

# REVERENCE FOR PUBLIC OPINION POOLING: A PANACEA FOR LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA

*Matthew Mom*

## **Abstract**

Most analysts have come to terms with the fact that the greatest problem facing this country today is that of poor leadership. The consequences of this phenomenon are myriad and catastrophic. Apart from the general decay and collapse of public institutions, the awe of stinking poverty, hunger and rural misery, Nigerians have also been forced to witness the collapse of three republics and a civil war. To further worsen the situation, it thus appears that leadership in Nigeria has absolute believe in the theory of power, force and coercion despite its profound weakness and consequences. Recourse to history however shows that, no leader can exist for a single minute without the cooperation of the people willing or forced and if people suddenly withdraw their allegiance in every detail, the government will come to a standstill. Equipped with this conviction, this paper argues that if peace and stability must be achieved in the fourth republic, our leadership must learn to embrace and treat Public Opinion Pools with reverence since it is the searchlight and a telescopic guide to the wishes of the people from whom the leader has his anchor.

## **Introduction**

Most people are conversant with the fact that what we have today as Nigeria came into existence on January 1st, 1914, following the Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British colonial administration. Prior to this historic event, the geographical stretch consisted of hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups each operating considerably varying judicial, administrative, religious, cultural, economic and other systems of human endeavor. Instead of devising administrative policies that would pacify these nationalities and pave way for national integration, British imperial administration introduced policies which encouraged divisive tendencies like regionalization, class stratification, repressive, oppressive and exploitative structures. It was these policies which were akin to the hitherto existing tenets of the various nationalities that for the first time truly brought the people together to fight for freedom which culminated in the achievement of flag independence in 1960.

At independence, the ideology which informed the struggle for freedom gave the people the conviction and believe that a state like one in which they have found themselves, ought to be a relation between free citizens morally equal, conducting itself according to law and resting upon discussion and consent rather than force. Experience has shown however that, since independence, most regimes in and out of uniforms in Nigeria, operate without cognizance to this philosophical dimension which Udentia (1983:45) called the social contract. In fact, Udentia continues that it is in the wake of this confusion that the Igbo of the South Eastern Nigeria in 1966/67 and on this philosophical calculations, spoke about;

*The breach of the social contract, the frustration of the social contract and hence, accordingly, a repudiation of the contract and there of, the quest for a state where the ideals of the social contract will be fostered and given vent for expression.*

The cause of Igbo uprisings is a topic of its own and has been handled by various scholars including Adejo (2008). What to note is that apart from this blood bath, there has been a litany of conflicts in Nigeria which are political, economic, social, ethnic, religious, and psychological or as some may put it, domestic. The country has come face to face with inexplicable oddities and absurdities. Nigerians have been encapsulated in unfathomable dangers of rolling conflicts. One may be tempted to ask, what exactly are the causes of this conflicts and what can be done to avoid future occurrence? The paper contends that the causes are multifarious but lack of respect for the social contract features most prominently. To this end, this work suggests that leadership in the country should refrain from the theory of force, power and coercion and embrace the reverence for public opinion pooling. Proceeds from this pool should also be allowed to guide policy formulation and implementation.

In the context of this work, the term Opinion is used to mean a product of man's thought which could have a bad or good, high or low point of view about something or somebody (Tema, 2000:87). Public opinion is considered here in, as a product of what majority of the people within a given population sample think should obtain. Leadership on the other hand, implies a person or persons saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the affairs of a people. It could be a home, community, organization, state or nation as the case may imply. He should be one who is knowledgeable, charismatic and endowed with ethical excellence and moral rectitude (Pad Moore, 1971:99). Given the quantum of crisis this country went through during the previous republics which snowballed into her failure, a work of this nature is not only considered timely but relevant because of the magic reverence for public opinion pool has done to other polities across the globe. Its justification is rooted in its attempt at proffering solutions to the country's present day leadership problems.

### **Public Opinion Sampling: A Historical Purview**

The phenomenon of opinion sampling is as old as man himself. A biblical extract has it that Jesus Christ once asked his disciples "who they think he was". In traditional African setting, evidence abound that consultations among age grades was paramount when important decisions binding on their societies were to be taken. In the realm of our contemporary situation, even when the government at the centre does not incorporate this mechanism as a front-burner for decision making, the country's assemblies (local, state and federal) are conscious of the reverence for opinion sampling. This goes to buttress the need for majority rule as it affects decision making in these houses.

