

Public Opinion and the Public Policy Making Process in Nigeria: A Critical Assessment

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Abstract

The process of making public policies is often influenced by a number of factors and considerations, one of which is public opinion. But the relationship between public opinion and the public policy-making process is a difficult one. This essay critically assesses the role of public opinion in the policy-making process in Nigeria, and while it is acknowledged that responsive and genuinely democratic governments are hugely sensitive to the opinions of the citizens on issues of public policy, it is argued that this is not the case in Nigeria. With the aid of the elite and class analytical models, it is contended that the opinions of the Nigerian masses hardly impinge on the policy-making process, and the “public” policies churned out of this process are often designed to promote and protect the class interests of those who control the Nigerian State. It is concluded that the extreme poverty and illiteracy which pervade the Nigerian society have emasculated and disempowered the majority of the people and made them inconsequential observers in the policy-making process in the country.

Key words: Public; Opinion; Public opinion; Public policy; Policy-making process

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INTRODUCTION

“Policy-making cannot be understood simply in terms of how decisions are made. Policy involves not only clusters of decisions, in the sense of a number of related decisions concerning a particular policy area, but also different kinds of decisions...” (Heywood, 2007, p.430).

In any modern political system where political and administrative powers are not concentrated in only one agency/authority, the process of making public policies can be a relatively complex one. It is an exercise that comprises a number of phases or stages, each of which is vital for the overall success of the venture. As Jega (2003, p.19) has observed, it is generally recognized that the process through which public policy is conceived, formulated and implemented is one of the most important processes of governance and societal development in modern nation-states; and its importance lies in the fact that it serves as the political, legal and administrative context and framework within which functionaries of government and the institutions of governance interact with a myriad of non-governmental stakeholders, synthesize ideas on how to satisfy identified needs and aspirations of citizens, convert these into executable policies, and then mobilize resources to provide goods, products and services aimed at addressing these identified needs and aspirations as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The public policy-making process is often influenced by a complex network of factors/variables, one of which is public opinion. This essay examines the phenomenon of public opinion and the extent to which it impacts on the public policy-making process in Nigeria. It analyses the process of making public policies in Nigeria, and attempts to demonstrate the disdainful attitude of the members of the political class towards the feelings and opinions of the masses in the course of making public policies and programmes. This analysis is against the backdrop of the widely acknowledged importance of public opinion in ascertaining the responsiveness (or

otherwise) of governments and political authorities to the views, moods, and yearnings of the citizenry. The situation in post-colonial Nigeria clearly shows that most public policies in the country hardly reflect the opinions of the populace. In other words, the various administrations which the country has had have rarely considered the genuine opinions and desires of the Nigerian masses in the process of making public policies. There is no doubt that public policies should be wholly driven by the need to promote the welfare of the majority of the masses (Obo & Obo, 2013, p.251); but regrettably, this has not been the case in Nigeria. A major reason for this is the disregard and contempt with which those who run the Nigerian state have treated the Nigerian people and this is reflected in the many obnoxious and self-serving policies and programmes presented as “public policies” (Obo & Obo, 2013, p.244).

This essay is broadly organized into four parts. This first part forms the introduction; in part two, a brief conceptual and theoretical analysis is presented. The major concepts employed in this essay are situated in their definitional perspectives and the theoretical frameworks adopted for the paper are also highlighted in this section. In part three, an attempt is made to x-ray the policy-making process in Nigeria, with specific attention on the role of public opinion. The conclusion is contained in part four.

1. A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

For the purpose of analytical tidiness, and in order to deepen the understanding of the major issues of interest in this essay, it is appropriate for the key concepts used in the analysis to be properly defined and clarified. This would also help to highlight the contexts within which these concepts are to be understood. The theoretical basis of the essay also needs to be considered; and these are the issues with which this part of the essay is concerned.

1.1 Understanding Public Opinion

Defining public opinion is a difficult task as it is a concept surrounded by a large amount of confusion and controversy. As V.O. Key Jr. (Anderson, 1997, p.147) has reasoned, “to speak with precision of public opinion is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost”. In the words of Rowe (Agi, 2006, p.223),

much confusion surrounds the concept of public opinion and while both the supporters and the opponents of a policy may agree that public opinion should prevail, it is probable that they have little awareness of the complexity of the phenomenon... The confusion lies, mainly, in the implication that there is a public and that it has an opinion...

