



From Idols of the Mind to Idols of Democracy: A Baconian Hermeneutics of Obstructions in Nigerian Democratic Practice

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Abstract

This essay reinterpreted Francis Bacon's doctrine of the idols of the mind as a tool for confronting the persistent challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Although liberal democracy is widely regarded as a system capable of ensuring good governance and improving citizens' welfare, Nigeria's experience of democracy reveals a significant gap between democratic ideals and practical outcomes. The study argued that failure in democratic consolidation is not merely institutional but is deeply rooted in cognitive, cultural, and ideological distortions analogous to Bacon's Idols of the Tribe, Cave, Marketplace, and Theatre. Adopting hermeneutic research methodology, the essay reinterpreted the idols of the mind as idols of democracy in Nigeria. The thesis of this essay is that, until Nigeria is purged of her idols in Baconian sense, consolidating democracy would remain a dangerous and impossible voyage. The interpretation of Baconian idols re-contextualized these idols to diagnose key obstacles to democracy in Nigeria. Tribalism and ethnic loyalties are examined as Idols of the Tribe, undermining meritocracy and national unity. Religious and personal biases, alongside the phenomenon of political godfatherism, are treated as Idols of the Cave. Manipulative political language and communication are identified as Idols of the Marketplace. While entrenched political ideologies, stereotypes, and institutional imbalances are conceptualized as Idols of the Theatre. These factors collectively distort public reasoning, weaken democratic institutions, and hinder accountability and development. The essay concluded that the mere adoption of democratic structures is insufficient

for achieving democratic consolidation. Instead, there is a need for a deliberate effort to purge these “idols” through critical inquiry, intellectual discipline, and institutional reforms that promote transparency, inclusiveness, and the rule of law.

Keywords: Accountability, Baconian, Competence, Consolidation, Democracy, Idols.

Introduction

Liberal democracy championed by the Western countries has been held by its proponents as the system of government that guarantees good governance and good life among all other systems of governance. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1990 and the dominance of the United States of America as the unipolar World power, liberal democracy has become almost the only reigning governmental system in the world. It is being recommended to the developing countries of the world; Nigeria as a country heeded to this recommendation as the only supposed alternative available in her struggle for poverty reduction, good governance and eventual prosperity. The heeding of the various countries of the world to democratic system of government at different period has been regard by Samuel Huntington as the wave of democratization. The fourth republic of Nigeria falls within Huntington’s categorization of democratization termed the third wave of democratization that has its beginning in 1974 (Huntington, 2017, p.16). Today, most countries of the world including Nigeria are claiming that they are practicing liberal democracy. This essay examines the major obstacles to gaining the ideals of democracy, it was based on the benefits of the ideals of liberal democracy that most countries of the world yielded to by becoming democratic.

The obstacles to democratic consolidation were viewed through the lens of Francis Bacon’s idea of the idols of the mind. The fundamental question here is that since liberal democracy is of high benefit, why is it that Nigeria has failed to have anything reasonable to show for its practice of democracy? The simple answer that was explore in this essay is that there are idols of democracy in the likeness of Baconian idols. Since her independence in 1960, Nigeria has practiced various forms of democratic governments with a view to adapting the one that best suited her. The Fourth Republic started with so much hopes and expectations by the people; they assumed that with democracy, people would be free to choose their leaders and representatives and hold them accountable for the overall objective of fast tracking development and improving the general living conditions of the masses. Considering the fact that Nigeria has abundant of human and natural resources, these expectations are not out of place but the reality on ground has shown that these expectations are yet to be realized. Hence

liberal democracy does not end with the adoption of democratic institutions in a country but entails proper consolidation of the principles of liberal democracy, without such consolidation, any practice in the name of democracy is likely to be an aberration. Larry Diamond (1997) viewed consolidation as follows:

Consolidation is most usefully construed as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine... this legitimacy must be more than a commitment to democracy in the abstract; it must also involve a shared normative and behavioral commitment to the specific rules and practices of the country's constitutional system—what Linz earlier called 'loyalty' to the democratic regime.

