

# **Activism and Nigerian Partisan Politics**

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**Abstract:**

One of the factors that necessitates political stability in Nigeria today is the presence and contributions of the critics, through the virtual and available mediums, where they serve turn to be the mouthpiece for the people, checkmating the activities of the government at various levels. Critics as bethought in this paper, involve analysts, media, professional bodies, practitioners, academics and such like. These critics are chiefly seen to be the frontiers of a better society with regard to their activism, participations and contributions. The point of contention here is the human problem that seem to exist in their analysis and justifications as a critic, and as appointees in politics. The sudden alteration in thoughts and ideas as a critic, and as a partisan, has precipitated my interest on this research. That is, why do we have change of thoughts or ideas when we have the critics in politics? To some extent, it can be argued that; it is not usually the same in all situations. This paper seeks to examine the roles and activities played by the critics, in correcting the irregularities and anomalies of the government, and their involvement in politics as appointees at various departments and ministries.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To have a politically stable state, there must be a high level of participation, good governance, know-how, and those that would be able to check when the government or administrators are falling apart. The essence of this study is to sharpen our mind towards an effective participation. However, it is not only to criticise and analyse issues but the ability and prowess to defend the people and speak for the people. It is in this manner that this paper seeks the participation of the people and their reliability to the citizenry therein.

## 2. THE FOUNDATION OF NIGERIAN PARTISAN POLITICS

Nigeria, a former British colony, characterised by a high degree of ethnic divergence, with over 250 ethnic groups; where Britain annexed Lagos, which became a Crown Colony in 1861. In 1946, Dr Azikwe and Herbert Macaulay founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons party (NCNC). The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was founded in 1949, while Chief Obafemi Awolowo founded the Action Group party (AG) in 1950. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa emerged as prime minister during the federal election held for the enlarged House of Representatives, while Dr Nnamdi Azikwe was the president for the Senate. Nigeria got her independence from Britain in 1960. On 1, 1963 Nigeria became a republic, with Dr Azikwe as the president of the republic. This brief historical foundation shows the level of commitment and patriotism of Nigerians for a self-government, which in turns shows the immemorial nature of partisan politics in Nigeria.

## 3. WHO ARE THE ACTIVISTS?

As conceived in this paper, the critics or activists make up the mouthpiece for the society. A society that seems politically stable or unstable has activists in it; the difference is their level of activeness. The activists involve the media, practitioners, professional bodies, pressure groups, academics, analysts and such like. The government guides and control the affairs of a nation but an activist checkmates the activeness, transparency, accountability of such government. For a better society to thrive and triumph, the importance of these ones cannot be left behind. Recently in Nigeria, NLC embarked on a warning strike before it was decided to be called off. During the process of this warning strike, other bodies also involved in the strike action before it was called off. Government has always been checked by these activists at different levels. The importance of an activist in participating in Nigerian politics would be further buttressed in the following sub themes. In situ, it should be borne in mind that these activists are one of the determinants of political stability in any developing or developed nation.

## 4. WHY & WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

The term, governance has been in existence over time, both in political and academic discourse, which generally means; the task of running a government, or any other appropriate entity. Similarly, Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1986:982) indicates that; governance is a synonym for government, or 'the act or process of governing, specifically authoritative direction and control'. This interpretation seems limited to the executive branch of government. The British Council, however, emphasises that 'governance' is a broader notion than government (and for that matter also related concepts like the state, good government and regime), and goes on to state:

Governance involves interaction between the formal institutions and those in civil society. Governance refers to a process whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and social uplift.

Governance is an important concept to corporate organisation; regional organisation; international organisations and institutions; among other groups and organisations across the globe. Etymologically, the term, governance is believed to have originated from the ancient Greek. At this point, it would be deemed necessary to establish what good governance is, especially to this study.

Good governance, according to the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, is the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development (Annan, cited in UN 1998). To Annan, lack of good governance will continue to promote political instability and underdevelopment. It is through good governance that impact of governmental activities can be felt, particularly in the area of economic growth, political stability and development. To the UNDP (2002) 'good governance' is about striving for the rule of law, transparency, equity, effectiveness/efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision in the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority. In other words, it could be seen as a process where public officers and institutions conduct public affairs, and manage public resources effectively through the above listed conditions.

For a nation like Nigeria to ensure political stability, for both 'governed and governing', there must be a good governance which would in turn contribute to political stability and national peace. Good governance manifesting in areas of rule of law, transparency, accountability, citizens participation among others are sine qua non for political stability, national peace, security and development.

## 5. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation can simply be seen as the involvement of the citizens of a country in the formulation and implementation of policies for their governance, and their participation in the choice of their leaders. Prior to this, the concept of governance was itemised and analysed. For

good governance to emerge, various forms of political participation are essential. Critics get involved in politics by criticising candidates for elections and government appointment. Such people sometimes write petitions against politicians and government officials, and may suggest alternative solutions to the problems facing the government.

