



Ethnic politics as an eternal clog in the wheels of politics: A Nigerian assessment

Tochukwu Nwauba¹, Vincent Chukwudi Chieji²

¹School of International Relations/Research School for South East Asian Studies,
Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian Province, China

²Department of History and International Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Correspondence: Tochukwu Nwauba (email: tochukwunwauba@gmail.com)

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is an examination into an essential and perhaps an overly underplayed character of Nigerian politics. Following a vast multi-cultural diversity crisscrossing Nigeria's society, ethnic/divisional politics has saddled Nigeria's over 50 years of statehood, dictating and influencing dynamics in and around socio-political and economic spheres. Like in most developing states, this has dramatically undermined Nigeria's politics overall growth and development, while limiting Nigeria's potentials and national power. Adopting the Instrumentalist paradigm, this survey finds that although colonial legacies among other structures, entrenched and sustain ethnic politics in Nigeria, on the whole, politicians and personal interests stand as principal exploiters of the ever-growing defect in Nigeria's polity. Current antecedents show that ethnic politics like in the past only holds more grave and dangerous spirals of conflict, political crises etc., of great magnitude going forward. Thus, robust and bold moves toward mitigating ethnic politics in Nigeria is of critical importance. Given this reality, this piece advocates more sincerity and commitment from all stakeholders: the government, individuals and the civil society. Also, qualitative investments must be made into political socialisation/education; while strengthening the institutions and activities that emphasise unity across the country.

Keywords: divisional, effects, ethnic, ethnicity, politics, Nigeria

Introduction

Without a doubt, the politics in Nigeria is a peculiar one. Its dynamics is filled with rich, unique systems, shared cultures, as well as an undeniable fair share of deep contradictions and controversies emanating mainly from multiple factors and realities. It is also easy to discern that the current Nigerian politics, although modelled after the American/Western democracy, has not

been as active and inspiring as the one(s) it took after. Several factors contribute to this reality, one of the most significant is the underlying division springing from the sentiments stemming out of her broad, diverse outlook. It is no secret that the marriage forced upon “*a medley of groups that are considerably different in culture, ethnicity, political system, and social structure*” (Badmus & Odubajo, 2005) by the British colonialists bore a massive chunk of the bag of complexities troubling Nigeria’s politics. Given the demographic composition with over 250 ethnic groups, ethnicity is, without doubt, an essential aspect of Nigeria's socio-political discourse as well as “*unique problems unknown to the experience of other peoples of the world*” (Nwomeh, 2005).

Despite the little attention it receives, few factors reflect more influence, contradiction, and complexity as the factor of ethnicity in the Nigerian political landscape. It is easily a force for both good and mammoth evil as contemporary events have shown more. Since independence in 1960, ethnic politics has succeeded in hijacking whatever political direction the state has chosen for herself; even rearing its ugly head across other spheres such as religion, economics among others. With independence and even till date, political parties are formed according to tribal and regional lines, while the selection of leaders is influenced mainly by their ethnic backgrounds and not by what they have to offer to the progress of the country. The need to understand this salient aspect of Nigerian politics is imperative especially considering Nigeria's bearing as Africa's biggest economy and most populous nation. Also, appreciating what recurring elements inhibits a supposedly ‘sleeping’ giant’s vast potentials and development is an important one in developing states political discourses. Undeniably, ethnicity is a huge factor that cannot be undermined in this attempt.

This study, therefore, seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of ethnicity in Nigeria, highlighting the foundations and character of ethnic-based politics in Nigeria. The study further investigates in what ways ethnic politics inhibits positive sectoral dynamics in Nigeria while proffering some feasible solutions in that regard.

Ethnic politics: Understanding the concept

Like most concept/phenomenon in social sciences, the attempt at defining the term 'ethnic politics' is quite controversial and a heavily contested one. Attempts at defining it are varied and potentially as many as there are scholars into it. Each perspective maintains different views influenced by their thoughts, experiences, and worldviews. It is noteworthy to state that most attempts at defining the concept adopt a split approach on the terms that make up the concept- 'Ethnic' and 'Politics'; hence understanding the root terms aid better comprehension of the concept.

