

**POLITICAL EDUCATION FOR MEANINGFUL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT:
RESCUING THE ELECTORATE FROM THE POLITICAL PARTY IN NIGERIA**

OKAFOR Chiedozie Okechukwu

Department of Psychology, Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

UMOH, Nanji Rimdan

Department of Political Science, University of Jos, Nigeria

RIMDAN, Nanle Oona

Clinical Psychology Unit, Department of Mental Health, University of Abuja Teaching Hospital, Gwagwalada, Abuja, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

One of the organs of political education is the political party. Political parties are the candle lights that provide guidance to the majority of the electorate when general elections are imminent. Political parties help to raise the national consciousness by shedding more light on the activities and plans of in-coming or incumbent governments. However, in Nigeria, the democratic governance in practice over the years has reflected a divergence from the primary roles of political parties. The paper reiterates the calls for professional political education to improve the status quo. The recommendations of the paper center on a proposal for “political counseling”. This counseling will be the avenue for cogent political information and the effective empowerment of the electorate. The benefits of the proper implementation of these strategies are expected to include the tangible political sensitization and value-reorientation of the electorate for a much desired political-cum-socio-economic growth and development.

Keywords: party manifestos, political

Introduction

The essence of education of any kind – political education inclusive – is to ensure a degree of behavior modification that determines a relationship between attitudes, behavioral intentions and behavior (Dekker, 1991). In defining political education, Pandey and Kumar, (1977) hold that

political education is a process whereby people learn several matters such as how to socialize within political culture, how to think and act on politics and government, how to adapt to the political process, how to shape political system and how to make decisions. Dag, Sozer and Sel (2015) posit that political education is a process whereby citizens internalize the set of values of the political system. Pacho (2014) noted that the role of political education is the sensitization of individuals to their rights, duties and obligations in order to ensure the protection of same. He quoted Article 21 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as stating that “...everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her own country directly or through freely elected representatives...”

What is paramount in the positions of these scholars is that political education represents a socialization process through which individuals acquire knowledge about the political happenings around them, about responsibilities attached to rights, and about the formation of appropriate responses towards the different political processes. Political education or socialization therefore implies a process through which people develop political beliefs and opinions that influence their behavior in social spheres. It entails a combination of several factors working together to produce belief systems that ultimately guide the attitudes and actions of stakeholders in the political process. These have the requisite capacity to engender, define the trajectory and mould the impressions, outcomes and political makeup of individuals in the political arena.

Owen (2009) described political socialization as a process through which knowledge about the political system and its workings are acquired, society’s value system and ideology are internalized, its symbols and rituals are understood, information about the roles of the active and passive members of society is got and decisions to participate in political and civil life, made. She further held that in the twenty-first century, political socialization takes place at the micro and macro levels with the micro occurring at the individual level while the macro signifies the system-level processes. Dekker (1991) evaluated political socialization as being two-pronged – direct and indirect. The direct involves the acquisition of knowledge and all other values that are purely political in nature. The indirect on the other hand, entails ‘the acquisition of knowledge, opinions, skills, attitudes, behavioural intentions and patterns that are not in themselves political

but exert a significant influence on the subsequent acquisition of specific political knowledge and so forth’.

The role of political parties in prospecting and stabilizing a democracy therefore cannot be overemphasized. Hofmeister and Grabow, (2011) observed that:

Without political parties, a modern representative democracy is not conceivable. The parties ensure that the citizens are permanently capable to act politically. They articulate and integrate different interests, visions and opinions. They are also the main source for the recruitment of political elites. In order to participate successfully in elections, the political parties have to be the voice of broad sectors of society. Associations, social organizations or citizens’ initiatives normally concentrate more on the individual and a limited scope of issues. Political parties, in contrast, are expected to take positions on all those questions and topics that are related to public order and the organisation of society...’

