



VOTER EDUCATION: A NECESSITY FOR GOOD AND SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

This paper discussed the importance of voter education in achieving good and sustainable governance. To achieve good and sustainable governance, citizens need to be equipped with knowledge of ideals, values and principles of democratic system which voter education is endowed with. Those ideals, values and principles are criteria which citizens can use to judge the means and ends of government. This paper therefore discussed the concept of voter education, electoral violence resulting from lack of voter education, benefits of voter education in achieving good and sustainable governance as well as the role of Social Studies Education in voter education. It is recommended that government should organize voter educational programmes in the media, such as radio, television, newspaper among others. This is necessary in order to make the youths knowledgeable on the right attitudes and value of voting to elect credible leaders during electioneering process. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should organise seminars to enlighten youths on the need for voter education to avert ignorance, political violence, apathy, political silence and discrimination among voters.

Keywords: Voter education, Youths, Voting behaviour, Sustainable governance.

Introduction

In a democratic society, citizens have the rights, duties and responsibilities to participate in electoral processes. They need to be involved in these electoral process before, during and post electoral process purposely to give room for good and sustainable governance. Effective voting takes place to choose credible leaders. According to Ajayi (2011), the youths need voter education to enhance good governance. They are enlightened, knowledgeable, acquire skills, ideas and concepts on voting exercise through voter education. Voter education also makes the youths to avert negative attitude during electoral process. Youths are vulnerable to election rigging, political assassination, protest, snatching of ballot boxes, apathy, political silence, kidnapping, wreckless driving, under age voting. Ignorance is also part of the problems of the youths to participate in voting. This is also due to lack of voter education. Youths do ignore voting because they do not know that it is their rights, duties and responsibilities to vote for credible leaders who are responsible, transparent, accountable, responsive to the yearning and aspiration of the people. Electorates vote along political party, ethnic and religion line which have no reference to rationality.

Furthermore, Hassan (2011) opined that for Nigeria to achieve good and sustainable governance, citizens must possess skills, values, and manifest the appropriate behaviours which promote good governance. Voter education helps citizens to make informed judgment about the nature of democratic system, politics, government and such knowledge

could promote the understanding of the nature and importance of democratic society and the art of good governance. A democratic society prevents the abuse or arbitrary use power by government. Good governance recognises that positive socio-political change is a function of citizens' active participations in electoral processes. Popular participation empowerment and consultation are important because they help to provide legitimacy for governmental action. As a political socialisation process, voter education provides necessary knowledge and skills required for voter effective engagement in this direction. Voter education gives individuals the self-confidence needed to engage in discussions on issues of governance and affords people the information required to make informed judgment.

To achieve good and sustainable governance, the citizens need to be equipped with knowledge of the ideals, values and principles of democratic system which voter education endowed with. Those ideals, values and principles are criteria which citizens can use to judge the means and ends of government. Voter education in a constitutional democracy means that each citizen is a full and equal member of a community and is endowed with fundamental rights and entrusted with responsibilities. In line with these assertions, William (2001) argued that, it is expected that after acquiring such knowledge under voted education, citizens should understand that through their involvement in political life and civic society, they can help in creating sustainable good governance. The intellectual and participation skills

are essential for informed, effective and responsible citizenship. After acquiring these skills, citizens will be able to identify, describe, explain, analyse and evaluate decisions as well as defend position on public issues. In the opinion of Babalola (2006), many of the youths seem to refuse to vote owing to ignorance and, when they do, they find it difficult to cast their votes appropriately, thereby resulting in the emergence of unpopular candidates. This could be attributed to lack of basic knowledge, as well as inability to demonstrate some capacities which involve intelligence and self-control. The youth as a citizen must be able to put the interest of the community above his/her own will and need to identify his/her responsibility to the community and be prepared to abide by it. In contrary to all these, indolence, indifference and political apathy have hindered the entrenchment and sustenance of representative democracy in Nigeria.

