

Civic Education as a Panacea to Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explored the concept of civic education, and how it affects Nigeria's political development especially in a democratic setting. It examined the extent to which civic education could be employed in curtailing electoral malpractice in developing countries. The paper recommended that a broad curriculum should be designed for civic education.

Keywords: Civic Education, Election, Electoral malpractice, Sustainable Development, Apathy, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The world in the twenty first century is shifting towards democratic system of government. Various innovative ideas are being pioneered by political analysts aided by the new order of information and communication technology. Concepts such as electronic voting, e-registration of voters, e-validation of voter's card, online political interaction/campaign, among others abound, across the globe, yet most developing nations are still struggling to attain socio-political and economic balance. While their citizens still display apathy towards political process including election, due to uninformed perception. Most of them refuse to participate in statutory obligation and to even demand for their rights. This is extended to socio-economic involvement. The leadership behaviour is another disservice that engenders and further discourages citizen participation in government affairs. This situation can be recorded positively through civic education.

For democracy to survive and flourish in a nation, its citizens must possess the skills, attitude, values, manifest behaviours, and understand the basic features and principles of a democratic political system to be able to access it when their interests are at stake, value and imbibe tolerance for divergent viewpoints and support for the rule of law. They must also be willing and able to participate in local and national politics through civic education to become properly informed about rights and obligations including participation in installing government. How then can citizens gain the knowledge, skills, values, and behaviours that are considered necessary for a stable and effective democracy? One of the answers to this important question constitutes the main thrust of this discourse. Hence, this paper is to examine civic education as a process with which to jump-start the acquisition of the much needed process of political socialization. Thus the following constitute the main focus of civic education:

- To introduce citizens to the basic rules and institutional features, principles and practices of democratic political systems
- To convey a specific set of values such as political tolerance, trust in the democratic process, respect for the rule of law, and compromise; and to encourage responsible and informed political participation

All these form the focus of this paper. Therefore, the paper explores civic education, approaches to civic education, element of electoral malpractices from the Nigeria perspective, and importance of civic education to sustainable democracy and makes some recommendations towards entrenching sustainable democratic system in Nigeria.

2. Civic Education and Its Sources

Civic Education is an important component of adult education that equips citizens with necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to participate in the public life of a democracy, to know their rights and discharge their responsibilities as expected by being responsive to act of governance. The term civic education is used to cover the larger job of educating citizens so that they can take responsibility for their roles within democratic state and exercise their rights as free human beings. Civic education seeks to make people powerful and capable of participating to the fullest in a democratic society and create a democratic society (Branson, 1998).

According to some scholars, it is that education which promotes recipients' understanding of the political system, their own interests, and options to contribute to government (Niemi and Junn 1998), or citizens' rights and obligations (Kanaev 2000). Civic education may also involve "exposing students to central and political traditions of the nation" and teaching them "moral sentiments" (Janowitz 1983, 1994, quoted in Kanaev 2000, 17). It is also argued that as a more personal type of civic knowledge, knowing one's rights is the first step, or a prerequisite, for participation and civic education should therefore not be restricted to the four walls of classroom, but should be targeted at all those regarded as adults in the segment of the society (Ruitta, 2007).

In rural parts of the developing world including Nigeria, most citizens have not been formally schooled to have required exposure, not even to out-of-school organized learning process either. For Finkel (2005), of civic education includes school based civics and programmes that provide instruction about the society and political rights of women, [or] voter education programmes, neighbourhood problem-solving programmes through group discussions that bring individuals in contact with local authorities for purposes of promoting collective action to benefit local communities. In these contexts, what is shared and learnt is "Mode 2" knowledge which is application oriented civic knowledge, as opposed to the more abstract information taught at school. "Mode 2" canvasses that:

Knowledge is "a form of knowledge that is created by and through groups rather than by isolated individuals; its origin lies in collective attempts to solve problems, and its meaning is only realized through application in an organizational setting" (Field 2005, 4). This is a good description of what learning and civic education may most often be in practice in developing countries.

Other sources of civic education include the electronic and printed which promote information dissemination, Civic knowledge can also originate at school, through government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and donor programs.

Lewis (2008), opines that Civic Education is the cultivation of virtues, knowledge, skills and experience necessary for political participation in a democratic society and the sustenance of democracy. The habits of the mind, as well as "habits of the heart," the dispositions that inform the democratic cultures, are not inherited. As Alexis de Toqueville (1969) pointed out that:

...each new generation is a new people that must acquire the knowledge, learn the skills, and develop the dispositions or traits of private and public character that undergird a constitutional democracy. Those dispositions must be fostered and nurtured by word and study and by the power of example. Democracy is not a "machine that would go of itself," but must be consciously reproduced, one generation after another.

