



Research Paper

Democracy, Public Opinion, and Public Policy Making in Rivers State.

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ABSTRACT: *Democracy fosters public opinion and policy making in any democratic setting. The process of making public policies is often influenced by several factors and considerations, one of which is public opinion. This study critically assesses the role of democracy and public opinion in the policy making process in Rivers state, and while it is acknowledged that responsive democratic governments are tremendously sensitive to the opinions of the citizens on issues of public policy, it is argued that this is not the case in Rivers state. With the aid of the Elite and Marxist analytical tools, it is contended that the opinions of Rivers people hardly reflect 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 state. The paper relied on secondary data and content analysis. It is concluded that the extreme poverty and illiteracy which pervade the state have weakened and disempowered the majority of the people and made them insignificant observers in the policy making process. Thus, the study suggests that Rivers people must make conscious efforts to ensure that their views are heard and implemented, and vote out leaders who do not hearken to their popular demand.*

KEYWORDS: *Democracy, Public Opinion, Public Policy, Policy Making, Elite theory, Marxist theory, Rivers State.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The basic duty of every representative democracy is to ensure that a platform is created for public opinion that will transform into public policy. Although given the nature of today's world, public policy making in a democratic system has become a little more complex. Jega (2003) believes that the making and implementation of government policies is one of the vital ingredients of any political system. Democracy provides greater opportunities for a greater number of individual opinions to emerge in the political system as it guarantees freedom. Public opinion in a democratic setting should influence public policy making. The utilization of the sum total of the opinion of the people lies in the hand of the policy maker which in this case are the elected representatives.

Nigeria is a democratic state with thirty-six federating units and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT) located in Abuja. Rivers state is one out of the thirty-six federating units with its seat of government located in Port Harcourt. The state has enjoyed over twenty years of uninterrupted democratic process since 1999. The state is made up of twenty-three Local Government Areas with various ethnic nationalities such as Ikwerre, Ogoni, Kalabari, Ekpeye, Etche, among others (Rivers of Possibilities, 2013). Rivers state is predominantly a Christian state and with people that share different political ideologies. The People Democratic Party (PDP) has constantly won all governorship election in the state since 1999 while All Progressive Congress (APC) has been the main opposition party in the state. The people of the state are divided into party lines, so also on their thoughts towards issues affecting the state, as this is made manifest in their opinions of and participation in the political system.

Democracy in Rivers state just like other democratic states ought to allow for the free flow of public opinion. However, one thing is to allow and promote public opinion and another is for the sum total views to reflect in the policy of the government. If people are allowed to express their views, then, the sum total opinion of the people should be able to influence public policy. Obo, et. al. (2013) in their previous study has shown how most policies of government have failed to emanate from the opinion of the people they represent, and at such, such policies fail to meet the common good of greater percent of the people. In line with this thinking, Obo and Obo (2014) opined that a greater number of public policies made by all levels of government in Nigeria

are not true reflections of public opinion. Rivers people are subjected to accept any policy of the state government which the state government deems fit. Since 1999 when democratic governance was restored in the state, most opinions made by the people have been overlooked by state policy makers in the policy making process. Policies of the state adopt the top-bottom approach because state policy makers consider themselves more knowledgeable about the needs of the people in the state. This situation portends danger in the consolidation of democracy in the state as it will limit the level of political participation, in other words, it makes the people to become passive participants in the governing process and leaving state policy makers in total control of the policy making process. Furthermore, Obo & Obo (2013) attributes the non-participation of the people in the policy making process as a result that the people are ignorant of their right to participate in the policy making and the few enlighten ones think that it is not necessary to participate because they feel that their inputs will not count. This scenario does not augur well with the tenets of democracy which advocates for freedom of speech and participation in the political system. Democracy provides an environment where public opinion will be expressed, filtered, and translated into appropriate public policy for the interest of the majority. Considering the nature and geographical location of Rivers state, one will expect that the sum total of view of the people representing various interest and units are sort for and considered in the policy making process. What is seen in most cases is that policies are engineered and influenced by some group in power who constitutes a class of its own.