Political parties play a crucial role in democracy-building. According to the ACE Encyclopaedia (n.d.), a political party is defined as ‘an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions that seek to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office’. A political party is a group of people that is organized for the purpose of winning government power, by electoral or other means. Political parties may seek political power through elections or revolutions. Unlike interest groups, the agenda of political parties is to compete for control over state power and government so that they can direct a country’s development process in the manner they see fit, based on their ideological orientations and policy frameworks as contained in their manifestos (Matlosa, 2005). Although the defining features of political parties are principally the capturing of government power and control of public policy-making, their impact on the political system is broader and more complex. The various functions of political parties can therefore be identified as representation, elite formation and recruitment, goal formulation, interest articulation and aggregation, socialization and mobilization and organization of government.

The present study

Since her independence in 1960, Nigeria has been battling with the task of enthroning a sustainable political culture that can ensure peaceful, progressive political development. However, it seems that each time she tries to win, success eludes her. This is evident in the failed first Republic which culminated in a bloody civil war (1966 – 1970). Her second Republic was also greeted with some political imbalances which led to the incursion of the military again in 1983, and so on. Some scholars (Achebe, 1983; Okafor, 2017 among others) have attempted to provide explanations for this political quagmire, yet no research has examined these problems from the point of view of the interactions between the political party manifestos, party campaign strategies, the expectations of the electorates, voting behavior and the activities of the elected officials in general.

Political Campaigns and the Indirect Negative Socialization in Nigeria

The quality of any democracy is largely determined by the vibrancy of the political parties involved in its democratic processes. Political parties are constantly in competition for influence and power as a prerequisite for administering the best ways of resolving political problems. One major age-old mechanism through which a political party educates the electorate on the plans of governments to come and a means of swaying votes or voting behavior in its favour is the party manifesto. Aghara, Nwaizugbo, Chukwuemeka and Onyeizugbe, (2015) capture this as political marketing. This marketing is reflected in Point three (3) of the People's Democratic Party(PDP) manifesto which reads in part that:

The PDP believes in the perpetual unity of Nigeria under the federal system of government. It shall therefore, continuously promote political tolerance, accommodation and compromise, religious harmony, as well as inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic accommodation and co-operation.

For the All Progressives Congress (APC), the mission statement as contained in her manifesto reads in part:

As progressives, we believe that Nigeria is greater than any individual or the sum of her Federating Units, therefore the country can only succeed when

all of us have equal rights, where no one is above the law, where the culture of impunity is abolished and where there is a level playing field.

Ideally, it is this marketing that enables individuals make guided decisions by identifying and kowtowing to the promises contained in the party manifesto which best describes the expectations they have of the government that they are either in support of or expect to be voted into power. Consequently, they exercise their rights and take part in governance on the platform of the political parties of choice. Further clarification on the essence of the manifesto is provided by Galadima (2014) who described it as the benchmark for evaluating pre-election appeal as well as post-election performance.

Opeibi (2006) cited in Aghara, et al. (2015) argued that political marketing in the past two decades in Nigeria has assumed a new dimension with an increase in the use of negative political advertising during electioneering campaigns. He noted further that prior to this period in Nigeria, political candidates concentrated more on selling themselves and their programmes to the people with very few instances of negative advertisements. However, with the resuscitation of democratic activities in 1998 leading to elections in 1999, the electioneering campaigns took on a more competitive posture, affected by the 'winner-takes-all-syndrome' that characterized the 1999 elections and subsequently, the 2003 and other elections. Many political candidates abandoned positive, issue-focused, image-building advertisements for direct vile attacks on their opponents.

The 2015 general elections as the most recent case in point, was heralded by a deluge of hate speeches being used by politicians against their opponents (individuals and groups). This fact was documented in a report by the Chairman of Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Prof. Chidi Odinkalu. Ukwueze and Uche (2015) reported that in the period leading up to the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, many political watchers, local and international observers and of course the entire citizenry had expressed concerns about the barrage of hate speeches that characterized the political campaign messages and adverts of the two main political parties. Ayo-Aderele (n.d) cited in Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) decried the hate speeches, describing them as uncouth, uncultured and absolutely damning statements emanating from the exchanges between the two major camps. In addition, he noted that the personal attacks

were not limited to sardonic jabs but had been escalated into a psychological war deployed in media advertisements, on social media spaces and in extreme cases, inter-personal discussions.