The above assertion is reinforced by the view that public opinion can be seen as

... a congeries of all sorts of discrepant notions, beliefs, fancies, prejudices, and aspirations. It is confused, incoherent, amorphous, varying from day to day and week to week. But in

the midst of this diversity and confusion every question as it rises into importance is subjected to a process of consolidation and clarification until there emerge and take definite shape certain views, or set of disconnected views, each held and advocated in common by bodies of citizens... (Bryce, 1981, p.571).

According to Idang (1973, pp.77-78), public opinion may simply be taken to mean any collection of opinions on specific political issues held or expressed by individuals and groups outside the government, and in this sense, public opinion may be synonymous with mass opinion, with the collective opinion of the voting public, or with any collection of individual opinions. It may be informed, mature and rational, but it may also be uninformed, prejudiced, or emotional. Public opinion can also be referred to as the commonly held attitudes by the individuals or groups of individuals regarding specific issues, policy outputs, and political personalities in politics or governing process. That is, it connotes the totality of private or individual opinions on political phenomena or policy outputs of the government, and it usually reflects people’s thinking or feelings on political subjects of local, state, national and international interest (Akindele, Obiyan, & Owoeye, 2000, p.82).

There is no doubt that opinions are products of an individual’s personality, social characteristics, and interests. But opinions are also shaped by institutional, political, and governmental forces that make it more likely that citizens will hold some beliefs and less likely that they will hold others. An opinion is normally the outcome of a process that takes place in the human mind, and only human beings are equipped by nature with the means, which is the mind, by which opinions can be formed. Public opinion can thus be regarded as the totality of the political orientations, beliefs, values, and attitudes expressed by members of a group about current issues, actors, and events in their political environment. (Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, 2004, p.367; Ayeni-Akeke, 2008, p.104). The point has been made that public opinion can be defined operationally as those public perspectives or viewpoints on policy issues that public officials consider or take into account in making decisions, and they may be expressed in many ways-letters to the editor and to public officials, meetings, public demonstrations, editorials, election results, legislators meeting with constituents, plebiscites, and radio talk shows (Anderson, 1997, p.146).

It has also been opined that while the term “public” means the people in a normative sense and its only intelligent part in an empirical sense, the term “opinion” refers to a belief which reflects their attitudes and personality on a matter of great national importance. That is, public opinion is not the opinion of the whole population; it is a view of the capable segment of the population. It includes those who are intelligent enough to know about public issues and who are enlightened enough to think rationally and then express their views in a detached manner (Johari, 2005, p.596). And in the words

of McKee (Agi, 2006, p.225), by public opinion, we mean the end products of a “process of public discussion leading to the formation of one or more widely shared opinions as to the advisability or desirability of a public policy or mode of action by government”.

However, regardless of how public opinion is defined, it is generally agreed that at least four factors are involved in public opinion, namely:

- there must be an issue;
- there must be a significant number of individuals who express opinions on the issue;
- there must be some kind of consensus among at least some of these opinions; and
- this consensus must directly or indirectly exert influence (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1980, p.210).

1.2 A Note on Public Policy

Public policy has been conceptualized in various ways by different scholars and authors. That is, there is no unanimity among analysts as to what the correct definition of public policy should be. The controversy is over the boundary of what should constitute public policy: should it be posited at the level of decision making, intention or action of government? (Egonmwan, 1991, p.1). With the group theory as his guide, Latham (Dye, 1987, p.27) argues that what may be called public policy is actually the equilibrium reached in the group struggle at any given moment, and that it represents a balance which the contending factions or groups constantly strive to tip in their favour. As he puts it, the legislature referees the group struggle, ratifies the victories of the successful coalitions, and records the terms of surrenders, compromises, and conquests in the form of statutes. This view is supported by Grindle and Thomas (Jega, 2003, p.23) who have noted that “public policy results from the conflict, bargaining and coalition formation among a potentially large number of societal groups, organized to protect or advance particular interests common to their members”.

