

## **Political Anger: The Basis for Contemporary Lack of Civility in Nigerian Politics**

*William .E. Odion, and Patrick N. Uhumwangho, College of Education, Igueben, Edo State. Nigeria*

### **Abstract**

The incidence of political anger and its dynamics calls for concern in the political arena. It has left in its trail all forms of casualties and threat to political and democratic stability in Nigeria. This paper argued that high stakes in politics, limited avenues for ventilating anger, the tendency to focus on majority ethnic groups while leaving the minority, conflict of interest and personality among political elites, the structural dysfunction of political parties, the nature of electoral process, institutional collaboration amongst others are responsible for political anger. It further argued that violence and other forms of negative political behaviors particularly during elections are the manifestation of political anger. The consequences are enormous and are both on the individual and nation. Methodologically, the article relies on secondary data for its analysis and concluded by suggesting measures that can be taken to minimize political anger in the polity.

### **Introduction**

In contemporary Nigeria, the issue of political anger has manifested greatly in the political scenario. The manifestation depends perhaps on the gravity of individual dissatisfaction with the political processes and a number of other political activities. Thus the lack of civility in contemporary Nigerian politics deserves serious attention. Politics certainly involves the competition and allocation of resources which usually crystallize into conflict. The attempt to dislodge political opponent from the stage attracts some measure of resistance. The sustainability of democracy in Nigeria therefore depends on the minimization of political anger.

True democracy is one that provides the possibility for resolution of participation crisis. It also perceives of political development as the successful resolution of certain crises or challenges which political systems encounter as a society tries to become a modern state (Ojo, 1997). Invariably, no nation can move forward without addressing the twin issues of political anger and violence. The consequence of neglecting this concept in the nation's political journey can be disastrous. It is unquantifiable and leaves its toil on both the individual and nation.

The objectives of this paper are therefore to identify and x-ray possible causes of political anger in Nigerian politics; its manifestations and consequences; and finally suggest ways of minimizing political anger in the polity.

### **Political Anger Causations**

The way people respond to political situations gives the perception of political anger. This occurs when one party perceives the other as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of goal. For political conflict to occur (which is a reflection of political anger) two prerequisites must be satisfied, namely, perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for interference or blocking (Schmidt and Kochan, 1972; Haralambos and Heald, 1998).

Nigerian politics is bedeviled by incidences of political anger and this is attributable to a number of factors. Basically, the nature of the electoral process creates room for the venting of political anger. The process is fraught with massive fraud, electoral malpractices (in the form of rigging and violence), and victimization of opponents. It also emphasizes winner take all which often denies political actors the opportunity to participate in governance.

Limited avenues for ventilating anger (political expression) accounts for the lack of civility in the political arena. Unwarranted provocation in form of suspension, expulsion and other forms were adopted by certain cabal to shut opposition views. Cases abound where members of political parties resorted to seeking redress in court and were expelled for daring to challenge the party decision. Senator Ifeanyi Ararume (Imo State) was expelled from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for challenging the decision of the party to drop him as its flag bearer after winning the party primaries in the wake of 2007 general elections. This of course raises the question of fundamental human rights observance in the democratic process.

The structural dysfunction of political parties has made political parties to abdicate its responsibility. It lent itself to hijack by godfathers who dominate the party structures and doubles as financiers and political godfathers (Odion, 2007; Ihonvbere, 2002). They selected and anointed preferred candidates for election while others were left denied and aggrieved. Agara (2007) had described the Nigerian political class as a closed one that regulates strictly who to admit and who not to admit thereby making it necessary for new aspirants to this class to resort to drastic acts.

The nature of Nigerian politics that creates room for continuous suffocation of opposition by ruling parties breeds political anger. The character, organization, disciplines and politics of the Nigerian political class negates possibilities for democracy and allows for primitive accumulation (Ihonvbere, 2002; Ake, 2001). The ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was known to have infiltrated the ranks of opposition Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) rendering them impotent and balkanized. The resultant effect was political anger that led to break away factions and instability in the political parties.

The conflict of interest and personality is also a reflection of political anger. This had done immense damage to the psyche of political parties as political parties arising from such crisis lacked ideological underpinnings. The conflict of interest and personality crisis in the Western States between Awolowo and Akintola (both in the Action Group) contributed immensely to the failure of the First Republic and also polarized the Yoruba political elites into two opposing camps. The breakaway of Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) from Nigeria Peoples Party of Nigeria (NPP) was an indication of political anger anchored on ideological conflict between political elites

from the North. The conflict of interest and personality between the then President Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice President - Alhaji Abubakar Atiku necessitated the formation of Action Congress (AC) to effectively oppose the ruling PDP in the 2007 elections.

