GOVERNING OF THE MAJORITY BY THE FEW IN A DEMOCRATISED WORLD: SOME THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

Aliyu, M. Kolawole
Department of Political Science
and
Bello, M. Ayodele
Department of Public Administration
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife

Abstract
Democracy refers to a system in which the masses possess supreme power to rule. Given this understanding, this study employed a descriptive analysis to argue in the contrary that the elites (few) actually control the masses (majority), even in the so called democratic state. The study made use of a number of theoretical postulations to situate this position. In doing this, political culture, political socialization, history and political behavior were used and their linkage to ideological standpoint were pointed out to further shed light on elite power derivation. A number of recommendations such as not allowing the elite to use its privilege for private gains, not locking in conflict with the masses, allowing vertical flow of information and free mobility to and from elite status were offered on how the masses can retain their relevance in the exercise of their power in a democratized state.

Keywords: Democracy, elite, masses, power, ideology
Introduction
During primary school days, the Civics Teacher gave the definition of “democracy” as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Emphatically, he said, democracy is the rule of the “majority”. It later became clear that the term democracy is not that simple and final in meaning. Evidently, the fact of governing the society, from philosophical perspective is that, though there are many types and forms of government such as democratic, despotic, authoritarian, fascist, majority rule, representative government, and monarchical and so on. And, without exaggeration, all the types and forms of government have their philosophical foundations. For instance, while Hobbes (1976) justified absolute monarchy, dictatorship and military rule; Locke (1974) supported representative, and constitutional regime. And, to Rousseau (1973), it is a populist philosophy, where power is in the general will of the people – the people are the sovereign, and the sovereign is superior to the government.

The fact that emerges after a deep peep into democratic governance and regimes is that only a “few” people rule over the “majority” in any society; whether modern, transitional or traditional societies. Harold Lasswell writes: the division of society into elite and masses is universal, and even in democracy, a few exercise a relatively greater weight of power and the many exercise comparatively little. The remarks of Stone (2010) capture the above with clarity.

In all societies, from societies that are underdeveloped down to the most advanced and powerful climes, there are two classes of people. The first, always the less numerous performs all political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings and the second group, more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first in a manner that is more or less legal, arbitrary and violent (Patrick et al, 1990). In a study conducted by Strator and Graile (2012), they noted that few are always able to understand themselves as to make decisive and far reaching decisions that are capable of bringing progress and development rather than stagnation. They further explained that majority are not against progress or advancement of any society but that the urge to bring landmark progress are often propelled by the few who have urge seeing such society moving forward. In contrast to the position held by Strator and Graile, Ogunjeminisinsin (2014), argues that the few
who govern some societies sometimes do so for clandestine motives, especially for personal aggrandizement. On either way, going by the arguments that some few people engage to rule because of their passion for their society and other few do so for personal reason, attest to the consensus that not all people are involved in the governance of all societies.

The issue therefore is why are the “many” governed by the “few”? How? What makes it easy for the few to govern the many? Indeed, David Hame (1739) puts it philosophically thus: nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few”. Arising from this apposite perception, we are interested in knowing how it is so easy for the few to govern the majority, because the real power equation does not conform to the ordinary meaning of democracy as the rule by the majority.

Although, in the final analysis power belongs to the people, we are interested in knowing who actually use power – all the people, majority of the people, a few people or one person? To this end, this study examines who rules and what strategies are employed that make it easy for them to rule in any democratic society or otherwise.

**Conceptualisations**

Democracy is derived from the Greek words demos (the people) and kratos (rule). This means that democracy is a system of government that is based on the rule of the people. Abraham Lincoln, former American President, aptly sums it up when he asserted that democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people. Democracy can be direct or indirect. According to Adeoye (2012), a system is said to be democratic when the people are involved in the management of their affairs, and leaders are accountable for their actions and adequate mechanism for peaceful removal of government from power is in place. In other words, a democratic government allows people to take active part in deciding who is to govern them through periodic, free and fair elections. Democratic regimes are characterized by the rule of law, multiple political parties, free and fair elections, civil liberties, independence of the judiciary, separation of power, checks and balances, existence of pressure groups and so on (Babalola, 2014). Thus, we can aptly sum up that a democratic system of government allows people to be
involved in taking decisions that affect their wellbeing.