Thus, according to Cohen (1974), an ethnic group is a formal interest group where members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups within the larger society because they share kingship, religious and linguistic ties. In the same vein, Nnoli (1978) points out that ethnic groups are social formations which are distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. Also, Ayatse and Akuva in the citation of Omu (1996:170) point to ethnicity as “*...the consciousness of belonging to, identifying with, and being loyal to a social group distinguished by shared cultural traditions, common language, in group sentiment and self-identity.*” To Ayatse and Akuva, ethnicity is the deliberate and consciousness of tracing one's identity to a particular group and allowing such feeling to determine the way one relates to people and things, ethnicity creates brackets of 'we', 'they', 'ours', 'theirs' feeling (2013:180).

Thus, ethnicity links to constant indices of common/shared language, traditions or whatever identify a group of people or differentiate them from others as well. In understanding the concept of ethnic politics, it merely denotes the actions of getting or keeping power in a given society, built around the dynamics of a defined societal group, based on common ancestries, shared languages or traditions. In a nutshell, every activity targeted at influencing governance or political events and are determined or based on membership to a defined social group, distinguished by history, descent or shared ties.

Contending explanatory frameworks

Explanations as to why the politics of many states is covered with ethnic outlook are a widely discussed subject among social scientists and political analysts. Undeniably, Nigeria's case is one with a good number of recorded reviews. While there is no generally accepted reason (beyond the cliché foundational reasons), several interesting and enlightening postulations have been advanced in a bid to explain this phenomenon, especially as it has continued to defy Marxist and modernist projections that it will fade away following industrialisation/modernisation or with rising globalisation.

One of the foremost among these theories is the Primordial theory. It traces ethnicity and ethnic politics as coming from an ascribed identity or assigned status or both. Finheritances (Yang, 2003:42). To Yang, common ancestry determines identity to an ethnicity. In other words, people belong to an ethnic group because members of that group also share common biological and cultural origins. Thus, it is not something one acquires like class or status. Instead, one is born into it and classified with people who share the same origin. Therefore, according to Isajiw (1992), it is fixed and permanent. Ethnic politics, therefore, hinges on this bond among different people. Thus, to Primordialists, biological ties or common ancestry; cultures, languages influence political consciousness.

The Constructivist model also represents another contribution of social scholarship towards capturing the nature of the phenomenon of ethnic politics. According to Yang (2003), this school of thought began its ascendancy in the 1970s. Unlike the Primordial model, it views ethnicity as something that is created and therefore not inherited. Also, it downplays the effects of cultural heritage. Isajiw (1992:4) states that *"the basic notion in this approach is that ethnicity is something that is being negotiated and constructed in everyday living."* To him, it is a process continuously unfolding. Thus, the model assumes that ethnicity is not fixed as the Primordialist School would consider. Instead, it is dynamic and reacts to the changing social environment.

The Instrumentalist model treats ethnicity and ethnic politics from an entirely different perspective. It adopts a realist approach to analysing ethnicity and politics built around it. To instrumentalist apologists, they view ethnicity as an instrument or strategy for gaining resources. Thus, the school of thought also assumes that ethnicity and ethnic politics are rationally oriented towards achieving closed-minded goals in societies. According to Cohen (1969:190), it operates within a contemporary political context and is not an archaic survival arrangement carried over into the present by conservative people. Also, apologists of this model, view ethnic politics as a strategy adopted by politicians seeking to mask divergent interests as an instrument of class exploitation.

Consequently, it is set to serve individual figures or demagogues who are driven by calculations of profits. As a hybrid of the realist paradigm, the instrumentalist theory focuses on individuals or a limited group of persons and their survival. It further argues that ethnicity is used

by elements who manipulates some values, norms, beliefs, symbols, and ceremonials of a defined group, among others instead of hinging on them as other perspectives assume in the struggle for power with other groups (Cohen, 1969:5). One of the features of this model is that clashes are imminent, as seen in the Nigerian political system, where there is a fierce clash of elements contesting to control the state and its machinery.

