

## Nigerian Politics and Strategic Repositioning: A Critical Analysis

Emegha, Ndubuisi Kalu

Department of Political Science Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria.

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria politics is characterized with chequered history of ethnic and sectional interest which has metamorphosed into personal and cabal dictatorship. This study examines how personal interest through strategic positioning has placed Nigeria on serious deficits across administrations. Anchoring the discussion on Marxian theory; causal research design and documentary method of data collection, findings of the study reveal amongst other things that the privileged ruling class has succeeded in milking Nigeria dry because the masses are too docile to revolt. The paper recommends amongst other things that the masses should develop the social consciousness to position itself better in order to partake in the benefits of Nigeria commonwealth.

Keywords: Ethnic politics, strategic positioning, cabal dictatorship, Marxian theory, Nigerian commonwealth.

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### INTRODUCTION

In Nigerian politics today, the struggle for ethnic dominance that existed during the nationalist era has not ceased. It has rather taken a new dimension where petty bourgeoisie and their allies have positioned well for deep rooted dominance against the common good of the people. While the veteran fathers of Nigerian politics played along ethnic fault lines, the present political elites has drawn their lines of play across various ethnic groups for individual gains. The defining lines of the political elites grouping is sealed with personal interest where federally initiated policies and programs have been tactically converted and shared among friends and families. [1].

This political game of win and retain the commonwealth has created a deficit in the national identity and reverse national development to cabal development. Down the lane, the strategies employed by the various factions of the political elites to win power include:

- (a) The mobilization of the ethnic homeland at times of elections to ensure monolithic support.

- (b) The widening of political base from the ethnic homeland to minority ethnic groups within the region.

- (c) Encouraging agitation by minority ethnic groups in regions under the rival political parties [2], [3].

However, the mobilization of support from the masses to win election has not always been the challenge, the problem is that after the elections are contested and won the masses whose votes were sought after with all forms of strategies, tactics and maneuvering are abounded irrespective of whatever manifesto or promise(s) made by the political elites. More importantly, after fifty eight (58) years of independence, Nigeria is still so much embedded in an unbalanced political system and culture. Painfully, while the political elites have refused to be schooled on requisite political behavior, the masses lack the required social consciousness to strategize for interest aggregation.

This manifest political behavior has posed a concern to scholars and analysts on how to check the tide: As expressed by (Okereke), this ill political behavior has brought about political

instability, ethnic inclination and antagonism, marginalization, inept and corrupt leadership. Indeed, the colonial conquest of African countries is back this time by Africans. The strategy of words of mouth, talking drums, debating candidates and party issues are done on tribal sittings. Time change

#### CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

##### **Ethnic Politics**

This refers to communal identity and link with a historic territory or homeland whereby those from such links do everything to favor and position it against the other. Ethnic politics is showing signs of solidarity and self-awareness and trying to ward off perceived or real threats to its tangible characteristics as risks to its identity. It is the mobilization of ethnic identity and ethnic nationalism as a powerful tool to engage in political struggles [4].

Ethnic politics therefore is the use of ethnicity as a resource for political manipulation and entrepreneurship, resulting in dominate ethnic groups excluding minority groups within national policies that reflect the interests and activities of the national majority which causes growing divisiveness and declining political stability [5]; [6]. Similarly, the control over the justice system, security apparatus by particular political, social or ethnic elite has been linked to inequalities and violence across countries.

These attributes account for the reason, many post-colonial African governments Nigeria inclusive have reinforced the inequalities left by colonial and white-minority regimes where liberation and independence movements were dominated by one ethnic group. During the colonial era in Africa, political, economic and cultural power was unequally distributed between the colonizers and the colonized. Its effects are very much playing out till date in Nigerian politics.

##### **Strategic Positioning**

Essentially, dynamism is the hallmark of strategic positioning. According to [7] strategic positioning deals with acquiring at an early date, a tangible or intangible asset which will place an ethnic group, political party, an

but tribal feelings persist on political lines.

This paper seeks to analyze why Nigerian politics has been dominated by personal and sectional interest and the need for social consciousness by the deprived masses to strategically reposition it.

individual or organization in an advantageous position. Flexibly, the driving force of strategic positioning is profit and adjustments are the putative platform for its expression and influence.

