Abstract

This paper has identified electoral brigandage as one of the vices that have plagued the democratic process in Nigeria over the years. It has attempted to highlight some perceived causes of electoral brigandage and its negative impact on children, adolescent and the society at large. The paper contends that counseling can be used to curb brigandage in politics. Governments at various levels should therefore employ the services of professional counselors to help curb incidents of electoral brigandage and hence ensure good governance in the country.

Introduction

One of the most important indices for determining the maturity of democracy in any society is the quality of the electoral process. This is because election is the only means by which the masses of any country give their mandate to whoever they want to lead them. The legitimacy of any democratic government depends on the quality of elections that brought the government to power. Morally, any government that comes to power through flawed electoral process may not genuinely lay claim to the mandate of the people. As a result, the loyalty and support of the populace to such a government will not be guaranteed thus, making governance difficult.

The 2007 general elections in Nigeria marked the country’s 7th attempt at electing their leaders through the democratic process. The earlier general elections were those of 1964, 1979, 1983, 1999 and 2003. The conduct of the general elections of 2007, as in all the earlier elections except that of 1993, was described by international and local observers as falling short of basic international and regional standards for democratic election (European Union Observer Mission, April, 2007). The only widely acclaimed free and fair election in Nigeria was that of 1993 which was purportedly won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola. That election was unfortunately annulled in circumstances that Ndaryo (2000), lamented had not been made clear to Nigerians.

A very disturbing development in the practice of politics in Nigeria is the upsurge of electoral brigandage. This is a situation whereby political actors use thugs (and incumbent office holders use security agents) to beat up opponents, hijack electoral materials and massively thumb print and stuff ballot boxes in order to win elections. This phenomenon has persisted in Nigerian politics over time and has the potential to thwart any meaningful development in politics and governance. Some intellectual effort therefore, needs to be made to examine this phenomenon with a view to identifying its causes, impact on society and possible counseling intervention.

Democracy, the Democratic Process and Electoral Brigandage in Nigeria

Democracy is a derivative of two Greek words namely: demos – meaning people and kraits – meaning power. Thus, democracy is a government where power is vested in the people. Ker and Obiabo (2003, p.8), maintain, Democracy is a rule of the people. This means that the people are supreme. It also implies that only the people can elect their representatives and they must not be ruled without consent.
The democratic process describes the means or way to attaining democracy. This process according to Wahab and Asabe (2000), includes the registration of voters, electioneering campaigns, casting of votes, announcement of results and governance. It is the inability of the political class to successfully implement the democratic process that is widely acclaimed as the hallmark of Nigeria’s democracy. Akume (2003) blames failure of the democratic process on the unwillingness of the incumbent governments to transit to another, which process could only take place in a free and fair election.

Nigerian politics is characterized by electoral brigandage. Politicians especially incumbent governments have been indicated by Falae (2007) and Falana (2007), for sponsoring or abetting over-voting, thuggery, killings, ballot box snatching and stuffing, intimidation of voters by armed soldiers and mobile police as well as indiscriminate allocation of votes by the electoral commission (Iwere, 2007). Electoral brigandage is facilitated by mass build up of arms and ammunition, organized armed youth militia that are used alongside soldiers and other agents of incumbent governments which, of course, has the monopoly of legal violence, to coerce the electorate into accepting results of elections against the popular choice of the people.

Wealthy opposition politicians in like manner, mobilize their followers, whipping up clannish and/or religious sentiments to counter their opponents. For instance, during the governorship elections of 14th April 2007, 62 suspects were arrested in Ebonyi State. Eighteen of them had firearms and a prominent politician in the area personally supervised the manhandling of a Divisional Police Officer for Ohaozara by a mob which apparently recognized the police officer as working for the incumbent party in the election (Chike, 2007). An election observer for the agency for mass mobilization, security and crime prevention reported that in Plateau State, at a particular polling unit, men in military and police uniforms arrived at some polling booths, chased away electoral officers and removed ballot boxes which later resurfaced at the collation center, stuffed with thumb printed ballot papers (Chike, 2007).

