

Governance Factor and Effects of Political Apathy in Nigerian Political Culture: A Prognostic Analysis

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Abstract

A lot of negative effects accompany political apathy in Nigerian society. When the citizens lose interest in partaking in different forms of political activities in their state or nation, the political development becomes negatively affected. Opportunities avail for unpopular candidates to emerge as winners in an election. The type of leaders that emerge under a situation of apathy are not always accountable to the people in general but to the few that made their emergence to power possible. This position of apathy affects the democratic principles and dividends which invariably shows the level of political culture in the society. This research is embarked upon to explore the dangers that follow the attitude of political apathy among Nigerian citizens, such as bad leaders, bad governance, insensitivity to the plight of the people, and neglect to the principles of democracy. Secondly, the study proffers solutions to political apathy in the society. This study adopts qualitative method where secondary sources as books, journals, magazines and newspapers are used as source materials. In-depth interview of key informants in the society were conducted to get primary information from people in the society. Systems theory was used as the theoretical framework of analysis of the study. The findings show that political apathy has led to emergence of bad leaders. The study concludes that it is difficult to enjoy the dividends of democracy in a society overtaken by political apathy. The study recommends free and fair election, fair playing ground for contestants, and provision of adequate security and prevention of violence.

Keywords: Apathy, citizens, electorates, governance, political culture

Introduction

Political apathy has become a part of freedom of expression among Nigerian citizens under a democratic government. The governance that is affected by political apathy is an outcome of the level of political culture obtainable in that society. Political apathy in Nigeria is an outcome of low political culture with pattern of political behaviour that did not just happen but historically and contemporary rooted. Nigeria's political history has been characterized with unity of people with different political ideologies. Nigeria has become an entity that was created by the British colonial administration in 1914 in an event popularly known as the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates. This unity, according to Nyong (2017, p. 65) was propagated from a heterogeneous and pluralistic society with many autonomous states within the nation existing independently, hence the multicultural and multi-religious nature of the country.

According to Kukah (2021) in his speech on insecurity and political issues in Nigeria, during the 61st Annual General Conference of the Nigeria Bar Association in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, "we must stay, fight, and resolve all issues because Nigeria is like a Catholic marriage; it may not be happy, but it won't break up" (in Daramola, 2021, p.1). In this statement is an embodiment of the stay of political apathy in Nigeria today. The existence of lack of willingness that is rooted in the nature of unity orchestrated by the British government. Similarly, Nyong (2017) in his article, *Religious and Political Crises in Nigeria: A Historical Exploration*, posited that religious violence and political instability in Nigeria today is predicated on by the 'divide and rule' and the pretentious "amalgamation" policy of the Colonial Administrators that favoured North against the South.

Historically, political activities in Nigeria has visibly shown embedded crises that when coupled with the nature of its unity can lead to political apathy as seen in Nigeria today. Adebajo (2022) revealed some case of these violence that had followed Nigerian elections:

Since the country's independence, almost all of Nigeria's general elections have been marred by acts of violence. Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates that the unrest following the first election held in 1964–1965 claimed more than 200 lives, particularly in the Southwest. Following the 1983 election, the nation also saw "massive post-election violence," which resulted in the loss of numerous lives and extensive property damage. Even the 1993 presidential election, which was widely regarded as the freest in the nation's history and had no severe violent incidents, had a spotty background (p. 1).

Various elections that were conducted before independence and after independence, recorded serious violence among opposition, ruling parties, party supporters and different groups with a showcase of practice of politics with anchor (do or die). Leadership in Nigeria has also contested between civilian government and Juntas that resulted from military coup and counter coup in the country. Electoral violence and other maladministration in Nigerian political system has caused a setback in different sectors which has necessitated political apathy in our society today. It is pertinent to note that the politics of every nation occupies a central stage that determines what happens in every of its subsystems; economy, humanity, national and international relations and whole lots of other areas needed for society's existence. In this light, Harold Laswell has maintained that politics is about, 'who gets what, when and how in society'. On the other hand, David Easton posited that politics is the authoritative allocation of values in the society.

In support of these definitions, Odeyemi (2014) holds that the stake of politics is very high in the society since it goes more than governmental organizations and operations of the state and its institutions and it is also critical and determinative of people's fate or fortune in life. Politics clearly has a role in determining who survives, who dies, who is favoured or side-lined, and who is lauded or vilified (p. 5). Wholesomely, the citizens of every society stands to benefit from all values of that accrue from politics. On the other hand, when the values of politics are limited, the citizens begin to lose interest in what concerns politics. With the understanding of politics as explained by these scholars, what happens when members of the society

become political apathetic` fully knowing that the state politics determines their wellbeing in their society? The answer is already playing out among many Nigerian citizens in their commitment to political activities in the country.