When a transitional democracy resists further growth, it means that democratic processes in such polities cannot be described as a consolidated democracy. Hence the consolidation of democracy is based principles of democracy totally devoid of the idols of democracy. In order to have a consolidated democracy in Nigeria, the idols which are the obstacles must be removed. Bacon identified four "idols," or false images of the mind, that hinder the pursuit of truth: Idols of the Tribe (universal human biases), Idols of the Cave (individual prejudices), Idols of the Marketplace (errors of communication), and Idols of the Theatre (dogmatic systems and ideologies). While originally applied to natural philosophy, Bacon's typology remains relevant to the social and political realm, where cognitive biases distort public reasoning and policy decisions (Peltonen, 1996). Bacon's remedy for the idols of the human mind is by purging our minds of all guesses or prejudice (Hattiangadi, 2024, p.141). Since this essay used Bacon's approach in addressing the problems of democracy in Nigeria, remedy similar to Bacon's solution entails purging Nigerian democracy of its major ills. In reinterpreting Bacon's idols for the Nigerian democratic context, this paper proposes that these idols can serve as diagnostic categories for identifying the epistemic and cultural obstacles to genuine democracy. Nigerian democracy suffers from forms of tribalism, godfatherism, linguistic manipulation, and ideological rigidity that mirror Bacon's idols. To overcome these, democratic actors must cultivate the very intellectual virtues Bacon demanded: humility, critical inquiry, and the systematic correction of error.

Francis Bacon's Idols of the Mind

The idols of the mind are obstacle that prevent man from accessing knowledge in its ideal form, in order to have knowledge devoid of error, Bacon explained how these obstacles affect our knowledge of things and how to deal with such obstacles. Idols can further be described as stronghold that flourishes on fallacies, this is in consonance with the description of idols as "cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit" (Stumpf, 1971, p.221). The logical component of Bacon's idols are seen in his assertion in the *Novum Organum*, when he held that "the doctrine of idols bears the same relation to the interpretation of nature as that of the confutation of sophisms does to common logic" (Bacon, 1901, p.20). In the same way, Copleston present a further explanation of the idols in the following terms; "Just as it is useful for the syllogistic dialectician to be aware of the nature of sophistical arguments, so it is useful for the scientist or natural philosopher to be aware of the nature of the idols of the human mind, that he may be on his guard against their influence (Copleston, 1953, p.302).

Categorically, an idol is a conceptual representation without real essence that is deified to the detriment of knowledge, truth, or comprehension. Idols serve as influences that frequently twist our understanding, thus offering us sentimental notions of ideal knowledge. Omoregbe described idols as prejudices and preconceptions that served as instruments that paint and distort our notion of things and the interpretation of experience (Omoregbe, 2011, p.78). As presented by Bacon, the important plight is that "the idols and false notions which have already preoccupied the human understanding, and are deeply rooted in it, not only beset men's minds that they become difficult of access, ... unless mankind when forewarned guard themselves with all possible care against them (Bacon, 1901, p.19). These idols that distort the human mind are classified as follows; the idols of the tribe, the idols of the den or cave, the idols of the marketplace and the idols of the theatre.

Idols of the Tribe: These are the obstacles to human knowledge that originates from human nature and the very tribe or race of man. In explaining these idols, Bacon opined that these obstacle are inherent in the structure of the human intellect which falsely assert itself as the standard of things instead of the universe (Bacon, 1901, p.20). The idols of the tribe can further be described as the tendency to take things superficially as they appear to us without adequate investigation, it also encompasses the tendency to cling to old beliefs, the tendency to see things that are in the state of flux as fixed, the tendency to read finality into nature, the tendency to see things as we want to see them (Omoregbe, 2011, p.78). These tendencies are inherent in the abstraction

propensity of the human intellect. The idols of the tribe are innate and also aided by sense deception. The deceptive nature of the senses are sources of contamination to the intellect. The desires of the intellect is much higher than what the senses can provide as tools for its abstraction, Bacon is of the view that this disparity can be remedied by “truer interpretation of nature... and appropriate experiments, where the sense judges only the experiment while the experiment judges nature and the thing itself” (Bacon & Rees,, 2004, p.87). The solution to the errors of the idols of the tribe is inherent in devising an extrinsic experiment would be necessary for the intrinsically inadequate senses. Hence, experimentally assisted senses will be able to flatten the mirror of the mind and, thus, “receive the natural light unrefracted” (Urbach, 1982, p.121). Urbach’s interpretation follows from what Bacon says about the forms: “forms are fictions of the human soul, except when you want to call those laws governing the act forms” (Bacon & Rees, 2004, p.89). It is an aberration therefore to think that these laws of action are in themselves sensible solidly. It is even a higher aberration to think that better and clearer lenses can merely correct the innate errors of the mind. Ultimately, the remedies cannot necessarily purge the idols of tribe since they are innate, the remedies are therefore tools that guide the senses in their judgment.