European Union observers reported violent disruption of polling and counting process and hijacking of electoral materials as well as stuffing of ballot boxes in many states such as Akwa-Ibom, Gombe, Edo, Niger, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Enugu and Zamfara. They observed that no election took place in 5 wards in Zamfara State but fake were included into the gubernatorial election results for these wards while in Ebonyi State, a polling station with 223 registered voters showed a result of 601 votes for only one party. In Nasarawa State, ballot papers for three local government area (Assakio, Ashinge and Arikya) were snatched by thugs. However, results were delivered including the total amount of ballot papers for these Local Government Area.

A cursory look at the reports of observers presented so far shows that electoral brigandage was quite prevalent at the 2007 general elections. Whatever form or shape electoral brigandage takes, its results are always devastating. For instance, Agbe, Tor-Anyiin and Obiabo (2004, p.102), recount that the 1983 elections were characterized by electoral brigandage. The results were that there were violent protests, vandalization and killings. In Ondo State for example, entire families of politicians were wiped out and hundreds of houses set on fire. In such cases the government that emerges has to spend time and resources trying to restore law and order, compensate some victims and appease aggrieved parties instead of channeling these resources to the provision of services to enhance good governance.
Causes of Electoral Brigandage

The fighting, killings, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes as well as announcement of fake election results are what the authors refer to as electoral brigandage. This electoral fraud has some perceived causes some of which are discussed as follows:

1. **The Psychological Mind-set of Politicians**: Political leaders in Nigeria exhibit a negative mindset each time there is an impending election. They have a "must win" attitude and do not prepare themselves to accept any results that would not be in their favour. For instance, former President Olusegun Obasanjo was widely quoted to have declared in the build up to the 2007 elections, that the election was a do-or-die affair. This type of mindset makes contestants and supporters at elections to prepare themselves to do anything including engaging in violent acts in order to win elections.

2. **The Winner-Takes-All Syndrome**: Winners takes all syndrome is a situation whereby "loosing an election means loosing everything" (Ortese, 2003, p. 136). In Nigeria, the attitude of political parties which win elections is to exclude all opposing politicians from participation in governance. The implication here is that except you win election, you are irrelevant. Here, the incumbent, President Umaru Yar'Adua needs commendation for the idea of including opposition politicians in his Government of National Unity (GNU). One hopes that this trend will continue in order to reduce the tendency of politicians to engage in electoral brigandage.

3. **Poverty and Ignorance**: Credible reports had it that the 2007 general elections alone, at least 200 people including candidates and police were killed in electoral violence (E.U. Report, 2007). It is instructive to note that those who do the actual fighting, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes are usually unemployed and ill-educated youths. These are the people that are so poor and have no hope of making it in the competitive elitist world. Also, due to their poor training of the mind, as correctly noted by Ortese (2003), they easily act on impulse once induced by their political masters.

4. **The Financial Attractiveness of Political Office**: In Nigeria, politics is business. Akum (2004), remarked that the fastest way of making money is to occupy political office. A Daily Trust Newspaper columnnist, supported this assertion when he noted that a secondary school drop-out manipulates his way into political office and in less than two years, he begins to flaunt stupendous wealth around, thereby, taunting and tantalizing the most brilliant ones in the universities who burned all the midnight oil to become lecturers (Sanu, 2007, p.8).

5. **Lack of Transparency in the Conduct of Elections**: The electoral body (INEC) is expected to be an unbiased and independent umpire in electoral matters. European observers however, report that the INEC which is financially dependent on the executive, did not prepare well for the elections and experienced widespread lack of confidence among electoral stakeholders in relation to its capacity and impartiality. Deadlines were missed throughout the pre-election period and it lacked transparency in its decisions and conduct. This lack of transparency makes INEC's role as an umpire suspect. It is generally perceived as working only in the interest of the ruling party and hence the tendency of some contestants to seek illegal ways to secure victory.
Impact of Electoral Brigandage

The immoral act of killings, snatching and stuffing ballot boxes during elections has far reaching impacts on the society generally, on the people who actually participate in it and on the moral development of children and adolescent in the community.