Presently, as Nigeria prepares for 2023 general elections, the same historical electoral or pre-electoral violence has continued to mar the peace of different Nigerian societies. Olaniyi (2022) has confirmed pre-electoral violence in Ibadan which is viewed as one of many cases:

Some All Progressive Congress (APC) supporters from Oyo state reportedly suffered injuries at the party's Tuesday campaign event in Ibadan. Members of the opposition party in the state were allegedly attacked by some automobiles while they were travelling toward the Oye region from the opposition party's secretariat in the Oke-Ado neighbourhood of Ibadan (p. 1).

No party seems to be exonerated from possible attack of this form. Adegun (2022, p. 1) revealed the incident of Labour party attack:

On Sunday, four armed men are accused of interfering with a Labour Party meeting in Umuida, Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area, Enugu State. The two motorcycle-riding assailants arrived and began firing randomly into the air, scattering partygoers and putting a car, tricycles, and motorcycles on fire in the process. The incident took place at two locations, UmuAji and NkwoIyida, where party supporters were conducting meetings, according to a source who asked to remain anonymous.

In these scenarios, what type of interest is expected from the majority of Nigerians towards activities that relates to political participation? Won't the occurrence breed more political apathetic citizens in Nigeria? How are the dividends of democracy applied? What happens to the fundamental human rights of 'to vote and to be voted for'? What will eventually be the outcome of all the violence in Nigerian society and its politics? All these questions have continued to bother in musing on the dangers and the way forward from political apathy.

Yakubu (2012) reiterated that, in Nigeria, political apathy has taken the following forms: one, a refusal to register as a voter; two, a rejection to cast a ballot; three, a failure to denounce election manipulation; and four, an unwillingness to provide the security forces with relevant information. It is obvious that once individuals lose interest in life, they will choose to pay less attention to the socio-political problems facing their country. Numerous dangers that emanate from political apathy among electorates in Nigeria have remained a clog in the wheel of the country's democratic consolidation and political development. Political apathy comprises all forms of disinterest among the electorates towards political activities in the society.

Globally, political apathy is a phenomenon that becomes an outcome of a society where people have lost hope in their government. The existence of political apathy in any society has a lot to do with political culture of the state which can be developed or low political culture. Developed culture is common among western countries such as; United States of America, United Kingdom and other politically and economically developed countries.

The nature of governance of a state or country is a great factor that can impact positively or negatively on the political behavioural pattern of the people. A good government therefore adheres to and adopts the principles of democracy and will continually draw its people closer to the government in order to benefit from the maintenance of the principles and harvest of dividends of democracy by any committed leaders.

The level of knowledge possessed by citizens or individuals in the society also add values to what interest they seem to build. Political education is vital towards the feeling of interest or the opposite, the level of political apathy in Nigeria has been on the increase with the rising failure of government in administration that recognizes its people's fundamental human right thereby driving the masses into a state of being politically apathetic. It is against this background that this study explores the dangers that emanate from and the best way to move forward.

The objective of this study is to explore the dangers that follow the attitude of political apathy in Nigeria, such as bad leaders, bad governance, insensitivity to the plight of the people, and neglect to the principles of democracy. Secondly, the study proffers the way forward in dealing with political apathy in the society. A lot of problems have followed this political behaviour in the society; an ample opportunity has been availed for manipulation of elections, unpopular leaders have emerged. Continuous deepening of disinterest in Nigeria's political activity has further resulted to 'Japa' syndrome (people running away from the country instead of taking part in its reformation).

Qualitative method is adopted for this study where secondary sources as books, journals, magazines and newspapers are used as source materials. In-depth interview of four key informants in the society were conducted to get primary information from citizens in Nigeria. Their selection was based on their understanding of the subject matter. Systems theory was used as the theoretical framework of analysis of the study.

This paper has been divided into different sections. The first section deals with introduction of the work with statement of the objectives and the problems. While the second section entails the conceptual framework of political apathy and the theoretical framework for analysis. In the third stage, different forms of political apathy as shown by Nigerian citizens is discussed. The fourth stage comprises of the various ways that that should be followed to ensure that sustainable progress is achieved in the political participation of Nigerian citizens with minimal political apathy among the citizens. Finally, in the fifth stage, conclusion and recommendation is stated with recognition of the systemic theory used for analysis.