However, there are three kinds of strategic positioning that call for definition:

- (a) **Defensive positioning:** This is the acceptance or adoption of a deliberate, planned, long-term position in the industry or polity, with the declared intention of avoiding being squeezed out by a powerful opponent or competitor. This could be likened to the position of the Hausa/Fulani in the Nigerian politics.
- (b) **Prepared Opportunism:** This is a posture of preparedness i.e. being ready to act if and when conditions are right. This could be likened to the position of the Igbos in the Nigerian politics where conditions cannot be right thereby incapacitating them to act. This incapacitation could be explained with the 3Cs of conspiracy, communication and control of the Igbos by other ethnic groups politically.
- (c) **Pre-emptive Positioning:** This is a move by a group "ahead of its adversaries which allows the group to secure an advantageous position from which it is difficult to be dislodged". This could as well be likened to the Yoruba's position in Nigerian politics in their alliance with mainstream politics [8]; [9].

As stated above, using the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria the suggestive value of these forms of positioning - defensive, prepared opportunism or pre-emptive is reflective of the Nigerian politics from early to contemporary era.

### **Cabal Dictatorship**

A cabal is a clique often secret that seeks power usually through intrigue. It could also be defined as a plot to carry out some harmful or illegal act especially a political plot, while dictatorship is a form of government in which the ruler is an absolute dictator not restricted by a constitution, laws or opposition. Technically, cabal dictatorship portrays authoritarian politics around the world and finds the same pattern repeating itself across countries. In its pattern, it does not suspend the constitution or does it replace same with tanks on the streets in a democracy rather it pays lip-service

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS**

#### **Marxian Theory**

The study is structured on Marxist theory. This framework analyses the absolute dividing line between the "exploiting" minority and "exploited" majority.

According to Karl Marx, man is the architect of his fortune [11]. The meaning is that people have the primary responsibility to give life direction and future. Expressly, the world is to be comprehended not as a complex of ready-made things but as a complex of processes, in which human history changes from one form to the other [12]. The central thesis of Marxism is that social existence determines social consciousness and not the other way round. This theory is espoused around Karl Marx's idea of class struggle and dialectical materialism and popularized by [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]. In the words of Lenin, the exploited majority of the masses are so crushed by want and poverty that they are not bothered or worried about politics let alone democracy (Lenin, 1978). In justification of the above statement, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels have posited that the condition of the "Have-not", laborers, and exploited masses is such that "the must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing before they can think about philosophy, religion, pursue politics and then fight against the exploiting class" [17].

In details, economic factor is the basic determinant of the form of politics, culture and ideology of every society and the ruling ideas of each age are the

to the constitution while behaving as if it does not exist. Side by side, cabal dictatorship could be established through military rule or democratically. Practically, it shows contempt for critics, stoke conspiracy about opposition movements and question the legitimacy of any vote that goes against it. Besides, it uses name-calling to silence strong voices in the clime. Another defining feature of cable dictatorship is constant assault on critical institutions of the state and inhuman treatment of those with opposing views while looking the other way over allegations against those within the cabal [10].

ideas of the rich class who controls the institutional apparatus of the society. The fragile economic posture of the exploited majority has placed democracy and power advantages to the insignificant minority; thus, democracy is for the rich and political elites who have become Lords, dictatorial and more exploitative.

In an outline, Karl Marx has revealed the concealed assertion that:

1. Every class struggle is a political struggle between the ruling class and the ruled class.
2. That the state is a means of capital accumulation by the ruling class.
3. That the state instruments and apparatus like the police, army, the navy, air force and others are the executive instrument for suppression and exploitation of the masses.
4. That laws and principles of the state are for the protection of the interest of the ruling class.
5. That Religion under which the ruling class hides under to pacify and gain the good will of the exploited is an opinion of the masses.
6. That Revolution and overthrow of the ruling class is the ultimate resort of the masses. The applicability of the theory to this study is seen in its relevance in today's world. After two hundred years (1818-2018) of Karl Marx's postulation, countries across Africa are still witnessing unity

of consciousness of the masses outside the context of religion which is the scourge of Nigerian politics to unseat and overthrow long exploitative regimes. Nigeria can borrow from the recent revolutionary political changes in Algeria and Sudan brought about by massive protests by the exploited people of the countries.

