seeks to evaluate the nature and effects of the Nigerian political culture on its democracy. It also aims at establishing the role of political culture in strengthening democracy in Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed that the political culture in Nigeria is characterized by interests, such as tribalism; ethnicity and religiosity, while the democratic process is marred by persistent challenges which include: unlawful use of security personnel by politicians; electoral officials often use their positions to serve personal or political interest. The finding also reveals that corruption; lack of accountability, injustice prevalent during electoral tribunals and poor coordination, together with fragmentation erodes public trust, discourages political participation and support for the implementation of reforms. Based on the results obtained this paper makes recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and the academia.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Political Culture, Ethno-Religion, Corruption. Nigeria.

### Introduction

Nigeria's journey towards democratic development has been a long-time sojourn characterized by complex movement from military rule to civil rule. From 1960 till 1967, the country has experienced and endured military dictatorship which has hitherto hindered the participation of many Nigerians in building the nation. Established since 1960, democracy in Nigeria has been consolidated by civil rule since 1999 based on the federal system of government which encompasses the executive, legislative and the judicial arms. The political culture in Nigeria is a mix of democratic frameworks and challenges. The country (Nigeria) has witness intense crisis of political culture overtime that undermines democratic consolidation and governance. Nigeria's political culture is plagued by impunity, corruption, electoral malpractices, ethnic and religious chauvinism, and a general disregard for the rule of law and democratic institutions. These issues result in frequent abuses of state power, poor leadership, and lack of respect for democratic norms, causing political instability, violence, insecurity, and social fragmentation. Despite the return to civilian rule, Nigeria's democratic governance remains fragile and ineffectual, as the political culture continues to entrench elite interests, weaken institutions, and limit genuine political participation by citizens.

This research is inspired by some fundamental issues surrounding political culture and democracy in Nigeria which include: corruption, election malpractice and ethno-religious gimmicks which have hindered the realization of core democratic values like liberty, justice and equality. Often times, political culture is deeply influenced by ethnicity, religion and ethnic rivalries which affects citizens participation and the quality of democracy in Nigeria. (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). These problems undermine democratic consolidation and encumbered delay in infrastructural development. The objective of the study, which seeks to evaluate the nature and effects of the Nigerian political culture on its democracy. It also aims at establishing the role of political culture in strengthening democracy in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the study seeks to answer the following questions: What role do ethno-religious and elite interests play in shaping Nigeria's political culture and democratic outcomes; how does the existing political culture influence citizens' political participation and attitudes toward democracy in Nigeria; what are the major democratic deficits arising from Nigeria's political culture, and how do these deficits affect the development of Nigeria as a nation?

This paper is relevant in the sense that political actors will find it as a base line for effective running of their agenda and achievement of political will. It provides a framework for correcting the long-standing negative political culture that have been fanned by ethnicity, regionalism and religiosity. While the academic community receives a boost in the quantum of knowledge, the government of Nigeria is also served with strategies for achieving good governance and sustainable democracy through the benefits of this study.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Almond and Verba's Civic Culture theory. (Almond & Verba, 1963). The theory conceptualizes political culture as consisting of three types of orientations. These are: cognitive (knowledge and beliefs about the political system), affective (feelings and attitudes toward political institutions), and evaluative (judgments about the legitimacy and performance of the political system). This approach helps explain how political culture, shapes political behavior and system stability.

### ***Conceptual review and Characteristics of Nigerian Political Culture***

Omitola & Bolaji (2020) defined political culture as a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and which also provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviors in political system. Based on this definition of political culture, the Nigerian political culture can be viewed as

characterised by a number of elements which shaped its nature and informed its operation. Some of these elements are outlined as ethnicity, regionalism, religiosity, corruption and elite domination which have cultured politics and political processes in Nigeria.

*Ethnicity and Regionalism:* Cohan (1974) in Salawu & Hassan, (2011) refer to ethnic group as an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups within the larger society because they share Kingship, religious and linguistic ties. Of these elements of ethnicity shared, Nnoli (1978) opined that the most important or crucial variable in Ethnic identity is language. Nigeria's three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) have distinct political priorities, often leading to political competition and mistrust. This ethnic-based alignment has resulted in a "winner-take-all" mentality and competition for resources, often causing political instability and violence. This national unity of Nigeria is influenced by ethnic and religious divisions resulting in stunted national cohesion, fueling tension, and exclusion.

