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# Empirical Analysis on the Practical Feasibility of Timber Legality Verification Work in China

Jianquan Li, Shaozhi Chen

Research Institute of Forestry Policy and Information (RIFPI), Chinese Academy of Forestry (CAF), Beijing, China  
Email: [jqli2002@163.com](mailto:jqli2002@163.com)

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## Abstract

With the acceleration of economic globalization and trade liberalization, illegal logging and timber trade, which are closely related to the ecological environment and climate change, have aroused extensive concern within the international community. Based on the authors' long-term experience and accumulated knowledge, as well as extensive field investigation, this article offers a range of observations. Firstly, it analyzes the worldwide significance and annual changes of China's forest products trade; secondly it reviews China's legal timber logging, transport and management systems and major challenges; thirdly, it compares timber legality verification schemes and methods around the world and summarizes experience of their implementation; fourthly, it proposes countermeasures and suggestions on strengthening the timber legality management in China; finally, the paper discusses the practical feasibility of timber legality verification work in China. The results of the authors' research show that strict forest logging quota management means the risk of illegally logging in China is relatively low, that legality verification in China can meet the international market demand for legal timbers and that launching timber legality verification work in China is therefore feasible. This would make a significant contribution to breaking through green trade barriers, enhancing China's position in negotiations, and promoting the standardization of the timber international trade.

## Keywords

Legality Verification, Practical Feasibility, Source Tracking, Empirical Analysis, Countermeasure Suggestions

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## 1. Introduction

The fact that legal timber trade can promote sustainable forest management has been widely recognized globally

(Wiersum et al., 2013), and there has been a worldwide upsurge in action against illegal logging and trading. After 15 years of negotiations, the United Nations in 2007 agreed *the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All types of Forests* and this was followed by the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, which nearly 130 heads of 193 member states and/or governments attended. Delegates engaged in in-depth discussions regarding the institutional framework for a green economy geared towards the goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication. This culminated in them passing a final Conference declaration *The Future We Want*.

In the meantime there have been a range of international initiatives launched that are specifically aimed at countering illegal logging and illegal timber trade. The East Asian-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) was held in Indonesia in September 2001 and the EU initiated an action plan for the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) in May 2003. The first African FLEG Ministerial Conference was held in Cameroon in October 2003 and the Europe and North Asian FLEG Ministerial Conference was held in Russia in November 2005. Alongside the international FLEG processes (EFI, 2011) of Asia, Europe, Northeast Asia, etc.—all of which China attended—, a Sino-EU FLEG Conference was held in Beijing in September 2007, and the 1st Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministerial Conference on Forestry was successfully held in Beijing in September 2011 (DIOC, 2012).

A range of developed countries have imposed legislative bans on illegal timbers entering their markets. In 2008, the United States amended the Lacey Act, expanding its coverage to the trade in plants, forest products, etc. Implementation of the amended act began in April 2010 (Brack, 2010). In 2010, the EU passed the Timber Regulation, which came into force in March 2013 (Chen & Wu, 2013) and, in 2012, Australia ratified *The Illegal Logging Prohibition Act*, which was due to come into effect in November 2014 (Australian Government, 2013). Meanwhile, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) jointly initiated forest certification systems, with the aim of countering illegal logging through market mechanisms. Amongst others, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Rainforest Alliance (RA), SGS, IKEA, have introduced Forest Management (FM) Certification, Chain of Custody (COC) certification of forest products, Verification of Legal Origin (VLO), Verification of Legal Compliance (VLC), etc. (Lawson & MacFaul, 2010; TTF, 2010; Yang & Yin, 2011).

Literature reviews show that in recent years, in tandem with its rapid economic development, China has become a major player in the production, trade and consumption of forest products from around the world and that China is playing a more and more important role in worldwide forest conservation and sustainable forestry development. At the same time, while China's governance system for timber harvesting and transportation is fairly comprehensive, it is also encountering a range of new challenges. For instance, while America and Europe are China's important partners in the international trade in forest products, the implementation of new regulations in these two regions has also had a profound effect on China's foreign trade in forest products. Therefore, in considering the feasibility of timber legality verification work in China, it is necessary to analyze China's legal logging, timber transportation, operations and timber management systems and the major challenges they face. It is also important to learn from international experience and to explore countermeasures and suggestions for ensuring legality of timber, improving market access for forest products and the safeguard rights and interests of China's forestry enterprises in the international arena.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Methods

#### 2.1.1. Literature Review

By using online databases, such as cqvip, cnki, ScienceDirect, etc., and web-based platforms, such as Google, etc., the authors were able to identify and review relevant documents, to consult and categorize data related to Chinese's and global forest products trade, analyze standards for legal timbers, practical requirements, legality verification and tracking methods and to systematically summarize theories and practical experience. This provided a complete baseline understanding of the forward trends, key results and latest developments in this field, and a foundation for further studies and for field investigations.

#### 2.1.2. Questionnaire Survey

Relevant leaders of local forestry departments, industry associations and forest industry groups sent a tailored questionnaire to the administrative staff and front-line workers of all forest enterprises, forest farms and/or re-

lated business units via E-mail, and reminded them to send the questionnaires back after completion, or, to compile relevant presentation materials and to wait for the survey research group to take back such questionnaires, to collect relevant materials and to interview them. The questionnaire covers the basic status of each enterprise, management and operation condition, domestic policies implemented, foreign policies learned, the level of demand for business management and so on. These issues will be explored in more detail in Section 2.2.3.

### 2.1.3. Field Research

Based on those questionnaires and seminars, relevant researchers were dispatched group by group to the Greater Khingan Range, Heilongjiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hebei, Beijing and some representative enterprises for field research and site inspection from July 2011 to May 2013. Here, they conducted face-to-face interviews on the status and problems of China's management of forest resources, the practical feasibility of identifying legal timber etc.

### 2.1.4. Comparative Analysis

China's forest products trade volumes were compared with those of the world as a whole and with those of Asia as a region, alongside a comparison of annual changes in the value of China's imports and exports. In addition, the study compared the standards for legal timber, as well as the verification methods and associated systems, and reviewed relevant achievements and experience abroad. The researchers also analyzed corresponding laws and practices. On this basis the authors offer their objective evaluation and conclusions.

## 2.2. Materials and Sources

### 2.2.1. Data Sources

The comparison between China trade in forest products and that of the rest of the world made use of relevant data published by FAO Forestry Trade Database. For changes in the national export and import of forest products the authors have utilized relevant customs statistics from the China Forestry Development Report which is compiled and published by State Forestry Administration (There are significant differences in the statistics offered by the two sources of trade data because of their different categorization of major forest products).

### 2.2.2. Survey Location

Guangzhou, Shunde, Zhongshan, Dongguan, Fengkai, Huizhou, Zijin and Shixing in Guangdong, Hailin, Suiyang, Dongning and Xinlin in Heilongjiang, Songling and Mohe in the Greater Khingan Range, Fenyi and Shanggao in Jiangxi, Shaxian, Nan'an, Ninghua and Xianyou in Fujian, Cangwu, Rongxian, Bobai, Beiliu, Luchuan and Wuzhou in Guangxi, Quzhou in Hebei, Miyun in Beijing, etc., as well as 3 - 5 representative enterprises of each of the above-mentioned, were investigated and surveyed.

### 2.2.3. Investigation Content

Relevant provisions surveyed include: the current logging, transport and management systems for timber, annual logging quotas, the procedures and basis for compiling timber production plans, application procedures for forest logging permits, acceptance, supervision and management systems for forest logging, application and monitoring procedures for timber transportation permits, and application and monitoring procedures for timber business permits. The authors also considered the current status and problems of the implementation of legal forest logging, transport and management, implementation of annual logging quotas and timber production plans, implementation of legal forest logging, transport and management permits and systems, evidence or reports on occurrences of illegally logging, etc.

The research also encompassed a review of the following: timber sources and purchasing practices of forestry enterprises, production and processing of timber products, commodity marketing and export, foreign policies, etc.; and, tracking and supply chain management systems of representative enterprises and their sources of timber, implementation and risks of illegality of timber, implementation and problems of labor and environmental protection laws, rules and/or conventions, etc.

Finally, the authors also considered opinions or comments on basic principles, criteria and indicators of legal timbers to be followed, opportunities and difficulties in developing verification and tracking of the legality of timber in China, and comments or suggestions on promoting the legality of timber in China.

### 2.2.4. Data Acquisition

Among the electronic and paper questionnaires completed and collected from various regions, 166 questionnaires, containing 0.10 million words of statistical information, have been considered. The researchers also made visits to facilities and organized seminars, in which the participants included 92 companies and business units from 28 districts and/or counties of 7 provinces. These produced a further 0.30 words of notes, 117 copies of introductions, 31 copies of electronic materials amounting to of 0.13 million words, 2695 pictures with a total of 13 G, and 27 tape recordings of total session of 13 hours, 24 minutes and 31 seconds.

## 3. Results and Analysis

### 3.1. Status and Changes of China's Forest Products International Trade

Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, China's international trade in forest products has made great progress. China is the top exporter, globally, of major products such as wooden furniture, paper, wood-based panels and wood products.

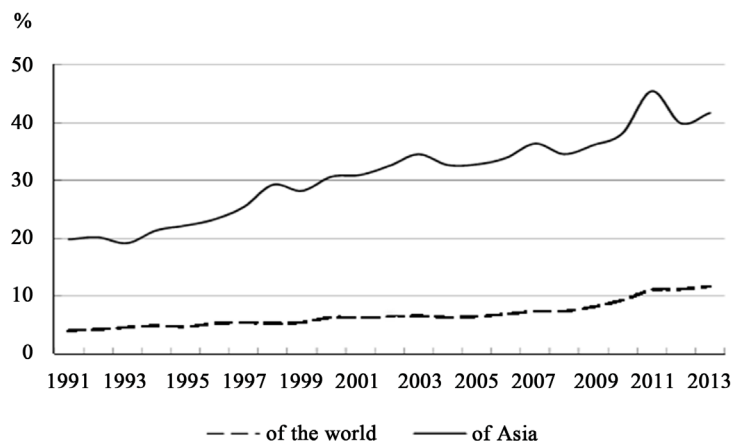
#### 3.1.1. Annual Improvement in China's Global Position

According to the FAO statistics database, the total value of global trade in main wooden forest products increased from US \$205.591 billion in 1991 to US \$493.526 billion in 2013, a 140% increase. Meanwhile, the total value of China's trade in forest products increased from US \$8.193 billion to US \$57.562 billion—an increase of 6.03 times, which is 4.63 times higher than that of the rest of the world. China's share of the trade in main wooden forest products as a proportion of trade within Asia and that of the world (1991-2013) has undergone insignificant fluctuations between years. However, on the whole, they exhibited upward trends (**Figure 1**), and historical peaks; accounting for 11.66% of the total value of the world trade in 2013 and that 45.40% of Asian trade in 2011 (**FAO, 2014**).

#### 3.1.2. Continued Growth in Total Trade

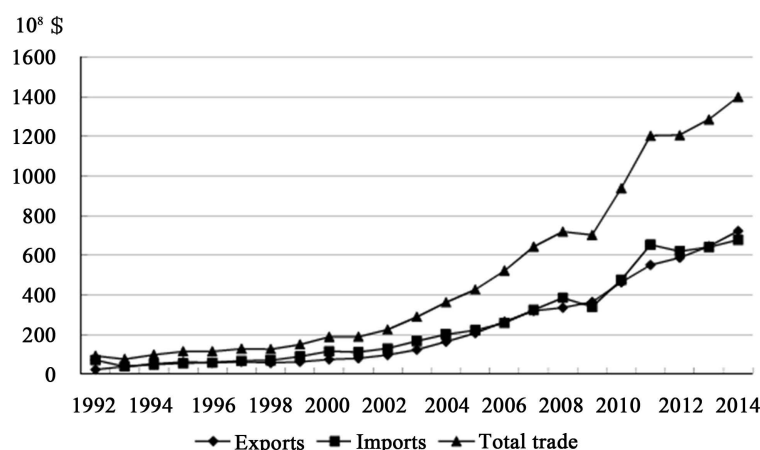
Although the value of China's import and export of forest products from 1992 to 2014 registered insignificant fluctuations between years (e.g. total value in 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2009 declined slightly) it still maintained an upward trend overall (**Figure 2**).

The volume of trade in forest products from 1992 to 2014 rose from US \$9.188 billion to US \$139.948 billion—a 14.23 times increase. At the same time, the value of exports rose from US \$2.181 billion to US \$72.198 billion—a 32.10 times increase and the value of imports rose from US \$7.008 billion to US \$67.750 billion—an 8.67 times increase (**SFA, 2014**). According to customs statistics, the trade value in 2014 was US \$139.948 billion, an increase of 8.9% on the previous year. The value of exports in 2014 was US \$72.198 billion—an increase of 12.0%—and the value of imports was US \$67.750 billion, down by 5.7%. The import volume of logs was 51.194 million m<sup>3</sup>, up by 13.4% and the volume of sawn timber imported was 25.746 million m<sup>3</sup>, up by 7.1%.



**Figure 1.** Chart showing China's share of international trade in wooden forest products relative to the rest of the world and to the Asia region from 1991 to 2013.





**Figure 2.** Trends in the value of China's import and export of forest products from 1992 to 2014.

### 3.1.3. Import Trade in Continuous Ascension

According to customs statistics, the total export value of forest products in 2010 accounted for US \$47.51 billion, an increase of 40.1% on the previous year. The value of imports in 2011 reached US \$65.30 billion—an increase of 37.6%; however, the import value in 2012 fell slightly (Figure 2). In 2013 and 2014 import values reached US \$64.09 billion and US \$67.75 billion, equating to increases of 3.5% and 5.7% respectively.

### 3.1.4. Export Trade Is Continually Increasing

The value of China's exports of forest products started to show an upward trend in 2000, then declined sharply from 2008 till 2009 due to the effects of the financial crisis, and then increased significantly from 2010 to 2014 (Figure 2). The value of exports first exceeded that of imports in 2006, and has yielded an overall trade surplus of US \$0.578 billion over the past 10 years. The trade surplus in 2009 alone was US \$2.414 billion, while trade surpluses for 2013 and 2014 were US \$0.367 billion and US \$4.448 billion respectively. There were some trade deficits in the intervening years.

## 3.2. China's Legal Timber Logging, Transport and Management Systems and Challenges

### 3.2.1. Institutional System

China has rigorous supervision and management systems for forest logging, transportation, processing and sales, based on presentation of legal evidence, and has strict administrative enforcement of laws. At present, the country has a unified management system of licensing timber transport, although Guangdong, Fujian and some other provinces have also opened their own forestry administration systems, enabling them to allocate permits for forest logging and transportation online, and allowing the comprehensive management of timber logging, circulation, processing and utilization. The supervision and management systems have the following main components:

#### (1) Management System of Forest Logging.

1) Management of logging quotas is an important legal tool for protecting forest resources. As specifically stated in the Forestry Law of the People's Republic of China, forest logging quota and production controls should strictly adhere to the principle of consumption being lower than production, and must follow the management systems set out in annual logging quotas and timber production plans. State-owned forestry enterprises and/or institutions designate the annual logging quota for state-owned forests and trees, while county authorities set annual logging quotas for collectively or individually owned forests and trees. Relevant forestry authorities at the district/municipal/provincial level are in charge of ensuring balance in the system as a whole, and local government is responsible for reporting to the State Council every 5 years.

2) Timber Production Plan. This is a specific means by which the government can control and regulate the annual consumption of merchantable logs and to guarantee logging quotas are not exceeded. As provided in the Forest Law of the People's Republic of China, a unified timber production plan should be worked out by the government, and no annual timber production plan may exceed the approved logging quota. In the event of any

logging exceeding the quota, this will incur punitive measures by the authorities. The government works out a unified annual timber production plan according to the approved annual logging quota, and strictly implements the management systems of quota acceptance, allocation and forest logging permits.

3) Forest Logging Permit. This is an important measure to ensure the implementation of logging quotas. As provided in the Forest Law of the People's Republic of China, any state-owned forestry enterprise or institution shall, prior to lumbering, apply for a bamboo or tree logging permit, and must strictly comply with the approved logging quota. As set out in relevant national policies, forestry authorities at all levels need to strengthen the audit of material sources of all timber processing and sales entities that are largely relying on consumable forest resources. It is prohibited to use any timber cut without a forest logging permit or other proof of it having been sourced legally.

4) Logging Acceptance and Supervision. National and local competent administrative authorities of forestry and township forestry stations are responsible for supervising the implementation of forest logging management systems. Forestry bureaus at the county level check the permit for the local logging, production and transport of timber or bamboo at random, and each forestry station inspects the timber transport documentation at a fixed site. Meanwhile forestry authorities and industry and commerce administration authorities streamline timber business units and processing enterprises in forest districts and key timber-producing counties as well as carrying out annual inspections, registrations and license renewals. They require the scope of business to proceed in line with relevant national laws, with regard to the state of the local resource and logging quotas or timber production accounting systems, and require that the number and the size of such units be reasonably determined. It is prohibited to individually resell or to smuggle. For its part, State Forestry Administration organizes inspections of the logging volume, freight volume and sales volume of each state-owned forest district every year, and supervises the forest logging.

(2) Supervision of administrative law enforcement of forestry. China's supervision system of administrative law enforcement of forestry effectively guarantees the implementation and supervision of legal logging.

1) A description of the administration law enforcement system is as follows. It has 5 levels of forestry administration, including the state, provincial, municipal (district), county and township-levels. The State Forestry Administration sets the forest logging quotas, which are implemented upon the approval of the State Council, and supervises the forest and bamboo logging and transport with permits. The provincial forestry departments set and implement their own local logging quotas, and supervise the forest and bamboo logging, transport and sales with a system of permits.

2) Systems and norms of administrative law enforcement. China has a sound law enforcement and supervision system, covering all aspects of the timber products business, such as logging, transport, processing, import and exports. It has established related systems of administrative law enforcement covering forestry, including the Procedural Provisions on Administrative Punishment of Forestry, the Measures for the Supervision of Administrative Law Enforcement of Forestry, the Administrative Punishment Hearing Rules of Forestry, etc. In case of any serious breach of any of such regulations, corresponding criminal violations shall be investigated.

3) Enhancement of law enforcement supervision agencies. The forestry security bureau is set up to guide the administrative law enforcement relating to forestry, and to urge to investigate and treat seriously cases in which forest resources and/or wildlife resources under special state protection are being destroyed. All levels of forest administration and public security organs are responsible for clamping down on illegal activities related to forests and each timber inspection post shall be responsible for checking relevant proofs of timber transport, and assisting the forest public security organs in handling major cases. The State Forestry Administration has also established offices of the commissioner for supervising timber resources in 13 provincial districts' forests, and these offices specifically supervise the utilization of local timber resources.