### **The Undying Effects of Sectional Politics**

Long before the birth of Nigeria, each ethnic group had developed sophisticated cultures of high repute as noted in the annals of international history. Some of these ancient groups include the Edo's of the former Mid-West, the Ijaws of the Delta, the Kanuri's of the North-East which is an off shoot of the ancient Sanghai empire, the Jukun's of the Middle-Belt and the Nupes. There are Hausas, the Igbos and the Yorubas and many others [18].

Following from the above, it could be noted that the country has passed through many stages, from the North-South dichotomy of early colonization, to the rather hesitant association of the late colonial period. As the struggle for independence gathered strength, federalism was thrust on the country for interests other than those of the Nigerian peoples. Thus, there was three-region structure, four region structure, unitary form of government, the twelve state structure, nineteen state structure, twenty one states structure, thirty state structure, the thirty one state structure

and the thirty six state structure of 1996. However, the phenomenon of the first republic politics in Nigeria has a burden of no mean order in today's Nigeria. It has fragmented the Nigerian state and citizens to the extent that when the North sneezes the South catches cold and when the South barks, the north gets ready for war. It has even transcended to naming calling and hate speeches. An Igbo person calls a northern person - "Alakuba" and the Yoruba "Ngbati" or "Onye Ofe Mannu". Such other names like 'kobokobo, Gambari, Nyamiri, Bayerebi, Aboki, etc. are taken out of context for derogatory purposes. Altercations and verbal exchanges at individual levels are most times allowed to degenerate into tribal, ethnic or geo-political wrangling or outright ethnic clashes. Outside that, this tribal circumstantial influence has found it dismantling effects at the geo-political zones. An Igbo person or Yoruba from another area within the same zone will make such comments like "Nwa Abakaliki", Nwa "Nsukka", "Ijabu man" or "Igbaa man" etc. Thus, politicians cash into it for trading of positions be it appointive or elective such that areas like Okota and Aguda in Lagos with high population of Igbo residents are a boiling point to prove dominance as witnessed in February 23, 2019 general elections (Punch, March 5, 2019: 25). For instance, the divide in the first republic was so wide that the slogan associated with the political parties then read thus:

**Table 1: Political Parties in the First Republic and their Slogan**

Political Parties		Slogan
Northern People's Congress	NPC	North for the Northerners
Action Group	AG	West for the Westerners
National Council for Nigeria & Cameroon	NCNC	Nigeria for all of us

Source: The Author.

Drawing from the above table, one can see tribalism at play. Unfortunately, after 58 years of Nigeria independence instead of the fault lines that divide us closing up it is rather widening. In reality, [19] has expressed that there are only two major tribes in Nigeria - the Elites and the Masses. One can factually

say that the entry point to these two tribes is:

- (a) Money and
- (b) Suffering.

For instance, making huge and unjustifiable wealth guarantees one into the Nigerian elites club while suffering places one at the Masses club. As logic would expect, when foot runners

become car owners, get elective positions, they sow seeds of tribalism and religion among the masses so as to sway the masses emotion for personal victory. For [20], this happens at both the national and state level. Unfortunately, tent pitching is done to capture power and position by politicians who reconcile after elective fights and compensate each other while the gullible masses continue to fight each other until they belong to the elite class.

Invariably, while the political elites circle in Nigeria is getting more united, the masses have refused to shift in thinking and ideology in order to learn from dead-end experiments of the system and its operators. For sure, the deep-rooted problems are systemic with social and economic insecurity that has impeded social consciousness of the populace. To justify the helplessness of the masses, one can observe that many critical actors in the Nigerian political and electoral circle (INEC, politicians, the Nigerian Police, the Nigerian Army and the others) has become a willing instrument in the structure in pinning the peoples' will down [21].

