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Exploring the Dichotomies and the Convergences of Political Attitudes: A Comparative Study of Nigeria and Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the political attitudes of Nigeria and Kenya, two of Africa's most prominent democratic nation, with the aim of identifying both areas of convergences and divergences-referred to as dichotomy in political attitudes, values, and trust in governance. Through comparative analysis using secondary sources to generate data, the paper adopts qualitative approach and content analysis. the study uncovers critical similarities such as high levels of political awareness and desire for democratic governance, as well as differences rooted in historical, ethnic, and institutional dynamics. The paper seeks to answer such research questions like; what factors influences political attitudes of Nigeria and Kenya? And in what ways do political attitudes in Nigeria converge or diverge from those in Kenya? The findings reveal that while both countries share a commitment to democratic ideals, their political attitudes diverge significantly in areas such as trust in institutions, electoral participation, and perceptions of corruption. This study contributes to a broader understanding of political culture in Sub-Saharan Africa and offers recommendations for fostering more inclusive, participatory, and accountable political systems in both contexts.

Key words: Democracy, Political Attitudes, Political behaviour, Ethnicity and religion

Introduction

Individual's evaluations of political issues influence their political behavior which encompasses actions and intentions related to politics. These attitudes like support for democracy or their perspective about specific government policies influences how people engages or participate in political activities. Political behavior involves a wider range of actions and attitudes related to the political system and processes. It includes formal activities like voting and running for office as well as in formal actions such as joining pressure groups, participating in protests and engaging in political discussion. Max Rosenberg (2015), Analyzing political attitudes. Submitted that, the term political attitude can be referred to the mental or emotional set with which an individual approaches a political problem and which determines his line of conduct towards that problem. All individual have political attitudes. All are affected by the acts of governmental units with resulting thoughts, opinions and attitudes. While many things have an effect on the political attitudes of an individuals, certain particular influences are apparently more directly significant. Of these we may mention the following economic standing, political experience, the influence of personalities, political parties, special pressure groups and organizations, newspaper, and radio. Democracy can be strengthened and consolidated in a society where there is active participation of the citizen in the political process of the state. Good governance promotes better political attitudes thereby leading to active political participation. In his words J.S Omotola (2007), Democratization, good governance and development in Africa; the Nigeria experience. This development in the view of some scholars has brought an end to the struggle for supremacy as to which system of government is best due to the hegemonic emergence of liberal democracy as the final form of human government. Put differently, Democracy has become "the only game in town (Linz and Stepan 1996:15).

The paper aimed to focus on the comparative analysis of political attitudes in Nigeria and Kenya. Both countries operate a democratic system of government where the citizens are expected to directly or indirectly involve in the political process. The paper will also examine the differences and similarities of the peoples' attitudes towards politics in Nigeria and Kenya, some of the factors that determines their political behavior and how democracy can be strengthened in both countries. The paper makes use of qualitative approach to gather data. The paper will help to contribute to academic research most especially on political issues related to democracy, value and beliefs in the political system.

Methodology:

This paper makes use of qualitative approach, using data gathered from secondary sources. It will be analyzed via content and historical analysis.

According to Creswell and Poth, (2023) qualitative approach is a research strategy that seeks to understand social phenomena through meanings, experiences, and interpretations, rather than by measuring them numerically. It emphasizes depth over breadth, focusing on how people make sense of their social and political realities. Methods of qualitative research includes the following; Interviews, Focus Groups, Participant Observation and Document/Text Analysis.

Conceptual clarification

Democracy; Democracy is seen as a political system that is characterized with periodic and free elections in which politicians arranged into political parties that engage themselves in a competitive poll to ensure a standing government, where the political right will enable all adult citizens (18 years and above as it applied in Nigeria) to vote and be voted for. Przeworski et al (1996) argues that democracy is a system where political office is filled through regular, free and fair election between competing parties with the possibility of a winners freely assuming office. Kolawole (2004) believes democracy is not the absence of military rule nor is it necessarily the presence of civilian administrators, but a situation where political actors and institution of the state are oiled in democratic values, norms and ethos. Furthermore, Huntington (1991) sees democracy as a political system which is considered democratic because the most popular candidates are chosen through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population are qualified to vote. This promotes political participation of all adult members. The full participation of the people during electioneering gives the new government a legitimate foundation to govern. Any government against this background will not enjoy legitimacy which gives every government a political support from the people because it is deemed rightful since the support emanates from the people. However, if democracy is all about to choose who should govern the people, then election is one paramount way to select.

