

PATTERNS AND CHANGES IN NIGERIAN CIVIC CULTURE: COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR INCREASED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE 2007 GENERAL ELECTIONS.

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Abstract

This paper looks at the role of communication in the effort to change the lingering culture of political violence, electoral fraud, and vote buying that influence political behaviour in Nigerian. Particularly, the paper studies the impact of communication in the restoration of the civic culture of electoral participation among Nigerians during the 2007 elections. The literature reveals that at the instance of the failure of vote buying to guarantee positive political behaviour, violence was adopted as a strategy to cause political apathy. However, prior to the 2007 elections mass campaign began with the aim to neutralize anti-participation forces and stimulate voters turn out. This paper discovered that this campaign made positive impact on all of these objectives, though with differences. The paper, therefore, recommends an intensified campaign with the aim of fostering links among peoples through institutions like churches, civil society organizations and community based traditional structures.

Introduction

In a democracy, candidates compete for popular support through campaigns and public debates normally in the media and rallies. Voters then choose the candidates whose programmes agree with their own set of preferences. In Nigeria, however, this process has been marred by the political class who resorts to a variety of means and behaviour – whether fair or foul – to attain public office. Their programmes and promises which ‘commonly lack credibility (Keefer 2004), are virtually identical across contending parties (Mohammed and Nordlund 2007).

It has been part of Nigerian political culture that campaigns are designed for mass mobilization (not for presentation of manifestoes), material inducement and political intimidation. Manifest electoral violence (Lebas 2006, Wilkinson 2004) and activities that deny citizens the freedom to express their electoral preferences are products of this culture. Most Nigerians see vote buying, electoral violence and manipulation as a siege on public ethics and morality. They resist the efforts of the political elite to illegally influence their political choice and voting behaviour. However, “Faced with irregular carrots or sticks during the course of an election campaign, their only other viable option is to feign compliance while refusing in practice” (Bratton, 2008).

In reality, some of the people who are paid or threatened during the electioneering campaign, never turn out to vote on polling day. Other voters deflect, voting for candidates who please them even after collecting money and or promising to vote for a particular candidate. These have led to the defeat of unpopular candidates who distributed money and materials.

The general elections of April 2007 promised a political watershed (Ibrahim, 2007; Rotberg 2007). It marked the first time since independence in 1960, a third round of elections would be held under a civilian regime and one elected president would succeed another. In spite of these promises, Nigeria’s 2007 elections were deeply flawed (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

Review of Literature

The term "civic culture" was best articulated by Almond & Verba (1963), who referred to it as a set of specific attitudes which are crucial to the success of modern democracies. In another publication, Almond & Verba's (1989) categorized civic culture as a subtype of political culture. They defined political culture as a substantial consensus on the legitimacy of political institutions and the direction and content of public policy. ‘It also means a widespread tolerance for a plurality of interests and a widely distributed sense of political competence and mutual trust among the citizenry’.

Earlier, the psycho-anthropologists such as Benedict (1946); and Kardiner (1945), developed the concept of culture as a personality which in turn, creates modal personality-level copies of itself. However, while anthropologists tend to treat civic culture as a kind of personality configuration, sociologists see it as being synonymous with community interaction levels (Putnam 2001; Bhargava & Reifeld 2005). They disagreed with the notion that folk or [civil religion](#) is the basis for associational life, as well as individualism in general (Bellah, 1985). Putnam's (2001) revealed that there is a decline in social trust and social ties in America with implications for the "social fabric" (how people are connected with one another). Bhargava & Reifeld (2005) made similar discovery in European societies based on fragmentation of citizenship claims due to confusion over identity with wave after wave of postmodernism and multiculturalism.

Skocpol (2004) defined civic engagement as individual and collective action designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Engagement usually means a greater than trivial level of intensity and is not exactly the same thing as service learning or volunteerism although a number of university centres exist on the basis of similarity. Ketter et al. (2002) have come up with 19 measures of the concept across 3 categories, as listed below.

The 18 Measures of Civic Engagement		
Civic	Electoral	Political
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community problem solving. • Volunteering for a non-electoral organization. • Active membership in a group or association. • Participation in a fund-raising run/walk /ride. • Other fund-raising for charity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular voting. • Persuading others to vote. • Displaying buttons, signs, and stickers. • Campaign contributions. • Volunteering for a candidate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting officials. • Contacting the print media. • Contacting the broadcast media. • Protesting. • Emailing petitions. • Written petitions. • Boycotting. • Cavnassing

Civic culture has traditionally been used as a variable for comparison of political systems. In fact, it may be the most important variable having the strongest impact in the direction of democratic political development. This is because it is pro-participatory oriented politics.