Together with other emerging views, this paper finds the above models useful in the understanding of the phenomenon, especially in the context of Nigerian politics. The theories pose without doubt explanatory aptitudes and ultimately give different insights into the knowledge and workings of ethnic politics in Nigeria. It is vital to state that the Nigerian case point is understood from the prism of the instrumentalist paradigm.

Ethnic politics in Nigeria: A background

Despite the contemporary spread of ethnic politicking in Nigeria, the very foundations are not so bright but are known to precede Nigeria's independence into pre-colonial times. Several works agree on the British unification and the divide-and-rule system as being the genesis of ethnic politics in a unified or structurally defined Nigerian entity. However, early manifestations of ethnic politics may have preceded Nigeria's independence and colonial days. Ethnic politics was already evident by the turn of the 19th century. The Fulani jihad led by Usman (also Uthman) Dan Fodio in the North which unified a higher section of Nigeria as far down to the South West left a new political arrangement built on distinctive theocracies (Emirates) all over the North. It maintained a distinct outlook in which the Fulani ethnic group dominated in a society with varying ethnic stocks (Igwe, 2011:76-77). Thus, marking a play out of ethnic politics in an organised part of what stands today as Northern Nigeria.

More consensus falls on the place of British colonisation in bringing ethnic politics in Nigeria. Having brought the various people making up Nigeria together, the British colonial policy of divide and rule marked the beginning of sectional sentiments in a unified and structured Nigerian state (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Ako-Nai, 2008; Ebegbulem, 2011; Nnoli, 1978; Onwubiko, 1978; Rudolph, 2006). The policy centred on the separate political leadership and development of the different regions, though it was designed at keeping the various groups from uniting against the colonial authorities (Ebegbulem, 2011:89) and ultimately ensuring British economic gains (Adegbami & Uche, 2015:62). While serving British purpose, the system saw to the formulation of loyalties to the different regions before the country which bred the divide and formed the core of divisional politicking which quickly took over the politics in Nigeria.

Also, early manifestations of ethnic politics were profoundly portrayed in the party politics following the colonial constitutions allowing partisan politics in preparation for an independent Nigeria. Most notable was the formation of the Action Group (AG) from the political wing of the Yoruba cultural association Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1953, in addition to the gradual easing of the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) into an Ibo dominated party. On another hand, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was formed and governed by the Hausa-Fulani in a bid to protect the Northern interest. These parties dominated in the West, East, and North respectively (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Azeez, 2009; Ebegbulem, 2011).

Apparently, the most notable event from this was Nnamdi Azikiwe's (an Igbo) loss of his position as the leader of the Western House of Assembly in Lagos to Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba in 1952 and the subsequent removal and replacement of Eyo Ita (a minority) as the leader of the Igbo-dominated Eastern Regional House of Assembly. Also, incidents such as the

Northern rejection of independence motion moved on the floor of the Nigerian National Assembly in Lagos in 1957 by Anthony Enahoro (a Yoruba from the South West) point to the place of ethnicity in Nigeria's politics at the time.

Ethnic politics: A Nigerian timeline

Nigeria is possibly one of the most diverse states in the world, with an ethnic stock count often estimated to be around or over 250, 300, 400 or even 450 groups (Anas, 2011; Mustapha, 2006, 2007; Nwomeh, 2005). According to Anas (2011:25) *“what is today geographically called Nigeria originated from a forcible amalgamation of disparate nations that, in the period preceding their colonization..., scarcely interacted with another beyond the mundane spheres of commerce, marriage, war, alliances, and diplomacy.”* Even common tribes maintained divisions along cities/areas. Thus, Igwe (2011:71) in the citation of Ikime points that *“it did not make sense to speak of Hausa, Yoruba, Ibibio, Igbo, Tiv. It made far more sense to speak of Kano, Katsina, Zazzau, Awka, Onitsha, Afikpo, Ife, Ijebu, Ondo, Oyo, etc, i.e [sic] to speak in terms of groupings that regarded themselves as socio-political units.”* Thus, pointing to the free state of things among the various people till colonialization disrupted it.