Civic education, therefore, is-or should be-a prime concern of any democratic society involving all its citizens. There is no more important task than the development of an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry. Democracies are sustained and or sustainable by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It is imperative therefore, that educators, policymakers, and members of civil society make case and ask for the support of civic education from all segments of society and from the widest range of government institutions for promotion of understanding of democratic ideals to enhance required citizen participation (Branson, 1998), this would go a long way to solving the problem of apathy.

3. Approaches to Civic Education

According to National Alliance of Civic Education (NACE, 2007), there are seven approaches to Civic Education. They are:

- (i) **The History-Curricular Approach:** This approach stresses the importance of knowing and respecting one's nation's social and political history, founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the changing of government, the Constitutions and the visions of freedom that a society has been founded upon.
- (ii) **The Government-Curricular Approach:** The proponents of this approach propose that every student from elementary level of education takes at least a one semester civics course that focuses on teaching students the structure of government, the law-making process, campaigns, elections, public policy and current events. This is to help students understand government and politics and thereby remove the obstacle that may disengage young individuals from culture and norms and required involvement usually created by ignorance of these issues.
- (iii) **The Critical-Thinking Pedagogical Approach:** This stresses a willingness and ability to think critically, to deliberate with others, and when necessary to challenge authority and to make society more just by participating to institute good act of governance. A more participatory style of learning in which learners and

facilitators see each other as partners-in-progress entails giving learners meaningful involvement in the creation of curriculum, an opportunity which civil education provides

- (iv) **The Community Service Approach:** This approach sees "responsible citizens" as people who provide direct, voluntary care for others in need. Those in this group argue that the way to re-engage young people as citizens is to encourage/require them to participate in community service in an extra-curricular manner during evenings and weekends to discourage segregation.
- (v) **The Service-Learning Approach:** This approach bears many similarities to community service, except that rather than viewing community service in an extra-curricular context; it is seen as an extension of the curriculum and a component of traditional coursework. Teachers involve students in deliberately designed community service learning experiences that complement and connect directly with classroom learning and are incorporated into the grading process.
- (vi) **The Public Achievement Approach:** This approach emphasizes that it is not enough to involve students in service-oriented projects that adults create and organize. Rather, students need to be taught to learn how to work together in small groups to identify real issues of a public nature that interest and affect them personally, and then learn how to work within existing political and social institutions to resolve relevant issue.
- (vii) **The Voter Training and Mentoring Approach:** This approach emphasizes the need to make voting the focus of efforts in a democratic setting, with education and training directed at the actual process of voting and the issues surrounding elections. This approach argues that the real impediment to voting is lack of understanding of how the process works, lack of mentoring by family and society, and lack of education surrounding election issues, especially civic education.

4. The signs of electoral malpractices

Scholars such as White (1996) and Kenya (2007) have identified some elements of electoral malpractice especially in developing countries. White (1996) showed human factors such as undue influence or people, impersonation and bribery, while Kenya (2007) pointed to what electoral bodies can do to bring about electoral malpractice which include inadequate election materials, closing polling station before the time and collusion of officials with politicians to allow irregularities.

5. Trends in Electoral Process and Electoral Malpractice in Nigeria

Election is seen as the act of selecting someone or something through vote; the exercise of deliberate choice (Word web, 2007). Elections constitute useful tool for achieving and strengthening democracy. For any election to be acclaimed to be free, fair and credible, every person who has attained the required age, citizenship and residence must be allowed to register, and be voted into positions. Votes, once cast, must be accurately and fairly counted and the results announced promptly; and people should be allowed to vote in private through secret ballot and without intimidation or influence. Otherwise the elections will not be seen as genuine and people will complain that the elections have been "rigged" or "manipulated." Election is said to have been rigged if the true outcome of the election is replaced with false results. Election rigging on the other hand can be defined as a deliberate perversion of people's interest through manipulation of election results. Oxford advanced dictionary (2006), defines rigging as a way of influencing something in a dishonest way in order to get the result that you want. In this context rigging could be understood to be any form of undue influencing and manipulation of election outcome result in a dishonest way to represent a particular interest outside the general interest.