Elite on its part is the few that shape the lives of the masses. Elite is the few who have power and participate in the decisions that shape the lives of the masses. Elites are not oppressors or exploiters of the masses as they are sometimes public regarding and deeply concerned with the welfare of the masses. At times, membership of elite may be relatively open to ambitious and talented individuals from the masses, or it may be closed to all except top corporate, financial, military, civil and governmental leaders. According to Alfred de Gracia (1950), elite possess more control over resources, power, wealth, education, prestige, status, and skills of leadership, information, and knowledge of political processes, ability to communicate and organize. Elite is the few in public or private business who have the privileged opportunity of being constantly involved in the governance of their society (Erickson, 2013). Elites have the opportunity to enjoy benefits that power, resources, connection and position bring to its holder (Tunde, 2011) In short, elites are drawn from a society’s upper classes which are made up of those people who own reasonable portion of the industry, commerce, finance, education, military, communications and law. The masses are the many whose lives are shaped by the elite over which they have little direct control. According to Harold (1977), the division of the society into elite and masses is universal and even in a democracy, a few exercises a relatively greater weight of power and the many exercise comparatively little. Public policies do not often reflect their demands; masses are often influenced by the elites rather than on the contrary.

Power can be defined as the causal effect that enables one person or group of persons to influence the action of others. It is also the ability to bring about a desired action in others (Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950). The constant use of power indicates absence of authority. While it is true that the threat of coercion is one of the most important bases of power, coercion itself is not the same as power. Braiton (2010) remarked that coercion signifies the absence of power, although coercion could be instrumentality of power in some instances.

Ideology in this context deals with man’s quest to rule. According to Daddey (2012), it deals with man’s quest to discover: how to rule?, who governs?; few, many, or one?
Political idea seeks to answer question of the essence of being, for example, the question of why are we here? Also because man is a political animal, ideology always answer the question of what is the nature of a good society. It basically gives satisfactory explanation on how man is organized in the society. Even when some of the ideas may not be appropriate for the present time, they provide a watershed to current events. Political ideas keep morality in limelight.

**Theoretical explanations**

The importance of ideology cannot be over emphasized in explaining the reasons that account for the rule by the few on the majority. Some have argued that ideology is a means whereby society identify its goals and the means to achieve such goals (Truay, 2011 and Sexton, 2013). But, to be frank, who defines this goal? Of course, it is the ruling few in accordance with their interests; bureaucratic, business, oil, gas, media, transportation, banking, finance, agriculture, education and other sectors (Sexton, 2013: 58). Starting from setting the agenda for the society, Westerry (2013), opines that it is the few who spur what they think is ideal for a society. Everybody, according to him cannot be involved in setting what is considered an ideal for a democratic system. In a more elucidatory way, Tayo (2014) observed that party manifestoes should translate to the policies of a ruling government, and this most often are drawn up by extremely few people in most circumstances. Political party’s formation across all societies is put in place by the few before it becomes enlarged in terms of membership. Thus, we can infer that it is the few that sells party’s ideals for others (many people) to embrace. Therefore, ideology as a tool by the ruling few is a reality.

