

Elites Strategies of Political Manipulation: The Nigerian Case

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Abstract

This paper explains the nexus between elites and political manipulation in the act of politicking. The study was expository in nature. It explored how the Nigerian elites employ various strategies that include linguistic strategy, character assassination, astroturfing and black boxing to manipulate the masses/ the political system for their interest. These strategies employed by the elites in the political space are usually perpetrated through the use of mass media/social media, campaigns, rallies, public speeches, government agencies and decision making process, among other medium to attract support for political gain. The choice of words and actions of political elites in Nigeria has exposed the fragile nature of the Nigerian political system. As such, the politics of hatred and bitterness does not only create enmity amongst the elites but also create tension, hatred and crisis amongst the masses. The implication is that, national unity and cohesion is being threatened.

Keywords: Elite, Political manipulation, Linguistic, Character assassination, black boxing

Introduction

In the process of acquiring and maintaining power, individuals struggle to influence decision making process by employing various means to outsmart their rivals. Alice, Dicaprio and Robinson (2012) assert that certain group of people in the society influences decision making process. Accordingly, this class of individuals is referred to as the elite class. The elite class according to Alice, Dicaprio and Robinson (2012) "disproportionate impacts stems from the control over productive assets and institutions which enables them influence both allocation of resources and allocation of authority". The class of the elite constitutes the centre piece for power struggle. The intensity for power struggle amongst the elite class is either to acquire power, influence or to maintain a present status quo.

Politicians represent the image of the elite in government, even though the non-governing elite such as business tycoons also dictate the pace at which power is employed by their representatives (governing elite) in government. The elite class by extension dictates political events in the society, and more often associated with manipulative skills in persuading their audience on the validity of their claim. Various tactics or strategies are being employed in convincing their audiences to accept their views. Usman (1977-87) reveals that political actors in Nigeria employ religion as a major manipulative tool in "controlling the action of a person or group without that person knowing the goals, purpose and method or that control is being exercised on them all" (Ladan-Baki, 2015).

Globally, political elites or politicians engage various strategies to manipulate their audiences in order to attract votes and support on important national issues. These manipulative strategies include linguistic language, such as expressing love on what the people admire, and expressing displeasure or remorse in situations of grief. Other strategies include astroturfing, character assassination, black boxing, class welfare, and the social media, amongst other strategies.

In Nigeria, the way and manner the elites apply these strategies in manipulating the political environment over the years have resulted to lengthy politics of hate amongst the political class which has plunged the nation into socio-economic crises that have persisted for long. Richard (2022) quoted Aare Afe Babalola who once said "experience has shown time without number that in Nigeria, campaigns are normally not used to focus not on issue deserving attention, but on negative matters which in reality should not be the focus of any serious campaign". Those campaigns are usually not issue based; rather hate speeches /character assassinations are seen to occupy the mass media, especially when elections are close. The above submission coincides with the words of Heywood (2015, pp.50), that "politicians are often seen as power seeking hypocrites who conceal personal ambition behind the rhetoric of politics service and ideological conviction".

More revealing, the political elites in Nigeria go as far as manipulating economic indices for their political gain. Ferriera et al (2013) & Lyu et al, (2018) infer that "political power is often connected to economic growth, as politicians possess incentives to manipulate economic data (Cai, Li, Lin, & Lou, 2022). In the same vein, the Africa and Middle East Forecasting (2019) compiled a special report on manipulation of economic indicators. According to this special report, politicians often manipulate economic indicators to attract political support or get re-elected into power. The report faulted the manipulation of economic data by several African countries which also indicated that Nigeria overtook South Africa as the largest economy in Africa after a rebasing calculation in 2014 that almost doubled its GDP to more than 500 billion United States Dollars. These figures were released less than a year to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria to convince Nigerians that then government of Good luck Jonathan is worthy of re-election .