Some citizens participate in politics by attending political party rallies to enable them identify the policies, programmes, and political party candidates contesting elections. The citizens of a country participate in politics by voting for the candidate of their choice during elections. People also participate in politics so that, they can hold or occupy political offices. The offices may be elective or non-elective, e. g. office of the president, governor, minister or commissioner. Participation in politics also involves discussing and analysing the major political events in the society. Such discussions may focus on personalities and manifestoes of candidates and political parties contesting elections and may take place in non-formal situations or through the mass media. The analysis affords voters the opportunity of assessing the candidates critically before casting their vote. Qualified active (political) participants may decide to stand as candidates seeking election into public offices. Citizens participate in politics by supporting the candidate of their choice during elections. Such support helps the candidate to win elections in order to control the machinery of government. Some wealthy individuals also participate in politics by sponsoring the ideas, programmes and objectives of candidates and political party of their choice. In the case of a political party, such assistance helps them to secure a good party secretariat and other requirements that could assist them in winning elections.

Similarly, Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010), described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Political participation is a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. And this is the reason why Adelekan (2010) emphasised that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. Some of the factors that determine political participation in Nigeria are: cultural, economic, political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals. Also, the level of political awareness as well as the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system.

## 6. POLITICAL STABILITY

The political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters. This is the reason why Appadorai (2004) posited that democracy demands from the common man a certain level of

ability and character: rational conduct and active participation in the government. In Nigeria, political activities and transition programmes have been marked with turbulence, uncertainties and violence. Right from the First Republic, the Nigerian politics is characterised by greed, love of power, violence, assassination, thuggery and election rigging amongst others. Political stability could be established in Nigeria through good governance, fairness, honesty, justice, transparency, accountability and a careful nurture of democracy through good education.

Corruption has been one of the most internal constraints to development in Nigeria. It has led to political instability in Nigeria and has affected economic growth of most African states. Corruption has resulted in erosion of cherished cultural values such as dignity of labour, fairness, honesty, faithfulness, integrity, etc. It has also affected the practice of democracy in Africa and hindered transparency and accountability, leading to bad governance. The opposite of stability is collapse, so 'political stability' generally refers to where a nation's politics fit on a spectrum between those two extremes.

A nation that is constantly having political coups or revolutions or civil wars would be said to have very low political stability, since there would be very low levels of respect for the existing political order, constitution, and government institutions by key political players like politicians, judges, and army officers. One could not take it for granted that, say, the president would be in power (or perhaps even alive) within a year, regardless of how long he was supposed to rule, simply because the political culture would be so chaotic and disrespectful basically any assumption, custom, or convention would have a high likelihood of being ignored or undermined for any number of reasons. A nation with high political stability would be one where politics was extremely predictable.

## 7. ACTIVISM AND NIGERIAN PARTISAN POLITICS

As discussed or highlighted earlier, there exists various forms of political participation. Some participate in politics by attending political parties, some by voting, some by writing petitions and checkmating the strengths and weaknesses of the government and the like. This set of people tagged 'activists or critics' are what precipitated the interest of this paper. These activists constitute various people at various levels, as mass media, practitioners, professional bodies, academics, analysts among others.

The mass media consists of the radio, television and all printed means of acquiring information across to the public. Here, the mass media plays an important role because through them most times, we have the voice(s) of these activists per se. Through the mass media, we have the involvement of academics being voiced to challenge the status quo in the society. So many times on media, we have the news and all sorts of information that seems unknown to the citizens regarding the past and current atrocities by every government. They tend to

analyse, reproof and provide possible solutions through their analyses, which in a way contributes to a politically stable state. Apparently, the media could be described as a tool used in reaching out to the government – the media serves the purpose through which the feelings, values and aspirations of the people are relayed to the government. People tend to participate in politics more because of its accessible nature.

Similarly, academics play a decisive role in shaping the orientation of their students. Education today, has helped changed the mindset of people towards governance unlike how it used to be. To some extent, some people know who is worth voting for, or qualities to be checked for before voting such an aspirant. Through the influence of these academics, the country is being shaped by a better future. So many times, academics are seen or heard on media checkmating the affairs of the government. This has sharpened the mind of many people in the nation, because it broadens the citizens' mind, on what is what. Many academics are also seen in their classrooms or lecture theatres encouraging students on what governance should be. This in turn helps the students in giving a better future to its people.

Professional bodies and interest groups also contribute to the shaping of the country for a better society. Most times, interest groups give out or voice out their opinions through the media. The political stability of a nation like Nigeria can only be achievable with the activeness and commitment of these activists. Professional bodies in Nigeria include Nigeria Bar Association, Association of Staff Union of Universities amongst others.

Among others are the analysts. We have various analysts that are being aired, most times on television or radio, to shed light on the achievements and weaknesses of government at various sectors. These critics are chiefly seen to be the frontiers of a better society with regard to their activism, participations and contributions. It would not be ideal if some areas are not checked I presume. In this, it is this checkmating role provided by the media that earned it the acronym 'watchdog'.

