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Political Participation, Empowerment and Alienation among the Popular Classes in Nigeria's 4th Republic: A Micro Cross-Sectional Social Survey

By

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Abstract

When this research was conducted in November 2012, Nigeria's Fourth Republic was the most enduring democratic experiment in Nigerian history.. From an unknown population of farmers, market people, road transport workers and craft people or artisans, a sample size of 500 voters was drawn in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area (LGA) of Edo State. A 29-item questionnaire was administered to them at home or in their work places. The analysis of data shows that voting was the not popular political activity among the popular classes: craft people (95%), farmers (86%), road transport workers (85%) and market people (82%). Their overall level of participation as political spectator ranks as follows (from high to low): road transport workers (54%), artisans or craft people (50%), farmers (48%) and market people (40%).

Keywords: Political participation, political efficacy, political alienation, political empowerment and popular classes.

The return of Nigeria to democratic rule on May 29, 1999 after more than one and a half decades of military dictatorship has brought to the fore the issue of political participation. In a democracy, the level of citizens' participation in politics is critical to good governance and political stability. If a democratic polity is characterized by popular or high level of political participation, efficient and equitable allocation of scarce societal resources (i.e. power, wealth and prestige) will be guaranteed and political stability will be assured.

Popular participation in politics, especially in the forms of incorporation of marginalized groups into the main-stream of politics makes the political system more responsive to popular demands and political leaders more amenable to control by their constituents. In fact, popular participation becomes grassroot empowerment.

A major determinant of political participation in a democratic polity has to do with citizen's socio-economic status. It is expected that the educated, well-to-do and gainfully employed citizens are more likely to participate in politics than those who are uneducated, poor, ill-informed and unemployed or underemployed. By implication, therefore, the socio-economically empowered citizens are more likely to participate in politics than their less empowered counterparts. In addition, the citizens' socio-economic status affects their perception of political institutions, processes and actors. If the perception is negative, the level of participation will be low. Conversely, if the perception is positive, one would expect a high level of participation. This truism about the positive correlation between socio-economic status and political participation may account for the disparity in political participation between the elites and the popular classes in Nigeria. However, this study is concerned with the type and level of political participation among the popular classes during the extant Nigerian Fourth Republic (1999-Date)

Review of Related Literature

Political participation is crucial to all political systems. Its form, nature and meaning attached to it in a particular political milieu provide some important bases for classifying political systems. Huntington and Nelson (1976:3) defined political participation as "activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making". Similarly, Orum (1983:235) defined it as "the variety of ways in which people try to exercise political influence over political process".

Two things emerge from these definitions. First, political participation provides major points of contact and interaction between society and the state. Secondly, the definitions point to the instrumental import of political participation which has to do with providing the channels through which influence is brought to bear on political leaders as well as the kinds of citizens that are likely to use these channels on a regular basis (Orum, 1983).

Milbrath (1965) identified fourteen kinds of activities which qualify as political participation. These he further categorized hierarchically into three levels of participation, namely, gladiatorial, transitional and spectator activities. However, Huntington and Nelson (1976:5) would not include the gladiatorial category of political office seekers as an aspect of political participation since this category involves the

full-time activities of those they referred to as the "political professionals" as opposed to the intermittent part-time and usually secondary nature of political participation.

Many empirical studies, especially of the industrialized Western and other countries, have not only confirmed the hierarchy of political participation, but have also linked such participation with demographic variables such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, race and religion (Milbrath, 1965; Orum, 1966; Olsen, 1970; Verba and Nie, 1972; Barnes, Samuel H., Max Kaase, and Klause R. Allerberk, 1979; Friedgut, 1979; Lipset, 1983; Leeson, 2008; Djupe and Congen, 2011; Quintelier et al, 2011; Oser Jennifer, March Hooghe, and Sofia Marien, 2012; and Christopher, 2012).