During the electioneering process, energetic young men are employed by the political leaders to carry out these illegal activities. The young men are paid and equipped with arms and ammunition with which to attack others and hijack the needed electoral materials. However, when the elections have been “won”, these young men are abandoned by their paymasters. Many of them turn to crime, sometimes using the weapons provided for them by the politicians to carry out armed robbery.

When elections go on, young children and adolescents watch elderly, often respected members of society stealing ballot boxes and stuffing them, sometimes in houses of traditional rulers as was observed in Gombe State, during the 2007 elections (E. U. observers report 2007), sometimes religious leaders are actively involved in the crime (as observed by the researcher in Benue State during the 2003 elections). Through vicarious learning, these young people copy the criminal acts. It is such imitative learning that the children often exhibit at home and in school in the form of bullying, pick pocketing and examination malpractices.

Through the experience of electoral brigandage, children actually watch thugs as they go about brutalizing innocent people and getting paid for it. They therefore, learn that one get money and the good things of life without working honestly for them. They young and innocent children whose minds are highly malleable, thus, learn to be laziness and criminal minded. The moral bankruptcy being noticed among young people is partly attributed to political brigandage.

Counseling Against Electoral Brigandage

Counseling is a helping service which a professional counselor assists a client or group of clients to adjust optimally to their environment, take rational decisions and live productive and fulfilled lives. The counselor uses psychological principles to make the client better understand themselves and their environment in order to facilitate effective decision-making in all aspects of life. The professional counselor can assist the political class to imbibe moral principles and avoid brigandage in the electoral process. Counseling theories such as the transactional analysis theory of Eric Berne and individual psychology of Alfred Adler can provide the theoretical base for such assistance.

Specially, the transactional analysis theory can be effectively employed in helping politicians adopt the “I am okay, you are okay” life position during electoral contest. This life position has the potential for making politicians accept the reality that “my opponent can be as good as I am.” This will enable contestants to cooperate with each other once elections are over, in order to facilitate good governance. At present, one observes that the prevailing position is “I am okay, you are not okay” which sees nothing good in an opponent and which promotes fighting and sabotage in the act of governance.

Individual psychology theory of Alfred Adler posits that individual interest should be subservient to social interest. According to Adler, social interest is the barometer for measuring an individual’s normalcy. This theory will be very useful in promoting patriotism and nationalism among politicians so that whatever they do, will be guided by the need to ensure good governance and the development of the community and not just their selfish interests.
Conclusion

The task of the counseling professional is primarily to ensure maximal adjustment of individuals in society. Electoral brigandage is a social vice that is bedeviling the Nigeria society, weakening its fabric and making governance difficult. This paper has identified some causes of electoral brigandage in Nigeria, highlighted its negative impact and the role of counseling in curbing the ugly situation. Governments at various levels should therefore, employ the services of counselor in their personnel departments, counseling units should be established in ministries, legislative houses and other government agencies. Counselors should also be attached to the various party secretariats to render services to the politicians. Workshops and seminars should be organized at regular interval where counseling professionals would interact with political actors and government functionaries.

During such interactions, the counselor could take on each of the earlier identified causes of electoral brigandage in order to find ways of curing the phenomenon. In this way, electoral processes will become moral credible and legitimacy of government better assured. Then we can hope for good governance in the country.

References


Sexuality and Celibacy in Roman Catholic Church  
– Ofordie, Chris. (Rev. Fr., Ph.D)

Cultural Values and Reported Crimes among Ethnicities in Delta State of Nigeria – Ewhrudjakpor, Christian (Ph.D)

Managing Subordinates for Effective Performance  
– Uduji, Joseph I. (Ph.D)

Developing Sustainable Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises – Global Template – Enih, O.C. and Okezie, Y.