The same also reflected in inherent contradictions that had led to several losses of lives. The tendency has been to focus only on majority ethnic groups while leaving the minority. Yet, because the political elite remained insensitive to popular demands, ethnic postures would get consolidated and become ever more violent as minority groups have become units of mobilization. Thus internalization of violence became the result as sub-ethnic groups engage each other in a struggle for supremacy and identity, as well as spurious claims to territories (Ihonvbere, 2002; Iyayi, 2005).

The high stakes in politics had contributed to political anger through the “the increasing materialization of politics” (Iyayi, 2005). Elected and political appointees smile home with mouth watering salaries and allowances while the electorates are angry and left to wallow in abject poverty. Poverty is known to be a deadly socio-economic phenomenon that manifest in peoples inability to acquire the basic necessities of life (such as food, shelter and clothing) needed for a decent living (NES, 1997). Available statistics shows that 2/3 of Nigerians are poor. Poverty rate moved from 27 percent in 1980 to 66 percent in 1996 and from 1999 to 2005, it has remained in the neighborhood of 70 percent (NPC, 2004). It is resented and has been a constant cause of unrest.

Institutional collaboration is another source of anger. Institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Judiciary and the security agencies are culpable in this direction. The state in this circumstance is accused of using the instruments of the state in penetrating (perpetrating) electoral brigandage, thuggery, violence and warfare (Iyayi, 2005). In the 2007 general election, INEC in connivance and collaboration with the ruling PDP engaged in disqualification spree and the frustration of opposition candidates before and during the election (though some of the illegalities had been reversed and annulled by the Judiciary). Law enforcement agents such as the Police, Army and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) were known to have been used to hound political opponents in the wake of the elections. It became a veritable weapon in the hands of the ruling government to deny, coerce most people into submission and decamping to the ruling party. In the same vain, they were also accused of being used to perpetrate electoral fraud and malpractice particularly during the elections. This bred anger in the opposition camp such as Action Congress (AC) which occasionally resulted in lack of civility. During the local government election in Edo State, civility was thrown away as several EDSIEC offices across the state were vandalized and burnt down by aggrieved political thugs/miscreants on the allegation of deprivation.

Undemocratic attitude of political actors and institutional representatives had accounted for political anger. The actions of political godfathers for instance in anointing preferred candidates for election and appointments while subverting the rights and privileges of the electorates had resulted in open manifestation of violence as the dreams and aspirations of interested contestants are foreclosed (Odion, 2007). In examining the 1983 Nigeria general election, the Babalakin Commission of Inquiry

argued succinctly that political parties were dominated by men of influence who see funding of political parties as an investment that must yield rich dividends (FRN, 1986). When Chief Chris Uba kidnapped a serving Governor - (Dr Chris Ngige) with the assistance/collaboration of the Nigerian Police Force (despite the Governor's immunity), he was 'commended' by his elevation to membership of the PDP Board of Trustee (BOT). At the same time, the judiciary became a subject of ridicule through its judgments and counter judgments at the time.

Closely related to the above is the fact that the same lack of democratic attitude has reflected in the careless and misguided utterances of some public officials. Political anger results from actions such as when an elected President Olusegun Obasanjo described the 2007 election as a '*do or die affair*', or referred to other contestants in derogatory terms such as '*not well brought up*'.

Generally, political anger results from systematic and generalized violations of fundamental human rights, the absence of democracy, politicization against members of the society, and interference of foreign interest (Wade, 2004). Nigerian political parties are also known to have a wide range of techniques to eliminate popular candidates from party primaries and thus provoking political anger. These include a declaration by powerful "party owners" to electorates to vote for a particular candidate; zoning formula; sponsorship of violence; provision of money and party machinery to the favored candidate and ; results by declaration (Ibrahim, 2007).

### **Manifestations of Political Anger**

Political anger manifests mostly in negative behaviors particularly during elections. They are manifestations under any guise which disrupts the peace, order and stability of a community, state or the nation at large (Beetham, 2000). The youths were mostly advised to avoid it. Any individual that is politically angry may indulge in any of the followings which Omorogbe and Orobor (2007) also identified as the negative behavior by youth during elections. These are the forms that political anger may assume: allowing oneself to be recruited as a thug by political parties, groups of persons, individuals, agencies or institutions under any guise. Disrupting elections or shooting at voting centers, or in the neighborhood so as to scare away political opponents. Used as hired assassin to eliminate political opponents. Rigging election by stealing directly or aiding the removal of ballot boxes at polling centers. Serving as fake party agents or security men in order to facilitate rigging during elections. Committing arson and other heinous crimes so as to intimidate political opponents by forcing them to withdraw their candidature or step down compulsorily. Enlistment into various occult groups in order to serve as party vanguards and kingpins. Kidnapping of political opponents, their family members or party supporters. Voting or stuffing of ballot boxes at illegal venues, unapproved premises or hideouts. Writing damaging articles in tabloids or helping to sponsor such publications. Tearing, removal or defacing of posters belonging to political opponents. Originating, aiding and/or abetting the spread of messages of calumny against political opponents. Accepting to falsify election results in favor of some candidates/parties due to anger. Multiple registrations and voting; and decampaigning to other political parties.