Some literature reviewed has shown that there exists a nexus between democracy, public opinion, and public policy making, but this study differs in terms of scope and the study area. For instance, studies conducted by Page and Shapiro, 1992; Schwartz, 1995; Kingdom, 2003; Stimson, 2004; Akande, 2014; & Ogoloma, 2016, have shown in their respective studies either the relationship between public opinion and public policy; or democracy, public opinion and public policy making in Nigeria. Some of them share the view that public opinions are ignored by policy makers and some have proved that policy makers consider public opinion in policy making, while some believe that the elite class hijacks public opinion for their parochial interest. None of these studies have looked into the situation that exists in Rivers state. Hence, this paper is interested in looking at democracy, public opinion, and public policy making in Rivers state to ascertain whether the democratic practice in Rivers state allows public opinion to influence the policy making process. The study will like to find out whether governmental policies emanate from the opinion of Rivers people. Put differently, the study intends to discover whether Rivers people's opinion informs public policy in the state or public policy is solely dependent on elites in the state. Hence, it is within this purview that the study is embarked upon. The study is broadly organized into five parts; the introduction, clarification of concepts, theoretical issues, democratisation through public opinion and public policy making in Rivers state, and then conclusion and suggestions.

II. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Democracy

Democracy has been traced to have originated from the ancient Greece, then described as a city-state. Although Ogoloma (2016) has opined that there was a hint of its practice in other places like ancient Rome, Europe, North America, and South America societies. The word democracy has enjoyed limitless definitions as there is no consensus among scholars on a generally accepted definition. Nevertheless, it is a form of government that is centred on people's rule either directly or indirectly (that is, a form of representative democracy). Democracy is of Greek extraction which connotes people's rule where "demos" means people and "Kratia" means rule (Ogoloma, 2016). Former United States of America President, Abraham Lincoln conceptualize democracy as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. His definition of democracy shows that democracy centres on the people. It is the rule that emanates from the people and the people are fully involved in the process of governance. It involves mass participation through the airing of opinion, voting during elections, and also in the policy making process, among others.

Dahl (1956, p. 5) sees democracy as "a society in which ordinary citizens exert a relatively high degree of control over leaders". The people exercise control during the election of their leaders, influencing leaders' policies when in office, making demands, and holding the leaders accountable. Zach-Williams (1963) conceives democracy as the capacity of the masses to control the decision-making process of their country. Democracy to Cohen (1971) means a system of community government where members of such a community participate directly or indirectly in the decision making that affects them. Chafe (1994) also viewed democracy to be centred on the people when he opined that democracy is citizens' involvement, in the running of their political, socio-economic and cultural affairs. According to Yio (2012), democracy is government backed by the peoples' mandate and with major participation of the people in the governing process. Democracy recognises the right of political participation of the people in the day to day governance of their affairs.

From the foregoing meaning of democracy, we deduced that democracy is people-centred and a government derived from public opinion through votes, and in turn, the government is accountable to the people they govern. Hence, it is a government based on the consent of the people.

Public Opinion

The concept of public opinion is derived from the French word "opinion Publique", which was first used in 1588 by Montaigne. The word public which means common good or interest from the Latin word "publicus" means the people. In other words, it could be referred to as peoples' interest (Akande, 2014; Ogoloma, 2016). Public opinion was first introduced into the political science lexicon in Europe by French writers especially Rousseau, who was the first to use it before the outbreak of the French revolution.

Public opinion enjoys multiple definitions. This is not strange as most concepts in the social sciences are viewed differently by scholars in the field. However, regardless of how various scholars views or define public opinion, it must reflect the following four factors; "(a) there must a topic to be discussed (b) there must be a significant number of persons who hold opinions on the topic discussed (c) there must be some kind of consensus among at least some of these opinions, and (d) this consensus must directly or indirectly exert influence" (New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1980:210). Jaja and Aba-Erondu (2010:102) viewed public opinion as, "the collective beliefs, judgment or views held by the majority of the people of a country about public or actions of the government. It is worthy of note that public opinion is the sum total view of the people toward a particular policy or action of the government that is crucial to them. And so, an opinion held by some group of people self-seeking interest as against public interest cannot be regarded as public opinion. Hence the social good of all is the primary consideration for public opinion. Public opinion is "the aggregate of individual views, attributes, and beliefs about a particular issue, expressed by a significant proportion of society. It is the totality of political orientations, beliefs, values, and attitudes expressed by members of a group about current issues and events in the political environment" (Lowi, Ginsberg, & Shepsle, 2004; Ayeni-Akeke, 2008).

