

Political Education and Social Engineering in an Emerging Democracy

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Abstract

This work discusses the role that political education has to play in an emerging democracy just opening up to the entrenchment of democratic principles. Such a democracy is often faced with some challenges; one being that its past is plagued with features that are antithetical to the principles of democracy such that if care is not taken, these anomalies will smother democratic institutions, practices and underlying philosophies. The second one identified in the paper is that moral principles are not adhered to in such a democracy. There is consequently the need for social engineering to correct the deficiencies. Political education is projected as a bulwark for strengthening democracy in societies where the concept is just finding its feet. It is through political education that, citizens can be imparted with necessary lessons regarding politics, democratic ethos and democratic institutions. Political education will aid the acculturation of citizens of emerging democracies in democratic norms and moral values.

Introduction

In this paper, attention is focused on discussing the need to explore political education as a means of inculcating in citizens of emerging democracies, beliefs and attitudes that will better enhance democratic tenets and functionality of democratic institutions. The position argued for in the paper

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is premised on the belief that “democratic behaviour is not genetically conditioned, inborn or inherited faculty - it is learned” (Gitonga, 1988:21). It is also premised on the belief that the adoption of political institutions is not sufficient for ensuring the success of democracy; but that there is the need for citizens, either as leaders or as followers, to have a set of appropriate behaviours that can aid rules, norms, and democratic institutions and thereby ensure that democracy leads to development. This puts a burden on governments of emerging democracies to consciously develop a system of education that will help nurture in citizens, important lessons that will lead to, not just development of intellectual soundness but more importantly, refined social and moral behaviour. The need to ensure that democracy does not turn to autocracy, which most emerging democracies emancipated from, is also a justification for the need to pay attention to political education, because, as Frazer (1999:7) points out, “authoritarian government, or social and political dominance by fractions of economic or cultural power, will not be effectively challenged unless citizens in general, and in their various coalitions and associations, are sufficiently knowledgeable and skilled in political interventions.” Thus, it is argued, in this work that, emerging democracies have the task of pursuing political education that will serve the end of imparting the right values into citizens, thereby creating a civic culture upon which democracy can find a sure footing. By this, we share the view of Pacho (2014:14) that “people ought to be aware of their rights and duties in order to participate actively and responsibly in government. This can be enhanced by providing students with political and civic knowledge.”

This paper is divided into two sections, apart from the introduction and the conclusion. The first part deals with what the idea of emerging democracy is, its features and why such democracies need social engineering. This is followed by the section that shows the role that political education can play in fixing the deficiencies of emerging democracies.

Emerging Democracy and the Need for Social Engineering

The term, “emerging democracy,” is employed, here, to refer to democracy in an embryonic form as found in societies that are just opening up to the entrenchment of the principles and ideals of democracy. Emerging democracies cannot be compared to consolidated democracies like France,

Britain, and the United States of America. Emerging democracies are found in societies in which the principles and processes of democracy have not been fully institutionalised. These societies, as Thompson (1994:10) describes them, are “newly democratising societies.” A distinguishing feature of these democracies is that their immediate past is one in which the system of governance is antithetical to democracy, due to their emergence from the shackles of military rule or colonialism, or some other form of dictatorship. The pre-democratic era often affects these democracies through the promotion of conditions, mentalities, and practices that eventually constitute danger to democratic governance. This is because democracy meets in place, in these societies, conditions that are incompatible with norms, values, purposes, and structures that are suitable for the sustenance of democracy. For example, in Nigeria, where military rule preceded the current fourth republic, Claude Ake compares values cherished by the military and those that are key for the sustenance of democracy by positing that, “the military values discipline and hierarchy, democracy, freedom and equality; the military is oriented to law and order, democracy to diversity and contradiction and competition; the method of the military is violent aggression, that of democracy is persuasion, negotiation and consensus-building” (Ake 1996:14).