In the assertion of Babatope (2010) activities in the Nigerian political process seem to be characterised with intolerance, intimidation, thuggery, assassination, bitterness, apathy, indolence, money and ethnic politics. As a result of this, the ingredients of democracy have not been able to thrive after many years of political independence in Nigeria. For instance, it was observed that party manifestoes seem not to be the major determinant of voters' behaviour in an election. Voter predisposition derives from a number of different variables, such as ethnicity, religious affiliations, sex, social class or socio-economic status.

Electoral Violence Resulting from Lack of Voter Education

Electoral violence is a threat or violence (harm) that is aimed at any person or property involved in the election process or at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period. Azeez (2010) asserted that physical electoral violence include physical attack, resulting in assault, battery, grievous bodily harm or death, disruption of other campaigns, use of abusive language and other forms of violence inflicted on individuals and groups Nwolise (2008) opined that from the array of definitions available, one can glean an operational definition. Operationally, electoral violence connotes all forms of violence (physical, psychological, administrative, legal and structural) at different stages engaged in by participants, their supporters and sympathisers (including security and election management body staff) in the electoral process.

A research conducted by Obakhedo (2014) revealed that electoral violence is as a result of the

rascally politics that the political elites engage in sometimes, which to be intra-party as well as and inter-party violence. Apart from that the fact that this phenomenon affects the credibility of the electoral system, the democratic system and the rule of law, the nature, extent and magnitude of violence and rigging associated with elections in Nigeria had assumed alarming proportions that necessitates intellectual excursion to the realm of possible solutions. Education has been discovered to be a major strategy and weapon to curbing this democratic impediment.

In Nigeria, electoral violence is more entrenched because our political system is supportive of zero-sum game politics. This was why Otoghile (2009) described electoral violence as the radio-active by-product of some structural and altitudinal dislocations in the society which affects the level of political participation in the citizenry. Agwu (2015) opined that the youths in the urban areas are sponsored by the politicians with the attitude of kidnapping, physical attack, snatching of ballot boxes and intimidation. This problem arises as a result of the unemployment on part of the youths. Also, they are affected by civilization and most of them do not know their rights as citizens and that each vote counts. According to the study of Inakoba and Maliki (2011), it was revealed that youths are vulnerable instruments of electoral violence as a result of dislocation and poor parental back ground, poor education, unemployment and under employment, moral decadence as well as political manipulations by an irresponsible political class.

Benefits of Voter Education in Achieving Good and Sustainable Governance

Voter education in a constitutional democracy means that each citizen is a full and equal member of a community and is endowed with fundamental rights and entrusted with responsibilities. According to Akintayo (2010) voter education helps to promote good governance by educating citizens on the importance of their vote, the role of elected officials, and how to hold them accountable. When voters are aware of the electoral process and their rights and responsibilities, they are better able to hold electoral officials accountable for their actions.

In the opinion of Kehinde-Awoyele (2012), good citizens are law abiding, contribute to the development of the state, listen to people's view/opinion when in power and made necessary amendment where needed. They also see that the state is always at peace. Furthermore, citizens in the

democratic society require disposition to electoral system necessary for good governance. Voter education is a necessary condition for political and economic reform because it sensitises the citizens on the need to be patriotic, cooperative, tolerant and abide by the constitutional provisions. By and large, voter education in a democratic society promotes peaceful and happy community, social responsibilities, reduction in poverty, high sense of co-operation and social justice within the political system.

Banks (2005) reasoned that the major demands which the study of voter education is expected to make in the society impinges on creating some positive impact on the behaviour of the citizens as he addresses himself to civic, social and political affairs. He stressed further that, through the programme, the student is expected to develop perspectives, insights, understandings, values and skills necessary for the conduct of affairs in a given democratic society. Specifically, as it is observed by Abdugafar (2011), voter education is geared towards raising awareness on the rights of the citizens especially the youths to actively participate in governmental activities. It is also towards achieving respect for human rights, transparency and accountability in public affairs, promoting leadership and followership skills among the youths and educating and mobilising Nigerians against ethnic, religious and sectional intolerance and manipulations to lay solid foundation for good governance in Nigeria. Voter education in a democratic society promotes peaceful and happy community, social responsibilities, reduction in poverty, high sense of co-operation and social justice within the political system. From the discussion so far, the overarching goals of voter education in Nigeria are to promote democracy and civic values. Falade (2012) argued that political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matter. Corroborating this, Akinboye (2013) posited that democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character, rational conduct and active participation in government.