Having gotten independence in 1960, the seeds of ethnic politics were already grown from the pre-independence days. It soon began manifesting. According to Rudolph (2006:178), *“The state was new, but the political loyalties of those supporting its governing parties were old-tribal identities, with all their incorporated suspicions of the other tribal fellow.”* The colonial legacy of formed ethnic parties, including the split tripod federal structure of regions, sustained this. It is on record that...*all the political parties of the first democratic era were more or less sectional and exclusionist. At its birth, the AG (a party metamorphosed from a Yoruba cultural association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa) was flatly proclaimed as a “Western Regional Political Organisation, pure and simple”. The NPC (which again originated from a cultural association, Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa) was an unmistakable regionalist party as indicated by its still well-remembered motto, “One North, One People, irrespective of religion, tribe or rank”. Its constitution restricted membership to only people of Northern origin. However, behind the pan-regional façade was the primacy of the interest of the traditional ruling classes of the Hausa-Fulani. Even the NCNC, which initially held the promise of a true vanguard of nationalism eventually shrank to an Igbo party* (Nwomeh, 2005:277).

Despite the danger which loomed from such a divisive spiral, springing of regionally closed parties became a common sight. Among some of such parties founded were the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) for the Middle Belt minorities as the Tiv, Idoma and Birom; the Borno Youth Movement, for Kanuris and the United Nigeria Independence Party (UNIP) for the non-Igbo minorities of Calabar, Ogoja, and Rivers areas. In the north, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) targeted low-born. Scores of others such as: the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo Party, Otu Edo Party, the Mabolaje Grand Alliance, including the Igbirra Tribal Union, Hausa Tribal Party, Tiv Progressive Union, Birom Progressive Union* among several others formed specially for peoples of particular ethnicities/sub-group characterized Nigeria's political scenery (Nwomeh, 2005:278). The proliferation of parties and interests created a lot of tension for the nascent Nigerian state. It is no wonder Ndubuisi (2014:1505) records consequently, *“...the situation degenerated into political riots, arsons, killings and other acts of vandalism, especially in the west. Subsequently, there was a military coup, which terminated in the First*

Republic in 1966.” Thus, laying the foundations of what became a pattern in Nigeria’s political outlook.

The coup could not change much. Instead, the sustained divisive politics meant it was seen as an Igbo coup against the Hausa/Fulani to pave the way for Igbo domination having been led by a young Igbo Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu alongside other 4 Majors. Also, none of the political leaders who lost their lives was from the Igbo ethnic group (Adegbami & Uche, 2015:62; Ebegbulem, 2011:84). Moreover, an Igbo Major General, Aguiyi Ironsi became Head of the State and declared a unitary government which appeared to make for Igbo domination in politics and public service as feared by the North (Orjiako, 2006). Thus, in reply to this sentiment, a group of Northern officers carried out a counter-coup six months after. During the coup, Igbo military officers were targeted, and in the violence that erupted, many Igbos were killed mainly in the North (Adegbami & Uche, 2015; Ebegbulem, 2011; Kalejaiye & Alliyu, 2013). The killings led the Igbo region to fear for their safety and subsequent domination; thus, following these state of affairs, on May 30, 1967, the Eastern Region would split from Nigeria as the Republic of Biafra. The attempt by the central government to force the area back into the union culminated into a 30-month Civil War, in which an estimated 3 million people lost their lives. The end of the war in 1970, meant the Biafra region was forced back into the union following her loss. The Region was subsequently divided into two as an apparent means of diminishing her political relevance. Hence, setting the stage for a clear Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba dominance which has assailed Nigeria’s socio-economic and political dynamics (Kasfir, 2015).