The immediate past of democracy, in emerging democracies, suffuses these societies with certain anti-democratic norms, practices, and mental orientations that require, on the part of democratic governments inheriting them, to put in place measures, programmes and efforts that will eventually lead to the eradication of norms, practices, and mental orientation that are antithetical to the values and practices of democracy. In countries that are just emerging from military rule, for instance, the military era conditioned the mentality of political leaders and those being governed in such a way that the rule of law, consensus-building, tolerance, free and fair election, accountability, checks and balances and other values of democracy became radically affected. Nigeria is an example of a democracy with a military past. As a democracy that emerged out of the immediate past of prolonged military governance, military rule bequeathed to political leaders an orientation which Kolawole (2007) terms “democratic despotism.” This refers to the fact that political leaders emerging after the demise of military rule are

unable to govern in line with democratic ethos. They are unable to submit themselves to other institutions for regulating the excesses of political leaders in the country. They simply “do not understand the trends and essence of democracy.... Their orientation is towards legitimacy by compulsion” (Kolawole 2007:63). That past is also responsible for ignorance about the nuances of democracy and as such responsible for “impatience with due process, calls for the intervention of the ‘presidency’ in matters that call for negotiations or other legal or quasi-legal procedures” (Bello 2005:48), and resorting to self-help instead of allowing necessary institutions in a democracy to handle grievances.

Deriving from this first feature of emerging democracy is a second, which is that, although these democracies often have in place necessary formal structures of democracy - constitutions, separation of powers - yet the necessary behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that are more crucial for sustaining the copied structures of democracy put in place are lacking. These democracies are merely successful in replicating institutions and practices of democracy found in consolidated democracies like those of the United States of America, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, while failing to develop in their citizens attitudes that are *sine qua non* for the optimal performance of the copied institutions on which democracy rests. It is instructive to note that underpinning the institutions of democratic governance are certain values that social behaviours must conform to, in order to get optimum performance from democracy and that democracy involves, more importantly, the cultivation of the attitudes of mind and heart and the promotion of forms of social behaviours that are germane for nurturing institutions, and creating atmosphere for democracy to survive and thrive.

The implication of the analysis undertaken above is that democracy, in societies tagged emerging democracies, is situated in an environment that is not conducive for its optimal performance or sustenance. To correct this, what needs to be done is to begin to create a conducive environment by imbuing the society in which democracy is grafted with necessary norms through the promotion of the principles, values, the right attitudes, beliefs and behavioural pattern that will make democracy effective. What is being advocated for, here, is in line with the position of Anyiam-Osigwe (2007:23)

that, “cultivation and strengthening of the moral element in the individual should precede the formulation and implementation of the developmental initiatives. Similarly, institutional reforms should be preceded by reform of the mindset of the people.”

Democracy depends on values, attitudes and patterns of behaviour in a society. Thus, Kolawole notes: “democracy is not the absence of military rule. It is not even necessarily the presence of civilian administrators. It is a situation where political actors and institutions of state are oiled in democratic values, norms and ethos” (Kolawole 2007:68). It is the extent to which these values are entrenched or strengthened in a society that will determine the quality of democracy a society has and, consequently, the development democracy is able to engender. If adherence to values in a society is weak, democracy may be less effective in translating to development. Likewise, if values are strong, democracy is more functional and able to achieve more through the promotion of development. Therefore, a society hoping to harness the gains of democracy will have to see to the entrenchment of certain social values.

There is, consequently, need to lay a solid foundation on which an enduring democracy may be built in emerging democracies. There are prices to pay for democracy and development and one of them is the entrenchment of values. A nascent democracy needs to undergo some form of social engineering to correct defects in the society, and create the kind of society that is conducive for the practices and institutions of democracy, before the gains of democracy can be harnessed for developmental purpose. It is to enable this that social engineering is important.

