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The Role of Political Education in the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria

Abdulrahman Adamu

*Dept. of Political Science, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Federal University,
Gusau, Nigeria*

Suleiman Mohammed Evuti

Department of Political Science, Al-Qalam University, Katsina, Nigeria

Fadeyi, Toafiq James

*Department of Political Science, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences,
Federal University, Gusau, Nigeria*

Abstract

This study examines the role political education play in sustaining democracy in Nigeria. The study revealed that Nigeria was an accident of creation. Its development has been played with ethno-religious conflicts, economic mismanagement, political violence, electoral malpractices, military rule, lack of political education, low political culture and leadership. The above factors undermined the development of the country for the past 55 years of independence. The study after highlighted the factors responsible for political instability in Nigeria, it examined the role political education play in eradicating such endemic issues that are inimical to the advancement of stable and sustainable democracy. The study finally recommends that the government should de-emphasize the issue of statism, tribal identities and other primordial ties. Thus, the National Orientation Agency should also enhance their level of creating awareness to the electorate.

Keywords: *Political Education, Sustenance, Democracy, Nigeria*

Introduction: In every human society, there is need for good government. And for an individual of such society to have a positive thought about governance and what government is all about, they must be educated on political issues. Political education, therefore, can be seen as the process of creating awareness or sensitizing the people in a society about politics. According to Ball (1984:63), political education refers to the establishment and development of attitudes and beliefs of the people about the political system.

Such practices as thuggery, political violence, and ethnic and religious sentiments are direct results of lack of political education. These create an avenue for politicians to take advantage of the low level of political education of the masses to use and dump them. Thus political education of the masses has positive effects of minimizing ethno-religious differences and cultural barriers. Such development will lead to peace and unity, and promote sustainable democracy in Nigeria, in which public participation is encouraged leading to the breakdown of elitist nature of government.

Nigeria as a nation is heterogeneous; it is an amalgam of tribal nations forcefully brought together for convenient exploitation by the British colonial power (Olaniyan, 2003). The attendant consequences of this fusion are: mutual political distrust, hatred, tribal/ethnic affiliation and display of loyalty, along socio-cultural and economic lines. The total effects of these are manifested in leadership and dominance struggle in Nigeria. These problems have hampered development, promoted unpatriotic attitude of the people towards state affairs.

Fanon (1974:145) argued that 'educating the masses politically forms the bedrock for political unity and economic development of any nation'. In search for durable and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, the value of political education cannot be over emphasized. The conspicuous absence of this has been the cause of crises and political instability in the country. Based on this backdrop, the study examines the role political education play in sustaining democracy in Nigeria

Conceptual Clarification: Writers on democracy and democratization have over the years emphasized on the importance of political education as the only viable tool for sustainable democracy. Therefore, the concept of political education could be view as follows:

Ball (1984:63) defined political education as the establishment and development of attitudes to belief about the political system. This apparently suggests that political education is germane for both socio- cultural and political stability of any society. If individuals are denied access to political education in a society, such society is bound to face political instability. Fanon (1974:145) also had this observation that, when people stress the need to educate the people (electorate) politically, they decide to point out at the same time that they want to be supported by the people in the action they are taking. In this respect, a government which declares that it wishes to educate the people politically, thus expresses its desire to govern with the people and for the people, it ought not to speak a language destined to camouflage a bourgeois administration.

However, universally, political education is the power which destined to remove all artificial inequalities and leave the natural inequalities to find their true level, such artificial inequalities in caste rank, title, race, sex among others with nearly all the oppression, abuse, prejudice, enmity and injustice that humanity is now subjected to. For instances, we have India producing a Prime Minister from lower caste and United States of America-USA producing Henry Kissinger, the secretary of state in 1964, a child of a poor farmer in the rural area (Brinkley 2003:894). Likewise, in 2008 USA elected President Barak Obama who is a Black American. In this light, educating the electorate politically in any society will lead to reduction of ethnic and religious affiliations.

In giving analysis of discrimination created between political educated elites and non-political educated masses in our society, it is often considered that the masses are not important in the government. This imbalance between political elites and the masses is responsible for incessant crises faced in Nigeria. Political education encourages loyalty to the nation, fostering of particular value and it may increase either support for, or alienation from the system. It is particularly important in the degree of participation in political life that is expected of groups and individuals, political education is not a process confined to the impressionable years of child hood but one that continues through adult life. There are ways which norms and values of the society are inculcated into the citizens of the society. If some processes of political socialization are absent, the society would cease to operate. Political education therefore is regarded as the way by which cultural, social and economic norms of society are transmitted and fitted into the individuals in an organized way of life in the society.

