

Politics and collective intelligence nexus: A qualitative area study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the potential relationship between politics and collective intelligence in Nigeria, a nation characterized by its diverse cultural, ethnic, and political landscapes. Employing a qualitative area study approach, the research delves into how collective intelligence, defined as the shared or group intelligence that emerges from collaboration and consensus among various actors, intersects with political processes, decision-making, and governance. The study highlights the roles of civil society, grassroots movements and informal networks in shaping political outcomes. Through secondary data analysis, the research uncovers how collective intelligence contributes to, or is hindered by, the prevailing political structures and practices in Nigeria. The findings suggest that while collective intelligence has the potential to enhance democratic governance and policy-making in the country, it is often constrained by systemic issues such as corruption, ethnic divisions, and a lack of institutional support. The study concludes by offering recommendations on how to harness collective intelligence for more inclusive and effective political processes in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for reforms that encourage greater citizen participation and the integration of diverse voices in decision-making.

Keywords:

Collective Intelligence, Nigerian Politics, Governance, Decision-Making, Ethnic Diversity, Political Structures.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this paper is attributable to Vekua (2024) who primarily raised the question: What connection can there be between politics and collective intelligence? It was a question that elicited and continues to attract divergent viewpoints from scholars everywhere. Hence, Ternyik, (2024) contributed that collective intelligence does not exist in politics as politics is an expression of the power principle, i.e. might is right. According to Ternyik, (2024) the direction of human evolution may point to a learning process, where reason prevails over the power principle but there is no connection between politics and collective intelligence because better learned people try to avoid the power principle as they know that might is not right. In this sense, argues Ternyik, (2024) the query of Vekua (2024) points to the messianic era, when the power principle will be abolished by the light of reason. Ternyik (2024) maintains that the power structure is about weapons and economic potential. Consequently, we can have the model of Führer politics ... or the model of the market society and in the market society, we can remain customers and citizens (putatively devoid of collective intelligence in the viewpoints of Ternyik); in the Führer model, we will become serfs (Ternyik, 2024). In the embedded debates, while Ternyik (2024) initially appeared to be the leading voice, the contribution of Mia (2024) makes a divergent entry as she argues that collective intelligence is a must in politics. Furthermore, Okeke (2024, p.1) argues in joining the same discussion that purposeful politics can gain immensely from collective intelligence, maintaining that the connection between politics and collective intelligence is essentially for the purposes of refining politics where politics has remained crude. According to Okeke (2024) it is not correct to argue that there is no connection between politics and collective intelligence, as the political process, wherever it is purposeful is a function of collective intelligence.

Invariably, the central research question of this contribution remains: What connection can there be between politics and collective intelligence? The surrounding interrogations are presented as an area study whereby the work is focused for empirical finesse on a geographical location even as it remains essentially prosecuted under a qualitative research design. The structure of the presentation includes a conceptual elucidation because both politics and collective intelligence as research variables need to be properly elucidated for logical research sequence and helpful findings. The Nigerian state in West Africa is the focus of the area study. Nigeria, a nation of immense cultural diversity and economic potential, stands at a critical juncture in its political development (Akanle & Shittu, 2022). Despite being Africa's largest democracy, the country continues to grapple with significant challenges, including corruption, ethnic tensions, and governance inefficiencies (Akanle & Shittu, 2022;

Banko & Onyekachi, 2020; Yunusa, 2020). In this complex political landscape, the concept of collective intelligence, where the collective knowledge, skills, and experiences of the population are harnessed to address common problems, offers a promising avenue for improving governance and fostering national development. This paper accordingly explores the nexus between politics and collective intelligence in Nigeria through a qualitative study, examining how these two research variables interact and how collective intelligence can be leveraged to enhance political processes, promote inclusivity, and address the pressing issues facing the nation. By focusing on Nigeria, this study aims to shed light on the potential of collective intelligence to transform political systems and contribute to more effective and responsive governance.