Challenges of Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria  
– Ozuru, H.N., Nwibere, B.M., and Asiegbu, I.F.

Effect of Training on Student Creative Thinking Performance  
– Nwachukwu, T. A. (Ph.D) and Iordah, T.A.

Motorcycle Taxis in Enugu: Implications for Development  
– Atubi, A. (Ph.D.) and Ali, A.O.

Evaluation of the Acute Toxicity of Corexit 9527/Forcados Crude Oil Mixture in Tilapia Guineensis and Sarothedron melanotheron  
– Akah, P.A. (Ph.D.), Ezike, C.A., Offia, N. and Agbata, C.C.


Developing Effective Human Relations and Community Participation in School Management through Transformational Leadership Behaviours – Chiaha, G.T.U. (Mrs., Ph.D)

Relationship between Communication and Sexual Adjustment Among Couples in Obudu Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria – Oshie, C. Katanyi and Igbo, H. Ihuoma (Ph.D)

Book Review

Author’s Guide
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality and Celibacy in Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>Ofordile, Chris. (Rev. Fr., Ph.D.)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Values and Reported Crimes among Ethnicities in Delta State</td>
<td>Ewhrudjakpor, Christian (Ph.D.)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Subordinates for Effective Performance</td>
<td>Uduji, Joseph I. (Ph.D.)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Sustainable Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises – Global</td>
<td>Enheh, O.C. and Okezie, Y.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises – Global Template</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria</td>
<td>Ozuru, H.N., Nwibere, B.M., and Chikwe, J.E.</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of Training on Student Creative Thinking Performance</td>
<td>Nwachukwu, T. A. (Ph.D.) and Iordah, T.A.</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle Taxis in Enugu: Implications for Development</td>
<td>Auubi, A. (Ph.D.) and Ali, A.O.</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the Acute Toxicity of Corexit 9527/Forcados Crude Oil</td>
<td>Akah, P.A. (Ph.D.), Ezike, C.A., Offia, N.</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixture in <em>Tilapia Guineensis</em> and <em>Sarotherodon melanotheron</em></td>
<td>and Agbata, C.C.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Financing and Coping Strategies in sub-Saharan Africa:</td>
<td>Ochonma, G.O. (Ph.D.)</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Systematic Analytical Review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Effective Human Relations and Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in School Management through Transformational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Behaviours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between Communication and Sexual Adjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among Couples in Obudu Local Government Area, Cross River State,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Review</td>
<td></td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s Guide</td>
<td></td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTRIBUTORS

Ofordile, Christopher (Rev. Fr., Ph.D.)
Lecturer, Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ewhrudjakpor, Christian (Ph.D.)
Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology/Psychology, Delta State University, P.M.B. 1, Abraka, Nigeria

Uduji, J.I. (Ph.D.)
Lecturer, Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus

Ench, O.C.
Research Fellow I, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus

Okezie, Young
Afrique Consults Limited, Lagos

Ozuru, Henry N.
Lecturer, Marketing Department, University of Port Harcourt, Choba

Nwibere, B. M.
Lecturer, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt, Choba

Chikwe, J.E.
Lecturer, Management Department, University of Port Harcourt, Choba
Nwachukwu, T. Ama
Professor of Education, Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 410001

Iordaah, T.A.
Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Atubi, A. (Ph.D.)
Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography and Regional Planning, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Ali, A.O.
Department of Geography, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Akah, P.A. (Ph.D.)
Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology, Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ezike, C.A.
Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Offia, N.
School of Veterinary Medicine, The University of West Indies, St. Augustines, Trinidad

Agbata, C.C.
Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 5022, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Ochoma, O.G. (Ph.D.)
Head, Department of Health Administration & Management College of Medicine, Enugu Campus, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Chiaha, Gertrude Theresa Uzoamaka
Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Oshie, Catherine Katanyi
College of Education, Obudu, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Igbo, Happiness Ihuoma (Ph.D.)
Department of Educational Foundations, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria.