

MY CHOICE! YOUR CHOICE!! OUR CHOICE!!! WHO'S CHOICE?

The Force of Electoral Power in Democracy

BY GODSON AZU

In a country where the sole employer is the State, opposition means death by slow starvation. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced by a new one: who does not obey shall not eat. L. Trosky 1937.

Politics as a game of rational choice, why choice is key determinant factor in selecting or electing democratic leadership and government.

Political leadership and electoral choice is the subject of this writing. We think of politics as those activities and behaviours associated with a group reaching 'collective decisions' and with individuals undertaking 'collective actions.'

The origin of politics may never be ascertained or established in view of its long debate. Some might believe it comes from our having fallen from grace by eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, with regards to first ever power struggle in the celestial or spiritual realm. My perspective leads to more empirical responses. Politics arises because groups of people have to do things together to achieve shared goals such as building a bridge, a community, or under certain circumstances, even to survive. There are things that we cannot achieve when we remain "unorganized." This is especially so when groups of individuals share a desire for something costly that they would accomplish as a group.

Examples abound but include such things as roads, environmental protection, law and order. In the social sciences these are known as 'public goods.' To accomplish the objectives of securing public goods, leaders are selected, and rewarded, taxes are demanded, and political competition arises. Often, however, these are the very activities that get in the way and actually prevent groups from getting things done in their own interest. This paper would try to explain why these sorts of contradictions occur: why politics is necessary, but so often dysfunctional. Indeed, politics is often so nasty that some become anarchists and argue that politics can't possibly be justified by the welfare needs of the group members.

For most of recorded history it was held that citizens were to support the welfare of the rulers. In this discuss, such an ethical justification of politics and its hierarchies is reversed (as it has been by most political theorists since Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan (1651). Democracies are predicated on the notion that the political is justified by the welfare of the citizens. Most noticeably this is asserted and enshrined in the Declaration of Independence: First it claims that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, which among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (American Constitution), thus, the Nigerian constitution has changed over-time but it still maintain a smiller context which states that all Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic, religious or political affiliation are bound by the constitution "That all men are equal, with the to life, respect of dignity, entitled to personal liberty and freedom" (Nigerian Constitution). Then politics, or more specifically government, is argued to be related to these rights, which include happiness: "That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the contract of social order.

To understand the patterns of politics in a group, we need to build on understanding the behavior of individuals in the group. Much of the modern explanations of the twists and turns that make- up the purposive behavior of individuals is premised on a relatively intuitive idea: When people choose, their choices reflect their values and their constraints. Leverage over this behavior is often obtained through the logic of rational choice theory. It is perhaps counter- intuitive that such a simple starting point can shine a powerful light on our understanding of the behaviors of governments, non-governmental political organizations, and individuals. But as the reader will discover, it is so.

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY: PREMISES TO UNDERSTAND POLITICS

The arguments and explanations that follow in this discuss are based on a core theory that many label the 'theory of rational choice.' The theory presumes decisions to be the result of conscious choice made by individuals to further the realization of their own preferences. Thus, the reasoning and level of approach would defer between the political concept obtainable in the British politics and that of emerging democracy in Nigeria, with the relative shift in interest accumulation and participatory level in both countries.

SELF-INTEREST

We need a definition that allows us to distinguish between self-interested and others regarding behavior, the definition of self-interest is not caring for the welfare of others when their welfare doesn't impact yours directly. Acting in the way that is most personally beneficial. Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, famously explained that it is possible to achieve the best economic benefit for all even when, and in fact because, individuals tend to act in their own self-interest. Smith wrote, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest." Smith's explanation of the invisible hand showed that through the self-interested actions of dozens, hundreds and even thousands of people, without any centralized planning, goods and services get created that benefit both producers and consumers.

Then self-interested behavior will be behavior motivated so that an individual would bear no costs to help (or hurt) someone else, unless doing so would lead to some expected benefit for herself. Perhaps such a definition is too restrictive, but it has some positive features:

- 1) its falsification is operationalizable: it divides all behavior into two non-empty classes;
- 2) it keeps the tie to choice over which we have some theoretical leverage.

COLLECTIVE-INTEREST

A **collective** is a group of entities that share or are motivated by at least one common issue or interest, or work together to achieve a common objective. Collectives are sometimes characterised by attempts to share and exercise political and social power and to make decisions on a consensus-driven and egalitarian basis.

Individual interests and collective interest in Bentham's works

The problem of the distinction between the 'is' and the 'ought' is therefore shifting towards the reconciliation of individual interest with the community interest. Whenever they coincide this gap is bridged. According to Halévy's reading of utilitarianism, there are three ways of identifying individual and collective interests. The first is the sympathetic fusion of interests; it supposes that individual interest is not selfish interest. The second concerns the natural identification of interests: if every one were to spontaneously act in an ethic manner—not necessarily consciously—there would in fact be no conflict between individual and collective interests. This apparently trivial statement comes from Bentham's economic philosophy.

The resulting spontaneous order finds echoes in libertarian theory, where government intervention is neither necessary, nor expected. These two approaches are however insufficient. Bentham devotes the principal part of his work to developing the third approach embedded in his philosophy of law: the artificial identification of interests. Outside intervention is necessary if collective and individual interests are to achieve compatibility.

Such intervention takes the form either of external intervention—the Civil or Penal code, the legal-administrative supervision of the town or city, or suitable legislation (Bentham, 1830; 1827; 1872); or internal intervention, resorting to a deontologist (Bentham, 1831).

There are two ways of tackling the problem of identification of interests in Bentham's work. The first consists in considering the diversity of the modalities of identification. Some authors have noted an opposition between his economic and political stances, defending a natural identification in the former case and an artificial identification of interest in the latter. But it is difficult to uphold this schizophrenic relationship between the economic and the legislative domain. Other writers have recently shown that Bentham also supports state intervention in the economic domain.

An exception to this demarcation moderates this view. The second approach to consideration of the gap between individual and collective interests is to focus on the case of artificial identification of interests. I therefore focus upon those states in which artificial identification is the only reliable modality of a junction of interests. The same conclusion can

be obtained: according to the principle of utility, any domain, political or economic, is likely to need—or is not likely to need a degree of state intervention.

PREFERENCES

Preferences are the term we use for values people place on outcomes, and alternatives from which they are to choose. As such, preferences are a relationship that one imposes upon one's alternatives: I prefer coffee to chocolate ice cream means that for me, coffee is superior to chocolate and when faced with the choice, I will pick coffee ice cream. But preferences don't get us very far unless we make assumptions regarding their properties. For example, if we argue that our preferences vary from moment to moment, that they are unstable, and contradictory we would have a less useful theory of behavior built on the foundation of preferences. A set of assumptions must underline our concept of preferences. We assume that people's preferences are well ordered and stable in any choice context or situation.

Relating this now to the challenging issues and debate ongoing with regards to the fourth-coming general elections in both Nigeria and Britain, it's very obvious that the level of preference differs from the either side political and economic spectrum. The behavioural mode and reactionary mode of voters on both side shows that the concept of preference is more fourth-coming in British politics than it is with the Nigerian politics. The reason why there is a consistent change of government and governance base on peoples preferences. Nigerian politics and it's electoral values are still an ongoing progressive study, in which are varying levels of improvement on voters mandate and understanding of representational government.

CHOICE

Choice by the individual is presumed to follow her preferences but there are other variables that must be considered. So, for example, you may prefer to win the lottery rather than to pay for a bus ride, but since the cost of the lottery ticket can also lead you to gain nothing, you may find that the gamble isn't worth it. Your valuation is modified by the probabilities that are involved in a manner reflecting on the expected values as defined above. Similarly, you may wish to purchase both the bus ride and the lottery ticket, but discover that you don't have enough money in your wallet. Thus, your choice is constrained by the resources available to you. (This constraint is referred to as a budget constraint in economics, but in politics I tend to call it though constraint). Because when it comes to the effective use of one's voting right (One Vote Many Choice), the determinant of one's vote is the thought-mind as influenced by the visual/vocal expression within one's environment.

In other words, persons make choices over actions, to obtain valued outcomes (a presumption that - except when the actions themselves have positive or negative value - the ends must justify the means). The choices are made in some sort of constrained environment - usually constrained by three things: a defined set of outcomes, a budget or resource constraint, and some set of costs or prices. Social situations involve a set of individuals who presumably each have their own preference.

Thus, the differentiation is politicking between Nigeria and Britain is very wide, in terms ideological expressions and understanding which leads to a preponderant political party choice base on attributes and expectations.

PART I: THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

We turn our attention to politics under two circumstances. Politics is vital when people share interests that are worth pursuing as a group but are too costly for any one individual or family to undertake alone. Politics also grabs our attention when politicians achieve

things that are not in the people's interests. We would examine politics by analysing the positive basis for politics that grabs our moral attention. Why are political institutions needed when the interests of a group surpass the means of any single individual? And then we would consider how the political institutions can be driven toward other ends.

Politics enables us to achieve together what we can't achieve separately. This view enables us to connect the premises of rational choice with the political life we all observe. Mancur Olson, brilliantly used this connection to fashion the first models of collective action. He put the point clearly enough to catch political scientists' attention. As Olson put it in the opening of his 1965 blockbuster, *The Logic of Collective Action*:

"The idea that groups tend to act in support of their group interests is supposed to follow logically from this widely held premise of rational, self-interested behavior. . . . But it is not in fact true that the idea that groups will act in their self-interest follows logically from the premise of rational and self-interested behavior. . . . The notion that groups of individuals will act to achieve their common or group interests, far from being a logical implication of their individual interests, is in fact incoherence.

PART II: COLLECTIVE CHOICE

We can see that groups can overcome inherent difficulties involved in providing themselves with public goods. Another aspect of the problem not discussed. Solving the dilemmas to achieve shared goals usually requires collective choice: a centralized decision. Just because unanimous support for some collective solution should always be possible, as all observers of politics have witnessed, rarely is collective choice of any sort - much less by unanimity - easy to come by. Frequently more is needed than making sure the group is organized to collect and apply resources needed to carry out collective projects. Collective, binding decisions are required regarding what is to be done. This process is anything but simple. Some of the roadblocks that make for some of these difficulties are analysed in this context.

We humans have a long and difficult history trying to engineer 'good' political systems to reach collective choices. We have ruled ourselves with various sorts of regimes, which we might divide into two overly broad classes: authoritarian and democratic. And here, in spite of the contemporary Western bias to democracy, looking at the landscape of political

history, one notices that humans have prospered under a variety of regimes. Civilization did not require democracy. But it did require an element of decent government. Since a degree of general prosperity is needed for the leaders, even the rare Stalins and Caligulas of the world have to consider constraints to their behavior in order to bolster the welfare of their citizens.

This is a continuous work on the role and impact of choice in the process of political actions both in developed democracies and emerging democracies. Please watch-out for the reaming parts on this page.