2. EXPLICATING POLITICS

Politics, as a field of study and practice, is one of the most complex and multifaceted human activities. It involves the art and science of governing, the distribution and exercise of power, and the processes by which decisions are made within societies (Cairney, 2021). Despite its pervasive influence on all aspects of life, from local communities to international relations, politics often remains misunderstood or oversimplified. This section of the paper seeks to explicate politics by exploring its foundational concepts, key theories, and the challenges inherent in political processes. At its core therefore, politics is about power, the ability to influence or control the behavior of others (Shively & Schultz, 2022). This definition, however, only scratches the surface. Politics also involves the allocation of resources, the establishment of rules and norms, and the negotiation of conflicts within a society (Goodfellow, 2020). It is both a formal and informal activity, taking place in institutions like governments, as well as in everyday interactions between individuals and groups. Aristotle (often regarded as the father of political science) defined politics as the "master science" because it touches on nearly every aspect of human existence. He believed that politics was inherently linked to ethics, as it seeks to create a just society where citizens can achieve their highest potential. This idea of politics as a tool for achieving the common good remains central to many political theories today (DeLue & Dale, 2021).

2.1 Key Concepts in Politics

To understand politics, one must first grasp several key concepts:

- **Power:** Power is the ability to influence or control others' actions. It can be exercised through various means, including coercion, persuasion, and authority. Political power is often institutionalized in governments, but it can also be found in other social structures, such as businesses, religious organizations, and media (Martin, 2024).

- **State and Government:** The state is a political entity with a defined territory, population, and sovereignty. It is the ultimate authority within its borders, capable of making and enforcing laws (Börzel & Risse, 2021). The government, on the other hand, is the organization or group of people that exercises the state's power. Governments can take various forms, including democracies, autocracies, and monarchies.
- **Democracy:** Democracy is a system of government where power is vested in the people, who exercise it either directly or through elected representatives. It is characterized by free and fair elections, the rule of law, the protection of individual rights, and the participation of citizens in political processes.
- **Ideology:** Political ideologies are sets of beliefs and values that guide individuals and groups in their understanding of how society should be organized. Major ideologies include liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism. These ideologies shape political agendas, policies, and the way citizens perceive the role of government.
- **Justice:** Justice is a fundamental concept in politics, concerned with the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights. Different political theories offer various interpretations of justice, from the utilitarian focus on maximizing overall happiness to the egalitarian emphasis on equality.

2.2 Theories of Politics

Political theories provide frameworks for understanding how societies organize themselves and how power is distributed and exercised. Some of the most influential theories include:

- **Classical Liberalism:** Classical liberalism advocates for individual freedom, limited government, and the protection of private property. It emphasizes the importance of civil liberties and political rights, arguing that government should exist primarily to protect these rights.
- **Marxism:** Marxism is a critique of capitalism and its inherent inequalities. It argues that political power is a reflection of economic power, with the ruling class using the state to maintain its dominance over the working class. Marxism advocates for a classless society where the means of production are collectively owned.
- **Realism:** In international relations, realism is a theory that views the international system as anarchic and emphasizes the role of state power in ensuring security and survival. Realists argue that states act primarily in their own self-interest, seeking to maximize their power relative to others.
- **Feminism:** Feminist political theory examines how gender shapes power relations in society. It critiques traditional political theories for their exclusion of women's experiences and advocates for the inclusion of gender as a central category of analysis in political discourse.
- **Constructivism:** Constructivism is a theory in international relations that focuses on the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping state behavior. Unlike realism, which emphasizes material power, constructivism argues that the international system is socially constructed through the interactions of states and other actors (Bruneau, 2021; Kratochwil & Peltonen, 2022).