According to Abdulsalami (Ezeani, 2006, p.289), public policy “refers to hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring governmental action for their solution”. Implicit in this view is the fact that public policy is what governments actually do and not what they intend doing. Thus, mere declaration of intentions, wishes, principles, or expression of desires cannot be regarded as public policy (Ezeani, 2006, p.289). While Dunn regards public policy as “a long series of more or less related choices, including decisions not to act, made by governmental bodies and officials”, Waldt sees it as “the formal articulation, statement, or publication of a goal that the government intends to pursue” in order to address a need or a problem (Jega, 2003, p.22).

In his own analysis, Anderson (1997, p.10) regards public policy as a relatively stable, purposive course of

action followed by government in dealing with some problem or matter of concern. Few points can be gleaned from this definition. First, policy is linked to purposive or goal-oriented action rather than to random behaviour or chance occurrences. Second, public policies consist of courses or patterns of action taken over time by governmental officials rather than their separate, discrete decisions. Third, public policies emerge in response to policy demands, or those claims for action or inaction on some public issue made by other actors-private citizens, group representatives, or legislators and other public officials-upon government officials and agencies. Fourth, public policy involves what governments actually do, not just what they intend to do or what they say they are going to do. Fifth, a public policy may be either positive or negative. Some form of overt governmental action may deal with a problem on which action is demanded (positive), or governmental officials may decide to do nothing on some matter on which government involvement was sought (negative). Finally, public policy, at least in its positive form, is based on law and is authoritative (Anderson, 1997, pp.10-12).

From the foregoing, it is clear that public policy is distinct from other forms of policies and it emanates from the actions or proposed actions of governments. As Waldt (Jega, 2003, p.23) has stated;

public policy differs from the policy of private organizations in the sense that it is authoritative. This feature of public policy means that it can be enforced through instruments of coercion. Public policies involve the participation of government institutions and fragmented structures of semi-independent groups and organizations through a complex system of formal and informal delegation of responsibility and control. At the very least, such policies must be processed, authorized, or ratified within the framework of government. Thus, in order to be authoritative, a policy must be approved and promulgated by an institution that is authorized by statute or the constitution.

1.3 Policy-Making Process Explained

With the work of Robinson and Majark as his guide, Ikelegbe (1996, p.67) states that the policy process refers to the methods, conditions, procedures, activities, interactions and stages by which policies are made. In his view, it has to do with how policies come about or are made and what is involved in the processing of policies from problems identification to the policy outcome. More generally, it involves all that goes on from when the need and desire for a policy was articulated to its formation, enactment, implementation, performance and impact. Ikelegbe also contends that the policy process is a complex web of activities, interactions, techniques, and strategies involving several persons, groups and agencies, and that policy making is more than an act; it is often a tortuous and complex process of bargaining, negotiations, compromises and choices among methods, goals, interests, techniques, alternatives, structures, resources, and political commitments.

The policy process is a shorthand way of designating the various processes and practices by which public policies are formed. However, there is no single process by which policies are made; they do not come off of an assembly line as do automobiles or television sets. Rather, variations in the subjects of policies will produce variations in the style and techniques of policy-making (Anderson, 1997, pp.38-39). On his part, Heywood (2007, p.426) points out that the policy process relates to the mechanisms through which public policy is made. According to him, policy-making is a process in two senses. First, it involves a linked series of actions or events which commence with the germination of ideas and the initiation of proposals, continue with some form of debate, analysis and evaluation, and conclude with the making of formal decisions and their implementation through designated actions. Policy-making therefore links certain “inputs” to particular “outputs”. Second, it is a process in the sense that it distinguishes the “how” of government from the “what” of government: that is, it focuses on the way in which policy is made (process), rather than on the substance of policy itself and its consequences (product).

