The Impact of Political Socialization on 2015 General Election: Reflections on Nigerian State

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Abstract: *The paper contends that political socialization, the process by which citizenship orientations are transmitted, is conditioned by shifts in the political, social, and economic contexts at the community, nation state, and international levels. The complexities that characterize the political socialization process and its outcomes become especially evident during periods of transition and upheaval. Election is an irreducible feature of democratic governance and the 2015 general elections in Nigeria have come and gone. The thrust of this paper focuses on the impact of political socialization on the just concluded general election in Nigeria. Having a strong grasp of how the socialization process works, the paper provides us with tremendous insights into the changes that took place in the general elections. The paper argues that the Nigerian state is painfully characterized by bureaucratic and political corruption resulting in high level of poverty and deprivation that necessitate change in government. It is against this background that this paper attempts a critical analysis of the political socialization patterns and governance process in Nigeria. The paper adopts cosmopolitan political theory as its framework. The methodology adopted is descriptive and content analysis. The paper posits that the absence of democratic stability in Nigeria especially since the enthronement of democratic governance in1999 is due largely to lack of effective citizenship education in the country. The import of the paper is that political socialization through effective citizenship education in Nigeria is the panacea to free, fair, peaceful and credible election as shown by the post election studies, and thus recommends how this could be realized in Nigeria. The paper concludes that to politically socialize Nigerians to evolve the right political culture necessary for nation building is a task that must be done by the new government.*
Keywords: *Political Socialization, Political Culture, Election and Cosmopolitanism.*

I. Introduction

Political socialization refers to the process of induction into a political system and remains the engine room of political development and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria when people of all ages are put through the process of teaching and learning about all aspects of the political system. With a thorough understanding of the political system and possession of relevant political knowledge and attitude the various factors that hinder appropriate practice of democracy and development of enlightened citizenship are gradually nipped in the bud (Hooghe, 2004).

The most common and important socializing events for many people as they approach or enter adulthood are elections—the time when politics is most salient in national life and during which people forms political identities and establish patterns of behavior that often persist over the life cycle (Ofoeze, 2001; Omotola, 2010). Many political observers have traditionally concentrated on the family as the major socializing agent, finding that political discussion within the home, parental voter turnout, and political resources significantly impact political participation in young adulthood. During adolescence citizens learn about their democratic responsibilities and also acquire political attitudes that translate into adult political behavior and opinions.

Empirical researches have shown that 2015 general elections demonstrate the true enthronement of democratic governance in Nigeria in which the ruling party was defeated by the opposition in a keenly competitive election (Chuks, 2015). Indeed, the election was characterized by profound excitement after a series of convoluted transition programmes since 1999. The level of political socialization and attachment that citizens have towards their countries is a function of ability and / or readiness of the country to justify the essence of its existence and fundamentally embark on proactive citizenship education (Ntalaja, 2004). Thus, the fundamental objective of this paper is to examine the impact of political socialization on the just concluded 2015 elections in Nigeria and proffer feasible solution to the federal government on how to implement people-oriented programmes for sustainable development.

II. Conceptual Clarification And Theoretical Framework

Political Socialization

Political socialization is a messy, in some ways elusive, process. Broadly construed, political socialization is the transmission of political culture to new generations of citizens in a given society (Almond, 2008; Beck, 1997). Political socialization is the process by which political culture is transmitted in a given society. It occurs at both the individual and community level, and it extends beyond the acquisition of political culture to encompass the learning of more sophisticated political ideas and orientations. Political socialization is a lifelong process and a variety of individuals and institutions contribute to its shaping effect. For example, individuals are politically socialized by such groups as their family, peers, and social class (Marshall, 1998). Furthermore, they are socialized by existing laws, media, religion, education, their own gender, and more. Basically, the process is never ending and the factors which shape it are all encompassing.

Those groups and institutions which contribute to the process of political socialization are known as the agents of socialization. These sources affect the development of political values and attitudes differently, but they all contribute to the individual's understanding of and orientations toward politics. The primary agents of socialization are those that directly develop specific political orientations such as the family. Whereas, the secondary agents of socialization tend to be less personal and involved in the process of socialization in a more indirect manner such as the media.

Basic political attitudes and values tend to be formed early in childhood and tend to be relatively consistent throughout life. Thus, the family is a very important agent of political socialization. However, the degree to which these basic political orientations are retained by the individual varies as a result of the discontinuities one experiences in their political socialization. Hence, this is where the other agents of political socialization become fundamental factors in one's political development.