Fasakin, et al., (2017) also noted that most of these derogatory speeches and advertorials used by the members of the two main contending political parties in the country –the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), were irreconcilable with the patriotic stances portrayed in the relevant sections of the manifestos of both parties. Some of the hate speeches used during the 2015 general elections campaigns contained in a report by the Nigerian civil society (Fasakin, et al., 2017) included statements by:

1. The Katsina State Governor, Shema who urged his supporters to attack his political opponents, referring to them as cockroaches that should be killed in the same manner as cockroaches.
2. The Ekiti State Governor, Peter Ayodele Fayose In January who repeatedly took out front page newspaper advertorials warning voters not to vote for the APC presidential candidate Muhamadu Buhari. These adverts, now widely known as “death wish advertorials” insinuated that the presidential candidate was likely to die in office like the late President, Yar’adua, if elected.
3. The then Nigerian First Lady, Patience Jonathan who urged the members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to pelt anyone that promises them ‘Change’ with stones. “Change” was the slogan of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2015.
4. Oba Akiolu of Lagos on April 3rd, 2015 who threatened non-conformists saying, ‘On Saturday, if anyone of you, I swear in the name of God, goes against my wish that Ambode will be the next governor of Lagos state, the person is going to die inside this water [the Lagos lagoon]. For the Igbos and others in Lagos, they should go where the Oba of Lagos heads to’. And so on.

These hate speeches driven by ethno-religious sentiments and the heightened confusion arising from the fear of an obviously imminent conflict in the event of an APC loss of the presidential election put the Nigerian state on tenterhooks with the possibility of going over the precipice. The worrisome trend heightened the entreaties for peace by both the local and international communities that culminated in the signing of a peace deal popularly referred to as the Abuja

Peace Accord. The political situation degenerated to the extent that the incumbent president and presidential candidate of the PDP at the time, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, stated that his victory at the polls was not worth the blood of any Nigerian. This statement was backed up with a no-contest of the election results and a peaceful handover thereafter to the winning APC Presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari. Till date, the hate speeches are traded, evolving in a more divided country.

In the light of the foregoing, it is the contention of this paper that voter (re)education and (re)socialization are unequivocally front-burner issues to be invested in by stakeholders in Nigeria's political arena. These processes must be less partisan and broad-based to ensure that the majority of the electorate are better politically appreciative and knowledgeable in tangible socio-political issues bereft of the periodic self-serving information disseminated by political parties, if any meaningful political development is to be achieved in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework:

The postulations of the elite theory and the dominant-ideology and sociological theories of voting behavior are adopted as the framework of analyses. The elite theory seeks to explain the power relations within the society. It is a theory of the state which posits that power in the state is independent of the state's democratic election process but rather rests in the hands of a small minority consisting of economic elite and policy-planning networks. In essence, the upper class elite pull the strings of government (Witten, 2015). Its main assertions include that power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites who are unified on the basis of common backgrounds and positions that span wealth, nobility, race, gender, religion, etc. This power is exercised to the exclusion of the non-elite groups who are the majority and are diverse and powerless (Shannon, 2011). Mills (1956) in expounding the elite theory assessed the roles of the eponymous triumvirate 'power elite' who occupy the dominant positions in the dominant political, economic and military institutions and the influence of their decisions on the trajectory of political processes. Their actions and activities are seen as emasculative, leading to a decline in politics as an arena for debate and its relegation to a merely formal level of discourse.

Over the years, the Nigerian political landscape has been run by cabals that fit snugly into the self-serving groups, processes and activities described by the elite and power elite theories to the exclusion of the vast majority of her citizens. Ball (1981) in assessing the role of social classification in patterns of voting listed occupation, income and education as some criteria that have provided a 'reliable' guide to voters' preferences to the detriment of more tangible objective assessments.

