

**POLITICAL EDUCATION: A CREATIVE INVENTION FOR
MITIGATING MILITARISM IN NIGERIAN**

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Abstract

Nigeria came into being with the amalgamation of the northern and southern Protectorates in 1914 where over 250 ethnic nationalities were arbitrarily made to coexist in Nigeria federation. The reason adduced by the colonialists for this action was administrative convenience. Rather than build strong institutions for the articulation of common interest, the colonialists and the post independent leaders instigated crises among the federating units mainly to maximize space in the struggle to control national resources. The Nigerian civil war of 1967-70, the various ethnic and religious crises, the crises of revenue allocation, the struggle for resource control, and the Boko Haram insurgency have their common denominator in Nigeria's political economy. The paper argues that the brute and militant ethno-regional and religious contestations for power and influence can be minimized with creative and innovative political education based on mass awareness of individual rights and obligation anchored on social justice.

There is an increasing rate of militarism in Nigeria. This has caused serious concern as measures taken to

arrest this menace by previous governments could not yield any positive result. Communal, ethnic and

religious crises have become a common norm in Nigerian society. Hardly a day passes in Nigeria without a record of crises based on ethnic and religious contestations. In most cases, these crises are motivated by economic factors. Politics which is supposed to be a platform where the collective destiny of a people is tabled for discussions and debates has been reduced to warfare resulting in the destruction of lives and properties. The spirit of sportsmanship that characterizes polities of advanced country is absent in Nigerian social formation partly due to the winner take-all syndrome. Fayeye (2005) observed that the lack of acceptance of electoral defeat always generate crisis leading to the loss of lives of many innocent citizens. Again, Gboyega (1997) posited that even in cases where the candidates who lose elections accept defeat, their supporters, more often than not persuade them to take to violence.

Militarism, the widespread use of arms in the form of ethnic militias since independence has underdeveloped Nigerian politics and society. Each ethnic group organizes and raises its militia, fully equipped with modern weapons to defend her own interest in the struggle to wrestle power from perceived 'enemy'. Oladoyin (2001) posited that at present in Nigeria, ethnicity seems to be detaching itself from being a cultural group symbol. It is now being shaped and armed by politico-economic considerations. The reason for this is lack of political education. Many citizens are not aware

of what politics is all about and how it can be used to lubricate the wheel of development process. The followings form the focal points of the discussion of this paper.

- The concept of political education
- Political education in other societies including Nigeria
- Political education and militarism in Nigeria
- The way forward.

The Concept of Political Education

Political education according to Ozmon and Craver (1976) is a way of bringing about a better polity into existence. Levre (1994) viewed political education as an interdisciplinary programme which gives students insights into issues connected with polity and helping them develop desirable attitudes towards the political system. Political education is the process in which individuals are socialized into the political attitudes and behaviours prevalent in a political system (Hamad et al, 2001). This implies that political education is simply the process of giving enlightenment or awareness to a target population about what politics is and how it should be practiced for the betterment of the society. It is the kind of education that enables individuals develops their potentials and socializing them to meet the country's political needs of maintaining stability, peace, law and order (Rusk, 2007; Ozurumba and Ebuara, 2014). Political education is aimed at conscientizing and mobilizing

the citizenry to disabuse their minds and behaviour of all the historically negative feelings and beliefs they have had over the years about politics. It is about preparing young members of the society to view politics as a social activity that recognizes the contribution of all and sundry in the process of governance. It equally encapsulates non-formal ways of orienting or even re-orienting the citizenry for a better polity through more and better involvement in the nation's political life (Nwankwo, 2012).

Politics is not just about a vertical relationship between the people and the state but also a horizontal relationship among the people and groups by recognizing the rights of members as equal fellow in the polity. This is the reason why education about polity plays a vital role in ensuring peaceful co-existence in a multi-cultural setting. In the views of Pazeit (2001), political education ensures that people and groups in a given polity live together in peace by safeguarding and regulating the generation and implementation of general political duties. The whole essence of political education is to prepare people and groups in society to learn to live and establish harmonious co-existence devoid of serious rancour, prejudice and mistrust that would threaten the stability of the political system. The basic problem facing Nigeria today is how to conduct healthy polity. This is corroborated by Nwankwo (2003) when he stated that political education contributes meaningfully to the growth

and development of the political process.