(3) Management of timber processing and sales. As set out in the Forestry Law of the People's Republic of China, timber processing and sales in forested districts shall be approved ahead of time by local forestry authorities above the county level. At present, most parts of China have implemented the licensing system for timber processing and sales. All entities and/or individuals engaging in timber processing and sales shall, prior to taking out their business licenses from relevant industrial and commercial administrations, obtain permits for timber processing and sales from relevant forestry authorities above the county level.

(4) Timber Transport Management System. It is important to ensure compliance with timber transport regulations, and to prevent any timber illegally cut from circulating. As required in the Forestry Law of the People's Republic of China, companies or individuals transporting timber from forested districts must be in possession of

transport documentation issued by local forestry authorities. This timber transport documentation must be valid throughout the transport of the timber from the point of origin to the destination. It needs to be retained throughout the journey, and the description of the products in the permit must be consistent with the materials being transported. Local timber inspection posts reserve the right to stop any timber consignments that lack such documentation or are inconsistent with it. Forestry authorities above the county level may confiscate any illegally transported timbers, and impose a penalty on the owner, of up to 30% of the value of such timber.

### 3.2.2. Major Challenges

Although relevant laws and regulations of China have strict provisions on logging, and relatively complete management, supervision and enforcement systems of forestry have been set up, there are still some outstanding issues in practice:

(1) Lack of rules for the implementation of forest management. 1) Over-harvesting. In some places, because of economic interests, there are still cases of above-quota logging and/or logging without a license. There are only a very few competent authorities that do not conduct logging area survey design, that do not issue forest logging permits correctly or which do not carry out checks as required. Indeed, in recent years, statistics suggest that the licensed logging rate in logging areas and state-owned forest districts and the pass rate of forest logging permits have increased significantly (SFA, 2014). However, in some places, there are still cases of logging permit misuse; notably above-quota logging and logging without a permit.

2) Poor transport management. It is hard to supervise the transport of timber and timber products, because of the long distances and wide range of parties involved. a) Discrepancy between transport and logging permits: In some places, the transport of timber materials within the territory does not require any transport permit, thus creating the opportunity for criminals to acquire timbers in such places and convey them to the point of sale using transport permits issued elsewhere. This results in the legalization of unlawful felling or denudation. b) No checkpoints on expressways: The supervision of timber transport is poor, and there is a long-standing problem of some checkpoints levying fines rather than imposing statutory punishments in cases where timber is found to be transported without a permit.

3) Excessive processing and sales. In a few places, in the interests of developing the economy or because of the pressure to attract investment, local authorities neglect the bearing capacity of timber resources, and license batches of timber processing and sales enterprises without examination, thus causing an embarrassing situation of excessive harvesting and poor quality of wood products. The internal management of some processing plants is not standardized, giving rise to problems such as processing without permit, business activities that are beyond the scope of permits, lack of proper accounting, sales of semi-finished products or product made from timber that lacks the proper permits, etc.

(2) Industry associations not functioning properly. At present, most of the industry associations in China are basically affiliates of government agencies. They are characterized by excessive administrative functions, inadequate service functions and a lack of capacity to coordinate industrial development or bridge the gaps between all the enterprises involved. In particular, forest industry associations have poorly-developed organization and unclear division of responsibilities, and there is still much room for improvement in key areas, e.g. developing plans for guiding the growth of the industry, introducing self-discipline conventions to avoid vicious competition, standardizing enterprise behaviors, dealing with trade barriers, strengthening social responsibilities for forest management and maintenance, providing market information, reducing operating costs, etc.

(3) Weak support of modern information technology. The support and introduction of modern information technology in China's forest conservation need to be strengthened. A particularly acute need is for the construction of a management and support platform for legal timber supply through utilization of E-government, digitalization of forest district administration, information services, media technology, etc., innovating technical means and administrative services for timber logging, transport and management, and realizing the resource integration, collaborative interaction, efficient sharing and one-stop services.

(4) Deficiencies in the capacity building of enterprises. Nowadays, China's forestry enterprises have weak capabilities, and they still have great room for improvement in conceptual development, management innovation, competitive strategy, corporate culture, staff skills, branded services, foreign relations, etc. 1) Deficiencies in global planning and pioneering and innovative efforts; 2) poor management capabilities of modern enterprises; 3) lack of top-level design, without core competitiveness; 4) significant problems in institutions and mechanisms, and lack of employee loyalty; 5) shortage of well-known brands, and low value and poor quality of products; 6)

lack of technical training, and inadequate follow-up services; and, 7) weak external communications strategies, and poor corporate image. In short, there is a big gap between the development strategies and the actual operating results.

(5) Lower levels of international exchanges and cooperation. Forestry is affected by international rules, and international exchanges and cooperation are of an important manifestation of a forest products industry's development. China faces a lack of comparative advantage in forest resources, a major discrepancy between supply and demand, little room for policy alternatives, low levels of internationalization, low level of exposure to international influences on the part of management personnel, lack of comprehensive international vision, limited efforts to recruit top talent, lack of international exchange in forest management, shortage of reputable foreign experts, narrow scope of cooperation, decentralized exchange cases, and lack of evaluation systems.

### 3.3. International Experience in Timber Legality Verification Schemes and Methods

At present, the international community has higher and higher requirements regarding the legality of timber and timber products. However, different countries, groups and/or individuals have quite different perceptions of what constitutes legality, and there is not yet a global consensus on this question. For example, the Japanese definition of legal is: logging activities comply with relevant laws and standard formalities of the timber-producing countries. By contrast an English definition is: logging enterprises have the legitimate rights to use forests, forest management organizations and all parties related comply with local and national laws, and all fees and taxes incurred have been fully paid. Then there is the definition in the EU Timber Regulation: timbers and timber products comply with the laws of the timber-producing countries (Li et al., 2010). The author believes that legality is assured when the timber materials used by business units of forest products or lumber producers have been harvested and transported in compliance with all relevant local and national laws, forest management plans, land administration and forest exploitation regulations.

#### 3.3.1. Verification Standard

When it comes to global timber legality verification schemes, there are five key criteria: a) the legal logging rights, which need to clearly define and describe the forest owner's legal status and authority by which timbers may be lawfully cut with complete adherence to regulatory requirements; b) the approved logging plan, by which logging enterprises observe all regulations and comply with all restrictions on timber production and logging; c) all taxes and fees are fully paid—logging enterprises to pay all taxes, fees and royalties incurred in a timely manner; d) the traceability of timber, requiring logging enterprises to document control and supervision of the supply chain for timber and timber products; and, e) comply with all related laws and/or conventions on labor, hygiene, environmental and social protections, and trade.

#### 3.3.2. Verification Methods

There are five methods to identify the legality of timbers in the world: a) independent third-party certification, such as the FM and COC certificates issued by the FSC or PEFC (certification and accreditation programs), or the certificate of compliance issued by another independent certification body; b) government-led legality verification schemes, such as Indonesian Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS) (van Heeswijk & Turnhout, 2013), and the legality verification schemes of Ghana, Cameroon, etc. under the framework of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement with EU (VPA) (Ochieng et al., 2013; Ros-Tonen et al., 2013; Atyi et al., 2013; Wiersum & Elands, 2013); c) regulations and/or rules promulgated by the industry associations, such as the risk evaluation and verification of timber sources organized by the European Timber Trade Association; d) large-scale enterprises' self-checking and related documents, such as IKEA's IWAY Forestry Standard; and, e) equivalent documents provided by suppliers and verifying the legality of the origins of their timber materials, such as those required by French timber procurement policies (Wang et al., 2011). It is clear that, although international timber legality verification takes the forest certification as an important criteria, many countries in the world adopt flexible and effective coping strategies according to their national conditions, thus giving rise to the coexistence of forest certification documents, timber legality verification and equivalent documents.

#### 3.3.3. Key Experiences

In order to reach all requirements related to the timber legality in the European and American markets, Chinese enterprises must provide evidence of legality, and achieve the traceability of timber sources. Using international

experience for reference, the enterprises may also indicate the legality of timbers through the forest certification, or verify legality through passing any legality verification schemes overseen by a third party, industry associations or any government-led agency, or by voluntarily proving or verifying the legality of timber with presentation of a series of lawful documents. At present, forest certification costs are high, however, the coverage is narrow, the proportion of the certified forest products is small, and the practical application of certification is restricted (Deng, 2010; Liu, 2010; Carlsen et al., 2012). Therefore, it is hard to meet the development needs of the international market this way. Thus, the timber legality verification has comparative advantages over the forest certification, and it is now becoming the preferred way for the Chinese enterprises to achieve the legality and traceability of timber.

### 3.4. Suggestions on Strengthening China's Management Countermeasures for Timber Legality Verification

There are still many difficulties and problems in achieving all requirements related to the timber legality in the international market, which require strengthening of management and provision of support on aspects of rules and regulations, science and technology, verification schemes, enterprise competence and international cooperation.

#### 3.4.1. Improvement of Relevant Laws and Regulations

China's three-permit management lays a solid foundation for ensuring the legality of timber, but it still needs to be further improved.

(1) Legitimate timber logging. a) Achieve the unified administration of all timber and/or standing timber (branch) logging activities on the unplanned forestation or non-forest land; b) Strengthen the issuance and acceptance checks for permits; and, c) clarify all detailed rules on imposition of punishments and regulations on above-quota logging and logging without a license.

(2) Timber Transport Management. a) Coordinate the issuance and acceptance of transport and logging permits, and adopt a unified format for timber transport documentation; b) indicate the application scope of timber transport documentation, correctly fill out the tree species, origin, quantity and flow direction of timber, and achieve the traceability of timber; and, c) set timber inspection posts on expressways, and strictly enforce relevant laws.

(3) Supervision of processing and sales. a) Strengthen the examination and approval management for timber processing and sales enterprises; and, b) supervise the formation, enforcement and punishment of internal rules and regulations of enterprises, and place emphasis on the inspection of processing and sales and account management.

#### 3.4.2. Strengthen the Support of Advanced Information Science and Technology

(1) Establish comprehensive supervision systems for timber resources and also ecological monitoring, utilize 3S and positioning observation techniques to monitor the various types of timber resources and ecological conditions in a dynamic manner, generate timely feedback information on the resource, and adjust management and control behaviors accordingly; (2) develop electronic accreditation systems, ensuring authorized personnel from grass-roots forest management units directly apply and handle online data anytime and anywhere, put an end to black-box operations and administrative rents, save processing time, reduce travel costs, improve work efficiency, ensure forest administrations at the county, municipal and provincial levels have relevant authorities to verify, supervise and manage permits; and, (3) utilize E-government and web-based platforms to fully collect, analyze and publish forest resource management information, and attain timely updates and sharing of information at the national level.

#### 3.4.3. Establish the Timber Legality Verification Schemes

China has already put forward a framework for timber legality verification schemes: (1) establish the government-led timber legality verification schemes. The application for timber transport documentation in China requires presentation of the timber logging license and other legal evidences. In principle, the timber transport documentation is enough to verify the legality of timber, however, with a view to perfecting the timber transport permit system, it is necessary to supplement it with information related to the raw material sources, tree species and legality of timber and finished products (such as timber logging license number); To be able to treat the



timber transport documentation as the legality evidences of timbers and timber products would be not only economical but also practical; (2) Establish association-led third-party legality verification schemes. Establish timber legality assessment criteria and certification procedures and methods for determining the legality of timber sources in line with national conditions and the state of the forest and international requirements regarding the legality of timber. Establish timber legality management and permit issuing authorities to directly audit or entrust a third party to audit, and issue timber legality certificates; (3) Enterprises may voluntarily accept any third-party legality verification or conduct the field verification themselves.

#### 3.4.4. Strengthen the Capacity of Enterprises

In line with to international market trends, Chinese enterprises should strengthen their capability, establish timber legality supervision systems, conduct third-party legality verification if necessary, actively cope with international trade barriers, meet relevant timber legality requirements, and improve their capabilities at the aspects of management innovation, competitive strategy, branded services, etc. (1) Global plan and innovation; (2) utilize modern enterprise management systems to improve service level; (3) complete top-level design to form the core competitiveness; (4) solve institutional problems, and improve staff cohesion; (5) strengthen brand building, and increase the quality and value of products; and, (6) strengthen skills trainings, and enhance follow-up service capabilities.

#### 3.4.5. Establish International Cooperation and Trust-Building Systems

China is an important participant in global industrial supply chains, and also a key driver of the international trade in forest products. China will continue to strengthen global multilateral and bilateral cooperation and exchanges, will look to jointly conduct a series of pieces of research on legal timber trade practices, enhance its image as a major power of the international trade in forest products, improve its regulatory ability, and ensure the legality of raw timber sources for commercial forest products. (1) Strengthen the bilateral cooperation with major trading partners in the forest management and combat against illegal logging and trade, coordinate with customs in sharing data on the import and export of timbers and timber products, and exchange experience on forestry regulations and public procurement policies; (2) Establish the unified international timber legality verification system with major timber exporting countries such as Russia, Papua New Guinea, Gabon, etc., ensuring each batch of imported timbers has proof of the timber's legal sourcing back to the point of origin; (3) Share the research results regarding China's distinctive timber legality certification standards and systems with the international community, reach mutual recognition agreements on verification mechanisms with major trading partners and/or all countries, form a real multilateral cooperation and mutual trust system, and create a favorable environment for China's timber product trade.

### 3.5. Analysis on Practice Feasibility of Legality Verification Work in China

Timber legality verification is a key to solving problems of illegal logging and associated illegal trade (Cashore & Stone, 2012). Timber legality assessment and verification work requires active verification of the source of timber, strengthening of timber legality documentation, improving timber tracking systems and strengthening of supply chain management (Lin et al., 2011; Tysiachniouk, 2013). These approaches can provide the core basis for the research, proposal and criteria for timber legality verification, and improve credibility through the third-party verification.

#### 3.5.1. Difficulties in Providing All Documents Required

China's forest logging permits are issued by competent forestry authorities at the county level. One aspect of handling the timber transport documentation is the requirement to submit the former forest logging permit to the forestry authority for archival purposes. While renewing the permit after processing, it is required that the applicant submit the former transport permit or evidence of legal timber trade. Thus, processing enterprises usually hold only timber transport permits. If necessary, timber logging licenses may be obtained from local forestry authority or relevant forestry enterprise, but this is subject to the scope of authority concerned, and it is difficult to do in practice. Moreover, timber transport documentation often varies between regions. In some provinces, finished product and semi-finished products, such as wood-based panels, etc. do not need any timber transport documentation.

### 3.5.2. Complete Key Documents

Logging enterprises generally provide legal logging permits, specific instructions on logging restrictions, evidences of logging activities within the specified forest districts and appropriate levels of exploitation, timber procurement and tax payment receipts, certificates of compliance with CITES requirements and timber transport documentation. According to China's quota management systems, forest logging permits set out timber logging type, method, location, deadline, area, tree species, volume and output, as well as method, tree species, area and deadline after renewal; timber transport documentation provides evidence of legal timber transport; and, evidence that licensed business units have already held timber processing permits, and paid corresponding taxes and woods-raising funds while handling the timber logging permit. Thus, timber logging, transport and processing permits may prove the legality of domestic timbers; and, once recognized by the international community, such timbers will meet the relevant requirements of international market.

### 3.5.3. Improve the Tracking System of Legal Timbers

China's timber transport documentation specifies the supply unit, purchase unit, sources of timbers, origin, destination, tree species, product name, specifications, quantity, volume and valid term, providing the possibility of achieving traceability of sources of timbers. However, because of the varied approaches taken across different timber-producing areas, only the forest product origin area is stated in the documentation, thus causing difficulties in tracking the timber origin. Meanwhile, as a highly developed industry, the supply chains of all enterprises engaging in the processing of forest products are often very complicated. For example, one of the investigated enterprises manufacturing wood-based panels has its supply chain involving more than 80 primary processing enterprises and over 100 forest owners, so it is hard to achieve traceability of all timber materials. At present, most enterprises cannot effectively identify their timber sources yet, and they are in great need of establishing and improving the tracking systems for legal timber. Such systems typically include timber procurement programs, production, sales and supervision chain systems, timber origin supervision system, internal audit procedures and report feedback mechanisms, enabling the identification of legal and illegal timbers, collection of evidence of legality, to track timber sources and to identify forest product origins.

### 3.5.4. Legal Timber Standards Provide a Basis

The project team has already studied and proposed the criteria for legal timber, which can provide the core basis for China's legality verification schemes. Independent association/government-led third-party timber legality verification schemes may now be established according to the national conditions and the state of the forests. Meanwhile, studies on the legality verification procedures and management methods may be carried out, and timber legality supervision and permit issuing agencies may be established to audit or issue, or to entrust corresponding verification units to audit or issue, the legality documents.

### 3.5.5. Improve Credibility through the Third-Party Verification

China's forest management and supervision systems are perfect, and the timber logging, transport and processing permits issued may be used as the credible evidences of timber legality. However, some places still have problems of non-standard permit issuance, poor acceptance checks, incomplete evidences provided while the exported timber materials go through customs inspections, etc. Enterprises still face difficulties in completely collecting timber legality evidence, tracking the sources of timber materials, etc. From an international perspective, in addition to the well-developed timber legality tracking system, enterprises also need to improve their credibility through independent third-party legality verification or their own field tests.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

### 4.1. Discussion

Although it is feasible to carry out the timber legality verification work in China, there are still some problems and difficulties in meeting all legality-related requirements of the international market for forest products. Therefore, China needs to further understand trends in the development of the world timber legality verification schemes and methods, deepen international exchanges and cooperation, learn from relevant international experience and findings as appropriate, continue to strengthen timber legality permit management, improve timber tracking systems, clarify the necessity and urgency of carrying out the practical research on the criteria for legal timber, and prove the significance and practical feasibility of supporting China's timber legality verification

work with advanced science and technology. Also, it is necessary to take advantage of modern means and advanced information technology, to achieve multilateral communication and collaboration, and to efficiently manage all chains of legal timber logging, processing, transport, sales and consumption, timely collection and sharing of information related to research criteria, international trade policies and regulations, categories and quantities of cross-border forest products, cargo certificates issued by customs, etc., and to promote the process of China's timber legality verification.

The project research has gained abundant firsthand material, and has placed particular emphasis on qualitative analysis of the Practical Feasibility of Timber Legality Verification Work in China. It would be advantageous to strengthen the quantitative analysis in this article; of course, and another paper with more detailed quantitative analysis derived from questionnaire responses will be published later. At the same time, the main reason for the significant differences of China's forest products trade value between FAO's data and Chinese customs' data is the different statistical calibration systems. Whereas Chinese customs' data included all wooden forest products and non-wood forest products, the FAO's data only includes main wooden forest products and does not include the wood furniture and wood floor and other wooden forest products which have been China's main wood products exports. A further point is that this paper has focused on the domestic timber supply. Research on legitimate management of imported timber will be further discussed to lay the work foundation of timber legality verification more fully in China; and research on China's net imports of wood will also be carried out, in order to address misunderstandings and eliminate the international community's criticism of China's timber import practices.