### **Consequences of Political Anger**

Political anger more often crystallized into political violence and can rock the boat and its consequences enormous. This section provides answers to what are the consequences of political anger? This is discussed under two categories. The first relates to the consequences at the level of individual. Some of them include destruction of lives and properties which usually may be difficult to quantify; severe injuries or incapacitation of family members; dislocation of family business/occupation; risk of prosecution or various jail terms on conviction; loss of income or monies due to bills accruing from treating injured family if it degenerates to violence and loss of faith in the political process.

At the level of the state or nation, the following are likely: heightened legitimacy crisis as a result of non participation of some actors and disrespect for constituted authority; breakdown of law and order due to protest and mass disobedience; general political instability which can collapse the psyche of the nation; dislocation of organs and structures of the nation. There could also be military intervention occasioned by dissatisfaction and collaboration of political actors; heightened insecurity/possible civil strife or war; general economic downturn due to effects on economic activities; hatred, bad blood and disunity among actors; and it breeds credibility crisis/problem since there is lack of faith in the political process/institution and security outfits.

Political anger is not all about destruction, there are also remarkable positive dividends. Where a government is responsive it leads to compromises from dialogue. Dialogue is no doubt a veritable tool for democratic stability. It also has capacity to lead to change/improvement in public policies.

### **Minimizing Political Anger in the Polity**

It is true that political anger cannot be eradicated due to divergence in opinion; instead attempts must be made to minimize its incidence. This section therefore advanced certain recommendations that can be adopted in minimizing political anger by political actors. The avenues for the selection or election of candidates should be transparently devoid of godfather influence. This point of course emphasizes party supremacy. Electorates should be allowed to exercise their discretion during elections and after objective assessment of party manifestoes. Exercise restraint, self discipline and maturity in the face of provocation. There should be credible avenues for ventilating anger. Emphasis must be placed on the strengthening and functionality of party structures/institutions. Members of the political class and their followers should be encouraged to utilize the legal avenues in situation where they are dissatisfied and aggrieved. The disposition of the Judiciary in redeeming its image and dignity raises hope for the common man. However the judiciary must be strengthened to overcome its numerous problems identified by Agbebaoku, Odion and Akhimien (2008) as disobedience of court orders by government and its agent, judicial corruption, indiscriminate granting of *ex parte* motions and injunctions, poor funding, over congestion and over bearing influence of the executive.

Institutions such as INEC and EFCC should be independent and not partisan. This will prevent them from being used as agents for the oppression of oppositions by the ruling party. Elected and appointed officials must refrain from acts of profligacy.

The flagrant display of affluence, sometimes acquired through corrupt tendencies by elected and/or appointed public officials has potentials to provoke people to anger. The high financial stakes in politics has to be addressed. A situation where only those who have primitively acquire wealth can fund or bankroll elections are not healthy for democratic stability as it has led to the emergence, growth, and dominance of godfathers and political gladiators. A ceiling can be placed on individual donations to the political parties or candidates. Political actors must also refrain from provocative utterances as followers and miscreants can easily capitalize on them to foment trouble and mayhem. A democratic attitude on the part of the leaders and followers must be encouraged. It is also important that any individual or group that makes such provocative statements or act in a provocative manner be identified and punished appropriately. The respective ethnic group interest must be recognized as they are stakeholders in the Nigerian project. Actors in the political scene while pursuing the interests must in the same vain place national interest above personal and sectional interest if the nation must move forward. It is also suggested that the security apparatus/agencies be strengthened both to refrain from being used to perpetuate acts that can provoke political anger such as aiding acts of intimidation and electoral malpractices and to actually combat offshoot of political anger such as recourse to violence. Situation where the Police Force still contend with obsolete and inadequate equipments, corruption and under funding cannot successfully curtail negative political activities that may arise due to political anger.

### **Concluding Remarks**

There is no gainsaying the fact that political anger had played a central role in the underdevelopment of politics and democracy in Nigeria. Many factors identified in this paper acted as incentives for political anger. The manifestation is in different forms depending on the extreme it is taken by the aggrieved persons. The negative behavior exhibited as a result of political anger constitutes the consequences and are both at the level of the individual and nation. The paper also argued that despite the incalculable damage that may be associated with political anger, it can be minimized if the suggestions above were adopted.

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