By the turn of the Second Republic, despite attempts made by the military transition government of General Murtala Mohammed at eliminating such dangerous politics. It didn’t take long for the old order of clannishness to rear its head again in the new democratic dispensation following the military transition to civilian government. *Indeed, four of the five registered parties were largely a reincarnation of the ethno-regional parties of the First Republic. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) were all but in names, a resuscitation of the old NPC of the Hausa-Fulani, AG of the Yoruba, NCNC of the Igbo and NEPU of the Hausa talakawa [peasant class] respectively. Even the Great Nigeria Peoples Party, a breakaway faction of the NPP, resembled the old BYM, with its major support from the Kanuri* (Nwomeh, 2005:282).

This did not stop at the formulation of political parties, it appeared that in the New Republic, *“both the Igbo and Yoruba believed it was their turn to produce the president in the 1983 election while the Hausa-Fulani felt they must retain the position and complete the maximum two-term tenure before ceding power to the southern ethnic groups”* (Nwomeh, 2005:282). The effects were such that another round of political rancour and tensions engulfed the country, leading to yet another coup. Hence, rolling back all the plans of achieving real pan-national political parties and the avoidance of the mistakes of the First Republic, including stunting Nigeria’s democratic culture.

The ill-fated Third Republic marked a brief alteration from the status quo. Horrible experiences of the First and especially the Second Republic meant the military regime's strict design and control of a two-party system along parallel ideological lines. Thus, ethnic colouration to partisan politics dropped as evidenced by each party’s electoral success across the geo-divides. While the National Republican Convention (NRC) won in important states in the south: Anambra, Lagos, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River despite her strong base in the North, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) a seemingly dominant party in the south won in the Northern States of Jigawa, Borno, Benue, Plateau, Kwara, Yobe and Taraba states (Nwomeh, 2005:285). Also, according to Nwomeh, *“even the attempt by the NRC to incite Southern Christians against*

Muslim-Muslim President and Vice-Presidential ticket of the SDP could not yield noticeable electoral dividend” (Nwomeh, 2005:285).

With the return to civilian rule on May 29, 1999, marking the beginning of the present Fourth Republic, divisive politics made its gradual growth simultaneously. A Yoruba and Nigeria's ex-military Head of State Olusegun Obasanjo became President. This was greatly influenced by the circumstances of the ill-fated Third Republic. Salawu and Hassan affirm that, *This may not be unconnected with the informal rotation arrangement of principal political offices of the federation among the six geo-political zones in the country. This could be seen from the arrangement that compensated the South-West in the 1999 Presidential Election in which the two presidential candidates filled were from the region in compensation for annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election, which was believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O.* consciousness in the politics and the attendant fear of domination among the various groups. The state of things meant that regional dominance of parties continued. The All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) dominance at the time in the North and the West respectively, point to this fact (Adegbami & Uche, 2015:63). Including the All Progressive Abiola from the South-West (2011).

The rotation design meant that other top elective posts as the Vice President, the Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives, alongside their deputies, were zoned along geopolitical zones. All of these, irrespective of the capabilities of other contestants from other regions. Thereby characterising the institutionalised ethnic Grand Alliance (APGA) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), which grew in the East and the North much later.

The Presidency returned to the North having been vacated by someone from the South-West. Ethnic politics soon reared its head this time in a confrontation with the constitutional provisions, following the death of President Yar'Adua in February 2010, which meant that his deputy, a southerner would succeed him, thus, a break of the informal zoning arrangement. According to Ayatse and Akuva (2015:186) Goodluck Jonathan, President Yar'Adua's Deputy was *"not seen in the light of a Nigerian citizen but as an outsider of the Northern enclave."* Sentiments in the North felt robbed of their *'chance'* to complete their 8-years as the informal rotation agreement spelt. With the events that took place afterwards, there seemed to be a huge deep sentiment in the South that the dreaded terrorist group Boko Haram, one of the crises that rocked the country was a response from the North to destabilize Goodluck Jonathan's administration following his succession of late President Yar'Adua (Kalejaiye & Alliyu, 2003:260).