Notwithstanding, political manipulation have become easier and more sophisticated due to the unprecedented growth in information and communication technology (mass media) where information is disseminated with ease. Peterson (2002) infer that modern sophisticated computers and image processing programme enable people to change images or pictures by means of addition or subtraction in order to influence the perception of a targeted audience. The way the mass media (radio, television, print and the internet) is being manipulated by political actors is quite worrisome, as politicians attack each other personalities and leashing out derogatory statements during political rallies and campaigns. Fasakin, Olusola, Oyero, Oyesomi and Okorie (2017) presented some facts that showed an instance where the media was used to tarnish the personality of a politician. A documentary was aired on African Independent Television (AIT) on March 1st, 2015 to condemn the person of, General Muhammad Buhari, retired, the candidate of the All Progressive Congress(APC).

This documentary made the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to indict and sanction the two television stations alongside 21 other broadcast stations for violation of its code. It is no longer a secret that top government officials control government media houses or information

channels by selling the policies and programmes of the government in power even though some of its policies and programme are mere comonflags .In some instances, the government or political actors hire people to act as beneficiaries of a particular programme or initiative with the aim of attracting support for political gains. This kind of political manipulative strategy is what Walker (2014) referred to as “democracy for hire”. It must be noted that political manipulation can never be divorced in the political process of any society, even in the most developed or sophisticated democracies around the world. Notwithstanding, the Nigeria case is so different because the elite class in most cases overheat the polity, especially in times of political campaigns and debate on important national issues.

Their actions and utterances in most cases incite hatred, division, violence amongst the masses. It has become so worrisome that average Nigerian politicians seek for power by all means possible, even at the detriment of the peace and security of the nation. Henry (2011) further clarify that, political manipulation in Nigeria has been very destructive compared to many other nations around the world. This can be attributed to the nature and character of the elites that took over the mantle of leadership from the colonial Master (British). The major political parties (NCNC, NPC and the AG) were built on regional, ethnic and religious ideologies. The vision of the political elites then was limited to struggling for power to occupy political positions in order to control national resources. This shaky and fictional foundation could not support the building block for a strong and reliable politicking that will attract growth and development. Rivalry amongst upcoming political elites became intensified, as the taste for power and greed for wealth occupy the political space.

Still on the character of the Nigerian political elites, the political elites were responsible for the horrible political experiments in the past, as politicians tarnish each other's personalities and manipulate the masses using ethnicity and religion to attract support for their political interest.Usually, when there are misunderstanding amongst the elites over national issues, politicians usually employ sentiments that are appealing to regional ,ethnic and religious to attack each other and attract grassroot support (Bolarinwa and Osuji 2022).These experiments over the years have become intensified and easier through the use of mass media that include as television, radio, the print media and the internet to manipulate the masses through character assassination, fake news, manipulation of images and contents on print media via editing to suit the interest of a political actor or group of political actors.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Elite

The social status one occupy in the society is being determined by the extent at which he\she could exert power and influence over others. The class of individuals who control power and resources in the society is referred to the class of the elite. Elite theorists such as Pareto, Mosca, St.Simon, Robert Michaels, Gaetano submit that the elite class occupies the highest positions in the society, and at the pinnacle, there is absolute concentration of power in the hands of few minority groups who are bestowed with the ability to direct and control the behaviour of others (Anifawose and Enemou, 2000).The elite class are imitable body of persons bound by ancestry or intrinsic qualities, high intellect, wealth and political power. Maxi (2006, p.284) avers that, the elite power designation relatively includes “the ruling class, political entrepreneurs; the

establishment, the governing minority”. In the same vein, Highly and Burton(2006) argues that the elite class do not in all cases seen occupying political offices or positions but may be seen manning powerful organisations, thus with the control of resources at their disposal, the capability to influence political outcomes becomes eminent(Matias,2013). Matias (2013) expatiate the submission of highly and Burton, that, the class of the elite is divided into two; the governing and non-governing elite.

