

Research Article

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Political apathy and the imperative of media education in Nigeria

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Abstract: The fact that the workability of any political process is largely dependent on the active participation of the masses remains undisputable. Also, the active participation of the masses in any political process is largely dependent on the level of awareness and effective mobilization. Research evidence and critical observations have all pointed to the fact that lack of awareness and effective mobilization of the masses for any political process engender and sustain apathy which ultimately frustrates such political agenda. The paper tried to explore the situation of political apathy in Nigeria and how such apathy could be mitigated by the media. Through intensive review of relevant documents, it was argued that led to critical discourse on the subject of focus of the paper, it was found that lack of education/sanitation of the masses, lack of effective mobilization, the menace of corruption, political violence and consistent military intrusion in governance have fundamentally engendered political apathy in Nigeria. It was also found that the media has the capacity to reduce or ultimately eradicate political apathy by engaging in aggressive sensitization and education of the masses, mobilization of the masses, fighting corruption, correcting political misconceptions and ensuring two-way-communication. Accordingly, the paper advanced a roadmap for the effective utilization of the media not only to change the status quo, but to position Nigeria on the path of political progress as an emerging democracy in Africa.

Keywords – Apathy, Imperative, Mass media, Politics, Postcolonial

1. INTRODUCTION

For any society to make progress politically, active participation of the masses is very expedient. The public must be fully involved for any political agenda to be successful. Both the drivers of the political agenda and the citizens must work together for the realization of a given political movement. However, one fundamental impediment to the success of any political process is political apathy. Political apathy is a situation where the citizens of a given society are not interested in the political process of such a society. It is also a scenario where the inhabitants of a nation are less concerned with the political developments/activities of such a nation. Meyor (2009: 2) affirmed the above that a citizen's refusal to show interest or concern in the political developments of a given country unveils the depth of political apathy of such a citizen. The citizens must be actively involved for any political process to succeed.

The above assertion by Meyor points to the fact that political participation of the masses remains a major determinant of the survival of any political movement. Here, the citizens must be actively involved in virtually all the processes of any political agenda. This goes a long way to engender the success of such a political agenda. Bill

(2011: 4) gave credence to the above when the researcher contended that active participation of the masses in any political agenda secures overwhelming success for such an agenda. It lubricates the smooth take-off and successful end of such a political move. Apathy on the other hand destroys the entire process.

Bill's assertion unveils the danger of political apathy to the success of political agenda. Where there is political apathy, securing political success becomes unattainable. This is because the citizens (who are supposed to be major players) are not interested in the processes. This, therefore, collapses the entire process of achieving political success. Over the years in Nigeria, particularly in democratic regimes, a lot of political activities which amongst others involved the conduct of elections have often been met with abysmal participation of the citizens. Research evidence and critical observations have affirmed amongst others that lack of awareness and effective mobilization of the citizens towards actualizing a political agenda have engendered and as well sustained political apathy amongst the citizens. Okon (2010: 31), unveiled in his study that lack of awareness and ineffective mobilization of the masses are major causes of political apathy in Nigeria. The researcher further affirmed that political apathy has ultimately led to the failure/questionability of Nigeria's democracy. Ibrahim (2011: 54) agreed with the findings of Okon equally revealed in his study that the inability to effectively inform and mobilize the Nigerian masses for political activities has given birth to an ugly child called political apathy.

From 1999 (when Nigeria returned to democratic governance) till date, studies have revealed the continued presence of political apathy in Nigeria's political landscape. Although there have been calls for effective political participation, the response is yet encouraging. The low turn out of voters in the April 2011 general elections in Nigeria is an obvious attestation to the above fact, an act many political analysts attributed to ineffective sensitization and mobilization. It was in recognition of the above that Adeyemi (2011: 113) affirmed that; in the midst of the growing apathy and political confusion amongst Nigerian masses, the need for effective awareness campaigns and mobilization becomes very expedient, especially in this era where democracy is encouraged globally. Nigeria as a democratic nation must understand that the major avenue to consolidate her democratic process is to effectively mobilize the masses toward active participation. This remains core ingredient to advance her democratic governance (Ibeh, 2011: 91).