Contextualization and Theoretical framework

The absence of affection and fidelity to a state characterizes political apathy. It is the lack of concern among people of any state for their stances on political matters, such as elections, the general public, and civic duties (Yakubu, 2012). Political apathy is then viewed as the totality of all forms withdrawal, unwillingness to be part of socio-political activities of the country with believe that it won't add value or make a difference in the observed state of the society. Many people in our society easily conceive political apathy to mean voting apathy or lack of interest in voting. Voting apathy is only a fraction of the lump sum of what political apathy entails.

Political apathy extends more than just lack of interest in voting but all that concerns politics of the state; it comprises of, association apathy, listening apathy, reading or obtaining information apathy, contributory apathy / supportive apathy. Citizens with political apathy always nurse the feeling that there is no benefit in being committed to political activities of the country. Political apathy is sparked in people by some factors such as; failed promises of politicians, ignorance/illiteracy, bad governance, wide gap between the government and the governed, historical experiences, fear of violence and incidences of violence, global exposure of what is obtainable in other countries, discontent of government impact on lives, lack of trust, high levelled corruption on the side of electoral officials, and whole lots of others. Political apathy becomes more dangerous when citizens that are supposed to be patriotic and contribute in capacity measures towards the country's development withdraw and turn recalcitrant to the entire political system.

The twin issues of illiteracy and purposeful deception by some politicians in Nigeria are the root of the country's political apathy. As a result, the general public is unable to draw a connection between their underdevelopment and their lack of engagement in the electoral process (Fabiya, 2010 in Falade, 2014, p. 19). One of the causes of electoral fraud and political manipulation by desperate politicians is this political indifference. For instance, it was stated that politicians purchased voter identification cards at a cost of 10,000 naira (#10,000.00) each in order to prepare for electoral fraud during the general election in April 2011. In other regions of the nation, including Kwara, Kano, Rivers, Katsina, Adamawa, and Bayelsa states, some of the victims of this questionable act were starving and politically indifferent citizens (Agbo, 2011 in Falade, 2014, p. 21). It is clear threat to democracy once citizens refuse or decide to dissociate from political activities in their own state or country. The attitude will end up bringing in mediocre as leader of the people.

It is expected of every Nigerian citizen to be patriotic; contribute their own quota towards the development of the state and at the same time expect to gain the dividends of democracy as they experience inclusion despite diversity in the country. Once these expectations are cut short, the feelings of discontent are visited with political apathy. Lack of interest in political activities can also be possible where citizens are well satisfied or not well satisfied by the government. Their comfort can inform their lack of bother to take part in political activities. In this condition, they may have the opinion that there is no need to worry about politics since everything is in order. Nigerian citizens are not alone in this behaviour of political apathy. It has become a global issue but people have different factors (negative or positive) that may necessitate the form of apathy obtainable in their own society.

Ghana with the management of her own political system have gone through proper implementation. Ghana's decentralization in 1988 to advance democratic participation of its citizens and improve service delivery, but almost 26 years of its use did not show any success in achieving the set goals on participation, and voter turnout has been kept low as a result (Yeboah-Assiamah, n.d). In this case of Ghana, the structure for achieving democracy has be laid but its failure brought about the apathy in Ghana. Viewing political apathy in America, Holland (2014, p. 1) queried America's setting of record for Political Apathy in 2014 which centred on USA voter apathy, in which he argued:

It's a paradox: The United States is supposed to be a beacon of democracy, yet Americans have one of the lowest levels of electoral participation in the world. In fact, a 2012 study found that the US ranked "120th of the 169 countries for which data exists on voter turnout, falling between the Dominican Republic and Benin." Our turnout rate has been consistently declining since the 1970s.

The writer never placed USA as part of arena of political apathy but it became visible in the outcome of electoral participation. Macdougald (2022) maintains the opinion of political apathy in America:

In national politics, Americans are dissatisfied with almost everyone and everything, according to a recent Quinnipiac University poll. Even worse than Trump's 38% popularity rating at the same point in his presidency, Joe Biden's job approval rating, which has been slowly declining throughout the year, hit a new low of 31%.

Once there is a feeling of discontent among the people, political apathy sets in which consequently affect their input into the political system.

Theoretical framework. The theoretical framework for the analyses of this study is systems theory. This theory has its origin in the field of science (biological sciences) and was later embraced by scholars in social science and organizations. Systems theory was proposed in the 1940's by the Biologist Ludwig Bertalanffy (General Systems Theory, 1968), and furthered by Ross Ashby (Introduction to Cybernetics, 1956) (Heylighten, 1992, p.1). Von Bertalanffy was reacting against reductionism and attempting to revive the unity of science. He emphasized that the real systems are open to and interact with their environments and that they can acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence, resulting in continual evolution (Heylighten, 1992, p.1).