According to Suberu (2007), political socialization is the product of interlocking sets of macro and micro level phenomena. The fundamental question underpinning macro level political socialization research is: how do polities transmit values, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors to the mass public? Micro level studies ask: how and why do people become citizens?

At the macro or political system level, political socialization is the means by which polities and other political societies inculcate appropriate norms and practices in citizens, residents, and members (Wattenberg, 2007). Polities convey established patterns of thought and action, laws and norms, and traditions and folkways through agencies, such as the family, educational system, peer groups, mass media, political institutions, community organizations, religious organizations, and the military (Marshall, 1998). The kinds of questions that are addressed at the macro level focus on "where and how people develop the kinds of political orientations and practices that transform the design of democratic constitutions and institutions into the creation of real, functioning democratic polities" (Osaghae, 1997).

At the micro or individual level, political socialization constitutes "the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live" (Oddih, 2007). As a result of political socialization, individuals acquire knowledge about the political system and how it works. They internalize the society's political value system and ideology, and come to understand its symbols and rituals. They become informed about the role of active and passive members of the polity, and may participate in political and civic life.

However, the current trend of events in Nigeria shows paucity of nation building ideology and the presence of a perverted political culture that is injurious to any polity. For our democracy in Nigeria to succeed, there is a necessity of an ideal form of political culture through adequate and effective political socialization into which the future generation must be initiated into. When a multiethnic country like Nigeria fails to politically socialize large numbers of citizens as members of a single community, the consequences are far-reaching. If there are multiple political cultures being perpetuated, members of the various sub-national communities will not be successfully integrated into the political system, and they will not share the norms, rules, and laws of the society.

Election

The concept of election is associated with so many meanings that it is hardly difficult to say its exact meaning. In the edition of the International Encyclopaedia of Social Science Vol. 5, Election is regarded as a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations. Election facilitates and shapes democracy. Democracy is regarded as the best form of government because its ideology promotes peoples' will. The people have political right to decide who should govern them in a free and fair conduct called 'election'. Therefore, elections constitute an essential principle in liberal democracy. Election in a democracy is very important because it is through which that the expression of the people are shown via legitimacy and leadership succession. According to Alfa (2012) election is defined as a

post mortem that investigate the record of office holders whose actual performance may have little to do with promises made when they were previously elected. This is a way of censuring, reposing function in a ruler that is popularly accepted and ejecting an unpopular leader. This method shuns mutiny and chaos in a system hence it reflects peaceful hand-over from one administration to the other so long as the process is devoid of election rigging.

Elections in Nigeria have been a recurring source of disputes, strong arm tactics, crises and conflict. Electoral crisis characterized by abuses of the electoral process by political parties, and refusal to accept electoral verdicts have had deleterious effects on democracy in Nigeria.The aspirations of Nigerians for stable democracy have been constantly frustrated by, among other things, poor administration and the conduct of elections. It is widely recognized that elections are among the most important pillars of democracy, being the mechanisms for popularly choosing representatives of the people for the machinery of democratic governance, especially in the executive and legislative spheres. Yet election administration in most third world countries has been fraught with problems, which leave much to be desired and which contribute to pre- and post-election conflicts, often with violently contested results. In Nigeria, election administration has been profoundly inefficient, characterized by muddled processes, and lacking in the desirable attributes of 'free and fair' elections, a situation which often induces acrimony and even violence. Thus, it can be said that a critical challenge of democratic sustainability and consolidation in Nigeria, is that of getting both the electoral process and election administration right.

Theoretical Framework

Cosmopolitan democracy is a political theory which explores the application of norms and values of democracy at different levels, from global to local. It is about what global governance of the people, by the people, for the people can mean. The academic advocates of cosmopolitan democracy include David Held, Daniele Archibugi, Richard Falk, and Mary Kaldor. In the Cosmopolitan Democracy model, decisions are made by those citizens that are affected by them, avoiding a single hierarchical form of authority. According to the nature of the issues at stake, democratic practice should be reinvented to take into account the will of stakeholders. This can be done either through direct participation or through elected representatives. The model advocated by cosmopolitan democrats is decentralized - global governance without world government, unlike those models of global governance supported by classic World Federalism thinkers, such as Albert Einstein.