It is plausible all the same to remind us that in the pre-historic age, opinion sampling was not as pronounced or elaborate as it obtains even in advanced countries today. This situation was rooted in the nature and character of the systems of governance practice in Europe and during the colonial era in Africa. Evidence has it that those systems were rigid, Ana-chronic and oppressive in all ramifications. The evolution of nation states in Europe as well as the French revolution prosaically referred to as the dawn of equality and freedom automatically changed the place of opinion sampling. This was because democratic governance came to replace draconian regimes. Also as a factor, was the geographical stretch encompassed by each nation state. Closely related was the invention of the print-media technology which made it possible for wide scope of information coverage and dissemination. Since leaders now have wide range of landmass and population to cover, it becomes necessary that

opinion sampling be taken seriously as a source of political polemic and as point of contact between the leaders and the led. In Nigeria however, given the past colonial leadership tenets followed by years of military rule, civilian regimes down to even the fourth republic appears to be more comfortable with the theory of power, force and coercion in administering this country. This, it is argued, have accounted for a fair portion of the litany of conflicts in the country.

### **The Need for Public Opinion Sampling**

Attempt at examining the need for opinion sampling quickly takes us to a brief assessment of the theory of power, force and coercion. This law is that which is clearly unequivocal that so long as men are broadly equal in terms of force and guile, a society is impossible. It argues that, it is only when men set up who monopolizes power that society comes into being. (Udenta, 1983:56). This perspective contends further that; men do what is expected of them because if they fail to comply, they may be threatened with physical punishment. Force, power and coercion are in the line of this perspective, the determinant factor in the nature and working of the social process. It is this theory that our leaders seem to adopt, "hook-line and Sink".

One basic fact which our leaders have refused to fathom with is that, the leader with his powers may not be able to administer the society without obedience coming from the people. While the led pay a price which is obedience, the leader pays his price for the powers conferred on her by dispensing social justice. Obedience may thus be due to habit, fear of sanctions, and a sense of moral obligation or self-interest. Obedience may also be due to psychological identification with the leader, indifference and/or a certain degree of tolerance on the part of the people or absence of self confidence among subjects. (White, 1990:60). The weakness which the theory of force, power and coercion exhibit is therefore, rooted in the fact that obedience which is one amongst the determinant factors in governance has both the voluntaristic and deterministic angles. It is quite often given to the governors or rulers and hence, can be withdrawn. Also as it was earlier argued in the opening passage of this paper; Nwokedi (1990:24) contended vehemently that, "Everybody must grant that no government can exist for a single minute without the cooperation of the people willing or forced and if people suddenly withdraw their allegiance in every detail, the government will come to a stand-still." Harrison (1966:45) collaborated Nwokedi's argument when he stated inter-alia, "Political power can never be exercised without the acquiescence of the people-without direct co-operation of the large number of the people and the indirect cooperation of the entire community."

From the preceding, it can be deduced that whether to a small or large measure, non reverence for opinion sampling indeed, accounts for a good chunk of the rolling crisis in the country. The need for adopting it therefore, becomes inevitable.

### **Sources of Public Opinion Pooling**

There exist variegated methods of arriving at the people's verdict over burning state matters. These include legislative houses, media publications, pressure groups, suggestion boxes, public debates; meet the people programmes, fault-line programmes Etc. As mentioned overleaf, there are three tiers of government in this country and each has a legislative body. There are the national, state and local legislative bodies. The most efficient contributor to this scheme by all measures should be the local assembly. They have direct access to the local-lot, who needs government presence the most. They "dine and wine" with bulk of the masses, know the type of water, the bad culverts, the streams that create natural boundaries and trunket the free movement of people and goods. They are therefore better equipped to advice the government on the needs of the people. Senators, members of House of

Representatives and members of state assemblies can also contribute to this scheme since they also have constituencies that they oversee.

The media print can also play a central role in organizing opinion pools for government. The television, radio, magazines and newspapers can play key roles by providing feelers. Given our current socio economic and political predicament, the television for instance, can provide spot interviews of people baring their minds on topical issues confronting the society. The CNN has also acknowledged the importance of the television when it argued that, “the television is indeed a market place, apart from the social and political ideas it churns out, it is also expected to expose live-scenes of the predicament the masses go through due to unpopular policies of government.”

The radio also helps in creating mental pictures as well as live reactions from people during programmes like Final Bus-Stop, Voices from the Market place- (a BBC world programme), community development, Radio phone in programmes, police and the society etc.

Newspapers on the other hand, put together reports on almost all aspects of human interaction; sports, politics, religion, industry, agriculture and other issues affecting daily interaction in a state. Government can therefore, garner valuable information from these media.