Public opinion refers to what members of the public think or feel about government proposed policy or action already taken by the government. The opinion of the people can be expressed through opinion polls on government policies, referendum, public responses or outcry, public demonstrations, voting in an election, mass media, radio and television talk shows, among others (Johari, 2005).

Jaja & Aba-Erondu (2000), identified and explained among others the following means through which public opinion is expressed;

- **The Mass Media:** The mass media provide a platform where members of the public express their opinion on issues bothering them or government policies affecting them since freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed. The expression of views is done through newspapers, magazines, journals, periodicals, handbills, leaflets, social media, radio, and television commentaries.
- **Pressure/Interest Groups:** These are groups that advocate for the welfare of its members and sometimes that of the welfare of the larger human society. They use various means in calling on government attention to their plights. They employ methods like industrial actions, demonstrations, or dialogue to influence public opinion and policies of the government.
- **Political Parties and Associations:** Political parties and associations influence public opinions especially during their electioneering and manifestoes presentations. Political parties and professional associations express their opinions on certain important national issues. This is mostly done by the non-governmental organizations and opposition parties.
- **Public Platforms:** Opinions of scholars, leaders, journalists, artists, traders, and others in public meetings can influence public opinion in a country. For instance, during the electioneering period, public platforms are exploited by political parties to convince people of different categories and sectors to vote for their party. The people get various types of opinions and viewpoints through the public platform.
- **Eminent and Influential Citizens:** Distinguished and powerful citizens in the society like the traditional rulers, politicians, lawyers, business moguls, scholars, artists, and activists, act as public opinion moulders and leaders of thought in any given society. Their viewpoints and statements help determine the type of opinions their followers are likely to hold.
- **Gossips and Rumours:** The ill-informed members of the public that are not aware of governmental policies, may formulate their own opinions towards such policies from gossips, rumours, and hearsays. If such a situation is left unattended, it may create room for the circulation of wrong information which may be inimical to government policies and the larger society. Thus, there is a need for proper enlightenment and announcements about policies of government to the people.

Public Policy

Public policy as an area of study and also as a professional activity has faced the problem of the lack of a generally accepted definition. It is equally evident that scholars in the field have not resolved this problem, which has created space for unnecessary subjectivity, though not surprising and unexpected for a social science concept (Allen in Alapiki ed., 2004). Some scholars have viewed the public policy as an action while others consider it a choice. Some experts in this area have simply referred to public policy as what the government chooses or chooses not to do (Egonmwan, 1991; Dye, 1976). Dror (1973) sees public policy as government

guide for action. As he asserted that public policy in most situation lays down general directives, rather than full guidelines on the action to be followed. For Rose (1969), public policy is not just a moment decision but a sequence of connected activities. Thus, it is a process and not just a mere intention. Public policy is a governmental program found in a country's law or national statement. It is an action a government of a country takes in pursuit and actualization of its set aim and objectives (Ayo, 2004). Ezeani (2006) refers to public policy as "hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programs designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring governmental action for their solution". And so, a mere declaration of intentions, wishes, or expression of desires cannot be regarded as public policy. Ikelegbe (2006:3) defines public policy as "an integrated course and programmes of action that the government has set and the framework it has designed to direct action and practices in certain problem area". Hence public policy provides the government with the road map, direction, and guide to achieve set goals.