Social engineering has to do with addressing the inadequacies of the society and finding ways through which these ills can be addressed, such that a new direction for the society can be charted to bring about positive changes in the society. The importance of social engineering in a nascent democracy lies in the realisation of the fact, that having a respected constitutional framework, laws and a number of functional government institutions are necessary for the survival of democracy, but that more importantly, there is also the need for appropriate beliefs, attitudes and set of social and moral norms that will help in the sustenance of the culture and values of democracy. This is necessary because the constitution, laws and the institutions of democracy are nothing in themselves, unless they are

founded upon moral ideals and people into whose hands they are committed possess the right moral orientation. In this regard, Anyiam Osigwe (2012: 11-12) is of the view that:

... while viable institutions are core to positioning a responsive and responsible social order for the led and the leaders, even the drivers of these institutions would pervert the entire process of development when they have not imbibed propriety as a way of life. Also, the led would hinder the objective thrust of well-intended initiatives, programmes or projects when their conduct is not guided by appropriate values.

In achieving the aim of social engineering, the individual in the society is seen as a change agent with prominent roles to play in correcting social ills. Thus, focus is on changing the mental orientation of the individual since “the greatness of a country is measured by the actualisation of the potentials of its citizens” (Akinwale 2004:56). Citizens, through an education designed for that purpose, must be imbued with the moral requisite that will not only sustain society but strengthen democracy. Working on the individual psyche or mental orientation is important in the light of the observation that “the institutions of a people and the character of the members act and react on each other. A change in the character of the members will tend to be reflected in a change in the institutions (Ginsberg 1958:207). Consequently, underpinning the belief in social engineering is the conviction that once individuals subscribe to some set of appropriate moral values or social norms then institutions will be positively imparted to behave as they ought.

There is need for social engineering in an emerging democracy, and that need is a result of the fact that as Gitonga (1988) suggests democratic behaviour is neither in the genetics nor inborn, and at the same time it is not an inherited faculty. Rather, it is learned. Social engineering should bring about social change, which touches on “changes in attitude or beliefs, in so far as they sustain institutions” (Ginsberg 1958:207). Social engineering will require, as Anyiam-Osigwe (2013:10-11) proposes, “the reordering of the belief system and the reconstruction of the mindset of the larger social mass towards a deeper appreciation of the feasibility and benefit of the imagined ideal.”

Consequently, all efforts at promoting change in a democracy will have to start from the people. This is necessary because the people are the basic building blocks of a democracy and as such, it is in helping the individual develop some set of personal values that a democracy can be consolidated. Democracy, in reality, reflects a people's culture and values. A realisation of this fact made Afrifa K. Gintonga to draw the attention of any group of people who are serious about institutionalising democracy to the pertinent fact that:

... the amount or degree of democracy in any given society is directly proportional to the degree of acculturation of the people in democratic values, attitudes and beliefs. For democracy to exist, survive and prosper it requires that the people be bathed in and drenched with the democratic ethos (Gitonga 1988:21).

While not disputing the fact that leadership quality matters in nation building, strengthening democracy, and in engendering development, it is also important to emphasise the fact that the character of the people being governed, determines the success of transformative agenda of leaders. Corrupt leadership is just a manifestation of what is fundamentally wrong with many emerging democracies, which really is the orientation of the people to statehood, democracy and governance. But the truth is that although leadership is a necessary factor in nation building and social transformation, it is not a sufficient one. This is so because "however, well-intentioned, visionary and courageous a leadership is, its effort at social transformation may not succeed unless its vision becomes institutionalised and appropriate values and attitudes are developed by the people for the sustenance of the process of social transformation" (Oladipo 2000:27-28). Fixing whatever is wrong with emerging democracies will have to realise that "...while the leadership cannot be exonerated from the blame, so also the public" (Lawuyi 2012:27). The entrenchment of values can best be done by pursuing a programme of political education.

Political Education and Social Engineering in Emerging Democracies

The term political education is here employed to refer to education designed to broaden the minds of its recipients about politics and their civic roles. It

is a form of education that is designed to address the myopic view of politics that some citizens may possess. Pacho (2014:15) notes, in this regard, that “even though many people have a general idea of what politics is about, there are a lot of misconceptions about politics. For instance, some people view politics as a ‘dirty game’ or as an activity confined only to politicians;” while some conceive politics as opposition, conflict and lack of agreement (Dag, Sozer and Sel 2015:1883). The aim of this form of education is to liberate the masses who might have been fed negative information leading to political apathy. Dag, Sozer and Sel (2015:1882) define it as “a process whereby citizens internalise the set of values of the political system.... A process whereby people learn several matters such as how to socialise within political culture, how to think and act on politics and government, how to adapt to the political process, how to shape political system and how to make decisions.”

