Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.7 No.1 March, 2024; p.g. 229 – 238; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

VIRTUE ETHICS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN NIGERIA

ASUKWO EDET OKO (PhD)
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria
Email: asukwooko@aksu.edu.ng; revasukwooko@gmail.com
Phone: +2348037297842

JOHN CLERK KOKO (PhD)
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Phone: +2348037101793
Email: john.koko@ust.edu.ng; johnclerk1@yahoo.com
&
CHRISTIANA PRECIOUS BLESSED
(Postgraduate Student)
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria
Email: wottleague@gmail.com
Phone: +2348023886724

ABSTRACT

Until the mid-twentieth century, deontological categories of normative ethics held sway in discussions relating to the right way of viewing or judging people's actions. In the twentieth century, however, there was a renaissance of interest in virtue ethics, one of the ethical theories prefigured by Aristotle, which has to do with judging an action from the point of view of the satisfaction gained by the agent through a display of virtue. Unfortunately, the deontological category (which proposes that human actions should be judged by obedience to set rules irrespective of the outcome) and teleological (utilitarian) category (which judge action based on its consequence or outcome) had already become normative for many, with the latter gaining more grounds especially within political undertakings and work ethics. This paper, therefore, aims at proposing an adoption of virtue ethics as a philosophy for citizens of Nigeria especially as they prepare for the polls in 2027. The research approach is participant observation and descriptive methods. The work shows that the adoption of virtue ethics to influence the pre-electoral processes of campaign, registration of voters and other forms of preparation for the polls would guarantee the right motivation, objectivity, smooth registration, standard campaign activities and, ultimately, a free, fair and credible electoral process come 2027.

Keywords: Virtue Ethics, Democracy, Electoral Process, Voting Behavior, Nigeria.

Introduction

During the era of the military in Nigerian politics, proponents for the return of the country to democracy had argued that democracy remains the best form of government that would usher in the needed development of the citizenry. This is because they believed that democracy

offers a more accommodating system of government capable of promoting and enhancing the participation of the citizenry in governance (Barikor & Nwodim, 2020:105). Democracy is broadly categorized into two namely, direct and representative. Representative democracy is a form of government where the people participate in their government indirectly by electing people to represent them- this is the form that Nigerian practices (Irek, 2016 in Bisong & Asira, 2020:34). The re-birth of democracy in Nigeria in 1990 gave the citizens hope for the practicability of the principle of the rule of law, justice and respect for human right. However, it seems the realization of that hope remains a mirage. Ajayi and Ojo (2014:107) aver as follows:

> Although democracy may not be strange to an overwhelming percentage of Nigerians; what may be strange to them is the band of democracy that invests, first and foremost, in human and material resources for the purposes of political stability, economic viability, scientific and advancement, technological breakthrough, educational development, and life-changing social services.

Egbule (2020:2) decries that this has not really been realized as successive administrations in the country easily violate the concept with carelessness and recklessness Egbule (2020:2) assert that:

> Democracy transcends the forming and merging of political parties, general elections, grapple for political office and having a civilian government/ leadership in power. It is a process that involves the total and effective participation of citizens in determining policies and decisions which affect their day-to-day lives at all levels.

Meanwhile, for Barikor and Nwodim Democracy is instructively about the participation of the individuals, the promotion and enhancement of his welfare, his involvement in the choice of who makes decision on his behalf and how the decisions are made. The absence and lack of any of these is termed undemocratic. In democracy, the people make choice of those who would lead and direct their affairs, devoid of compulsion. Koko (2021) observed that democracy involves the process of politicking and in politics there is usually a social contract between the government and the citizens. Accordingly, Irek, Egbule, and Barikor&Nwodim (2020) have highlighted the indispensability of participation of members of the society in the entire process of election. They are unanimous in asserting that such participation is the key factor in a democratic government. However, as important as the pre-electoral processes on the part of the citizenry are, it seems there has been a general decline in political participation over the last few cycle and off-cycle elections. For instance, on June 26, 2022, Premium Times reported that the Anambra State governorship elections in 2021 recorded a 10 per cent voter turnout. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recorded a similar turnout in the Lagos East Senatorial by-election in December, 2020. The same source reported that in presidential elections the decline has been very obvious with voters turn out reaching as low as 35 per cent for the 2019 presidential election.