The patterns and levels of political participation tend to be closely bound up with a sense of political efficacy or political competence. This sense has to do with a belief in one's ability to influence the political system, the belief that change is possible and that one's action can help to bring about the desired change (Nelson , 1987; Peil, 1976; Pateson, 1970; Almond and Verba, 1965). Many studies have found a positive correlation between a sense of political efficacy and political participation; that is to say, the sense of political efficacy tends to increase as the level of political participation increases. For example, Almond and Verba (1965) found such a correlation in their comparative study of the United States of America, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Mexico. Moreover, Peil (1976) came to a similar conclusion with reference to Nigerian politics. The absence of political efficacy tends to suggest political alienation or apathy, that is, a distrust of political authority, a feeling of powerlessness and meaninglessness among the citizenry within the political milieu (Gilmour and Lamb, 1975; Aberbach, 1974).

Inspite of their significance, the concepts of political efficacy and political alienation have hardly been given systematic attention in the study of political participation in the Third World countries. In fact, Huntington and Nelson (1976) pointedly discountenanced these concepts in their analysis. The general tendency has been to analyse political participation in terms of voters' turnout during elections (Niemi and Barkan, 1987). Except for Peil (1976), this trend has been the same for studies of political participation in Nigeria. For example, Dudley (1981), Kurfi (1985) and Nwabuzor and Oronsaye (1985) represented this trend. In all these works, ethnicity remains the cardinal variable for explaining voting behaviour. However, Peil (1976) represented a major advance in the sense that she attempted an analysis of the relationship between political efficacy and political participation in Nigeria. She found that Nigerians have a high sense of political efficacy and that they tend to use various networks--personal, ethnic, religious, traditional, and associational-- in making contacts with government. Such contracts, she pointed out, do not necessarily elicit favourable response from the government (Peil, 1976).

While the absence of political efficacy means political alienation, its presence invariably, entails political empowerment. As defined by Page and Czuba (1999:3), empowerment is:

A multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

There are three components to this definition, according to these scholars. First, empowerment is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, political and other dimensions. Secondly, empowerment occurs at various levels, such as individuals, group and community. Thirdly, according to these scholars, empowerment is a social process in the sense that it is a phenomenon that continuously occurs and defines the relationship between individual, groups and communities.

Other scholars (Davies 2000; Guijt, 1991; Florin and Wardersman 1990; James, 1999; Rowlands, 1999; Wills, 2000; Lukes, 1994; Kreisberg, 1997; Rapport, 1984; Speer and Hughey, 1995; Wilson, 1996; Zimmer- man, 1984), while agreeing with the notion of empowerment as a social process, do contend that empowerment also entails the ability of people to make choices that positively affect their lives. Thus, to be disempowered implied to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. To this end, political empowerment can be conceptualized as the direct opposite of political alienation. The concepts of political participation, empowerment and alienation are the focus of this research.

Research Method and Measurement of Variables

This study employs a cross-sectional social survey method to investigate the type and level of political participation, empowerment and alienation among the Nigerian popular classes (Lubeck, 1978; Watts and Lubeck, 1983) in Ikhoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State. A social survey method is a quantitative data-gathering and analytic procedure in which people are systematically asked questions about their attitudes, feelings, ideas, opinions, behaviours, beliefs or anything else (Asika, 2006; Bailey, 1992; Babbie, 1991; Baker, 1988; Monette et al, 1986). The major instrument of the social survey method is the questionnaire which is a set of questions designed to tap certain information from the respondents about the variables under investigation.

In this study, the questionnaire was designed and administered to the target population−the popular classes (i.e. farmers, market people, road transport workers and craft people) −living in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State through direct contacts by trained research assistants. While five hundred (500) copies of the questionnaire were administered, four hundred and ninety four (494) copies were found usable, which was ninety-four percent (94%) return rate.