The underlying factor here is that postcolonial Nigeria has witnessed and is still experiencing political apathy which scholars believe can be changed through effective sensitization and mobilization of the masses.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Relevant literature were reviewed in line with the subject of focus.

2.1. Political apathy in Nigeria: A review

As asserted earlier, postcolonial Nigeria has witnessed and is still witnessing political apathy. Studies have confirmed that right from the first republic till date, the problem of apathy still surfaces in Nigeria's political journey. Nwafor (2011: 4) affirmed in his study that the negative attitudes of Nigerian masses toward politics have continued to threaten the growth of Nigerian's political system. Kabiru (2010: 17) corroborated Nwafor's finding when his study shows that Nigeria is yet to achieve active participation of the masses in political movements. Furthermore, Ebimo and Muhammed (2011: 7) unveiled in their study that politicians have continued to sustain the growth of political apathy by their corrupt and dangerous activities. These findings are in agreement with that of Okpoku (2010: 71) who also discovered in his study that from the first republic till date, political apathy has continued to be on the increase. The researcher further affirmed that political violence has been a major cause of the current level of political apathy in Nigeria.

Also, Adebola (2011: 53) revealed in his study that the level of political apathy in Nigeria, especially the rural areas has drastically increased. The author stated that the rural dwellers are often excluded or insufficiently informed about several political agenda. Gbenga (2011: 61) supported the above findings which discovered in a study that much has not been done to eradicate political apathy in Nigeria, particularly in the rural communities.

Another scholar, Oguche (2011: 16) revealed in his study that corruption has consistently increased the level of political apathy in Nigeria. The author asserted that in 1960 when Nigeria got independence, Nigerians were filled with high expectations of an improved way of life. However, it is very heart-breaking to know that from then till date, the corrupt nature of our leaders has continued to improvise the masses. This has led to lack of trust and confidence in the Nigerian political system and governance. To this end, participation of the masses in the political processes has remained low.

As a result of the above, scholars have come to recognize the capability of the mass media in salvaging political apathy. Onah (2011: 30) recommended in his study that an effective utilization of the mass media is what is fundamentally needed to change the current status quo of political apathy in Nigeria. The researcher traced the success of U.S. political system to the effective and efficient use of the mass media to sensitize/educate and mobilize the masses toward achieving a successful political development. Adekunle (2011: 18) agreed with Onah's recommendation which equally advocated for the right application of the mass media for effective political advancement in Nigeria. The researcher x-rayed the various prominent roles (such as political education and mobilization) the media have played to advance the political system of France.

Abubakar (2011: 93) in his study also recommended the maximum adoption of the mass media as a very viable means to curb the political apathy in Nigeria. The researcher contended that amongst all other options open to Nigeria to fight political apathy, the mass media remain the priority. Abubakar made reference to the western media and their overwhelming impact on the growth of western politics.

2.2 The Causes of Political Apathy in Nigeria

Several compelling factors have no doubt led to political apathy in Nigeria. These factors include:

(i) Lack of effective education/sensitization of the masses

One major factor that has engendered political apathy in Nigeria is the fact that the Nigerian masses (especially those in the rural areas) are yet to be effectively sensitized / educated on political movements. This has led to political ignorance amongst the people which has left them with no other option than to stay away from political activities in the country. In their Studies, Luke (2011), Olufemi (2010) and Obi (2012) revealed that the low awareness level of political issues amongst Nigerian masses has led to the high level of political apathy currently being experienced in Nigeria.

