

Appraisal of the Values of Voter Education in Achieving Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Voter education is expected to enthrone sustainable social order in Nigeria's political scene. Voter apathy works against the principles of democracy. The values of voter education are delineated as follows: encouraging leadership discipline, control of political violence, exposure on the process of election, peace building and maintenance of democratic order. Sustainable democracy can be actualized through voter education in the following ways: extension of voter education, mass mobilization, values to shun violence, stemming corruption and national consciousness sensitization. The consequences of voter apathy are addressed as follows: absence of sustainable democracy, forced leadership, stabilizing illegitimate government, low political participation and political instability. Conclusion was drawn based on the ensuing discourses and it was recommended amongst others that voter education will encourage mass political participation and the maintenance of sustainable social order.

Keywords: Education, Nigeria, Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Democratic government is adopted by all nations of the world because the opinions, rights and decisions of the people are embraced to ensure social order in a polity. Credible election is one of the potential legitimate means of appointing political leaderships to man the affairs of nation states. Voter education has become paramount in developing nations as a means of maintaining sustainable democratic governance. Highlighting the need for voter education in order to maintain political stability in Nigeria, Mezieobi (2004) opined "Electoral campaigns which is a crucial aspect of electoral process in Nigeria, rather than focus issues and party programmes are characterized by calumny, hooliganism, arson, thuggery and gangsterism". Political violence, rigging of election, voter apathy amongst others do not ensure stable democratic operations of governments at the Federal, State and Local governments level in Nigeria.

According to Onyeansi (2016:100) "...democracy as a form of government...is quite pertinent in countries with multi-ethnic and multi-cultural composition". The essence of democratic governance is to build peaceful interaction amongst diverse culturally related

citizens in a polity. Voter education is meant to promote national consciousness, patriotism, unity and cooperation amongst all Nigerians irrespective of ethnic and religious divide.

This paper will address the following: conceptual clarifications, the values of voter education, how voter education can be utilized in achieving sustainable democracy in Nigeria and the consequences of voter apathy in Nigeria political scene.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

A truly democratic system of government is people oriented in the sense that citizens are primarily involved in electing their representatives. A democratic government is legitimate to the extent that elections are free and fair, represent the choice, needs and aspiration of the masses (Mezieobi, 2015).

Ogunna (2003) penned that principles of democracy such as the respect for rule of law, freedom of the press, human rights and equal treatment of persons are germane for guiding the conduct of the government and the governed in a democratic nation state. Nwanolue (2003) remarked that popular participation exist when the masses are effectively involved in governance. One of these ways is free contest of elections, freedom to vote and be voted for, this can only be realized through voter education. Sustainable democracy in the context of this paper, is the operation of democratic governance through legitimate procedures that ensures, peace, cooperation and respect of human rights. Sustainable democracy does not promote political violence, political crises and military overthrows as it is common with developing nations.

Voter education is primary in exposing the electorate on the essence of voting credible candidates...based on their qualifications and contributions to national development and are genuinely out to serve and protect the welfare, aspirations and interest of the voters (Mezieobi, 2015:112). Ogunna (2003) agree that ineffective voting means that popular decisions of the masses are not made. Voter education is advocated to sensitize the Nigeria citizens on how to maintain political stability through rightful conducts in elections, political activities and political participation.

THE VALUES OF VOTER EDUCATION

The values of voter education in the democratic operations of governance in Nigeria will be highlighted as follows:

- **Leadership Discipline:** Voter education is not meant for the electorates alone but essentially the leaders. Leadership is to be equipped with political education on how to manage state resources with fairness and the respect of the sanctity of human rights in the treatment of the citizens. Okafor (2010:24) stressed "Nigerian leaders usually struggle for power at all cost", the essence is to grab political power, not genuinely for service but to amass wealthy. Many states in Nigeria have not paid workers salaries since 2015 till date. This scenario works against the stabilization of sustainable democracy.
- **Control of Political Violence:** Rigging of elections, ballot snatching, killings during elections amongst others in Nigeria, is against the ethics and principles of true democracy. As rightly noted by Eboh (2005:129) "...social order is very important in the society, for the growth of the society. Where there is no social order in the society, the (political) society will be chaotic" voter education is essential in operating elections, electioneering campaigns and political activities legitimately. It is a means of controlling political violence in a civilized society.

- **Exposure on the Process of Election:** It is instructive that voters are meant to register comprehensively voters for popular conduct of national elections. Voters ought to be informed that Independent National Electoral Commission is statutorily meant to conduct election in Nigeria, they are to be informed that INEC as an electoral body is involved in voter education with a view to realizing sound democratic electoral process, by inculcating in the voters of acceptable conducts or voter behavior germane for realizing credible election in Nigeria (Mezieobi, 2015). This will brighten the conduct of election, because electorates are adequately socialized on the process of elections.
- **Peace Building:** Sufficient voter education is a credible means of building peace among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. However ethnic consciousness supercedes national consciousness in Nigeria. Ebirim and Edi (2014) tendered that political violence in Nigeria have their roots in intolerance and religious discrimination. In a secular state, religion should not be involved in national politics.
- **Maintenance of Democratic Order:** Democratic order can be realized maximally through voter education. Democratic operation in line with legitimate and legal process promotes unity, acceptance and cooperation of citizens in a country. Nigeria needs democratic order to achieve sustainable democracy.