Olatunde and Ademola (1963:50) see political education as:

[...] process which makes the biological organism into a human being and gives it a self. It is through the self that biological organism can behave in ways which becomes recognizably human and which gives it a sense of identity. Our behavior becomes regulated through political education, due to this; we now possess goals, ambition, values and live in an ordered environment, which protects lives and properties. It furthermore, means that human personality and integrity are developed through political education when education is set politically it is called political education or socialization.

From the above, political education teaches the citizens the new programme and procedure of the government in power. When it fosters a particular value and norms of existing political system in a positive way, it therefore supports the government in power. But its propaganda negates the policies of the government it helps to alienate the people from the system.

The Process of Political Education: According to Olatunde and Ademola (1963:71) a child must be taught to learn to behave in a human way. This is followed by learning the cultural or the whole way of life of the society in which the child is living. Due to this, it is therefore necessary for the child to inherit some qualities of innate attributes like ability and personal qualities. But since societies are not the same these qualities also vary. Man is with the ability to learn about other people. Learning is a continuous process and only ends with death. Man learns customs, languages, ways things are done and attitudes in the environment he is living. The environment shapes the behavior.

Objectives of Political Education: The main objective of political education or socialization (Olatunde and Ademola, 1963:54) includes the following:

- 1) It teaches social and economic roles of the society as well as the norms;
- 2) It helps people to learn good attitude towards themselves which is moral sense of right and wrong;
- 3) It teaches conformity for political and social norms of a given political administration and society;
- 4) It instill political aspirations through the realization of our needs and priorities; and
- 5) Political education inculcates basic discipline by restraining people from immediate wrong doing.

Political education from the above objectives is a continuous process and thus it is not static. In a stable political system, it is educating. Agencies must be sufficiently flexible and interdependence to allow changes in the political system without stress for a sustainable democracy; the various agents of political education must interact, interrelate and aimed at promoting any new political plan introduced into the political system. This therefore means that the agents must conform to each other and not negate or conflict with one another supposedly to achieve sustainable democracy.

The Nature and Aspect of Political Culture: Political culture is the attitude, emotion and values of the society as it relates to the political system and the political issue of the society (Ball, 1984:63). Attitudes may not be consciously held but may be implicit in an individual or group relationship with the political system. The awareness of the basis or fundamental principle of political culture

will allow a wide range of picture of the political system, which is to be practiced. It will be complicated if only political institution as well as the policy issue of the political process is taken into consideration. For example, there is a belief in Nigeria that only the leader who has the same interest with the masses can push the country out of the present economic predicament. It therefore means that leader must consider the citizens first before taking any major decisions. But in Britain, the socially superior individuals are best suited to political decision making. This is the aspect of British political culture. A strong political system will produce stability in existing political administration but a weak political system breeds conflict and confusion. Thus, in a strong political system, there must be consensus on the goals of the society and the means of realizing these goals by working through the existing political structure instead of attempting violently to overthrow them.

Where there are differences between groups in a given society, there must be existence of political culture. A society which is stable may not necessarily process homogenous political culture. For example, French citizens who are in Canada think that loyalty to their groups is superior to loyalty to Canada as a nation, due to this belief of separatist government which is very strong in human beings. Another good example is the United States of America, where the black minority constitutes a political sub-culture. It therefore means that most political cultures all over the world are heterogeneous.

Absence of Political Education Leads to Political Crises in Nigeria: The apparent ignorance in civil education among Nigerians has affected people's attitudes towards government policies and programmes. It has also influenced wrong attitude and perception generally towards people from different parts of the country. This wrong perception has been formed by people and this has not augured well for the much desired unity and political stability in the country.

Interestingly, events in the Fourth Republic have indicated that, 55 years after the independence of Nigeria, the legacies of political bitterness and violence are still hunting the country. Political conflicts, violence of ethnic and religious clashes have been a reoccurring decimal on the nation's political landscape since the re-birth of democracy in May, 29 1999. Of major concern are the incidences of political thuggery in major state in Nigeria, which led to the killing of innocent citizens and destructions of property in various parts of the country, and this violence normally occurs due to the low political education of the people.

However, the word 'violence' defies any precise commonly accepted definition. The concept is often used for variety of protest, military coercion, and destruction and so on. General violence (Hornby 2000:1332) connotes a behavioral attitude that is intended to hurt or kill. Violence or threat of violence is a universal phenomenon. Individuals and groups throughout history have in one form or the other resorted to violence or its potential use of tactics of potential actions. Violence has been used by groups seeking power, by groups holding power and by groups in the process of losing power.

The phenomenon of political violence has particular relevance in Nigeria political history. This is demonstrated by political turbulences in Western Nigeria and Tiv division in the 1960s; the collapse of the First Republic in 1966; the upheaval in Northern Nigeria in May and September of the same year; the two counter coups of July 1966 and July 1975 and the civil war; and the crises that led to the collapse of the Second and Third Republic.