*Parochialism:* Many Nigerians exhibit low interest in or connection with the political system, resulting in apathy, lack of participation, and minimal sense of belonging. This is attributed to poor governance, disconnection from leadership, and recurring disappointment in public institutions

*Patronage and Corruption:* Political behavior is often influenced by clientelism, patrimonialism, and patronage networks, where loyalty to ethnic or religious leaders secures access to state resources. Corruption becomes pervasive, undermining democratic norms and eroding public trust

*Elite Domination:* Political life is controlled primarily by a small elite, with the wider populace accepting this as the norm, which restricts broad-based political participation and perpetuates social inequality

### **The Overview and Ethno-religious Influence on the Political Culture in Nigeria**

Political culture refers to the collective thoughts, beliefs, philosophies, and orientations that individuals in a society clutch to regarding their political system, involvement, governance, and influence. Omiwole (2023), refer to political culture as a set of beliefs, orientations and options of a citizen towards the form government and his political system. In Nigeria, political culture is shaped by several factors, including ethnicity, religion, colonial history, economic structure, and experiences with military and civilian rule.

In this paper, the political culture in Nigeria will be considered in the following context: its characteristics, its value and belief system. Understanding Political Culture in Nigeria begins with understanding what political culture connotes. Political culture refers to the collective attitudes, values, beliefs, and orientations that individuals in a society

hold regarding their political system, participation, governance, and authority. In Nigeria, political culture is shaped by several factors, including ethnicity, religion, colonial history, economic structure, and experiences with military and civilian rule. The political culture of Nigeria is characterised by a number of issues.

The nature and value system of Nigeria is another characteristic of Nigerian political culture. Its value and belief systems are deeply intertwined with its cultural and historical influences. Nigerian value and belief systems are expressed in one's respect for elders, handwork and strong family ties as well as a deep sense of spirituality. These elements of values and belief systems are often incorporated in both traditional beliefs and religions like Christianity and Islam. The values therefore, shape social interactions and influences attitudes towards political affiliation and activities. Nigeria's diverse environment, from rainforests to savannas, has shaped traditional practices and beliefs related to natural resources. Some communities have strong totemic beliefs associated with animals like the python, which are seen as sacred and integral to their cultural identity. Traditional belief systems often incorporate taboos and restrictions to protect natural resources and promote environmental sustainability. Respect for nature is often rooted in spiritual beliefs about the interconnectedness of humans and the environment. Values in almost every culture in Nigeria requires respect because Nigerians highly value respect for elders, those in positions of authority, and those who have achieved success through hard work and integrity. (Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021). A strong family bonds and the preservation of family name are central to Nigerian culture. Nigerians are known for their generosity and welcoming nature towards guests and visitors, this made us hospitable.

The expression of these value system and belief systems are usually measured by hard work and productivity. This is the ability to provide for oneself and one's family is highly valued and linked to respect and social standing. Another component of the nation's value truthfulness and honesty which are seen as essential for maintaining social harmony and trust. Integrity and professionalism are values emphasized in various aspects of Nigerian life, including business, politics, and social interactions. Patriotism however, is a sense of national unity and a commitment to the common good which are also very crucial to the political culture of Nigeria.

The Belief Systems on the other hand is tied to religion as seen in the spiritual allegiances of Nigerians. These allegiances have over time informed people's affiliations to various political parties and elections in general. Nigeria is a multi-religious nation with a significant Muslim and Christian population, alongside traditional African religions. Like values, belief systems also have difference expressions depending on the choices of the citizens. One of such beliefs is the traditional beliefs which a number of Nigerians adhere to. Traditional belief systems incorporate elements of animism, ancestral worship, and reverence for natural forces.

Spirituality, which has to do with strong sense of spirituality and belief in a higher power is a common thread across different belief systems in Nigeria, and Moral principles which implies social values are often intertwined. They shape interpersonal relationships and social behavior. Further to this, traditional practices and rituals also play a vital role in shaping belief systems and reinforcing cultural identity.