## 4.2. Conclusion

(1) China's forest logging quota management is strict, and there is little risk of illegal logging. It is still hard for China's forest products to reach relevant legality requirements in the international market, however. In some places, there are still some bad phenomena occurring but national legal forest logging, transport, processing and management systems are strictly enforced and supervised, and are having quite good results, so, on the whole, the proportion of timbers illegally cut or from unknown sources is relatively low.

(2) Legality verification can meet all demands for legal timbers in the international market. In addition to use of forest certification, Chinese enterprises may also reach the timber legality requirements in the American and European markets through third-party/association/government-lead legality verification, or through providing a series of legitimate documents, or through voluntarily proving or verifying the timber legality and achieving the traceability of the source of the timber.

(3) The work to developing timber legality verification in China is entirely feasible. China's gross trade value of forest products has continuously increased with the Chinese industry's international status improving year by year. The system of timber logging and transportation with permits and the processing and sales of timber products with permits constitutes a unified supervision and management system for forest logging and timber circulation. In addition, China has already carried out practical research on forest certification (Shen et al., 2010; Wang, 2013), legal timber criteria and timber legality verification. China has also established its own timber legality verification schemes, has conducted extensive international exchanges, and has rich experiences in scientific research and practice. Therefore, to carry out the timber legality verification in China is feasible.

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# Nigeria's National Image and Her Foreign Policy: An Exploratory Approach

**Oluyemi O. Fayomi, Felix C. Chidozie, Lady A. Ajayi**

Department of Political Science and International Relations, School of Human Resource Development, College of Leadership Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

Email: [nike.fayomi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng](mailto:nike.fayomi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng), [felix.chidozie@covenantuniversity.edu.ng](mailto:felix.chidozie@covenantuniversity.edu.ng),  
[adaina.yartey@covenantuniversity.edu.ng](mailto:adaina.yartey@covenantuniversity.edu.ng)

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## Abstract

The task of this paper is to critically appraise the relationship between Nigeria's national image and her foreign policy since independence. In doing this, it embarked on a historical and analytical examination of the contradictions that are embedded in Nigeria's foreign policy and their fundamental link to the country's domestic crisis. The article observes that Nigeria's foreign policy over the years has been grossly sabotaged and undermined by image crisis both nationally and internationally. Relying heavily on secondary data, and anchored fundamentally on the role theory as a framework of analysis, the paper argues that Nigeria's role expectations at different "concentric circles" of her foreign policy have generated multiple role perceptions, thus leading to unintended role conflict. The direct implication of this is confusion and dissonance in the domestic institutional and constitutional mechanisms that impel foreign policy formulation and implementation. Consequently, the paper concludes that resolution of the distortions embedded in the country's foreign policy is the only panacea to resolving her national and international image crisis. It therefore, canvasses an imperative need for Nigeria to transform her convoluted foreign policy, redirect her diplomatic compass and re-align her foreign policy architecture to reflect the demands of a globalizing world.

## Keywords

National Image, Foreign Policy, Role Theory, Concentric Circle

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## 1. Introduction

National image both at home and abroad is an ethical issue. It may appear intangible but the benefits and advan-

tages flowing from a good image are inestimably unquantifiable. The perception of a country by members of the international system, how a country pursues its relations with others and particularly, the behaviour of its citizens at home and abroad combine to determine the country's image (Zimako, 2009). Thus, image making is an essential feature of a nation's foreign policy.

Holsti (1996: p. 22) further clarifies this point when he defined image as an individual's perception of an object, fact or condition in terms of badness or goodness as well as the meaning ascribed to, or deduced there from. If we extrapolate from that, we can conclude that image-building must necessarily constitute a fundamental element of a nation's foreign policy, suggesting that the way a country is perceived, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is a function of her national image (Adeniyi, 2012: p. 356).

Accordingly, image-building form an essential element in the strategy for foreign policy formulation and implementation, in any country, when well focused, foreign policy initiatives help create and reinforce favourable images of a country to the external world (Alimi, 2005: p. 335). Consequently, the image a country attempts to create and project, through its foreign policy, must conform to its national interests, and the image expectations of other members of the international community. Hence, Federal Ministry of Information (2012: p. 345) stresses that a nation's attempt to have a meaningful impact on, and accordingly influence, the world around it will be guided by her foreign policy objectives and national interests and how effectively such disposition is transmitted or communicated to the world. In other words, foreign policy objectives and national interests must be clinically packaged and projected to achieve their aims.

Indeed, the image issue is a product of perception. There is yet no universally acknowledged scientific standard for perception as it is pervasively subjective. To the extent that human societies are complex, perception is a complex phenomenon (Jackson, 2001 cited in Zimako, 2009: p. 207). The perception of a nation in international relations is the perception of its people, and the perception of its people is also partly a function of the political leaders' actions and character. Thus, Nigeria's foreign policy over the years has been grossly sabotaged and undermined by ineptitude, corruption, nepotism, leadership deficit and poor democratic credentials, which have negatively affected the international reputation of the country (Achebe, 1983; Nwoke, 2014: p. 59).

Furthermore, Nigeria's role expectations at different "concentric circles" of her foreign policy have generated multiple role perceptions, thus leading to unintended role conflict. For instance, the policy of Afro-centrism (the policy of Africa being the centre piece of diplomatic relations) which informed and guided Nigeria's foreign policy for the first four decades of her independence, culminating in the country's massive investment in material and human resources in the prosecution of the "war" against racism and imperialism in Africa yielded little or no diplomatic dividends for the country. Akinboye (2013) puts it most eloquently:

Unfortunately and disappointingly, many of the countries that have benefitted tremendously from Nigeria's largess often turned around to show ingratitude to both its citizens and the government itself. ...South Africa exhibited xenophobic attack against Nigerian citizens living in that country... Besides, the countries it has supported financially, diplomatically and strategically becomes but the butt of derision and envy by them. Some of these countries equally harbour or even offer training facilities for terrorists, while others campaign openly against Nigeria's bid to occupy one of the permanent seats of the United Nations Security Council. From these instances, it has become clear that the age-long philosophical notion of Africa as the centre piece of the country's foreign policy has become moribund, mundane and anachronistic (Akinboye, 2013: pp. 43-44).

From all appearances, it is obvious that the inconsistencies and ambiguities in Nigeria's foreign policy objectives over the years, accentuated by vagaries in domestic policies, more than any other variable, explain the image crisis that has bedeviled the polity as a result. Specifically, as far back as 2004, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at a public forum in Lagos, concluded that Nigeria's poor external image has been denying it the much needed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to accelerate its economic growth. This is understandable given the fact that Nigeria has for long been bogged down by its perception as one of the most corrupt nations in the world (Adeniyi, 2012: p. 357). In fairness to the Nigerian state, some administrations have in the past attempted to address and redress her image crisis.

In view of this background, the paper explores the distortions and nuances that have attended Nigeria's attempt to redefine her foreign policy and re-focus her image perception to reflect the changes in contemporary international relations. Thus, the paper is partitioned into five sections. Following the introduction, the second part clarifies the concept of role theory. The third segment problematizes the discourse by reviewing extant literature on Nigeria's foreign policy. The fourth section examines the origin, nature and dynamics in Nigeria's

image crisis. The fifth part concludes the paper and proffers relevant recommendations.

## 2. Conceptualizing Role Theory

The role theory is derived from the concept of role as used by psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individual or group role perceptions and actual performance in any social gathering. This could be family, peer group, religious group, workplace, community, market and in this case, the political groups (Folarin, 2010: p. 89). According to Biddle (1986: p. 68), role theory concerns one of the most important characteristics of social behavior—the fact that human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situation. He argued that role theory explains roles by presuming that persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of other persons.

Again, Folarin (2010: p. 93) argued that role theorists see role theory as one of the most compelling instruments bridging individual behaviour and social structure. According to him, roles, which are in part dictated by social structure and in part by social interactions, guide the behaviour of the group or individual. He concluded that, the group, in turn, influences the norms, expectations, and behaviours associated with roles. In other words, the understanding is reciprocal and didactic. It is in this sense that, the adoption of role theory to interpret the foreign policy behaviours of the Nigerian state, represented by different actors with different ideological and political orientations explain the role confusions and dissonance that have become the hallmark in the conception, formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy. A logical outcome of these behavioural patterns explain Nigeria's national and international image dilemma.

## 3. Literature Review on Nigeria's Foreign Policy

A review of Nigeria's foreign policy positions over the years does point up a number of philosophical-conceptual building blocks which are strongly related to the state of the international environment. Within the context of decolonization, "self-determination and self-government" were core philosophical principles that informed the country's foreign policy. As the country matured as an independent and sovereign nation, other philosophical principles that became part of Nigeria's foreign policy fundamentals are enlightened national interest, African solidarity, interdependence, internationalism, asymmetric world order and supranational authority (Ogwu, 2005: p. 7).

Indeed, Chapter 2, Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution, which is the fundamental objectives and directive principles as provided in Section 19 (a-e) encapsulates the Nigeria's foreign policy objectives to include: (a) promotion and protection of the national interest; (b) promotion of African integration and support for African unity; (c) promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among all nations, and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations; (d) respect for international law and treaty obligations as well as the seeking of settlement of international disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication; and (e) promotion of a just world order (1999 Constitution of the FGN; Akindele, 2013: p. 13; Salu, 2013: p. 171).

To be sure, it is generally asserted that there has been continuity in the substantive content or focus, meaning the principal objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy, since independence (Akinyemi, 1989; Akindele, 1990; Isah, 1991; Akinboye, 1993; Gambari, 1986; Salu, 1999; Obiozor, 2007; Ayam, 2010; Akinboye, 2013). It is further stated that whatever difference there is or has been, is, by and large, a matter of style, emphasis, personality, institutional reform, and historical circumstances within and outside Nigeria. Solomon Akinboye boldly reaffirms the above submission, thus:

It is very clear that there is continuity across regimes in spite of changes in the pursuit of national interest. There is constancy in Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and foreign relations from the civilian regime of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to President Goodluck Jonathan (Akinboye, 2013: p. 13).

The pursuit of Nigerian foreign policy began in earnest after the attainment of independence in October 1, 1960. In the foreign policy statements made in August and December 1960 respectively, the first Prime Minister of Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa, outlined some objectives of the country's foreign policy. These objectives or goals of the Nigerian foreign policy have consistently been maintained despite numerous changes in government. At independence, the country's foreign policy sought to achieve the following objectives: promotion of the economic well-being of Nigerians and Africans; promotion of Nigeria's territorial integrity; eradication of all forms of racism and colonialism from African continent; protection of the rights of black men all over the world; and

promotion of international peace and security (Ogwu, 1986: p. 8; Olusanya & Akindele, 1986: pp. 3-5).

However, the philosophical foundation of Nigeria's foreign policy in the first republic was not unconnected to the country's colonial experience, the nature and structure of the world system, and the vocabulary of politics. It is the combination of these interrelated factors that provides the sources of the philosophical foundations of the country's foreign policy, at a time when the anti-colonial struggle and the crisis of collective racial identity of colonized peoples were critical issues in world politics (Jinadu, 2005).

Despite these lofty aspirations, Nigeria's foreign policy in the First Republic has often been generally described as timid, docile, ambivalent, dissonant, indecisive and inert (Akinboye, 2013: p. 5). The colonial legacy which restricted the policy options of the immediate post-independence leaders, the relative poverty of the country at the time, the lack of experience in international affairs, the conservative outlook of the prime minister Tafawa Balewa and other members of his cabinet, and serious domestic divisions which led the regions to open different consulates abroad are some of the reasons that have been advanced for the low-profile foreign policy (Idang, 1973; Aluko, 1981; Osaghae, 2002).

The brief interregnum that ushered in the administration of General Aguiyi Ironsi, following the Nigerian military coup of January 15, 1966, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, saw his government pursue essentially the same objectives that characterized Nigeria's foreign policy from independence (Ademoyega, 1981). This was based on General Ironsi's world view and perception of the hierarchy of Nigeria's interests, in relation to the concepts of solidarity and national interest as the philosophical building blocks of Nigeria's foreign policy. In all, it can be argued that the timid and moderate foreign policy that had become the hallmark of Balewa's regime equally persisted under Ironsi's regime. Consequently, three main factors led to Nigeria's shift away from a "moderate" and timid foreign policy during the 1960s to a relatively more activist and influential role during the 1970s.

First, the post-civil war military governments of Generals Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo succeeded in dramatically and effectively redressing the balance of power in favour of the central government in relation to Nigeria's regions and states; second, the Nigerian civil war of 1967-70 marked a watershed in the country's foreign policy; third, and perhaps most importantly, the increasing wealth from oil revenues and membership of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries provided Nigeria with the resources to pursue an activist foreign policy (Aluko, 1971; Nwoli, 1989; Akinterinwa, 1999; Gambari, 2008: p. 64). Much has been written in the scholarly circles about the 1970s being the "golden era" of Nigeria's foreign policy (Garba, 1987; Fawole, 2003; Saliu, 2006a).

However, the contradictions in Nigeria's foreign policy remained evident in the 1970s despite the zest and tempo that characterized it. In retrospect, Garba (1987) had argued that the Angolan policy of General Mohammed's administration which made Nigeria to collide with the USA was a barren adventure. He attributed this to the attitude of Popular Movement for the Peoples' Liberation of Angola (MPLA) leaders who only saw Nigeria in the light of "Naira-spraying diplomacy", and never showed any commitment on their part to reciprocate Nigeria's role in the independence of their country. Garba (1987: pp. 26-27), puts it succinctly:

...at the first appearance of the MPLA Government at the OAU summit in Mauritius in July 1976, Nigeria's name was conspicuously absent from the list of countries to which they publicly paid tribute for assistance in achieving their independence (Garba, 1987: p. 26).

Again, Garba (1987: p. 27) regretted:

The Prime Minister (Lopo do Nascimento of the MPLA) was very soft-spoken, but he was profuse in his expression of gratitude, and our subsequent conversation was full of the promise of intimate cooperation between our countries, a promise which... they never fulfilled (Garba, 1987: p. 27).

Saliu (2006a: p. 211) however, argued that Nigeria's African policy has always lacked the standard requirement which is reciprocity, which appears to be a recurring phenomenon in her diplomatic practice. According to him, the dictates of the global system frown at giving without anything in return. He stressed that assistance is rendered without any visible reference to either the short or long term interests of Nigeria. Thus, the recipient nations do not know how to behave to meet the country's expectations afterwards. This, he concluded is interpreted to mean a show of ingratitude to Nigeria.

The next phase in the development of Nigeria's foreign policy started in 1979, with the return to civilian rule under the Presidency of Shehu Shagari. Shagari came to power after an election that had seen no significant debate on foreign policy issues (Chidozie, 2014: p. 183). The presidential candidates were well aware that the overwhelming majority of Nigeria's electorates generally had little interest in foreign policy. The outcome was a



lack of well articulated foreign policy for the country right from the out-set of the Second Republic. In essence, in the sphere of foreign policy, the main challenge remained how to revive and sustain the momentum of the Murtala/Obasanjo era, which continued to enjoy the support of the informed public (Ogwu, 1986: p. 56; Otu-banjo, 1989).

There was a paradox that characterized Nigeria's foreign policy at this phase. It concerned the fact that the Nigeria's oil wealth and the technology that produced it came from the West, and her national power was anchored in Africa, while seeking at the same time to borrow models of social and national emancipation from the East. Gambari puts it very clearly:

How could Nigeria's civilian regime be economically dependent on the West on the one hand, while looking (vaguely, and without deep conviction or sustained effort) to the Eastern bloc for models of social and national liberation on the other, and yet continue to walk in the ideological non-alignment middle? (Gambari, 2008: p. 67)

Again, Nigeria's leadership in African affairs was seriously eroded as the country vacillated on issues such as Western Sahara, Chad and Namibia. As a result of these Afro-centric policy inconsistencies, coupled with crippling domestic challenges, Nigeria's neighbours had scant respect for the country, and some of them such as Cameroun and Chad, even crossed into Nigerian territory and attacked and killed its civilians and soldiers with impunity. Indeed, smaller neighbours disrespected Nigeria, using its borders for illegal smuggling and bunkering along with Nigerian partners, violated its territorial integrity and disregarded any threat or warning from the Nigerian authorities (Osaghae, 2002; Fawole, 2008; Osuntokun, 2008; Folarin, 2010; Akinboye, 2013).

General Buhari which came to power in 1983 strove to give clearer form to the country's foreign policy orientation. Africa was to constitute the area of primary concern to the country. It was also emphasized that Nigeria's national security and economic wellbeing would constitute the axis around which revolved its foreign policy, with a promise to put on a more constructive footing in relation with Nigeria's immediate neighbours. The Buhari administration believed that the old conception of Africa being the policy center-piece would be properly defined (Gambari, 1986: p. 74, cited in Folarin, 2010).

However, the articulation of Nigeria's foreign policy under Buhari's regime to accommodate "good neighbourliness" became an issue of serious concern in literatures. In essence, under Buhari's regime, relations with member-states of the sub-regional body, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) reached an all time low. Not only were the nation's borders permanently closed against its neighbours, thus badly hurting their economies, the regime did not heed all the appeals for them to be re-opened (Akinrinade, 1992; Fawole, 2002: p. 21; Adeniji, 2003, 2004; Akinboye, 2013: p. 33). The position of the Buhari regime's foreign policy towards its neighbours has been justified in literature as premised on the basic rationale behind the coup itself, which was to arrest the country's rapidly deteriorating economic situation, eliminate corruption and improve the well being of the generality of Nigerians (Osaghae, 2002; Folarin, 2010).

The General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida regime was the sixth military rulership in Nigeria. He shot himself to power after sacking the regime of his former boss, General Muhammadu Buhari on August 27, 1985, and thereafter declared himself "Military President", thus becoming the first Military President in Africa and probably the world (Folarin, 2010: p. 253). Babangida had demonstrated his dissatisfaction and disaffection with his predecessor's policies, especially in the external context which he felt was not in tune with the expectations of the international community. Thus, in the area of foreign policy he registered unmistakable doubt and what he considered as inconsistencies with the country's founding philosophy. According to Babangida,

Nigeria's foreign policy was characterized by inconsistency and incoherence. It lacked the clarity to make us know where we stood in matters of international concern to enable other countries relate to us with seriousness. Our external relations have been conducted by a policy of retaliatory reactions (cited in Saliu, 2006a: p. 297).

Therefore, the regime of Babangida set out early to repair the damages done to Nigeria's foreign policy by the Buhari administration. Both the IMF loan stalemate and the frosty relations with the West were quickly resolved. Nigeria soon resumed its diplomatic relations with Britain. In the same spirit, the closure of Nigeria's borders with her neighbours together with the vexing issue of illegal aliens, which had converged to worsen relations between Nigeria and her neighbours were astutely reversed to the admiration of West African countries (Saliu, 2006a), culminating in the provision of economic assistance to these countries, which won him the Chairmanship of ECOWAS for three consecutive terms (Adeniji, 2005: p. 6).