According to Balogun (2002:11), Nigeria as a nation since the inception of the current democratic experiment in 1999, witnessed sporadic and turbulent violent conflicts, these conflicts ranges from ethnic/communal violent clashes, religious and political violence and illegal activities of quasi-security outfit and ethnic militia. Between 1999 and 2002, Nigeria has witnessed not less than 65 violent conflicts, all politically motivated. This violent conflict has on several occasions resulted in wanton destruction of lives and properties. As stated earlier on and disruption of essential services and threatened the credibility and legality of constituted authorities. In addition, the economic havoc, fear of insecurity and political instability brought about by the conflicts retarded development and undermined the corporate existence of the country.

In this democratic dispensation, religious crisis such as the Sharia crisis has been a common phenomenon that has been reoccurring, especially in the northern part of Nigeria, but it is now losing little interest while political thuggery is now on alarming rate. Political thuggery can be seen as the tireless repetition of misleading “facts” designed to depict an opponent as personally despicable and, in regard to governance, dangerous to the physical and spiritual life of the nation (see political thuggery in vague [http:// www.svtirnes.com](http://www.svtirnes.com)).

There is increasing spate of political thuggery in all parts of the world. This situation now appears to be an endemic feature and a universal phenomenon that is of particular relevance to Nigeria politics of today. The practice of political thuggery is encouraged persistently by Nigerian politicians. They (politicians) took advantage of the low knowledge of the youth on politics and encourage them to involve in the inhuman act involved killing of innocent citizens and destruction of properties by giving them money. Normally, these politicians take politics to be a “do or die” affair. They believe that they must manipulate the electoral process to win at election and this is usually done through the youths. Only way to a sustainable democracy in the country the sooner the doctrine of viable political culture is adopted a means of socio-political development through a well designed systematic method of educating the entire populace, the better for the democracy in Nigeria.

Political Education and Leadership: Every society in the world gets the type of leadership it deserves. Countries that cherish such values as corruption and dishonesty will naturally be saddled with bad leadership. Whereas societies that esteem the values of honesty, selflessness service stands the chances of having the ideal leadership. Nigeria can never be said to have been with good leaders from independence to date. However, in line with the above context one may argue that the problem and crisis that characterized the body polity in the country may be the product of the society (bad fellowship), since political stability is a product of stable society.

Adedeji (1990:78) once posited that the types of leaderships we always had in Nigeria are ‘more tribal rulers, who suddenly emerged as national leaders’. This is a statement of fact hence all the past leaders of this country lacked nationalistic and patriotic status even though they claim to be statesmen. Added to the array of deficiencies of these past leaders, is total lack of understanding of working of governance. The past leaders with a few exceptions cannot be said to have had sound political education that would transform them from tribal attachments into detribalized and objective nationalist. Most of them do not possess the intellectual capability that is highly subscribed in the society.

The approach to national issue in modern society and even in international politics portrays them as mediocre the high intellectual aptitude that would enable modern and dynamic leader to desert

and analyze complex, political and bureaucracy matters using solid empirical political theories is totally absent in them. Some of the leaders especially the military dictators adopt arrogance in their administration simply to cover up their ignorance or lack of political education. Even when they enlist the intellectuals and political scientist in their administration, they sooner or later run into the crisis of lack of confidence in their political advisers due to ignorant of politics and selfish motives. A good leader must be conscious of his name, image and even above all integrity, but the question is, how many of our past leaders can boast of only one of the above values?.

Leadership means service and accountability; the character and personality of a leader at every given time could have negative and positive influence on the political life of any society. For instance, a society that cannot trust her leaders may likely develop political apathy over political events.

Factors Reponsible for Political Instability in Nigeria: In discussing or analysis of factors responsible for political instability in Nigeria, one striking point to note is that, the causes of the rise and fall of the First Republic, equally led to the fall of the others. However, the causes of political instability in Nigeria could be briefly and succinctly examined in the following ways:

Regionalism and ethnocentrism: Regional attitude toward politics has been one of the problems facing Nigeria since independence. It has been observed that, even the gladiators who are to lead Nigeria in to independence and shape post-independence politics did not see Nigeria as devoid of regionalism. For instance, Awolowo viewed Nigeria as a mere geographical expression to distinguish between those living within Nigeria from those living outside Nigeria. Balewa, on the other hand, opined that many Nigerians deceived themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one. Azikwe also believed, is the supremacy of the Igbo race to rule or lead. All these utterances simply connote or express the desire for their respective ethnic or regional bodies to rule the country (Anyaele 1991:291-295; Madu 2004:41).