In a research carried out in Abia State in 2019 on voter behavior, Obani and Odalonu (2019:11-12) reported that the most common reasons given for not voting were that respondents were too young to vote (40%), they did not have any identity (29%) or they were not interested in politics (27%). Being too young to vote previously apply to younger respondents (age 18-34), while other respondents (35 years and above) were more likely to indicate that they had never voted before because they have no interest in politics (48% compared to 25% of younger

respondents). Considering the percentage of young adults who did not have identity document in the above report, one wonders what stopped them from acquiring such documents on time since they were all ready of the required age to acquire them and exercise their franchise.

It is obvious that many Nigerians do not show interest in what is happening around them in the political arena. Some believe that their vote do not count since democracy has been hijacked by the elites. There are lots of injustices in our electioneering process. The internal democracy is brought into dust by some political parties and party leadership (Oko, 2020:192). The truth remains, however, that weather they are interested in politics or not, politics has a way of determining, regulating, enhancing or crippling one's personal ambition. Many writers have looked at the issues of voters' apathy from different angles in a bid to understand its dynamics and possibly chart the way forward. However, they need to apply a branch of ethics that has to do with approaching life from the view point of character or one's disposition to a given situation (Ugoala and Israel, 2020). This is the task that this paper seeks to undertake.

Virtue Ethics

The study of ethics deals with the very definition of right and wrong, and the formulation and application of principles that define behaviour affecting other living organisms. Normative ethics is the branch of ethics that discusses when an action is right or wrong and the moral questions that arise when one performs an action. Normative ethical theory can be divided into three categories: Kantian, consequentialism, and virtue ethics (Roojen, 2001 in Hegde, Agarwal and Rao, 2002: 167). Kantian or deontological evaluate an action base on the set of moral rules (deontology) rather than the consequences of an action. On the other hand, consequentialism emphasizes the effects of an action. An action that increases or brings about something that is considered good by the ethical theory is deemed to be morally acceptable (Alexander and Moore, 2006 in Hegde, Agarwal and Rao, 2022: 167. Virtue ethics emphasizes the inherent moral characters (virtue) of actions. While all three approaches accommodate virtue, consequences and rules, they differ in what they considered to be fundamental (Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2018 in Hedge, Argarwal and Rao, 2020: 167).

Virtue ethics is an umbrella term, covering a variety of different theories and terms, which have their roots in the works of different philosophers namely Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Nietzeche, amongst others (Athanassoulis, 2012:6). For Devettere (2002:63), the virtues (except wisdom) are not primarily actions but psychological states. Virtues are not ultimately based on our social rules. Virtues are not also disconnected or incompatible with our best interest. On the contrary, it is believed that wisdom is not one virtue amongst the others but the foundational virtue that creates every other authentic virtue. Hence, Oakley and Cocking (2001:9-24) delineated the following as the essential features of virtue ethics.

a) An action is right if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances. This deals with the primacy of right character in the justification of right action. Such right action is one that is in accordance with what a virtuous character would do in the circumstances; what makes the action right then is that it is what a person with virtuous character would do here. That is why the Nigerian society needs urgent restoration of peace, considering the high rate of injustices, poverty, insurgency and inequality (Oko and Ndubuwa, 2022:56)