The governing elites are those individuals seen occupying political offices and top civil servants. This class of the elite is referred to as the” power elite”. The example of governing elite include, the president, ministers ,governors, parliamentarians ,chairmen, etc .On the other hand, the non-governing elites are referred to as elite of wealth ,knowledge and charisma. This class of the elite influences the decisions of the governing elite. The examples of the non-governing elites are business tycoons, multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations etc. The power of this class can never be overemphasized due to the commanding influence it has on the governing elite .This group of elites sponsor political parties and candidates for elective positions. They go as far as influencing the appointments of ministers, advisers, and heads of ministries, departments and agencies of government. Maxi (2006, p.284) describes the Nigerian elite class in these words;” they may go by designation: leaders of thoughts, the VIP, the heavy weights men of timber and caliber, the king makers, who in general feature as prominent in social and political affairs.

Political Manipulation

Manipulation as a strategy in the act of politicking is applied in different ways to achieve political goals. Politicians employ various means at their disposal to lure individuals, groups or audience by legitimatizing a particular action to attract support. Manipulation according to Edward “ obtains when an actor influences the behaviour of others without making explicit the behaviour which he thereby wants to perform” (in Anifawose and Enemou,2000) . Anifawose and Enenou (2000) posit that, manipulation involves strategic process or processes designed to convince a targeted population or audience by utilizing symbols to capture their attention and support. In other words, Van Dijk (2006) views manipulation as a strategy that do not only subscribe to power, but domination of others. Manipulators makes others believe or do things that are in their interest which in most cases is against the interest of the manipulated. The ideologies of the manipulators are usually clear, captivating and appealing, but their intentions are far from it (Ngozi and Emeka, 2013).

Shawqi (2013) aver that, in politics, politicians use words to convince their audience with the aim of achieving their goal, even if their intentions are far from the truth. Similarly, Nnamdi and Ogan (2019) reveal that, politicians usually craft their ideologies to suit the taste of their audience. They employ strategies, such as, character assassination their audience, astoturfing, black boxing, class welfare, amongst others. Perhaps, the mass media, especially the internet through social media platforms like twitter, facebook, snapchat, instagram, zoom, tiktok, has made political manipulation easier. Allyson (2019) further asserts that, the advances in communication technology for centuries have been used to commit crimes, especially in the modern application of the social media and the internet. Sihyung (2019) argued in line with the above assertion, that “traditionally, political manipulation has leverage television and newspaper to trick the public. However, current manipulation increasing, utilizes online communities-web

portal, social network, and discussion forums”, fake news and political propaganda flood these platforms where the reputations of political rivals are being tarnished to achieve certain goal.

Furthermore, Petersen (2002) exposes how political manipulators go as far as utilizing web-portals and social media platform by employing editing technology to edit speeches, stories and images or pictures before publication or display .The digitization of the media has given politicians more access to manipulate information for selfish gain. Richard and Sabine (2020), in their study found out that about 38 of 48 countries where the study were conducted , proved that there has been recurring tactics of fake accounts on social media platforms in the name and profile of others with the aim of tarnishing their reputation.

Accordingly, besides fake accounts, the study also revealed that “ cyber troop activity on chat applications such as instagram, LINE, Snapchat, Telegram, Tinder, Wechat, Whatsapp” are used by politicians or their agents to cause confusion in misleading the public to subscribe to their ideology or to poison their minds against others(political rivals) .In Nigeria, for example, Bappayo, Abubakar and kirfi (2021) submit that the mass media/ the social media has become a medium where individuals are compromised by politicians to cause confusion for selfish gains. The social media, especially, has currently become an assembles of sponsored political agents where derogatory statements, fake images / scenes of religious and ethnic crises are been sent by these agents, in most cases, using fake social media accounts to incite hatred amongst religious and ethnic groups for political gain of their political godfathers.