In essence, this era, not only marked a high point of the country's rising international profile, it also conferred commensurate prestige to Nigeria in her foreign policy. Saliu (2006) attributed the success of Babangida's foreign policy initiatives to the crop of intellectuals whom he assembled as members of his "kitchen cabinet". Among them were personalities such as Elaigwu, Obiozor, Ofoegbu, Akinyemi, Chime, Olagunju, Oyovbaire, Ogunsanwo, Oshuntokun, among others. Despite the remarkable contributions to Nigeria's foreign policy by these intellectual giants, Osaghae (2002) argued that the foreign policy arena under Babangida nonetheless, suffered great confusion and incoherence resulting in the arbitrary change in the ministers of external affairs.

This confusion was greatly reflected in the regime's bid to elevate religion as a conscious guide to Nigeria's foreign policy. This was demonstrated by the circumstances that surrounded Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1987. The regime decided to change Nigeria's status from that of an observer status to a full-fledged member without due consideration of both domestic and international concerns. The direct result of this was a serious and lasting dent on the regime's credibility. For instance, Fawole (2012: p. 156) argued that the decision by Babangida to make Nigeria a full member of a largely Islamic grouping of states generated considerable opposition at home and remains one of the most highly contentious and unresolved issues in the country till date. It was all the more so, with the unending transition programme of the administration that permanently eroded the gains made at the external context (Olukoshi & Agbu, 1995; Akinboye, 2013: p. 34).

This deliberate subversion of its own transition programme by the government became evident when the June 12 1993 presidential election was annulled. The emergence of Abacha administration in Nigeria on 17 November 1993 could be traceable to the annulment of June 12, 1993 election, adjudged to be the "freest and fairest", by the Babangida regime. The political instability that arose from the incident made the military believe Nigeria needed a more "radical" approach to reverse the dangerous political trend in the country (Saliu, 2006a).

Indeed, radical and combative approach to foreign policy became almost synonymous with the Abacha regime, prompting Fawole (2002) to describe it as the most combative and defensive foreign policy in Nigeria's history. For Abacha, his recognition meant "an eye for an eye" approach to international relations (*The Guardian*, 1998), which prompted him to employ an "area boy" diplomatic style to survive the hostile domestic and international environment into which his regime was born. This explains the uncoordinated approach and misunderstanding of the international environment that occasioned the regime's approach to foreign policy.

It is important to mention that Abacha's adamant nationalism and autonomy consciousness which, led to the abrogation of liberalization policies and a sustained anti-Western stance on many issues, reinforced this hostility. Accordingly, the United States and other Western powers actively encouraged and supported opposition groups in the country as well as those based abroad, and on some occasions, issued statements which amounted to gross interference in the country's internal affairs (Osaghae, 2002: p. 309). This reached its height with the formation of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) in May, 1994, a loose coalition of old and new-breed "progressives" mostly from the South-West of the country, which consistently promoted and fuelled anti-Abacha sentiment abroad (Zabadi, 2004).

However, some scholars have argued that Nigeria's foreign policy under Abacha revealed that the military administration, in its own way, conducted the country's foreign policy to an arguably level of delivery (Lipede & Adelus, 1995; Onadipe, 1997; Useni, 1997; Saliu, 2006a). This was evident in its ability to create policy confusion in the West; the latter did not know how to relate with the Nigerian administration. Its purported deft steps at shifting significantly to Asia and having political romance with some anti-Western countries in the world could be accepted as tangible achievements of the regime (Saliu, 2006a). But given Nigeria's potentials and against the background of her past external involvement, these achievements are easily dismissible. In all, Abacha's administration of Nigeria's foreign policy could be said to be circumstantial. The regime was born when the domestic environment had been polarized, no less the external environment. Thus, the argument that "Nigeria's foreign policy under the regime was to respond to the pressure from abroad and not to exert pressure abroad" becomes tenable (Olukoya, 1996: p. 30).

Following General Abacha's sudden death in June 1998, General Abdul salaam Abubakar, his successor, initiated a transition programme (ten months programme) that resulted in the coming of power of President Olu-segun Obasanjo on 29 May, 1999. Indeed, the post-cold war international environment that characterized President Obasanjo's accession to power in May, 1999 required new approach to Nigeria's foreign policy. To be sure, the international security environment had altered significantly for Nigeria at this period, with the emergence of multivariate level of threats to the task of nation building. This period was marked fundamentally with the lin-

kage of domestic issues with international relations and the gradual erosion of the concept of absolutist sovereignty (Ayam, 2004; Dokubo, 2010; Alao, 2011).

As a matter of fact, the ‘concentric rings’ of Nigeria’s foreign policy priorities which relegated the global societies to the fourth level, indicating that national, sub-regional, and regional concerns should precede the international agenda was fast losing its relevance (Magbadelo, 2007). Abiodun Alao puts it succinctly:

This new era of foreign policy differed from the preceding period in Nigeria’s diplomacy, in which it had always prioritized sub-regional and continental interest. The relative stability along these fronts enabled the country to strike a better balance between external policies and domestic interests. This was especially important because many Nigerians believed that the country had little to show for the generosity and sacrifices it had made in regional and continental diplomacy. Many also felt that Nigeria should replace its past practice of confronting major powers in the pursuit of an African-centred agenda with a new practice that better suited Nigeria’s national interests (Alao, 2011: p. 7).

Akinterinwa (2004) argued that, with the emergence of President Obasanjo in 1999, there was a paradigm shift from an African-centered, to a global-focused, foreign policy. According to him, Nigeria’s foreign policy still remained essentially Africa-focused at the political level while it was global-centered at the economic level. The poor situation of the Nigerian economy inherited by Obasanjo, coupled with political vulnerability at the time, demanded new tactics and strategies, and indeed, prompted the need to focus greater attention on extra-African actors, without necessarily implying any form of neglect of Africa. Thus, Nigeria emphasised the economic factor to the detriment of political considerations. This dramatic shift was explicated by President Obasanjo, that Nigeria’s foreign policy interests extend:

beyond our concern for the wellbeing of our continent. The debt burden is not an exclusively African predicament. Many countries in Asia, the Caribbean and South America are facing similar problems with it. It is imperative therefore that the countries of these regions harmonize their efforts in their search for a fairer deal from the industrialized nations of the world and this requires of us a more global approach to world affairs than was previously the case (cited in Akinterinwa, 2004: p. 445).

Additionally, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, Obasanjo’s Foreign Affairs Minister (2003-2006), expounded on this shift in Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust from the original “cornerstone” and “centre-piece” trajectory that had informed it since independence. He argued that Nigeria’s foreign policy direction had to lead to where there are development funds and technical assistance, particularly in the light of the weakness in intra-African cooperation, crisis and conflicts in Africa, as well as Africa’s inability to bail Nigeria out of her economic doldrums. He submitted that Africa as cornerstone of Nigeria’s foreign policy was geo-culturally and proximity factor-induced, while the global setting was issue- and economic reality-compelled (Adeniji, 2003). Again Alao puts it this way:

A number of major trends are clearly discernible in Nigeria’s foreign policy since 1999. Perhaps the most important of these is the desire to establish and maintain friendships with countries that have historically shaped global diplomacy, while cultivating deep alliances with emerging powers featured in recent global economic developments. Nigeria has also sought to align its diplomacy with domestic developments, especially as these relate to the consolidation of its new democracy... Consequently, the country’s diplomacy from 1999 to 2011 has been a cautious balance of devotion to traditional obligations towards West Africa and African concerns, and the desire to ensure that external relations, especially with global powers, also assist in domestic concerns (Alao, 2011: p. 6).

In fact, the logical explanation for the shift in Nigeria’s foreign policy in 1999 can be located within the forceful and seemingly irresistible influence of globalization, which continued to encroach on national borders and by implication redefining the scope of sovereignty. In essence, the doctrines of capitalism and democratization had been elevated to the supreme standards of international relations by the key players in the international system (Ayam, 2004; Okolie, 2010).

The relevant point in Obasanjo’s administration’s fundamental shift of Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust in a globalizing international environment is that Nigeria and more importantly, the Nigerian person, stood to benefit from globalization as thrust of Nigeria’s foreign policy. Put differently, the “concentric circles” principle that had guided Nigeria’s foreign policy from 1980s was inadequate and needed to be reconceptualized to reflect



contemporary realities by making its epicentral consideration the Nigerian person. In view of this, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji considers that, “concentricism, as a foreign policy guide, has to be made constructive and beneficial”, and that “the focus of a constructive and beneficial foreign policy should, first of all, be the Nigerian people”. By implication, anything ‘Nigerian’ should really be the focus (Akinterinwa, 2004: p. 452). In Ambassador Adeniji’s words:

The Nigerian has not really been made the main focus of our policy. Emphasis is placed on law but not on the man himself... the law cannot be more important than the man who made it and defending and protecting a nation whose people are valueless is at best also meaningless. In the same vein, Africa as cornerstone or centrepiece of our foreign policy is also meaningless without the Nigerians. Foreign policy successes in which the Nigerians are not direct beneficiaries are not likely to impact on, or enjoy the support of, the people... constructive and beneficial concentricism therefore, fills this gap in foreign policy thrust... (Adeniji, 2004: p. 423).

It is important to mention that the author of “concentricism” (predicated mainly on geo-political prioritization and operationalization of Nigeria’s foreign policy) as Nigeria’s foreign policy thrust in the 1980s, Professor Ibrahim Gambari, had articulated this direction of foreign policy based on what he perceived to be the discrepancy or asymmetry between Nigeria’s foreign policy and the peoples’ direct needs. He averred that:

Nigeria’s foreign policy has never been directly related to the needs of the masses of the people; rather it is formulated, articulated and implemented in highly elitist circles. Hence, the country’s foreign policy relations have reflected the needs and aspirations of a national super elite of business, bureaucratic, military and traditional ruling group... (cited in Akinterinwa, 2004: p. 451).

In essence, constructive and beneficial foreign policy direction of the Obasanjo administration was intended to address and redress the perceived inadequacy inherent in concentricism: which was the fact that “concentricism was not at all an objective but a means; it was more or less a foreign policy tactic that had not been fully taken advantage of; and as a means to an end, concentricism had to have focus” (Akinterinwa, 2004: p. 453).

Consequently, Obasanjo’s foreign policy was largely shaped by the above philosophy, which guided his diplomatic approaches to issues in regional and global politics. He nonetheless, set out in achieving this lofty principle through a number of approaches. The most visible was his deliberate decision to personally embark on shuttle political diplomacy, earning him the title of the most travelled Nigerian Head of State (Zabadi, 2004; Saliu, 2006a; *The Punch* Editorial 2007: p. 14; Okolie, 2010).

President Obasanjo was succeeded by the Late Umaru Musa Yaradua who was reputed to have introduced the concept of “citizen diplomacy” as the thrust of Nigeria’s foreign policy (Ogunsanwo, 2009: p. 19). According to Agbu (2009: p. 52) citizen diplomacy is a political concept depicting the involvement of average citizens engaging representatives of another country or cause either inadvertently or by design. He stressed that the concept sometimes refers to “Track Two Diplomacy”, which connotes unofficial contacts between people of different nations, as differentiated from official contacts between governmental representatives. He argued that the concept was construed by Nigeria under President Yar’Adua to mean that Nigeria’s foreign policy would henceforth be focused on the Nigerian citizens at home and in the Diaspora.

The foreign policy position of the current administration of President Goodluck Jonathan which succeeded the late Yar’Adua is generally perceived as a continuation of the foreign policy thrust of his predecessor. Many commentators and scholars agree that there is no radical departure in terms of Nigeria’s foreign policy transactions to warrant serious reflections. However, it will suffice to mention that the current spate and direction of Nigeria’s domestic insecurity have intensified the debates on the country’s national image.

#### 4. Origin, Nature and Dynamics in Nigeria’s Image Crisis

Nigeria’s image crisis is rooted in her history, nature of her independence, character of her federalism and complexities of her ethnic composition (Agbodike, 1998; Ayoade, 1998; Tamuno, 1998). In short, it is rooted in the “national question” as a recurring and nagging issue in her national discourse (Alapiki, 2005; Lalude, 2005: p. 501; Nnadozie, 2005; Olasupo, 2005). An understanding of Nigeria’s national question is an understanding of her image crisis. Jonah Onuoha captures the interpenetration of the concept of national question and foreign policy enterprise most succinctly thus:

Essentially, the national question involves not only the territorial integrity of Nigeria, power sharing and management of Nigeria's resources in terms of access, control and distribution, but also the issues of minority interests, ethnicity, citizenship, revenue allocation, the creation of states as well as religious, linguistic, cultural and educational policies. It is about resolving the antagonistic contradictions between the majority and minority ethnic groups, combating tribalism, racialism and any form of ethnic chauvinism... the central question is, to what extent does the issues of national question influence external relations between one country and another? (Onuoha, 2005: pp. 406-407).

The point remains that a critical view of the above array of contradictions contained in the national question discourse portray the stark reality about the origin, nature and indeed dynamic character of Nigeria's image crisis. Hence, it can be safely posited that the origin of Nigeria's image crisis is the violent electoral politics in the First Republic that culminated in the first military coup of January 15, 1966 (Ademoyega, 1981; Akinsanya, 2005). Indeed, this was followed by a counter coup on July 29, 1966 culminating in series of political drama that ultimately resulted in the civil war of 1967 (Achebe, 2012).

The Nigeria-Biafra civil war of 1967-1970 which was prompted by the collapse of the "Aburi Accord" in Ghana and the consequent Igbo pogrom in northern Nigeria followed after. Following the end of the civil war in 1970, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated the 3Rs (Reconciliation; Reconstruction and Rehabilitation) as a post-civil war image-redeeming strategy to both pacify the aggrieved parties in the war and redeem Nigeria's troubled international image. But scholars have dismissed the venture as mere propaganda and thus, did not succeed in redressing the fundamental issues that caused the war (Aluko, 1971; Nwolise, 1989; Akinterinwa, 1999; Fawole, 2003; Achebe, 2012).

However, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme became a major image-booster for Nigeria and arguably one of the most enduring legacies of the civil war experience for the country, irrespective of its shortcomings. The introduction of the NYSC scheme, coincided with the oil politics of the 1970s, accentuated by the Yom-Kippur War, and attracted petroleum windfall for Nigeria, thus ushering the country into the "golden era" of her foreign policy (Garba, 1987; Olaitan, 1997: p. 97). To be sure, other indices that attracted international recognition for Nigeria during the 1970s include the radical/revolutionary military administrations of the era, Nigeria's diplomatic credentials on the multilateral platforms and Pan-Africanist and Afrocentrist foreign policy architecture of Nigeria (Ajala, 1986; Saliu, 1995; Osaghae, 2002; Eneka & Odife, 2005; Saliu, 2006a; Gambari, 2008; Akinboye, 2013).

The Second Republic began on a shaky note for Nigeria's image as a result of the widely faulted electoral process of 1979 that birthed the era (Nwolise, 1988: p. 36). In the specific context of foreign policy, it was evident that Shehu Shagari was bestowed with relatively radical foreign policy credentials that both overwhelmed his introspective and taciturn milieu and dwarfed his professional and technocratic dispositions (Soremekun, 1988: p. 219). In essence, in the sphere of foreign policy, the main challenge remained how to revive and sustain the momentum of the Murtala/Obasanjo era, which continued to enjoy the support of the informed public. As Femi Otubanjo succinctly noted:

The ... regime of ShehuShagari inherited a foreign policy which was very popular with the people as well as being the object of respect in the international system. But while adapting its principles, goals and rhetoric, the regime quickly showed that it neither had the zeal nor the competence to keep up the pace it inherited... The result was that Nigeria's foreign policy remained at the level of routine observance of existing relations and obligations...The four years of the regime were, therefore, a period of recess for Nigeria's foreign policy (Otubanjo, 1989: p. 6).

The above assessment typified the foreign policy effort of Shagari. It is therefore, in order to affirm that the Second Republic administration of Shagari erased, indeed, reversed all the gains made in the earlier decades in Nigeria's foreign policy enterprise; and when the grossly inexperienced and revolutionary military administration of Idiagbon/Buhari is added to the picture, the negative impact on the country's international image becomes complete. The following accounted for this assessment: the excessive corruption and ineptitude of the ruling class, poor human rights records of the succeeding military administration, the "diplomatic baggage" involving Umaru Dikko that strained Nigeria's relations with Britain, highhandedness, militarization and unpromising posturing of the Idiagbon/Buhari military regime and crippling economic indices, which all connived to discredit the Nigeria's Second Republic and the succeeding military administration (Achebe, 1983; Akin-

sanya, 1983; Ogwu, 1986; Graf, 1988; Akinrinade, 1992; Soyinka, 1994; Osaghae, 2002; Fawole, 2008; Osuntokun, 2008; Folarin, 2010; Akinboye, 2013).

The aborted Third Republic which was supervised by the military administrations of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha have been adjudged respectively in scholarly circles as “the most hated” and “the most harassed” governments in Nigeria’s post-independence history (Ayagi, 1997: p. 13; Onadipe, 1997: p. 52; Osaghae, 2002: p. 273). In other words, the two administrations accounted for, indeed, supervised the worst era in the image crisis in Nigeria’s external relations. For the Babangida’s regime, a number of factors connived to sabotage his foreign policy efforts, in relation to Nigeria’s external image.

For instance, under the Babangida regime, the poor handling of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) debates; the failure to address the allegations that the state supported and condoned the Advanced Fee Fraud (419) and other related corrupt practices; the circumstances that surrounded Nigeria’s membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1987; and the endless transitions that eventually led to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Elections, adjudged by both local and international observers as the “freest and fairest” elections in Nigeria, all contributed immensely to undermine Nigeria’s international image (Olukoshi & Agbu, 1995; Adeniji, 2005; Saliu, 2006; Akinboye, 2013). From a more vintage position, Ibrahim Ayagi passed the verdict on the regime this way:

We have had a worst administration that any country could be unlucky to have (1985-1993)... The style of the administration was “Maradonic”. Within the eight (8) years (1985-1993), Nigeria joined the rank of the 13 world poorest countries...poverty has eaten deep into our living conditions, we are and have been poverty-stricken (Ayagi, 1997: p. 13).

It was in this atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion that the General Abacha administration came into power on November 17, 1993. Abacha was fortunate to have supervised the termination of racism in South Africa in 1994 which marked the official end of colonialism in Africa, thus heralding a new international environment for the Nigerian state (Chidozie, 2014). However, Abacha squandered the opportunities created by the new international climate through poor understanding and assessment of Nigeria’s foreign policy, prompting Fawole (2002), as earlier alluded, to describe the country’s foreignpolicy during that era as the most combative and defensive foreign policy in Nigeria’s history. This was amply demonstrated by the decision of Abacha to execute Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Ogoni brothers, popularly referred to as “Ogoni Nine”, in November, 1995, at a time when the Commonwealth Auckland Summit in New Zealand was on (Zabadi, 2004). This singular incident attracted heavy sanctions on the Nigerian state and earned her a pariah status (Saliu, 2006a: p. 348).

The Abacha regime also sustained its clamp-down on pro-democracy groups, especially the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO); continued the detention and harassment of political prisoners, prominent among whom where Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled June 12, 1993 Presidential Elections, Olusegun Obasanjo, former Head of State and Chris Anyanwu, a civil right activists; assassinated many civil rights leaders, such as Chief Alfred Rewane, MrsKudirat Abiola, and Bagauda Kaltho, among others; and unleashed state terrorism on the Nigerian state (Akinyemi, 1995; Olukoya, 1996; Onadipe, 1997; Amuwo, 1998; Zabadi, 2004; Saliu, 2006). All these domestic developments attracted immense international sanctions and isolation for the Nigerian state and earned Abacha the title of the most oppressive leader in the history of the country (Osaghae, 2002; Soyinka, 2006).

Scholars have reached the consensus that Nigeria’s image crisis attained the peak under Abacha’s regime and was in tatters when he left office through the historic “apple drama” on June 8, 1998. Fawole (1999) eloquently summarizes the scholarly verdict on Abacha’s highly discredited regime, thus:

...in the five years he reigned, General Abacha presided over the most combative and defensive foreign policy in Nigerian history. Abacha’s brand of diplomacy pitched the regime in conflict with the West, because of poor domestic policies particularly the issue of human rights which condemned the regime to a state of permanent isolation (cited in Akinboye, 2013: p. 35).

The fourth republic arguably began with a transitional programme by the brief but exciting and circumstantial regime of General AbdulsalamiAbubakar in 1998. To that effect, at its inception on June 9, 1998, General Abubakar’s regime inherited an explosive, traumatized and volatile socio-political situation, which made his regime basically a corrective and reconciliatory one (Badmus & Ogunmola, 2003: p. 381). Indeed, the apparent sincerity of General Abubakar’s transition programme generated tremendous goodwill for the country and earned Nigeria a measure of international respectability (Adeniji, 2005: p. 8; Saliu, 2006a: p. 356; Dokubo, 2010: p. 256).

What can however, be considered as the biggest snag on the administration of General Abubakar was the sudden death in detention, of Chief MKO Abiola, the supposed winner of the aborted June 12, Presidential Elections, who was detained under Decree Number 2 by the former military administration of General Abacha. Chief Abiola's death on July 6, 1998, while at a meeting with a high profile delegation from the US led by Susan Rice was mired in controversy and attracted wide scale violence domestically and international condemnation from notable figures like Reverend Jesse Jackson and Walter Carrington, the former US Ambassador to Nigeria. Susan Rice gave a graphic detail of the sad event that resulted in the death of Chief Abiola's thus:

At the beginning of our discussion, Moshood Abiola had a coughing fit. First of all we thought that it was an irritation of his throat before it dawned upon us that it was a heart attack. We then decided to call a medical doctor who came immediately. Unfortunately, it was too late (cited in [Badmus & Ogunmola, 2003: p. 385](#)).

With the successful completion of General Abubakar's transition to civil ruleprogramme, President Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office on May 29, 1999, presumably the most experienced of all Nigeria's Head of State with impressive political pedigree and diplomatic credentials ([Fawole, 2002: p. 26](#); [Saliu, 2006b: p. 359](#); [Folarin, 2010](#)). Consequently, upon the realization of the damage that had been done to the international image of Nigeria and the likely disadvantaged position this would foist on the country in taking maximum advantage of globalization, the regime of Obasanjo set out early through shuttle diplomacy to redress the image problem of the country. In essence, the task before the new administration was how to change the pariah status of Nigeria and regain the lost ground in international reckoning. As President Obasanjo's National Security Adviser, Lt-General Aliyu Mohammed (rtd), opined, regarding the new direction of Nigeria's diplomacy:

The current thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy is to regain respectability and relevance in the international community... The grand strategy seeks the conversion of foreign policy activities into concrete achievements which are of direct benefit to Nigeria. The main objective is "peace, security and prosperity through friendship". The goals to be achieved are as follows: (a) Economic integration of ECOWAS; (b) Responsibilities in Multilateral organizations—UN, AU, the Commonwealth, OPEC, NAM, and G-77; (c) Cooperation with the Far East; (d) Promotion of foreign investment and trade; (e) Debt reduction (Mohammed, 2001, cited in [Zabadi, 2004: p. 348](#)).

Furthermore, Obasanjo succeeded in re-positioning Nigeria to take its rightful place among the comity of civilized nations by "re-branding" her foreign policy especially through personalization of the process and economic diplomacy. Despite Obasanjo's lofty achievements in Nigeria's foreign policy circle, a number of factors connived to dent the country's international image, and by implication blight Obasanjo's laudable legacy. These include, but not limited to the following: the controversial US \$30b debt negotiation and eventual "forgiveness" in 2006; the contested agreement on Bakassi Peninsula territory (Green Tree Agreement) facilitated by the United Nations (UN) between Nigeria and Cameroun in 2006; and the attempt to subvert the constitution in April 2006 to extend his tenure in office ([Magbadelo, 2007](#); [Mustapha, 2007: p. 13](#); [Saliu, 2007: p. 405](#); [Adebajo, 2008: p. 4](#); [Menkene & Fonkeng, 2010](#); [Alao, 2011: p. 21](#); [Akinboye, 2013: pp. 25-36](#)).

According to a survey by *Afrobarometre*, Obasanjo's approval rating dropped from 84 percent in 2000 to 32 percent by 2005, as Nigerians became increasingly disenchanted with his autocratic leadership style ([Mustapha, 2007: p. 13](#)). In the specific case of the "Green Tree Agreement", arguably considered as Obasanjo's worst legacy in foreign policy transaction, Solomon Akinboye brilliantly submitted that:

The overriding import of the Green Tree Agreement was to ensure that the two parties (Nigeria and Cameroon) uphold the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict. Perhaps, one may conjecture that Obasanjo acted in order to curry favour of America and the other Western Countries to secure their support for his third term agenda bid... Indeed, the general consensus, mostly in informed circle, is that Bakassi crisis constituted a major sore in the country's diplomatic pursuit (cited in [Akinboye, 2013: p. 36](#)).

In all appearances, President Obasanjo left a "big shoe" in the diplomatic circle for his successor, late Musa Yar'Adua to fill in. Hence, despite the introduction of citizen diplomacy as a plank of Nigeria's foreign policy, alluded to earlier as one of the most practical approach to diplomacy, cleverly combining national image and national interest as critical components of Nigeria's foreign policy, Yar'Adua will be remembered for his 100-Day absence from office as result of health-related problems which created an unprecedented leadership vacuum in the history of Nigeria. This singular incident is arguably one of the most damaging to the country's international

image in recent time.

In fairness to President Goodluck Jonathan, it is premature to pre-empt Nigeria's national image in relation to the country's foreign policy in view of the fact that the former is still in office. However, this observation does not detract from the obvious national security challenges in the country involving the Boko Haram Islamic insurgency, which has been rightly considered as the most damaging factor to Nigeria's international image in recent time and the litmus test on the current administration's ability to manage Nigeria's national question (Danjuma, 2014; Omitola, 2014; Omotosho, 2014; Onuoha, 2014; Sampson, 2014). In short, Jacob and Akintola (2014: p. 211) have asserted that the terrorist activities of Boko Haram sect have greatly affected Nigeria's external relations on international economic relations with serious consequences for the country's economic development. According to Standard and Poor's Rating Services (S & P), an international rating agency:

Nigeria had a "very high risk" in "economic resilience", a "highrisk" in terms of 'economic imbalances', and a "very high risk" in "credit risk in the economy". Nigeria is a country with a high political risk, low GDP per capita, and large infrastructure needs, all factors that contribute to a volatile and risky operating environment for banks... The industry risk score of "7" for the country was based on its opinion that the country faced "very high risk" in its "institutional framework" and "competitive dynamics", and "intermediate risk" in "system wide funding" (*Daily Sun*, Monday March 05, 2012, cited in Jacob & Akintola, 2014: p. 212).

It must be mentioned that, in addition to the Boko Haram insurgency, the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria will ultimately determine not only the historic verdict on President Jonathan administration's Transformational Agenda, but more fundamentally the future of Nigeria's foreign policy among the comity of nations (Oche, 2013; Jega, 2014).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper sought to demonstrate the interpenetration of Nigeria's national image and her foreign policy through a rigorous look at the country's foreign policy since independence. It argued that Nigeria's role perception by succeeding military and democratic governments in bilateral and multilateral engagements have not only shaped her foreign policy but paradoxically undermined the country's international image. This, the paper hinged on a combination of factors, the chief among them being the contradictions and dissonance between foreign policy formulation and implementation. In essence, the paper argued that despite the concerted efforts by the past administrations in Nigeria since independence to reposition the country's foreign policy to make it more assertive and robust with a view to boosting the country's international image, the results have been, in some cases, counter-productive. In short, Attahiru Jega has correctly summed up Nigeria's performance and assessment profile on both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic fronts in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy as follows:

Looking back at fifty years of Nigeria's foreign policy, one sees much to be proud of. However, positive initiatives are too often offset by avoidable contradictions and inconsistencies pervasive in the conduct of Nigerian foreign policy. These contradictions may have beclouded, if not eroded, gains that have accrued from global engagements and interactions (Jega, 2010 cited in Akindele, 2013: p. 36).

Therefore, foreign policy constitutes a critical component of a country's conduct of public policy as it relates to other actors (both state and non-state) in the larger international system or the external environment (Fayomi, 2013: p. 44). As a result of the importance of foreign policy in a country's agenda, Gebe (2008) states that consideration must be given to all the important actors on the international scene that affect the policy-making and implementation processes of the country concerned. The policy decisions include relations with other nations, international and non-governmental organizations, institutions and agencies, as well as individuals, in so far as they impact on the system of inputs and outputs. The dynamics of policy choice that entail the processes of formulation and implementation, sometimes conflicting, other times cordial, determine the character, content, direction and the possible impact of the country's foreign policy (cited in Fayomi, 2013).

The paper recommends that Nigerians in the Diaspora should be properly recognized in the scheme of foreign policy articulation and implementation. They have a prominent role in advancing the foreign policy of the country, by implication her international image and hence should be given sufficient diplomatic attention (Akinboye, 2013: p. 57). More so, Nigeria has a "vibrant Diaspora population that needs to be constantly engaged to contribute to national development" (Adelusi & Oluwashakin, 2014: p. 150). In addition, there is the need for a strong



strategic plan and long term projection of the nation's foreign policy posture with a view to fashioning out a roadmap for Nigeria's diplomacy. And without any contradiction, Nigeria's foreign policy in contemporary context must be premised solely on national interest with emphasis on national security and welfare, regional and global peace, as well as robust multilateral diplomacy that is tailored along strong strategic partnership with friendly states in the global arena (Akinboye, 2013: p. 58).

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# A Comparative Study on the Domestic and Overseas Public Interest Litigation System

Pengfei Ji

Northeast Petroleum University, Qinhuangdao, China  
Email: [guicaitang@163.com](mailto:guicaitang@163.com)

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## Abstract

The rapid economic development of our country is accompanied with a series of problems that should not be ignored, including environmental pollution, erosion of state assets, infringement on public interest and so on, but it is difficult to properly solve these problems in short term as a result of imperfection of the existing legal system and inadequate supervision. Through the comparative study on the public interest litigation (PIL) system of major countries at overseas and combined with China's national condition, the existing legal system should be improved specifically in the respect of expanding plaintiff's qualification and extending the statute of limitations.

## Keywords

Public Interest Litigation, Comparative Study, Statute of Limitations, Civil Procedure Act

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## 1. Introduction

With the further deepening of reform and opening up, China's economy has made great development, people's living standard has been greatly improved, but in our country's rapid economic development and at the same time, we also face a series of major problems, such as environmental pollution, soil erosion, loss of state-owned assets, the group of consumer rights and interests damage events such as, for and so on the public interests or the interests of the state of damaged cases, although our country August 31, 2012 amended the "PRC Civil Procedure Law" fifty-fifth stipulates: "the pollution of the environment infringement, many of the legitimate interests of consumers and other damage to the social public interest behavior, the provisions of the law of the relevant organs and organizations may bring a lawsuit to the people's court." But because the regulations are too general, fuzzy, and the lack of relevant supporting program implementation of security, bring a large extent hindered the public interest litigation. It is necessary to make a contrastive study of other countries, the system of public interest litigation, and then to China's public interest litigation system put forward a sound proposal, further improve China's public interest litigation system, to provide better service for the harmonious society.

## 2. Overview of PIL

PIL is an age-old system with a history dating back to Roman times and was confirmed for the first time in the legislation of the United States. It is generally said that PIL is a new means for rights relief and a system whereby national, social organizations and citizens file lawsuits in court to safeguard public interest in accordance with laws when illegal activities companies, enterprises and other organizations or individual citizen have conducted infringed or will infringe the public interest. Compared to the conventional litigation against breach of contract or violation of rights, PIL has the following characteristics.

### 2.1. The Purpose of PIL Has Publicity and Preventability

The PIL is established, on the one hand, to safeguard the national interest and social public interest, on the other hand, to prevent the occurrence of events violating the national interest or public interest.

### 2.2. The Plaintiff in a Case of PIL Is Diverse

The plaintiff in a case of PIL can be either social organizations and individuals whose personal rights or property rights suffer direct losses due to direct violation, or social organizations and individuals whose personal rights or property rights are not damaged at all or suffer no direct or indirect losses, or even state agencies as long as the illegal activities of the parties offense against the national interest or public interest and legitimate rights of an unspecified majority of people. Only relevant state authorities are allowed to file lawsuits on behalf of the state, while any other organizations and individuals can file a lawsuit on its own behalf.

### 2.3. PIL Is Subject to the National Intervention

In PIL, the State confers upon all organizations and individuals the right to file a lawsuit against any law violator who infringes the national interest or public interest, in particular, confers upon national prosecuting authority the right to file PIL, which enhance the national intervention with the support of public power intervention right.

## 3. Legislation Practices Related to PIL in Other Countries or Regions

Public interest litigation has been developed in abroad for many years, has a relatively mature system, has very important significance to china. American lawsuit is the founding members, but also the development of environmental public interest litigation is the most mature countries, it establishes the citizen suit system is a model for countries to learn from; the most high level and group litigation system in Germany on behalf of the countries of continental law system in the field of public interest litigation; British prosecutor action and collective action system the maximum protection of the interests of vulnerable groups; and as the level of economy, population, environmental quality and Chinese similar developing countries—India is the first Asian country to establish the environment public welfare lawsuit, attracted the eyes of the world, is many Southeast Asian countries emulate.

### 3.1. The Practices on PIL in the United States

The United States is the founder of the modern PIL, and has passed “Sherman Antitrust Act” as early as 1890, which is the first statute to rule the PIL system (Cheng, 2014).

There are two means to file an environmental PIL, one is a lawsuit filed by the Attorney General, and the other is a lawsuit filed by a citizen. The lawsuit filed by the Attorney General refers to PIL for environmental protection filed by the Attorney General on behalf of the US federal government or state governments against any citizen, legal person or other organizations that cause environmental pollution and damage. Under the US Statutory Law, the lawsuit filed by a citizen refers to PIL filed by a citizen against other citizens, legal persons, organizations or state authorities whose illegal activities have caused environmental pollution and damage. The permissible civil PIL in the United States mainly includes “qui tam action”, antitrust litigation and citizen suit in the field of environment law. The “qui tam” provisions initially specified in “False Claims Act” of 1863 in the United States allow a US citizen to file a civil action against any illegal activity defrauding the government in order to recover the losses the government has suffered, and the person filing an action can receive a portion of any penalty imposed under the relevant law if the suit was successful. Since the federal government, rather than the citizen fil-

ing a suit, is the main beneficiary from such suit, the suit has the nature of PIL. The provisions of citizen PIL system in the field of Antitrust Law are mainly included in the “Clayton Antitrust Act” of 1914 in the United States, and the Article 15 of the law empowers any citizen, firm, corporation and union to bring a lawsuit for injunctive relief in a court which has jurisdiction over the parties. Since the field has influenced the PIL in the United States most, the citizen suit in the field of environment is prescribed in the Clean Air Act 1970 at the earliest, and this law begins to include the provisions for citizen suit, empowers any citizen to receive assistance from the federal government and supervise the law enforcement, and improves the relevant proceedings on citizen suit.

### 3.2. The Practices on PIL in the United Kingdom

The legislation and provisions related to PIL are mainly included in “Crown Procedure Act”, “British Civil Law” and “Rules of Civil Procedure”, and there are two forms of action: the procurator action and representative action, class action.

1) The PIL filed by a British prosecutor. As per the provisions of “Crown Procedure Act” and the third edition of “Code for Crown Prosecutors” revised in 1994, the prosecutor is entitled to bring suits on behalf of the royal family when the interest of British royal family has been violated. In the United Kingdom, the civil procedures allowing prosecutor to be involved in are as follows: (a) The civil lawsuits concerning the interest of royal family. The Attorney General, acting as the representative of the royal family, is empowered to bring a suit against the tort-feasor in the name of the king or the royal family when the interest of the royal family has been violated. (b) Lawsuits denounced by citizens. The Attorney General is allowed to participate into a lawsuit upon application by the citizen and on behalf of the citizen who revealed the lawsuit concerning the violation of public interest in order to stop the activities disturbing public order and causing harm on public property or to enforce the public duty. The Attorney General can file a lawsuit independently if the activities above were found to be harmful to the public interest. (c) Lawsuits to confirm illegitimate and legitimate children. As per the provisions of “Civil Procedure Act”, when the party applies to the court for confirming illegitimate and legitimate children, the application form must be submitted to the Attorney General who has jurisdiction over it, and the Attorney General will be involved in the hearing and trial as the defendant.

2) The representative action, class action of British action. The British mass claim includes representative action and class action. The representative action is where a group has a common claim in the case of mass claim, and therefore, one or more than one of them are allowed to participate into the lawsuit as representative (s) of the group. The decision of the court has binding effect on other persons in the class. The class action is a suit involving a large number of people in the case of mass claim, and these persons form a group to bring a suit on behalf of the group or members in absence due to their common claim. The “Rules of Civil Procedure” of the United Kingdom allows the parties or the court itself to bring a class action. The decision and verdict the court made have a binding effect on all members involved. Any member refusing to accept the ruling can appeal against the decision and verdict after approval by the court which made the decision and verdict.

### 3.3. The Practices on PIL in Germany

Germany has a more comprehensive legislation in PIL system and the relevant provisions of PIL are included in Constitution of Germany, Administrative Procedure Law, Civil Procedure Act and the Anti-Unfair Competition Law. The following focuses on an analysis on the PIL system of Germany from the view of the subject filing PIL (Liu, 2014).

1) PIL filed by citizens. The provisions of PIL filed by a citizen are mainly included in Constitution of Germany where it is also defined as the “public action”. The Constitution empowers all citizen of Germany to sue the German Constitutional Court in the request that the unconstitutional law shall be judged to be invalid by the German Constitutional Court as it deems certain provisions in the existing Germany law violate the constitutional rights and other rights regardless of whether infringement occurs or whether the infringement case concerns the direct or indirect interest of the citizens themselves (Qi, 2013).