### **Effects of Democratic Deficits from Political Culture and Development in Nigeria**

Democratic consolidation as a prevailing political culture affects democratic participation. For Nigeria, the dominance of patronage, corruption, and ethnic rivalries undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions, hampers effective governance, and obstructs the realization of democratic dividends such as justice, equity, and political stability. A country's political culture directly shapes citizen participation. In Nigeria, widespread political apathy and focus on ethnic interests limit productive engagement in policy processes, making it difficult to hold leaders accountable and push for reforms. The process is based on a culture of violence, rigging and corruption. These practices have weakened the confidence of citizens and broken the faith they once exhibited in Nigerian's democracy. (Jatula, 2019). According to Jatula (2019), "elite privilege and Nigeria's political culture is incompatible with democracy and its institutions free press, independent judiciary." This statement expresses the uncommendable nature of democracy and democratic processes as portrayed by how much deficit the Nigerian democracy has experienced. The deterioration is a function of the faulty political culture nurtured in the state overtime. There is indeed a positive relationship between healthy democracy and national development; implying that a healthy political culture is required to shape people's mind set and societal attitudes towards democracy. Democracy is key in birthing visionary and patriotic leaders who will deliver the dividend of democracy to their citizens. Regrettably, the existing political culture has caused damaging issues such as political violence, social insecurity, and democratic deficits.

### **Influence of Political Culture on Citizens' Political Participation in Nigeria's Democracy**

The loyalty of most Nigerians is mainly tilted in the direction of ethnic affinity and religiosity. To that end, the political participation of the masses tends to favour the opinions of the elites from their ethnic or regional group and religious leaders. Elite domination therefore, has become a political culture in Nigeria in the sense that it manifests a political life controlled primarily by a small group of elites. Unfortunately, this is widely accepted as a norm, which restricts broad-based political participation and perpetuates social inequality.

Sambo et al (2024), observed that Nigeria's political culture since democratization has had a negative effect on voting patterns and electoral outcomes. Arguing that

democratic practices in Nigeria has turned into a bazaar for the highest bidder. (Sambo et al, 2024). This is evidence in the election results released by the Independent Electoral Commission since the return of the civil rule in 1999. The voting pattern has been the north, voting a fellow Northerner than a southerner, then the southerners, have consistently voted for candidates who are indigenous to their regions. The experience is similar in respect to religious affiliation. Nigerians commonly vote along religious beliefs and affinity.

## **Methodology**

Methodology for Qualitative Research on Political Culture and Democracy in Nigeria. It basically provides a robust framework to explore the complex interplay between political culture and democracy in Nigeria through qualitative inquiry.

### **Research Design**

This study will adopt a qualitative research design to deeply understand the political culture and its impact on democracy in Nigeria. The qualitative approach is suitable because it allows exploration of the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that define Nigerian political culture and how these influence democratic processes and governance.

### **Data Collection Method**

Secondary Data: In-depth research of documents including academic publications, newspaper articles, and historical records was done to source for relevant data. Documentary analysis was employed to review relevant literature such as government reports, election observation reports, and other data sourced from secondary sources to contextualize and triangulate findings.

### *Data Analysis:*

Thematic analysis was applied to this qualitative data collected.

Comparing and contrasting views to identify patterns and divergences in democratic experiences across contexts.

## **Findings**

### **The State of Political Culture in Nigeria**

Any country's political culture reflects the impact of its history on the way people think about politics and their society as a whole. In Nigeria's case, the lack of unity and support for the regime and, at times, for the very existence of Nigeria have plagued it since the country gained its independence. What's more, the actions of the elite since 1960 have undoubtedly left the country more alienated and polarized than it was forty years ago. That alienation and polarization, in turn, are reflected in what average people do politically, thus adding yet another strain to an already overloaded system.

In recent times other political culture like mediocrity and cultural cleavages have been identified as recent activities in Nigerian democracy. (Omiwole, 2023). Therefore, the democracy of Nigeria lacks accountability, and is full of injustice prevalent during elections and electoral tribunals.

