

Exploring Non-formal Political Education Programme for Addressing Political Apathy and Irrational Voting Behaviour in Nigeria's 4th Republic.

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Abstract. Democracy is under serious threats in a political system with significant level of political apathy and irrational voting behaviour. The formal political education focused curriculum in the school system is addressing this challenge. However, the illiterate population outside the school system constitutes the greater majority among Nigerian voters. This paper explores and proposes non-formal political education agencies and platforms as well as contents for addressing rising trend of political apathy and irrational voting behaviour among Nigerian voters. Five major interrelated themes are proposed for packaging political education messages in domesticated formats using the non-formal political education platforms revolving around the kingship of voters and subservience of elected politicians as well as appointees to the expressed wishes of voters in their political manifestoes.

1. Introduction

Democracy thrives on popular political participation by all eligible adults or at least a greater majority of them. Athenian or direct democracy as practices in the ancient Greek city States of Athens and Sparta was actually the government of the people by the people. Representative democracy in contemporary modern society requires all eligible electorate to elect their representatives into elective positions in government. Elections in Nigeria have revealed significant variations in the number of eligible voters and the actual voters in general

elections in Nigeria since 1999. Indeed, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2006) observed that voters' turnout in Nigeria general elections up till 2011 has always been below 40% of the general registered voters. In the same vein, the 2015 Presidential election recorded 43.65% (or 29,432,083) voters' turnout. This amounts to 32.11% of the Voting Age Population of Nigerian Voters (91,669,056). These data show high level of voter apathy or political apathy among Nigerian electorate. The implication of low voters' turnout is that successive regimes of government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are minority government. This contradicts the popular democratic requirements that government should be formed by majority which will allow the minority to have their say with all rights guaranteed.

Another major index of democratic government is voting behaviour. The democratically governed societies are expected to move closer or achieve the civic culture and away from the subject or parochial political culture in terms of voting behaviour (Almond and Verba, 1963). Under the civic culture, the voters are expected to manifest greater degree of rational voting behaviour by voting according to issue orientation, candidate orientation and party identification. This is contrary to voting according to religious, ethnic/tribal, monetary inducement and other sentiments or primordial considerations which are becoming very significant factors in Nigerian voting behaviour

(Powell,1992; Roberts, 2009; Vergne, 2009; Falade, 2014; Amdi, 2014 and Afolabi, 2015).

Consequently, the prevalence of high degree of general political apathy and more specifically, voter apathy as well as irrational voting behaviour among Nigerian voters after 16 years of uninterrupted democratic governance and 25 year of staggered democratic governance are becoming serious concerns requiring urgent solution. Fortunately, Social Studies, Civic Education and other Citizenship-Education related subjects have been introduced into the school curriculum at all levels to solve this problem among educated and eligible voters in the Nigerian School System. Unfortunately, a larger proportion of illiterate Nigerians within and above school age are yet to be positively socialized and reoriented in such a way as to address the problems of political apathy and irrational voting behaviour. Therefore, this paper is an exploration and proposition of a political education agenda, using counter-socialization strategy to address political apathy and irrational voting behaviour among illiterate Nigerians who constitute a greater proportion of Nigerian voters for the purpose of promoting sustainable democratic culture and governance.

2. Political Participation and Apathy

In democracy, there are different levels of political participation which enables the political system to function effectively. These include organizational activism, organizational contribution, opinion leadership, voting and non-voting (Okunloye, 1990). Organizational activism involve those holding different positions in party hierarchy or bureaucracy and nominated to fly party flag(s) in elective position

or ultimately elected or appointed into political offices in an elected regime of government. The organizational contributing level involves those supporters, financiers and individuals or groups that ensure the success of the parties in polls within and outside government. The opinion leadership level involve charismatic and other influential individuals who sometimes double as organizational contributors playing significant leadership role in political party or parties to determine the survival and performance of parties in and out of government.

At the voting level, are party and non-party members who are registered in their respective constituencies and usually vote in general elections. At the non-voting level, politically articulate individuals and groups who are mainly below the voting age are engaged in partisan politics except voting, this group on attainment of voting age, graduate into higher levels of political participation. The citizens below the non-voting level of political participation are regarded as apoliticals. The apoliticals manifest withdrawal syndrome from politics or partisan politics. Other voting and non-voting population that manifest such attitude of withdrawal or indifference to politics or partisan politics are said to be manifesting political apathy. Specifically, registered voters who refuse to vote in elections are said to be manifesting voter apathy (Powell, 1992). The trend of voter apathy has been associated with the Nigerian voters from 1979 – 2015 general elections (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2006). This trend is observable in Table 1 showing Presidential election results in Nigeria (1979 – 2015).