The Political Bureau Report (MAMSER, 1987) confirmed that before independence in 1960, Nigeria, which existed as an amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates since 1914, had already witnessed three different elections. The first one was in September, 1923 in Lagos and Calabar following the introduction of Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution in 1922. The Nigerian National Democratic Party led by Herbert Macaulay won the three seats for the Lagos Legislative Council while the Calabar Improvement League, won the only seat for Calabar. It was by election was based on limited franchise. Those who could vote or in which only British citizens residing in the cities and British Protected Persons with a minimum gross income of 100 Pounds a year could vote and be voted for. The second election in Nigeria took place in the year 1946 which was an indirect system based on Sir Arthur Richards Constitution. The Legislative Council had 45 members for the entire Country – 28 members were Nigerians (4 elected and 24 nominated). Three political units emerged: the Northern, Western and Eastern Regions. The third one was the general election through Electoral College following Sir John McPherson Constitution. The Nigeria's political independence was ushered in by the 12 December 1959 general elections into local councils, Regional and Federal Legislatures. The political parties all agreed that there should be approximately one seat in the House of Representatives to every 100,000 persons in Nigeria with a total

population of 31,559,026. Elections were therefore held in 312 single member constituencies nationwide. Voting was by secret ballot and all registered adults in Western and Eastern Nigeria were eligible to vote. In Northern Nigeria only registered adult males were voted, however, eligible to vote.

It is perhaps arguably true to say that outright malpractice of elections in Nigeria, began with the general elections in 1964, the first after independence in 1960. The coalition of the Nigeria People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) had collapsed. Each party had now formed a new alliance. The NCNC and the Action Group became United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), whilst the Northern People Congress (NPC) aligned with the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). Despite an all-party consensus to ensure a free and fair election at a meeting called by the then Prime Minister, all agreements reached were widely breached. The NPC being the party controlling the central government influenced the arbitrary abductions, arrests, detention, and intimidation of candidates of the opposition parties. Copious evidence of this was submitted to the President by UPGA demanding for the postponement of the elections, but the government refused and" UPGA boycotted the elections. Despite the boycott, elections purportedly went on in Northern and Western Nigeria and the federal territory, Lagos, where the' NNA governments were in control. "The boycott was effective in the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) controlled areas - the East and the Midwest. On account of the boycott, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) despite its clear unpopularity, without participation of oppositions, claimed victory in the West, and forcefully remained amidst crisis having perfected its rigging strategies(Gboyega et al, 1989). The fall-outs of this were political chaos manifesting in various forms. Thus the NNDP got 16 of its candidates returned unopposed through violence. Even when and where any opposition candidate won, the results were simply reversed, and the government candidate was announced on the government owned radio as the winner (Price, 1977).

On 15 November 1976, the Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo (who assumed leadership on the assassination of General Murtala Muhammad who had on October 4, 1975 instituted a 50-member Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated a new 24 –member Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) headed by Mr. Richard Avic, a retired Civil servant. Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, on 21 September 1978 signed Decree No. 25 which promulgated the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria into law to come into effect on 1 October 1979 when a new civilian administration was to be sworn in, as a major paradigm shift in Nigeria's political experience. It evolved a presidential system of government modelled after the United States of America, and effectively abandoning the Parliamentary (Westminster) system inherited from the British at independence in 1960.

Results of the elections in the states confirmed the ethnic colouration of the parties. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was dominant largely in the North; the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) controlled the Yoruba South West while the NPP was the leading party in the Igbo states of the then Anambra and Imo. The People Redemption Party (PRP) held onto its traditional NEPU stronghold of Kano and Kaduna while the GNPP made a statement in Borno and Gongola States in the North East more or less indicating Kanuri independence of Hausa –Fulani domination. Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari, of the NPN was the eventual winner of the Presidential Elections on 26 September 1979 after the Supreme Court had interpreted the provisions of the constitution on what constitutes two- thirds of 19 states, critical requirement to ascertain overall winner. Usman Aliyu Shehu Shagari was sworn in as the first Executive President of Nigeria on 1st October 1979, to take over the reins of government from military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo.

In 1983 election, the National Party of Nigeria, (NPN) consolidated its hold on the polity, breaking into the traditional strongholds of the UPN (United Party of Nigeria) and Nigerian People's Party, (NPP). The gubernatorial election results provided the first indication that the NPN had transformed itself into a "Super-Power," as its new slogan indicated, albeit the other parties alleged the process was massively rigged with, Shehu Shagari of the NPN again emerging winner, defeating Awolowo (UPN), Nnamdi Azikiwe (NPP), Aminu Kano (PRP), Waziri Ibrahim (GNPP) and Tunji Braithwaite (NAP). On 31 December 1983, another military coup d'état aborted Nigeria's journey in democratic governance.