The popular classes are the people commonly referred to in the Nigerian literature as the "masses". They are the self-employed, non-government adult workers who reside in the urban and rural communities in Edo and other states in Nigeria. There are about 90,000 of them in Ikpoba-Okha communities (2006 census). The respondents were selected through the purposive or judgemental sampling technique that involved the selection of whichever units of the population were easily accessible to the research assistants and which they considered would have the accurate information desired (Ogbeide, 2011:33). The administration of the questionnaire was conducted in November 2012, a little over 13 years after the inauguration of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

To examine the type and level of political participation among the respondents, the researcher relied on Lester W. Milbrath's classification scheme contained in his 1963 classic titled, Political Participation. In this scheme, political participation was operationalized into 14 political activities as shown in tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 below. From the responses of the survey respondents, the respondents were classified into four (4) groups, depending on their level of participation in politics since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2012). The groups included the "Apathetic" (no participation), "Spectators" (minimum participation), "Transitional" (medium participation) and "Gladiators" (active participation). The statistics are presented in Table 5 below.

To operationlize political alienation, the respondents were asked the following question: "Politics in Nigeria since May 1999 has made the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer." The alienated were expected to answer in the affirmative. Similarly, political empowerment was operationalized with the question; "Don you believe that the role of people like you will make a difference to how Nigeria is governed in this Fourth Republic?" Those who feel powerless politically were expected to answer in the negative. The results are presented in Table 6 below.

Data Analysis

Table 1 below displays the frequency distribution of type of political activities in which the farming population in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area were involved during Nigeria's extant Fourth Republic. According to the table, the farmers

were more likely to vote (86%); discuss politics with others (57%); and attend political meetings or rallies (51%) than to be involved in other political activities. Conversely, they were less likely to contribute money to the parties or candidates (1%), seek elective offices (2%) and to hold public or party offices (4%).

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Type of Political Participation among Farmers in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State (n = 198)*

		YES	NO	N
a.	I exposed myself to political stimuli (political information/issues in the	57 (29.8)	141 (71)	198 (100)
b.	I voted	169 (86)	28 (14)	197 (100)
c.	I discussed politics with others	112 (54)	86 (43)	198 (100)
d.	I talked others into voting a certain way.	89 (45)	109 (55)	198 (100)
e.	I wore party stickers, button, dresses	48 (24)	150 (76)	198 (100)
f.	I contacted a government official or a political leader.	9 (4)	189 (56)	198 (100)
g.	I contributed money to a party or candidate	2 (1.0)	196 (99)	198 (100)
h.	I attended a political meeting or rally	100 (51)	98 (49)	1.8 (100)
i.	I have participated in political campaigns.	85	112	197

		(43)	(54)	(100)
j.	I am an active member of a political party.	95 (48)	103 (52)	198 (100)
k.	I attended a caucus or a strategy (planning) meeting.	81 (41)	117 (59)	198 (100)
l.	I solicited political funds	13 (7)	185 (93)	198 (100)
m.	I have been a candidate for elective office.	3 (2)	195 (98)	198 (100)
n.	I hold or I have held public and party office.	7 (4)	191 (96)	198 (100)

***** Percentages are in parentheses

But among the market people, as shown in table 2 below, voting was the most popular since 82 percent of them were involved in this political exercise. They also had some interest in discussing politics with others (45%), attending political meetings or rallies (4%), participating in political campaigns (37%) and being active members of political party (37%). The market people, on the whole, were less interested in other political activities; scoring between 1 percent and 35 percent in these other political activities.

Table 2:
Frequency Distribution of Type of Political Participation among Market People in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State (n = 147)*

		YES	**NO**	**N**
a.	I exposed myself to political stimuli (political information/issues in the mass media)	34 (24)	109 (79)	143 (100)
b.	I voted.	119	27	146

		(82)	(18)	(100)
c.	I discussed politics with others.	64 (45)	77 (55)	141 (100)
d.	I talked others into voting a certain way.	50 (35)	91 (65)	141 (10)
e.	I wore party stickers, button, dresses	26 (18)	116 (82)	142 (100)
f.	I contacted a government official or a political leader	09 (6)	130 (94)	139 (100)
g.	I contributed money to a party or candidate	06 (4)	136 (96)	142 (100)
h.	I attended a political meeting or rally	57 (40)	85 (63)	142 (100)
i.	I have participated in political campaigns	52 (32)	87 (63)	139 (100)
j.	I am an active member of a political party.	53 (37)	90 (63)	143 (100)
k.	I attended a caucus or a strategy (Planning) meeting	41 (29)	101 (71)	142 (100)
l.	I solicited political funds	11 (8)	130 (92)	141 (100)
m.	I have been a candidate for elective office	01	141	142

		(1)	(99)	(100)
n.	I hold or I have held public and party office	02 (1)	142 (99)	144 (100)

* Percentages are in parentheses.