Contemporary writers attribute elitism to the impact of urbanization, industrialization, technological development, and the growth of the social and economic decisions. The confidence of the elite to control the masses is not un-connected with the capital – inflow in possession of few. This constitutes the major reason, as reported by Robertson (2014) that the capacity to control the economy, in terms of the resources in possession of an individual, to a large extent determines elite’s dominance of public issues. To him: all capitalist states’ major pre – occupation is to allow a free – economy , where everyone would be free to control in a degree the economy of that
entity. Thus, it can be theorized that, even if not a major indicator, the level of wealth of an individual is a relevant parameter that determines the extent of one’s influence, not only in a capitalist economy but beyond. Robert Dahl (1995) writes that the key political, economic and social decisions are made by tiny minorities … It is difficult and impossible to see how it could be otherwise in large political system. And according to Harold Lasswell, the discovery that all large scale societies are in the hands of a small number of people confirms a basic fact – government is always government of the few, whether in the name of the few, the one, or the many. It has been argued elsewhere that few individuals are differently naturally endowed (Ajewole, 2011 and David, 2014). These innate traits according to the above scholars may be in language skills, perseverance, emotional stability, oral prowess, patience and service delivery. This is often considered before some people can be called charisma. For those that are naturally endowed with the skills, controlling the masse is seldom difficult for them. Ojokun (2013) noted that though people can be trained in the above - mentioned traits effectively, yet people that are naturally endowed find it easy to get on with the traits, carry masses along much more in a democratic system than those that have imbibed the skill through training. He noted, in a study of some un–elected leaders in Missipi that they do better as party leaders, campaign managers, council mayors than those that personally aspired for positions.

According to David (1980), being more influential, the elites are privileged and being privileged, they have, except with few exceptions, a special stake in the continuation of the system in which their privileges rest. It does not mean that elite members never disagree or never compete with each other for pre- eminence. There is never such a society in which there is no competition among elites. But, elitism implies that competition takes place over a very narrow range of issues. Elites agree on more matters than they disagree and even when they disagree it is over means rather than ends (Westerry, 2013).

**Dominance of the many by the few**

Attempt is made here to justify why it is easy for the few to continue their domination and governing of the many. The factors such as political culture, socialization, history, political behavior and political stability are considered in
relation with ideological context.

First, political culture and ideology shall be considered. According to Almond & Verba (1963), every system is embedded in a pattern of orientation to political actions and values. That is political culture as the system of beliefs about people’s pattern of orientation to political actions and their attitudes to what is happening around them which influences and shapes their political behavior. Shafritz (1988) sees political culture as “a community attitudes towards the quality, style, and vigor of its political processes and government operations. Therefore to understand why individual behaves the way they do, we have to understand both the political culture and the ideology–which affect the political behavior.

Political culture and ideology can be regarded as synonymous because they both suggest a system of beliefs within a system about the pattern of interactions, institutions, and orientation to political actions of the people. Based on Walter Rosenbaum (1966) argument, political culture operates both at individual and systemic levels. At individual level, political culture entails all the important ways in which a person is subjectively orientated towards the essential elements in his political system. And, at the systemic level, it refers to the collective orientation of the people towards basic elements in the political system. Thus, political culture refers to the method of induction and civic instruction to what pass for a “correct” political behavior, that is, political socialization, by which the individual are indoctrinated into the political system and made to know the norms of the society, the prevailing political culture and ideology.

But then, who or what determines this system termed ideology or political culture? Of course, it is the ruling elites. Therefore, to fully understand why individual behaves the way he does, one has to understand the political culture and ideology, and the formulators of the ideas that make up the political culture and ideology. This is because; the prevailing ideology in a society is the ideology of the ruling elites, because political ideology comes out of the conflict of classes or interest groups that want to protect it and to extend it or the political leadership. Thus, after the conflict, any group that emerges would enforce its ideology on the system, and whatever system of belief is got; it is the consequent of the ideology of the ruling elite.
Adrexsion (2012) is of the view that since political socialization is the process by which the individual is indoctrinated into the system - the values, norms, and so on; what one is inducted into, is the prevailing ideology, which is the ideology of the ruling class.