Political education will enable its recipients to “take advantage of various opportunities for political participation and help build a positive attitude towards politics” (Pacho 2014:13). In a democracy, the ability to understand the nuances of how things work can only enhance democracy. This is so because it is government of, by, and for the people and thus requires informed minds in order for politics to be played right. Political education in a democracy is thus crucial because “levels of political knowledge and engagement and commitment to democratic values are ‘low’ for the health of a democratic political system” (Frazer, 1999:7). Political education in a democracy consequently seeks to influence political culture and enhance citizens’ level of engagement by curtailing political apathy as manifested, for instance, in low electoral turn-out, apathy to voters’ registration, lack of interest in joining political parties and/or pressure groups, etc. It seeks, in addition, to inculcate into persons the right disposition since, as Akinwunmi and Ohyoma opine, poverty of political education shows itself in bribery, intimidation, election rigging and politics with bitterness, and intolerance. Moreover, political interactions, in a democracy, takes place within a body of rules, procedures, and institutions, and it is important to understand how these relate and work together to produce desired results. Otherwise, citizens, emerging from undemocratic mode of governance, may be predisposed to abuse or be abused.

Political education is both a formal and an informal affair. It is formal if received within the walls of a school environment with regulated curriculum by the right authorities. On the other hand, it is informal if it is a product of informal social settings through the family, religious institutions, civil, professional and other social organisations. Both have their separate advantages. It has been argued, for instance, that there is an education effect, which refers to a “strongly positive correlation between educational attainment (measured both by being in more rather than less academic school streams, and by years of formal education and qualifications obtained) and political knowledge, interest and participation” (Frazer, 1999:6). In addition,

learning in school itself instils certain kinds of values and interpersonal skills which are necessary in democratic societies: understanding of social differences, the capacity for autonomy, the rejection of authoritarianism, courage in speech and action, the capacity for rational and cooperative deliberation- these are fundamental to education proper, and to political education (Frazer, 1999:11).

However, one cannot dispute the fact that citizens, through informal education, have more opportunities to socialise themselves politically. First, social settings are more relaxed than formal settings and afford recipients of political education in that setting an opportunity to learn in a relaxed environment. Second, certain areas of political education might be restricted and not available to people in formal curricula. Third, not all individuals will have the opportunity to receive formal education for a number of reasons, and some who have access to it may drop-out at some point. This means that political education is not just the duty of government but those of the citizens in their various social settings as they politically socialise each other and upcoming generations. Participation in civil society is thus to be encouraged in order that people may have the opportunity to engage in public discussions, and consequently learn, about politics in a democracy. Democracy must be presented in a light which does not limit participation only to voting, but a system of government which requires active participation on the part of citizens through its diverse phases.

It may be contended, however, that there is a dichotomy between being

taught, learning, and doing what one learns; such that there is no guarantee that people who are taught will learn or, even if they learn, will do what they have learnt. One may respond in the words of Frazer (1999:10), that:

...the point of teaching with ‘factual’ content is not, surely, that students should know just those facts. The point rather is that in learning facts they acquire understanding- valuable in countless life contexts- of systems, structures, processes, interactions, macro consequences of micro actions, etc. This does not make ‘the facts’ irrelevant. To have learned and forgotten, to have listened and not understood, to have heard but ignored, are not epistemically the equivalent of never having been told.

We are here reminded of the position of Socrates that “knowledge is virtue.” In a sense, Socrates’ association of knowledge with virtue shows that “vice, or evil, is the absence of knowledge. Just as knowledge is virtue, so too, vice is ignorance. The outcome of this line of reasoning was Socrates’ conviction that no one ever indulged in vice or committed an evil act knowingly. Wrongdoing, he said, is always involuntary, being the product of ignorance” (Stumpf 1994:42). For Socrates, once a man has knowledge, he shuns evil and deliberate wrongdoing.