Although the origins of cosmopolitanism lie in an essentially moral view of the individual as having allegiances to the wider world, it was to acquire a political significance once it was linked to peoplehood. The main tradition in modern cosmopolitan thought, which derives from Immanuel Kant, sought to extend republican political philosophy into a wider and essentially legal framework beyond the relatively limited modern republic. With this came the vision of a world political community extending beyond the community into which one is born or lives. Cosmopolitanism thus became linked with the universalism of modern western thought and with political designs aimed at world governance. Cosmopolitan political theory has been much discussed in recent times and has tended to overshadow the contribution of social theory (Cohen 1996; Lu 2000; Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Tan 2004).

In relating Cosmopolitan political theory to Nigerian experience, cosmopolitan approach insists that the maintenance of truly stable democracy requires a particular way of understanding, organizing and conducting peaceful, credible, free and fair elections. Drawing from cosmopolitan political theory, cosmopolitan conception of governance emphasizes inclusivity and accountability that are apparently absent in Nigerian polity.

Since the attainment of political independence in 1960, Nigeria has been governed by members of a political class whose desire for wealth acquisition and accumulation is insatiable. A major recurring decimal in governance in Nigeria since 1960 is that people who occupy public offices leave those positions of responsibility much wealthier than they were before they assumed those positions. There are even cases of people who could barely eke out a living – before they were appointed or elected into offices – but who suddenly became members of the wealthy and property-owning class. Indeed, there is no doubt that the richest people in Nigeria are those who have either personally occupied public offices or have done so through proxies. The reality in Nigeria is that the Nigerian state is controlled by a very greedy and rapacious ruling class whose essence is self-aggrandizement, and to the members of this class, the welfare of the citizenry means very little or nothing to the political leaders.

III. Political Socialization As A Strategy For Curbing Electoral Violence In Nigeria

The electoral process in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular especially since the beginning of the 21th century is characterised by violence. It is important to emphasize here that though violence has been a long- standing feature of the democratization process in the post colonial Nigeria, its recent manifestations especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic has assumed an unprecedented magnitude thus constituting a major threat to the survival democracy. Fundamentally, there is no doubt the fact that electoral violence remains

a major source of political instability in a democratic society with palpable threats of deconsolidation. Both domestic and international political sociologists based on empirical investigations argue that the greatest obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria is electoral violence. This is as a result of the rascal politics that the political elites engage in. Sometimes, the violence is intra-party, and most of the time, it is inter-party. 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.

There is a galaxy of ways that Nigeria could use to curb electoral violence and strengthen democratic governance. They include: constitutional amendment; electoral reform; pressure from civil society groups through agenda-setting; change in the character of the elite and most importantly, political socialization. Indeed, all others rest on its effectiveness. It has been argued at several fora that the significance and utility of political socialization cannot be over-emphasized. This is because political socialization as it were is the conduit-pipe through which the political cultural values and behavioural patterns of the society are imbibed and internalized. Children grow up to be responsible citizens through the interplay of various influences and institutions which are characterized as agents of political socialization – including family, religion, school, peer groups, and the mass media – that help shape their sense of civic duty and political self confidence as these would enlighten them about the dangers of electoral violence from childhood.

The Family

The family exerts the first and most important influence on the formation of individual values. As Almond (2008), observed, the direct and indirect influence of the family – the first socialization source that an individual encounters are normally powerful and lasting. The family shapes future political attitudes by defining a social position for the child; establishing ethnic, linguistic, class, and religious ties, affirming cultural values; and influencing job aspiration. In order to contribute meaningfully to democratic stability, the government should not be indifferent towards the family. In societies where governments support and nurture the family, the level of political consciousness is high. Nigeria is not known to support families and in homes where parents cannot cater for their children, the children are vulnerable to a lot of vices and abuses which are threats to credible election and democratic stability.

Schools

The role of schools in transmitting civic education cannot be over-emphasized. This entails the inculcation of fundamental values and beliefs of society to the young. Through public education, states seek to influence young people before their moral character is fully formed. As Magstadt (2009) asserts, "the ideal of liberal education fits easily into the scheme of constitutional democracies that protect the right to question authority. Simultaneously, higher levels of education seem most likely to encourage citizens to participate meaningfully in politics". Education also affects the political skills and resources of the public. Educated people are more aware of the impact of government on their lives and pay more attention to politics. The better educated have mental skills that improve their ability to manage the world of politics. They also have more information about political processes and participate in a wider range of political activities. (Almond et al, 2008). To enhance greater democratic stability in Nigeria, the government must refrain from its present lackluster approach towards the education sector and accord it the prime of place it deserved. Also, the need to abhor all forms of violence must be incorporated into our school curriculum. The political education that the pupils and students would receive will both in the short and long term deepen their political culture and socialization processes. Therefore, Nigerians should know the dynamic nature of our politics, and the emerging trends that shape the political culture and determine the direction of political socialization, and in relation to electoral violence, should learn, imbibe and internalize the political sociology of electoral behavior through functional education. This would help the nation to deepen its emerging democratic order.