Socialization and ideology are also well connected as the second level. Socialization, according to Braiton (2010) starts from childhood and never ends there. It is a lifelong process of the values and beliefs which the ruling class want portrayed and are the ones on the basis of which one is socialized. For example, schools – one of the main agents of socialization is used to teach people from birth the “correct” political behavior which is what the ruling class wants. Such subjects as civics in state like Russia, the people are made aware of what is expected of them. Thus, since ideology or political culture is the ideology of the ruling class and political behavior is dependent on this, one of the means used by the few to govern the many is through political socialization, and political behavior which is derived from the political culture. It is essentially in the interest of the ruling few. The ruling class has always used ideology to shape the behavior of the people such that the latter would always be loyal and serve their interest. Liberal system is influenced by few people, perhaps as a result of the formal education they have. Chung (2011) sums it all that the few fits into control because of their level of education, level of exposure, objectivity and ability to make sacrifice for the system. Not that the un–educated are docile but are more parochial and one sided, though stiff – necked but get tired easily.

The next factor which the few used to govern the majority is history. Ideology has been used to give the impression of an ideal stage. From the West, democracy is used to convince the people as to the necessity of the few taking decisions for the many. Indeed, Karl Marx (1973) talked about the stages of history in his Dialectics. Marx argued that there is a movement of history along stages, with each stage being an improvement on the former until we get to the ideal which is communism. But today, rulers have used Marxian idea to bring about what Micheal Bakuni feared and called dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx argued that because the workers are oppressed, they would rise and take over from Bourgeoisie. But today the situation has not changed. It is still a case of the rrule and ruled, oppressor and
oppressed, exploiter and exploited. Today rulers have used the ideology of socialism to blindfold the masses and make them content of their rules (Ricket, 2014).

Political behavior and ideology also have influence in this argument. Political behavior is certainly a product of socialization processes. It is the outcome of the indoctrination into the values, beliefs and norms of the society. As a result, political behavior is learnt. The ruling elite use ideology to maintain the status quo through the process of socialization. For example, good citizenship are taught in schools, especially in the United States of America. Thus, the concept of political behavior will by its nature be conservative since it is based on the interest of the ruling elite and the maintenance of the status quo. As further argued by Rosebaum (1965), a political behavior with considerable continuity of governmental institutions and stable civic processes will give in to conservative political socialization or induce a relatively modest change. The above position captures the scenario in a clearer way as David (2014) summarily concluded when he noted such is the importance of socialization, that when a new regime (say radical) takes over power, what it first does is to take over the agencies of socialization. This is because it is through these means that it can begin to socialize the people according to its ideological position or if it has to keep the loyalty of the people. Mugabe used this strategy in Zimbabwe during his early reign (Moore, 2006). Thus, ideology serves the interest of a set of people; these people are obscure but real. They use it to give the people the impression that without it, their common goal cannot be accomplished. And, so people continue to give their loyalty. Thus, ideology gives what Marx called false consciousness. We can conveniently say the few use ideology to impose their leadership on the many through avenues such as political culture and political socialization. Therefore, one of the means whereby the few are able to govern the many easily is ideology which the former use to rationalize obscure reality.

Finally, there is the linkage of political stability (system maintenance) and ideology. It has been argued by Erickson (2013) that the study of political culture in any society should be one of power struggle, power sharing, ideological conflict and class struggle. That political ideology comes out of conflict between different classes or interest
groups that want to project themselves as the political leadership so that when one emerges victorious, it imposes its ideology on the societal ideology. After the conflict the ruling elite would persuade the people to give their support and loyalty to the new group of men. Roda and Adrews (2010) were of the opinion that it is this competition that allows the maintenance of the system.

Monopoly of the state instrument of coercion and force is another factor for the easiness with which the few is able to govern the majority. Also important as to how a few finds it easy to govern majority is the explanation given by Michael (1962). According to him, in any society there are small group of people that governs. There is the impression that they are more interested in the other group, therefore they are put in position to direct the group in their interest and on their behalf. Pareto (1963) argued in favor of the ruling class as having certain qualities and values which the majority does not have. Such values can be ideologically defined, and could include charismatic rulers who are given passive obedience because the followers believe them as possessing certain extra – ordinary qualities which they envy, and so believe they cannot make any mistake or lead them astray (Strator and Gaile, 2012).