There exist two major actors of public policy making in every known country. These two actors are governmental actors and non-governmental actors. According to Ikelegbe cited in Dahida & Maidoki (2013), the governmental actors comprise of the executive, legislative, judiciary, and bureaucracy. The executive arm of government is saddled with the responsibility of policy implementation. The executive can formulate, initiate, articulate, and draft public policy, which it sends to the legislative arm. The legislative arm of government plays the function of representation and expression of popular opinion, lawmaking, control, and oversight of the executive branch and control of expenditure. The judiciary interprets the law and settles conflicts arising from the various arm of government, individuals, and groups in the country. The powers of adjudication, interpretation, and review make the judiciary an actor in the policy process as it could make pronouncements as to the fairness, legitimacy, and constitutionality of laws or proposed laws. The bureaucracy is a key administrative arm within which policy making, implementation, and evaluation take place.

The non-governmental actors consist of political parties, interest groups, and citizens. Political parties influence public policy and the policy process in numerous ways. Much of the influence arises from their role in the political process. Political parties articulate the needs, demands, and interests of their members and supporters and aggregate them into courses of policy actions. The party formulates its programmes based on these policy activities. The party apparatus researches and considers policy issues and alternatives, and decides on courses of action. An interest group consists of people who share similar interests and characteristics. They exist mainly to pursue and protect their mutual interests. An interest group influence on the policy process occurs at every stage. They are active in the initiation, generation, formulation of public policies, and in the determination of their content and direction. They articulate the interests and demands of their members to governmental actors in the policy process and seek to influence them to enact their demands and choices into policy actions. The citizenry is also a major factor in the policy process. The citizens could be considered as the main actor because they make-up the human environment of policies. The citizens equally make the demands for public policy; hence policies are made for the citizens. Again, the citizens contribute resources through the payment of taxes which serves as a source of funds for policies. Lastly, the citizens have the power of electing, supporting, or rejecting the major governmental actors and the policies they stand for (Ikelegbe cited in Dahida & Maidoki, 2013).

Public Policy Making Process

Public policy does not just spring out to the public domain. It involves a whole lot of processes, and so, the approaches, conditions, procedures, methods, activities, relations, and phases by which policies are made is referred to as the public policy making process (Ikelegbe, 1996). Ikelegbe also posits that the policy process is a process that comprise activities, interactions, techniques, and strategies involving several persons, groups and agencies. It is more than an act; it is a complex process of bargaining, negotiations, compromises and choices among methods, goals, interests, techniques, alternatives, structures, resources, and political commitments. The public policy making process has to do with the way and manner in which governmental policies are made and executed. It undergoes a vigorous process arising from policy identification to policy implementation and getting results. It involves systematic stages of policy articulation, formation, implementation, feedback, and evaluation (Ugumanim, et al, 2014).

Furthermore, it is pertinent to assert that there is no one-for-all process by which policies is made. Public policies are made in various styles, techniques, and methods to suit the policy maker to get the required outcome (Anderson, 1997). Heywood (2007) views the policy process as the methods and mechanisms through which public policy is made. Heywood categorised policy making as a process in two dimensions. The first category is that it involves a series of activities that begin with the development of ideas, critical scrutiny and analysis, evaluation, and conclusion. Hence, policy making involves the making of inputs to obtain a corresponding outcome. The second is that it is a process that focuses on how policy is made, rather than on the substance of policy itself and its consequences.

Scholars have identified various stages in the public policy making process. For example, Jones (cited in Ezeani, 2006; Ugumanim, et al, 2014) classifies five stages: problem identification, policy formulation,

legitimizing, application or implementation, and policy evaluation. For Lasswell (cited in Ezeani, 2006; Eminue, 2005; Ugumanim, et al, 2014), there are seven stages: information or intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal, and termination. In Rosenbaum's opinion (Eminue, 2005; Ugumanim, et al, 2014), we have five stages that are recognisable: agenda-setting, policymaking, implementation, assessment, and (sometimes) termination. While Jega (2003) draws attention to five stages: policy agenda, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Egonmwan (1991) identifies the stages of policy formulation, implementation, feedback, and evaluation. Anderson (1997) recognizes five stages: problem identification and agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation.