Strategies of Political Manipulation: The Nigerian Case

In Nigeria, the nature and character of the elite class has made political manipulation more pronounced in the tune of hate, disunity and violence which have engendered the peace, unity and overall development of the nation. Kai and Vurasi (2013) posit that, the success of any society is dependent on the development of its elite. More so, the power relation amongst the elite class in the act of politics / policy making process brings out its character, either positive or negative. Notwithstanding, there are several strategies employed by the elite class in Nigeria. This study explored strategies that include, linguistic strategy, character assassination, astro-turfing and black boxing. These strategies are extensively discussed below:

Linguistic Strategy

Ngozi and Emeka (2016) express the importance of language in interaction and controlling the behaviour of audience. Language plays varied functions, ranging from aphetic communication, assertive, declarative, co missive and referral functions. Language also provide means of accessing our thoughts in expressing emotions such as love, hatred, approval, rejection, praises, condemnation etc.

In the political arena, political elites use persuasive and convincing languages to lure audience to align or accept their views. In most cases, the usage of false statement known as “big lies” to make people believe what they say is eminent in pursuing political interest. Political elites modify their speeches by creating new form of linguistic slogan, and mind catching phrases to suit the culture of a particular group or audience.

In Nigeria, politicians manipulate the behaviour of people or group using attractive and heart-melting phrases like "God" to control the aggression of a targeted audience. Nigeria, a nation with diverse culture and a predominant Christian- Muslim society where its inhabitants respect and adore statements associated with God. As a result, politicians use phrases and statements align to a religious or socio-cultural group to attract sympathy and acceptance. For instance, the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo on assumption of office, in his inaugural speech captured the minds of Nigerians referring God as the creator of destiny of men and leadership (Ngozi and Emeka, 2016). Despite unfilled promises by his government, religious and socio-cultural leaders kept calming their followers not to revolt or criticize the government, but to be patient and have faith in God, as God is in control. Notwithstanding, both the governing and non governing elites use religious inscriptions from the Bible and the Qur'an to manipulate and convince their audiences to support or reject individuals, political parties and policies that suit their interest.

More revealing, Mark (2015) reveal that when former president Ebele Jonathan seek to be elected as president in 2010, he aligned himself to someone from a poor background and knows what hardship is, haven rouse from grass to grace with the aim of attracting sympathy and instilling confidence in voters as proof that he will not betray their trust if elected. In his words ; "In my early days in school, I had no shoes, no bags, There were days I walked miles and crossed rivers to school every day. Didn't have power, didn't have generators, studied with lanterns, but I never despaired. Fellow Nigerians, if I could make it, you too, can make it"

This very statement rekindled the hopes of Nigerians, especially his supporters who might have given up hope on him. This was a strategy to garner support from the poor masses despite the increase in corruption and insecurity emanating from the Boko Haram insurgency as president after the death of Musa Yar'adua. On a similar path, Kawo (2015) stated that, the former president, Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, haven sworn to the Holy Book (Qur'an) made a breathtaking speech that captured the heart of Nigerians to submit and believe in him. In assurance, he said "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody". This mind catching statement became appealing to Nigerians that Buhari would protect the interest of the masses (everybody) at all cost and he belongs to nobody, that is, he would resist any form control from anybody (eiltes).

Paradoxically, despite the belief and confidence Nigerians had on the president, Nigerians evaluated the phrase "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody" as an embodiment of deceit from the former president to protect the interest of the messes. This is evident in claim of his wife, Aisha Buhari that his government had been hijacked by cabals and her husband, the president is controlled by some powerful politicians. Amidst suffering and rising inflation, the former president was detached from the pains of the masses. He(Muhammadu Buhari) also admit that during his time as president, his government might have been hijacked by cabals(Daily Trust,2023).

Following from the forgoing, the wave of linguistic language usage to manipulate the behaviour of individuals or group was also witnessed on the eve of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Fusan (2022) claimed that the popular slogan of "Muslim-Muslim" ticket was a linguistic slogan to capture the population of Muslims in Nigeria, especially the Muslim dominated northern region of Nigeria. The All Progress Congress (APC) having a Yoruba man as the presidential

candidate predicated to have secured the votes of the South-eastern Yoruba dominated region which the presidential candidate comes from. To secure the votes of the Muslim dominated Northern region and as the most populated region in the country, the APC had to search for Muslim vice presidential candidate to secure the votes of the Muslims. Thus, the Muslim-Muslim linguistic slogan was used to manipulate the Muslims to vote for the APC.