2.3 Challenges in Politics

Politics is inherently contentious, as it involves competing interests, values, and visions for society. Some of the key challenges in politics include:

- **Conflict and Cooperation:** Politics often involves managing conflicts between different groups, whether they are based on class, ethnicity, religion, or ideology. The challenge lies in finding ways to mediate these conflicts and foster cooperation, both within and between societies.
- **Corruption:** Corruption is a persistent problem in many political systems, where individuals or groups use their power for personal gain rather than the public good. Corruption undermines trust in government, weakens institutions, and hinders economic development.
- **Democratic Erosion:** In recent years, there has been growing concern about the erosion of democratic norms and institutions in many countries. This includes attacks on the rule of law, the weakening of checks and balances, and the rise of authoritarianism. Protecting democracy requires constant vigilance and active participation by citizens.
- **Globalization:** Globalization has transformed politics by increasing the interconnectedness of states and societies. While it has brought economic growth and cultural exchange, it has also created new challenges, such as economic inequality, environmental degradation, and the rise of populist movements that reject global integration.

- **Technological Change:** The rapid pace of technological change poses both opportunities and challenges for politics. Social media, for example, has democratized information but has also been used to spread misinformation and polarize societies. Similarly, advances in artificial intelligence and automation raise questions about the future of work and the role of government in managing these changes.

In the final analysis, politics is not just about governance; it is about how societies organize themselves, distribute power, and make decisions that affect everyone. As societies become more complex and interconnected, the study and practice of politics will continue to evolve, demanding new approaches to old problems and new ways of thinking about power and governance. Understanding these complexities is essential for anyone who wishes to engage meaningfully in the political process and contribute to the creation of a just and equitable society. Understanding the embedded complexities is essential for anyone who wishes to engage meaningfully with the connection between politics and collective intelligence.

3. ELUCIDATING COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

Collective intelligence refers to the shared or group intelligence that emerges from the collaboration, collective efforts, and competition of many individuals, often enhanced by technology (Suran et al., 2020). This concept, rooted in the idea that groups can often outperform individuals in problem-solving and decision-making, has gained increasing importance in various domains, from business to academia, and from politics to social networks. The notion of collective intelligence is not new. It has historical roots in the works of philosophers and scientists who observed the power of collaboration and collective effort. In ancient Greece, Aristotle noted that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," a concept that resonates with the modern understanding of collective intelligence. During the Enlightenment, philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes debated the role of collective decision-making in society, laying the groundwork for modern democratic theories (Malone & Bernstein, 2022; Warner, 2022). The term "collective intelligence" was however, popularized in the 20th century by the cybernetician Douglas Engelbart and the French philosopher Pierre Lévy. Engelbart, a pioneer in computer science, envisioned the use of computers to augment human intelligence collectively, while Lévy explored how digital technologies could enhance the collective intelligence of societies (Olszowski, 2024).

3.1 Mechanisms of Collective Intelligence

Collective intelligence operates through various mechanisms that allow groups to pool their knowledge, skills, and perspectives to solve problems or make decisions. Some of the key mechanisms include:

- **Collaboration:** Collective intelligence thrives on collaboration, where individuals work together towards a common goal. This can occur in various forms, such as teamwork in organizations, open-source software development, or collaborative research.
- **Swarm Intelligence:** Inspired by the behavior of social animals like ants, bees, and birds, swarm intelligence involves decentralized, self-organized systems where individuals follow simple rules to achieve complex outcomes. This concept has been applied in robotics, algorithms, and problem-solving.
- **Crowdsourcing:** Crowdsourcing involves outsourcing tasks or problem-solving to a large group of people, often via the internet. Platforms like Wikipedia, crowdfunding sites, and citizen science projects exemplify how collective intelligence can be harnessed through crowdsourcing.
- **Prediction Markets:** Prediction markets aggregate the knowledge and opinions of many individuals to forecast future events. By buying and selling shares based on predicted outcomes, these markets have been shown to provide accurate forecasts, often outperforming expert predictions.
- **Collective Problem-Solving:** Platforms like Kaggle and InnoCentive allow individuals from around the world to collaborate on solving complex problems, leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise to arrive at innovative solutions (Abbas et al., 2024; Budhwar et al., 2022; Kameda et al., 2022; Kudyba et al., 2020; Malone & Bernstein, 2022; O'Bryan et al., 2020; Suran et al., 2020).