The principal manifestation of ethnic and divisive politics in the Fourth Republic came with the 2015 elections, the two dominant parties: the leading People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Action People's Congress (APC) were split along ethnic lines. While the PDP dominated in the East and in the South where the then President Goodluck Jonathan hails from, the APC had most of its followers from the North - the home of her Presidential candidate. The latter includes the West where the founder's of one of the coalition parties in the APC alliance (Action Congress) come from and where the party had dominated since 1999. Although tensions doused following the incumbent President's concession of defeat at the polls, Nigeria was on the brink of conflict, potentially able to split the country.

Effects of ethnic politics

Among the impact left on Nigeria by ethnic politics include the undermining of minorities, while centring on the more prominent groups like Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. As Ebegbulem (2011:80) captures, *"Within the smaller ethnic groups appear to be a rising feeling of sub-nationalism, of a*

need and desire for the groups to take their own fate into their hands. They question the concept of nationhood in a Nigerian system with less than caring attitude and posture towards issues that affect them.” In a political game where numbers translate to dominance, minorities have less or few chances of advancing their course/leading as the three major groups. It is no wonder there have been multiple incidents of armed ethnic movements among minorities seeking to protect their interests. Isaac Adaka Boro's unsuccessful twelve-day revolution in 1966 marked the first minority rising against the state (Ikporukpo, 2016). Other contemporary militia groups include: the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND); the Niger Delta One Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF); the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) among several others (Muzan, 2014; Nwankwo, 2015), paint a better picture of the explosive situation. More recent groups include the Niger Delta Avengers (Ewokor, 2016), the Niger Delta Marine Force (Ikporukpo, 2016), Red Scorpions, and the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Movement (Golden-Timsar, 2018) etc. In many cases, these are suitable conditions for fuelling conflicts which have come to characterise the Nigerian political scenery.

Akin to the above is the fact that it has left Nigeria even more polarised than united while limiting the chances of functional national cohesion needed for stability and growth. It is common knowledge that election periods in Nigeria have come to be synonymous with violence and crisis as the experience of over five decades have shown. While this limits national power, it encourages even more conflicts which have continued to characterise the national landscape. In strategic terms, the country is torn from many points and outstretched within, such that it is incapable of protecting or advancing its course externally and otherwise.

Similarly, ethnic politics has made for a de-emphasis of meritocracy in the public sector. Nigeria's leadership crisis readily explains this. Despite an abundance of human and natural resources, there is a consensus that the leadership class has continually failed to be a coordinating factor in achieving the Nigerian dream. Primordial sentiments in politics continue to limit the process of selecting qualified/skilled citizens into positions of service. In the same vein, the efficiency of the civil service at every level continues to be threatened following sweeping sectional sentiments which have advanced to characterise its workings. More specifically, there is a shared sentiment in the South of Nigeria that the contemporary Civil service and armed forces, including political appointments, are dominated by the North especially since the end of the Civil War. According to most sentiments, there seems to be a plan or agenda to shut out people from the Eastern region or the Deep South from top public positions (Ebegbulem, 2011; Orjiako, 2006). Also, this could have stemmed from the fact that the collective tribes of Yoruba, Ibo and the general minorities have only ruled the country on a few occasions as against total Northern domination.

Tied to the above is the fact that ethnic politics in Nigeria has enormously undermined the democracy in Nigeria. Besides ruining the merit system, it has made for more desperation in the polity. People are more ready to scuttle and manipulate political processes to suit their exclusive interests/designs. Most often, elections are security situations with recurring cycles of violence in almost all parts of Nigeria. All these limit the effectiveness of democracy and socio-political stability.

