

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN THE NIGERIAN STATE: THE HUMAN CAPITAL DIMENSION

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Abstract

Democracy as a system of government is critically framed on both hope and purposeful action. In other words, the concept of democracy is essentially predicated on a publicly manifestable power of the people to make things happen. The concept is thus hooked to the hope that the power of the people would make things happen. Furthermore, the power of the people, which is embedded in democracy, also entails an allusion to the concept of human capital. Hence, when this power is impaired, democracy is devoid of deep content and the position of human capital becomes questionable. In this study, we have focused on the Nigerian state to examine the relationships among these variables. We have interrogated the nature of the relationship between the depth of democracy in the Nigerian state and the national human capital position. We found a weak linkage. We have consequently highlighted the role of education in human capital formation. The study recommends that as the educational system in any troubled democracy, aims at producing professionals in engineering, medicine, accountancy and different societal areas, it must as an imperative also, aim at the formation of human capital, for political purposes in generic terms and in particularities, for the deepening of the democratic processes in the given problematic country.

Keywords: Democracy, Nigerian State, Human Capital, Dimension

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Democracy as a system of government is actually framed on both hope and purposeful action. But the democratic system of government in Nigeria appears like an amalgam of hopes and tragedies, framed on a mirage, with its trajectories dutifully orchestrated on perpetual bases, by pathologically perfidious political elites. In contrast to the elite, the subaltern component of the Nigerian state only survives on democratic expectations. Democracy should be much more than this. We highlight that colonial Nigeria obtained independence from Great Britain in October 1960. However, by January 1966, some impatient military idealists concluded that the bloody civilians in power in Nigeria were not living up to the new nation's democratic expectations. They therefore decided to stage a highly bloody coup, to teach the civilian rascals a lesson or two. What subsequently followed were cataclysms and tragedies, bloody coups and their equivalent counter coups, a civil war (fought between 1967 and 1970), games of musical chairs, political subterfuge (occasioning intermittent experimentations in civilian governance), until 1999 when the military (perhaps) finally retreated to the barracks. It became democracy again in Nigeria. Hence, from May 29, 1999 to May 29, 2015,

the political party in power in Nigeria was the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Earlier in the year, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Muhammadu Buhari, had defeated the sitting Nigerian President, PDP's Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, in the 2015 Presidential Election. The opportunity of a different political party coming into office in the country has led to the in-depth investigation of the activities of some corrupt officials of the previous administration [1, 2, 3, 4]. The corruption expositions have further led to the research instinct of examining the role of such officials in the democracy configurations of their states. It calls to mind, the issue of human capital.

The central research question of this study therefore is as follows. What is the nature of the relationship between the depth of democracy in the Nigerian state and the national human capital position? Invariably, the general objective of the study is to examine the human capital dimension to the deepening of democracy in Nigeria. The specific objectives are (i) to examine the nature of the relationship between the depth of democracy in Nigeria and the national human capital position and (ii) determine how human capital formation may contribute to the deepening of democracy in this country. Indeed, a major significance of the study is in its framing of the human capital and democracy variables. In other words, the theorization of human capital have mainly been undertaken in the fields of economics, education, business studies, corporate strategic planning and allied subject compartmentalizations and not usually in political explications. To hypothesize on democracy and human capital therefore implies some degree of novelty. In the second place, democracy and its trajectories have truly remained among the globally critical issues of social science investigation. Hence, the performance of democracy anywhere, usually attracts universal academic and empirical interests. In the Nigerian case, the character of democracy may elicit a large measure of such international attention. The country's current population-estimates are in excess of 181 million people [5]. It is also the most populous country in Africa and invariably, the most populated black nation on the planet. Furthermore, Nigeria is currently the seventh most populous country in the world, with the forecast of becoming by 2050, the fourth most populous country in the global ranking [6]. Essentially, all of this possesses critical implications for the global course of democracy and the welfare of large segments of humanity. They further add to the significance of this study.

2.0. THE CONCEPT OF DEEPENING DEMOCRACY EXPLAINED

Democracy is a complex concept. This complexity however, is not usually self-evident. This is principally because, we all lay a certain claim or the other to knowing the meaning of democracy. Consequently, several generations of scholars (and lay writers alike) have attempted to conceptualize democracy. In these processes, the connotation of majority rule is easily ascribed to the notion of democracy. However, according to Ober [7], the original meaning of democracy is the capacity to do things, not majority rule. In other words, the concept of democracy is predicated on a publicly manifestable power of the people to make things happen [8]. It is the majoritarian interpretation of democracy (in the emerging brands of the democratic practice as in Nigeria), which leads to certain democratically detractive issues as interethnic struggles. Actually, the ethnic character of the struggle for power is among the most critical issues that tend to give democracy in Nigeria, a hollow colouration. It gave the then impatient military minds in the country the impetus to topple the first post-independence civilian government in the Nigerian nation.