Idols of the Cave or Den: It is hypothesized that each individual has his or her own cave that obstruct knowledge. Not much description and details were given by Bacon and commentators about the idols of the cave. “The ‘idols of the den’ are the errors peculiar to each individual, arising from his temperament, education, reading and the special influences; which have weighed with him as an individual” (Copleston, 1953, p.303). The idols of the cave may be liken to Kantian view that describe the obstacles to knowledge as a veil covering the things as they are in themselves. The nature of such veil or lens are what determines the individual’s interpretation of the sense perception by the individual’s intellect. The veil or the lens which are associated with the categories of the human mind are factors that lead an individual to interpret phenomena according to the viewpoint of such veil or lens which are tantamount the individual cave. One key concept related to the idols of the cave in Bacon’s philosophy is the notion of Plato’s allegory of the cave where each person’s perception is affected by the limitation within the cave. Our personal ideas of things and notions do not always represent the truth. The visible world is perceived differently by everybody having a different perception. To this end, truth exist outside individual’s perception. This idea is further corroborated by Descartes ‘cogito ergo sum’ which entails the view that nothing exists outside of our own perception; “through the act of thinking he accepts the idea that he exists – but outside of his own thoughts he cannot say what actually exists” (Francis Bacon’s Idols,

2026). Individual's perception therefore is dependent of the nature of our own senses, and of our personal state of mind. As ones ideas become entrenched, they become increasingly difficult to uproot, and develop impermeability to facts. An individual's attitude to, and capacity to deconstruct, the "facts" one rely on, will determine the extent of their personal prejudices.

Idols of the Marketplace: These are obstacles to knowledge and truth that originate from human relationship via the use of language majorly. Bacon regard these idols as the greatest nuisance of lot that slipped into the intellect through the alliance of words and names. The main reason the stronghold against truth and knowledge is established through these idols is because "men believe that their reason rules words but it also happens that words turn and bend their power back upon the intellect; and that has made philosophy and the science sophistical and inactive" (Bacon & Rees, 2004, p.93). The problem of language that is responsible for the idols of the market place is further validated by Feyerabend (1981, p.29) who is of the view that man's interpretation of language always depends upon their prejudices and their general ideas about things and their properties. Our common language is to an extent entrenched in prejudices because the words used in common languages to describe things are commonly conceived. However, when critical mind sees that the commonly accepted analysis of things is inadequate, language may stand in the way of the expression of a more adequate analysis. This is certainly, an enormous obstacle in the pathway of knowledge. Occasionally words are used without any clear concept of what is meant or without any commonly recognized meaning. Bacon takes as an example the word 'humid', *humidum*, which may refer to various sorts of things or qualities or actions (Copleston, 1953, p.303).

There are several examples of the idols of the market place embedded in how certain social and cultural influences affect our thinking and perceptions about the world. Here are some examples of these idols in advertisement, social media, news media and cultural norms. The use of language and images that are targeted at manipulating our desires and perception by advertisers tend to buttress the idols of the marketplace. Social media platforms also buttress the idol of the marketplace because they can generate ideas that reinforce our existing beliefs and biases. This as such can lead to polarization and groupthink, where individuals become more deep-seated in their positions and less open to alternative viewpoints (Lexicon of Psychology, 2026). When news media becomes biased and selective in reporting sensitive matter capable of shaping public opinion and influences, it is a manifestation of the idols of the market place. Cultural norms are also some of the examples idol of the marketplace; "as they

can shape our perceptions of what is acceptable or desirable behaviour. This can include gender roles, beauty standards, and other social expectations that may not align with our individual values or beliefs” (Lexicon of Psychology, 2026). By the way of objectivity devoid of negative influences, truth and knowledge can be accessed, this can be possible by our awareness of the dangers of the idols of market place and the consciousness to get rid of them even though they are innate.