## 8. THE MEDIA

The Media in the country has helped in the formation of attitude through the establishment of values for the society or nation and thereby building a climate of change in the society or nation. According to Alade Odunewu as cited by Yakasai A.S. 1996, this involves the dissemination of news and information in response to a basic human need, which is the 'right to know'. In the same manner, protection of social justice is an important role played by the activists in national development, in that the media are not only expected to record, compose or report account of events and stories just as the historians do, but the media are also expected to analyse issues and facts contained in the news, in line with the need and interest of social justice. Dr Stanley Machebu pointed here that the press 'are subordinate to a far higher goal: the goal of ensuring



that public and private conduct is directed towards the greatest possible measure of justice, in society'.

Therefore, in order to ensure a peaceful national coexistence and progress, the media have before them the task of discouraging such negative issues as ethnicity, dictatorship in leadership like the military rule and of course discourage embezzlement of public funds, as it is the disturbing trend presently indulged by politicians occupying positions of responsibilities and related public officers in Nigeria. Perhaps if the media in Nigeria were carrying out or were allowed to ideally carry out their function of investigating facts and announcing them to the public, the recent scenario where some ex-governors were arrested by the anti-graft commission, the EFCC for alleged money laundering and embezzlement might have happened earlier.

The responsibility of informing people about development projects and programmes is another major role of media to national development. Such programmes designed and proposed by policy makers could be entirely new to the people at whom they need to be enlightened, educated and mobilized by the media. Examples of such programmes are the Universal Basic Education (U.B.E.), the Nomadic Education, Girl-Child Education, Adult Education, Fighting Drug Addiction and Trafficking and for instance, a nationwide campaign towards boosting agriculture and food production.

Offering solutions to problems is another developmental role of the media, in that they are not only expected criticise government officials and condemn their actions, but also as watchdogs of the society. They are expected to review, analyse, appraise or criticise, as the case may be, activities of government agencies and programmes such as the Re-capitalisation of banks and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), with a view to offering solutions in the areas where they are failing or lacking, and suggest ways to their rectification.

## **9. ACTIVISTS OR POWER INTOXICATION?**

The point of contention here is the human problems that seem to exist in the analyses and justifications of a critic, or some critics/activists, and as appointees in politics. The sudden alteration in thoughts and ideas as a critic, and as a partisan, has precipitated the interest of this research. The question then comes to fore – why do we have change of thoughts or ideas when we have the critics in politics?

For the emphasis, an activist is someone who organises and acts for the purpose of changing a public policy or law while a politician is one who seeks election to a public office on behalf of a general ideology and/or a specific agenda on which they promise to act. Activists are majorly interested in the betterment of the society especially rights to education, free life, speech and lots more. They majorly exist at various levels so as to checkmate the activities of governments when such fall apart. However, it has come to be a general rationale in today's

world to see these activists in politics or being given the opportunity to manage the affairs of a nation, and as such, it is expected that what they preach should be put into action, but nay, reverse is mostly the case in Nigeria. More often, when an activist becomes a politician, society loses the former to gain the latter. The reverse is also true because there are exceptions, but they are very rare.

A politician must compromise to get results. An activist on the other hand must be uncompromising and does not have to worry about offending large numbers of people by using language that is strident. Such stridency can increase the odds that the activist will gain the public's attention. However, many of them have been abusing such power and misbehaving even in terms of looting what belongs to the people. Is it because they were not involved in power? Or is power a major problem? Other countries outside Nigeria exist where such is limited and this people remain consistent in their actions. It seems to be a general human problem in Africa, especially Nigeria that when these critics and analysts are given the opportunity to serve, they misbehave or abuse it all, and in turn seen to be like the politicians. One could ask the essence of theories and literatures they analyse when they happened to be outside power.

Corollary to that, many educators and professors in Nigeria have been given such opportunity; the question is what comes in return? Is it what they preach against or in support when they checkmate the affairs of those in government? To digress a little, an Honourable was once approached and asked why such problem do exist; his response was sharp as, 'what would they do when they haven't seen or tasted power before'. This response could not be the same case for all as some people are being pressurised even from within, and this seems to be case of such appointees retiring from various offices. In the midst of it all, there have been some cases where such critics proved it wrong, and remained loyal to their ideas, but the question remains, how do one get away with this? Do they have to behave like politicians when they are meant to checkmate the same? The research however is in continuum, and it would be of good nature to buttress further when questions arise.

## 10. CONCLUSION

This study has been able to clarify some concepts as political participation, political stability, governance, media amongst others. The essence of this paper is not only for the purpose of clarification, but to see the tenets and precepts of good activism especially in good governance. This paper further looked into the roles of media in propagating the perspectives and opinions of the activists, in addressing the problems of governance and aforementioned concepts in Nigeria. It is believed and posited that political participation must go beyond the level that 'I can lead or you can', to the realm of loyalty to the citizenry in thoughts, decisions and actions.



More importantly, for a politically stable state to be birthed, good governance and the role of the activists must not be undermined. Likewise, activists must be both preacher and doer of their thoughts and ideas, negating the regret of Buber, where he argued that, the origin of all conflicts is that people in the country do not say what they mean, and do not do what they say.

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