
CURBING POLITICAL THUGGERY AND VIOLENCE AMONG NIGERIA YOUTHS THROUGH EFFECTIVE CIVIC LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper examined political thuggery and violence as a major challenge to democratic system of government in Nigeria. It is now hard to hear that election is conducted without death being recorded as a result of despicable activities of political thugs employed by politicians. Unfortunately, the unemployed youths are used as instruments of operation. The causes of political thuggery and violence were identified as bad governance, poverty, unemployment and ignorance, among others. The effects of political thuggery and violence on the people, the nation and its political system include destruction of lives and properties, mass disruption of socio-economic activities, increase in crime rate, stealing of genuine mandate, among others. Effective civic learning in school was therefore suggested as a means of curbing political thuggery and violence among Nigerian youths. In order to ensure that students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and values for active participation in the democratic system, teachers were advised to employ the 'six proven practices' recommended for effective civic learning.

Keywords: *Political thuggery, violence, causes, effects, youths, effective civic learning.*

Introduction

With an estimated 170 million people in Nigeria, youths form one third of the total population and unfortunately most of them are

unemployed. Despite the repeated release of figures by the National Bureau of Statistics in newspapers that the Nigerian economy has been creating millions of jobs in recent years, Nnodim (2014) while quoting CBN said that 80% of Nigerian youths are still unemployed. According to Odutola (2014), Nigeria has a very large youth population that is presently unengaged, unemployed, untrained and unskilled to positively contribute meaningfully to the prosperity and growth of the nation. This unemployment situation has created a breeding ground for largely unengaged youths to serve as willing hands for perpetrators of political and economic violence which is presently spreading all across the nation.

The rate at which youths are involved in crimes, especially political thuggery and violence before, during and after election, is alarming. Due to unemployment and poverty, the youths are susceptible to being used for various nefarious activities by the political class. They are used for distribution of money at polling centres, manipulation of voter registers, manipulation of election results, diversion of electoral materials, snatching of ballot boxes, causing confusion and riot in order to disrupt the electoral process. For the young ones to be effectively and positively involved in political matters now and when they become adults, they must be able to demonstrate politically related positive habits and values.

Thuggery is an act of violence or behaviour by ruffians hired or instigated by politicians to intimidate their opponents. Agagu (2010) viewed political thuggery as illegitimate and unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will of others while Oni (2014) defined it as the illegitimate means of seeking political power or any act of intimidation, violence, hooliganism, brutality or gangsterism, whether leading to death or not, calculated to pose a threat or scare political opponents or perceived political opponents before, during or after elections and aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage. Violence, according to Anzaki in 'The Lawyers Chronicle' (n.d.) is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm,

maldevelopment or deprivation. Activities of political thugs usually lead to violence involving destruction of lives and properties.

Electoral violence, therefore, is described by Anzaki in 'The Lawyers' Chronicle' (n.d) as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speeches, disinformation, physical assault, blackmail, destruction of properties or assassination. Political thuggery and violence manifest in snatching of ballot boxes, elimination of political opponents, riots and thuggery, forceful declaration of fake results, even when no election takes place. Political violence also occurs when the majority of the voters do not agree to announce results of election with the belief that a wrong person is declared winner, refusal of the electoral body to swear-in winner of election or refusal to vacate office after losing elections. General elections in Nigeria have been characterized by widespread protests, riot and violence usually caused by political supporters. Any time there is violence; there is a total breakdown of law and order and it is usually accompanied with irrational behaviours that lead to killing, maiming, looting etc. Political aspirants mobilise unemployed youths and instigate them to threaten or unleash violence on their opponents as a means of achieving political ambition. The presence of fierce-looking political thugs at polling centres at times do scare credible voters away as a result of which the thugs and other unqualified voters are unlawfully allowed to take charge of the whole process and vote for the candidate of their choice.

Political thuggery and violence constitute political problems that climax into political instability and endanger democracy. There is no doubt that it also constitutes major threat to national security and enhances bad governance. In view of this, it is deemed necessary to examine the causes of political thuggery and violence and its effects on the Nigerian society so as to bring out the reasons for the suggestion of effective civic learning as the way out.