HOW VOTER EDUCATION CAN BE UTILIZED IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Voter education can be utilized to achieve sustainable democracy in Nigeria as delineated below:

- **Extension of Voter Education to all Citizens:** Voter education is disseminated through social studies, civic orientation, publications, seminars, conferences and workshops, including national orientation. Teaching voter education in schools is not enough, the Nigerian populace need to embrace voter education through massive national reorientation of the citizens through national orientation agencies, ministry of information, in textbooks. Olugbuiyi (2007:22) said "...legitimacy of a government...rest on the acceptance and the recognition by the generality of the people that the government has a right to rule". This perception of the legitimacy of government in power helps to sustain democracy.
- **Mass Mobilization:** Voter education inculcates political education and the national consciousness that sensitizes the masses to be involved in the political process. Large voter turnout and participation in politics is one of the cardinal principles of democracy. Ekpeyong and Bisong (2009) accept that functional democracy allows the masses the right to credible, free and fair acceptable election.
- **Values to Shun Violence:** Batcheson (2010) perceives Nigeria as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual political state. It is therefore imperative that ethnicity might influence election and political participation. It is therefore the place of voter education to inculcate values to shun political violence and thuggery associated with elections in Nigeria. Imo and Essien (2013) are bothered that Nigeria is enveloped in general insecurity, which by extension is based on nature of governance, election practices and the attitudes of the electorates towards the management of national resources by the political class.

- **Stemming Corruption:** Corruption is capable of undermining the credibility and stability of democracy in a polity. Bribery and corruption has influenced the conduct of elections and electioneering campaigns. The mandate of the people are bought or hijacked through various forms of rigging by the political class. Integrated voter education is the option to deviate the masses from accepting gratification or selling of their voters cards. Alarmed by the level of corruption in Nigeria, Ubi (2014) noted "...corruption, anarchy are uncertainties that threaten the (democratic sustainability) of the Nigerian nation".
- **National Consciousness:** The diverse ethnic composition of Nigeria can be integrated through national consciousness sensitization that Nigeria is an indivisible nation. The spirit of patriotism should be fired and inspired in the citizens, when the leaders lead rightly, without diverting national resources into their pockets. Akindele (2005) condemns visionless leaders who are there to deplete national resources without creating political legacies or conditions that will improve the conditions of the masses.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF VOTER APATHY IN NIGERIA'S POLITICAL SCENE

Voter apathy is capable of stimulating the following disastrous consequences on the political stature of Nigeria:

- **Absence of Sustainable Democracy:** Voter apathy is an apolitical behavior which doesn't portray civic responsibility and civic obligations for national development and progress (Mezieobi, Ogheneakoke and Nwalado, 2015), this is because the people are scarcely involved in the election of leadership. Sustainable democracy is established with the mandate of the people in a legitimate democratic process. The non-involvement of a large percentage of the populace in election means that the resultant result of the election is confronted with crises and instability. Onyeanus (2016) posits "credible election is the attribute of a democratic government". A non-democratic government will scarcely establish political stability because of gross mass agitations by disgruntled citizens.
- **Forced Leadership:** The resultant effect of voter apathy is the enthroning of forced leadership. "Insecurity is another phenomenon currently featured in the present day Nigeria. Security of lives is the primary function of a government and any government that fails to secure her citizens is a total failure" (Ufiem, 2016:156). Democratic government is directed at national development when the people are massively involved in the choice of leadership. This is noted by Nwanolue (2003) and Ogunna (2003) respectively.
- **Stabilizing Illegitimate Government:** One great consequences of pronounced voter education is the installation of illegitimate government or administrators of state institutions, with mandate not based on approved or legal choice of the citizens (Mezieobi, Ogheneakoke and Nwalado, 2015). In corroboration, Ogunna (2003:34) remarked "when elections are not free and fair, no popular decisions is made at the pool. There is no representation of the population will. The resultant government is illegitimate, and democracy is sheer mockery and wishful thinking".
- **Low Political Participation:** A potent potential democratic order is realized with popular mandate. The existent low participation of voters in election is antithetical to sustainable democracy. It further shows the existence of insecurity in the political stature of a nation. Transition monitoring group (2005) showcased that excessive rigging is typical of elections in Nigeria.

- **Political Instability:** Political violence is common when elections are not properly conducted. No nation achieves political stability in the midst of political violence, mass protests and agitations. Nwanolue (2003) and Onyeanus (2016) acclaim that democratic order ensures national development, because of the existence of coordinated peace.

Ideally, democracy in a state promotes national unity and integrated actions of the citizenry towards maintaining relative peace, social order and convivial environment for national advancement and growth.

CONCLUSION

Voter education is ideal for promoting sustainable democracy, while voter apathy works against political stability and cripples the progressive objectives of democracy in national development of Nigeria. This paper articulated the values of voter education, how voter education can be utilized in achieving sustainable democracy in Nigeria and the consequences of voter apathy in Nigeria's political scene.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are tendered based on the focus of this discourse, they are as follows:

- Voter education should be extended to the citizens of Nigeria massively, this is to increase political participation and ensure sustainable democracy.
- Politicians and political actors ought to ensure that politics is operated in line with the principles of democracy, this encourages voter confidence in governance.
- The populace should understand that voter apathy is inimical to stabilization of democracy, this is because popular mandate is not given to leadership.
- Political instability, political violence, mass killings, destruction of properties, mass protests and so on will be reduced, when the political order in Nigeria is sanitized and democratic leadership enthroned.

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