2) PIL filed by a group. The group PIL refers to a lawsuit brought by qualified corporate body or agency under the law in order to protect the interest of an unspecified majority of people when they have no intention or ability to bring a suit since each of them suffers small losses from the case from which the majority suffer losses.

3) PIL filed by a prosecutor. Germany allows a prosecutor to bring PIL or participate into PIL as the representative of public interest. As per the provisions of German Civil Procedure Act of 1877, the prosecutor can bring lawsuits for confirming the nullity of marriage, application of interdicted person and declaration of death

of missing person and so on, or participate into lawsuits in trial.

### 3.4. Legislation Practices on PIL in India

The United States is the founder of the modern PIL system, while India is the first country to introduce PIL system and has established a more perfect PIL system than that of the United States.

PIL in India has a history dating back to the late 1970s and early 1980s with a reference to the related legislation of environmental PIL in the United States, and India has developed “Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act” in 1974, promulgated “Forest Conservation Act” in 1980, passed “Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act” in 1981 and enacted “Environment Protection Act” in 1986. PIL in India has its distinct characteristics. It has less limitation on the plaintiff standing to use and empowers its all citizens and all eligible social organizations to bring an action. Its relief measures mainly depend on interim order which is an interim measure enforced by the court in order to timely stop the illegal activities endangering public safety regardless of whether the party made an application or whether the defendant is at fault. In respect of the jurisdiction over litigation, the courts at all level have jurisdiction over PIL under Indian law, and in general, the Supreme Court has jurisdiction over mass-related cases concerning a large number of people and influential cases. India has established the relevant supporting measures to simplify the procedures of PIL, reduce expenses on PIL and encourage citizens to bring PIL.

## 4. The Current Situation of PIL System in China and Suggestions for Improvement

The “Civil Procedure Act” newly revised on August 31, 2012 introduced the PIL system within the scope of civil procedure for the first time, which is a major breakthrough of PIL in China. The Article 55 stipulates that the eligible institutions and related organizations under the law can bring an action against the activities in violation of the social public benefit including the pollution of environment, the infringement on legitimate rights and interests of a majority of consumers. But the provisions are too simple, and the lack of relevant supporting measures, in practice it is difficult to implement.

At present, in China’s current legislative system concerning the public interest litigation, although the direct provisions of the public interest litigation system, but these provisions are too scattered and simple, no relevant judicial interpretations complement, also no real sense of the public interest litigation procedures, and has not formed the unified public interest litigation system, it is difficult to operate in the judicial practice, also it is difficult to reflect its value. Compared with the USA, Britain, Germany, India and other countries are relatively perfect and mature system of public interest litigation, a considerable gap. Therefore, to put forward the following suggestions for China’s public interest litigation system to improve.

### 4.1. Strengthen the PIL System

Strengthening the relevant legislation is the key to establish a sound PIL system, especially in the fields of environmental protection, water resource conservation and consumer protection. For a long time, there is no accountability or law to go by after the activities endangering the public safety and violating the public interest occur due to the inadequate legislation of PIL in such fields in China.

### 4.2. Define the Scope of Plaintiff and Increase the Type of Plaintiff

In accordance with the Article 55 in the “Civil Procedure Act” of China newly revised on August 31, 2012, the plaintiff in PIL shall be legal institutions and organizations. It is widely believed that this provision is ambiguous and oversimplified. Firstly, neither the law nor other laws further defines what is legal institution and organizations. In order to successfully start procedures of PIL, it is necessary to specify the “legal institutions and organizations” further. Secondly, a citizen is not recognized legally as a plaintiff standing to sue in PIL in our legislation of PIL system, since such provision is objectively imperfect, the author suggests that it is necessary to allow a citizen to be the plaintiff in PIL (Qi, 2014).

### 4.3. Provide the Statute of Limitations of PIL Separately

The special provisions of the statute of limitations of PIL are not included in the existing legal system in our country. In accordance with the regulations on the statute of limitations in the existing legal system in our country, the special statute of limitations shall be one year as specified in Article 136 in “General Rules for Civil Law”

in China states “The statute of limitations shall be one year in the following situations: 1) Claims for compensation for bodily injuries; 2) sales of substandard goods without proper notice; 3) deferred or non-payment of rent; 4) storage property was lost or damaged.” The ordinary statute of limitations shall be two years under Article 135 in “General Rules for Civil Law” in China that the statute of limitation on the application to the People’s Court for the protection of civil rights shall be two years, except otherwise provided by law. It is obvious that both the special and ordinary statute of limitations are too short, which is adverse to the case of PIL and the protection of the public interest, so the author believes that special provisions shall be made for the statute of limitations in the case of PIL. Different scholars may have different views on how long the limitation period shall be, still, the author holds that a period of 10 years may be applicable considering that 10 years is long enough for the relevant institutions and groups to bring an action and collect evidence (Wang, 2010).

In the process of learning the advanced PIL system from other countries, we should take our local culture into consideration in order to improve the relevant laws and regulations of our country, establish an integrated PIL system and perfect PIL system of our country.

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# Generational Responses to Job Security, Traditional Class Division, and the American Dream

**Yakasah Wehyee**

Political Science Department, Hamline University, Saint Paul Minnesota, USA  
Email: [kingyakasah@gmail.com](mailto:kingyakasah@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

**This paper examines some of the leading theories around the generation question. Using data gathered from the Survey Documentation and Analysis-Frequencies/Cross Tabulation Program, this paper analyzes generational responses to three issues: job security, traditional class division, and the American dream. The purpose of this research is to arrive at which theory of generation more accurately explains generational behavior.**

## Keywords

**Job Security, Class Division, American Dream, Life Cycle, Collective Consciousness, Generation**

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## 1. Introduction

In recent history, there have been much speculation on the impact of generation upon politics. In this conversation, many authors such as Karl Mannheim, Susan MacManus, and Michael Delli Carpini, have attempted to provide a clear meaning to the fundamental question of what it means to be a generation. Every author's attempt to find a clear definition of a generation has been met with another's attempt at the same end. Therefore, there exists no clear explanation or definition of what constitutes a generation, and how it is politically significant. As a result, people are more confused now than ever when it comes to understanding the concept of generation. Still, these conversations are much needed, especially now in the midst of trying to define the Millennial Generation. This paper will illustrate generally, some of the key concepts surrounding the generation question. The second objective of this paper is to provide some analysis as a means of understanding how, if at all, generation affects perceptions in three areas: job security, traditional class division, and the American dream. From these findings along with some of the leading theories in the field, this paper will juxtapose some of the leading theories with



the data results as well as provide new insight to what the implications of the findings might mean.

## 2. Literature Review

Much of the research and debate around generational politics derives from the ideas developed by Karl Mannheim. For Mannheim, a generation is not necessarily defined by age but rather, by conscious awareness. Through this perspective generation can be seen as cohorts who consciously identify with each other and the times (Mannheim, 1952). He believes that location and biology are important but that the conscious awareness of who one is in time creates the bond that is called a generation. He also believes that this consciousness can develop without cohorts knowing of each other. Mannheim argues that generations are molded to shift their specific role in society (Mannheim, 1952). Michael Delli Carpini, another leading voice in the debate of generation and generational politics adds another dimension to the conversation. Like Mannheim, he also believes that there must be some collective awareness. He adds that before cohorts can become a generation, they must experience a major destabilizing event which then leads to a rethinking (Carpini, 1989). This rethinking, he contends, is the collective consciousness essential to create the bond necessary to form a generation. Where he differs from Mannheim's interpretation is that he believes that how the consciousness is interpreted may differ, but the members of the generation are aware of each other's existence.

In her book *Young V. Old: Generational Combat in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Susan MacManus associates generation more rigidly with age. Her thesis is that the ensuing conflict within 21<sup>st</sup> century America is a result of age differences; that the schism of America is young vs. old. She argues that policy interest and civic engagement positively correlate to one's age; that older people strongly support issues which affect their cohort such as Medicare and social security while the young tend to support issues that affect their cohorts more; such as education (MacManus, 1996). The fact that the different age cohorts view each issue differently therefore creates an ostensible rift due conspicuously to age, according to MacManus. In this way MacManus's focus is less about generational differences and more on age and its lifecycle as the central variable affecting political action. In their book *Millennials Rising* William Strauss and Neil Howe see the current socio-political atmosphere differently. They describe it as a conflict between the Millennial Generation and preceding generations that are still alive: including, the Silent Generation, the Baby Boom Generation, and the Gen Xers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). For example, their research has found that Millennials have been raised in an atmosphere of "confident individualism," where by parents have been obsessed with uplifting their Millennial children's self-esteems. This sort of emotional attention according to Howe and Strauss has not been characteristic of any other generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Their research has also found that Millennials are coming of age in the most "socially fragmented" environment America has ever experienced. This trend is characterized by the pernicious gap in areas of "income, race, language, and lifestyle" (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Each of these views has either directly or indirectly influenced this research. It is the goal of this paper to arrive at which theory best explains the results of findings of this paper.

## 3. Method

The data in this research is derived from the Survey Documentation Analysis-Frequencies/Cross Tabulation Program (SDA Frequencies/Cross Tabulation). Using a univariate approach, this research identifies age as an independent variable. The age variable is divided between those cohorts between ages 18 - 30, 31 - 50 and 51 - 95. This age division is largely influenced by popular understanding of general age breakdown along generational lines. It is noted that William Strauss and Neil Howe as well as MacManus and other leading authors roughly breakdown generational cohorts along these lines. Three variables are analyzed as dependent variables: Job satisfaction, class division, and the American dream. The decision to analyze these particular variables is influenced by the leading notion that the economy and people's perception of progress in this area is the main indicator for political participation (Walsh, Jennings, & Stoker, 2001). There are three graphs in total; one for each of the dependent variables. The first graph which examines job security asks the respondents to rate how important job security is to them. The scale range is from 1 - 7; one being least important and 7 being very important. The second dependent variable tested is class division. Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which traditional class divisions still exists in America. This scale ranges from 1 - 4; 1 representing those who strongly agree that traditional class division still exists and 4 representing those who strongly disagree. The final variable studied is how well one is able to live in America. This question is basically the classic American dream question and attempts to see how various cohorts view it. The graphs are displayed and discussed.

#### 4. Data/Discussion

In **Table 1**, when asked how important job security is, unsurprisingly, more people between the ages 18 - 30 gave higher marks (47.3%, 28.4%) than people between the ages 31 - 50. Only 11.3% rated it as not important compared to 30% of those between ages 31 - 50. This issue appeared to be less important still to those cohorts between ages 51 - 95. 58.7% of this group thought job security was not important. From these results one can infer that for the young, it is more difficult to hold on to a job for reasons that could be attributed to experience, education, and stability. The higher impact of job security might be further captured when one analyzes the 2012 Census data on poverty which shows a higher proportion of young people living in poverty than older people. The poverty rate of those 65 and older was 9.1% in 2012 while the poverty rate for those 18 and younger was 13.7% (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012). Furthermore, the Census data shows that more young people are without health care than older people.

Typically, people with good stable jobs have access to healthcare benefits and the fact that young people are disproportionately without healthcare indicates that they do not have well-paying stable jobs; at least not in comparison to older generations. People between the ages 18 - 30 are usually in the process of figuring out what they want to do with their life; what career path they want to take. People between this age group are often committed to school and are unable to commit to a full time work schedule. Naturally, in a situation of strenuous circumstances, part time positions which are often occupied by those between ages 18 - 30, are the first to be cut. The 2012 Census indicates that in 2012 only 2.9% of full time employees lived under poverty while 7.3% of part time employees lived in poverty (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012). The *New York Times* published a spectacular article which gave a litany of some of the challenges young college age adults face in the modern American context. According to the article, college costs have increased 60% in the past few decades. As a result, more students have to work while attending college than ever before (DeParle, 2012). The anxiety that one might feel about these facts is more than probative in explaining the high marks given by those between ages 18 - 30 on the question of job security.

In that regard, the middle age cohorts do not view job security as a big issue because they presumable have the education, and the experience to be considered more valuable assets to the job. Many middle age cohorts are the bosses of the young cohorts and therefore have to worry less about losing their jobs. Those in their mid-age are often more stable than the younger generation and can keep a job longer than the younger cohorts who might have to change jobs due to schooling and other life situations. The 2012 US Census released that the highest earning brackets consists of those between ages 35 - 54. This is the age when most Americans earn the most in their careers (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012; Pew Research Center, 2013; Jäntti, 2006). Therefore, it is less likely that this group would

**Table 1.** Job security.

Frequency Distribution								
Cells contain:		JOBKEEP						
-Column percent								
-Weighted N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Row
	Unimportant						Very Important	Total
Age	11.3	26.2	40.2	31.8	36.4	47.3	28.4	32.1
	2.4	2	6.9	11.4	27	69.3	167.8	286.8
	30	49	19.8	43.3	39	36.4	30.9	32.9
	6.3	3.8	3.4	15.5	29	53.3	183.1	294.4
	58.7	24.8	39.9	25	24.6	16.3	40.7	35
	12.3	1.9	6.8	8.9	18.2	23.9	240.8	312.9
Col Total		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
		20.9	7.7	17.1	35.8	74.2	146.5	591.8
								894.1

be very concerned about job security. It might also be noted that by the ages 31 - 50 more Americans are married and therefore have shared income. There have been much research in recent times that directly correlate one's economic status with marriage. Married couples on average have higher income than non-married individuals (Jäntti, 2006; Pew Charitable Trust, 2012; DeLeire & Lopoo, 2013).

The higher income which the middle aged cohorts enjoy provides them with more freedom and power in the job market. Although on average this population enjoys the best aspects of the job market, the fact still remains that they are still participants in the market and are still at some risk of losing their jobs. And so it makes since that this group would be less concerned about job security than the younger generation but more concerned than the old generation. The older generation as before mentioned is least concerned of all the generations about job security. The younger half of this cohort, those between the ages 51 - 70, in theory have more job experience and education. This group is also more stable than the younger generations. The older half of this generation might account for the lower number of those unconcerned about job security because most of them are retired. That is, they no longer have to worry about job security because they don't work. Many of the members of this generation enjoy Medicaid and social security benefits. They are not faced with the same sorts of challenges that the younger generation faces with school, and lack of healthcare and all the other assortment of issues that group faces.

In **Table 2**, when asked if traditional class divisions still exist, more people between ages 18 - 30 (39%) thought that they do not still exist. A larger number of those between ages 31 - 50 thought that traditional class divisions do still exist with 43% strongly agreeing. Those between ages 51 - 95 had responses that were pretty close with a 5.7 margin between the highest and lowest response rates. However, marginal, the oldest generation had more respondents who strongly agree (31.3%) and somewhat agreed (32%) than those who somewhat disagreed (28.2%) and those who strongly disagreed (25.6%) on the question. On the issue of class division, there appears to be a clear generational divide between the old and the young generation with the older generations agreeing that traditional class division still exists. The majority of the younger generation do not see traditional class division as something that still exist. Max Weber provides a basis upon which one may properly apply the concept of class. According to Weber, class is determined by market situation which is,

“Represented exclusively by economic interest in the possession of goods and opportunities for income” (Weber, 2013).

Therefore, the very act of recognizing class, which is basically one's economic positioning in relation to others, is a privilege and an act of power. Following this school of thought, it can be anticipated that those with more economic capital will be more inclined to identify class division as it is the primary identifier of one's socio-political standing in society, and one of the most obvious indicators of one's power.

**Table 2.** Traditional class division.

Frequency Distribution					
0	USCLASS1				
-Column percent					
-Weighted N	1	2	3	4	Row
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Age	25.4	30.5	34.1	39	31.1
	58.2	224.2	119.1	33.1	434.6
	43.3	37.4	37.7	35.4	38.3
	99.4	274.8	131.5	30	535.7
	31.3	32	28.2	25.6	30.6
	71.8	235.2	98.4	21.7	427.2
	100	100	100	100	100
	229.4	734.2	349	84.9	1397.50
Col Total					

If one were to apply Weber's theory of class to the results of the data, one would argue that because the younger generation generally doesn't have much economic power in regard to possessing property, and other goods and income, they are less inclined to identify with traditional class divisions. Digressing from Weber's theory, consider this; The Millennial generation is the most diverse generation in American history. This generation has grown up in a time where the middle class has vastly expanded to include more historically marginalized groups (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012; Pew Charitable Trust, 2012; Deparle, 2012). They are more likely to have friends across class lines, blurring the perception of any real class divide. In the current socio-political landscape, it is often unclear what actually divides the various classes. The concept of the American middle class is a fluid ideal that changes from place to place, person to person. Thus, in the case of the Millennial generation, it might be a question of identifying the various classes. Without this understanding, it would be difficult for the Millennial generation to form an opinion on whether so called traditional class divisions still exists.

Of all the generations surveyed the middle aged had the strongest opinions on the question of class division. More participants from this group strongly agreed that class division still exists in America. Weber would argue that this is because they are the ones with all the capital and therefore, all the power. It is necessary to their social status to be in tuned with their own class and know where they stand in relation to others. To better understand this generation's strong response it might prove valuable to consider the history of this cohort. This group consists of what most experts consider the Gen Xers. This generation came after the movers and shakers of the 1960s who seemed to have achieved many of the great things which we enjoy today, including: passing the most comprehensive Civil Rights Act, establishing Medicare and Medicaid and ending the Vietnam War. According to Howe and Strauss, Gen Xers came into the world with low expectations of what they could achieve both from the older generations and from themselves. This fact was reflected in their low test performances and high crime rates (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Being young adults during the days of boomer activism in the 60s this generation has witnessed some of the most massive reforms brought about by the generation before them. Their belief that traditional class division still exists might be a reflection of their low performance in the area of socio-economic change compared to the Boomer generation.

The older generation also seemed to agree that traditional class division still exists in American culture. This age group ranging from 51 - 95 consists of two generations combined in one; the Baby Boom generation and the Silent Generation. The numbers for this last age group most likely doesn't tell the full story of the respondents. There might be different reasons for the responses of each of the two generations that are grouped in this category. The Baby Boomers came into a very segregated world both in terms of race and class. They had the determination to change the conventional order of their time for a new more just society (Matusow, 2009). In many ways, they achieved these ends but their victories were met with many defeats as well. Although Boomers sparked cultural and social change, they eventually became consumed by the conservative American machine and could not impact any real political-economic change (Matusow, 2009). The Boomers who came of age with benign sentiments towards the government would experience the failure of two presidencies—LBJ's Great Society and Richard Nixon. After the passage of the two civil rights legislations, the Boomers waged a cultural war that drained their energies and could not do much in the realm of class struggle (Matusow, 2009). Therefore, the high rate of Boomer respondents that agreed that traditional class division still exists are likely responding to the fact that in their effort to bring about overwhelming change, they missed their mark on the class issue.