The Role of Social Studies Education in Voter Education

Social Studies in Nigeria was due to the need for a more effective way of educating citizens. Relatively, voter education needed by the youths during political process is an educational programme that provides the citizenry with knowledge, skills and values for the development of the society. Ololobou (2010) asserted that Social Studies gives youths opportunity to have knowledge and understating of the society in which

they live and promotes living together of the youths as one people. Voter education gives room for the youths to experience and enjoy a peacefull life in the society, fair play, transparency, accountability and justice that of great value in corporate governance.

In the contribution of Akinlaye, Mansaray and Ajiboye (2006), Social Studies has a special task of freeing the citizens from the shackles of ignorance in the areas of man's relations with his varied economic environments be it in agriculture, commerce, business, and industry and also in all cultural situations of disease, grinding poverty, and perplexing rapid population. Ololobou (2010), reported that Social Studies contributes immensely to the development of favourable attitudes of social, physical, cultural and economic development in the youths to enable them participate in the development of the community as citizens. This is very relevant to voter education required by the youths.

Akinyele (2005) stated that Social Studies give the youths the means of interpreting and assessing developments in the world. This makes them see where things happen and what they mean to be good of human beings. In view of this, voter education is to make the society impinge on creating some positive impact on the behaviour of the citizen social and political affairs. It also promotes democracy and civic values. There by voter education allow the youths to avert the attitudes of participating in electoral violence before, during and after election which could also be intra or inter party. Social Studies is a discipline that makes the youths to understand their relationship with the society of the world as a whole. A rightly observed by Ololobou (2010), Social Studies makes youths to grow in wisdom and understanding, trains them to live together with others and improve their basic attitudes to society. Social Studies as a discipline has the capacity to sensitizes the youths as citizens on the need to be patriotic, cooperation, tolerant and abide by as a discipline the constitutional provisions. Social Studies Education plays an important role in inculcating the spirit of national consciousness and patriotism in the youths through the teaching of citizenship concepts as an aspect of Social Studies curriculum. Scholars contend that the causes of political instability could be attributed to greed, electoral abuses, rigging of elections, abuse of political power, marginalization, exclusion and political economy of oil. These are the effect of lack of voter education among our youths in the society. If effective voter education is imparted on the youths they will know the right attitudes to display to contribute to the development and progress of the society.

Conclusion

Voter education provides necessary knowledge and skills required for voter effective engagement, it also gives individuals the self-confidence needed to engage in discussions on issues of governance and affords people the information required to make informed judgment. Voter education promotes peaceful and happy community, social responsibilities, reduction in poverty, high sense of co-operation and social justice. For sustainable and good governance, political stability and effective voting to take place in any democratic society, citizens need a worthwhile voter education. In a democratic and successful election, youths must know their rights and responsibilities, knowledgeable and be well informed on how to cast ballots that are legally valid in an election and this appears to be possible through voter education.

Recommendations

Based on the above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should organize voter educational programme in the media, such as radio, television, newspaper and journal to educate youths who were not opportuned to be involved in the voter education programme on voting exercise. These youths will be knowledgeable on the right attitude and value of voting to elect credible leaders during electioneering process.
2. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should organise seminars to enlighten electorates on voter education to avert ignorance, political violence, apathy, political silence and discrimination among voters towards voting before, during and after election. So as to eradicate religious marginalisation, exploitation, rebellion, protest, inequality and allow cooperation among citizens in Nigeria.

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