



Negative Political Characters in Nigeria: Effects on Political Behaviours.

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Abstract. Character is key to the success or otherwise of individual, community and the society in general. Character becomes more significance for us as a social being. Social being needs to relate and interact with other people of diverse culture and tradition, religions, historical background, languages and so on. Hence, the character that is display or exhibited as social being in different circles goes a long way to determine the kind of responses and reactions such a person would receive in such circles. For a pluralistic and diverse society such as Nigeria, with over 250 ethnic groups and over 300 languages, there is dire need for proper, adequate and acceptable political character in the country. The failure of any of the ethnic groups to exhibit acceptable character in the country may serve as a threat to the political stability and social cohesion of the country. This becomes germane, as the negative characters may lead to negative voters' behavior which may subsequently threaten the corporate existence of the country as more and more voter shows apathy towards voting in particular and political participation in general. The aim of this paper is to examine the negative political characters in Nigeria vis-à-vis its effects on voter's behavior in Nigeria. Purely a qualitative paper, hence secondary data will be put to use. Some major negative political behavior identified by this paper are corruption, political violence and lack of accountability. The paper therefore suggested good governance and social inclusiveness as some of the solutions to these problems.

Keywords: Negative characters, political behavior, Nigeria, corruption, apolitical

1. Introduction

Public participation is on the agenda globally and in Africa, as well as in Nigeria. This is because public participation can help to enhance development and service delivery, make governance more effective and accountable and further deepen democracy. However, public participation in Nigeria and most African nations are mostly mere consultations rather than formal empowerment.

One vital tool or vehicle for the sustenance of viable either old or emerging democracies is no doubt, popular public participation. This becomes even particularly pertinent in the case of Nigeria, which could be described as an emerging democracy or a nascent democracy. Against this backdrop, it is significant to look into the relevance of public participation in democratic governance in Nigeria.

According to Joseph (2014), Nigeria as a nation-state with diverse ethnic groups, religions, historical background, languages and culture, needs to be united. There is a dire need for national unity, cohesion and integration; and, one of the basic means of fostering national integration is to have mass participation of the populace in who governs them or not, to foster a feeling of belonging that comes from being part of the decision-making process.

According to Mazrui (2012), elections in Africa are usually very volatile, serious and sensitive issues, so serious that politicians would go to any length to sway the results in their favour to the detriment of the electorate. Vote rigging-unlawful interference with an electoral process is not restricted to Election Day. Electoral malpractices include pre-electoral and post-electoral fraud, besides polling day manipulation. This undemocratic attitude has often led to political violence. One of the means through which rigging of the election and political violence could be reduced is

for the citizens to play an active role in democratic governance.

2. Negative Political Characters in Nigeria

Nigeria as a country has been enmeshed in various forms of negative and debilitating political characters. Over the years, these negative political characters have served as negative wheels in the course of the country's socio-political cum economic development. However, this paper would concentrate on the following negative political characters in the country, which by no means represent the total pictures of the issues at hand. These are as follows;

2.1 Corruption

Idoko, Agyeni and Emmanuel (2015) depict corruption as one of the social problems confronting the developmental efforts of Nigeria. This is because money and other resources meant for development are often diverted to private pockets by privileged few individuals at the expense of the entire population. The acquisition of wealth through selfish acts and greed has characterized most communities in Nigeria, and that has negated the social and economic efforts of many communities therein. Corruption in the form of election rigging, abuse of power, embezzlement of public funds, buying of voters' cards, reported cases of underage voting, distribution of money at polling centres, manipulation of voters' registers, diversion of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, unlawful possession of firearms and other electoral offences are rife. This political scenario has engendered lukewarm political attitude and participation among some citizens. These and other related activities are obvious obstacles in citizens' unprejudiced participation in a political system.

2.2 Lack of Accountability

According to Agbude and Etete (2013), in most African countries, the political elites are interested merely in occupying public offices and enjoying the paraphernalia of office. Responsibility is usually jettisoned to the detriment of authority, ignoring the reality that with every authority there is attendant responsibility. They are not interested in having accountability as their watch word. The hallmark of a good leader is transparency, besides tolerance of opposing opinions and accountability. When more people take part in democratic governance, the leader is made to realize the fact that he/she is accountable to the electorate and the democratic structure. This will go a long way to bring about better

accountability and transparency by the political elites, and more people will participate in democratic governance.

2.3 Political Violence

Comatose development is another challenge of Nigeria's democracy, to the extent that deliberately, the political elites, through violence, have succeeded in stifling development in Nigeria. By implication, violence affects the psyche of Nigerians and this in turn has a retrogressive impact on development in geometric progression, especially in the current age of globalization, where the world has become a global village and economic or political happenings in one region of the world have direct effects on the politics and economy of other parts of the world, which Nigeria is not alienated from (Adeoti and Olaniyan, 2014).