The dominant-ideology model highlights the degree to which individual choices are shaped by a process of ideological manipulation and control. As the voters attitudes conform to the tenets of the dominant ideology, the parties rarely formulate policies that fall outside the ideology. Ironically, the electoral process tends to uphold this position including the distribution of power and resources within the society. The model also tends to resemble the aspects of the sociological model which emphasize a person's position in a social hierarchy. The dominant-ideology model downplays individual calculation and personal autonomy and emphasizes social conditioning. It highlights the role of political education by the government and the mass media as determinants of how individuals and groups interpret their position. This is because the media are able to distort the flow of communication by structuring preferences and sympathies and influencing the agenda for debate (Heywood, 2003). One point to note is that in a country like Nigeria, politics is ideology-driven. This fact is also upheld by the elite theory which describes the mass media as one tool which is sometimes owned or manipulated by the elite groups for the achievement of their socio-political goals through the advancement of their ideological stances.

The sociological model on the other hand associates voting behavior with group membership in the sense that the electors adopt voting patterns that reflect the social and economic positions of the groups to which they belong. The model highlights the importance of social affiliations along the lines of the various class, ethnic, religious, gender and regional divisions and tensions within the society in question. Rationality and party allegiance are based on group interest and party allegiance. This model has however been criticized for ignoring the role of individual and personal self-interest as determinants of socio-political affiliations (Heywood, 2003). In spite of this criticism, the major contentions of the model are upheld because of their apt description of the influences on individuals in Nigeria's political arena. The electorate tends to be swayed by

the general beliefs of the groups to which they belong and their voting choices also reflect this to the extent that the instructions of traditional rulers as noted by Fasakin, et al. (2017), are potent in providing guidelines for the decisions of voters.

Discussion:

Galadima (2014) described political parties in Nigeria as largely inchoate and undeveloped and built around personalities and the politico-economic elite of the country rather than around political programs or platforms. He went on to state that there is little or no regard for ideologies or platforms since the political parties hardly reflect an organized group of persons pursuing the same ideology, political ideas or platform of government. The fallout of this is that the political parties have no standpoints on national issues and lack clear policy streams where alternatives are considered and decisions made.

Expectedly, the confidence and trust of the public in the political parties is waning because of the non-existence of the parties as inclusive, participatory organizations with visionary policies and clear values in their manifestoes (Galadima, 2014). This position results in a situation that can be described as a double-bind in which the electorate is the victim exposed to a repetitive activity, in this case a constantly unfavourable political exchange.

As enumerated by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland (1972) quoted in Gibney (2006), the double-bind entails situations whereby individuals are embroiled in a communicational matrix, in which messages contradict each other, the contradiction is not able to be communicated on, yet the victim is unable to leave the field of interaction. Gibney (2006) in his discourse on the double-bind theory observed that it introduces the concept of 'power', albeit covertly, in the psychotherapeutic realm. The double-binds 'work' because someone has power over someone else or at the very least (and hardly 'least'), someone has the right to define the operant context for another person. In the case of Nigeria's political communication, the electorate is the victim while political parties are the communicators. Though the constitution prescribes freedom to vote and be voted for and party manifestos claim respect for human freedom and dignity, it is contradictory to learn that people are not actually free to participate in politics. The electorate and the elected officials are the key players in a relationship whereby the political and socio-

economic well-being of the former is at the behest of the latter. The analysis by Bateson et al. is an exposition on this misnomer as the very seeable shadow in most distressing human interactions.

The United States Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) describe ‘the planned operations designed to convey selected information and indicators to audiences to influence their emotions, motives and objective reasoning and ultimately, the behavior of governments, organizations, groups and individuals’. The PSYOPS (1999) entails three (3) main types: the Strategic (the informational activities conducted outside of the military arena), the Operational (the activities conducted across the range of military operations, including during peacetime) and the Tactical (the activities conducted in the area assigned to a tactical commander across the range of military operations).