Indeed, while this position of Socrates has its merit, this may not be entirely right, for as scholars have argued, and as it is obvious, human beings despite and in spite of their knowledge about certain evils, even in the face of dire consequences, go ahead to do evil. However, while equating knowledge to virtue may not be right, we may concede to the fact that knowledge aids virtue. Take, for instance, two individuals, one who has knowledge of the wrongfulness of an act and another whose conscience is not against an action and who is not aware of any prohibition against pursuing such a wrong action. We can *a priori* say that, if confronted with the same scenario of having to choose between using the particular action in question and others in achieving some end, the likelihood that the second person will go ahead and engage in such an act is greater than the likelihood of the other person, even though to law ignorance is no excuse. Political education that imparts knowledge of the ideals of democracy is important because it can stimulate individuals to pursue the highest good in their dedication to

the public interest.

One area that political education may be directed at is the area of enabling understanding of social differences. Citizens ought to be taught to develop respect for others irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, ideologies, or social classes. The manner through which issues can be resolved in a democracy also needs to be imparted, seeing that there are a number of violent ways through which social change may be pursued in other political systems. The need for patience must also be emphasised since a lot of citizens and rulers, emerging from military rule, for instance, are more familiar with decrees and processes being circumvented. Democratic decisions may take longer, but outcome of such decisions are expected to have gone through rational evaluation rather than personal impulses, and as such expected to be more beneficial to the people.

Political education will strengthen the citizenry to engage in political debates, political demonstrations, belong to political organisations and trade unions, and participate in the electoral processes as voters and, sometimes as supervisors of voting process. Political education will also enable people to constructively engage ideas, ideologies, policies, political institutions, and their activities as well as propaganda and political manifestoes. Citizens will gain political consciousness and will be able to scrutinise the activities of political leaders and government institutions.

There is a moral dimension to education generally, including political education. Education should lead to refined social behaviours. An educated individual should be able to make rational choices, and be able to distinguish between actions that are right or wrong and, thereby be able to make informed decisions. According to Dag, Sozer and Sel (2015:1882-1883), “the political function of the school and education is to bring up good citizens. This, in fact, is particularly the common and fundamental purpose of political, democratic and citizenship education. Awareness and responsibility of citizenship is gained by people’s living it in practice and through the political education process.” It is expected that through access to political education, mental reorientation will take place and people will begin to see the negative consequences of immoral actions. This is needed to arrest a situation described as one in which there is the inability to manage democratic institutions which is working for others just because our minds are not right because they are “sieged by the death of values” (Usman 2011:98). Lawuyi

(2012) points out, in like manner, that gross disregard for moral values in the conduct of state business and various aspects of national life can be instrumental to impeding the ability of democracy to translate to development. Through political education, a sense of moral goodness and dedication to its pursuit can be instilled in citizens of emerging democracies. This will aid the development of appropriate set of values needed for the sustenance of democratic culture.

Conclusion

At least two conditions are important for democracy to thrive. The first is some level of affluence. Without this, the level of poverty in a polity will be exploited and the wish of the people cannot actually be known since freedom is essential in making democratic decisions; and poverty stifles freedom. The second is education, some level of which is needed if the led are going to be able to set the right agenda for leaders to pursue; and meaningfully engage their government and its policies. Thus, in this paper, we have critically examined the importance of political education for citizens in emerging democracies. Our position is that being a democracy coming out of a past with features antithetical to democratic norms and practices, it is important to instil in citizens of emerging democracy attitudes which will help nurture the institutions of democracy and spur its culture. This can be done through a curriculum which imparts what needs to be done for protection and development of democracy; what elements citizens should be careful about when voting as voters; and how they can bear political influence through party activism, organisation, direct action and informal contact (Dag, Sozer and Sel 2015: 1183). This can also be achieved through imbuing people with moral rectitude as a product of political education.

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