Idols of the Theatre: Amongst the various groups of idols presented by Bacon, the idols of the theatre are the only idols that are not innate and as such are capable of being purged from the minds of men. Much attention was given by Bacon to these groups of idols because of the necessity to purge these idols as a precondition to take up the mantle of scientific enterprise. The idols of the theatre primarily are cognitive biases that originate from sources like belief systems, philosophical systems or cultural traditions which we accept without questioning their validity or considering alternative perspectives; “for we regard all the systems of philosophy hitherto received or imagined, as so many plays brought out and performed, creating fictitious and theatrical worlds” (Bacon, 1901, p.22). Since they are fictitious and we tend to hold unto them as the authentic knowledge, they stand as strongholds to truth and knowledge. At large, there are three types of false philosophy that comprises the idols of the theatre. First there is 'sophistical' philosophy, Bacon opined that Aristotle is the chief proponent of this false philosophy, it was on this note he held that Aristotle’s “dialectic corrupted natural philosophy when he fashioned the world from categories...and forced on the nature of things countless other ideas as the whim took him” (Bacon & Rees, 2004, p.99). In Bacon’s explanation on these idols, he presented Aristotle as someone who bent experience to match his preconceived opinions, and consequently his so-called experimental works which are not in any way different from his works on logic. Without regard to contrary intermediate, his work seeks to prove their premises, to this end, his work then, of the sophists merely relates and contributes to the idols of the theatre.

The second false philosophy that constitutes the idols of the theatre is empirical philosophy, its error is to generalize a comprehensive view of things based on few experiments. The chief proponent of this is as presented by Bacon is William Gilbert the chemist, author of *De Magnete* (1600). Gilbert “employed himself most assiduously in the consideration of the magnet, immediately established a system of philosophy to coincide with his favorite pursuit” (Bacon, 1901, p.29). The error lies in establishing a system with few experiments of magnet. To Bacon, the empirical is “monstrous than those of the Sophistical or rational family; because it does not base itself on the light of common notions (which, though it be faint and superficial, is still in a way universal and

bears on many things) but on the darkness and narrowness of a handful of experiments (Bacon & Rees, 1901, p.101). Limited number of experiences are insufficient for generalization as it is practice in empiricism. The third major false philosophy that constitutes the idols of the theatre is 'superstitious' philosophy, For Bacon, sophistical ensnares the intellect while superstitious deludes it. Superstitions are often mixed with theological dogmas and as such are subtle and dangerous. This false philosophy was championed primarily by the Pythagoreans, Plato and the Platonists. The problem the superstitious is that it engages in unhealthy mixture of the divine and the human which "begets not only fantastic philosophy but heretical religion" (Bacon, 1901, p.38). It is therefore important to soberly to render unto faith the things that are faiths and philosophy the things that are philosophical.

The idols of the theatre are exemplified in certain psychological context as shown below. Confirmation bias which entails accepting information that confirm our pre-existing beliefs and values to the point of rejecting contrary viewpoints no matter how authentic they may be. Groupthink that entails people accepting ideas of their peers and conforming to the group norm without being critical or forming independent opinions. Holding unto stereotypical views about certain groups without recognition of unique circumstances is also a manifestation of the idols of the theatre. Furthermore, authority biases are indications of the idols of the theatre, in this regard, people often accept ideas and beliefs that come from perceived authorities or experts without questioning their qualifications or examining the evidence for themselves (Lexicon of Psychology, 2026). In the final analysis, idols of theatre are deleterious to decision-making and problem-solving.

The Idols of Democracy in Nigeria

Obviously, Bacon's term idol was used to portray the obstacles to scientific knowledge, it was in this regard that he presented inductive method as a viable solution to the obstacles or biases posed by the idols. Even though the primary scheme of the usage of the term idol is in natural philosophy, epistemology and philosophy of science, the same adumbrations can be applicable to political philosophy. Having unravelled the essence of Baconian idols, we are now positioned to present its metaphorical application through a reinterpretation process. In the scenery of contemporary democratic governance, the practice of democracy often tackles various systemic failures and obstacles that undermine its ideals. Nigeria's practice of democracy after more after almost three decade can serves as a poignant template of how these failures are apparent. The Idols discussed by Bacon provide a background for understanding the

myriad challenges plaguing Nigerian democracy, below are the idols of democracy in Nigeria.

Idols of the Tribe: Tribalism cum Ethnicity Obstacles to Democracy in Nigeria

It is not a hyperbole to state categorically that tribalism is an existential threat to democracy in Nigeria, this is because democracy in most cases can hardly flourish significantly in a heterogeneous society. The primary reason for this limitation is that the various units of heterogeneous society are often in a state of flux and tension of dominance of one ethnic group over another, to this end, tribalism constitute an idol in Nigeria's democratic platform. The fundamental danger of tribalism is irrationality and as such an incompetent tool for human relationship. Irrationality is entrenched in tribal sentiments, it is such sentiment that constitute idol to democracy. "Holding firm the tenants of one's tribe is not accomplished with rational thought and deliberation" (Newby, 2020, p.185). Tribalism as an inherited genetic trait was beneficial and necessary for the ancient ancestry but now detrimental to contemporary democracy. To adequately understand how tribalism constitute an idol to democracy, it is proper to present an explication of its contents as it is in-built in the term tribe. "A formal definition of the word tribe is a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, typically having a recognized leader" (Newby, 2020, p.76). In Nigerian context, tribalism is often used interchangeably with ethnicity:

Ethnicity or tribalism in Nigeria: is defined as social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of a competing communal group(s) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, race, religion and/or common history. What is peculiar to ethnicity or tribalism is that it involves demands by one group on other competing group(s) (Adeyanju, 2026).

The demand associated with tribalism is so strong in Nigeria to the point that tribalism has been declared as Nigeria's deadliest enemy, it worth noting that it was for the sake of administrative convenience the country was divided along the three major ethnic groups into three major regions: Northern, Eastern and Western. But the abrupt danger surpasses any administrative advantages (Ottah, 1960, p.191). What the danger can do to the unity of the federation, to the spirit of oneness of its peoples, their economic growth, to their sense of civic responsibility and to their tolerance of one

another is fully manifested in the epileptic nature of the current democracy in Nigeria where competence is often sacrificed on the altar of tribalism.

The establishment of tribalism as the soul of democracy in Nigeria remains the fundamental reason why democracy has failed to be consolidated after almost three decade of embracing such alternative as a viable solution to the political system. Despondently, the edifice of Nigeria's democracy rest on tribalism. From the First Republic to the Fourth Republic, tribalism remains the fundamental determinant of leadership positions at all levels. For example, slogans like 'sai baba', 'emi lo kan' and many others are tribal-based sentiments in Nigeria's politics that has shaped democracy to a large extent. The first slogan mentioned above presupposes that it must be 'Buhari' as the president or no other candidate, the second presupposes it is my turn to rule therefore any other parameter of determining competency of candidates must be thrown away. The danger that tribalism poses as an idol of democracy is that competence and professionalism are considered irrelevant. Furthermore, the atrocious impact of tribalism is manifested in the inability to fight corruption due to the practice in Nigeria that often forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. In all, tribalism divides people, provoke conflict and war, derails governance, prevents national unity of resources and revenues, slows down economic development, and made the country a crippled giant (Osaghae, 2023, p.36) .Under such condition, democracy cannot make things better but worse, that is one of the primary reasons Nigeria is moving from bad governance to worse governance in its practice of democracy.

Idols of the Cave: Religion and Cultural Inclinations as Obstacles to Democracy in Nigeria

The Idols of the Cave represent the personal biases influences that shape individual perspectives. In Nigeria, these biases are entrenched in religion and cultural influences on individuals. The ubiquitous influence of religion, principally Islam and Christianity creates a disunion that extends into the political sphere. The politicisation of religious identities along with the multicultural nature of Nigeria has produced prejudice and intensified conflicts, particularly in the northern regions and Eastern regions affected by religious crisis inherent in Boko Haram insurgency and cultural crisis as manifested in IPOB separatist movement primary based on cultural affiliation respectively. Ideally, religion ought to be a matter of private affairs in a democratic state, without such approach, it would be impossible to have freedom of religion. When there is no separation between religion and the state in a democratic state, such state is bound

to have constitutional cum legal crisis. Such is the state of affairs in Nigeria where the state lay claims to being democratic but with higher percentage of her constitution yielding to religious laws. Despite the fact that Nigeria lay claim to be a secular state in her constitution, the same constitution contradicts it declaration by not giving attention to the various major religions in Nigeria equal attention. It is therefore necessary to state that;

A constitutional declaration of secularity means, first and foremost that the state does not wish to invoke religion as a justification for its authority, actions and decision. It must be emphasized that proclamation of secularity, both historically as well as presently in the majority of cases denote official impartiality in matters of religion rather than official 'irreligiosity'. Secular states in that respect should certainly not to be confused with declared atheist or anti-religious states (Temperman, 2010, p.112).