Implicit in the aforementioned conceptualizations is the fact that the policy-making process has a number of stages or courses of actions. These have been identified by various scholars in different ways. For instance, Jones (Ezeani, 2006, p.303) identifies five stages: problem identification, policy formulation, legitimating, application or implementation and policy evaluation. For Lasswell (Ezeani, 2006, p.303; Eminue, 2005, p.92), there are seven stages: information or intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal and termination. In Rosenbaum’s view (Eminue, 2005, p.93), five stages are identifiable: agenda-setting, policy-making, implementation, assessment and (sometimes) termination. While Jega (2003, p.26) draws attention to five stages: policy agenda, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation and policy evaluation, Egonmwan (1991, p.4) identifies the stages of policy formulation, implementation, feedback and evaluation. And in his analysis, Anderson (1997, p.39 & 41) recognizes five stages: problem identification and

agenda setting, formulation, adoption, implementation and evaluation. Jega’s, Egonmwan’s and Anderson’s categories are respectively captured in the Figures and table below.

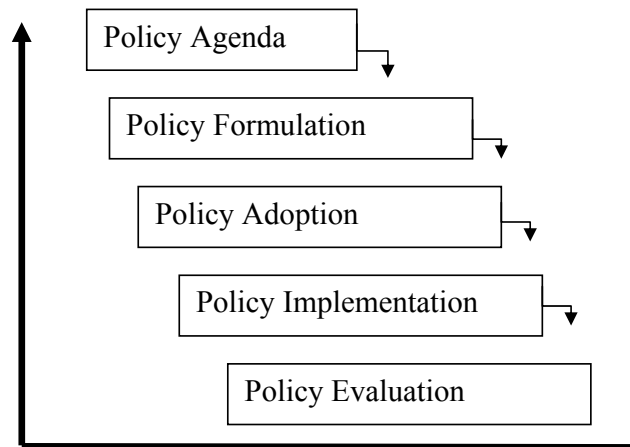


Figure 1
A Model of Logically Sequenced Phases of Rational/Scientific Public Policy Making Process
Source: G.V.D. Waldt (Jega, 2003, p.27)

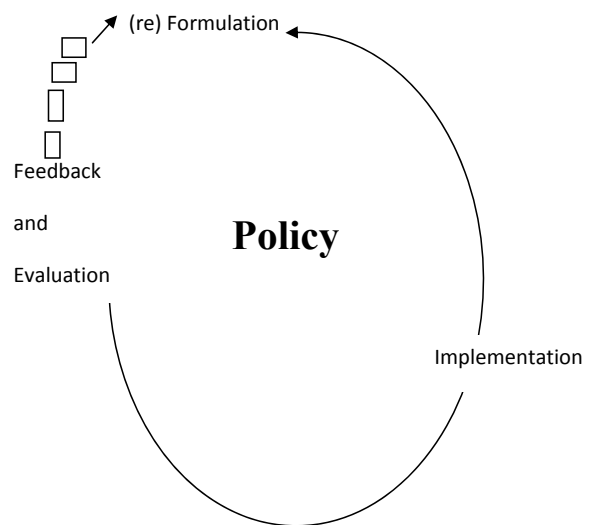


Figure 2
The Policy Making Process
Source: Egonmwan (1991, p.4).

Table 1
The Policy Process

Policy terminology	Stage 1 Policy agenda	Stage2 Policy formulation	Stage 3 Policy adoption	Stage 4 Policy implementation	Stage 5 Policy evaluation
Definition	Those problems, among many, that receive the serious attention of public officials	Development of pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with a public problem	Development of support for a specific proposal so that a policy can be legitimized or authorized	Application of the policy by the government’s administrative machinery	Efforts by the government to determine whether the policy was effective and why or why not
Common sense	Getting the government to consider action on the problem	What is proposed to be done about the problem	Getting the government to accept a particular solution to the problem	Applying the government’s policy to the problem	Did the policy work?

Source: Anderson, Brady, and Bullock III (Anderson, 1997, p.40).

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The situation in Nigeria clearly shows that the views and preferences of the majority of Nigerians are hardly considered when public policies are made. Policies are often made by the operators of the Nigerian state to promote their self and class interests. We do agree with the view that "...although theory cannot by itself transform reality, without a theoretical illumination reality must appear a closed riddle" (Mamdani, 1996, p.299). Thus, their shortcomings notwithstanding, the Elite and Marxist (class analytical) theoretical frameworks have been adopted for this essay.