As it is said, "the judiciary is the last hope of the common man" but in Nigerian polity the reverse is the case. Before election, it is usually the boom time for lawyers as several cases would be in court before the elections and many others would go into the election petition tribunals. Though it is good for the economy of lawyers since they make good money out of these politicians from their cases and counter cases but is not good for the polity, the unity of the country and the growth of democracy. The finance and its effects on the country every four years, the risks and other associated consequences and the level of violence falls back on the masses (The Nation, 2019).

#### **Strategic Analysis of Political Elites and Masses Dichotomy in Affluence and Poverty**

Strategy is about survival and dichotomy is opposing forces or parts that want to survive within the same environment in order to shape the future [21]. Across governments and administrations in Nigeria, two opposing parts have always being a

difficult issue. These two opposing forces are not rivers, mountains, oceans and Islands but the political elites and the masses and attendant poverty and affluence gap that exist between and among them. Painfully, with Nigeria's current estimated population of 198 million (NPC, 2018), the masses numbering over 69 million are unemployed. Side by side, the two most populous countries in the world are China and India, while China has a population of 1.386 billion, its unemployment rate is 0.09 per cent. India, with a population of 1.37 billion, has unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent (Vanguard, April. 2019). In downright numbers of the unemployed in these two countries, one can see that the high rate of Nigeria's unemployment has nothing to do with the burden of population but with the estrangement of economic management over the years which the politicians has converted from commonwealth to private wealth.

Nearer home, less endowed countries are doing better than Nigeria in ensuring that their citizens are better off. For instance, the unemployment rate in Niger Republic is 0.3 per cent while Rwanda that came out of civil war twenty five (25) years ago (April 1994 - April 2019) has 0.9 per cent.

Comparatively, Nigeria with 23.10 percent of unemployment rate is at the lane of miserable people in Africa with Swaziland 26 per cent and Mozambique 25 per cent (Agbese 2019). This inglorious league of nations Nigeria found herself in, is caused by politicians in various administrations who are hell bent in pinning the masses down and widening the gap of poverty with the ambers of ethnicity and religion in politics. For the politicians, population is a political weapon for personal enrichment through constituency projects instead of a means for more government amenities to the masses.

#### **Loss of Economic Confidence by the Masses**

Nigeria as Africa's top oil producer with seven (7) deep water fields through inconsistent policy options has remained backward economically. While the potentials are many the political will to manifest those potentials are grossly inadequate [22]. Today, Nigeria is a land



of many resources with lost opportunities. Following from the above, [23] has raised concern over the way the nation's crude oil revenue; had been managed in the last 60 years. He queried why the nation-state cannot feed the population, cannot provide education for her children, cannot generate and distribute electricity and still feed mostly on the colonial railway lines? Pointedly, the worry or concern of Kukah stated above is the worry of every concerned citizen. However, the response always points to the fact that Nigeria mono-cultural economy managed by the Federal Government is the cause, all the politicians and top government officials that have access to it fall and climb over one another in an attempt to steal from the purse while ordinary Nigerians languish in poverty and want [24].

Disappointingly, there are close to thirty-three (33) untapped strategic natural resource in Nigeria, among them are iron ore, silver, gold, limestone, manganese bitumen coal, lead/zinc, salt, Bentonite, gypsum, Bauxite, kaolin, marble, ruby, copper, tantalite, cassiterite, columbite, emerald, molybdenite, wolfram, cotton, soda ash, potash, flake etc. [25]. Where these resources are tapped at all, it is done by natives who use them to support livelihood and where government officials' interests focus on it, those sites are purchased uprightly by politicians as private property thereby converting common wealth to private wealth and when interest clashes pertaining those sites, the politicians will incite the masses clannishly to fight for their interest. This enlightened despotism in Nigerian politics has made the rulers "politicians" to know what the ruled "masses" needed or what peanut is good for them and proceeded to provide it in order to keep the heads of the ruled down in penury [26]. On this note, the instruments of actualization include military conquest, the threat of it, blackmail and bluster. The outcome is that the Nigerian masses had been denied the right and chances of development.