A participative-oriented politics is designed to encourage more citizen participation by broadening the range of people who have access to opportunities for political decision-making. Some scholars (e.g., Chambers and Kymlicka 2002) argued that this kind of reform extends the domain of civil society and that only strong governmental opportunities for participation create strong, liberal democracies that empower the poor. Traditional (representative) government tends to limit citizens participation to voting, leaving the actual governance to politicians, but participative government tries to reach out to disenfranchised citizens by making them consultants to help organize citizens into teams or task forces.

These civic responsibilities have been destroyed by certain form of political culture found among African nations particularly Nigeria. Vote-buying, violence and other forms of political fraud have led to political apathy in Nigeria. Van de Walle (2003) noted that Nigerians, to some extent, appreciate vote buying as signals of a patron's wealth and capability of winning elections, and this draws people near to the wealth holder (Bratton, 2008; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007: 64).

However, Bratton (2008) observed that 'only 7 percent of Nigerians would go so far as to characterize vote buying as "not wrong at all." Thus, Nigerians are resistant to both vote buying and electoral violence on moral grounds. From the data he generated from straightforward survey questions, individuals encountering offers of "something...(money, food or a gift)... in return for your vote" or threats of "negative consequences in order to get you to vote a certain way", existed in both the 2003 and 2007 in an increasing ratio (Bratton, 2008). This experience is similar to that of Taiwan where the pace of vote buying accelerates as the day of the election approaches (Wang and Kurzman 2007). This has led to lack of confidence on the electoral system and mass apathy to the electoral processes.

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Nonetheless, some writers have blamed some other factors as being responsible for this culture of apathy in Nigeria.. Eze (1983) listed these other factors to include:

- Economic Poverty - obsession with procurement of lower order satisfier creates political inertia in the Nigerian electorate.
- Long time exposure to military rule has conditioned Nigerian electorate to totalitarianism and maximum rule. Authoritarian persons are conservative, slavish to rules and authority, prejudiced in thinking and discriminatory in behaviour (Adorno, et al. 1950).
- Political Alienation: Long time political alienation of a large section of the citizenry leads to political apathy, political cynicism and political scepticism.
- Education: There are two types of education: general and political. General education informs the electorate and frees them from irrational decision-making. Political education enables the electorate to be conscious of its fundamental human rights, to make demands for the citizenry's protection when government institutions attempt to encroach on them, fight for these rights when it becomes obvious that they may not be granted by government. It is the combination of the poverty of these two types of education in Nigeria that has prevented the thriving of participatory democracy.
- Learned Helplessness: The complacent behaviours and actions of Nigerians towards changing their political misfortune to political fortune suggests that the psychological mechanism operating is learned helplessness. According to Seligman, it is a learnt state that is produced by exposure to noxious, unpleasant situation in which the possibility of escape does not exist (Reber, 1995:332).
- Ethnicity: Ethnicity creates the evils of ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotype and discrimination (Adebayo, 2001:105) with ethnic groups trying to outdo one another, with the military institutions becoming a ready tool for such (Suberu, 1988). The consequences of ethnocentrism are political instability, political aggrandizement, ethnic violence, injustice, inequity and interethnic and intra-ethnic war (Ugwuegbu, 1995:6).

It is in evolving a solution to this apathy that the role of communication in the alteration or changing of Nigeria's civic culture manifests. The media have remained the dominant source of communication in a multi ethnic and large society like Nigeria. The literature on the role of the mass media in political reporting (Nationally, locally and internationally) abounds in published materials. Gerbner et al (1982), Chaffee et al (1970), Sandman et al (1976) and Umechukwu (2001) all agree that the media are agents of political communication and propaganda. Fred Omu (1978) noted that "The early Nigerian press was essentially a political press which took on the opposition to the government". Galadima & Enighe (2001:64) supported this view thus:

The press was owned and ran by nationalists to confront the colonial government. It was "press of protest" in which, Babatunde Jose said, seditious and criminally libellous articles were written against the colonial government in the name of nationalism. However, this helped in the constitutional reforms and the granting of self-government to the nationalists.