Kaplan (1957) describes a system as a set of variables so related in contradiction to its environment that describes behavioural regularities that characterize the internal relationship of the variables to each other and the external relationships of the set of individual variables to combinations of external variables. Strickland et al (1968) viewed a system as a set of things related in some ways so that changing or removing any one thing in the set will make a difference in the other things in the system. Nigeria is a system that is believed to have failed her citizens' expectation and therefore resulting to political apathy (In Kura, 2019, p. 128).

Scholars of system theory; Morton, Kaplan, Charles McClelland, Karl Deutch have posited that the systemic belief of political participation and citizens' apathy on the other hand is an embodiment of the relationship between components units and different subunits in Nigeria's political system. Mbah (2014) posited that the political system can be viewed as analogous to an electronic computer which processes and then changes into 'inputs' into 'outputs' while adjusting mechanisms, allowing for a feedback from the 'outputs' on the 'inputs' mechanism (In Idike, 2014, p.3)

Nigerian government is a system surrounded by many other sub-systems and units and her behaviour in handling of all issues in the country becomes an input into the political system that are received by the gatekeepers. The integrity of the gatekeepers matters greatly to what becomes the output in the society. This output can lead to discontent, protest, strike, and leading to disequilibrium, political apathy,

bad image, political violence, terrorism, bad governance, and '*japa*' syndrome (running away from country). Political apathy seen in Nigeria today is an outcome of a failed nation shown in its output into the system.

Systems theory despite its usefulness in this analysis has been heavily criticized. The critiques have stated that the system theory have failed to take care of the dynamic nature of the system as it laid emphasis on the structure while ignoring the contents, trends and the interplay of forces that are capable of adjusting the structure. It has also been accused of being too rigid and lacking the flexibility feature of that theories should have in order to accommodate changes. Lieber (1973) has observed that system relationships are often unspecified and the entanglement between definitions and propositions presents further problems (in Kura, 2019, p.143).

Different scholars have used system theory in their analysis. Idike (2014) in his work, "Political Parties, Political Apathy and Democracy in Nigeria: Contending Issues and the Way Forward", used system theory in the analysis and concludes that, Nigeria has over the years experienced a case of deepening political indifference that has been misrepresented as political participation because a very small number of members of the registered political parties occasionally assert that they are choosing and presenting candidates for what, in their opinion, amount to general elections.

Effects of Political Apathy

Bad governance/Insensitivity to peoples' plight: Most times, the refusal of the masses to participate in political activity can inform government introduction of policies that lack 'human face'. The masses will be slated to suffer as a revenge for not participating in political activities, especially when a particular society refuses to vote during election or organisation failure to pay their tax.

Unpopular leaders are elected: As people maintain their withdrawal from political activities, all the activities are never put on hold but piloted by few individuals that can easily be manipulated. It is also an ample opportunity for unpopular candidate to emerge the winner since the majority that would have decided have become indifferent. "Worst leaders will come to power, you know those leaders that their people have put them there. I have my PVC but not for voting sake, I just want to have it in case I will need it anywhere" (Respondent 1, 2022).

Agitation/political instability: The indifference developed by the people do not get better without a working solution. Respondent 3 (2022) on his opinion on the dangers of political apathy maintained that, "It is obvious that as people are being more apathetic, they will also be thinking of possible way out even if it is legal or illegal. For me, I want this country to be divided. It will become a country where different regions will go back and practice politics". "Political apathy can lead to more insecurity. As time goes on the rate of kidnapping, killings and terrorism we have today will be a child's play. A lot of people want food to eat not when the campaign will commence, the Christian/Muslim ticket issue, the Igbo presidency or all those political stuff" (Respondent 2, (2022).

There is greater chances of broadening the indifference of political activities, forming government opposition and developing government enemies as terrorists, armed gangs, bandits or even self-determination agitators. When the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the process of their agitation for self-determination declare non-participation of their people in an election, it is an outcome of high levelled

political apathy. Most times, agitations can lead to instability especially if the agitators clash with security operatives. The outcome of IPOB activities undoubtedly has a level of instability in it as shown in the crisis that erupted in Rivers state during the group protect (Chukwudi, et al, 2019).

This state of the society is capable of increasing the level of insecurity in the society.

Bad image abroad: The technological innovation and the use of social media in sharing and receiving information has compressed the world. The feelings of citizens of every country in the globe is crystal clear to others. These peoples' condition and treatment received from their home government are open for observation, researched on, analysed and archived for references.