A religious-based government cannot be democratic in nature because of the necessity of adhering to the tenets of the religion which at times do not consider the minority or the non-adherent of such religion. Democracy is not tantamount to anti-religious order but a platform for equality where religion is placed as a private affair. Just as each individual has his own cave that stand as an obstacle to knowledge as shown above in Baconian idols of the cave, in Nigeria, democracy obstructed by individual's political inherent in the modus operandi of political godfathers; "in Nigeria politics, the variant of patronage culture that rules is known as godfatherism" (Nwankpa, 2023, p.76). Godfathers in Nigeria democracy in an ideal sense ought to be mentors with the people's interest, on contrary political godfathers are sentimental influential wealthy individuals that hardly have the interest of the people, greediness defines their attitude and operations to a large extent. Igbini and Okolie (2020, p.94) define a godfather as "someone who has developed unimaginable respect and supporters (electorate) in the society and enjoys a well-organized political network and widespread acceptance from the voters that could ensure success for representatives of his preference". Political godfathers system affect democratic consolidation in Nigeria because of their extremes which has turned mentorship to lordship over their political godsons:

Democratic godfathers use their power to exclude anyone from participating in Nigerian politics; they are political gatekeepers, dictating who can and cannot engage in politics. Since "the reigning

godson is at pains to fulfil the whims and caprices of the godfather among other conflicting demands on the scarce resources," this type of condition encourages mediocrity and financial corruption. The interest of the greater majority is savagely exploited by the government's finances (Oghuvbu, 2023, p.68).

Decision making to key democratic tenets at party level are often affected by godfatherism, it limit effectiveness of democracy at the various political parties because many prominent political parties are the dynasty of political godfathers. Under such situation, there cannot be any form of consensus decision, it is the will and caprices of the political godfather that determines the direction of political parties. The so called members of political parties have little or nothing to contribute to internal democracy at the party level. It is on this note that Momoh (2014, p.91) argued that "the influence and power of godfathers have continued to shape and reshape the nature of internal democracy within political parties and this continues to play a significant role in understanding the crises in political parties in Nigeria. Not only do godfathers influence politics within their parties but they have also sought to influence other civil societies that could become instruments in their bid to perpetuate their political powers." In full, the politics of godfatherism is antithetical to the tenets of ideal democracy, it denies peaceful coexistence, law and order, establish electoral malpractice and greediness. The system of godfatherism is therefore a pathway to authoritarianism rather than democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

There are plethora of examples of the idols of democracy analogous to the Baconian idols of the cave in all the states in Nigeria. The problem in Rivers State in South-South Nigeria remain one of the most recent example, where the former governor allegedly insisted on getting certain percentage of the state allocation and the state government apparatus. Effort to liberate the State from the shackles of the godfather was one of the reasons allegedly responsible for the declaration of the state of emergency in River's state. The veracity of the aforementioned allegation are subject that would be laid bare in due time.

Idols of the Marketplace: The Power of Language and Communication

In Baconian term, the idols of the marketplace critiques how language can use as a tool to falsify understanding, within such perspective words are used for the purpose of manipulating reality in the public discourse. It is therefore worthy to note that misleading rhetoric is a device for establishing veil of ignorance that endorse

misunderstandings of the discourse on political matter that relate to the citizenry. In Nigeria, the idol of the marketplace is often manifested through deliberate deceptive political communication embedded in political parties cum their candidates' manifestoes and deceptive campaign promises. Politicians in Nigeria under democratic dispensation habitually employ euphemisms and unfathomable language to confuse their true intentions. The intentional use of language for manipulative purposes indicate how language can become weapon of massive destruction in the hands of amoral politicians. Arthur Koestler affirmed the danger of using language in a manipulative manner when he held that, "man's deadliest weapon is language. He is susceptible to being hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases. And where there is an epidemic, the group mind takes over" (Koestler, 1973, p.132). The use of language in its dangerous form by most Nigerian politician hinges on the fact that subtle strategies are frequently deployed to achieve their selfish aims. "The language choice of Nigerian political actors is most time persuasive and manipulative so it can influence the opinions of the listeners or electorates just to get their support or change of attitudes" (Inegbe, 2024, p.215). The danger of abusing political communication as an oppressive devise is commonly entrenched in five dimensions of political communication, these are;

The first is the tradition of rhetorical analysis of public political discourse.... The second,... how different governments use propaganda/persuasive messages to influence public opinion... the third, the tradition of voting studies... the fourth is the study of mass media effects... and fifth is the tradition of institution study of the press and government in their relation to public opinion (Lin 2004, 70).

These various dimensions of abuses and misuse of political communication are prevalent in Nigeria. There are bound to be almost absolute failure of democracy when political communication is abused. The case of failure to be able to consolidate democracy in Nigeria can easily be traced to the abuse of political communication in the various dimensions shown above. Social media, news media, political parties' rallies and advertisement are the avenue commonly use to disseminate the aberrations of political communications in Nigeria.