3.2 Applications of Collective Intelligence

Collective intelligence has far-reaching applications across various fields:

- **Business and Innovation:** Companies increasingly rely on collective intelligence to drive innovation. For example, Google and IBM use internal platforms to encourage employees to contribute ideas and solutions. Crowdsourcing platforms also enable businesses to tap into a global pool of talent and creativity.

- **Education and Research:** In academia, collective intelligence is harnessed through collaborative research projects, open-access journals, and platforms like ResearchGate, where scientists and researchers share their work and insights. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) also exemplify the use of collective intelligence in education, allowing learners worldwide to access knowledge and contribute to discussions.
- **Politics and Governance:** Collective intelligence plays a crucial role in democratic processes. Participatory budgeting, for example, allows citizens to have a direct say in how public funds are allocated. Online platforms enable civic engagement, where citizens collaborate to propose and vote on policies.
- **Technology and Artificial Intelligence:** The development of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms often involves collective intelligence. AI systems, such as recommendation engines and language models, are trained on vast datasets created by collective human input. Additionally, AI can enhance collective intelligence by processing and analyzing large amounts of data to support decision-making.
- **Social Networks and Communities:** Social media platforms are prime examples of collective intelligence in action. Users contribute content, share knowledge, and engage in discussions that collectively shape opinions and trends. Online communities, such as Reddit and Stack Overflow, rely on the collective wisdom of their members to provide answers and solutions to various problems (Javaid et al., 2022; Malone & Bernstein, 2022; Panda et al., 2022; Suran et al., 2020; Tenório et al., 2021).

3.3 Challenges and Ethical Considerations

While collective intelligence offers many benefits, it also presents challenges and ethical considerations which include the following:

- **Quality Control:** Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of information generated through collective intelligence can be challenging. Misinformation, bias, and groupthink are potential risks that need to be managed.
- **Privacy and Data Security:** The use of collective intelligence often involves the collection and analysis of large amounts of data. Ensuring the privacy and security of this data is crucial, especially in an era where data breaches and misuse are common.
- **Inclusivity and Representation:** Collective intelligence should be inclusive, ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are represented. Marginalized groups must have equal opportunities to contribute and participate.
- **Ethical Use of AI:** As AI systems become more integrated with collective intelligence, ethical considerations around the use of AI, such as transparency, accountability, and bias, become increasingly important (Ashok et al., 2022; Brendel et al., 2021; Kameda et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Indeed, collective intelligence is a powerful concept that harnesses the power of many to solve problems, make decisions and drive innovation. Its applications are vast, spanning business, education, politics, technology and beyond. However, as humanity continues to rely on collective intelligence, it is essential to address the challenges and ethical considerations that arise. By doing so, the world can ensure that collective intelligence serves as a force for good, enhancing our ability to tackle the complex challenges embedded in its usage.

4. POLITICS AND COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is a country with immense potential, rich in natural resources, cultural diversity, and human capital. Yet, it is also a nation grappling with significant political challenges, including corruption, poor governance, ethnic tensions, and economic inequality. Moreover, the nation's politics is characterized by a mix of democratic and authoritarian practices, shaped by its colonial history, military rule, and the struggle for power among its diverse ethnic groups. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced a series of military coups and brief democratic interludes, culminating in the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Despite the return to civilian rule, Nigerian politics continues to be marred by issues such as corruption, election rigging, and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities for political gain. The political landscape in the country is dominated by a few powerful individuals and groups who wield significant influence over the state apparatus. This has often led to a concentration of power in the hands of a few, to the detriment of the broader population. The result is a governance system that is frequently unresponsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, leading to widespread disillusionment and apathy among the citizenry. In the context of Nigeria therefore, collective intelligence can be seen as a way to counterbalance the concentration of power and foster a more inclusive and participatory political process. By engaging the broader population in decision-making and problem-solving,

collective intelligence can help to address some of the systemic issues that have long plagued Nigerian politics. Harnessing collective intelligence in Nigerian politics accordingly entails spirited focus on the following approaches