b) Goodness is prior to Rightness. That is, the notion of goodness is primary while the notion of rightness can be defined only in relation to goodness: no account can be given of what makes an action right until we have established what is valuable or good. In particular, virtue ethics claims that we need an account of human good before we can determine what it is right for us to do in any given situation.
c) The Virtues are irreducibly plural intrinsic goods. This means that the substantive account of the good which form the foundation for virtue ethics' justification of right action specifies a range of valuable traits and activities as essential for a humanly flourishing life or as central to our view of admirable human being. The virtue here is valuable for their own sake rather than as a means to promoting or realizing some other values. For example, Aristotle argued that friendship is 'choice-worthy in itself' apart from any advantages it may bestow on us.
d) The Virtues are objectively good. This implies that virtue ethics regards the virtues as objectively good in the sense that they are good independently of any connection which they may have with desire. What the objective goodness of the virtues means in positive terms depends on the particular rationale given for them.
e) Some intrinsic goods are agent relative. Amongst the variety of goods which virtue ethics regards as constituting humanly flourishing life, some such as friendship and integrity are held to be agent relative while others such as justice are thought more properly characterized as agent neutral. To describe a certain good as agent relative is to say that its being good of mind gives it additional moral importance in contrast to agent neutral goods, which derive no such additional moral importance for their being goods of mind.
f) Acting rightly does not require that we maximize the good. What this means is that the core thesis of most version of consequentialism is the idea that righteousness requires us to maximize the good weather goodness is monistic or pluralistic, subjective or objective. In all virtue ethics by contrast rejects maximization as a theory of rightness.

Voting Behaviour

Voting behavioralso known as electoral behavior involves understanding the factors and reason which influence voting patterns. According to Antwi (2018) in Satridai, Yusuf and Ali (2021:961), one of the most exciting questions regarding election is not always about who the winner is but how the voting community makes their political decisions to vote the candidate. This must be done in the atmosphere of peace which (Oko and Ndubuwa, 2022) averred that societal peace is possible with maintenance of covenant with God and preservation of the environment. Bartels (2010) in Mahsud and Amin (2020:65) noted that the modern history of academic study of voting behavior started just before the 1940 American presidential election where the theme of researchers led by the Austrian-American sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld (Columbia University) started using survey research for the scientific study of voting behavior. Since then, researchers in the field of electoral studies have put forward theories about the determinant of voting behavior.

Political psychology researchers study ways in which affective influence may help voters make more informed voting choices with some proposing that such an influence may explain how the electorates make more informed political choices in spite of low overall level of political attentiveness and sophistication. Conversely, Bruter and Harrison suggested that

electoral psychology encompasses the way in which personality; memory, emotion, and other predictions about behavior concerning a voting decision with respect to factors such as gender, race, culture or religion must be considered. Furthermore, a more theoretical approach can be taken when viewing electoral behavior such as viewing wealth and region in which a voter lives which will impact upon his or her electoral choice. Moreover, key public influences include the role of emotions, political socialization, tolerance of diversity of political views and the media. The effects of this influences on voting behavior is best understood through theories on the formation of attitude, belief, schema, knowledge structure and the process of information processing (Diener, 2000:35). There is need for the purification of memories, admission of sinful deed perpetrated against one another and see apology as a way necessary in the process for peace and reconciliation (Oko, 2018).

This study takes the theoretical approach that has to do with the character of voters with relation to virtues, which influences their perception of and participation in the electioneering process.

Indices of Electoral Success in Democracy

According to Chigudu (2016:515), free, fair and credible election are a result of perception by voters based on incumbent political parties, interested parties, legal frame work and electoral contestant. Dauda, Ahmad and Keling (2019:280-281) explained in a tabular form conditions that constitute free, fair and credible elections. The researchers adopt their approach as presented in table 1 below:

TIME	FREE	FAIR
Before polling day	i. Freedom of speech ii. Freedom of assembly iii. Freedom from fear in connection with election. iv. Freedom of movement v. Absence of impediments to standing for election vi. Equal and universal suffrage	i. A transparent electoral process ii. An election act and a system for seat allocation which grant no special privileges to any party, group, or person. iii. An independent and impartial electoral commission iv. Impartial voter education programmes v. Absence of impediments to inclusion in the electoral register. vi. An orderly election campaigns. vii. Equal access to public mass media iii. No misuse of government facilities for campaign purposes.