According to the elite theory, public policy mainly reflects the values and preferences of the government elites. So, it is not the people or the masses who determine public policy through their actions and demands but rather, public policy is decided by a ruling elite and carried into effect by public officials and agencies. This implies that the making of decisions about public policy is a small group affair and the assumption is that the wishes and desires of these minorities are always protected. However, policies might sometimes be in the masses' interests, even though the long term interest may be that of the elites, but this happens as concessions to or reactions by the elites to threats of the status quo by the masses (Anderson, 1997, p.29; Eminue, 2005, p.256; Olaniyi, 1998, p.61; Ikelegbe, 1996, p.33). Dye and Zeigler (Anderson, 1997, pp.29-30) have provided a summary of the assumptions of the elite theory:

(i) society is divided into the few who have power and the many who do not. Only a small number of persons allocate values for society; the masses do not decide public policy;

(ii) the few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socioeconomic strata of society;

(iii) the movement of non-elites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only non-elites who have accepted the basic elite consensus can be admitted to governing circles.;

(iv) elites share a consensus on the basic values of the social system and the preservation of the system;

(v) public policy does not reflect demands of the masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary; and

(vi) active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses. Elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

With their class analytical model as a guide, Marxists contend that every capitalist society is a class society. As shown elsewhere (Obo & Coker, 2013, pp.38-43), Marxists argue that in any capitalist society, there are two main classes of people: the "bourgeoisie" (i.e; the owners of means of production) and the "proletariat" (i.e., the wage-labourers or non-owners of means of production), the former being the dominant class. It is

asserted that the state and its apparatuses are controlled by the "bourgeoisie", and the state is used as an instrument for the domination and oppression of the "proletariat" by the dominant class. The state, in the view of Marxists, is not a neutral umpire, rather, it is a tool used by the dominant class-which controls it-for the perpetuation of the domination of the weaker class. In this kind of system, public policies are often carefully tailored principally to promote and protect the interests of those who dominate and control the state while the views, values and desires of the majority of the people are discountenanced. Indeed, if as Claude Ake has pointed out, "politics is the competition among groups to make public policy conducive to the realization of their interests and ideologies", then the role of the ruling class is determinant in what the state does and what the state chooses not to do in the value allocation process (Sambo, 1999, p.297).

2. PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING PROCESS IN NIGERIA: WHAT ROLE FOR PUBLIC OPINION?

The history of public policy-making in Nigeria clearly shows that the process has generally lacked "the essential attributes of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, participation and consultation". On the contrary, as Jega (2003, p.30) aptly puts it,

...the process is essentially driven by officialdom, in the sense that government officials, both the elected and unelected, arrogate to themselves the wisdom, prerogative and expertise of controlling and managing the policy-making process, with little if any reference to, or interaction with, the overwhelming majority of the citizens. Thus, the process is not people-driven, transparent, consultative, or participatory. It is restrictive, closed, exclusive, insensitive, unresponsive, and often irresponsible...

As Rosenau (Suberu, 1991, p.83) has shown, the relationship or linkage between public opinion and policy-making involves three different but closely interrelated processes taking place at three distinct levels. At the lowest level, we have the opinion-making process, which involves the formation and circulation of opinions and ideas on public issues through the actions and interactions of various publics and agencies in the society. At the intermediate level, we have the opinion-submitting process through which the influential opinion groups and leaders attempt to seek governmental support for their preferred opinions on public policy matters. And at the highest level, we have the decision-making process itself. Here the institutionally designated decision-makers will attempt to formulate policies in the light of among other considerations, the opinions of the relevant publics.

There is no doubt that, as Suberu (1991, p.83) has reasoned, the relationship between public opinion and policy-making is a complex one. According to him, most people are not usually informed about an issue and cannot therefore participate effectively in shaping public policy;

the few that are informed about, and are interested in, an issue may hold divergent opinions and may not be able to convince the government to adopt their preferred position, and the government itself is not a disinterested actor in the opinion-policy process as it may take several steps to shape, organize, or mobilize public opinion in support of its own policies.