Causes of Political Thuggery and Violence among Youths

Bad governance: It is important to note that political thuggery started as a result of bad governance in Nigeria. Failure of political

leaders to do the needful in providing gainful employment for the teeming population of youths that graduate from the higher institutions in the nation every year is a great challenge. The remote causes of violence, according to Abimbola and Akinsote (2012), are inherent in failure of good governance by the political elites and their collaborators since return to civil rule in 1999. In fact, election rigging through thuggery, violence and any other means is a way of forcefully installing a wrong candidate in office, the resultant effect of which will no doubt be bad governance.

Unemployment and poverty: As pointed out earlier, poverty and unemployment are some of the causes of political thuggery and violence among youths. Political aspirants entice unemployed youths with money and instigate them to threaten or unleash terror on their opponents so as to achieve their political objectives. Agba (2011) also revealed that the rising level of poverty, unemployment and weak security agencies account for the thriving market for political thuggery and violence in Nigeria.

High remuneration: High remuneration of political office holders is another cause of political thuggery and violence. The problem of national assembly remuneration stemmed from the shortcoming of the 1999 constitution that failed to stipulate the salary of members. It was reported in the news on radio recently that the assembly members earn so much that the federal government was alleged to be spending about 15% of the national budget on their remuneration. Apart from that, other politicians have access to money from many sources that they spend anyhow. Agba (2011) stressed that the more elective offices are made attractive financially, the more politicians employ thugs during elections and campaigns. High remuneration of thugs by the politicians on the other hand is one of the reasons the youths find the job attractive and irresistible. Most of the youths take up appointment as political thugs due to financial gains derivable from it. Some now see it as lucrative job through which they can earn living and acquire properties, like any gainfully employed person.

Ignorance and low level of political education: Some youths are lured into unacceptable behaviours in the society due to ignorance, low level of political education, lack of democratic value, poor knowledge of what democracy stands for and inadequate knowledge of the electoral process. They just accept to do any assignment given to them provided money is involved. They maim, kill and destroy with impunity as directed by their 'god fathers' without looking back.

Bribery and corruption: This is a great disease that is gradually destroying the socio-economic political and judicial system of Nigeria. Bribery and corruption seem to be the order of the day among political office holders. The judges in charge of the judicial system are not even helping matters. Bribery and corruption have blindfolded them in their dealings with political office holders, political aspirants and the electoral body to the extent that it is now difficult for them to maintain justice and fair play while it is easy to adjudicate in favour of thugs working under their politician clients. This also accounts for impunity that is being shamelessly displayed by political office holders and their cohorts as they continually perpetrate criminal acts.

Effects of Political Thuggery and Violence on the Society

From observations, political thuggery and violence have the following effects on the people and the society:

- It leads to destruction of lives and properties, looting of properties and massive disruption of socio-economic activities.
- It instills fear in people as a result of which voting behaviour of the electorate is negatively influenced thus resulting in low participation of eligible voters.
- It hinders the emergence of credible candidates and encourages stealing of genuine mandate.
- It increases crime rate, thus a threat to achievement of democratic dividends and exercise of citizenship rights in Nigeria.
- It encourages impunity.

- It also serves as threat to right of citizens and makes voting a mere formality and facilitates election rigging (Agba 2011).

Curbing Political Thuggery and Violence through Effective Civic learning

In this paper, effective civic learning is being suggested as an approach that can be employed to curb political thuggery and violence among Nigerian youths. Civic learning is any learning that contributes to a student's preparation for community or public involvement in a diverse democratic society. It means promoting the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning and social responsibility (Howard, 2001).

Through civic learning, students learn to understand what right attitudes and wrong attitudes are and must be prepared to contribute positively to community and national growth. The students should be able to come to the realization that democratic system of government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance and that they do not have to passively accept the dictates of others, agree to their demands or be threatened, forced or instigated to cause trouble, riot or violence in an attempt to assist some people to destroy lives and properties or disrupt electoral processes. Based on this, effective civic learning should help students to:

- Develop confidence to participate effectively in electoral process
- Understand the workings of democracy
- Be prepared for active involvement in community activities
- Acquire knowledge, skills and values that are necessary for democracy
- Respect and appreciate diversity and social responsibility
- Develop the skills and dispositions necessary for engaged citizenship
- Get involved as citizens now rather than later and
- Practice what they have learnt.