Many scholars are in agreement about the role the media could play in political reporting which is a primary area of development in any polity. Politics without so much emphasis determines the well being of a society. Even development communication has a political undertone or colouration. Politics in this part of the globe is simply concerned with acquiring or exercising political power within a group or an organization or a state. In the view of Uzoegbunam (1977) cited in Umechukwu (2001), discussing the concepts of power, dominations, control, influence, society and class brought together for the working of a people in a territory means discussing politics.

Shaw and McCombs (1977:106) did comprehensive work on agenda setting and are in acknowledgement of the fact that media surveillance of events and issues revolves around setting agenda for civic concern and action. This is politically significant. Generally, it is held that media professionals or reporters determine what is news, which political happening or condition will be covered or prescribed and which to downplay or give prominence in their daily coverage of national and international issues. Undesirable political conditions that may be tolerated while they remain obscure may quickly become intolerable in the glare of publicity (Umechukwu, 2001:103). McCombs and Mauro (1977) on their on part note that the media also provide clues to the public about the

degree of importance of an issue. Political issues covered more prominently by the media are likely to be considered most important by media audience.

Blumler cited in Umechukwu (2001:104) pointed to the fact that the mass media functions essentially as agencies of social legitimation – as forces, which reaffirm those ultimate value standards and beliefs, which in turn, uphold the social and political status quo. Since the media are the eyes and ears of the citizens, their means of surveillance which tell them about political conditions, economic and social conditions, journalists need to be more objective in news reporting and imbibe a crusading posture in order to influence public opinion. It is through the gathering and dissemination of information that the people assume that their political system is still relevant despite the predisposition to trial and error mechanism. This is vital if the people must have peace of mind.

Gerbner et al (1982:101) viewed the mass media as “the mainstream of the common symbolic environment that cultivates the most widely shared conceptions of reality”. Kraus and Davies (1976), and Chaffee et al (1970) empirically supported this. These mass communication scholars and media researchers all agree that the mass media are the primary agents of political socialization. To corroborate this view, Umechukwu (2001:106) notes thus:

This being the case, the Nigerian mass media should present political values that will lead to reforms since media-cultivated facts and values are standard by which we can judge. Once basic orientations towards the political system have been formed, attitudes usually stabilize and later learning largely supplements and refines earlier notions. Much of what the average person learns about political norms, rules, values, and events...necessarily come from the mass media.

People’s opinion, feelings, and evaluation about political system may spring from their own processing of facts supplied by the media. It is, therefore, imperative that journalists should task themselves with supplying the right political values which would create response from the people. Still on political socialization, which the mass media are expected to promote, Okunna (1998:108) noted that through the process of socialization, the individual is made aware of and internalizes the values, norms and acceptable behaviour pattern of the society.

It is also important at this point to briefly summarize some findings on Nigerian press coverage of conflicts and crises. Galadima and Enighe (2001) analyzed Nigerian press coverage of political issues and came up with the following conclusions:

The Nigerian press are always used by their owners- private party or government – for the propagation of the interests of such owners, especially in the struggle to gain power or monopolize same. There is recklessness and partisanship on the part of the press during elections and transition to the civil rule programmes instead of restraint and responsible reporting of events.

The principle of objectivity is always abandoned by the championing of the causes of their master’s political struggles. Manipulations of the press to report false election results, which caused violence, mostly in the western region, have been a common trend since independence. Proscriptions, banning and closures of media houses have been a recurrent trend since the first republic. Galadima and Enighe (2001) study focused on the press in Nigerian politics with emphasis on the historical analysis of issues and patterns of news coverage. The study assessed the role of the press in the struggle for political positions by Nigerians since independence and concluded that the Nigerian Newspapers have operated more as players in political issues than as impartial reporters of such political events or issues. Four newspapers and four newsmagazines were analyzed to arrive at this conclusion. This paper and the study by Galadima and Enighe are essentially alike but a major difference between them is that the present study is focused primarily on the impact of the media of communication on the changing civic culture in Nigeria.