Equally, national issues as census continue to remain controversial (Rudolph, 2006) because people regard it as ways of stamping group numerical strength, which implies more political dominance and resource allocation. The politics of ethnicity has made for the intense competition for resources among ethnicities, with such result that group inequalities, particularly among minorities, have significantly deepened. Many a time, issues regarding resource distribution formulae result in a constitutional crisis and tension among the different group. According to

Ndubuisi (2014:1509-1510), *“This impairs meaningful resource allocation and utilization for development...As it leads to the tendency to want to exclude outsiders in the sharing of scarce resources, the amenities that can improve the well-being of people...”* An unfair system for minorities is an explosive situation for Nigeria’s stability. Not only does the system put more pressure on the planning and administration of the country especially with regards to resource control and distribution, it also poses a huge security risk for the entire country. Experiences show they are perfect conditions for the growth of agitations as in the Niger-Delta region. Thus, it is safe to state that the effects could leave cyclical implications and consequences on Nigeria and even on the international system as the Nigerian Civil War and Boko Haram have proven.

Gainfully speaking, ethnic politics is the biggest culprit to the recurring sporadic conflicts in Nigeria. An examination into the history of conflicts in Nigeria exposes the fact the country has been entangled in recurring degrees of disputes. Mostly in the forms of political riots, pre, and post-election violence etc. The impact of these conflicts continues to haunt the unity and progress of the country, especially with enormous human and material costs. It readily explains the attendant underdevelopment and stagnation which characterise the Nigerian state despite her vast potentials.

Recommendations

Effectively eliminating ethnic politics in societies like Nigeria's is at best impractical considering the deep roots cast by social groupings. Without a doubt, social identities and groups are long permeating structures, and their influences are difficult to curb even in politically advanced societies. Despite this, the reality of leaving it open leaves effects with a too much sour taste for it to be left to wax on. It is in Nigeria's best interest to adopt measures to weaken the influences of ethnicity in her politics. Thus, this piece enjoins some thoughts hereinbelow, via the:

- a) Adoption of strong narratives centred on embracing Nigeria's diversity as one of its biggest strengths, while encouraging even more unity in national politics to reflect a unity of identity and destiny, especially among the growing population.
- b) The repeal of laws and policies as the Federal Character Principle, emphasising social groupings over collective identities and the making of laws outlawing ethnic identification in all official documents.
- c) Strengthening of institutions which bring Nigerians together, like the: National Youth Service Corps which gathers graduates, away from their various states of origin where they work for the nation for a year; sports, inter-marriages, Unity Schools etc. This engenders feelings of collective identity which manifests directly into the politics over time.
- d) Qualitative investments into education and public awareness of the goals of national politics built on sound ideologies than on social identities.
- e) Adoption of tough actions/stance against individuals, parties or organisations employing sectional sentiments as avenues of seeking power, through jail terms, outright disqualification, ban, and total disbandment.

Conclusion

Past and contemporary experiences expose the fact that ethnic politics has grown alarmingly in Nigeria and has mostly been a bane to Nigeria's development. From instigating violence, instabilities, inequalities, in addition to undermining meritocracy, while destabilising national cohesion and democracy; the diverse adverse effects of ethnic politics indeed mirror greatly on Nigeria's society. This paper posits that while the colonial legacies bore the seeds of ethnic politics in Nigeria; politicians and personal interests remain the biggest propagators and exploiters of the system instead of the very ethnic groups they ride on as the vast underdevelopment and current politics highlights. Nigeria has not learned to tap effectively from her immense diversity, and till the different interests find common grounds, the political dynamics will continue to tell deepening sorry tales of conflicts, bloodletting, the rise of ethnic militias, constitutional crises etc. It is the position of this paper that in order to contain the influence and spread of ethnicity in Nigerian politics, the government, politicians, civil societies and all stakeholders must unite at all levels to fight ethnic politicking and people who profit from it. Bold decisions must be made, no matter who profits from this ugly trend. Despite Nigeria's potentials, politics with ethnic clout is dangerous and an ill wind which blows no one any good. It cannot be ignored or treated with unserious hands as is being done. Nigeria's development, stability, security, and unity are directly involved.

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