The state of the political culture of this nation has hitherto been shaped by the cognitive which is the knowledge and beliefs about the political system as well as the affective which depicts feelings and attitudes toward political institutions, as well as the evaluative, connoting judgments about the legitimacy and performance of the political system. (Almon & Verba, 19663). This approach truly explains how the cognitive domain of citizens function and how it influences their understanding and belief system with regards to politics.

### ***The Impact of Political Culture on Democracy***

#### ***i. Mass Political Culture***

As with most third world countries, there have been no systematic studies of Nigerian political culture even though most observers are convinced that it is one of the most important causes of its fluid, unstable politics. Therefore, all we can do here is outline the broad themes that those observers point to. However, that early optimism did not turn into sustained support for any of the country's regimes. If anything, Nigerians have grown more skeptical and cynical about politics and politicians. Part of the problem is that Nigeria is one of the most fragmented countries in the world. As we have seen earlier, the division is largely along overlapping religious and ethnic lines.

The limited evidence available to us suggests that most Nigerians do in some way think of themselves as Nigerians. However, their ethnic identification matters more as a source of pride (e.g., we Igbo) and even more importantly as a source of dislike and division (e.g., you Yoruba). (Myschool.ng, 2019) The three largest groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) have virtually nothing in common politically, socially, or historically. The overwhelming majority of Nigerians only speak their "home" language, and if they learn another, it is invariably English and not one of the other indigenous tongues. The different groups live separately, either in their traditional regions or in ethnic enclaves in the few cities that are ethnically mixed.



Closely paralleling ethnicity is religion. Religion is nowhere near as important as ethnicity in most of the South, where, for instance, Yoruba Muslims tend to act politically as Yorubas more often than as Muslims.

In the north, however, it is hard to disentangle the impact of religion and ethnicity because so much of Hausa-Fulani culture is defined along Islamic lines. Traditional political and religious officials (who are often one and the same) have resisted attempts to "Westernize" the region, often with considerable success. Women have never voted in the North. Similarly, when the federal government sent Igbo women census takers into the region in 1963, it touched off widespread protests (Myschool.ng, 2019). The northern desire to use a separate legal system based on *sharia* or Islamic law has held up the drafting of the constitutions of all three republics.

There is the region itself, which to some degree transcends both religion and ethnicity, in even broader fears the north has about the south and vice versa. As we saw earlier, many northerners are afraid that southern (or modern) cultural values and economic practices will undermine their way of life. Southerners, by contrast, fear that a northern majority could seize power and leave them a permanent and aggrieved minority. Nigeria is by no means the only country divided along these lines; Other countries are even more fragmented, and some, like the Netherlands, have a similar pattern of overlapping cleavages but have avoided the destructive controversies that have plagued Nigerian politics. The problem is that Nigeria is not just fragmented, it is polarized as well. Under the best of circumstances, it is hard for people to reach compromises about these kinds of issues to find a way, for instance, to use the *sharia* in some parts of a country but not in others, without antagonizing people. In Nigeria, the politicians who have fanned the flames of ethnic, religious, and regional hatred also failed to address the country's real social and economic shortcomings. Therefore, it was just a matter of time until the violence that had been primarily orchestrated by the elites started breaking out spontaneously among an increasingly embittered public.

The importance of this alienation has been magnified by other aspects of Nigerian political culture, not the least of which has been the failure of class issues to take root. Most Nigerians live in abject poverty; in fact, poverty is one of the few things most Nigerians share. Moreover, the gap between rich and poor has grown dramatically, in particular as the corrupt political elite has siphoned off public funds to support its lavish life-style. Had economic issues become more important in defining basic values and assumptions about politics, Nigeria might have found itself in a better position. Reactions against that common poverty might have cut across ethnic, religious, and regional lines. This is clear as described by the properties of the Civic Culture theory which argued that the feelings (affective) and judgement of the citizens concerning political affairs go a long way in shaping their political culture and due participation.



In a 1988 study of politics in rural Nigeria, William Miles showed that the traditional distinction between nobles and commoners has been carried over into the politics of modern Nigeria. Virtually everyone seems to accept the hierarchical relationships in which clients defer to their patrons when it comes to politics or advice in general.