Electoral malpractices: The history of electoral processes in Nigeria is bedeviled with problem of rigging, malpractices, fraud, thuggery, violence intimidation of opposition, political assassination, inter and intra-party conflict, absence of manifesto and political ideology, politics of money, ethnicity politics of clientalism and elite domination and garrison controllers (Ake, 1996:28). This problem of electoral irregularities spell doom for the nation as a setback for good governance as we witnessed the collapsed of the First, Second, Third and the sin kingship of Fourth Republics unabated (Ukaje, 2001:76). Also this often steer contestants (at various levels) to reject and oppose the election results, and hence, form an opposition to the existing government of the day.

Inter and intra-party rivalries: Political parties in Nigeria often witness intense intra and inter-party rivalries/crisis between and amongst themselves. Atimes this usually led to violence, leading to loss of lives and properties worth millions. These unhealthy confrontations made it difficult to achieve a successful and stable leadership in the country over the years.

Leadership in competency: One other major factor that further worsens the phenomenon of political instability in Nigeria is the failure of leadership at various government levels. Most leaders in Nigeria aspires leadership position mainly to satisfy their personal self aggrandizement. And this brought about tension and feelings of dissatisfaction among the populace, which often leads protest and revolts.

Socio-cultural and religious differences: Differences in culture and religion has been outlined as another causative factor of political instability in Nigeria. The different cultures vis-a-vis religions in

the country hardly come into consensus on several matters relating to politics in the country. The shariah implementation controversy few years ago is a clear example.

Controversial census figures: The 1962/63 census is another crisis that threatened the corporate existence and unity of Nigeria. The 1962 census figure was never officially published as rebel of alleged rigging, but the figures finally leaked out. The unofficial figures that were published in news papers showed a tremendous increase in the population of the east and west region, and decrease in that of the north (Anyaele 1991:291; Ojiako 1979:3). This regional orientation to politics has made the census figure of paramount relevance to political instability in Nigeria. Each region or state wants to be more populated so as to determine its revenue allocation. The recent census conducted in the country between March and April 2006 clearly attests to this claim.

The politicized armed forces of Nigeria: The military have contributed immensely to political instability in Nigeria. Their involvement in the political arena at various stages poses a great threat to the political development and stability of the country. The civil war and June 12 crisis are evidences on ground.

Constitutional Amendment: The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria in itself could be said to be a source of conflict in the country. This is sequel to the interest of the ordinary citizens, rather, the protection of the interest of elites, who at various time tend to amend it to suit their desire, as exemplified during the third term agenda.

However, beside the above, other causes of political instability in Nigeria may include: the Niger Delta crisis of oil exploitation and ethnic crisis which has also attracted international audience, embezzlement and mismanagement of state resources, lack of political education, and the disarticulated and dependent nature of the Nigeria economy, and the moral decadence in the country.

Conclusion: The primary issue this study set out to address is the role of political education as an important tool for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. It also attempts to advance reasons why democracy in Nigeria could not work in spite of the general strives in this direction. The study resolved that, political education holds the key to the eradication of Nigeria's socio-cultural and political problems. It is also seen as possible panacea to the problem of the past. By exposing students, youths, adults and other citizens to some forms of civic and political education, which would help facilitate the production of more conscious and perhaps patriotic citizens for Nigerian society, particularly with the new democratic dispensation in place.

The education would eliminate all forms of electoral malpractices in Nigeria, thus it will encourage mass based political parties such as the case of Europe and America. And the ideological standing point of political parties will be easily captured and assimilated by an informed party membership. In this regard the legislative, executive and judiciary arms of government would be manned by people who have knowledge and experience in the ideas of democracy based on the principle of separation of powers. Finally, peaceful and harmonious relations between political parties in the country are a sine-qua-non to the prevalence of peace and socio-economic and sustainable democracy in the country.

Recommendations: With the democratic system of governance in place, there are fears of its sustainability and viability in Nigeria especially with some, if not all the primordial ideal issues that led to the collapse of the past republics much around. To allay this fear of the failure of the fourth

Republic, the instrument of political education is being prepared as a recipe for stable democracy in the country. In this context the following recommendations are offered:

1. The government should de-emphasize the issue of statism, tribal groupings and other primordial ties.
2. Youths of Nigeria should be sensitized politically through school activities such as social studies and citizenship education, to modify their long aged traditional values.
3. National integration campaign should be pursued vigorously.
4. The Nigerian political leadership should be exemplary and much policy statements with action.
5. Civic education should be made compulsory at all levels of educational system.
6. Government should enhance her level of creating awareness to the masses through the media, such as television, newspapers, radio and translator versions of the constitution and other basic public document etc. made available to the masses at no cost.
7. For democracy to thrive, political parties must be organized and run strictly according to constitution binding them.
8. Police and other security agencies have a very important role to play in a virile democracy. They should protect the citizens and carry out other enforcement functions as the judiciary may decide.
9. National Orientation Agency (NOA) should enhance their role in mobilizing and sensitizing people on political education, and also how to come out en masse to vote for the candidates of their choice.

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