Political attitudes and behavior:

Political Attitude refer to the views, beliefs, and feelings that individuals hold regarding political issues, parties, candidates, and the political system as a whole. According to Dalton, R. J (2008). "Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation, submitted that Political attitudes are formed through various processes, these processes include family, education, media, personal experiences, and group affiliations like ethnic and religious group. Political attitudes can also be influenced by historical context and the

prevailing social norms. On the other hand, the actions taken by an individual in the political system can be referred to as political behavior. This actions in the political sphere includes voting, activism, attending political meetings, and engaging in discussions about political issues. Political behavior is influenced by political attitudes but also by structural factors such as the political environment, laws, and institutional frameworks. Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, explains that Factors such as socio-economic status, education, and group identity can influence the likelihood of political participation. The Role of Identity in determining Political attitudes cannot be overemphasized. Identity factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and religion significantly influence political attitudes and behaviors. Group identity can dictate political preferences and levels of engagement. The knowledge of political attitudes and behavior is essential in understanding the dynamics of the political system and the functioning of democracy. According to Osei and Mensah (2024) political attitudes are not merely individual predispositions but are socially embedded, often reflecting broader power relations, cultural narratives, and institutional trust. They argue that contemporary political attitudes are increasingly influenced by issues of identity politics, governance performance, and citizens' perceptions of legitimacy in both established and emerging democracies.

STRATEGIES THAT CAN BE EMPLOYED TO PROMOTE POSITIVE POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

The following strategies can be employed to promote positive political attitudes and democratic values;

1. According to Torney-Purta, J., & Amadeo, J. (2005). "Civic Engagement in the 21st Century, submitted that enlighten the citizens about their rights and responsibilities within a democratic sphere. This includes understanding the political system, the importance of participation, and the value of civic engagement. Creating community programs that educate citizens about democratic processes and governance.
2. Promoting Tolerance and Inclusivity; Democratic societies thrive on diversity and the acceptance of different viewpoints. Promoting tolerance and inclusivity helps to build a respectful political culture. Exploring a strategy of Initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity and promote intercultural dialogue. - Programs aimed at reducing discrimination and fostering understanding among different ethnic, religious, and social groups can be initiated.
3. Strengthening Democratic Institutions; Strong, transparent, and accountable institutions are vital for maintaining public trust in democracy. Citizens are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward democracy if they perceive institutions as fair and effective.
4. Utilizing Media and Technology; Media and technology can play a powerful role in shaping political attitudes. Promoting responsible media consumption and encouraging the use of digital platforms for political engagement can enhance democratic participation.
5. Encouraging open dialogue among citizens about political issues can help to foster a culture of respect and understanding, which is essential

for a healthy democracy. Organizing community forums and discussions that allow citizens to express their views and listen to others. Conflict resolution programs that focus on constructive dialogue should be encouraged.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopted two theories, Political culture and Social Learning Theory (SLT).

POLITICAL CULTURE THEORY explores how cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes influence political behavior and outcomes within a society. It examines the subjective dimension of politics, focusing on the motivations and values that drive political actions. This theory is crucial for understanding how individuals' political orientations, shaped by socialization and historical events, can impact governance, state dynamics, and even political change. Political Culture Theory has been founded by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in their impressive work, *The Civic Culture* (1963), and has been viewed ever since as one of the most debated theories in political science whose resilience against devastating criticism has impressed as much the voices defending it as the voices expressing dissatisfaction and doubt. This has resulted in periodically painful or strategic withdrawals from the front, followed by strong comebacks on the arena of political science research. The political phenomena in Eastern Europe after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 have been giving the latest substantial boosts to political culture research and call it once more to the front. The most powerful argument was the view upon the dynamic role political culture plays in the relationship between the *citizens* and the *State* in a *democratic* society.

Application of Political Culture Theory

Individual Attitudes: Political culture shapes individual attitudes towards political objects, such as the state, government, and political parties.

Aggregation of Attitudes These individual attitudes are aggregated to form mass attitudes, which can influence the dynamics of the state and its operation.

Impact on Political Change: Changes in political culture can drive and enhance political change, including regime shifts and revolutions.

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY (SLT)

Proponent of this theory include Albert Bandura who builds on earlier work by Julian Rotter 1954. Social learning theory is built on these core principles: Observational Learning; individuals learn attitudes and behaviours by watching others (models). Imitation & Modeling; behaviour is reproduced if the model is admired, respected, or considered similar. Cognitive Processes; learning is not automatic, individuals actively interpret, evaluate, and internalise observed behaviour. People acquire new behaviours and attitudes through direct experience *and* observing others. The likelihood of adopting a political attitude increases when role models (parents, peers, leaders) demonstrate and reinforce it.