Electoral Violence and Media Campaign in Nigeria

Violence is a weapon used in elections to intimidate and scare voters from exercising their electoral choices, to snatch or switch ballot boxes, to facilitate ballot stuffing and mass thumb printing of ballot papers. In the past particularly during the 1964 and 1983 general elections, many people

were killed or injured during election violence. Consequently, a substantial proportion of the electorates often avoid voting due to fear of violence. In a survey conducted by Alemika and Omotosho (2008), 54% of the respondents were fearful of becoming victims of election violence. The researchers observed after the election proper that:

--Political campaigns and rallies were characterised by violence. The electoral commission and other relevant governmental agencies responsible for elections (a) treated civil associations that serve as election management watchdogs disrespectfully, (b) demonized and misrepresent patriotic citizens and civil actors who demanded efficiency, accountability, transparency and impartiality in the administration of elections in the country. These events led to uncertainty about whether or not the elections will hold at all. Those who felt that the elections would hold were apprehensive about the prospects of fairness and freeness of the elections. The objective political condition during the six months preceding the elections did not engender optimism that the election will be conducted or that if they were conducted, they would be free and fair.

The state of security in the country was terrible. In the lead up to the 2007 elections, human rights defenders and various non-governmental organizations, including the Media Rights Agenda publicly complained about State Security Service, a domestic intelligence agency, making incursions into news organizations. According to Fadope (2007), independent broadcast media such as the African Independent Television and Raypower-FM stations were harassed by authorities with programs stopped in mid-air, tapes seized and reporters arrested. Just before the Christmas of 2006, the Chairman of the Editorial Board of *ThisDay Newspaper*, Godwin Agbroko was found dead behind the wheels of his vehicle. Days later, the office of *ThisDay* was gutted by fire. Then in January 2007, two newspapers (i.e. *The Leadership*, a daily, and *The Abuja Inquirer*, a weekly) were raided and their offices briefly shut down.

In anticipation of violence and mass apathy during the 2007 elections Action Aid International Nigeria (AAIN) launched a nationwide campaign against electoral violence in February 2007. AAIN's campaign encouraged voters to resist intimidation and to participate in the elections. It also tried to persuade voters to punish violent candidates by voting against them. Campaign staff toured villages and urban neighbourhoods organizing town meetings and street theatres to sensitize voters to the campaign message. They also distributed leaflets, posters, and items of clothing bearing an anti-violence message, the purpose of which was to reinforce and disseminate the message further (see <http://www.iig.ox.ac.uk/research/08-political-violence-nigeria/default.htm> for details of this campaign, including the full design of its media, and photos/films of its conduction).

Furthermore, Human Rights Watch (2007) in a report released in May observed that during the election proper:

Violence and intimidation were so pervasive and on such naked display that they made a mockery of the electoral process. ---Where voting did take place, many voters stayed away from the polls. ---By the time voting ended [on the election days], the body count (of people that were killed) had surpassed 300.

This violence was identified by Human Rights Watch to be originated from marginalized political groups, many of who are dissidents formerly associated to PDP). 'On the ground, this hostility emerged in the form of assassinations of known politicians, but mainly as locally-widespread intimidation usually conducted by armed gangs recruited among the young and unemployed. This is the context in which we ran our field experiment, to which we now turn' (HRW, 2007). Nevertheless, when compared with previous electoral violence, there was a reduction. Collier and Vicente (2009:25) discovered through field work that AAIN campaign impacted on violence-related measures during the election. They noted that the campaign changed responses on political freedoms by 9-12%, and those on free and fair elections by 18-21%. In terms of general electoral violence at the local level, the work found that for 'conflict within the local community', there was a 12% effect and 5% change in intimidation directly conditional on voting. On local violence originated at the top, effects ranged from a 6% change in the influence of assassinations, an 8% change in politicians advocating violence and in gang activity, to a 10% change in security from violence originated by politicians (Collier and Vicente, 2009:17-18).

Electoral Fraud and Media Campaign in Nigeria

The incidence of electoral fraud and protest during the 2003 elections was very similar to that of 1983 and 1963/64 except for violence which the media helped to avert. High voter turnout marked the first phases of the elections (12 and 19 April). Some polling units could not open on time while many voters could not locate their names on the register. Complaints attended the counting and collation process; party agents, citing exclusion from it refused to endorse some results. Security was tight, but some officials were implicated in vote –rigging. The media was restrained; it declared results announced by INEC and gave coverage to criticisms of the conduct of the election. Commenting on the 2003 electoral fraud, Alemika and Omotosho (2008) observed that;

INEC was slow in announcing results. In one state its officials declared as winners candidates who did not contest.