On polling day	i. Opportunity to participate in the election ii. Absence of intimidation of voters.	i. Secrecy of the ballot. ii. Adequate provisions to ensure that voters only vote once. iii. Well-designed ballot papers without serial numbers. iv. Access to the polling stations for accredited party representatives and election observers v. Impartial assistance to incapacitated voters vi. Proper treatment of void ballot papers
After polling day	i. Legal possibilities of complaint. ii. Adequate possibilities for resolution of election related conflicts.	

Since the focus of this paper is on the pre-poll attitude of members of the electorate, discussion of the table shall be limited to the first row. Under the determinants of fairness in election in the table, it is obvious that a transparent electoral process can be said to be attained when all the other factors are in place. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission has been carrying out voter education programmes. Access to the media depends on one's location, availability of time, interest, and economic level. The issues that seem to be perturbing in the Nigerian situation are items 'ii' and 'v' as some people seem to be making attempts to hinder fellow members of the electorate from having their names included in the voters' register. For instance, on June 9, 2022, Sahara Reporters gave an account of South-East traders who shut down their markets in Lagos State to register and get their Permanent Voters Card (PVC) being attacked by hoodlums suspected to be political thugs. According to them, a video which went viral shows that the hoodlums came to the registration center and started throwing stones at the traders. This came on the heels of an unprecedented surge in the number of citizens wishing to register as voters and the challenges they face across the country (Omeiza Ajayi, Vanguard News, 10/06/2022). This reported intimidation coupled with issues of logistics that discouraged people in many centers are bound to scare some members of the electorate from preparing for the polls. Speaking about the attitude of the electorate with relation to this, Chigudu (2016:509) asserts:

> The procedural utility they derive from participation in election is an enhanced sense of personal wellbeing from the feeling of being involved and having political influence and inclusion, identity, and self-determination. These feelings fulfill innate needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. That probably accounts for the determination of some voters to participate in elections despite the risk of threat or physical attack, notwithstanding the courage of some voters, from voting in the near term and over the long term.

This highlights the imperative to accentuate the role of virtue ethics, an approach that has to do with cultivation of attitudes that makes tough situation bearable and assure the happiness of an agent (in this case every individual vote-eligible Nigerian).

Virtue Ethics and the Preparation for 2027 Polls in Nigeria

It is often the character of a person that helps build relationship with others, manage a plethora of different situations, handle emotions, solve problems related to various issues, practice self-awareness and many more (Tripathy&Sarangi, 2017). Relationships with each other person should be cordial (Ugoala, 2020). In the preparation for 2023 General Election in Nigeria, maintenance of relationships with both acquaintances and strangers, management of unpleasant situations that may arise in the course of one's exercise or his/her civic responsibilities with relation to election, handling the emotions of some who may think or act irresponsibly due to partisanship, and self- awareness are required. The inner strength to handle all these can only come from a developed character and this is where virtue ethics comes in.

When people are barred by illegally constituted elements from registering for their voter's card for instance, it seems instinctive to walk away and subsequently boycott the election. However, what would a virtuous person do in the circumstances? Virtue ethics insists on doing what constitutes virtuousness. Accordingly, this has to do with the inculcation of patience and a forbearing spirit, one that insists on doing what is good. As asserted earlier, virtue ethics proposes that an action is right if it is good. In other words, insisting on doing the good in opposition to evil, is equal to being right and being right is becoming a voice to the voiceless (Atanang, Ekanem and Oko, 2022:207).