Consequently, interethnic cataclysms leave the basic issues of human welfare unaddressed as national politics remains ethnicized. Then, besides the ethnicization of national politics, the next strong pretext under which the military replaced the post-independence politicians in Nigeria was that the bloody civilians were humongously corrupt. However, the scale of political banditry that has been witnessed in Nigeria ever since, indicates that the pristine Nigerian politicians were classifiable as genuine patriots. But through the intervention of the military, the nation chose not to place hope on the pioneers and in the process, the national political hope was placed on military nothingness. At the end of the day, the military as a class, led the bewildered nation to nowhere in

particular. The military's governance template typified a different version of the amalgamated hopes, contradictions and tragedies that have characterized generic governance in this country. And where these precarious conditions persist in an ostensible democratic setting, then the democratic offering is not deep enough. Hence, in its elementary connotations, democracy is a government of the people and in its idealistic conceptualization; it is a government by the people. Indubitably, however, democracy is conceived for the benefit of all the people, as different from the satisfaction of the greed and materialism of only the people in government. Hence, such greed and perfidies, interethnic melees and public-sector banditry, present democracy as an unbecoming phenomenon. Under such settings, there is lack of depth in democracy. The deepening of democracy therefore entails the self-evident portrayal of its people-centeredness and the contradiction of its unflattering designs.

2.0. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF HUMAN CAPITAL

Strictly (in the historical context), human capital theorizing did not take place in mainstream political studies. However, Adam Smith, the progenitor of human capital thinking (not necessarily human capital theory) was also an indisputable political scientist, even where the subject matter of economics has almost appropriated his prodigious erudition and seminal scholarship. Actually, the magnum opus of Adam Smith [9] was a political economy exposition. In addition, two highly influential contributions in the evolution of the human capital theory [10, 11] were published in the *Journal of Political Economy* [12]. Consequently, human capital issues may fall within the domain of politics and public administration. Hence, in the specific context of democracy, we argue that devoid of its political economy connotations, democracy as a concept would become some ordinary literature and in the empirical axis, it would incidentally also tilt towards obfuscating abstractions. We therefore posit that the concept of human capital and the process of deepening democracy may be related. The nature of their relationship is of central concern to this study.

Human capital has been described as the stock of skills that the labour force possesses [12]. We ascribe this to the labour force of democracy. Human capital has been conceived also as the stock of productive skills, talents, health and expertise of the labor force [12]. We specifically in this regard, identify mental health as a human capital component. We posit that mental imbalance may lead to incidents of kleptocracy, an undesirable characteristic of any democracy. Indeed, human capital refers to the abilities and skills of human resources [13] and the human capital content is critical to the evident success of all democracies. Being a capital factor, it is ideally created. It is not a phenomenon that is only hoped for but an imperative of democratic development, which is engendered by strategic action or series of purposeful actions. This invariably leads to the notion of human capital formation, which essentially cannot be hoisted on a polity from the top.

3.0. BUILDING THE EMPIRICAL NEXUS

Curiously, democracy has become a beggar-thy-neighbor enterprise in Nigeria, with the public treasury being the source of the dubious diadem over which an insatiable elite, attempt to outdo each other. But for a nation-state to run her democracy-enterprise on generally profitable bases, she must invest in human capital formation. Conceptually, human capital formation is distinct from human capital development. In human capital formation, the subsisting slate is a tabula rasa. And this is the unfortunate narrative of democracy in Nigeria. Human capital development on the other hand is suggestive of the existence of a human capital developmental seed, which of course is widely known to be non-existent in the current self-seeking caricature that is denoted as democracy in Nigeria. Indeed, evident democratic profitability on national basis is not obtained on trial-and-error designs. Its human capital content, must not only be noted for productive skills, talents, health (mental health) and expertise but the human capital position will also drive the ethical imperatives of such democracy.

Indeed, there is a grand developmental contradiction embedded in democracy in Nigeria, when compared with the previous military regimes in the country. It follows in this regard. The military regimes definitely trampled upon the citizens' rights of partisan political association but in comparative terms, they deployed the resources of the nation in the execution of capital projects. There were no political parties but the ordinary citizens associated freely with the military rulers. Then democracy comes and rules the masses out of reckoning, and the finances of the state become converted into the bean-cakes of the ruling party, the elected officials and their sundry cronies. Consequently, the democrats deploy the same value of funds that the military expended on capital projects, to consultancy services [14]. Indeed, when the men in the military wanted to share the money (as the Nigerian phrasing goes), they went ahead and shared it. They did not call it consultancy services.