Branson and Quigley (1998) maintained that participation in electoral process must be based on informed, critical reflection and on the understanding and acceptance of the rights and responsibilities that go with membership of the community. Youths need to develop democratic values, positive attitudes and acquire skills and knowledge desirable for them to be able to participate effectively in political matters and electoral processes. This is a role expected of parents, teachers, government and even religious institutions. But the bulk of the work rests on teachers who are saddled with the responsibility of teaching, guiding and giving the youths formal instructions on how to become effective citizens and participate positively and meaningfully in the electoral process while in school.

The type of productive citizens which civic education aim to produce requires teachers who possess a sound knowledge of what to teach, ability to demonstrate possession of adequate teaching behaviours, ability to master the methods of instruction thoroughly and choose appropriate ones. Based on this premise, it must be emphasised that professionally trained teachers who understand the contents and methods of translating the essentials of the objectives of civic education into practice through effective communication can be considered fit to handle the subject.

Milner (2006) believed that providing students with classroom instruction related to democracy is one method to developing a better informed citizen and that democratic classrooms incorporate a curriculum that actively engages student, allowing decisions to be made through a collaboration of students and staff. Guilfoile and Delander (2014) submitted that while lecture method can be an effective strategy for instruction, developing the skills and dispositions necessary for engaged citizenship takes practice, and that civic education course work should include opportunities for students to engage as citizens now rather than focusing on how they may engage as citizens in the future. The students, having gone through series of contents related to democracy need to practice what they have been taught.

Young people who engage in and know more about their communities, according to Milner (2006), are more likely to want

to improve those communities through better government, voting, political discussion and other civic activities than their less engaged and knowledgeable counterparts. National Council for the Social Studies (2013) added that students who leave high school with civic competencies achieved through high quality civic learning practices are more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, to volunteer and work in community issues and are more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the students must come to the realization that democratic self-government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance and that they do not have to just passively accept the dictates of others or agree to their demands. Students need to develop civic dispositions from the early stage to discourage them from the social vices that are destroying the lives of youths today, especially when it comes to political matters. The society is a place where children and youths see many contradictions which their lives also reflect. Despite the fact that the youths possess noble, valuable and positive characteristics, they can as well be forced to exhibit negative characteristics due to their experience in the society if not properly guided and trained.

In order to develop better informed citizens, students must be provided with classroom instructions that are related to democracy. In a guidebook written by Guilfoile and Delander (2014), 'six proven practices' for effective civic learning which teachers can use were identified. The 'six proven practices' are to be used as guide to teach, train and assist students to develop into well informed citizens that can actively and effectively participate in electoral process and make meaningful contributions to the political development of their communities and the nation at large. The six proven practices for effective civic learning are highlighted thus:

- Provide instruction in government, history, law and democracy
- Incorporate discussion of current local, national and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young ones view as important to their lives

- Design and implement programmes that provide students with opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to formal classroom instruction
- Provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools and communities i.e activities that offer students to work with their peers in addressing local community needs and aspirations.
- Encourage student participation in school governance, such as student council, youth advisory board, departmental committees etc.
- Encourage student participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures. (Guilfoile and Delander, 2014)

It is believed that when these guidelines are followed and the suggestions properly implemented, the students will be able to acquire necessary knowledge, skill and values which are important for the maintenance and improvement of democratic way of life. While borrowing the ideas from this guidebook, teachers are advised to note that high quality classroom instruction must remain at the foundation of civic learning. They must make inculcation of political knowledge in learners a priority and ensure that students participate in speech and debates on political issues/matters. This goes beyond selection of few brilliant students but requires getting every student actively involved. Performance of community service also necessitates that students go through service learning which is focused on teaching young people how to be productive citizens in their communities. This can be done by teaching, guiding and assisting students to engage in meaningful service activities in their schools or communities.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that political thuggery and violence has constituted a challenge to democratic governance in Nigeria and that youths are the instruments used by politicians. The causes of political thuggery and violence were identified as bad governance, unemployment, poverty, bribery and corruption, high remuneration,

ignorance and low level of political education. One of the effects is that it hinders the emergence of credible candidates and encourages stealing of genuine mandate. Others are destruction of lives and properties and massive disruption of socio-economic activities among others. In order to curb political thuggery and violence, effective civic learning was suggested. This will allow the students to develop democratic values, positive attitudes and acquire skills and knowledge desirable for active participation in political matters and electoral processes.

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