Again, when one is tempted by the prevailing economy to show apathy towards the electoral process in the country, the underlying logic is usually the fear of expending so much energy, time and resources on something that may not be worth it in terms of value. Positive behavior is very crucial in interpersonal relationships, otherwise it leads to conflict (Ugoala, 2022:177).This logic stems from utilitarianism, a branch of normative ethics that judges an action right or wrong according to its outcome. In Nigeria, many people think that their votes do not count. It is beyond the scope of this work to argue about that. Suffice it to say however, that virtue ethics considers an action right because it is good, not necessarily because of its outcome. Members of the society are encouraged to vote with hope that their votes will count and credible candidates will emerge and lead the country well. Nevertheless, members of the society also need to get to the point where they do the right thing irrespective of their fears. They should vote for candidates that they trust can address the challenge of injustice, inequality and unemployment (Oko, 2020)In turn, this engenders the spirit of sportsmanship and eliminates unnecessary post-election petitions.

Virtue ethics rejects desire as the rationale for goodness. There may be times that one's desire is anti-virtue. At such times, virtue ethics strongly recommends a detachment with the emotions and a strong inclination to the good. As people prepare for elections, it is important that they prepare to vote according to their conscience and not with any sympathy towards the emotions. As strong as family sentiment and friendship bonds are, for instance, they are not enough to determine what is right when it comes to exercising one's franchise. Objectivity,

it is virtue that helps people to do things the right way, thereby enhancing the growth of the society.

Honesty is another virtue that needs to be imbibed in the electoral process. Part of the things that threaten a smooth election is dishonesty on the part of many citizens. When people go to register for their PVC, some deny having been registered for the Temporary Voter's Card (TVC) in 2011 before. They present themselves as fresh registrants to the Independent National Electoral Commission. INEC has announced that many people would be disqualified for registering twice because their double registration would be considered as a fraudulent to vote more than once. What would a virtuous person do? He/she would tell the truth about what happened to his/her card and his/her data would be recalled from the commission's database. That way, duplicity would be avoided.

The next virtue is loyalty. Loyalty is a virtue that seems to be on recess in the present society. The second line of the Nigerian pledge says, "To be faithful, loyal and honest". The virtue of loyalty is what makes a person go out of his/her way to please the common good. Loyalty to the motherland by citizens predisposes a nation to extensive development. When citizens are loyal, they defy the odds and show immense zeal, zest, ardour and commitment towards the development of their motherland. It is worthy of note that the true virtue of loyalty is not self-seeking. The interest of the nation comes first.

Finally, the objectivity recommends by virtue ethics also covers use of words before, during and after the casting of votes. Accordingly, there is no need to talk down on a particular candidate or party during campaigns for election. Everyone has supporters, and the ethics of election forbids the use of foul language, distortion of facts and character assassination on one's opponents. What is recommended is the promotion of one's candidate.

Conclusion

The application of virtue ethics to the entire electoral process in Nigeria and other democratic countries of the world would go a long way in creating a healthy, competitive and promising atmosphere for elections. It is common knowledge that a people's way of life influences what happens around them. Although Nigeria is a secular state, her citizens are very religious, and all religions promote virtue. Clerics should emphasize the place of real virtue in religion and continue to accentuate its benefits to the society. Conducive environment should be created by churches, mosques, companies, NGOs and other bodies for registration of voters. The church and other religious groups have contributed to the advancement in education, healthcare, employment, morality and other contributions to national development (Oko and Umana, 2022). While that is being done, such organizations should avoid the use of coercive measures such as denying people their rights in a bid to get them to be politically active. It is hoped that, with the application of virtues such as integrity, honesty, commitment, loyalty, love, patience, etc. on the part of Nigerians, the 2027 General Elections and subsequent ones will be better than previous ones.

References

Atanang, B. E.; Ekanem, J.B. &Oko, A.E. (2022). Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria: Christianity in Focus. *Niger-Delta Journal of Gender, Peace & Conflict Studies*. Vol.2,3,197-211

Ajayi, A.T &Ojo, E. O. (2014). Democracy in Nigeria: Practice, Problems and Prospects. Developing Countrt Studies, 4(2): 107-125.

Athanassoulis, N, (2012). *Virtue Ethics*. New York Continuum.