Table 1: Presidential Election Results in Nigeria and Voters' Turnout (1979-2015)

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting Age Population	Population	Invalid Votes
2015	43.65%	29, 432, 083	67, 422, 005	32.11%	91, 669, 056	181, 562, 056	2.85%
2011	53.68%	39, 469, 484	73, 528, 040	48.32%	81, 691, 751	155, 215, 573	3.19%
2007	57.49%	35, 397, 517	61, 567, 036	49.85%	71, 004, 507	131, 859, 731	
2003	69.08%	42, 018, 735	60, 823, 022	65.33%	64, 319, 246	129, 934, 911	6.00%
1999	52.26%	30, 280, 052	57, 938, 945	57.36%	52, 792, 781	108, 258, 359	1.40%
1993		14, 039, 486		27.79%	50, 526, 720	105, 264, 000	
1979	35.25%	17, 098, 267	48, 499, 091	44.83%	38, 142, 090	77, 841, 000	2.00%

Source: International IDEA: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=NIG>

From the available data in Nigerian Presidential elections from 1979 – 2015 as shown in Table 1, Nigerian voters displayed the highest level of voter apathy in 1979 when only 35.25% of the registered voters voted in presidential election. A comparative analysis of voters' turnout against the Voting Age Population (VAP) for 1979 showed a lower level of apathy as VAP turnout in general election appreciated to 44.83% of VAP. The observable level of voters' turnout and inferred level of voter apathy are understandable because 1979 marks the return of Nigeria to civil democratic rule after 13 years of military rule which nurtured subject political culture.

However, in 2015, contrary to expectations, after 16 years of democratic rule, the voters' turnout stood at 43.65%. Much more, of greater concern, however, was the VAP turnout which dropped to 32.11%. Meaning an absolute majority of VAP amounting to 67.8% did not vote for President Buhari or any other Presidential candidate in the 2015 Presidential election. Therefore, this observable level of voter apathy is most worrisome as it implies a minority of Nigerian voters voted for all the presidential candidates including the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This scenario is contrary to major democratic norms of forming government by the majority. The observed voter apathy has been attributed to several factors, including voter's perception of election results as predetermined, fear of violence, weak democratic political institutions, eroded voters' confidence in politicians, unfulfilled electoral

promises/manifestoes, low democratic political culture, complexity and rigour of voting procedure, shift of election dates, ease of access to polling centres, among others (Dudley, 1982; Powell, 1992; Roberts, 2009; Vergne, 2009; Falade, 2014; Amdi, 2014; Afolabi, 2015; Mahmud, 2015; Mudasiru, 2015 and Okunloye, 2017).

3. Voting Behaviour

Voters vote for candidates, parties and manifestoes of their choice in general elections are determined by a wide range of factors. These include ideology leaning, level of education, racial/ethnic/tribal affiliations, geo-political affiliations, party identification, issue orientation and candidate reorientation (Ranney, 1963; Dudley, 1982; Okunloye, 1990; Falade, 2014; Afolabi, 2015; Mahmud, 2015 and Mudasiru, 2015). These factors are collectively known as voting behaviour intervening variables (Bone and Raanney, 1963 and Okunloye, 1990).

Candidate orientation refers to voters' psychological attachment to a particular party or that which is traceable to or resembles their original party of choice. Issue orientation refers to voters' consideration or attitude to matters of the moment that have public policy implication and generated public discuss at the timing of general elections in a political system. Candidate orientation refers to voters' assessment of and attitude to the personality and propensity of candidates contesting election to satisfy their

expectations or solve problems that are common to groups of voters.

There is therefore a higher degree of rational voting behaviour when voters vote on the bases of party identification, candidate's orientation and issue orientation than when they vote according to party's and/or candidate's ability to be the 'highest bidder' by way of immediate gratification in cash or kind. Unfortunately, all Nigerian political parties are alleged to be involved in monetizing votes or giving packaged food and related materials during general elections and even intra-party elections. This less rational voting behaviour has a greater tendency of engendering the politics of zero-sum or winners-take all, corruption and bad governance, given the inordinate political bargaining and transactions between the politicians/parties and group of voters. The right of the group of voters involved in such political transaction has the unintended effect of mortgaging political sovereignty of the voters and political contractual duties of the elected Politian in government to serve the electorate during the elected term of office. These may actually be the cause of bad governance in democratically elected regimes of government in Nigeria and other democracies with high incidence of monetized voting transactions.

4. Non-formal Political Education Agencies and Platforms

The school curriculums at different levels of education are equipped to handle formal political education in classroom situations. The observable trend of political apathy and irrational voting behaviour among Nigerian voters at all levels are best handled by non-formal political education agencies and platforms outside the school system. The relevant agencies in this regard include the print and electronic media, using political awareness creation platforms in Newspapers, radio and television broadcasts and documentaries. Other agencies include Political Education Directorate of Electoral Commissions, National Orientation Agencies (NOA), Federal and State Ministry of Information as well as political socialization-focused Civil Societies through awareness

campaign, Town Hall meetings, Bill Boards, posters and domestication of voting procedure in local languages, sponsored debates and serialized Radio and Television drama, among others. These agencies have constitutionally recognized rules and platforms for non-formal and political education of the electorate in Nigeria.

5. Proposed Non-formal Political Education Contents and Strategy

Based on the identified trends and causes of political apathy and irrational voting behaviour, the proposed non-formal political education targeted at the illiterate Nigerian voters and apoliticals should focus on counter-socialization or re-socialization contents and strategies. According to Haralambos (2001), counter socialization or re-socialization is required for the reintegration of a group or people into a newly desired or aspired culture when the culture which they already imbibed will not suit their newly desired role in society. Therefore, the electorate who are already politically apathetic and engrossed with the 'buying' of votes should be counter-socialised into near ideal civic culture of active political participation and rational voting behaviour. The contents of this counter-socialization strategy should be developed around five major interrelated themes namely:

- (i) Kingship of voters in democracy;
- (ii) Making the elected to serve the voters during elected tenure of office;
- (iii) Using political weapons of control in the hands of the electorate on the elected or political appointee;
- (iv) Voting to reap long lasting reward for all, and
- (v) How not to sow the seed of servitude, mortgaged and hopeless future in general elections.

6. Effects of Political Apathy and Irrational Voting Behaviour

Democracy is unsustainable in an environment characterised by high level of political apathy and irrational voting behaviour. Both factors

undermine democracy and democratic governance in several ways. First, they have the tendency of imposing minority regimes of democratic government on the politically apathetic majority and predominantly irrational voters. Secondly, in the same vein, these have the tendency of affecting the result of general elections even to the extent of turning the expected losers to winners and vice versa in a general election (Faeren, 2015). When low voters turnout and monetized voters are capable of producing minority or unpopular candidates as winners in general elections.

Thirdly, both can erode the legitimacy of democratically elected regimes of government. Legitimacy of an elected regime of government is usually proportional to the margin of popular vote in favour of elected candidates and parties in general election. Hence, legitimacy is tacitly eroded when low turnout of voters is recorded in such elections.

Fourthly, both have the unintended effects of electing bad individuals and parties into government. According to George (2012), “Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote”. In other words, the silence or apathy of good voters is capable of making the few irrational voters who voted in elections to have their irrational candidates elected. Fifthly, both make reversal of bad policies by elected bad officials difficult if not impossible during the elected tenure of office. This is because the constitutionally provided mechanism of removing bad elected representatives in government before the expiration of the elected tenure known as impeachment or recall are very difficult to implement and sometimes impossible when legal technicalities and prolonged hearings or interlocutory injunctions are used by the litigants in the process.

Finally, both may lead voters and other concerned individuals who are desirous of changing previously elected individuals or parties by constitutional means to resort to violent and unconstitutional process of changing regimes of government. They may resort to political assassination, coup d’etat, etc.. as the

saying goes “he who makes peaceful change impossible makes violent change inevitable”.

7. Conclusion

The cost of operating democratic governance with rising politically apathetic voters and irrational voting behaviour is enormous and unbearable. The greater majority of Nigerian voters that are illiterates who are excluded from formal political education platforms need counter-socialization strategy and contents, this is obtainable through non-formal political education agencies and platforms.

8. Recommendations

The following measures are suggested for addressing political apathy and irrational voting behaviour. First, the non-formal political agencies and platforms should be adequately explored and used to reverse political apathy and irrational voting behaviour. Secondly, the five proposed interrelated themes should be used to package the counter-socialization messages to be channeled through the non-formal political education agencies and platforms. Thirdly, the non-formal political education agencies and platform or National Inter-agency Committee on Voter Education and Publicity (NICVEP) should improve collaboration among themselves on the use of their platforms to harmonize and positively reinforce their messages for greater efficacy. This may foster participant political culture and rational voting behaviour. It is hoped that these measures would promote sustainable democracy and good governance in Nigeria.

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