Many political parties alleged that the results declared did not reflect expressed preferences. In some polling units incumbents secured the vote of every registered voter. The ruling party asked losers to file petitions at the election tribunals while opposition parties called for a cancellation of the results and the conduct of fresh polls. A coalition of parties announced a campaign of mass action to compel a re-run of the polls. Opposition parties were notably hesitant to file election petitions, reflecting a lack of faith in that process. But the media joined the government in reminding the aggrieved that the electoral law vests the resolution of electoral disputes in the election tribunals. INEC has complained about the cost of defending the petitions that were subsequently filed.

The malaise of the 2007 election unlike the 2003 started with voters' registration, which is the foundation of free and fair elections. The preparation for voter registration prior to the 2007 elections was very shoddy. 'During registration, potential electorates could not locate registration centres and when they did, officials were absent, necessary supplies for registrations were unavailable, or equipment malfunctioned. Attempt by politicians to manipulate the registration in connivance with electoral officials who sought bribes was widely reported'. Reactions to these inadequacies as experienced and reported by the media led to violence in many places and apathy among potential voters. However, NGOs like the Alliance for Credible Elections and the Transition Monitoring Group mounted massive grassroots campaign to mobilise citizens to endure the frustration of the poor preparation for the exercise. Religious and community organisations and leaders waged the campaign among their members to register and vote as their civic duties demand.

Findings from the first round survey by Collier and Vicente (2009) and Alemika and Omotosho (2008) showed that 64% of the male population compared to 51% of females were registered. However, it is important to note that registration was uneven across the country.

In addition to the above irregularities, Domestic Election Observation Groups released a report immediately after the first round of elections itself stating that the election was marred by such frauds like hoarding of result sheets by INEC; lack of secrecy in balloting; underage voting, non inclusion of pictures and/or names of candidates on the ballot paper; partisanship of INEC officials, snatching of ballot boxes and papers; intimidation of voters and unacceptably high number of deaths recorded in the exercise (Preliminary Report on the Gubernatorial and State Assemblies Elections, Held on Saturday, April 14, 2007 available at www.afrobarometer.org). The Coalition further stated that:

... monitors throughout the country noted and documented numerous lapses, massive irregularities and electoral malpractices that characterized the elections in many states. Based on the widespread and far-reaching nature of these lapses, irregularities and electoral malpractices, we have come to the conclusion that on the whole, the election was a charade and did not meet the minimum standards required for democratic elections ... We do not believe that any outcome of that election can represent the will of the people (DMG, 2007:1).

The manipulations and violence that characterised the preparations for the elections led to a general atmosphere of uncertainty and apathy in the few months preceding the elections. Yet, the findings of

Alemika and Omotosho (2008) survey indicated a very high level of interest in electoral participation among the electorates:

- 92% of those that registered were sure they would vote in the elections
– [very sure (74%) and somewhat sure (18%)];
- 93% of males and 91% of females reported that they would surely vote during the elections.
- Enthusiasm of the registered voters is highest in North-West and North-East where 97% of the registered voters said they were sure to vote. This is understandable because the candidates of the big parties are from the two zones.
- 91% and 94% of registered voters in the urban and rural areas respectively reported that they will surely vote in the elections. The pattern of response indicated prospect of high turnout.

Fafchamps and Vicente (2009) noted in their field experiment that the results of media campaign by AAIN in 2007 on ensuring positive change in people's voting behaviour was negative. However, on voter's participation or turn-out, Collier and Vicente (2009) in their field experiment noted that the result is different. The main purpose of the AAIN campaign was to persuade people who had decided not to vote because of intimidation to vote after all. This purpose was achieved by the campaign because the proportion of people who changed their mind and voted was 9% larger in the treated group, an effect that is significant at the 10% level (Collier and Vicente, 2009:27).

Conclusion

This paper reviews the culture of electoral violence, fraud and their consequences for voters' behaviour and apathy during general elections in Nigeria. It explores field experiments and reports designed to evaluate the reinforcement and diffusion network effects of communication campaign to discourage electoral violence and fraud, change voters' behaviour and increase their participation during elections. Generally, the paper discovered that communication/campaign impacts positively on the expected changes in the civic culture of Nigerians with regards to political violence, political fraud, voters' behaviour and political apathy, though differentially. It becomes necessary to recommend an anti-violence, fraud and apathy campaign of the kind implemented prior to the 2007 elections by AAIN as an effective tool for positive behaviours in Nigeria's electoral system. It is imperative that proximity reinforces the impact of such campaign and diffuses its effect more widely. Thus, the campaign should be magnified by fostering the formation of links among peoples through such links as churches, civil society organizations and community based traditional structures.

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