III. THEORETICAL ISSUES

Rivers state is a heterogeneous state with people of diverse cultures, ethnicity, religion, and ideologies. Observation from the political environment in Rivers State shows that the opinions and preferences of the majority of its citizens and residents are barely considered when public policies are made. Public policies are often engineered, made, and influenced by officers of the state power to promote their self and class interests. Thus, this paper employs the Elite and Marxist theory as its theoretical tool of analysis.

The elite theory was advocated by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels, Wilfredo Pareto, and Ortega Gasset (Dlakwa, 2009). Its major assumption is that political authority is exercised by few economically advantaged minority and policy makers, therefore, it is only the elites that constitute the minority that determine what happens in the society and not the whole people. They determine what policy is good for the people and go-ahead to implement them, without minding the sum total views of the people over such policy. The idea from the elite theory suggests that public policy mainly reflects the values and preferences of the governing elites. The people do not actually determine or influence public policy through their actions, rather, policies are made by a small group of individuals through the use of state apparatus and resources to implement policies that suit their interests. This system only measures that the wishes and desires of these elites are enhanced and protected (Ugumanim, et al, 2014). However, policies made by these elites might sometimes be in the interest of the people, even though the long-term interest may be that of the elites, but this occurs as concessions to or responses by the elites to threats of the status quo by the people (Anderson, 1997; Eminue, 2005; Olaniyi, 1998; Ikelegbe, 1996). Dye and Zeigler cited in Ugumanim, et al. (2014:89) have put forward the following assumptions of the elite theory: "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. The few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socio-economic strata of society". It is right to say that the movement of non-elites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. From the elite theory perspective, one can possibly opine that most public policy does not reflect the yearnings and demands of the people but that of the elite.

Furthermore, the Marxist theory sees every capitalist society as a class society. Marxists argue that in any capitalist society, there are two main classes of people, the class that owns the means of production in other word known as the bourgeois class and the class that does not own the means of production but contributes their labour, also known as the class of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie dominates and exploits the proletariat (Obo & Coker, 2013). 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, according to Marx, is not a neutral umpire, rather, it is a tool used by the bourgeoisie in the continuous domination and exploitation of the oppressed class. In this kind of system, public policies are often carefully tailored chiefly 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 disregarded (Obo, Eteng, & Coker, 2014).

IV. DEMOCRATISATION THROUGH PUBLIC OPINION AND PUBLIC POLICY MAKING IN RIVERS STATE.

The success of every democratic government depends on the extent to which the public opinion is articulated, established, and effective in directing governmental policies and actions (Ogoloma, 2016). Democracy provides an equilibrium stage for both the government and the people to chat and work assiduously for the common good of mankind.

Rivers state has enjoyed over twenty years of uninterrupted democratic process since 1999. The historical antecedence of public policy making has shown that the policy process in Rivers State lacks the vital traits of honesty, all-inclusiveness, transparency, mass participation, and consultation. Jega made this point clearly when he aptly avows that; "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" (Jega, 2003, p. 30).

Suberu (1991), made a distinctive relationship between public opinion and policy making involving three different but closely inter-related levels.

The first level is the one he called the mass public, which is the largest group but the least capable of articulating intelligible opinions on public policy or exercising any influence on governmental decisions or policies. Members of this group lack the informational and evaluative resources necessary to adequately comprehend the complexities of public policy. The second level is the interested public, which is smaller in size when compared with the mass public, but it plays a far more significant and reliable role in opinion formation and policy formulation. Members of this public are educated, informed, and highly motivated participants in public affairs. The third level is 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, can 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 more or less direct access to the centres of decision making in the society (Suberu, 1991:75-76).

From Suberu analysis, one can argue that the majority of Rivers people belong to the mass public, this is because most of the people are poor and unemployed. They lack the financial resources and ability to impact on the state policy making process. Also, some Rivers people believe that their opinions about government policies do not count. Even when the people are aware and interested in certain governmental policies, they may hold conflicting opinions and may not be able to persuade the government to adopt their preferred position (Ugumanim, et al, 2014).

