

## Citizenship Education and Democratic Stability in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The paper establishes an interface between Citizenship Education and Democratic Stability in Nigeria. 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 on May 29, 1999 is due largely to lack of effective citizenship education in the country. The import of the paper is that effective citizenship education in Nigeria is the panacea to Democratic Stability in the country and recommends how this could be realized.

**Keywords:** Citizenship Education, Democratic Stability, Governance, Nigeria

### Introduction

The enthronement of democratic governance in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 was characterized by profound excitement after a series of convoluted transition programmes (Suberu, 2002). However, the country has been bedeviled by a plethora of challenges since then, ranging from Sharia crisis, Niger Delta militancy, ethno-religious conflicts, electoral and post-election violence, politically motivated killings, the Boko Haram saga among others (Alfa, 2012). As Adekanye (1989) and Omotola (2010) observed, Nigeria's history has been dotted by different kinds of democratic challenges posing threats to its survival. Thus, the claim by Ake (1981) that politics in Nigeria has assumed a warfare character is apt and plausible.

The level of 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.

### Conceptual clarification

#### Citizenship Education:

Citizenship Education, like most social science concepts, defies a universally acceptable definition. However, many scholars assert that the concept denotes the training process whereby the citizens are kept abreast of their political roles in the society. It is an educational process, formal and / or informal, through which the citizens get acquainted with the basic requirements of good citizenship. It behooves us to note that citizenship education is also referred to as political socialization. According to Almond *et al* (2008), "Political Socialization implies the way in which political values are formed and the political culture is transmitted from one generation to the next".

#### Democratic Stability

The premise of democratic stability is that what sustains government and ensure stability is voluntary support or consent of the citizens rather than reliance on coercion (Osaghae, 1997). Democratic stability implies that government is a product of the will of the people and derives



its legitimacy from the people's consent. This, therefore, ensures that the people willingly support the government given that the government is not arbitrarily foisted on them. In order to reciprocate, the gesture, the government carries out policies that are in tune with the yearnings and aspirations of the people. When there is democratic stability, democratic consolidation is assured. To that extent, therefore, a revert to authoritarianism becomes remote because democracy is seen as the 'only game in time' (Linz and Gunther, 1995; Alfa, 2011).

### **The Role of Citizenship Education in Guaranteeing Democratic Stability**

Though the proper definition of citizenship may be disputed, people generally agree that good citizens are made, not born. Children grow up to be responsible citizens through the interplay of various influences and institutions – including family, religion, school, peer groups, the mass media, and the law – that help shape their sense of civic duty and political self confidence. (Magstadt, 2009).

### **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 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.



### 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, 2011, 2012).

### 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.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

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.

The denial of full citizenship rights to selected individuals and groups in Africa has triggered political violence. In many instances, these conflicts have slowed down democratization process, which is essential for pulling Africa out of poverty and placing it more firmly on the path of stability and sustainable development. This has serious implications for national, regional and global governance. Also very detrimental to democratization is the political manipulation of exclusionary notions of citizenship, reinforced by competition over scare resources and socio-economic opportunities in crisis situations (Ntalaja, 2004).

As a pre-requisite for democratic stability in Nigeria, government should support and nurture families; schools should incorporate schemes that encourage students to question authorities and motivate citizens to participate actively in politics. Political parties should be ideologically based and observe the tenets of intra-party democracy; the mass media should be neutral and be equally accessible to both incumbent and opposition; full citizenship rights should granted to all citizens irrespective of their place of residence; exclusionary notions of citizenship should not be manipulated.

Citizenship education is the process whereby citizens develop the values, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions that enable them to relate to and function within the political system. Specific influences on the developing citizen include the family, religion, public education, the mass media, the law, peer groups and key values. Citizenship education is of paramount importance, if Nigeria fails to socialize its citizenry on a large-scale basis, the country's political and democratic stability can be endangered.

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