Idols of the Theatre: The Influence of Ideological Constructs as Obstacle to Democracy in Nigeria

The idols of the theatre, critiques the time-honoured belief systems and ideologies that obstruct objective analysis. For there to be consolidation of democracy, one must be ready to let go of old belief systems and ideologies; “without emptying one's mind of the old ways, no new progress could be made. In other words, holding tenaciously to extant doctrines without any effort to critically scrutinize them in line with current realities will continually distort the progress of knowledge; and in a way, the growth and development of any given society” (Ishaya, 2023, pp.147-148). In cognizance of Bacon's explication of these idols, it was shown that these systems of thoughts become similar to theatrical performances that has the capacity of diverting the citizenry from the substance of the reality that is affecting them. In Nigeria, these idols are manifested in the challenges posed by imbedded political ideologies and patronage systems that dominate the democratic scenery.

In Nigeria, there are certain practices that were established throughout her history that has become a dogmatic system of belief. One of such examples is the amalgamation of the North and South that took place in 1914. Though, the union was meant to ease administrative control of the colony, it has now become a dogma for the two regions to remain undivided and therefore rotate power by zoning key political positions without preference to professionalism and competence. In an attempt to carry everyone along, the ideologies entrenched in the hypostatic political union that form Nigeria as a nation has proven to be antithetical to democratic consolidation. Homogeneity is more compatible to democracy than heterogeneity, the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria pave way for the idol of the theatre. For example, the principle of federal character that is meant to establish quota for all available positions in government is undemocratic in nature and it does not permit the best to be place in a position to contribute to the development of Nigeria.

Stereotyping is one of the manifestations of the idols of the theatre in Nigeria, this is evidence in the culture that people of different regions, religious or ethnic groups often hold stereotypes about other groups of people without cognizance of the characteristics or uniqueness of individual or circumstances of each situation. To this end, the fundamental determinant of political leadership position are religion, ethnicity and region. In this regard, religious leaders, regional leaders and traditional leaders are often equipped with the capacity to determine who their follower are to vote for in election and violence are also used as a means of ensuring the emergence of the

unqualified. Under this condition, minority groups are not meant for key political positions no matter their level of competence.

For democracy to be worth its salt, the principle of separation of power and the rule of law are sine qua non. Even though the tripartite institutions of democracy are in existence in Nigeria, in practice what is obtainable is the dominance of the executive over the legislative and judiciary arms of government. The key positions in judiciary the supposed last hope of the common man are determined by the executive arm of the government. This remains one of the main sources of unconsolidated nature of democracy in Nigeria because the appointee would always pay allegiance his or her appointer. The lack of separation of powers in practice in Nigeria's approach to democracy is exemplified in the National Assembly operating as an appendage to the presidency where the legislative arm can hardly reject any form of abnormal request from the presidency. This count as one of the reasons Nigeria is indebted to many nations and organization, request to borrow even when not necessary are not rejected. In the same way, mismanagement of funds are hardly questioned by the legislative arm of the government in Nigeria. Moreover, the focus on the will of the executive by the legislative arm of the government where alignments are often based on political parties, ethnicity or religious identities has often acted as a theatrical backdrop, diverting attention from pressing issues such as poverty, infrastructure, and education. The divide-and-rule tactics employed by political actors underpin this paradigm, leading to greater alienation and disillusionment among citizens.

Smashing the Idols of Democracy in Nigeria

The idols of the mind and by extension the idols of democracy as shown above are obstacles to truth and knowledge that serve as a veil covering truth. It is therefore necessary to note that "truth might be hard to find, but we can take steps to eliminate common cognitive biases" (Thomson, 2022). It such steps Francis Bacon took by the kind of solution offered. The key step taken was inherent in recognizing the idols for what they are; "once we see that we have certain biases, we can take pains to rid ourselves of them. Of course, it's impossible to be entirely free of prejudice...But it is possible to minimize biases and try to overcome them in some ways" (Thomson, 2022). As a strategy to overcoming the ills of the idols, Bacon finds himself with the obligation finding remedy to idols. His remedy is deep-rooted in "calling up of notions and axioms by true *Induction* is certainly a sovereign remedy for restraining the *Idols* and driving them off. But even just drawing attention to them is of great use" (Bacon & Rees, 2004, p.79). Such attention would necessarily help in taking appropriate step in casting down

the idols of the mind and possibly the idols of democracy. In addressing the challenges posed by the idols identified in this essay, a more than formal observance of democratic structures that demands a deliberate transformation of the cognitive, cultural, and institutional foundations of governance in Nigeria are required. In line with the Baconian framework adopted in the study, the following approbations are proposed to “purge” the idols undermining democratic consolidation.