One can suspect that the Silent Generation was more in the middle on the question of traditional class division. On one hand, they came of age during a very segregated time in American history like the Boomers; but on the other hand, they have witnessed the expansion of the middle class and the increase of working wage (Harris et al., 2011; DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012; Deparle, 2012; Isaacs, 2013). Unlike the younger Millennials, the Silent generation did not grow up in a very diverse America. For the most part, people associated with others who were of the same socio-economic-class status. In this regard, it is easy to distinguish a division along class lines. The overall response of those between 51 - 95 are most likely over represented of the Baby Boom generation considering the fact that they are substantially more in number than the Silent generation.

In **Table 3**, when asked if one is able to live well in America, more people between ages 18 - 30 strongly disagreed (39.9%), compared to 30.6% who strongly agreed. For those between ages 31 - 50, respondents more strongly agreed that one is able to live well in America (37.1%) than strongly disagreed (33.5%). More people between ages 51 - 95 strongly agreed (32.3%) than strongly disagreed (30.8%) to the question. According to the Brookings Institute (2006), more women are in the workforce now than previous generations, and average earning has increased for women, while average income has remained flat for men. In general, income has risen per-

**Table 3.** The American dream.

Frequency Distribution						
Cells contain:		EQUAL6				
-Column percent						
-Weighted N	1	2	3	4	Row	
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	
Age	1: 18 - 30	30.6	32.2	24	39.9	31
		204.2	191.2	30.3	18.2	443.9
	2: 31 - 50	37.1	39	41.6	33.5	38.2
		247.7	231.5	52.5	15.2	546.9
	3: 51 - 95	32.3	28.8	34.5	26.6	30.8
		215.5	170.6	43.5	12.1	441.7
		100	100	100	100	100
	Col Total	667.4	593.4	126.3	45.5	1432.50

generation. That is, the Baby Boom generation makes, had, or has higher average earnings than the Silent generation—and Gen Xers on average have higher earnings than Boomers; and that Millennials are projected to earn more than any of the previous generations (Isaacs, 2013). Given these facts, Millennials largely believe that many inequalities still exist. A recent Pew research shows that Millennials believe that women are still paid much less than men for the same work and do not believe that enough is being done to address gender inequality (Pew Research Center, 2013). So even though the Millennials are coming up in an age where women are about half of the work force and are,

“Better educated than their mothers and grandmothers had been—or than their young male counterparts are now” (Pew, 2013).

It is no surprise that the younger generation is largely unsatisfied with one’s ability to live well in America.

Research has shown that the millennial generation does not have the same optimism regarding American exceptionalism as older generations (Jäntti, 2006). A 2006 research conducted by the Institute for the Study of Labor compared the United States’ performance on income mobility to Great Britain and four Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden). The research found that the Nordic countries have the highest inter-generational income mobility and that the US ranks last in income mobility. The research also found less upward mobilization in the bottom 5<sup>th</sup> quartile and less downward mobilization in the top 5<sup>th</sup> quartile (Jäntti, 2006). Other researches have found an increase in poverty concentration and an ostentatious increase in wealth gap (Harris et al., 2011; DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012; Kneebone et al., 2011; Deparle, 2012). The Millennials see, hear, or read about these things through the internet and other sources and can’t help but think that their world is not as good as it could be. They appreciate the American values of freedom and liberty but also acknowledge that there are other countries who have made equal or greater strides to these ends.

Much of the Millennials’ experience in America has been characterized by unfavorable wars, questionable political maneuvering such as the Patriot Act and the worst economic condition since the Great Depression. In short, the Millennials have not had a lot to be optimistic about. Perhaps most importantly, the Millennials recognize the progress which previous generations have made but are not content with the seemingly stagnant state of the country today. In this way, most Millennials most likely responded to the question through a social justice perspective. They believe that America has not fully delivered on its’ promise of liberty and justice for all, and recognize that there are still large populations who do not have full equality in America (Harris et al., 2011; DeNavas-Walt et al., 2012; Pew Charitable Trust, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2013; Deparle, 2012; Kneebone et al., 2011). It therefore does not come as a surprise that they are more pessimistic about one’s ability to live well in America.

In contrast to the Millennials, each of the older generations have had ample time to witness and experience



worse moments in American history. For the Gen Xers, events like the LA riots, the crack epidemic, and the Iranian Hostage crisis play vividly in their conscience. For Boomers events like the death of JFK, RFK, and MLK as well as the Vietnam War and Water-gate might over shadow any current issue. For the non-racist majority of the older generation, America is better now than it was when they were growing up. In addition, those who control society are the older generation. They make the laws and enforce them. They are the CEOs and presidents at the jobs which employ the younger generation so if they have any complaint about America, they can shape it to their liking. Given the fact that most, if not, all of the political socio-economic capital is in the possession of the older generations, it makes sense that they largely agree that one can live well in America. This is their experience and their truth.

## 5. Conclusion

From the data analyzed one can conclude that when it comes to issues related to socio-economic class, the older generations (Gen Xers, Boomers/Silent) are more closely aligned with each other than with the younger generation (Millennial). This supports Howe and Strauss's argument. We will revisit this point after a brief analysis of how the data supports MacManus' hypothesis. The results validate MacManus' argument that people respond positively to issues that they perceive to directly impact their cohorts. This is evidenced from the responses of each generation on the question of job security. The data showed that the younger generation is more concerned about job security because they are potentially at greater risk of being fired for the reasons provided above. On the other hand, each of the older generations did not consider job security to be of grave concern because they were at lower risks of losing their jobs compared to the younger generation. The data from this research did not yield any conclusive evidence to prove MacManus's thesis that age, not generation, influences political action. The data confirms Howe and Strauss's main argument that the Millennials are basically in a tug of war with all the other generations. In each of the categories: job security, class division, and the American dream, the older generation responded in concert while the younger generation stood alone. Although it is not clear how much influence age as a separate agent affects people's stances on economic and class issues, evidence from this data point to a clear generational divide between the young Millennial generation and older generations namely: Gen Xers, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation. This data yields conclusive evidence that generation as a variable in researching socio-political attitudes is worth studying.

With that being said, there seemed to be two additional forces influencing both the result and interpretation of the data. Both of these influential factors are found in McManus' life cycle theory. The first fact is on the issue of age. One cannot communicate the findings of the data without consideration of age. Recall that the essential fact of lifecycle theory is that age positively correlates to political interest and engagement. No conclusive findings were yielded on the topic of political engagement but there is something to be said about age. In this research, it was impossible to segregate the age variable from that of generation. And so, in the attempt to make a purely generational argument, age had to be considered because the tables distinguished generations by age. The other variable that came to play in the interpretation of each table was the other aspect of the life cycle theory, interest. In one way or another, the findings in each of the datasets were explained through a self-interest paradigm. For example, on the question of job security, each of the explanations provided were essentially based upon what was in the best interest of cohort. While it a pure observation of the data may suggest that Howe and Strauss' generation theory stands alone as the strongest theory to explain the research, when one begins to interpret the data, McManus' life cycle theory complements the narrative. This paper therefore resolves that the three variables; age, interest, and generation are inextricably linked. The data further yields that on economic issues, the older generations; Gen Xers, Boomers, and Silents are more optimistic than the Millennials. Each of the generations appear to be more passionate about issues that they perceive to directly and perhaps immediately affect their cohorts. Each of the generations including the Millennials appear to have a strong sense of which issue affect them the most. The issues which are perceived as having a negative impact presented higher marks perhaps as an expression of passion from that particular cohort.

It would be to the benefit of this study and others in the field for future researchers to conduct univariate research on the variables, age, generation (clearly defined), and interest. Such a study might shine some light upon the question if the three variables can in fact be separated so as to conduct individual studies upon them. The paper also invites future research involving other issue choices in order to test whether or not the result will be identical to the findings of this paper in regard to the relationships of generation, age, and interest. Such research will add to the current scholarship, and further enrich the understanding of the role in which generation, age, and

interest plays in political and civil action.

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# Qualified for Power? On Epistemology in Voting

Sofia Wiman

Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden  
Email: [wimanso@gmail.com](mailto:wimanso@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Equal distribution of suffrage is given a nearly “quasi-religious” status by democrats. However, the right to vote rests on a presumption of capacity, and knowledge and competence therefore are important features of democratic arrangements. Democratic theory often assumes that, in order for (representative) democracy to work properly, the average citizen should be interested in, and pay attention to, politics. In reality, however, only a minority of citizens live up to these standards. This paper examines whether demands of uncontroversial knowledge, that is, knowledge about what it means to vote, can be demanded of voters in order for them to be allowed to vote. It is concluded that, for reasons of justice and “issues of mutual concern”, such demands can be raised regarding such uncontroversial knowledge (but perhaps not for knowledge more controversial in kind).

## Keywords

Democracy, Voting, Knowledge, Ignorance, Policies

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## 1. Introduction

In the modern, Western world equal distribution of suffrage is given a nearly “quasi-religious” status by democrats. However, as Frédéric Bastiat argues, the right to vote rests on a presumption of capacity (see for example Caplan, 2007); an expectation that people’s aggregated views are at least better than a coin flip when it comes to the quality of political decisions (see Estlund, 2008: p. 6). This is to say that it is desirable to reach political decisions that are “true”, or at least in line with “the best available knowledge”. An outcome cannot be perceived

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\*Corresponding author.

as acceptable *only* because it is produced by democratic procedures,<sup>1</sup> since lack of “epistemic cues” may lead to decisions based on habit and narrow prejudices instead of rationally reflected upon principles (see for example Brennan, 2011a; Caplan, 2007. See also Lau & Redlawsk, 1997). Knowledge and competence therefore are important features of democratic arrangements, and democratic theory often assume that, in order for (representative) democracy to work properly, the average citizen should be interested in, and pay attention to, politics. Such interest and attention, it is assumed, allow for political decisions on behalf of the voters (e.g. a vote) that are rationally considered and that properly reflect voters’ self-interest and the common good (see Lau & Redlawsk, 1997: p. 585). Jason Brennan argues that, since political decisions are imposed upon citizens, they “*must be made by reasonable and competent people in a reasonable and competent way*” (Brennan, 2011b: p. 701). In reality, however, only a minority of citizens live up to these standards (see for example Brennan, 2011a; Caplan, 2007. See also Lau & Redlawsk, 1997)—a great amount of empirical surveys show that citizens often do not know about party differences, what the representatives they vote for stand for, or what they have done or wish to undertake in office (see for example Arnold, 2012: p. 796). Moreover, as I experienced during my work as election supervisor in both the election for the European parliament and the Swedish general election of 2014, many people do not comprehend the voting process *per se*—the most frequently asked question among all ages of voters was: “How do I do this?” Furthermore, there were numerous misconceptions on how many ballots should be cast, and even on the difference between voting for parliamentary politics and voting for municipality politics. I estimated that only about one out of ten knew the proper procedure without having to ask.<sup>2</sup>

If one believes that an attentive and somewhat knowledgeable public that makes (epistemically) “correct” decisions is necessary for an *optimal* function of representative democracy, then we stand before a democratic dilemma—there seems to be an in-built tension between the value of good-quality political decisions, and the right to vote (in a non-epistemic way). This, in turn, raises questions of sources of reason and which claims to authority ought to be normatively justified. The overarching aim of this paper is to normatively examine whether some practical and theoretical knowledge (i.e., epistemic knowledge) about (i) the voting process and (ii) the political system can be demanded of voters in order to be allowed to vote. In short, should there be some degree of epistemic qualifications for holding political power in the form of casting a vote? This paper will proceed as follows: Section 3, firstly, discusses the value of the right to vote. Section 4 thereafter discusses the epistemic dimensions of voting, and Section 5 lastly, concludes and comments. Before embarking on this quest, however, a discussion on what kind of knowledge this paper deals with is warranted.

## 2. Uncontroversial Knowledge

The discussion on the role of knowledge in politics is of course not novel; it goes back at least to Plato who, as well known, claimed the philosopher’s right to supreme power in an ideal state (see for example Arendt, 1990: pp. 76–78) and voter knowledge is often a significant part of democratic theory today. However, contemporary debates on political knowledge are either too allowing, almost to the point of “anything goes”, or too demanding, almost to the point of impossible to meet. The too allowing part is here represented by Richard Lau and David Redlawsk, who, in short, define “correct” (knowledgeable) voting as occurring when a voter’s preferences correlate with those of his or her selected candidate (see Lau & Redlawsk, 1997: p. 586. See also Lau, Andersen, & Redlawsk, 2008). This has little to do with knowledge about the voting process and the political system, and, furthermore, a “knowledgeable” decision defined as above can be completely random—it may look as if a voter rationally considered her preferences and those of her selected candidate, while the resulting decision, in fact, depends on “dumb luck”.

The too demanding part, in turn, is here represented by Jason Brennan who argues that we, as voters, have a moral obligation not to vote morally or epistemically “bad” (i.e., “incorrect”). Unlike Lau and Redlawsk, Brennan claims that a voter could, and should, be blamed for “voting the right way, but for the wrong reasons”. According to Brennan, not only the resulting outcome, but also whether the method used to arrive at a decision is reliable has significance (Brennan, 2011a: pp. 68, 79–80. See also Brennan, 2011b; Brennan, 2009). What is needed, Brennan claims, is not being selective in information gathering *per se*, but rather knowing *how* to know.

<sup>1</sup>The term “acceptable” may of course raise questions of several kinds (“acceptable to whom”? “Acceptable in what sense?” etc.). These questions will be addressed later on in this paper, but for the time being it suffices to invoke for example the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as a framework within which an outcome of democratic procedure needs to be “acceptable”.

<sup>2</sup>To be noted, this is not an observation based on scientific scrutiny and evidence, but with some thousand voters a day for three weeks, at least it is an indication of a general lack of “know-how” regarding the voting procedure and awareness of the political system.

If information is not processed in an open-minded and reliable way, it is of no use. In order to vote “correctly” (or, in Brennan’s word “justified”), a voter has to look for evidence that contradicts her beliefs, and change her mind if the evidence calls for it. She must learn from her mistakes, take disagreement seriously, accept criticism, and regularly scrutinize her cognitive biases (Brennan, 2011a: pp. 179-184. See also Brennan, 2009).

The knowledge I wish to discuss in this paper constitutes a kind of “middle way” between these two theories. It puts somewhat higher demands on the epistemic, but uncontroversial, knowledge of the voting process and the political system than do Lau and Redlawsk, but it puts lower demands on “moral knowledge” than does Brennan. The core of this “middle way” is that what is at stake is knowledge about what it *means* to vote. This does not imply knowledge about exactly which policies will produce which consequences, which ethical view is the best, which the “correct” conception of justice is, and so on, but knowledge to the extent that voters understand *that* voting do have consequences regarding “issues of mutual concern”, and that those consequences may be unjust. This, thus, is not to argue, as does Brennan, that a voter must vote in a justified way; nor does it concern whether she votes “correctly” in the sense of having her preferences correlate with those of her selected candidate. Rather, this paper raises the question of whether it can be demanded of voters to know what it *means* to vote; whether she knows to what she contributes and the possible consequences of her doing so. That is, this paper raises modest questions of uncontroversial knowledge—basic factual knowledge of the voting process and the political system—which makes the “moral cost” of such eventual demands lower than demands for more controversial knowledge, such as what is the best ideology; what ethical view is “correct”, etc. There are, however, still costs even to modest knowledge-demands on voting because of the value intrinsic to the right to vote. This will be discussed further in the following section.

### 3. The Value of the Right to Vote

#### 3.1. Desiring the Right?

The single vote of an individual is unlikely to determine the outcome of any voting process, and undoubtedly there are other ways of expressing political opinions, ways that may be more direct and more decisive than one ballot among many. Yet people do vote and cherish their right to do so. Why is this, when an individual vote is practically meaningless? It has been said that if the right to vote is undermined, then all other rights, even the most basic, become illusory (see for example Cofsky, 1996: p. 353); the right to vote is founded in natural law and emerged as a consequence of the social compact and of popular sovereignty. In line with this latter notion, voting is conceived of as a form of personal expression, a necessity for the development of one’s personal character. This, in turn, makes one a good member of society (see Brennan, 2011a: p. 45). A good person thus carries out her role as a citizen, and voting becomes the highest form of political expression. Would not, then, deprivation of a citizen’s vote make her not only “much less a citizen”, but also much less a person *qua* person?

Brennan argues that if I do not know what I am talking about, or if I know that I am prone to bias and error in judgment, then I show proper respect to my fellow citizens only if I abstain from partaking in decision-making (i.e., voting). According to Brennan, abstention under such circumstances is not a loss of power—not something that makes me less of a person *qua* person (or citizen *qua* citizen). Rather, to refrain from voting is, in this case, to vote indirectly by saying something like: “I want the best policy, but I do not know what the best policy is. Since the rest of you do know that which I do not, I indirectly vote that my vote reflect your wisdom”. The persons who make the decision do not rule over me because I willingly refrain from doing so and instead leave it to others to decide for me (Brennan, 2011a: p. 96).

There are two major problems to this argument, one that has to do with the notion of willingly giving up one’s right to vote, and another that has to do with the notion, which Brennan himself notices, that “bad voters” often do not know, nor can they know, that they are, in fact, bad voters. The following sections will discuss these problems, starting with the first concern; that of willingly giving up one’s (right to) vote.

#### 3.2. Willing the Right?

Interestingly enough, to willingly giving up the right to vote actually was the case with some voters in the Swedish election of 2014. Being allowed to vote for parliament as well as municipality and county (or, in some cases, region), some voters chose not to exercise their right to cast all three ballots. The reasons given were lack of knowledge or interest in such policies, and some voters refrained because they did not know they were allowed to cast three ballots. When the latter was the case, when informed about their right to cast all ballots, about one



third of voters decided to cast a ballot for the election they did not know they were allowed to vote in, even when still expressing their ignorance about, say, municipality policies. Most commonly, voters who chose not to cast all three votes chose not to vote for municipality or county policies, but some actually refrained from their parliamentary vote. However, this behavior was relatively rare, and even though some voters willingly refrained from casting one or two ballots, they still did cast one or two votes for the remaining election(s), presumably finding themselves sufficiently knowledgeable to do so.