(ii) Lack of effective mobilization

It is not enough for one to just be sensitized/educated on an issue, such a person must be effectively mobilized to participate in such an issue to successfully achieve the goal. To this end, it is very glaring that the inability to effectively mobilize the masses for a political action has contributed immensely to non-participation of the masses in Nigeria's political journey. Studies by Nwabara (2011), Bola (2010) and Isa (2011) have pointed to the fact that the Nigerian masses have not been effectively mobilized to participate in the political processes. This has led to the poor turnout of the masses on political movements, particularly during elections.

(iii) The menace of corruption

Corruption is no doubt a fundamental impediment to active political participation in Nigeria. In fact, it is a very devastating challenge Nigeria has been battling with for decades, and yet, it has remained a recurring decimal in Nigerian's political landscape. More worrisome is the fact that even those placed in highly respected political positions end up looting the funds budgeted to better the lives of the people and in the end, nothing is done to prosecute them. Even when they are arrested for prosecution, after the razzmatazz, their cases just die natural deaths because of their powerful influences. This unacceptable reoccurring decimal has seriously discouraged the masses from participating in political movements. Njoku (2011: 71) affirmed the above which found out in his

study that corruption in governance has continually deterred the public from getting involved in Nigerian politics. Because nothing is done to those who stole, the next group takes corruption to the next level. Today, one can talk of mega corruption in Nigeria. The cover pages of most Nigerian newspapers and magazines are usually awash with scaring banner headlines of the bleeding of the nation by greedy politicians.

Virtually on daily basis, we have shocking revelations of how Nigeria's political class is bleeding the nation to death. This high level of corruption has made most of the Nigerian citizens to develop ill-feelings towards politics and politicians. Their apathy can only be captured by the statement of E.M Forster. The researcher stated that "whichever way I cast my vote, I find myself in the boat and Mr Brown and Grey will row it the same way". So, for Nigerians, it does not matter who is there, they are the same, why break your head getting involved at all.

(iv) Consistent military intrusions in governance

Postcolonial Nigeria (like many other African nations) has witnessed more of military regimes than democratic rules. The incessant toppling of civilian governments by the military has seriously affected the country's political system which has negatively affected the attitudes of the public in that regard. Idohu (2011: 14) asserted that "in these periods (military regimes) political ideals were dropped and democratic consciousness continued to diminish drastically".

The incipient and berenaial depoliticization of the majority of Nigerian citizens has been as a result of the prolonged military dictatorships that have truncated and stymied the vital latitudes of freedom and flexibility which are integral to the flourishing of any meaningful political consciousness and participation of the citizenry (Okonkwo, 2004: 89). In fifty two years of Nigeria's independence, we have had both military and civilian administrations. In the military era, the people were alienated. For the military, power flows from the barrels of their guns and not the voters' card.

(v) Political Violence

Political violence has been a very dangerous and reoccurring decimal in Nigeria's political landscape. In fact, it has become a norm in Nigerian politics. In majority of the political movements in Nigeria, political violence (which most often leads to killings) has continued to take center stage. We saw how lives and properties (including young graduates on national assignment) were violently terminated in the April 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The presence of political violence has to a very large extent engendered political apathy in postcolonial Nigeria. Thugry, arson, outright murder have remained serious challenges to the Nigerian political system.

Because politics has been turned a mode of production, an "investment" of sort, politicians take politics as a do or die affair. These acts of violence alienates the masses who do not want to be caught in the cross fire between rival political groups.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is no doubt about the fact that postcolonial Nigeria has witnessed and is still witnessing political apathy. Scholars have established amongst others that lack of awareness and effective mobilization of the masses are major factors breeding political apathy in the country. To correct this mindset, efforts have been made, yet, the problem continues unabated. In fact, it has consistently served as one of the major impediments to the success of Nigeria's political agenda.