In an ideal situation, public policies made should be beneficial to the people as posited by Ikelegbe cited in Dahida & Maidoki (2013) because the people makes up the human environment, make demands, contribute their resources through paying taxes, and decide who governs their affairs through the election, hence their opinions should be considered in policy making by government. However, the reality on the ground in Rivers state is different. While the resources used to fund governmental policies belong to the citizens, the opinions of these vital components of the society rarely 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 power belongs to the people, it is in the interest of the government to be guided by the majority opinions and preferences of the people 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 survival can consistently and completely ignore the opinions of the people (Suberu, 1991). For instance, governments are expected to derive their mandates from the people and they can only retain their positions too at the instance of the people. Hence, elected public officers who ignore public opinion and do not include it among their criteria for decisions may likely find themselves out of luck at election time (Anderson, 1997). Unfortunately, this analysis does not capture the situation in Rivers state. In Rivers state today, for instance, parties' candidates for elections are not elected in transparent and credible primaries, rather, they are mostly imposed on the parties by few people, that is; political cabals, caucus party members, godfathers, among others. The general elections themselves have never truly reflected the wishes of the masses (Obo, Eteng, & Coker, 2014). Furthermore, Obo, Eteng, & Coker (2014) have attributed poverty as a cause of the non-participation of the people in the policy making process. The majority of Rivers people lack the resources and empowerment to effectively partake in the policy making process. The people are more interested in meeting their daily recurrent needs to survive, thus participating in opinion on public policy issues is often regarded as not important. Some believe it is a waste of time as the government would not listen to their opinion (Obo, Eteng, & Coker, 2014).

It should be echoed that Rivers state is a class and an exploitative state, firmly controlled and dominated by a few wealthy people and their external collaborators in whose interests the policy making process in the state is primed. The history of public policy making in Rivers state is full of cases that show how Rivers state government's disregard public opinion in policy making. For instance, during the Rotimi Chibuike Ameachi administration (2007-2015), the government embarked on numerous projects and most projects never emanate from the majority opinion of the people. The Mono-Rail project was one of the projects of the state government that highly received public outcry. Rivers people in their various opinion spoke against the project but the government went ahead with the project, disregarding the peoples' opinion on it. Over 30 billion naira was spent under Amaechi watch on the mono-rail project, but the project is still far from completion and has been abandoned. Furthermore, after much appeals and opinion for the need to have a road linking the Ogoni's

and the riverine area of Andoni and Opobo. The Rotimi Amaechi administration embarked on the Ogoni-Andoni-Opobo unity road, which the administration promised to complete by December 2013. The road was never completed and the people through the various platform have called on the government to complete the road (Onoyume, 2013). Under the current administration of Chief Barrister Nyesom Wike, the people of Okehi in Etche Local Government Area of the state have been calling on the government of the day to repair their dilapidated roads which have been ignored for so long and paralyzing socio-economic activities in the state. Their calls seem to have fallen on deaf ears as there have not been corresponding policies to address their demand. Rivers people clamour for employment and empowerment of youths but this popular opinion of the people is not hearkened to by Governor Wike administration, rather the administration believes in the construction of roads and flyovers within the Port Harcourt metropolis.

The various examples cited have shown that democratisation in Rivers state has not developed to the extent that public opinion will account in public policy making as the government chooses to reject public opinion and implement their class and self-seeking policies. Hence, promoting a top-bottom centred approach in policy making which is in total negation of the tenets of democracy.

V. CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS

Democracy, public opinion, and public policy making are means through which the people and government come to understand and appreciate each other in the building of a better human society. Democracy allows for freedom of expression of views which should aid the government to make and implement policies that meet the people's desires and needs. Unfortunately, we found out that, that is not the case in Rivers state as most policies are made without full and proper consultation of the people. Most policies implemented by the state actors are purely elitist and not desired by Rivers people.

We, therefore, suggest that the Rivers state government should ensure that Rivers people are empowered, eradicate poverty and illiteracy and should seek and accept the popular opinion of the people as their opinion reflects their immediate needs. Again, Rivers people must not be tired of airing their views about government policies. They should make conscious efforts to ensure that their views are heard and implemented, and vote out leaders who do not hearken to the popular demand. Finally, the civil society organisations in Rivers state need to raise, educate, and enlighten the mass public on the need to air their views on government policies.

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