The road transport workers participated more in politics than either the farmers or the market people. As demonstrated in table 3 below, the road transport workers scored 55 percent in exposure to political stimuli, 85 percent in voting, 58 percent in political discussion, 57 percent in political meetings and rallies, 56 percent in political campaigns and 51 percent in party politics. However, like the farmers and market people, the road transport workers were not interested in holding public and party offices (0%), seeking elective offices (1%) and contributing money to parties or candidates (1%).

Table 3:
Frequency Distribution of Type of Political Participation among Road Transport Workers in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State (n = 111)*

		YES	**NO**	**N**
a.	I exposed myself to political stimuli (political information/issues in the mass media)	58 (55)	48 (45)	106 (100)
b.	I voted	94 (85)	17 (15)	111 (100)
c.	I discussed politics with others	64 (58)	47 (42)	111 (100)
d.	I talked others into voting a certain way	46 (43)	62 (57)	108 (100)
e.	I wore party stickers, button, dresses	37 (34)	71 (66)	108 (100)

f.	I contacted a government officials or a political leader	03 (3)	105 (97)	108 (100)
g.	I contributed money to a party or candidate	02 (2)	101 (98)	108 (100)
h.	I attended a political meeting or rally.	61 (57)	46 (43)	107 (100)
i.	I have participated in political campaigns	61 (57)	40 (44)	111 (100)
j.	I am an active member of a political party.	56 (51)	53 (49)	111 (100)
k.	I attended a caucus or a strategy (planning) meeting.	50 (46)	58 (54)	108 (100)
l.	I solicited political funds	09 (8)	97 (92)	106 (100)
m.	I have been a candidate for election office	01 (1)	105 (99)	106 (100)
n.	I hold or I have held public and party office	__ (0)	107 (100)	107 (100)

* Percentages are in parentheses

As shown in table 4 below the craft people (artisans) scored very high in voting (95%), beating the other social classes in this type of political activity. They also scored average (53%) in discussing politics with others during the Fourth Republic. And like the market people, they were also not very excited about other

political activities as they scored less than fifty percent in any of these other political activities. Finally, similar to the other classes, they scored very low in holding public/party offices (5%), seeking elective offices (3%) and soliciting political funds (3%).

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Type of Political Participation among Craft People in Ikpoba-okha Local Government Area of Edo State (n = 38)*

		YES	NO	N
a.	I exposed myself to political stimuli (political information/issues in the mass media)	12 (32)	26 (68)	38 (100)
b.	I voted	36 (95)	02 (5)	38 (100)
c.	I discussed politics with others	20 (53)	18 (47)	38 (100)
d.	I talked other into voting a certain way	18 (47)	20 (53)	38 (100)
e.	I wore party stickers, button, dresses	09 (24)	29 (76)	38 (100)
f.	I contracted a government official or a political leader	01 (3)	37 (97)	38 (100)
g.	I contributed money to a party or candidate	03 (8)	35 (92)	38 (100)
h.	I attended a political meeting or rally	18 (47)	20 (53)	38 (100)
i.	I have participated in political campaigns	17 (45)	21 (55)	38 (100)
j.	I am an active member of a political party	14 (37)	24 (63)	38 (100)
k.	I attended a caucus or a strategy (planning) meeting	10 (26)	28 (74)	38 (100)
l.	I solicited political funds.	01 (3)	37 (97)	38 (100)
m.	I have been a candidate for election office	01 (3)	37 (97)	38 (100)
n.	I hold or I have held public and party office	02 (5)	36 (95)	38 (100)

* Percentages are in parentheses

In table 5, the four social classes under investigation were ranked according to their level of participation in the democratic politics. As can be observed from the table, the political apathetics were more likely to be found among the market people than in any other social class. Twenty-five percent of the market people were not

involved in any form of political activity during this period, as against none for road transport workers, 9 percent for farmers, and 11 percent for artisans.