This paper therefore examined the causes of this apathy and the potential of the media to change the mindset of the people to ensure active participation in Nigeria's political agenda.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The agenda – setting theory was used to explain this study. The theory is of the assumption that the mass media exert tremendous influence over human affairs. The ability of the mass media to mould the minds of the public and

significantly influence them is a widely ascribed power. In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of attention given to it by the media. The mass media may well determine the important issues-that is, the media may set the agenda of the campaigns (McCombs & Shaw, 1972: 176; Wogu, 2008: 145).

In line with the thrust of this paper, the media, with the widely ascribed power can be effectively used to remould/reshape the minds of Nigerian masses from political apathy to active participation.

5. METHODOLOGY

The document review method was used for the study. Relevant documents were carefully reviewed in line with the study to properly address the goal of the paper which focused on exploring how the media can help in the fight against political apathy in Nigeria. The documents included books, journals, unpublished works and publications in the dailies.

6. DISCUSSIONS

As affirmed earlier, the mass media command a lot of influence in molding/shaping attitudes. Political apathy is not an exemption. To this end, this paper advanced the following steps the mass media can take in eradicating political apathy in Nigeria.

(i) Aggressive sensitization/education of the masses

For the mass media to effectively deal with the issue of political apathy, a fundamental demand is on them to create political awareness by sensitizing/educating the public. Efforts must be made to effectively educate the masses on the political process at hand. Political issues must be brought to the consciousness of the masses. There is no doubt about the fact that political apathy is majorly caused as a result of the inability of the masses to access political information. Therefore, the mass media can come to the aid of the public by providing adequate political information for the enlightenment of the masses. Abadi (2010: 43) affirmed that "the media with all the potentials can effectively create political awareness by sensitizing/educating the public on political processes". The mass media can carryout planned public education and enlightenment programmes aimed at disseminating relevant information on government policies, programmes and projects (Odigbo, 2004: 175). Tailor (2011: 15) found in his study that the sensitization and education efforts of the media contributed seriously to the success of the last U.S. election that produced Barack Obama as president.

More so, the point above is in line with the information and education functions of the media which demand that the mass media must inform and as well educate the people on various issues including political apathy.

(ii) Mobilization of the masses

This is another fundamental role of the mass media in the eradication of political apathy. Here, the mass media mobilize the masses for political actions by preparing them toward taking firm decisions on expedient political issues through the provision of fora for debates and discussions which will ultimately lead to informed decision making. This, also, is in line with the mobilization function of the mass media that places a demand on the media to mobilize the masses toward achieving a course(s). Lucas (2011: 48) affirmed the above that "the power of the mass media to mobilize the public for political action stands undisputable". The researcher further stated that the mass media in the United States, France and others have to a large extent contributed to the active participation of the masses through effective mobilization.

(iii) Fight corruption

One fundamental way of winning the heart of the people toward participating in any political process is to combat

corruption in government. This has no doubt served and is still serving as a major impediment to active political participation in Nigeria. The citizens have certainly lost confidence in the system. One can imagine a situation where a politician emerges and instead of bringing about good leadership, he or she embarks on stealing public funds. The media in this regard can be effectively utilized to probe/investigate and expose corruption in government. In doing this, the heart of the citizens on governance would have been won and this will trigger their interests in the political process that will usher-in their leaders. Bob (2010: 37) agreed with the above that "the media has a great deal of potential to fight corruption in government and restore the heart/trust of the people". Combating corruption is a necessary step to discouraging political apathy.

(iv) Eradication of political violence

Here, the mass media can eradicate political violence by re-orientating the attitudes of Nigerian politicians on the need to see politics as a means of bringing about peace and development of a nation, and not to see politics as a do or die venture. Through compelling communication strategies, both the minds of politicians and the thugs used to perpetrate violence can be changed.

With the mass media and new communication technologies now increasingly taking the center stage in human, national and international affairs, political violence can be terminated if politicians understood the efficacy of the mass media in political engineering and mass mobilization. The various media (newspaper, magazine, television, radio, films) have great potentialities for political mobilization and should be used extensively and intensively by practitioners to pursue the gladiatorial objectives of the contending political forces (Okonkwo, 2004, p.89). When this is successfully done, active political participation will be encouraged.