#### **Dramatization of Politics**

To keep the masses busy and politically alive, Nigerian politicians have become

dramatic with political rallies, flattery with commissioning of projects and indifference with public policies. The aim is to keep the masses active and at the same time secure personal and sectional benefits rather than carrying out programme of public interest all in the name of party politics. In the words of Alexander Pope, party politics has been defined as "the madness of the many for the gain of the few. While the few political elites benefit immensely the majority of the citizens are left out of the game [27]. In this order, the political office holders are the "few" while the masses are the "many". Conversely, the political office holders and government officials depend on the government to enrich themselves while the masses depend on the politicians to get job, infrastructure, education and health.

This perspective could be likened to Joseph Stalin's brutal treat of plucking the feathers of a live chicken off one by one, while the chicken/bird trembled in pain, Stalin deep his hand into his pockets took out some chicken food and started throwing it at the poor and hapless bird. As Stalin walked towards his seat and kept dropping some feeds on the floor the chicken followed him and sat feeding from his feet. In that condition, Joseph Stalin then turned to members of his political party leadership and said, the chicken represents the people; you must disempower them, brutalize them, beat them up, starve them and then leave them. When they are helpless and in desperate situation, feed them systematically, they will blindly follow you and worship you". They will think you are a hero forever, and forget you are responsible for their sorrowful situation.

Taking a passing look at the above circumstance, one can observe that the same is at play in the Nigerian political landscape. What Joseph Stalin demonstrated about (85) eighty five years (1934-2019) in Russia has been remodeled across the globe. The posture of Nigerian politics today drawing from the above analogy is on personal issues and interests which are placed against the general interest of the masses. This personal politics are played along

cultural, religious and tribal lines. As [28] observed it is sad that today, a lot has happened in the political landscape in the sense that there are divides from religion, tribal and cultural divisions caused by political affiliations. Politicians who are supposedly role models find it so pleasing to use derogating and unguarded utterances to get cheap popularity instead of ideologies capable of transcending enduring policies.

Against this backdrop, [29] has urged Nigerian political office holders, representatives of civil society and religious leaders to avoid amplifying ethno-religious tension in Nigeria and focus on peace building and policy related issue. The import of the above position is that empires have risen and fallen, governments come and go but politics, and religion and tribe remain and survive while the masses who supposed to gain at each phase of these transitions have been sacrificed on the altar of politics.

#### **Masses and Strategic Repositioning**

Politics is the father of strategy. The Nigerian masses can use politics not just to advance the interest of the politicians but to redefine their identity, because people always need to answer the basic question of who are we [30]. Thus, the behavior of the masses i.e. the common people who possess the greater number of the Nigerian population but have been kept in dilemma of choosing between leprosy and madness (remaining poor and getting poorer), need to be reexamined by themselves. The value of a recognized self by the masses cannot be overemphasized. It can be done through a planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain unity and mutual understanding among the masses irrespective of tribe and tongue. At all times, politics is all about decisions and policies which affect the majority of the people. In our clime, agenda, program and policy intended to meet a public need have been misconstrued in the singular interest of the privileged few. For instance, Ajaokuta steel company limited (ASCL) built on a 24,000 hectares (59,000 acres) site in 1979 in Kogi State has not commenced full operation after 40 years let alone generally employment

to the masses. The point for emphasis is that politicians have been improving their houses and husks but have not equally improved the masses that are to inhabit the state [5].

Lopsidedly, the political elite, has perpetrated atrocities on the masses. For instance, it defaults in its promise of affordable low-cost housing and subjects the citizenry to unfold hardship characterized by homelessness. In defense of their manipulations, they will draw attention to the workings of capitalism which posits that every man should fend for himself according to his means. In a specialized deceit, the social philosophy of the Nigerian politicians, their cronies and associates is that they are endowed with special insight energy and ability to direct the masses (The Nation, April 24, 2019).