Table 5: Level of Political Participation among the Popular Classes in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State (n=494)

	Popular classes				
Level of Political Participation	**Farmers**	**Market People**	**Transport Workers**	**Craft People**	**n**
Spectators (a-e)	95 (48)	59 (40)	60 (54)	19 (50)	233 (47)
Transitionals (f-h)	37 (19)	24 (16)	22 (20	07 (18)	90 (18)
Gladiators (i-n)	47 (24)	27 (19)	29 (26)	08 (21)	111 (22)
Apathetics (no participation)	19 (9)	37 (25)	0 (0)	04 (11)	60 (13)
n	198 (40)	147 (30)	111 (22)	38 (8)	494 (100)

* Percentages are in parentheses.

Table 5 also shows that the size of the gladiators differs among the classes: transport workers (26%). farmers (24%), craft people (21%), and market people (19%). As spectators, the four classes also differ: transport workers (54%), artisans (50%), farmers (48%) and market people (40%),. Similarly, the classes differ as transitionals: transport workers (20%), artisans (18%), farmers (19%) and market people (16%).

From the following analysis, the popular classes in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State could be ranked in their level of participation in the

Fourth Republic as follows (from high to low): road transport workers (54%), artisans (50%), farmers (48%) and market people (40%)

Table 6: Level of Political Alienation and Empowerment among the Popular Classes in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area (n=484)

	Popular Classes				
Level of Political Alienation Empowerment	**Farmers**	**Market People**	**Transport Workers**	**Craft People**	**n**
Democratic politics made rich get richer and poor get poorer. YES (alienated) NO (not alienated) DON'T KNOW	174(88) 18(9) 5(3)	117(80) 23(16) 6(4)	90(85) 12(11) 04(04)	33(87) 04(11) 01(2)	414(85) 57(12) 16 (3)
	194 (40)	144 (30)	108 (22)	38 (8)	484 (100)
Role makes a difference to how Nigeria is governed YES (empowered) NO (not empowered) DON'T KNOW	173 (89) 21 (11) ----	125 (87) 19 (13) ----	86 (80) 22 (20) ----	35 (92) 03 (8) ----	419(87) 65(13) ----
n	197(40)	146(30)	106(22)	38(8)	484(100)

* Percentages are in parentheses

Data in table 6 above indicate the respondents' responses to the feelings of political alienation and empowerment. There is a very strong feeling of political alienation among the popular classes: 88 percent of the farmers, 87 percent of the craft

people (artisans), 85 percent of the road transport workers and 80 percent of the market people feel that the democratic politics made the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. On the whole, 85 percent of the popular classes feel this way about the Fourth Republic politics.

Despite this very strong feeling of political alienation, a very large majority of the popular classes feel a sense of empowerment: 92 percent of the craft people, 89 percent of the farmers, 87 percent of the market people and 80 percent of the road transport workers feel that their role in politics will make a difference to how Nigeria is being governed. Overall, 87 percent of the popular classes feel this way.

From the analysis of the statistics in table 6, one can conclude that while the popular classes in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State strongly believe that politics in the Fourth Republic and by extension the Nigerian politics, was used by the rich to consolidate their wealth, they equally feel strongly that they have the political power to change politics in their own favour.

Conclusions

The market people, farmers, road transport workers, and artisans in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State in Nigeria participated in the politics of the extant Fourth Republic more so as spectators and gladiators than as transitionals and apathetics. Moreover, although they strongly believe that politics is used by the rich to consolidate their wealth, they also believe strongly that with proper mobilization, they have the political will to change the process and structure of governance in Nigeria in favour of their own interests.

For further research and knowledge, it is recommended that this particular study should be replicated in all the remaining 773 Local Government Areas in the country in order to confirm or refute the findings in this study. In addition, this study can be elaborated to include the upper and middle classes of voters in Nigeria.

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