Certain components of the larger description of psychological operations as described in the U.S. PSYOPS document, can be related to the current overarching influence of the style, quality and content of political education on political processes and subsequently, political development in Nigeria. The components of the Strategic PSYOPS are relevant to the purpose of this paper as a result of the demilitarized tactics which it engages including the conveyance of selected information and the influence on the motives, objective reasoning and behavior of individuals. It is noteworthy that the procedure constitutes part of a planned process. Dekker (1991) referred to processes that adopt such strategies for influencing or modifying political attitudes and behaviour as ‘intentional political socialization’. These psychoanalytic, demilitarized, intentional planned processes are agreeable with the postulations of the elite theory and the dominant-ideology and sociological models of voting behavior. They can be used to describe the mechanisms which the more powerful political elite groups have engaged over the years to effectively keep the electorate in Nigeria in a perpetual position of subservience and docility.

In the same vein, the position of the resource availability theory on access to the means of acquiring political knowledge and opportunities for participating in politics being determined by the social status of the individual (Dekker, 1991) holds true in Nigeria’s politics. The role of poverty and lack in deepening the divide between the rich and the poor and further engendering

the deprivation and social injustice that pervades the society cannot be understated. In reality, a vast majority of the Nigerian population lives below the poverty line (Opejobi, 2016). This *status quo* is maintained by the fact that most viable sectors of a developing country like Nigeria have been hijacked by the ‘select few’ members of the upper class alongside the contradictory “do-or-die” campaign strategies of the various political parties. They are the be-all-and-end-all when it comes to the formulation of target-specific policies that should ordinarily steer the nation in the right direction. Sadly, most of the policy outcomes are evidence of the relegation of the expectations of the electorate.

In the absence of tangible, authentic political information and the inability to reconcile campaign promises with government performances, the voters are constantly left confused and psychologically numbed towards any meaningful political participation. The over-concentration on the somewhat bloated, distractive and derogatory information disseminated concerning the personalities of political opponents results in a disconnect on the part of the electorate, from the political processes. This disconnect arises from the inability to reconcile the goals and cogent perspectives of the party manifestos with the realities with which they are confronted in practice. This results in a disjoint of the functional political thoughts and evaluative actions that should guide the choices of the right candidates by the electorate.

Consequentially, throughout the years of Nigeria’s stints with democracy, the election promises, policy strategies, and political behavior of the individuals whom they continually enable to occupy the exalted offices have continued to run parallel to the expectations of political gains, benefits and so forth held by the electorate. The electorate are forced to live with the grim realities of the electoral choices they made in the ‘hope’ of achieving an escape from a ‘vicious cycle’ only to realize that the cycle actually metamorphosed into a deep pit in which they are still stuck.

The elite groups and dominant ideologies thrive on the ignorance of the majority of the electorate. It is sometimes bred by the futility of the economic status and social class in which they find themselves and the effects of these in determining their access to the mechanisms and corridors of power. The electorate is systematically ‘fed’ select information through the phony,

well-crafted manifestos of political parties designed by these ‘select few’ in order to influence their motives and behavior. This process is systematically planned, comparable to the strategic PSYOPS utilized by the United States military. It is also resplendent of Dekker’s (1991) intentional political socialization since it plays on the psyche of the electorate and is crucial to keeping the cabal in a perpetual position of dominance that empowers them to quell all forms of revolution against the subsisting state of affairs.

Rescuing the electorate from the political party: A political counseling proposal

With the electioneering processes about to commence in lieu of the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria, this paper proposes several strategies and recommendations that not only emphasize political socialization and education but also encourage the requisite values which relate to the quality and sanity of the political landscape such as:

1. **The establishment of an independent political information and counseling agency-**

This agency should either be established as an autonomous body or be created as the political counseling unit(a sub-unit) of the National Orientation Agency (NOA). The agency or unit will be responsible for the continuous political education of the electorate. The process should surpass the rudimentary political education and be escalated to levels that adequately sensitize and equip the citizens with the requisite values necessary for the assessment of political processes or events before, during and after any general elections. The unit should be constituted of professionals of reputable character in the civil service who have training in the social sciences and law. The responsibilities of the agency must encompass:

- **The political counseling and sensitization of the electorate:** This is the mainstay and topmost recommendation of this paper. It becomes more important in view of the trend of voter behavior, voter intimidation, election violence and other anomalies that have characterized election processes in Nigeria as well as the fact that the onset of political activities to herald the 2019 general elections is imminent.