Ideally, public policies are meant to benefit the citizens who could be considered as the core actors for some reasons. First, they constitute the human environment and their perceptions, values, preferences and demands constitute a major environmental influence on public policies. Second, the citizens make the demands for public policy and constitute the clients and targets. Third, the citizens contribute the resources for the provision of policy goods and services through public taxes and other means. Finally, the citizens have the power of electing, supporting or rejecting the major governmental actors and the policies they stand for (Ikelegbe, 1996, p.100). However, the reality in Nigeria and other underdeveloped countries is different. While the resources used to fund government's policies belong to the citizens, the opinions of these vital components of the society seldom influence the policy-making process. As Egonmwan (1991, p.164) puts it,

the situation is worse in the developing countries where policy making is not made explicit but dictated, in most cases by men at the top due to low level of literacy of the masses, the weakness or ineffectiveness of the mass media (where they exist), centralization of authority, and the ineffectiveness of interest-aggregating structures (where they exist) because of the thin line of distinction between them and the ruling class...

It is generally believed that since sovereignty lies with the citizens, it is in the interest of the government to be guided by the opinions and preferences of the majority of the citizenry in the policy-making process. It is reasoned that public opinion is a significant factor in the policy-making process as no government interested in its own survival can consistently and completely ignore the opinions of the public (Suberu, 1991, p.83). This, the argument goes, is because governments are expected to derive their mandates from the people and they can only retain their offices at the instance of the citizens. This implies that "elected public officials who totally ignore public opinion and do not include it among their criteria for decisions, should any be so foolish, are likely to find themselves out of luck at election time" (Anderson, 1997, pp.147-148). Unfortunately, this analysis does not capture the situation in Nigeria. In present-day Nigeria, for example, parties' candidates for elections are not elected in transparent and credible primaries; rather, they are mostly imposed on the parties by few people who are variously described as "Godfathers", "Stakeholders," "Party Elders", "Caucus Leaders" etc. The general elections themselves have never truly reflected the wishes of the masses. For instance, as pointed out elsewhere (Obo

& Williams, 2007, p.8), "if the electoral process of 2003 was a sham, then what took place in April 2007, which people inappropriately describe as 'elections', was a monumental fraud and a calamity to democracy".

It is also important to remember that Nigeria spent the greater part of its post-colonial years under brutal and extremely corrupt military dictatorships, and it is a known fact that these regime-types are hardly responsive to public views and opinions. By their very nature, they are unaccountable and intolerant of dissenting views. And under these regimes, "the policy making process became increasingly restrictive, closed, arbitrary and authoritarian" (Jega, 2003, p.32). The point has to be made that due to the crippling poverty which permeates the Nigerian society, majority of the people do not only lack the resources and empowerment to effectively participate in the policy-making process, they are also more concerned and preoccupied with the struggle for survival. To them, expressing an opinion on public policy issues is regarded as an irrelevant and unimportant venture.

In one of his insightful essays, Eskor Toyo (2000, p.47), while focusing on government economic policy-making, observes that Nigerian economic policy-making since 1960 has basically served parasitism and has been borne in a vehicle of misguided theories and prescriptions-misguided when judged from the standpoints of basic social and national interests. And deploying the Marxist class analytical framework, Toyo (2000, p.48) states:

in a class society, the main focus of economic policy is the driving interest or interests of the ruling class or alliance of classes, and the angles from which policies are judged arise from the positions and interests of the various classes, strata or groups involved in sharing the national income. In Nigeria, since 1960, this has also been the case.