Application Of Social Learning Theory to Political Attitudes

Social learning theory helps to explain how people develop political orientations, loyalties, and prejudices through;

1. **Family Socialization:** Children adopt political attitudes (e.g., party loyalty, religious-political alignment) by observing parents. In Nigeria, families transmit ethno-religious political leanings; in Kenya, children often learn that voting for their ethnic group ensures communal survival.
2. **Peer Influence:** Young people may adopt protest culture, activism, or apathy by observing classmates or colleagues.
3. **Media & Leaders:** Political speeches, religious sermons, and campaign ads model political behaviour and shape perceptions. For example, when religious leaders in Nigeria endorse a candidate, their followers often adopt that political attitude.
4. **Reinforcement:** If individuals see their group gain resources or recognition when "their" candidate wins, this reinforces ethnic or religiously-based voting patterns.

FACTORS INFLUENCING POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF NIGERIA AND KENYA

According to Akinyetun (2023), Political attitudes are shaped by an interplay of social, cultural, and institutional forces. In Nigeria and Kenya, two of Africa's most politically significant states, political attitudes are deeply embedded in histories of colonial rule, ethno-religious pluralism, and patterns of state formation. These attitudes are not formed in isolation but are mediated by ethnicity, religion, political socialization, economic conditions, media, and institutional performance

Ethnicity Factors In Nigeria

Ethnicity plays a dominant role in shaping political attitudes. Nigeria's "tripodal" ethnic structure — Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the southwest, and Igbo in the southeast — along with numerous minorities, produces voting patterns strongly aligned with ethno-regional identities. Citizens often

interpret politics through the lens of group representation and resource allocation. As Suberu (2022) argues, the persistent demand for “zoning” in presidential elections reflects entrenched ethno-political attitudes that prioritize communal rather than national interests.

Ethnicity Factors In Kenya

In Kenya, ethnicity is perhaps the single most important determinant of political attitudes. Kanyinga and Odote (2021), opined that Voting blocs are organized around ethnic coalitions such as Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin, and Luhya, with politics functioning as a struggle for access to state resources. Citizens frequently perceive elections as “ethnic censuses,” with political loyalty framed as an obligation to ensure the survival of one’s group.

Religion Factors in Nigeria

Religion is a central axis of political orientation. The Muslim north–Christian south divide is a critical determinant of electoral attitudes, trust in government, and perceptions of fairness. For example, Ojo (2024) submitted that the 2023 “Muslim-Muslim” presidential ticket sparked heated debates, reflecting how deeply religion shapes political perceptions. Religious leaders also function as political brokers, endorsing candidates and shaping voters’ attitudes. According to Okolie and Anazodo, (2023).

Religion Factors In Kenya

Religion plays a more supplementary role. While Kenya is predominantly Christian, political mobilisation is not usually organised along religious lines. However, Muslim minorities along the coast and in the northeast often articulate political attitudes of marginalisation, framing exclusion in religious terms (Lynch, 2022). Churches and mosques also act as mediators during political crises, influencing how citizens view peace and legitimacy.

Political Socialization Factor

Both Nigeria and Kenya illustrate how political attitudes are learned through socialization agents such as family, peers, schools, and the media.

Nigeria: Families often transmit ethno-religious political orientations to children, reinforcing patterns of bloc voting. Media outlets aligned with ethnic or religious groups further shape public attitudes (Akinyetun, 2023).

Kenya: Political elites’ model ethnic loyalty, with citizens learning from childhood that communal solidarity is the path to accessing state resources (Cheeseman & Lynch, 2023). Campaign rallies and political songs act as vehicles of mass political education.

This reflects Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), where individuals acquire political attitudes through observation, imitation, and reinforcement.

Institutional Performance and Governance Factors

The performance of state institutions also shapes political attitudes:

In Nigeria, weak democratic institutions, widespread corruption, and electoral malpractice produce cynicism and apathy. Okolie & Anazodo, (2023) opined that Citizens often perceive politics as elite manipulation, fostering low trust in government. Nigeria is ranked number 140 in the world transparency index with a score of 26%. Indicating how corrupted Nigeria governance is (world transparency index 2024)

In Kenya, repeated episodes of electoral violence (e.g., 2007–2008) have entrenched attitudes of distrust in electoral commissions and courts. However, citizens also show resilience by mobilizing through protests and civil society, reflecting ambivalent attitudes toward the state (Cheeseman & Lynch, 2023) Kenya is ranked number 121 in the world transparency index with a score of 32%. Indicating how corrupted Kenya governance is, though a little better than that of Nigeria (world transparency index 2024)

Economic Conditions and Inequality

In Nigeria, Economic deprivation fuels political attitudes of distrust toward the state. Unemployment, poverty, and corruption influence citizens to view politics as a means of patronage rather than service (Adebanwi, 2021). Resource distribution is perceived through ethnic and religious lenses, reinforcing communal-based attitudes.

In Kenya, Economic inequalities across regions strongly influence political perceptions. Groups in historically marginalized areas, such as the coast and north, view the state with suspicion, while those in central regions (traditionally favored under Kikuyu dominance) are more supportive of government institutions (Kanyinga, 2021).