For nation-states therefore, human capital must possess a moral fiber. If we decide to sound only secular, then we propose that human capital in nation-states must be imbued with ethical qualifications. Thus, when public officials loot the public treasury, despite the linkages of their academic degrees and the prestigious locations of the awarding institutions, what such officials contribute to the democracy process cannot be counted as human capital. We argue that the immensity of the tendency towards corruption in any polity (any democracy) is the function of a generally weak human capital position. In very specific terms, politicians are the foot soldiers of democracy. Therefore, in presenting the thesis of human capital formation, the attention is on the Nigerian politician. In this regard, a Nigerian national policy on education needs to incorporate the formation of selfless politicians, as a core curriculum goal.

We argue that democracy is not only a system of government but also a system for the guarantee of human freedom, which invariably includes freedom from poverty. Incidentally, in this regard, nearly two decades since 1999, the Nigerian state has been under democracy but the poverty level in the country also remains gargantuan. Hence, following statistical governmentese, in August 2015, Nigeria's Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, stated that about 110 million Nigerian citizens were still living below poverty line, despite the policies of past governments to improve their welfare. The Vice President declared that the policies were wrongly formulated and as a result did not have direct impact on the people [15]. Nigeria's population is currently estimated in the region of 180 million people [16]. The Vice President's figures therefore suggest that about 70 million Nigerians are living above the poverty line. But this is disputable. The truly poor people in the country are not usually captured in any functional statistics.

Nigerian statistics are perpetually based on doubtful and curious estimates. Hence, when the corrupt bureaucratic elite retire from service (or when sacked from such positions) and the fraudulent political elite are voted out of office, they return to the villages and live in opulence, in abject contradiction of the static misery of the very villagers they claimed to have captured their horrendous conditions in the dubious statistics. Thus, whatever this former bureaucrat or defeated political actor must have contributed to national service-delivery, is not measurable by the standards of human capital, if at the end of the day, the poverty index in his pristine vicinity remains unaffected. Indeed, democracy is not intended to create solo-beneficiaries. Consequently, democracy is deepened when it creates less of such beneficiaries. In fact, a basic assumption of democracy is that it should guarantee the welfare of the citizens [17].

Furthermore, a Nigerian civil society organisation, Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), found after the 2015 general elections in the country that the two major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) spent a total of N11.6billion on the presidential election campaigns. Out of the N11.66billion, the PDP (which eventually lost the election) spent the highest amount of N8.75 billion, representing 75 per cent, while the APC (the subsequent winner) spent N2.91billion. The group further stated that the combined spending of N11.6billion was the amount that could be empirically verified, stressing that there were other expenses incurred by the two political parties in the course of the campaigns that could not be

ascertained [18]. We highlight that this was only the expenses made for the presidential election. There were still, campaign expenses incurred by the political parties and their members on the National Assembly elections, governorship elections in the 36 states of the federation and elections into the 36 states' Houses of Assembly, in the federation. The most critical issue in all of this however, borders on whether these funds were truly expended in the Nigerian economy? The Nigerian elites are globally known to be notorious for siphoning funds away from their country, for curiously egocentric safekeeping in other lands [19].

We further highlight that the Nigerian Electoral Act 2010 specified the limit to which a political party candidate could spend or receive funds in an election. Specifically, Section 91 subsection (2-7) of the Act put a limit to the total amount expected to be expended by candidates. Subsection (2) in particular states that the maximum election expenses to be incurred by a candidate at a presidential election shall be N1.0 billion [20]. Furthermore in these configurations, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the body charged with the responsibility for conducting elections in Nigeria, has on these same 2015 general elections, also spent the sum of N125 billion [9]. Thus, the Nigerian brand of democracy is intriguingly built on the billions of the country's currency, which find their ways back to the bank accounts of the elected officials and their coconspirators, while the voters remain abjectly indigent. Consequently, while the human capital content of the process of democracy in the country becomes progressively questionable, its financialization trajectories are increasingly self-evident. We opine that human capital formation ranks among the top-priority issues to be addressed, in order to deepen democracy in this country. Therefore, to deepen democracy in Nigeria, the billionization of democracy-trajectories in the country must be contradicted and the essence of the democratic process reverted to the power of the people to make things happen [8].

5.0. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we reach the role of education in human capital formation. Indeed, there is a strong functional relationship between human capital formation and education. Then the truth is that the Nigerian educational system in historical context, has never been hoisted on a strong philosophical foundation and this affects its evident functionality and the indisputable capacity of education to lead to human capital formation in the country. Hence, the nature of the relationship between the depth of democracy in the Nigerian state and the national human capital position is weak. Thus, to deepen democracy in the country, human capital formation for the political process must be a goal of education. We therefore recommend as follows. As the educational system in this country (and in any other troubled democracy) aims at producing professionals in engineering, medicine, accountancy and different societal areas, it must as an imperative also aim at the formation of human capital, for political purposes in generic terms and in particularities, for the deepening of democracy in the given country. And we recommend that the core content of such education for human capital formation must be indigenous. Indeed, in the political consideration, human capital formation must precede the deepening of democracy.

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