2.4 Ethnic Superiority

Anazodo, Agbionu and Ezenwile (2013), one of constant and critical hydra-headed malaise afflicting public participation in the political process in Nigeria is that of the cultural system denoting group boundaries in class and ethnicity. Nigerians usually predicate their participation on class and ethnicity. This problem has the tendency of beclouding the people, preventing them from making honest and objective participation judgement: it has also led to many becoming disinterested in participation. Participation is thus, based on class and ethnic considerations, and not on the Nigerian project. This lack of participation by citizens has also led to persistent lawlessness and the breakdown of law and order in the form of ethno-religious crises, armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom due to the disconnect between the government and its citizens".

2.5 Chauvinism Tendency

Falade (2015) believe that the Nigerian political system and act of governance as presently constituted do not encourage mass participation of the people. The system is discretely skewed toward chauvinism, being continuously male-dominant and elite-driven, creating in the people lack of confidence in their political leaders, a situation that has led to mutual suspicion between the government and the citizens. According to Lowndes (2001), a tool that can strengthen democracy is the full participation of women. Women form an appreciable number of most countries' populations, they serve different roles at different times as daughters, wives, mothers,

mothers-in-laws, grand-mothers and so on. Nigeria's percentage population of women was put at 49.36% (World Bank, 2013).

This means that if a good number of women are able to take active part in the affairs of their countries, a good number would have taken part in public participation in democratic governance. In sum, the more the women participate in democratic governance, the more likelihood of curbing the emergence of tyrannical leadership through the checks and balances of the mass participation of women in democratic governance.

3. Effects of Negative Political Characters on Political Behaviours in Nigeria

The following represents some of the effects of negative political characters on political behaviours in Nigeria. These are:

3.1 Lukewarm Political Attitude

This political scenario engendered lukewarm political attitude and participation among some citizens in the political system: other activities related to these are obvious obstacles for unprejudiced citizens. This ugly scenario has implications for popular participation and governance. According to Falade (2015), this is corroborated by the report of an interview conducted during the 2011 election. One of the respondents said, "My father told me not to vote when I was leaving home. This morning, my father said I was wasting my time. He said all politicians were the same and it would make no difference." Statistical analysis of the 2011 general elections shows that only 35% of the registered electorate voted during the election. This evidence shows glaringly the level of public participation of Nigerians as far as voting at elections is concerned.

3.2 Political Assassinations

The sudden death or assassination of some renowned politicians, journalists, businessmen and women in the country still haunts the country, the horror is still fresh in the people's memories. There are also high-profile assassinations and kidnapping and hostage taking of politicians, children and women. For example, Harry Marshall was killed in his Abuja home in March 5, 2003, Bola Ige the then Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of the Federation was murdered in his country home on December 23, 2004, others include, Alabo Dikibo, Abigail,

Barnabas Igwe, Ogbonnaya Uche, Theodore Agwata, Daramola, Kudirat Abiola, Funso Williams to mention a few. Also, what can be called the latest trend in Nigeria is the politically motivated kidnappings and hostage taking of children, wives or parents of politicians and highly placed individuals who may be connected to state power. These negative tendencies in the political system have undoubtedly narrowed the political space for sincere and honest individuals to engage in politics in Nigeria (Wenibowei, 2011).

3.3 Proliferation of small arms

The proliferation of small arms has also characterized Nigeria's democracy: small arms and light weapons such as handguns, rifles, grenades, machine guns, mortars and other portable devices are cheap, portable, readily available, easy to maintain and easy to use. More disturbing is the fact that these arms have found their way into the hands of trigger-happy, gun-toting Nigerian youths who have no prior training or orientation on weapons handling (Hazen, 2007).

3.4 Youth restiveness

Today, the irresponsiveness of the Nigerian democratic structures by successive governments in the country to the welfare, well-being and safety of citizens has led to the Niger-Delta conflicts, which have also given birth to the formation of various militia groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Front (NDPVF) and the Boko Haram (BH) insurgency, headquartered in the North-Eastern part of the country, which have all been attributed partly to arms and ammunition distributed to the youths of the regions by politicians with different political views and ideologies (Hazen, 2007).

3.5 Apolitical citizens

According to Alonge (2005), one of the major outcomes of negative political character formation is the alienation or apathy results when a person is not interested in governmental affairs. Alonge (2005), thus identified some of these conditions as: Legal Restrictions, Finance, Psychological Threat, Disruption of One's Private Life or Job, Lack of Political Skill and Competence, Religious Considerations, Election Irregularities, Unfulfilled Promises by the Political Elites, Military Regimes.

3.6 Civil Strike, Protests and Riots

Aderibigbe (2015), whenever there is protest, civil strife and riot, it is often followed by breakdown of law and order (anarchy) and violence. Thus, leading to public amenities and human lives being lost. Intelligent citizens have been lost to protest and riots, these are the people that would have contributed immensely to the political growth and development of the country. It thus affects our political life negatively.