As Michael Tooley claims in his essay *A Defense of Abortion and Infanticide*, there is a conceptual connection between i) the rights an individual can have and the circumstances under which they can be violated, and ii) the actualization of the corresponding desires. According to Tooley, violation of rights involves frustrating the corresponding desire. Consider the following example: Jane owns a car. To be under the obligation not to steal the car is not, Tooley claims, unconditional. Instead, it depends in part upon the existence of Jane's corresponding desire. If she does not care whether her car is taken, then her rights would not be violated if her car was in fact taken<sup>3</sup> (Tooley's essay appears in Feinberg (ed.), 1973: pp. 51-91). This line of reasoning can be transferred to having the right to vote—if someone does not care about her right to vote, depriving her of that right would not constitute a violation of said right. Or, vice versa, according to this logic, someone who does care about her right to vote could not be deprived of this right without also having her right violated. Brennan's argument to a great extent hinges on the assumption that voters willingly and freely not exercising their right to vote. This brings us to the second concern of his argument: that "bad voters" often do not know, nor can they know, that they are bad voters. Rather, such voters will often believe themselves to be informed and responsible (Brennan, 2011a). If a voter has a duty not to engage in collectively harmful activities, as Brennan claims, how could she be supposed to abstain if she does not know she is obligated to do so? One way out of this dilemma is to tell bad voters that they are, in fact, bad voters, thereby demanding of them to abstain from voting (see Caplan, 2007; Brennan, 2011b). In such a case, where someone does not measure up to the epistemic (and, in Brennan's theory, moral) demands that allows her to vote but who still desires to do so, her being deprived of this right must be justified some other way. Whether, and, if so, how, an individual should weigh her desires (e.g., should she desire the right to good-quality political decisions more than she should desire her individual right to vote if and when those desire contradict) might of course provide a "moral key", but it is not an enterprise on which I wish to embark at the moment. Instead, the following will discuss whether restrictions to the right to vote can be justified due to lack of knowledge (as defined in Section 2), given the plausible notion that most citizen do care about this right, for whatever reason. Let us, then, turn to the epistemic dimension of voting, starting with knowledge about the process of voting *per se*.

## 4. The Epistemic Dimension of Politics

### 4.1. An Unfair Process

If there are election supervisors present at the polls, who can quickly, easily and pedagogically<sup>4</sup> tell unknowing voters how voting is done, then what is the problem with insufficient knowledge on the voting procedure? Voting is, simply put, "*a conventional means of expressing one's political preferences that can directly influence government in ways determined by the existing electoral process*" (Nathan, 2009: p. 277, my underlining). By voting, one participates in the electoral process on its own terms, and these terms can be seriously unfair. The consequences (i.e., outcomes) of voting are largely determined by the nature of the electoral process and the wider context in which this process is embedded. Unfairness is, by definition, built into the process to smaller or larger degrees, e.g., citizens are unevenly represented; the access to polls differ; voting districts are gerrymandered; or some citizens are barred from voting. Such unfair conditions of course differ between countries, but the point is that if there are no reasonable prospects of altering unfair electoral conditions by voting, or if voting rather perpetuates the unfair conditions of the electoral system, then these are important features of the know-how of voting.

<sup>3</sup>To be noted, one can think of cases where one does not care about her right to something although she "should" care about it, were circumstances ideal (she had not been indoctrinated not to care; she had higher self-esteem; she was not "unhealthily altruistic" etc.). This is an interesting argument, but I will here, for the sake of argument, assume that the desire of a right is based on caring for said right under ideal conditions.

<sup>4</sup>Of course, this may not be case—in the Swedish case, which I know best and therefore refer to here, election supervisors are not required to have in-depth knowledge on neither politics nor the voting system, even though they have to undergo a one day education. This may still say nothing on their ability to "quickly, easily, and pedagogically" transfer this information to others. That said, the one-day education is thought to provide the basic knowledge needed, and, at least in theory, election supervisors should be able to answer questions on "how to" regarding the voting procedure.

When not knowing what one does, or in what context one does it—in essence, what it *means* to vote—the vast majority of voters assume that the voting process is sufficiently fair. As a consequence, they vote for policies that will maintain the in-built, unfair status quo of the electoral system (see for example [Nathan, 2009: pp. 279-280](#)), thus (unintentionally) fomenting a system that is unjust and contravenes issues of mutual concern.

Widespread voter participation is often taken to indicate a significant degree of satisfaction with the electoral process, and some scholars suggest reductions of the minimal voting age in order to overcome mistrust and political alienation among the young. Being able to vote, it has been argued, would make young people more content with the workings of democracy and the results of politics (see for example [Hinrichs, 2002: p. 41](#)). This, however, may be an empirical falsity—during my work as election supervisor, I encountered the seriously meant question: “Which party do I vote for when I do not want party politics?” on more than one occasion. Some degree of voters also expressed severe mistrust in the fairness of the electoral process *per se*—not the inherent unfairness of the kind mentioned above, but rather those voters feared that they would be connected to a vote for a specific party, or they believed that “undesirable” votes would be simply thrown away when counted. Still others expressed deep mistrust with the democratic system altogether, and thereby justified their vote for, say, an extreme right wing party. Even though such votes were often meant as voicing unhappy feelings about the political system or political policies,<sup>5</sup> they nevertheless counted in overall voter turnout. As Hanna Nathan observes, those looking at voter participation statistics have no means of subtracting those who wish to express dissatisfaction from those who are in fact satisfied with the electoral process ([Nathan, 2009: p. 282](#)).

Those who view the process as sufficiently fair often do interpret their participation in ways that support this view. Of course, there may also be those who actually want to perpetuate inherent unfairness of the electoral system—the US Republican party, as one example, makes no secret of their opposing restoration votes for felons. Moreover, elections in themselves suggest that the choice one faces is a choice worth making, which might well detract or outweigh worries about unfairness. This, in turn, raises the question of how we, as an electorate, can be permitted, let alone whether it can be demanded of us, not to take the opportunity to influence electoral outcomes. The answer is that it depends. Not only is it determined by the kind of unfairness built in to the voting system, it also depends on what the choices in the election are about. That elderly people have trouble getting to the polls may, for example, be considered unfair, but still less unfair than, say, a system in which districts are gerrymandered so as to give Afro-Americans less influence. If voting perpetuates the former unfairness, this may be outweighed by the choices of an election, even if these choices are in no way extraordinary. In order for the latter unfairness to be outweighed by the choices of an election, the choices must be of a higher dignity—suppose for example that an election poses the threat of a particularly horrid candidate being elected. In that case, the need to prevent such a candidate from coming to power might outweigh the unfairness of gerrymandering to the disadvantage of African-Americans (see for example [Nathan, 2009: pp. 281, 282](#)). This is to say that under circumstances where the unfairness of the voting system are great, and the choices of the election are not extraordinary, it is warranted that we, the electorate, are demanded not to influence electoral outcomes but that we should avoid perpetuating unfairness built in to the voting system. This places some demands on knowledge on the voting process. Leaving aside the most basic practicalities, what voters should know is the bigger context in which the voting system is embedded, a context in which circumstances of unfairness and dignity of election choices may be altered from time to time, in essence, what it means to vote under the circumstances of one’s voting system. Is this knowledge, then, reasonable to demand from citizens in order to be allowed to vote?

Even though the level of knowledge here requested may seem daunting, it is actually not very hard to acquire. Information on how voting districts are divided, where election stations are located, whether one must register to vote, who is not allowed to vote (e.g., felonies and children) etc. is easily accessible in modern democracies. Likewise, come election time, information about candidates and parties abound. It is not very time consuming, nor does it require high levels of cognitive skill to learn the basics of one’s voting system and the broader context in which it is embedded. The societal costs of not knowing are higher than the personal cost of acquiring this basic information, and therefore it is plausible to require a basic degree of knowledge, as defined in Section 2, of one’s voting system in order to be able to vote. To be noted, though, as discussed in Section 2, this does not say anything on *how* a voter should (morally) vote. She might thus be, for example, a racist, but if she satisfies the “factual”

<sup>5</sup>To be noted, Sweden do employ free and secret elections, but that does not mean that voters are not allowed to express and explain their opinions to election supervisors. The latter are not allowed to engage in discussion or to have opinions on voters’ views—that would be a felony—but they often have to handle the delicate situation of someone expressing, defending, and justifying his or her view, more or less publicly.

knowledge here discussed, she also satisfies the here discussed demands for being allowed to vote. Whether this is too small a demand has been discussed elsewhere (see e.g., Brennan, 2009, 2011a, 2011b).

## 4.2. Acting Like a Child?

Although many countries still do base disenfranchisement on citizenship (e.g., only Swedish citizens are allowed to vote for the Swedish parliament) as well as desert (e.g. criminals are not allowed to vote in the US) and gender (e.g. women are excluded in Saudi-Arabia, for example), the only legitimate and accepted reason to exclude anyone from suffrage in contemporary democracies is that of competence (see for example Olsson, 2008: pp. 59-60). The case of children clearly illuminates this. The disenfranchisement of non-adults is part of almost all democratic voting arrangements (see for example Olsson, 2008), and, as Francis Schrag notices, any argument defending the participation of *all* citizens must explain the basis on which some persons are excluded (Schrag, 2004: p. 373). Children's disenfranchisement is justified by the strong, almost self-evident assumption that they lack the appropriate political knowledge and competence to vote; a strong epistemic criterion. Only mature people can make reasoned choices, and since children are not sufficiently independent-minded, they are easily influenced by their parents or other adults in their surroundings, such as teachers or supervisors. Also, being occupied with forming their own identity, children are thought to lack interest in politics, and not having the informed will required to responsibly partake in elections (see Hinrichs, 2002: p. 41). Instead, children are considered impressionable, impulsive, and unreasonable. Because of their being unreasonable (see Schrag, 2004: p. 371), and because only reasonable arguments merit consideration, the arguments of children should not influence public policy (see Estlund, 2008: pp. 60-61, 51-54; see also Schrag, 2004: p. 370).

However, the line between childhood and adulthood is not self-evident (nor is, of course, the line between serious mental illness and lighter forms, mental illness being a reason of exclusion from suffrage in some democracies). Minimum voting age is more an attempt to try to differentiate between competence and incompetence than a clear distinction between childhood and adulthood. Therefore, it has not so much to do with age *per se*, but rather the ability to think and reason in a rational, logical, and consequential way. Being a child is not in itself reason enough to withhold the rights of democratic participation. The incapacity to comprehend one's own personal and interpersonal rights, on the other hand, is. The exclusion of children, therefore, are justified by what they do not *know*, not by what they do not *are* (see Brooks, 2003: 99, 428-429). Children "*do not understand what is at issue in debates about justice and the decisions that must be based on them*". Since they lack the ability to reflect on which ideas of justice are likely to reflect their personal and interpersonal interests, i.e., what it means to vote, their status is not undermined by exclusion from collective decision-making (see Christiano, 2001: p. 207; Quotation p. 207). In short, children's exclusion from suffrage rests on the paternalistic assumption that since they do not know what is in theirs, or others, best interests, they, and others, are better off if children are submitted to the decisions of those who do. Democracy must retain a certain basic sense of rationality, and the competence argument maintains that the part of demos that unquestionably has no understanding of politics must be excluded from suffrage in order for democracy to work properly (see Olsson, 2008: pp. 59, 62).

This "lacking in understanding" part of demos is commonly translated to mean children (and sometimes the mentally disabled), and the claim that the same paternalistic measures should apply also to (less knowledgeable) adult citizens is often dismissed as faulting in respect. But why should the risk of unjust or harmful policies trigger paternalistic measures when it comes to children and not to ignorant and incompetent adults? If an action prevents harm and/or promotes benefit, then that is normally a valid reason for that action, and, as Kalle Grill observes, it does not take tremendous imperfections in knowledge to make for decisions that are harmful to the self and to others (Grill, 2010: pp. 10, 14-15), i.e., decisions that contravene issues of mutual concern. Consider for example John Locke, who likened the "unfinished man" to a child, driven by nothing but her passions, which makes her not only purely self-interested, but also outright dangerous. The "finished" person, on the other hand, is morally mature and has a sense of social responsibility; she seeks the well-being of all (see for example Held, 2005: p. 107). If man lacks the ability of self-reflection, she is "(...) *no good judge in [her] own case*" (Fukuyama, 2006: p. 172), i.e., unreasonable. While this may seem as a quite outdated, 18<sup>th</sup> century idea, Brennan claims that a voter who vote on the basis of peer pressure and emotional impulses rather than on good reasons thereby unjustifiably defer to others (see Brennan, 2011a: pp. 97-98)<sup>6</sup> in the same way as children are supposed to do, were they allowed to vote. An individual is more rational vis-à-vis political policies when she sufficiently grasps

<sup>6</sup>Note though that Brennan does not refer to children in this section of his book.

the complexity and nuance of relevant circumstances whereas shortcuts, on the other hand, tend to make uninformed voters vulnerable to emotional, or even infantile, appeals, or to turn to simplistic stereotypes (see for example [Hoffman, 1998: pp. 461-464](#)). Forming beliefs in this manner imperils both the personal and interpersonal interests of a voter in the sense of potentially leading to policies that contravene issues of mutual concern and thus hinder government from representing the will of the people in any meaningful way. Therefore, what is at stake here is not imposing alien values and preferences on people (neither children nor less knowledgeable adults). If restrictions, such as knowledge demands for voting, can be justified by appeal to a person's own values and preferences, then it does not subject her to the will of others (see [Grill, 2010: pp. 9-15](#) for a discussion on paternalism and "personal good reasons"), and it is plausible to argue that the overarching values and preferences of a person are those of her well-being (and the well-being of those she loves, even though possibly not the well-being of *all* citizens if that would infringe on her own well-being). It is an approach aimed at protecting the future selves and others from shortsighted and foolish decisions made by earlier selves and others. Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between exclusion from suffrage and a certain degree of demands for competence. While exclusion is permanent, demands of competence does not equal exclusion for all time to come.<sup>7</sup> Since it is unlikely that some kind of test would accurately and once and for all determine whether an individual has reached a sufficient level of competence, it can only be viewed as a tool to track down and show real differences between competence and incompetence. It need not, as Estlund fears, be a formal and permanent subjection to the rule of others, *provided that there be opportunities for retrial*, both of citizen's comparative results, and of the criteria used for such comparisons. On the basis of this, if a "childlike" voter (unintentionally) foment injustice in, and by, the political system, thus convening issues of mutual concern, this would seemingly justify putting demands on her knowledge, as defined in Section 2, in order to be allowed to vote. However, Estlund raises an important concern of what he calls "invidious comparisons"—unfair and possibly offensive comparisons of citizen's political knowledge. This is the topic of the following section.

### 4.3. Unfair Comparisons?

By affording continuous opportunities for revision, democracy seems to diminish the epistemic burden on voters. If it is assumed that voters, over time, acquire more knowledge on important political matters, it can also be assumed that opportunities for revision can produce better-quality (although perhaps not "best-quality") political decisions (see [Fuesrstein, 2008: pp. 86-87](#)). This speaks in favour of voters' competence of acquiring political knowledge over time, and it is highly plausible that most (adult) citizens *could* meet the epistemic criteria defined in Section 2 if they put in the effort. The better real differences between competence and incompetence can be tracked down and shown, the less objectionable such divisions would be (at least in the abstract). This, of course, is not easily done. Even if true criteria of competence were to be formulated, it cannot be reasonably expected that this truth would be agreed upon by all qualified points of view—points of view are those that are not necessarily *True* in a strong sense, but that still are reasonable to hold in John Rawls's sense of the word (see [Estlund, 2008](#); see also [Brennan, 2011b](#)). To put epistemic demands on suffrage could have significant effects by invoking what Estlund calls "invidious comparisons"—unfair comparisons of citizens' political knowledge. To know, and publicly justify, which competence criteria to rely on cannot easily be done since it cannot be expected that all qualified points of view would agree on where to draw the line between competence and incompetence. No one is so obviously better at political matters that not some qualified point of view can deny it. To put competence demands on the voting population would thus rest on a basis not acceptable to all qualified points of view, and hence Estlund claims that it is unfair to use competence as a criterion for assigning political power ([Estlund, 2008: pp. 44-49, 51-52, 261-262](#)).

Not all comparisons among citizens are to be disqualified, which Sections 4.1 and 4.2 above have established—that children are excluded is not subjected to (much) controversy, at least not outside the academic world. And even this is not the end of the story. There is a further dimension to the epistemics of voting, one that to a high degree concerns "knowing the knowers": do we really want to endorse the practice of open elections to positions of power and influence if the recognition of some form of expertise is problematic? Knowing what implications for policy decisions a constituency's interests and opinions have require some form of political competence (see for example [Jay, 2009: p. 35](#)), as do the satisfaction of needs and protection of interests (see for example [Krouse, 1982: p. 45](#)). We do, for example, want a foreign minister who knows about foreign policy, and a minister of

<sup>7</sup>Nor, of course, do childhood—once coming of age—when you are no longer considered a child—you are allowed to vote. However, as long as you are under the age-threshold, you are not allowed to vote, regardless of your level of knowledge. Here, therefore, the exclusion of children is seen as more permanent than demands for competence.

finances who knows about (national) finances. Otherwise, the resulting policies could contravene issues of mutual concern. Knowledge among voters is important in this sense, so they are able to contribute to rational control of public policy. Ignorance, on the other hand, may potentially open the door for policies that err, in the sense of contravening “issues of mutual concern” (see for example Somin, 2004: pp. 1-3). A voter who does not comprehend that her voting does have consequences, and that those consequences may prove unjust, but who still holds qualified points of view, may (unintentionally) foment injustices in, and by, the political system. Remember the discussion in Section 4.1—if the system is significantly unjust, or if a candidate is specifically horrid, the consequences of not knowing what one does may be disastrous. As Christopher Jay observes, there is an important distinction to be made between not according some qualified, but opposed, point of view meaningful input into the decision-making process, on the one hand, and to punish someone for having such a point of view, on the other (see Jay, 2009: pp. 34-35, 37). While the latter cannot be part of any democratic arrangement, the former is a necessary condition if democracy is to function at all.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined whether knowledge in the form of knowing what it *means* to vote—that voting has consequences, and that those consequences may be unjust—can be demanded of voters in order to be allowed to vote. The above sections have established that such knowledge can be demanded, otherwise voters may unintentionally contribute to the keeping of an unjust and harmful system. Furthermore, comparisons of the knowledge of the uncontroversial kind here discussed are not to be disqualified (since they do not contradict issues of mutual concern). Thus, the answer to the question “Can some practical and theoretical knowledge be demanded of voters in order to be allowed to vote?” is yes. What this paper has not, on the other hand, discussed, is whether this is merely a necessary condition for good- (or at least better-) quality of political decisions, i.e., whether there should be epistemological and moral demands more controversial in kind. As David Estlund suggests, such demands would surely lead to better consequences and more justice, but while comparisons of uncontroversial knowledge are not to be disqualified, I strongly believe that comparisons of knowledge more controversial in kind (moral, religious, philosophical, and so on) would fall short on Estlund’s acceptability criterion. This tension gives incentives to further elaborate on the ideas on what role different theories of knowledge put forward by scholars (e.g. Brennan, 2011; Caplan, 2007) should play since this, in turn, gives a deep imperative to rethink the concept of representative democracy as a whole. The right to vote, and with it the right of being regarded as equals in voting, are cherished features for any Western democrat. Still, the findings of this paper give reasons to consider the, maybe provocative, idea that voting (and voting equality) is not the foremost important right in a political system that is to concern itself with the common good. Indeed, voting may be contra-productive to representative democracy,<sup>8</sup> if we by “representative democracy” mean a rational system that by definition make decisions that deals with “issues of mutual concern”. When thinking about the role of knowledge in voting, the way in which representative democracy is conceptualized may well need rethinking as well. Theories on the role of knowledge—and what kind of knowledge—may be helpful in this task—to redefine what constitutes really representative democracy and good governance.

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