In addition, it is in the countryside where illiteracy remains the highest. Not surprisingly, local studies have shown that most rural residents have at most a fuzzy idea of what national political processes and issues are all about. For instance, on the morning after the 1983 coup, Nigerian radio began playing western classical music, which residents in one typical village assume is military music because it is only played before the announcement of a coup or some other ominous event! When the announcement itself was made, it was done in English, which very few people in the countryside understand. Only two days later was it broadcast in Hausa. Perhaps because of their isolation, rural residents rarely get deeply involved in national politics on their own. Rather, they tend either to follow the initiatives of their local patrons or be swayed by the outsiders who appear during crises or election campaigns.

The booming cities are a different story altogether. There, observers find highly politicized people who seem willing to take a stand on almost any issue at almost any time. They also find large numbers of highly dissatisfied people, alienated from a government that cannot provide jobs or housing or health care.

## *ii. Elite Culture*

In every country, elites think and act differently from the masses. In few places, however, are the differences as pronounced and as politically important as they are in Nigeria.

The political and economic elite have been what amounts to a bourgeois class if not quite in the way Marx anticipated. Its wealth stems from its control of the state. This has given rise to a category of political and bureaucratic officials popularly known as *lootocrats* who have used their positions for tremendous personal gain and who, like the European bourgeoisie Marx did write about, have been able to protect their wealth and power under civilian and military rule alike. In the high-stakes game of Nigerian politics, defeat cut one out of the process in which wealth was accumulated and distributed.

Consequently, with but a few exceptions, those in Nigerian elite were willing to violate the rules of democratic game under the first two republics and overstep normal bounds of authority when the military was in power. They accurately saw that the electoral stakes were very high and demonstrated what Larry Diamond calls "a shallow disposition to tolerate opposition when they had the power to discourage and repress it." That greed and the willingness to subvert the democratic process that went along with it

were shared by the elite as a whole and were not the province of any particular ethnic, religious, or regional group. On the other hand, the elites were quick to use ethnic, religious, and regional appeals because those were the ones, they could most effectively use to mobilize their largely rural clients.

### *iii. Non-Electoral Participation*

If we looked at culture alone, it would be tempting to conclude that Nigeria is again a disastrous civil war or revolution waiting to happen. Neither seems imminent in Nigeria today, ironically, precisely because the long history of military rule has neither provided many outlets for protesting participation nor created widespread expectations that mass involvement of any sort can accomplish much. Thus, while there have been episodes of spontaneous, violent protest as recently as 1998, they have been few and far between in comparison with India or many other ethnically divided societies.

Students of democracy argue that it can thrive only if there are ample guarantees and opportunities for people to express themselves politically either as individuals or as part of groups. Here, Nigeria has a mixed record on at least two counts. First, civil liberties of all sorts have frequently been honored in the breach even under the first two republics. As we saw earlier, civilian politicians were all too willing to implement provisions for emergency rule and bully their opponents by denying them the effective right to vote or express their opinions. At times, especially under Babangida and Abacha, their opponents were arbitrarily arrested or worse.

The spontaneous and often violent protests that have wracked Nigeria have occurred primarily in the cities, especially in the former capital, Lagos. There they have often been dramatic and even violent. In the early 1990s, rioters burned cars, looted stores, and trashed government offices in Lagos to protest against the government's acceptance of an IMF-imposed austerity program to be discussed in the policy section below. In urban areas, we also find a wide variety of groups representing doctors, lawyers, students, and more. Informal groups of business leaders or ethnic associations seem to be far more influential in large part because they can work more effectively within the patron-client networks that still largely dominate Nigerian politics.

There have also been a number of groups that have pushed for legal and constitutional reform, especially when military rule began to weaken. Thus, today's **People's Democratic Party (PDP)** is an outgrowth of the earlier People's Democratic Movement which was founded by General Shehu Yar'Adua and other former officials who had been imprisoned under Babangida (Yar'Adua died in prison in 1996). Similarly, the 63 human rights organizations that made up the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) brought to light a number of violations of the electoral law during the 1999 legislative and presidential campaign.