- **Strengthening Democratic of Institutions:** Nigeria's democratic institutions, including the judiciary, legislature and electoral bodies, are essential for ensuring that collective intelligence can be effectively harnessed. Strengthening these institutions requires reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness. For instance, electoral reforms that ensure free and fair elections, coupled with robust anti-corruption measures, can help restore public trust in the political process and encourage greater citizen participation.
- **Promoting Civic Engagement:** Civic engagement is a critical component of collective intelligence. In Nigeria, civil society organizations, the media, and grassroots movements play a vital role in mobilizing citizens and advocating for change. These groups can act as platforms for collective intelligence by providing spaces where citizens can share their ideas, voice their concerns, and collaborate on solutions to societal problems. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a powerful tool for civic engagement, enabling Nigerians to connect, organize, and participate in political discourse on a scale never before possible.
- **Empowering Local Communities:** Nigeria's federal system of government provides an opportunity to harness collective intelligence at the local level. By decentralizing power and empowering local communities to make decisions that affect their lives, the government can tap into the unique knowledge and expertise of different regions. This approach can also help to address the country's ethnic and regional divides by promoting greater inclusivity and ensuring that all voices are heard.
- **Encouraging Collaborative Problem-Solving:** Many of Nigeria's challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and insecurity, are complex and require collaborative solutions. Collective intelligence can be harnessed through collaborative problem-solving initiatives that bring together government, private sector, civil society, and citizens to address these issues. For example, public-private partnerships can be used to tackle infrastructure deficits, while community-driven development programs can help to address local needs in a more targeted and effective manner.
- **Leveraging Technology for Governance:** Technology offers a powerful tool for harnessing collective intelligence in Nigerian politics. E-governance platforms, online forums and mobile applications can be used to facilitate citizen engagement, improve service delivery and increase government accountability. For instance, platforms like "BudgIT" and "Tracka" allow Nigerians to monitor government budgets and projects, providing a means for collective oversight and ensuring that public resources are used effectively (Atairet & Ibanga, 2021).

5. CHALLENGES TO HARNESSING COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE IN NIGERIA

While the potential of collective intelligence in Nigerian politics is significant, there are several challenges that must be addressed:

- **Political Elitism and Corruption:** The concentration of power among small elite, coupled with endemic corruption, poses a significant barrier to the effective use of collective intelligence. For collective intelligence to thrive in the country there must be a genuine commitment to inclusivity and the equitable distribution of power.
- **Ethnic and Religious Divides:** Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity, while a source of strength, has also been a source of division and conflict. These divides can hinder the formation of a cohesive collective intelligence, as different groups may have competing interests and agendas. Bridging these divides requires fostering a sense of national identity and promoting dialogue and understanding among different communities.
- **Limited Access to Functional Education and Technology:** Access to functional education and technology is critical for enabling citizens to participate in collective intelligence. However, in Nigeria, many people, still lack access to quality education and digital tools. Addressing these gaps is essential for ensuring that all Nigerians can contribute to and benefit from collective intelligence.
- **Weak Institutions:** Weak institutions, including a lack of purposeful governance structures and rule of law, can undermine efforts to harness collective intelligence. Strengthening these institutions is necessary to create an enabling environment where collective intelligence can flourish.

6. CONCLUSION

Politics and collective intelligence in Nigeria are deeply intertwined. While Nigerian politics has historically been characterized by the concentration of power and exclusion of the broader population, the concept of collective intelligence offers a pathway towards more inclusive, participatory, and effective governance. By harnessing the collective knowledge, skills, and perspectives of its diverse population, Nigeria can address its most pressing challenges and unlock its full potential. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the significant barriers that stand in the way, including corruption, ethnic and religious divides, and limited access to education and technology. With the right reforms and a commitment to inclusivity, collective intelligence can become a powerful force for positive change in Nigerian politics.

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