Political Parties

Political parties are essential and conspicuous features of liberal democracy. (Alfa, 2011) political parties normally play an important role in political socialization. In democratic systems, political parties attempt to mould issue preferences, arouse the apathetic, and find new issues to mobilize support (Almond et al, 2008). However, an exploration of Nigerian Political parties today shows that they contribute to democratic deficits rather than democratic stability (Alfa, 2012). The government should compel all registered political parties in the country to provide adequate awareness to all their members and fans about the adverse effects of electoral violence on our democratic experience. Sociologically, politics marred by violence is synonymous with the politics of bitterness that would create an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and arson; and would not allow the people to choose their leaders. Such politics undermine competitive electoral politics and alienate the citizens politically and make them politically apathetic, and create a fundamental disjuncture between the civil society

and the state. This deeply-rooted problem contributes to growing cases of mass disenfranchisement of the citizens with its attendant political normlessness and exclusion which does not help to deepen and consolidate our democracy.

The Mass Media

The mass media also play a significant role in the political socialization and continuing education of citizens. Most of the media houses in Nigeria are publicity owned and are used as the mouth-piece of the government. this negates the principle of accountability in governance and negatively affects democratic stability. In Nigeria, government's desperate effort to brainwash the citizens with propaganda through the media and other agents of political socialization to love and trust their leaders is an exercise in futility because of citizens continuous negative experiences with government and her agents – the police, the teacher, the health official, the council boss etc. Added to these negative feedbacks are images of fractured infrastructures, high crime rate, teeming unemployed youths, excessively corrupt and gluttonous leadership in all tiers and organs of government. In this regard, a state that have agenda of development and yearns for sustainable national development should educate its citizenry about the inherent dangers of allowing an entrenched culture of electoral and political violence as part of the features of the political system. Unless this is achieved, the problem of electoral violence remains politically topical for a while in Nigeria.

IV.   The Impact Of Political Socialization On 2015 General Election

Many election observers both local and international opined that Nigeria's 2015 general election which was conducted on March 28 and April 11 was arguably the best run since the beginning of the Fourth Republic. Their acclamation is understandable, as international and local election observers have unanimously described the elections as peaceful and generally credible. Specifically, political pundits applauded the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for insisting on the use of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and the Smart Card Reader, designed to facilitate the authentication of voters' eligibility and consequently reduce election malpractices. Available records indicate that in spite of the initial controversies generated by the rescheduling of the elections, the polls elicited large voter turnouts across the country. Specifically, the Presidential and National Assembly elections were rescheduled from Feb. 14 to March 28, while the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections were shifted from Feb. 28 to April 11.

The INEC Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega, who was the Chief Returning Officer for the presidential election, declared retired Maj.-Gen. Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) the winner after polling 15,424,921 votes to defeat all other candidates. In the election, President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP garnered 12,853,162 votes to place second. Acknowledging the success of the election, election observation missions of the Commonwealth, the AU and ECOWAS unanimously agreed that the elections were peaceful, transparent and credible (Okello, 2015). The election observers particularly applauded Nigerian voters for their maturity, orderliness and commitment towards the success of the polls.

However, the impact of political socialization on 2015 general election in Nigeria could be observed through the campaign of calumny that dominated the media. In Nigerian society the agencies of political socialization particularly, the media did little in mobilizing the citizenry to identify with the symbols and institutions of the political system. The Nigerian media, particularly the newspaper sector and televisions remain as highly political as ever. Indeed, this political profile is not directly inherent in the professionalism of the journalists as such but on outcome of the country's political structure and ethnic configuration. During the preparation for the 2015 general election, the campaigns, particularly in the social media at some point were completely turned into an exercise of insults exchange as well as abuses and counter-abuses by supporters. Although, the bulk of social media campaigners are made of young people and are not officially recognized as part of the campaign team of the candidates, but that does not in any way underestimate their relevance or that of their activities.