#### *iv. Political Parties and Elections*

Political parties and competitive elections are accorded a privileged place in analyses of democracy. On the one hand, their very existence is part of the definition of liberal democracy itself. On the other, how they operate in practice goes a long way in determining whether or not democracy will endure. Earlier, we saw that there were a number of highly active political parties before independence and then during the First and Second republics. The military regime then created two new parties as part of the transition to a third republic, which ended with the ill-fated presidential election of 1993. Afterward, the Abacha government banned all partisan activity, a ban that remained in effect as what turned out to be sham consultations on a new constitution began. Indeed, it was only after Abacha's death in June 1998 that the government authorized the creation of new political parties. Unlike the parties created along with the second republic, the parties that sprang to life in late 1998 had little in common with earlier institutions. Obasanjo and others who had come to oppose the Abacha government in the mid-1990s (though only after many of them had been sent to prison) formed the People's Democratic Party. There are widely believed rumors, however, that the PDP has close ties to the military, especially to supporters of former President Babangida who is said to have donated as much as \$18 million to the party's coffers. The smaller **All People's Party (APP)** is led by politicians who were close to Abacha. Only the small **Alliance for Democracy (AD)** had anything approaching serious democratic credentials, since it was led by people who had been close to Abiola. What's more, in all the articles written on the 1999 elections, the parties' goals and ideologies are rarely stated, since they hardly featured in the campaign.

The elections largely lived up to the mixed expectations of most observers.

On the one hand, Obasanjo and the PDP did about as well as expected. The party handily won the legislative elections totaling just under 60 percent of the vote and the seats for both houses. Their poor showing in the legislative elections prompted the AD and APP to run a single candidate, Ole Falae, in the presidential election. Obasanjo, however, did slightly better than his party had in that two-way race, winning nearly 63 percent of the vote, though he ran poorly in his native Yoruba-dominated west.

#### **Challenges of Political Culture in Nigeria**

Patrimonialism, godfatherism and winner-takes-all politics, which has hindered the realization of core democratic values like liberty, justice and equality, leading to crises and poor governance outcomes and by examining the persistent challenges such as

corruption, ethno-religious divisions, electoral violence, and elite manipulation undermining democratic consolidation.

### **1. Civic engagement and Political Education**

Educating citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and democratic principles is essential. Political education is fundamental, yet scarcely available in Nigeria. This lack of political awareness often leads to political apathy. Cheeseman et. al (2024), in their study: how to strengthen democratic resilience, outlined five lessons for democratic renewal.

### **2. Addressing corruption**

Corruption has been a major cankerworm in many industries in Nigeria. Its trace and impact in Nigerian democracy is felt over the years. The election of candidates who usually emerge as flag bearers of the various political parties in the country has over time been marred by malpractices that are elements of corruption. A typical example of

The prevalent culture of corruption, political godfatherism and electoral manipulation inhibits democratic consolidation. A patriotic renewal and democratic resilience are antagonistic to this practice. Democratic resilience is seen as processes through which democracy will stand as a way out of corruption and other ill political and democratic practices. The concept ‘democratic resilience’ involves maintaining the integrity of democratic governance, including the protection of civil liberties, the rule of law, free and fair elections, and political pluralism. (Cheese et al, 2024).

### **3. Dealing with political opportunism**

The practice of exploiting situations to gain and or maintain political power, influence and support often at the expense of ethical principles and ideological consistency. It is usually characterized by seizing every opportunity, compromising ideas or values to achieve short-term gains.

### **4. Reforming Political Parties and Process**

Reforming political parties and the political process is a critical aspect of improving democratic governance and ensuring that political systems are more inclusive, transparent, and accountable. Here are key elements and principles involved in such reforms:

Democratizing	Political	Parties
Political parties should be genuinely democratic internally. This includes promoting party loyalty, facilitating internal party democracy, and ensuring transparency in party operations and financing. Reforms aim to reduce the influence of vested interests and		

encourage broader participation from all sectors of society, including marginalized groups such as women, youth, indigenous peoples, and minorities.