First, to counter the Idols of the Tribe manifested in tribalism and ethnic politics, there is a need to emphasize national identity over parochial loyalties. To do this, civic education ought to be intensified at all levels to encourage patriotism, shared values, and the preeminence of merit in leadership selection process. Electoral and party systems reformation are needed to discourage ethnic-based mobilization, while institutions must administer strict penalties against discriminatory political practices. Sortition and the use of advanced technology should be inculcated into the electoral laws. Sortition would necessary place competent and professional persons in the right position without biases. The National Orientation Agency and other similar agencies ought to be positioned to encourage issue-based politics rather than identity politics that is capable destroying the unity of multilayered cultures in Nigeria. These steps will help in shifting public discourse toward competence and accountability. Second, in addressing the Idols of the Cave, particularly religious bias and godfatherism, strengthening the secular character of the state and deepening internal party democracy is a necessity. Neutrality must be maintained by the state based on the principle of openness in matters relating to religion, ensuring equal treatment of all faiths as a means of preventing the politicization of religion should be given priority. Concurrently, legal and institutional frameworks should be reinforced to curb the influence of political godfathers by promoting transparent candidate selection processes, campaign finance regulations, and the empowerment of independent electoral bodies. Political participation should be a precondition for key documentation process in banking and other important public service entities.

Third, to mitigate the Idols of the Marketplace associated with manipulative language and deceptive political communication, there must be greater regulation and accountability in political messaging. Independent media institutions should be reinforced to provide fact-based reporting and counter misinformation. Civic literacy programs that is capably of equipping citizens with critical thinking skills to assess political rhetoric should be given appropriate attention, while laws against false campaign promises and disinformation should be imposed. Promoting transparency and integrity in governance communication will help rebuild trust between leaders and

citizens. Fourth, overcoming the Idols of the Theatre involves critical re-assessment of entrenched ideologies and institutional practices that obstruct democratic progress. Policies such as federal character and zoning should be reviewed to balance inclusivity with meritocracy. Strengthening the separation of powers is obligatory for consolidating democracy: the judiciary and legislature must operate independently of executive influence, with clear safeguards against political interference. Institutional reforms should prioritize accountability, professionalism, and adherence to the rule of law. Key democratic positions lie the leadership of the electoral regulatory body, the judiciary and the legislative should not be determined by the executive. In order to get this done, elections ought to commence from the local government level, the state and the federal government.

As a final point, a broader cultural shift is compulsory. Democratic consolidation in Nigeria hinge on cultivating intellectual virtues such as critical inquiry, openness to evidence, and resistance to entrenched dogma and ideologies that established the nation Nigeria on a shaky foundations. Civil society organizations, educational institutions, and the media all have crucial roles to play in promoting this mindset. Without such a transformation, democratic institutions will continue to operate superficially. In all, the path to a consolidated democracy in Nigeria lies in both structural reforms and a reorientation of public consciousness. Only by addressing these underlying “idols” can democracy evolve from a nominal system into a functional and effective instrument for national development, unity and peace.

Concluding Remarks

To sum up, while liberal democracy remains a compelling ideal for achieving good governance and societal well-being, its mere adoption does not guarantee its realization. The Nigerian experience demonstrates that democracy without genuine consolidation becomes an empty formality rather than a transformative system. By reinterpreting the challenges of Nigerian democracy through the lens of Francis Bacon’s idols, this essay has shown that the obstacles are not only institutional but deeply rooted in cognitive, cultural, and ideological distortions that are inherent in tribalism, religious and personal biases, manipulative political communication, and rigid belief systems. These “idols of democracy” continue to undermine rational judgment, accountability, and national cohesion.

For Nigeria to move beyond the façade of democracy to its substantive ideals, there must be a conscious and collective effort to purge these idols. This requires cultivating critical thinking, promoting competence and professionalism over sentiment,

ensuring the neutrality of state institutions, and fostering a political culture grounded in transparency, inclusiveness, and the rule of law. Only through such deliberate intellectual and structural reorientation can democracy in Nigeria evolve from a fragile practice into a truly consolidated system capable of delivering development, justice, and prosperity for all.

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