4. Solutions to Negative Political Characters on Political Behaviours in Nigeria

4.1 Good Governance

According to Adegboye (2013) one of the viable solutions to negative voters behavior is good governance, it is the extent to which a government is perceived and accepted by the general citizenry to be legitimate, committed to improving general public welfare and responsive to the needs of the citizenry, competent in assuring law and order and in delivering public services, able to create an enabling policy environment for productive activities and equitable in its conduct, favoring no special interests or groups.

4.2 Social Inclusiveness

This is also one of the core solutions. It emphasizes a situation where all and sundry are given the opportunity to productively and positively participate in public decision making and administration, but in reality, the direct link between the people and government particularly at the local level is often absent, hence one of the pivotal solutions to negative voters' behavior is social inclusiveness (Lutz and Linder, 2004).

4.3 Accountability

Adamolekun (2008) describes accountability as "holding public officials responsible for their actions" specifically, it is public accountability, the requirement that those who hold public trust should account for the use of that trust to citizens or their representatives. He goes on further to say that it signifies the superiority of the public will over privately interests, and tries to ensure that the former is supreme in every activity and conduct of a public official.

4.4 Empowerment

This implies the degree of freedom that the citizens enjoy in calling the government to accountability. It includes the existing level of participatory process, access to information, civil freedom, the involvement of the civil society in public participation and access to basic needs of the citizens. When these are present, it is a sign of positive development, but if it is absent, the government and the citizens must work together and provide an enabling environment for this to happen.

4.5 Safety and security

One of the major tasks any government is meant to provide to its citizens. Political, economic and social development will only thrive where there is peace, safety and security. Therefore, the number of safe areas in the community should be of great concern to government. If the number of safe places is on the increase, we can conclude that the community is relatively peaceful, but if otherwise, plans have to be put in place to achieve this (Lutz and Linder, 2004).

5. Conclusion

Without any iota of doubt, Nigeria as a nation-state is a highly diverse country. The need therefore for acceptable character formation from all the ethnic nations that makes up the country becomes even more relevant. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasized as it will have effects on the political behavior of the populace. It appears that a good number of Nigerian politicians and public office holders do not possess the right caliber of character formation. Hence, they display many forms of character formation such as political violence, lack of transparency and accountability, ethnicity, male chauvinism and so on. All these negative characters are a threat to the corporate existence of the country and its democratic stability and sustainability. This paper provides a way out of the negative character formation among the political elites by presenting viable solutions to the problems.

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Appendices

Table 4.1: Exchange Rate, Public Debt Stock, Ratio of External Debt Servicing to Total External Debt Stock and Ratio of Domestic Debt Servicing to Total Domestic Debt Stock (1980-2019)

Year	Exchange Rate	Public Debt Stock N' billion	Ratio of External Debt Service to External Debt	Ratio of Domestic Debt Service to Domestic Debt
1980	0.5640	7.52	2.04	75.72
1981	0.6100	13.52	19.92	37.53
1982	0.6729	23.83	2.99	22.67
1983	0.7241	32.80	10.46	31.76
1984	0.7649	40.48	8.00	11.41
1985	0.8938	45.25	6.05	2.04
1986	2.0206	69.89	1.71	1.67
1987	4.0179	137.58	0.83	17.57
1988	4.5367	180.99	1.43	17.78
1989	7.3916	287.44	2.38	12.32
1990	8.0378	382.71	0.33	7.25
1991	9.9095	444.65	0.91	27.64
1992	17.2984	722.23	2.18	26.25
1993	22.0511	906.98	2.68	33.28
1994	21.8861	1,056.40	1.29	14.78
1995	21.8861	1,194.60	3.13	1.49
1996	21.8861	1,037.30	1.27	7.63
1997	21.8861	1,097.68	2.25	1.67
1998	21.8861	1,193.85	2.62	20.82
1999	92.6934	3,372.18	0.82	33.22
2000	102.1052	3,995.63	0.0003	11.52
2001	111.9433	4,193.27	0.0003	11.67
2002	120.9702	5,098.89	0.0003	12.78
2003	129.3565	5,808.01	0.0002	12.31
2004	133.5004	6,260.59	0.0002	3.39
2005	132.1470	4,220.98	0.0004	9.40
2006	128.6516	2,204.72	0.0022	2.57
2007	125.8331	2,608.52	0.0023	9.79
2008	118.5669	2,843.56	0.0019	6.49
2009	148.8802	3,818.47	6.31	6.65
2010	150.2980	5,241.66	5.78	8.26
2011	153.8616	6,519.69	4.66	8.63
2012	157.4994	7,564.43	4.52	9.68
2013	157.3112	8,506.30	4.02	10.85
2014	158.5526	9,535.52	3.76	11.14
2015	193.2792	10,948.51	3.01	11.28
2016	253.4923	14,537.11	2.22	12.20
2017	305.7901	18,377.01	3.13	13.05
2018	306.0802	20,533.60	3.77	14.63
2019	306.9206	23,295.05	4.97	14.05

Sources: (1) Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Statistical Bulletin 2019 Edition
 (2) Debt Management Office (DMO), publications for various issues, Abuja, Nigeria.