There should be a liaison with other voluntary counseling centres around the country to boost the efficacy of this effort. The activities of the unit should spread to the churches, mosques, markets, tertiary and vocational institutions, political party secretariats, government offices and other places where the groups that can wreak mayhem during electoral periods are easily mobilized.

The counseling processes should hinge on guiding the electorate in ways that maintain the focus on the assessment of the political issues and promises raised in the manifestos of the contending political parties and not on issues that fuel disharmony and disunity by deepening the divide along ethno-religious lines.

- **Personality profiling of political candidates prior to elections:** This should center on the doctrines of transparency and accountability. It must involve the assessment of the political candidates' previous performances in the various capacities in which they have ever served either in the formal or informal sectors of the economy. This position arises from the concern that most political attitudes and behavior portrayed are usually reflections of learned behavior inculcated from the arenas external to the political environment that become modified by the exigencies of the political offices and party affiliations. Fundamentally, the psycho-social evaluation and profiling of individuals vying for political offices can help pre-empt leadership behavior to ensure their alignment with the responsibilities of political office.

All information gathered in the course of the evaluation processes including on the eligibility or otherwise of candidates with regard to their psycho-social stability and intellectual capacity must be made available to the public. This will help place only socially and morally qualified candidates on the ballot and redirect the electorate in terms of their expectations, choices and appropriate voter behavior thereby enhancing the quality of the political process.

2. **The entrenchment of the principle of political integrity:** This aspect of the political education will be targeted at engendering adherence to the oaths of political offices; adherence to the promises/commitments in the party manifestos; obedience to the rule of law; obedience to constituted authority; and obedience to the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria by duly elected officials. Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a watchdog of the political processes should ensure that political parties voted into power are held accountable for the implementation of the programmes which were presented to the electorate to gain their trust and votes (Galadima, 2014). This will also boost the confidence of the electorate in the commitment of the government to the protection of the political rights and trust of the electorate through the oversight functions of the INEC.

3. **The ingraining of a renewed spirit of patriotism:** This aspect of the political education will center on knowledge about protecting our father land. Efforts will be directed at encouraging

a one-directional focus on the qualitative and harmonious co-existence which engenders the unity and progress that are our national motto. Galadima(2014) canvassed for a more participatory and democratic procedure of party manifesto and programme development which will checkmate the current practice whereby a conspiratorial group forces their whims and caprices on the party and on the electorate.

4. **Encouraging peaceful co-existence:** This will be anchored on de-emphasizing relations, cleavages and affiliations that are prone to deepening ethno-religious divides, corruption, social exclusion, injustice, the escalation of tensions and the loss of hope in the Nigerian project. Accordingly, prioritizing the rights of every citizen especially the right to life, freedom of movement and association and the right to live in any part of Nigeria, must top the agenda of strategies being developed to ingrain these core values in the fabric of the Nigerian society.

Conclusion

Indeed, Nigerians have been dealt a raw deal as far as electioneering campaigns in recent times are concerned. Over the years, effective political education in Nigeria has been marred by the pall cast on political enlightenment, party affiliation and patriotism by information content and context driven by ethno-religious divisions, threats of post-election violence, and so forth which constitute aspects of Dekker's (1991) indirect political socialization.

Despite all the inherent anomalies, democracy in Nigeria must be maintained. Its maintenance will depend heavily on the actions, activities and commitment of responsible citizens. However, the onus may also lie on the influence of technology and communication on twenty-first century political socialization, civic engagement, the creation of virtual organizations (Owen, 2008) and the development of new political identities (Bennett, 2008) consistent with the norms of citizen engagement (Owen, 2009) and a constantly evolving society, as mechanisms for righting the inherent and perceived anomalies within our political landscape.

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