Character Assassination/ Hate Speech

Power is like a magnetic force that attracts persons, groups and nations in touch and also in rivalry. As politics is the struggle for power, individuals and characters collide in the process of acquiring power or values in the society. In the process of acquiring power, individuals struggle to beat or overcome their opponents using various strategies. One of the strategies is character assassination. Character assassination is a deliberate and sustained process that destroys the credibility or reputation of a person, institution, social groups or nations. Samoilenko, Shireave, Kooehne and Icks (2015) view character assassination as an art or practices by persons or groups to deliberately damage the reputation or credibility of individuals. It involves a defamatory attack using language and symbols to paint the character of an individual as bad or incapacitated to compete for a position or to handle a task.

In politics, character assassination according to Johnson (2021) is a crafted attempt by politicians to tarnish the personal trait of their rivals in order to influence and distract individuals or voters for their interest (Miskolezy and Gherghina 2024). Thus character assassination in politics is aimed to destroy opponents' credibility in the context of a debate, interview, campaign rallies and using symbols in form of pictures and cartons. Nahar, Tabassum and Nisa (2023) further reveal that character assassination in politics target the characteristics of individuals that include behaviour, past actions, family life, traits, age, gender, ethnicity, being manipulated to destroy an opponent and garner support.

In Nigeria, character assassination in politics have for long beclouded the political space, especially during electioneering campaigns. Even before independence, character assassination amongst Nigerian elites had intensified and incites hatred amongst politicians, ethnic and religious groups. Queen (2020), character assassination/hate speech by the elite in Nigeria incites hatred and violence amongst religious, ethnic and regional groups, thereby affecting the socio-economic progress of the country. In Nigerian political history, Cole (1965) revealed that Nnamdi Azikwe in 1949 made a derogatory statement on the image of the Northern region. He said " in the north, feudal aristocrats and their minions spared no time in making it easier for non-English speaking ciphers and dummies to flood the northern House of Assembly with the deference , may I say that these marionethes are entitled to about fifty percent of seats in the central legislature"

The statement according to the northerners portrays them as a group of people ruled by feudal aristocrats and social actors as mindless and uneducated. This according to the Northerners, the statement was to tarnish their image as a people (Adekoya, 2018). In the same vein, Sir Ahmadu Bello also made a statement which the Igbos found insulting. Nwabufor (2021), when the first Premier of the northern Nigeria was interviewed in 1964 on his reservations about the Igbos, he said: well the Igbos are more or less the type of people whose desire is mainly to dominate everybody. If you put them in a labour group as a labourer, they will try to emerge as headman

of that camp and so on". The implication of this statement is that, it deepened the political rivalry between the Hausa-fulani north and the Igbos, and also for the northerners to be wary of the Igbos not to occupy key leadership positions in the country.

Apuke (2016) aver that, as the media is becoming more sophisticated, character assassination is also gaining easier access by political actors to blackmail or tarnish the image their rivals through what is called sponsored journalism or "junk journalism". Junk Journalism is the tendency to publish information that is false or untrue to attract a targeted audience or tarnish the image of an individual or group for political interest. Political elites or elite sponsor persons and programmes using the print and other media platform to publish and transmit information that suit their interest and on the other hand, tarnish the image of their political rivals. More revealing, Onah and Uroko (2021) present some cases of character assassination by top political actors in a Nigeria. In 2013, the former governor chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Colonel Ahmadu Ali (rtd) said, "the Yoruba people are ungrateful and do not appreciate what others have done for them".