Brain drain: The 'japa' (running away) syndrome has become very popular in Nigeria today. A lot of professionals; engineers, doctors, nurses, educationists, technocrats and many others are leaving the country in their large numbers. The mass exit is also an outcome of political apathy, lack interest in identifying with the non-progressive country and the undying desire to search for greener pastures. The development that Nigeria needs as a country is taken away to other countries through these 'brain-drain'. Respondent 4 (2022) supported the assertion, "Na to run away!!! Everybody want to leave Nigeria. Come to passport office and see the number of people looking for passport to 'japa'. I have collected my passport, it is Visa that is delaying me. Nothing in Nigeria is interesting. Even the important people that will help Nigeria are running away. So who will remain?"

On the Way Forward

Ensuring the Dividends of Democracy: Democracy entails that government belongs to the

People. Under democratic governance, the law is supreme. There is the rule of law where no one is above the law but equal before the law. This should be purely practiced instead of ending in the pages of papers. The practice of democracy as it is practiced in most developed countries will go a long way to encourage citizens to believe in their country and contribute to its development. If real democracy is practiced in Nigeria, citizens will develop love for Nigerian politics, support and participate in its activities (Respondent 2, 2022).

End to aged leaders: Nigeria as a country has been disappointed by these set of old and aged leaders that keep going from one governmental position to the other and amassing nation's wealth to themselves. The state of global technological innovation witnessed today is no longer matching with the styles of the old / aged Nigeria have today. Nigerians will want to see new 'blood' in Nigerian politics. A lot of these elders in Nigerian government have failed us. I believe that can make people to have interest again (Respondent 1, 2022).

Political education: Illiteracy has contributed dangerously to the apathy seen today in Nigeria. The best combat will be to launch a continuous political education of the masses. This education can be introduced as part of school curriculum, can be separately adopted through public political education campaign. According to Respondent 4 (2022), "Serious education of citizens on the value of political participation is highly needed. Through this education people can change mind to develop interest in politics". Education will surely help to make citizens know the values of their coming out to vote during election. Getting our PVC is the solution.

With our PVC we can vote out the unwanted candidates and make politics more interesting (Respondent 2, 2022). The improvement of peoples understanding about the play of politics equips them to appreciate and protect their fundamental human rights, contribute towards the political system and represent a good image of the country in any part of the world.

Respect for fundamental human rights: Transparency/communication: The practice of transparency in the government closes the gap between the people and the government. When the people get informed about their government, they will be able to check on government. This will help in reducing the rate of corruption; embezzlement, elongation in office, marginalization and other activities that negates the rights of the people.

Sanity in the use of EFCC and ICPC Sanity in the government with use of agencies like The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). The use of these two agencies, EFCC and ICPC in fighting corruption should be practiced in a manner that some people are not witch hunted due party disloyalty or non-membership. In this fight against corruption, individuals should not be targeted based on ethnic or religious difference. Nigerians should be made to trust their government to enable them participate and contribute towards its development and this can be achieved through their participation. In the submission of ACE (2021, P. 4), the ICPC has designed a way to make citizens part of the fight against corruption and this involves the hiring of civil servants in its anti-corruption sensitization via Anti-Corruption and Transparency Units (ACTU).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Political apathy in Nigeria is an outcome of a failed system which comprises of several sub-systems that have failed to work in the interest of the citizens. The negative effects of political apathy in Nigeria has doubled over time from just bringing in an unpopular candidate to leadership positions, bad governance, brain-drain, low political culture and insecurity to a lot of other features of disequilibrium as specified by system theory. The political system and its sub-systems should be properly sanitised through good governance that can assure the people of a change from disequilibrium to equilibrium of the system. This will help to awaken the interest of apathetic Nigerian citizens to partake again in political activities of their nation.

Equality before the law should be promoted to assure citizens of government's shun of impartiality based on religion, region, or status.

Improved education of the masses will help to improve knowledge of the masses and leading to more understanding of political unfolding in the society. Transparency and prudence is highly required on the side of government and its electoral commission in the management and real conduct of election. Free and fair election, security provision, protection of vote, improved political culture, respect for fundamental human rights and so many desires of citizens need to be assured in a political system. These conditions when taken care of, will help in restoring the hope of citizens in government political activities.

The government of inclusion is very vital, considering the nature of unity and the level of diversity. This will offer sense of belonging to both minority and majority groups.

In a global world, it is important to study what has worked for other countries that increased their level of political participation and apply in in Nigeria's political system

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