In duality, the masses are too indocile to confront the lip-service patriotism of the individuated elites who have usurped privileges and power, turn them into rights and tactically inflicted misery on the ordinary citizens [12]. From the foregoing, the masses need to strike a balance between the real and imagined society having seen the deceit and anti-clockwise policies that feasted on the development of the country. The repositioning movement of the masses should be devoid of morality in order to withstand the manipulations and survival strategies of the political elites. The vanguard for strategic repositioning requires a hardcore agitation rather than a piece meal approach. As a competition, the strategic repositioning of the masses is a process that changes functions within the society and its institutions - not just how people react to the ills of Nigerian polity, but what they do. The masses are to generate a conscious adaptation to the changing Nigerian environment, in order to represent a fundamental shift in terms of value propositions [19]. While repositioning is a pure play of self-consciousness owing to age long neglect by those who supposed to use core strategic values of Nigeria for its developmental progress; logic expect that reflections have to draw strength from the Nigeria of old wherein women took to streets of Aba in 1929 because

of injustice and stood their ground for (29) twenty nine days until the colonial administration cancelled its obnoxious policy of taxing women.

Aside the above mentioned protest, there were Enugu coal mine strike in 1949 which yielded positive results, protest against the Anglo - Nigerian defence pact in 1960; the 1964 federal election and 1965 west Regional election, Agbekoya riot of 1968-1969 in Western Nigeria, Ali must go riot of 1978, June 12, 1993 riot and various protest on increases in fuel prices under Obasanjo and Jonathan regimes [22]. The present administration of President Mahammadu Buhari since May 2015 has also witnessed protest, riots and demonstrations either by Shiite Islam, IPOB or ASUU all in a bid to make government change policies that are

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The operational interpretation of this paper evidences that the Nigerian politicians' concentration on the acquisition of power and its application without recourse to rationale and ethical behavior that characterize the practice of governance. This long buried evidence of Nigerian politics is symbolized with identity politics, reconfigured along cultural lines and sees the masses as true enemies and competitors of the enterprise called Nigeria.

The study also found out that the romance of the Nigerian politicians and the masses is not a happy one but does not break because the politicians keep

anti-masses. However, signs pointed to the fact that strategically these protests and demonstrations are done in piece meal(s) by various bodies whereas it supposed to be holistic across the nation. As such, it has received as usually palliative measures or unresponsive approach from the government. In agreement with [7], Peaceful protests by the people or masses against the government policies are essential ingredients in a democracy, but the masses whose tool it is to potentially gain from it have maintained an untrained attitude to it. In this circumstance, the unity and self-consciousness of the masses across the geo-political zones of Nigeria is the only unifying force needed for strategic repositioning.

making amorous advances and promises without conclusive evidences of deep affection.

Again, it was deciphered that the unregulated class interests and power relations have made positions and privileges to become class fortunes rather than public assets.

The Nigerian state and its apparatus as well has become a means of capital accumulation by the political elites.

In all, facts show that all the factor joined together are systemically working against the masses thereby making them to be politically inactive, apathetic and dispirited.

#### CONCLUSION

Constructively, politics is the father of strategy and strategic repositioning is the application of pure play of self-consciousness and fundamental shift in terms of value propositions. The proposition of the Nigerian masses in terms of politics is that of apathy boycott or outright rejection of participation. In caution with the neglecting position of the masses, Bertolt Brecht posits that:

The worst illiterate is the political illiterate. He hears nothing, sees nothing, and takes no part in political life. He does not seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour, of

rent, of medicines, all depend on political decisions. He even prides himself on his political ignorance, sticks out his chest and says he hates politics. He does not know, the imbecile, that from his political non-participation comes the prostitute, the abandoned child, the robber and, worst of all, corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitative political elites.

The import of the above statement is for the masses to wake up from their political slumber through compulsive



behavior to create strategic anxiety for

the exploitative political elites.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Deriving from the above, the paper recommends the following:

1. The Nigerian masses should know that political power is not given by asking but struggled and contested for.
2. That population is a political weapon thus; it should be converted to the axiom which states that the majority will have their way while the minority will have their say.
3. The Nigerian masses need to reverse the strategic error of

accepting politics as madness of the many for the benefit of the few "political elites."

4. They should do away with a "hands off approach" in politics in order to take their core position for interest aggregation.
5. Nigerian masses should cut off the ideological sympathy in "soft link relations" with the political elites and borrow a leaf from recent political changes in Algeria and Sudan by massive protests.

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