Furthermore, On May 3, 1989, another constitution was decreed into existence by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, who overthrew the Gen. Muhammad Buhari Government in August 1985, He created two political parties (The NRC and SDP). With politicians as their "equal founders and equal joiners" based "a little to left" and a "little to the right" of the centre principle. The Presidential Elections of June 12, 1993 pitched the SDP's Moshood Abiola a businessman, against NRC's Bashir Tofa another businessman. It was an election that promised to erase the ghosts of ethnicity, religious and political intolerance, which had for so long haunted the Nigeria political space. The adjudged freest and fairest election in Nigeria were inconclusive as the Babangida regime annulled the results, in which M.K.O. Abiola, the candidate of SDP (Social Democratic Party) was adjudged the winner, promising another Presidential election before October 1993. Instead, by 27 August 1993 an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan, was put in place. Gen. Sani Abacha, however, sacked the ING in November of the same year and abrogated the 1989 Constitution and

suspended all political activities. Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar became another military Head of State on the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998. Building on the recommendations of a work-in-progress constitution evolved by the Abacha regime, a transition programme was announced to terminate with a handover to an elected civilian president on 29 May 1999. Three political parties – Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) - were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to participate in the elections. The results of the 1999 Governorship elections indicated that the **PDP** had more national spread by winning in 21 states across the country. **APP** followed with nine states; while **AD**, which held sway in the Yoruba Southwest had six states. The 1979 Presidential Elections pitched Olusegun Obasanjo(PDP), against Olu Falae (AD-APP) who lost in the election. However, 2003 and 2007 general election raised a fresh issue of concern and opened another chapter in the arrays of electoral malpractice in Nigeria as international community described the two elections as the ones with highest record of election malpractice. People with growing anxiety for winning through monetary inducement, a process nationally described as Ghana-must-go politics.. Thus, the second tenure issues became a household concept in electioneering process. By May 2007, election rigging has assumed a scientific dimension. The Independent National Electoral Commission itself had gone computerized and ready for electronic voting system. It is, however, disdainful that inspite of international and local monitoring groups and the promise of the then INEC headship, the 2007 elections were also fraught with a lot of malpractice. Many of the election outcomes were challenged in the law court, many of which were upturned while fresh elections were declared in other states. Examples included Edo, Oyo, Ekiti, and Benue among others. The election in Nigeria now could be seen as a struggle between those already in the power circle and those who wish to join, using the instrumentalities of political parties. Different tools ranging from ballot snatching, violence, godfatherism, among others were employed during this struggle between both groups, thereby creating tension and large room for election rigging and malpractices of all kind among the power circle groups, with their fall-outs and attendant socio-economic and political crises.

6. Importance of Civic Education to Sustainable Democracy

Democratic system of government has been adjudged by the International Community in the world over as the best system to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable development is seen by UNESCO (2007) as a deliberate attempt geared towards meeting the immediate needs of the society while ensuring that future generations can also meet their needs based on the available environmental resources. Government cannot survive in its policies and plans/programmes towards achieving sustainable development without adequate civic educational programmes being put in place to guide the populace. The importance and relevance of civic education in a democratic setting like Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. These include:

- i. **Political Knowledge:** Through civic education, people would gain knowledge about politics and governance and become responsive and responsible citizens in the society know why they should. Civic education, therefore, is a sine qua non to the realization of national development in all its ramifications.
- ii. **Political Participation:** Political apathy is the opposite of political participation. Some see voting as a waste of time and resources as they believed that leaders always emerged by rigging and undue influence. Collective participation, democratic should not be seen as a dirty game therefore and left in the hand of few selfish individuals. Civic education, therefore, will help erase or reduce all manners of political apathy and enhance citizenship participation in governance through appropriate orientation.
- iii. **Political Efficacy:** Efficacy is seen, according to Wordweb dictionary (2007) as the capacity or power to produce a desired effect. Civic education, if properly organized, would make politics and political participation to be efficacious in the lives of people.

Democratic Values: Democratic system of government is no doubt a distinct system with peculiar norms and values. For the installation and survival of democracy, such values include the rule of law, fundamental human right, equal opportunities for and could all, among others, be inculcated through civic education as a segment of Adult Education.

7. Recommendations

In view of the position of this paper therefore, the following recommendations are made:

- i. That a broad curriculum for civic education should be developed by educational stakeholders to cater for the identified problems herein.
- ii. That governments at all levels should embark upon rigorous periodical campaigns on such policies and activities that will enhance participation of majority of the citizens in democratic process by encouraging civic education.

- iii. That Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should complement the activities of government in promoting civic knowledge acquisition among the citizenry for better actualization of genuine democracy and overall development national development.

The National Orientation Agency should embark on mounting civic education programmes before elections in the country.

-Conscientization for awareness remains a task that must be done by all stakeholders.

8. Conclusion

Thus far, it has been examined how civic education can lead to socio-political knowledge illumination and liberation liberation of people in a democratic setting, especially from the perspective of developing democracy like Nigeria. The needs to embrace civic educational and awareness programmes that could create in them necessary knowledge, skills, ideas right attitude and values that would allow a participatory governance to bring about desired socio-political and economic progress have been isolated. This part has been restated as the basis for national democratic well-being in the nation's polity and to guide the citizens against misrule in the art of governance. To achieve this, all important objective, civic education continues to be a-must-do programme in the country's national life.

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