It should be reiterated that Nigeria is a class and an exploitative society, and the Nigerian state is a neocolonial one, firmly controlled and dominated by a few wealthy Nigerians and their foreign collaborators in whose interests the policy-making process in Nigeria is primed. The history of public policy-making in Nigeria is replete with cases which show the Nigerian government's disregard for public opinion. A few examples would suffice. After overthrowing his boss in a military coup, General Ibrahim Babangida, in his quest for legitimacy and popular acceptability, presented Nigerians with the opportunity to express their views on the government's economic policy and Nigeria's relations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The opinions of the people which were aggregated via what became known as the "Great Debate" were overwhelmingly opposed to the conditionalities of the IMF and its policy prescriptions. But the Babangida's military junta ignored the opinions of the Nigerian people, accepted the IMF's conditions of economic enslavement, and consequently fast-tracked Nigeria's economic subjugation. As Osundare (Obo, 2001, pp.68-69) stated then,

...Nigerians...decided overwhelmingly to reject the International Monetary Fund and its enslaving conditionalities. However, in the end the people had their say, the government had its way. The International Monetary Fund was smuggled in through the backdoor in the guise of a contraption called the... SAP... Is anyone asking why Nigerians should have been so cunningly deceived by their rulers?

In the Fourth Republic, the Olusegun Obasanjo-led regime (1999-2007) increased the pump prices of petroleum products several times - in contradistinction to the opinions of the majority of the Nigerian people who were clearly opposed to that policy. Obasanjo never pretended to care about public opinions in the course of designing and implementing his mainly class-inspired and anti-people policies. On January 1, 2012, the regime of Goodluck Jonathan elevated official wickedness and sadism to higher levels by raising the price-per litre-of petrol from sixty-five naira (₦65) to one hundred and forty-one naira (₦141), an increase of over a hundred percent. President Jonathan even arrogantly and tyrannically declared that the increment was irreversible! But the point that Nigerians were totally united in their opposition to, and rejection of, that policy was evident in the fact that millions of people thronged the streets of different cities of the country to protest against it. In fact, the country's economy was paralyzed for a week before the government grudgingly reduced the price from one hundred and forty-one naira (₦141) to ninety-seven naira (₦97) per litre, which still represented an increase of thirty-two naira (₦32).

It is instructive to note that the public opinion on the above-named issue was unequivocal: the price should **not** be increased. Indeed, the numerous revelations-by probe panels-of massive corruption involving government officials and their friends in the management of the oil industry in Nigeria show that the government's policy of increasing prices of petroleum products is designed to promote the interests of those who control the Nigerian state.

Another example is the government's policy of privatization of public enterprises in Nigeria which was formulated and implemented without any consideration for the desires, feelings, and opinions of the majority of the masses. And as most of its outcomes have shown, the policy tends to "accentuate the collective pauperization of majority of the people on the one hand, and enhance the continuous **bourgeoisification** of the privileged few, on the other" (Obo & Obo, 2013, p.244).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that it is proper "that governors shall seek out popular opinion, that they shall give it weight, if not the determinative voice in decision, and that the persons outside the government have a right to be heard" (Key, 2006, p.230). But as pointed out earlier, in Nigeria,

the governors hardly seek or accept popular opinion-which is contrary to theirs-and Nigerians outside the government are rarely heard.

In the opinion-making process, three main groups of "publics" have been identified; they are:

the mass public: this is the largest public, but the least capable of articulating coherent opinions on public policy or exercising any influence on governmental decisions or policies. Members of this public lack the informational and evaluative resources necessary to adequately comprehend the complexities of public policy;

the attentive or interested public: this is smaller in size than the mass public, but it plays a far more decisive and consistent role in opinion formation and policy formulation. Members of this public are educated, informed, and highly motivated participants in public affairs; and

the opinion-elite or opinion-making public: this group is made up of the confirmed or recognized opinion leaders in the country. These are those persons who, because of their social position, communication resources, organizational ability and political leverage, are able to exert a strong influence on public moods as well as public policy. The main difference between the last two publics is that although both are informed and interested in public affairs, the latter has the additional quality of having a more or less direct access to the centres of decision-making in the society (Suberu, 1991, pp.75-76).

It is appropriate to state that majority of Nigerians belong to the mass public, and they do not have the requisite competence and financial resources to influence the policy-making process. Apart from the fact that different governments in Nigeria have always been unresponsive and insensitive to the people's yearnings, to the vast majority of the population (who are mostly poor and uneducated), the phrases "public opinion" and "policy-making" mean very little or nothing.

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