Also, in the same year, an Islamic cleric, ImaSadiq referred to Christians as infidels, that, it is a sin for a Muslim to vote for a non Muslim. As such, all Muslims should vote for Muhammadu Buhari. More so, in 2015, the wife of the former President, Patience Jonathan directed a statement on the personality of the former president and then the Candidate of APC in the 2015 presidential election to stoned whenever he is seen campaigning. Furthermore, that he did nothing in 1985 and old age is catching up with him, so let him allow those who has strength to rule. Consequently, Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim and Uba (2017) also reveal that, the former Governor of Ekiti State, Ayodele Fayose referred to the former president Muhammadu Buhari as a walking corpse, and that there is the possibility to die in office if elected. Notwithstanding, character assassination by the elites\political elite in Nigeria no doubt have resulted to rift and hatred amongst political actors, religious, ethnic and regional groups which have distracted political elites to concentrate on real politicking and good governance for the interest of all.

Astroturfing

Astroturfing involves a false representation or participation amongst people or a group of people appearing to be part of them in what they do or being part of what they do. Zeng, Carpenter and Ko (2013) view astroturfing as a crafted scene displayed to create a deception or false impression about a particular idea or opinion to attract wide spread support. People or group of people may cease opportunities to mask themselves as sponsors or part of a movement in support of an idea which may include political, religious, ethnic or regional. In politics, astroturfing is a carefully designed strategy inform of political movement masked on policies or programmes portraying an outward look of grass root support to achieve an interest in politics. There are usually wide spread advocacy at the grass root level creating an impression that action of a politician is aimed at grass root development.

Astroturfing is central to political manipulation, especially in countries identified with decaying democracies such as Nigeria. Bellis (2019) reveal that astroturfing strategy is employed by political actors inform of crowd sourcing (hiring people) to achieve a political aim. People are being hired and paid to spread ideas or opinion of an individual or group for political gain reaching out to millions of audiences within the shortest time possible. Walker (2014) stress

that astroturfing is a grass root for hire or democracy of hire where political actors recruit individuals or group ranging from religious, ethnic, business, trade associations, celebrities etc to sell out their policies or programmes as audience friendly. In Nigeria for example, astroturfing is employed through the use of social media, rallies, flyers, ply cards, short drama or play to convince the audience making them believe that a political actor supports their aspirations.

Opara (2015) presented an instance that portrayed astroturfing in the Nigerian political scene. In 2015, the former president, Good luck Jonathan crafted a movement known as the Transformation Ambassador of Nigeria (TAN) to influence his re-election for a second term. The movement mobilized thousands of volunteers across the nation which signaled an endorsement of the former president Good luck Jonathan as their preferred candidate. The volunteers were trained to promote the candidature of President Jonathan to ensure victory at the polls. The movement according to many analyst was believed to be showcasing what the government believe they have done, and what they intend to do, instead of engaging in issue-based campaign. The organizers tried to convince the masses at the grassroots that the president's policies and programmes are for the interest of the poor masses and the nation will no doubt witness more progress if Good luck Jonathan is re-elect as President.

Ajaja (2022) reveal that Nigerian political actors or elites exhibited behaviours associated with lions in wolves' skin. For example, the former governor of Ekiti State, Ayodele Fayose in 2015 was spotted eating a plate of Amala in a roadside food seller together with the poor masses. This act came immediately he obtained his presidential primaries nomination form depicting his interest to become President. This act to was attracting support from the poor masses that a high profile politicians like him (Fayose) also has the masses at heart. Also, in the same year (2015), Godwin Obaseke, the immediate past governor of Edo State was seen with his godfather, Adams Oshiomole chewing corn as they moved from street to street to show that despite being first class citizens they still have the poor at hearts.

That eating and mingling with the poor freely is an evidence that they still embrace a simply life despite their positions and achievements. Recently, Omenazu (2024) stated that “ the federal government and some state governments, religious and traditional rulers were mobilized against the peaceful mass protest...” which was slated for August 1, 2024 for fear of violence”. Women were also mobilized from different states converging in Abuja to portray disapproval of the protest as anti masses. This was a strategy by the government to divide and weaken the minds of the masses who were intending to join the protest, especially women and youths. Notwithstanding, the aforementioned instances and many more depicts astroturfing as a strategy used by Nigerian elites to attract the support of the masses in achieving their political ambitions.