Political Education in Nigeria and Other Countries

Political education is not new to any society. It was deeply rooted in Athenian society in the 4th Century BC. Plato recommended that education be employed as the chief method of reforming both the individual character and the state (Edward, 1967).

Many countries have used political education to create awareness of the right attitudes demanded of citizens about politics and governance. In America, citizens are adequately educated and enlightened on the rights and duties needed to function effectively in the society. Also Enoh (2003) documented that education is a spiritual and cultural transmission of inherited tradition, the purpose of which is mainly intellectual and moral discipline, in the school system. Based on this definition, countries like America, Italy, England, to mention but a few have used political education/awareness to correct the impression that politics is a deceptive game. Hardly has politics been a bone of contention in those countries that have adequately educated their citizens regarding what to do and what not to do to ensure good governance.

According to Peters (1966), the goal of political education is the inculcation of behavioural patterns considered relevant to the stability, peace, law and order in a particular political community. It implies

capability which is intellect-based and willingness which is emotive in nature. The success of political education in countries like America, Italy and England was as a result of the fact that these countries have taken time to let their citizens know through political education that a politically educated citizen should have the ability and willingness to participate in and shape politics by building strong institutions for the articulation of common interest. The extent to which any country inculcates this truth in their citizens, determines the extent to which politics is played in that society.

In Nigeria, the story is somewhat different. Many citizens have not come to terms with the reality of politics – that is, the majority of people are politically illiterate hence they view politics as the struggle to share the ‘national cake’. The fear of losing out in the struggle to share the national cake and being reduced to the bottom of social ladder explains the potency of political contest in Nigeria (Ernest-Oho, 2003). The losers of political contest are sometimes intimidated brutalized and incarcerated by their political opponents hence the resort to dishonest means such as bribery, rigging and all kinds of fraudulent acts to win election. This is the basis of militarism in Nigeria politics as competitors of political office and their supporters take arms against each others

Ethnic Militias in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. Based on these characteristics, there is bound to be conflicts in the absence of effective crises resolution mechanism to checkmate the excesses of political power players. The conflicts are basically about power and resource control (Fayeye, 2013). Sanda (1976) said that the elites manipulated ethnic loyalties in Nigeria in order to realize economic, political and other ambitions. The inordinate ambition to build political fiefdom by the regional political elites created a tug-of-war political arena as expressed in micro-national agitations and quarrels. Prominent among these quarrels/ethnic militias according to Fayeye (2004) are: the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), the Bakasssi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Niger-Delta Youth Movement, the Plateau Movement, the Benue/Tiv Youth Movement, the Juku Youth Movement, the Kano-based Aljdid Movement and the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). Also worrisome is the emergence of ethno-religious militant group called Boko Haram threatening the peace of Nigeria

Causes of Ethnic Militias

Several factors have been adduced as responsible for the proliferation of ethnic militias in Nigeria. Some of the factors may not be

mutually exclusive. Fayeye (2003) identified the followings as the cause of ethnic militias in Nigeria.

- **Boundary – related factors:** Some ethnic groups share common boundaries. Most often, land and territorial demarcations causes conflicts between ethnic groups. In most cases, one ethnic group may feel cheated in the process and this can result to clashes which could lead to the deployment of ethnic militias.

- **Resource – control:** Some ethnic groups are located in regions with a lot of natural endowment. In a bid to control the gains of the exploration of the resources, they may resort to using ethnic militias against interference by others. Example is the case of Niger-Delta boys on exploration and exploitation of oil in Nigeria.

- **Politically – motivated factors:** Though the Nigerian government introduced federal character, and quota system as a way of ensuring fairness in the distribution of offices, the dream of providing equal opportunities and social justice remains unrealized hence ethnic militias are often used to protest any slightest marginalization.

- **Poverty and unemployment:** The high rate of poverty and unemployment in the country has made many youths to register their displeasure over inept leadership of the elites. Ethnic militias provide political ventilation for the

marginalized to draw the attention of the government to their plight.

Other causes of proliferation of ethnic militias in Nigeria as argued by Daniel (2008) include: - poor welfare, security challenges, and electoral malpractices.

Challenges of Political Education

Political education is a means of creating awareness for the citizenry about how to conduct themselves on issues relating to politics. However, the success of political education in Nigeria is in doubt. Many factors have played to hinder effective political education. Some of the factors are discussed here under.