COMPARISON OF NIGERIA AND KENYA POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Nigeria and Kenya operate a democratic system of government with both countries having a multi-party-political system. While both Nigeria and Kenya are democratic countries, differences exist in their political attitudes. Kenya has a more established and consistent democracy compared to Nigeria, which

has experienced periods of authoritarian rule with military intervention in the political system of the country. Analysis of their differences is as follow;

1. Political Structure and Governance: Nigeria operates a federal system with 36 states and a central government. The political landscape is often characterized by ethnic divisions, with significant influence from various ethnic groups such as the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. Political parties are often formed along ethnic lines, leading to a complex interplay of regional loyalties. While

Kenya has a unitary system with a devolved government structure that includes 47 counties. Political attitudes in Kenya have historically been influenced by tribal affiliations, but there is a growing trend towards national political parties. Ethnic politics remain highly significant, but there have been efforts to promote national unity and inclusivity.

Ethnicity and religion dominate political attitudes, but their weight differs, Kenya being primarily ethnic, Nigeria being ethno-religious.

2. Political History and Colonial Legacy: Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, and its post-colonial history has been marked by military coups, civil war, and significant political instability. The legacy of colonial rule has fostered a competitive environment among ethnic groups, which continues to shape political attitudes. While

Kenya's independence came in 1963, and the country has experienced its own share of political challenges, including authoritarian rule and electoral violence. The legacy of colonialism, particularly the land issue, has influenced political attitudes and has led to calls for reforms and land redistribution.

3. Corruption and Governance: Corruption is often seen as pervasive in Nigerian politics, affecting public trust in government institutions. Political attitudes towards corruption can be cynical, with many citizens feeling disillusioned about the ability of leaders to address corruption effectively. While

Corruption is also a significant issue in Kenya, and it impacts citizens' political attitudes. However, there has been a more vocal civil society and media presence advocating for accountability and transparency, leading to a somewhat different public discourse around governance.

4. Electoral Processes and Participation: Election in Nigeria are often characterized with allegations of electoral fraud and violence. While

Kenya has faced significant challenges regarding electoral integrity, particularly highlighted during the disputed elections of 2007 and 2017, which resulted in violence. However, there has been a push for electoral reforms and a more engaged civil society, leading to increased voter awareness and participation.

5. Civil Society and Activism: In Nigeria, there is existence of civil society with numerous organizations advocating for human rights, anti-corruption, and social justice. However, there are also challenges, including government crackdowns on innocent protesters. While

Kenya has a vibrant civil society and a history of activism, especially on issues like land reform, electoral justice, and governance. The role of civil society is cannot be overemphasized in shaping political attitudes and mobilizing citizens for change.

Despite the differences in Nigeria and Kenya political attitudes, they also shared some Similarities that influences their political attitudes and behavior.

1. Ethnicity and tribal influences, plays a major role in shaping their political attitudes

2. corruption has been a contending issue in both Nigeria and Kenya leading to wide spread of public discontent. Citizens in both countries feel concern with lack of transparency and accountability in governance thereby influence their attitudes towards politics.

3. Election in Nigeria and Kenya are often marred with allegation of fraud, violence and electoral malpractices which often play a major role in determining the political behavior of the citizen.

4. Colonial history; Nigeria and Kenya have been shaped by their colonial histories that have left a legacy of inequality and ethnic division which shaped and influences contemporary political attitudes.

Summary Of Findings

Based on analysis of Afrobarometer data and literature review, the study identified the following key findings:

In the aspect of Convergences or similarities,

Democratic Aspirations: Both Nigerians and Kenyans overwhelmingly express support for democracy as the preferred system of governance.

Political Awareness: Citizens in both countries show increasing political awareness, particularly among the youth, driven by social media and civic

activism.

Demand for Accountability: There is a growing demand for transparency, anti-corruption measures, and better service delivery.

In the aspect of dichotomy or differences

Trust in Institutions: Kenyans generally exhibit higher trust in electoral bodies and judicial institutions compared to Nigerians, where skepticism remains high.

Forms of Participation: Nigerians are more likely to engage in informal political behavior (e.g., protests), while Kenyans tend to participate more through voting and formal channels.

Ethnic and Regional Influences: While ethnicity plays a central role in politics in both countries, it is more institutionalized and politically mobilized in Kenya's electoral system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS;

The comparative analysis of political attitudes in Nigeria and Kenya reveals significant similarities and differences rooted in each country's unique historical, social, and political contexts. Both nations are characterized by diverse ethnicities and cultures, which profoundly influence political behavior and attitudes. The study thereby recommends that each country should develop an initiative that encourages active political participation among citizens, especially among the marginalized groups and should prioritize strengthening their democratic institutions to foster public trust. Tolerance, inclusivity should be encouraged to enhance positive political attitudes and participation.

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