### **The Impact of Nigerian Political Culture on Democracy**

It is argued that Nigerian political culture is influenced by belief, attitudes and values. Relating the impact of political culture on democracy, (Omiwole, 2023) posit that key aspects of Nigerian political culture influenced democracy when he argued that Nigeria is practicing a hybrid democracy. These irregularities hinder elections from being free and fair as expected. Jatula (2019), posits that culture disrupts the efforts of national unity and diversity.

He (Jatula,2019), further argued that the Nigeria's political culture creates a winner-take-all approach. (Jatula, 2019). For Nigeria, the dominance of patronage, corruption, and ethnic rivalries undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions, hampers effective governance, and obstructs the realization of democratic dividends such as justice, equity, and political stability

A country's political culture directly shapes citizen participation. In Nigeria, widespread political apathy and focus on ethnic interests limit productive engagement in policy processes, making it difficult to hold leaders accountable and push for reforms. The Nigerian quest for democratic consolidation has, in recent times been facing serious challenge owing to the spate of inconclusive elections and the influence of ethnic and religious divisions has stunted national cohesion, fueling tension, exclusion, and at times violence. (Abah and Nwokwu, 2016).

Based on the nature of the political culture in Nigeria, the relationship that exists between the culture and democracy is critical. Looking at the case study of the Plateau State gubernatorial election of 2015, the struggle began in 2014 when the incumbent Governor thought it best to support a man from the northern senatorial zone to become the new governor in the 2015 elections. The matter didn't sit well with other party members and most *Plateaunians*, especially those who felt it was their turn to produce the state's apex leader from their ethnic group and region. Consequent to this and issues of this sort, which are the prevailing ethno-religious challenges, the political culture undermines democratic values and processes. choice of an inclusive political culture should begin from ethnic levels and extend to determine nationally valued political culture, articulated and chosen in a joint decision of the ethnic groups through their representatives. (Anzu & Onyeukwu, 2022).

Electoral reforms focus on creating a strong, independent, and effective electoral management body (EMB) with substantial autonomy. This helps to ensure fair, transparent, and credible elections. Key recommendations often include clear regulations

on campaign financing, establishing commissions for party registration and regulation, electoral offenses commissions for addressing malpractice, and centers for democratic studies to educate the populace and political actors. Reforming Political Finance. Sound regulation of political party financing is essential to avoid dominance by any single party and to maintain a level playing field. This includes clear definitions of permissible campaign activities, strict control of contributions (both private and public), reporting requirements, and oversight by an independent body to audit political parties' financial activities. Promoting Participation and inclusion Reforms aim to widen the opportunities for citizen participation in political processes, enhancing equality, diversity, and justice. This means tackling inequality and exclusion by including historically marginalized groups and ensuring proportional representation, gender equity, and transparency in the political process.

Political reform extends beyond rules to encompass changing the political culture for better governance. It addresses how power is exercised and seeks to enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust. Citizens' ability to revoke mandates and increased monitoring of political processes are parts of this reform. This democratic resilience' involves maintaining the integrity of democratic governance, including the protection of civil liberties, the rule of law, free and fair elections, and political pluralism. view is in line with the contributions of Cheesman et al (2024), when they posit that democratic resilience' involves maintaining the integrity of democratic governance. They belief protection of civil liberties, the rule of law, free and fair elections, and political pluralism can restore and maintain the values of democracy thereby, leading to democratic resilience.

Experiences from countries like Nigeria, Bolivia, Ghana, South Africa, and others have shown that reform processes are complex and require commitment from political elites, civil society, and the public. Reforms provide frameworks for peace building, reconciliation, and development but must be coupled with changes in attitudes and behaviors to succeed.

In essence, reforming political parties and processes involves strengthening institutions, regulating financing, democratizing internal party mechanisms, broadening political participation, and fostering a culture of accountability and transparency. This comprehensive approach is necessary for sustaining democracy, improving governance, and ensuring that elections reflect the true will of the people. (Cheesman et al 2024) also advocated for reforms, civic education and empowerment as ways of strengthening democratic resilience.