Another outstanding area is the pressure groups i.e. Academic Staff Union of Universities,(ASUU) Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Jamaal Islam or National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and a lot other organizations. These groups have strong representations and people’s opinion can also be got from them.

Similarly, suggestion boxes can also help in collecting public opinion for organizations and the government. These boxes are normally nailed to the wall in strategic places for people to make written contributions as to how they feel over certain developments in their societies and in most cases, cogent suggestions can be drawn through this process. Government can therefore extract pieces of information from this medium too. Government can also embark on “meet the people’s tour”. Such informal interactions can remove the phobia that inhibits most people from baring their minds on topical issues under formal or official interaction with government agents and leaders.

Public debates have in many advanced countries, contributed significantly in shifting government’s position on very vital mistakes it could have gone into. It is the opinion of this work that such views as expressed by the people whether on radio, television or organized gathering, can also help in guiding popular policy formulation and implementation. In America for instance, Fault Line is a programme specifically designed to bring out the weak areas of American leadership. These programmes no doubt help government in re-tracing bad steps thus, bringing to the barest minimum tensions that could heat the polity

### **The Place of Public Opinion Pooling in Nigeria**

Reverence for public opinion in Africa has been very poor. This explains why the continent has continued to be a theatre of conflicts which in most cases, snowballs into open wars. In Nigeria for instance, be it in or out of uniforms, government’s non reverence for opinion pooling as a phenomenon has played significant roles in the collapse of the past three republics, the 1967 blood-bath and continues to contribute negatively in the spade of the looming instability in the fourth republic. In Europe, America and other parts of the globe, the situation has been different. Michel (1977:90) argued that as far back as 1789, during the French revolution, it was public opinion pool and the force it carried that forced the king to abdicate his office. This he contended was a very vital factor in the success of the French revolution. The Soviet Union’s withdrawal from the First World War was due to the overwhelming force of public opinion pool. Similarly, the decision to liquidate

British colonial empires oversee was borne partly out of public opinion pressure from the British party. All these are indicators that these countries have respect for the social contract.

In Nigeria, when the case of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was placed for debate, majority of Nigerians kicked against the programme but Babangida went ahead to enslave the people with the programme. The June 1993 election is another glaring case of the abuse of this phenomenon. Incessant fuel price hike and protest have always fallen on deaf ears. The list is indeed endless. However, this few examples are meant to drive home the case that Nigerians have no reverence for opinion pooling.

### **Conclusion**

The entire effort made here so far is simply aimed at portraying a mental picture which shows that the world has long graduated from times when leadership and follower-ship relations hinged on the theory of force, power and coercion to that which sees the state as a relation between free citizens morally equal, conducting itself according to law and resting upon discussion and consent rather than force. It is the submission of this paper that so long as leadership in Nigeria does not embrace reverence for opinion pooling, instability will continue to linger on. In this context therefore, the paper argued that for us to actualize this noble dream of a stable democracy in the 4th republic, reverence for opinion pooling must feature prominently in the scheme of governance. The paper also observed the importance of communication between leaders and the led, noting that without communication, any government or social relationship is impossible for there would be no motion, movement, cooperation, collaboration, command nor common enterprise.

### **Way Forward**

- 1) First and foremost, it is suggested here that government should set up high powered public enlightenment machinery on her purported programmes as well as seek the consent of the people over such programmes before implementation.
- 2) Government should note that the peasants are also citizens of the Nigerian state. She should therefore revisit the agricultural sector and device programmes that can give the peasants a sense of belonging for it is said that a hungry man is an angry man.
- 3) Finally, the follower-ship should also be prepared to accept the prinking stabs of reforms that can lead to positive transformations in their societies.

### **References**

- Akande, O. (2008). *Public administration and public affairs*. New Macmillan Pub. Ibadan.
- Azikiwe, N, (1979). *Ideology for Nigeria, capitalism, socialism or welfarism Nigeria*: Macmillan Press.
- Castle, F. (1976). *Pressure groups and political culture: A comparative study*. New York: Humanities.
- Coleman & Rosenberg (1970). *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*. University of California.
- Eze, B. (2008). *The role of public opinion pooling in western political process*. Oxford Press Ibadan

Lane, F. (1978). *Current issues in public administration*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Mc Anthony, Y. (2004). *Re-appraisal of the role of public opinion in the French revolution*. Caness Pub. Paris.

Ruth, F. (1970). *The Barrel of a Gun*. Oxford University, London.