The social contract angle
The social contract is also an invaluable theory that explains how the few are able to govern the majority. Appadorai (1975) noted that the state is the result of an agreement entered into by men who originally had no governmental organization. The history of the world is thus divided into the periods before the state was instituted and the period after. In the first period known as the state of nature, there was no government and no law which could be enforced by coercive authority. Men lived only by such regulations as nature was supposed to prescribe. There was no human authority to formulate rules and enforce them. So, man lived as he liked and it was a state where only the most powerful get things at the detriment of others. So, according to Hobbes, in the state of nature, life was nasty, brutish and life expectancy was very short, because men were selfish. Given the selfishness in the state of nature, man agreed to part with their natural liberty to obey laws prescribed and enforced by government for their common good. This was to arrest the very poor state of
nature and enhance peace therein (Erickson, 2013).

A state is thus created with authority given to a man or group of men who are now few but have the authority to regulate behavior and enforce rules on others. The government is therefore sovereign. This is the main essence of the social contract theory. Although, Hobbes tagged it absolute sovereignty while Locke labelled it limited sovereignty and Rousseau refered to it as general will. Whatever name it is called, the point is that the result of the social contract is to provide order and to make life more comfortable for the people as they give up their rights believing that the few will be considerate and reasonable in their conduct of affairs of the state. A state where no one is oppressed and individual rights guaranteed is the essence of allowing the few to rule the many to use the words of (Ojokun, 2013).

**Conclusion**
It is clear that there is no democracy where majority of the people rule, neither is there any democratized state where one man rules. However, the few are able to rule over the majority because of the interplay of some factors such as political culture, socialization, history, political behavior and ideology. The paper has pointed out the manipulative ability of the ruling elites to impose their own ideology on the generality of the society in spite of the existence of a variety of conflicting interests. One wonders whether the concept of democracy is not only in the abstract sense because in reality, there has never been a real democracy and there never will be.

**Recommendations**
The governing elite should avoid using its power for its private gains. It should avoid this in an attempt to protect its power position or hold on to special privileges. It should prevent its elite power from metamorphosing into oligarchy or tyranny.

Since elitism does not necessarily mean that other individuals from the lower classes cannot rise to the top, it is essential that some social mobility be truly allowed from the lower class. However, it is important that the mobility of individuals from non–elite to elite positions be a slow and continuous assimilation rather than a revolutionary one.

The idea that the masses are apathetic and passive need to be re-examined. It is no gainsaying that mass sentiments are manipulated by elites. Issues of public discourse, decisions and
public policies are often in favor of the elite and this directly and indirectly affect the articulacy of the masses. The masses should be given opportunity to partake in taking vital public decisions.

Communication between elites and masses flow downward. Policy questions of government are seldom decided by the masses. If at all, it is only through membership of political parties and election. Even when this is allowed, the participation in the above democratic institutions are only allowed for the symbiotic value of the elites. It is believed that the masses are just been tied down to the political system by giving them role to play on Election Day and in a political party with which they can identify with. If the masses have any input at all, it is at best an indirect influence over the decision making behavior of elites. This is deceitful.

Elites should not continually lock in conflict with the masses. Power holders should not always be desperate to achieve their goals at the detriment or expense of the masse or public. Elite should do away from using its power to oppress the masses. Elite should not be so rigid as to disallow power shift over time or think that new elites cannot emerge to compete with new elites.

Since in actual sense majority finds it extremely difficult to exercise power, we wish to say that the true, real and final definition theories are modified to downplay the idea of majority rule as the core or custodian of democratic governance. It is not to say that the masses do not have influence in a democratic dispensation but that real policy decisions are manifestations of the wishes of the few elites or ruling class.

Elites should form close alliances with key elements and actors in the society for inclusive government with the entire citizenry. If they do, governing on behalf of the public will ensure. For this to work out, elites should imbibe new ideas just as social conditions are changing and new problems are emerging.

References


Leadership. 7 (21), pp. 63 – 87.