This summary draws on principles and practical examples from constitutional reform processes, electoral reform committees, and political finance regulation efforts globally.

The literature in this study clearly reveal that the political culture in Nigeria is characterized by interests, such as tribalism; ethnicity and religiosity. As rightly pointed out by Omiwole (2023), tribalism and ethnicity has taken the order of the day in determining who secures the mandate of an election within a region. Another cankerworm is that a typical political Lords in Nigeria has become a master in imposing his puppet as flag bearers of a parties to represent the people of his constituents or other constituents. Such individuals are instituted as flag bearers by these political elites irrespective of their capabilities, abilities and ethical standing. Their drive is basically to the achieve their personal interest. The endorsed candidates are meant to serve their selfish interest irrespective of his patriotism and capacity to lead the people.

The complexity of the multi-lingua in the country is another issue related to the political culture challenging the democratic process in Nigeria. The process is therefore marred by persistent challenge of getting the right candidate for leadership positions. Other factors revolve around unlawful use of security personnel by politicians. The electoral officials often use their positions to serve personal or political interest as against transparency and justice which are tools that enhances the emergence of good leaders.

Similarly, this study reveals negative projections associated with Nigeria's democracy due to political cultures like corruption; lack of accountability, injustice which are prevalent during electoral tribunals and poor coordination. Together with these, fragmentation erodes public trust, discourages political participation and support for the implementation of reforms.

Research shows that Nigeria's undemocratic political culture, marked by political opportunism and manipulation of electoral processes, hinders credible elections and undermines democratic consolidation. A thriving democratic culture is necessary to institutionalize democratic norms and values, ensuring popular governance and preventing authoritarian relapse.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Strengthening institutions is a critical and multifaceted process aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, accountability, transparency, and resilience of public institutions and governance systems. This effort is essential for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), promoting peace, justice, and inclusive governance, and ensuring efficient public service delivery. Improving Governance and Public Sector Performance



Developing clear and coherent national policies with effective coordination mechanisms between federal, state, and local governments to ensure policy coherence and implementation.

Enhancing public sector appointment processes, performance management systems, and tenure security to foster accountability and reduce corruption.

Government should emphasize merit-based appointments the Independent National Electoral Commission with operational autonomy and stick to the tenures for key public sector leadership positions. They should not be interfered with on the ground of political difference as it is the practice in recent times.

Practitioners should encourage and practice transparency and accountability and increasingly.

The paper recommends that Nigerian government should expand digitalization and e-government initiatives to improve efficiency, reduce corruption, and accelerate citizen engagement.

The study requires government agencies to publish service standards, performance indicators, budget reports, and audited financial statements to enhance transparency.

Another viable recommendation is the establishment of feedback mechanism for citizens to channel their grievances.

Considering the legal stand of democracy, this research recommends that institutional reform as a long-term challenge requiring strong political leadership, continuous adaptation to demographic changes, emerging technologies, and public demands for better service delivery.

The study recommends re-establishing democratic values which are essential for strengthening and sustaining democracy. Democratic resilience can be strengthened by creating effective institutions that support checks and balances, judicial independence, media freedom, and civic mobilization. The academic community can assure that these reforms are captured in schools' curriculum to educate learners on the pathway to imbibing a positive political culture in Nigeria. Core democratic values such as freedom, equality, justice, accountability, transparency, political tolerance, and human rights are essential in strengthening democracy in Nigeria. Democratic participation goes include public debates, peaceful protests, and active civil society engagement in addition to election.

The education and civic engagement of youths are also recommended because they promote democratic values which is vital for nation-building and sustaining democracy.

Conclusively, the impact of political culture on democratic in Nigeria requires the re-establishment of democratic values. To achieve this therefore, a comprehensive approach that includes institutional reforms and the promotion of core democratic principles is essential. Practitioners should strategically organize townhall meetings in order to deliberate and arrive at a workable approach of building a healthy political culture across religious and ethnic groups. The prevailing political culture as argued affects democratic consolidation. Tackling these cultural challenges is vital for boosting democratic dividends and socio-economic advancement in Nigeria. These recommendations will lead to a reformed political culture that positively impacts democracy in Nigeria.

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