1. **Faulty School Curriculum.** A school is a microcosm of the larger society where political skills are taught and learned. The school curriculum should be enriched to include things like crises resolution, social justice, law and order and cooperativeness. The place of clubs and societies in schools as platforms of political education should not be relegated to the background (Adelabu and Akinsolu,2009). Sanda (2004) observed that the school should make contributions to the political socialization of children and people. This demand on school as an agent of socialization is often taken for granted. The curriculum content does not really capture issues on political education. The curriculum contents at the various levels of education need to be revisited and enriched on political education.

2. Inter-religious Quarrels

Religious organizations are among the principal agents of socialization. In Nigeria, the two major religions are Islam and Christianity. It is expected that the leaders of the two faiths educate their adherents on the need to maintain peace and order to ensure good governance. The teachings in the mosques and churches should be used to shape the socio-political orientations of the citizenry (Fayeye, 2012). However, at present, the story is different. What one notices is more of rivalry between the two faiths to grab political power for selfish ends. The various ethno-religious crises like the Maitatsine riot of 1980, the Zongo-kataf crises and the extant Boko Haram insurgency are issues of grave concern.

3. Family Dysfunctionality

The family is the smallest unit of social organization. The family (home) is the first point of contact of a child with the world. As such, the first socio-political orientation ought to be given to the child from his family. All preparations about personal and societal life begin at the family level. In the views of Hinelmen (2000), the children are given moral training by the family elders. However, in the Nigeria situation, most homes are characterized by parental strife, separation, poverty and acrimony which have threatened their peace and stability. When a family is in disarray, political education cannot be effectively carried out as expected.

Political Education and Militarism

The prevalence of ethnic militias and their operations in Nigeria have resulted in the perpetration of violence. This violence constitutes other public crimes. This is the reason why Fayaye (2012) advocated for adequate political education of the entire citizenry. Advocates of political education like Sanda (2004), Hutchful (2001) Fayeye (2012) among others gave some cardinal reasons why political education is a panacea for militarism in Nigeria. The rationales for political education are:

1. Political education teaches individuals to be responsive to the political order of the nation
2. It helps youths to imbibe healthy attitudes and beliefs necessary for peaceful co-existence in the country.
3. Political education helps to increase awareness about how people conduct themselves in the midst of political differences.
4. It helps to change the attitude of youths about politics.
5. It gives adequate information about the consequences of political disintegration among others.
6. It raises a generation of youths who are politically aware, ready and willing to participate in politics peacefully without violence.

Oladoyin (2001) documented that lack of political education has made

youths and citizens to betray and disempower large masses of the urban and rural poor producing violent conflicts via use of ethnic militias. Hence, with adequate political education, militarism in Nigeria politics will gradually disappear from the public scene.

Conclusion

The operation of militarism in Nigeria has led to series of violent crises and conflicts between and among groups of people. More often than not, these conflicts are economically motivated. The conflicts ensue principally because many citizens are not politically enlightened. The concept of political education was defined. The paper further examined the role of political education in curbing militarism in Nigeria. It is all about creating awareness of political system by inculcating in citizens the right attitudes towards political life. Mentions were made of major ethnic militias like OPC, MASSOB, MOSOP and Boko Haram. The paper made a case for political education by highlighting the reason why political education is important and helpful in reducing the deadly activities of ethnic militias in Nigeria. It is believed that if the citizenry are adequately educated about political issues, all the violent crises and conflicts arising from ethnic militia will be a thing of the past in Nigeria.

The Way Forward/Recommendations

At present, there is great apathy, selfishness and withdrawal from political life due to decadent political practice in Nigeria. This situation is not healthy to the nation. To reduce the proliferation of ethnic militias in Nigeria, the under listed are recommended

1. There is need for adequate political education that will make people see politics as an essential aspect of the entire social system.
2. There should be a systematic and continuous process of orientation and re-orientation of the entire citizens about politics.
3. Individuals should be adequately educated through integration of political education into school curriculum.
4. Peace and conflict studies should be made compulsory as part of general studies education for all undergraduate students.
5. The church and mosque should be encouraged to use their meetings and programmes to educate their members on the need for peaceful coexistences as enshrined in their Holy Books.
6. Clubs and societies in schools should be encouraged to help students develop social and political skills.

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