(v) Educate the people to resist military intrusions in governance

The mass media must not only sensitize the Nigerian masses to appreciate politics, but must also educate the people on the need to resist any further military intrusion into governance because it does not fall within their responsibilities. The masses must be educated to prevent further military intrusion in governance by actively promoting democratic ideals.

Every Nigerian citizen should not only be sensitized by the mass media to understand and appreciate the supremacy of the Nigerian constitution, but should also be conscientised to resist any further attempt by the military to seize political power by force, no matter the reasons adduced. The Nigerian citizens or soldiers should be oriented toward appreciating the constitutional obligations of the military which are to defend the country against external aggression and to maintain territorial integrity of the nation and not venture into politics as it is only the people that have the right to remove a bad government constitutionally (Okonkwo, 2004: 89).

In a study conducted by Sobowale, Dare and Fadeyi in 1984, they was found that although the mass media played a significant role in the political process, especially the electorates or voting process, thereby positively influencing people's political awareness, they also found out that long periods of depoliticization resulting from military dictatorships (in Nigeria) have led to frustrations and apathy among the electorates (Okonkwo, 2004: 85). Therefore, there should be a movement to end depoliticization of the masses which is vigorously and conscientiously pursued through the mass media to cultivate the enabling environment for the growth and development of democracy as well as for the promotion of peaceful elections in the country (Okonkwo, 2004: 89).

(vi) Correction of Political Misconceptions

One of the major breeders of political apathy is the misconceptions widely and strongly held by the Nigerian public on the issue of politics. Studies (Afordi, 2011; Segun, 2010; Oputa 2011) have revealed that most Nigerians have wrong views on the issue of politics. They see it as dangerous and very harmful. They as well view it as a do or die affair. The role of the mass media in this regard is no doubt very expedient. The mass media can correct such misconceptions by engaging in very persuasive, compelling and convincing communication.

More so, there should be a massive employment of the subtle persuasive communication techniques by the mass media for national campaigns geared towards awakening democratic consciousness and correcting political misconceptions (Odigbo, 2004: 181).

(vii) Ensuring effective two-way communication

The communication gap between the masses and the drivers of a political process is a serious factor that engenders political apathy. To avert this, the media must act as the missing link between the politicians and the masses. It must serve as an effective platform for both the politicians and the masses to reach each other. The media can do this by serving as the channel or mechanism that conveys both the views of the politicians and that of the masses. Here, the mass media act as mediators that mediate between the public and the politicians with the ultimate intention of engendering effective political system. Hampo (2010: 39) affirmed that "in the advancement of political system in Nigeria, the media can serve as a bridge builder that enforces a link between the politicians and the citizens". Okolo (2011: 11) recommended in his study that with the potentials for unity and integration, the mass media can serve as effective tools to bridge the gap between politicians and the masses.

7. FINDINGS

After a critical discourse as aided by the review of relevant documents, it was found that

1. Lack of education / sensitisation of the masses, lack of effective mobilization, the menace of corruption, political violence and consistent military intrusion in governance have fundamentally engendered political apathy in Nigeria.
2. The capacity to reduce or ultimately eradicate political apathy by engaging in aggressive sensitization and education of the masses, mobilization of the masses, fighting corruption, correcting political misconceptions and ensuring two-way-communication

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one can say that Nigeria has witnessed and is still experiencing political apathy. This has contributed and is still seriously contributing to the non-advancement of the country's political system. To change the status quo, the media will be valuable. They media can be utilized to vigorously enforce a requiem for political apathy which will ultimately engender the much desired active political participation in the country. The media can do this through several means which amongst others involve mass mobilization, political education, exposing corruption and vehemently criticizing bad leadership while extoling good governance.

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