Barikor, I.B. &Nwodim, O. (2020). Democracy and Development: Appraising Nigeria's fourth Republic. *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research*8(4): 105-117.

Bisong, P. B. &Asira, A. E (2020. Consolidating the Gains and Reshaping the future of Democracy in Nigeria. *Pinisi Discretion Review*, 4(1): 33-42.

Chigudu, D. (2016). A critical review on the determinants of a free, fair and credible election. International Relations and Diplomacy, 4(8): 508-518.

Dauda, M., Ahmad, M. & keeling, M, (2019). Mechanism towards free, fair and credible election in Africa: Challenges to electorate and other actors of electoral processes. International *Journal of recent Technology and Engineering*, 8(2&3): 278-283

Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. American Psychologist, 55(1):34-43.

Devettere, R. (2002). Introduction to virtue ethics: Insights of the ancient Greeks. Washington: Georgetown University Press.

Egbule, P. O. (2020). Consolidation of democracy in Nigeria: A task before social studies. Nigerian Journal of Social Studies, Vol. XXIII (1).

Hegde, A., Agarwal, V. & Rao, S. (2020). Ethics, prosperity and society: Moral evaluation using virtue ethics and utilitarianism. Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence (IJCAI-20).

Koko, J.C.(2021), Politics, Security Challenges and Eroding African Values in Nigeria. *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1 (1), 11-16.

Mahsud, N. H. & Amin, H. Theoretical approaches to the study of voting behaviour: A comparative analysis. Sir Syed Journal of Education and Social Research, 3(3):65-73.

Oakley, J. & Cocking, D. (2001). Virtue ethics and professional roles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Obani, E. F. &Odalonu, B. H. (2019). Election and voting behavior in Nigeria. South-East COEASU *Journal of Teacher Education*, 5(1): 122-131.

Oko, A,E. (2018). The Place of the church towards Peace process for Sustainable National Development. *AkwaIbom State University Journal of Arts.* Maiden Edition. AKSUJA. 29-42.

Oko, A.E. &Ndubuwa, O.N. (2022). Concept of Shalom in Psalm 122:6 And Imperativeness in African context. *Lafia Journal of Religion and Humanities* (LAJRAH)Vol. 1& 2, 49-64.

Oko, A.E. (2020). Social Needs and Injustice in Nigeria. An Appraisal. *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities & Development Studies* (SGOJAHDS). Vol. 3,2,189-196.

Oko, A. E.&Umana, A.E (2022). Proliferation of Churches in Nigeria and its Impact on Nation Development.*Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities & Development Studies*(SGOJAHDS). Vol. 5, 2, 261-273.

Satriadi, Y., Yusuf, S. & Ali, R. (2021). Understanding the voter's behavior in Nigeria as an effort to increase public's participation in Indonesia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(2): 960-972.

Tripathy, M. & Sarangi, I. (2017). Exercising concepts of virtue ethics in business culture. IOSR *Journal of Business and Management*, 19(10).

Ugoala, B. (2017).Communicative and Cohesive Devices in President Buhari's Directive to the Service Chiefs on the Urgency of Fighting Boko Haram Terrorism in

Nigeria. *Journal of Multimedia Technology & Communication Studies*,3(1),187 - 211. Published by World Bank Step-B Centre of Excellence in Multimedia and Cinematography.

Ugoala, B.& Israel, P. C. (2020). Practs in First Official Speeches of Presidents Muhammadu Buhari and Nana Akufo-Addo on Coronavirus Pandemic. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*,10,740 - 764.https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2020.106045ISSN Online: 2164 - 2834.

Ugoala, B. (2022). Power in words: An Analysis of the Flaming Devices in PresidentVladimir Putin's Speech Before the February, 2022 Attack on Ukraine. *Kampala International University Journal of Humanities*, 7 (2), 171 - 179, ISSN:2415-0843
Availableat:<https://www.kampalajournals.ac.ug/ojs/index.php/kiuhums/article/view/1482>. ISSN: 2415 – 0843.