Black Boxing

Black boxing is a way of portraying something or an issue openly different from what is real in the hidden. The public not knowing the internal workings of the system, as decisions and policies are made in the internal structure of a system which “opaque”, that is, not transparent for the public to see what happens in the internal part of system, as those who control system decision making process decides outcomes that affects the entire system.

In politics, black boxing is a strategy used by the elite to influence and manipulate decisions in their favour. They do this by employing decision making apparatus to make laws, implement laws and even adjudication processes are being manipulated by the elite to suit their interest. Confining black boxing to explicit explanation of David Easton system theory analysis, it explains the relationship between inputs and outputs in a political system..." inputs are fed into the black box of decision making, otherwise called the conversion box to produce outputs . Outputs are decisions and policies of the authorities"(Anifawose amd Enemou, 1999). Decisions are made by those in authority and what happens in the process of decision making has little public influence. Bradley (2020) reveals that"black box theory seeks to uncover the practices of government leaders and politicians....and black box theory are sometimes used to support conspiracy theories. For example, government leaders accepts inputs from the public on important national issue like budgeting, but at close doors, lobbying and corruption in the interest of the elites occupies decision making process leading to the inputs of the masses thrown in a trash bin.

In Nigeria, the use of black boxing to manipulate decision making process and influence possible outcomes has become more pronounced due to the fragile and decaying nature of the system. Egbo (2021) stated that, the 1999 constitution having operating for over two decades has been systematically manipulated by the elite to promote their interest as they sustain certain sections that do not address contemporary realities and amend sections to their favour. More so Oyinbe (2024) claim that budget paddling has been a manipulative strategy by the elites to vote money secretly for their personal interest. In a similar case, Isuwa (2024) reveals that investigation shows that the 2024 budget was influenced by high ranked law makers to their advantage. The Senate President received a substantial amount of 21billion naira for his constituency while some law makers received as low as 6-7 billion naira.

This act was never known to the public prior to investigation. This act coincides with Nisa, Mustapha, Yaseen, Arslan and Imran (2021) that governmental processes and policies are usually align to elite preferences. Aside law making and budgeting process, Aminu (2023) submit that the elite judges are also involved in black boxing through the manipulation of judgments in favour of a class of elite. For instance according to Aminu(2023, in the post-election judgments of 2023, " the judges claim to have power to cancel over 165, 000 votes in kano but claim not to have such powers in Kaduna State's gubernatorial election petition and at the PEPT" (Presidential Election Petition Tribunal). Notwithstanding, these and many more instances of black boxing strategies in Nigeria by the elites have further engender the political system to corruption and citizens are being detached from decision making process.

Conclusion

The routine and trends of political manipulation by elites in politics is an inevitable act of politicking in any society. Though it appears differently and more intense in developing democracies such as that of Nigeria. In Nigeria, the way and manner elites employ political manipulative strategies is quite alarming and detrimental to national cohesion and progress. Elites or political actors tarnish the image of their rivals inform of discrediting their abilities and competency for a position or policy acceptance or rejection. Notable political actors or elites usually commands the behaviour of group(s) ranging from ethnic, religion and party affiliations by manipulating their emotions for support or rejection of an idea for political gain, even if such

idea is against national unity and progress. As such, hatred, division, tradition of deceit/deception in politics and endemic corruption engenders national unity and progress.

Recommendations

- i. Civil societies that include non-governmental organisations and religious bodies should educate the masses on linguistic mind catching phrases associated with religion, ethnicity and big lies used by politicians or elites to attract support for their selfish interest.
- ii. Transparency and accountability should be the core principles of governance in Nigeria to reduce the manipulative strategy of black boxing.
- iii. Related political Programs, campaigns and images on media outlets that include news papers, television, radio and social media platforms should regulated to reduce character assassination/hate speech amongst politicians. As such, unnecessary political rivalry is detrimental to national unity and cohesion would be reduced to the bearest minimum

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