While inaugurating his campaign in Lagos, Jonathan angrily lamented the way he is being abused in the social media, but he did not made any attempt to distance himself from the loads of social media abuses meted on others in the name of campaigning for him. In a related development Buhari and his campaign had strongly condemned Ayo Fayose's death wish advertorial in some National Dailies, but evidence suggests that they have practically not done much to checkmate their supporters' excesses. This is despite the accord signed by the two candidates – an accord that promises issue-based campaigns.

The implication is that most Nigerians show greater sentiments, allegiance and loyalty to their ethnic groups, families, kinsmen or religious affiliations, rather than the state (country). This situation has given rise to counter political behavior, which is inimical to socio-economic and political development of the nation. These counter political behaviors find expression in the words of Oddeh (2007) in which he asserted that:

Up till date, an electoral fraud arises from the desire to control resources at local, state and federal levels of governments. In effect, the incidence of manipulation of census figures, rigging of elections, siphoning of public funds and other anti-social vices associated with Nigeria's electoral processes are born out of the desire to have access and control over material resources.

The citation above shows that greed for political power, manipulation of census figures, electoral frauds, siphoning of public treasury, among others are visible manifestations that most Nigerians lack faith in Nigeria's socio-economic and political systems. Put simply, such citizenry have not been mobilized by various agencies of socialization to be committed to the ideals of nation building. This situation accounts for why political leaders cannot deliver the dividends of democracy to Nigerian society. This is in spite of the fact that "Nigeria is the world's seventh largest producer of crude oil and in spite of the fact that she has four oil refineries, but imports 70% of its refined petroleum products. The refineries, which have the capacity to process 445,000 barrels of crude oil a day, are running at about 30% of installed capacity… about N700 billion is spent on petroleum subsidy annually (Aiyede, 2008).

Development, be it economic, social or political, will continue to be a mirage in Nigeria not until the people imbibe the right political culture through effective agents of political socialization. A situation in which all members of the society regardless of ethnic, religious, class or linguistic difference comes to identify with the symbols and institutions of the Nigerian state and share common sentiments and common sense of destiny. Under this state of affairs, the government will be capable of exercising authority and rendering services that will actualize the Thomas Jefferson's concept of "getting the greatest good for the greatest number of the citizenry" (Magstadt, 2009). Thus, It is hoped that Buhari administration will launch pragmatic initiatives that will provide effective political socialization through which Nigerians would imbibe political culture of patriotism, transparency and accountability, and improve the living standards of all Nigerians.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2015 general election has come and gone. The empirical evidence abounds of how political socialization determines the success of electoral system, the democratic system and off course the rule of law in any society. Given these phenomena, the paper concluded that the inability of the political leaders and their political parties, to use political socialization to crystallize right political culture supportive of the political power system is to a large extent responsible for the political crises in some parts of the country. When a multiethnic country like Nigeria fails to politically socialize large numbers of citizens as members of a single community, the consequences are far-reaching. If there are multiple political cultures being perpetuated, members of the various sub-national communities will not be successfully integrated into the political system, and they will not share the norms, rules, and laws of the society. This ugly trend raises a fundamental question about the capacity and ability of the Nigerian state to deepen democracy.

However, with a thorough understanding of the political system and possession of relevant political knowledge and attitude the various factors that hinder appropriate practice of democracy and development of enlightened citizenship will be gradually nipped in the bud.

VI. Recommendations

The paper offers the following feasible recommendations to achieve efficient political socialization in the country;

1. For the nation to be able to achieve right political culture and strengthen democratic institutions and deepen democracy, politicians, their supporters and the electorate alike should support and nurture family institutions as family shapes future political attitudes by defining a social position for the child.
2. As a pre-requisite for democratic stability in Nigeria, government should ensure that our schools curriculum incorporate schemes that encourage students to question the excesses of the authorities, offer useful suggestions and motivate citizens to participate actively in politics.
3. In democratically matured climes, political ideologies are the oil that grinds the wheels of successful political socialization. Ideologies serve as the roadmap that guides a Party's quest for control of the apparatus of government. It has been observed that virtually all political parties in Nigeria lack distinct political ideology and this pose a great danger to democratic stability in the country. Political parties should be ideologically based and observe the tenets of intra-party democracy, educate and indoctrinate their followers about right political culture, norms and evils of electoral violence.
4. The mass media should be neutral and be equally accessible to both incumbent and opposition. Campaign of calumny as witnessed in the just concluded general election is not healthy for democracy, and efforts should be made to avoid its re-occurrence in the future election.
5. Finally, government should embark on genuine programmes to empower the youths and give them sense of belonging. This will enable them to be the instrument of transformative change and contribute their own quotas to the development of the country.

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