

ETHNICITY AND DEMOCRACY: POLICY APPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a product of the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates by the colonialists led by the Governor General Lord Lugard. With diverse Nationalities of well over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups, this false marriage of heterogeneous society is predominantly Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Yorubas in the South-West, the Igbos of the South-East and the oil/gas rich South-South with ethnic groups such as the Ijaws, Ogonis, Itsekiris, Urhobo, Ibibios, among others. With six (6) geo-political zones, the country has majorly two religions, Christianity and Islam. Nigeria is at present structured to self-destruct predicated on the presence of in-built ingredients of instability such as diverse conflictive ethnic, religious and cultural rivalries, political and regional dominance and tribalism. The main objective of the work is to examine ethnicity and democracy; policy implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. The historical descriptive methodology were used in gathering and collating information for this study. Democratically, governance has tended to favour the North with three regions and has so far produced nine (9) Presidents whether civilian or military. The South-West three (3), South-East two (2), while the South-South has only one President. Using the Pluralists and Relative Deprivation Theories of Conflict, the study submits that the reactionary measures by subsisting stakeholders cannot guarantee lasting peace and security required for the stability of the country. Therefore, the study recommends holistic conflict transformation initiative for addressing the excesses, restructuring of the country along ethnic or regional lines as well as harnessing all the positive attributes of diversity and redressing all the negative ones through political cum constitutional engineering that will tinker with extant structural deficiencies.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Democracy, Sustainable, Development, Policy

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with multicultural, religious people as well as the product of the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by the British colonialists led by Sir Lord Lugard. The name Nigeria was a suggestion by Flora Shaw that several British protectorates in the Niger should be known collectively as Nigeria.

In retrospect, the amalgamation greeted the unequal competition, rivalry and the conflicting relationships between the diverse ethnic and religious groups. Other thinkers saw the acclaimed union as false marriage while Emmanuel (2016) sees it as “marriage of convenience” because the whole process was conceived and executed without due consideration and respect for the socio-cultural and political differences embedded in the political, economic and social structures of the wedded couple. The Nigeria’s foremost nationalist speaking on the amalgamation maintained that Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression; meaning that there are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are English, Welsh or French. Against this background, the questions begging for answers are;

In what ways have ethnicity and democracy destabilized Nigeria and what are the policy applications for sustainable development in Nigeria?

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Ethnicity and Democracy

The word “Nigeria” is a mere destructive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (Awolowo 1947). He further expatiated his view from its “nation” definition when he said we will see that the destructive and inseparable characteristics of a nation are common language, common culture and sometimes common ancestry. Within the nation there are usually many tribes, each of which speaks a common dialect, but all of whom speak the same language which in their mother tongue, share the same cultural and sometimes claim the same ancestry; meaning that they will tend to live together even if separated under different government (Awolowo 1981, Emmanuel 2016).

Sir Ahmadu Bello lending his views on the issue tends to describe the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates as “The mistake of 1914”. The first prime minister of the independent Nigeria, Balewa also averred that the southern tribes who are now pouring into north in ever increasing numbers are not welcome. “we look upon them as invaders” (Bello 1962, Balewa 1960). It is quite feasible that the British government has tried to make their false marriage work as a country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, their religious beliefs and customs do not show any sign to willingly unite. To Emmanuel, Nigerian unity is only British intentions for the country. All these positions or outpouring of emotions are results of misgivings about amalgamation due to the multiplicity of ethnicity, culture and religion existing in each of the protectorates.

Invariably, Okafor (1982, 2007) maintained that for any meaningful development to take place in the society, peaceful co-existence is a major requirement, hence the need for order and stability in the society. This implies that no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of chaos. The importance of electoral system lies in the role of regulating the quality of democracy through a process leading to the award of seats in democratic assemblies to those seeking political offices. The qualities to be measured are the fairness of democratic dispensation namely, how well relevant public interests are represented and how much control voters have over their government. Of note is that Nigeria at this point in time does not have a self-correcting majoritarian democracy. The thinking of many is that Nigeria is yet to have a bonafide representative democratic government as a result of a disconnection between the political class and the people.

The harmonization of the concepts of Ethnicity and Democracy is fundamental to this work; political instability is the breakdown of democracy.

Lincoln (1861), in his most basic definition, is government by the people and for the people; that is to say, government runs in accordance with the people’s preferences and serving their interests. What is of utmost importance in democracy is its level of accountability and responsiveness to the wishes of the people. In constructing the index of the indicator of democratic quality, a number of criteria have been identified in the measurement of democratic quality. According to Fagbohun (2013), among these are universal suffrage, universal eligibility for public office, protection of women’s rights, socio-economic equality, free elections, freedom of expression and association, public policies that are responsive to voter’s preference and general satisfaction with democracy. The country must also be sufficiently democratic in terms of regime and institutional characteristics to justify the appellation and the democracy must have been firmly established. Before we can easily understand the term Ethnicity, we will do justice to some related concepts such as Ethnic group and Ethnicity.

Nnoli (1978) is of the opinion that Ethnic groups are social formations which are distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. For Cohen (1974), Ethnic group is an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups within the larger society because they share kinship, religious and linguistic ties. For Nnoli, the most distinctive variable in an ethnic identification is that of language; meaning that an ethnic group could easily be identified by virtue of common ancestry, language and culture; that is “their way of life”. This dissimilarity has been expressed in terms of language, local delicacies (diet), dress, and other type of social engagements. Mariam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary eleventh edition defines Ethnic as a nation, people akin to custom- more at classed according common racial,

national, tribal, religious, linguistic or cultural origin or background. Ethnicity is therefore seen as quality or affiliation. Nnoli (1978) sees Ethnicity as interactions among members of many
Osaghae (1995) defines ethnicity as the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situation of competition, conflict or cooperation. In other words, he suggested that ethnicity could be perceived as a fall back on factors such as ethnic identity, differences, common origins or interests, shared experiences and common history that could provide assurance of solidarity or commonality in times of need such as competition, conflict or cooperation. Rupesinghe (2003) maintained for instance that ethnicity is the mixture of perception and external contextual reality which provides it with meaning. In political theory, “ethnicity” describes a group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity, composed of people who are aware, perhaps only latently, of having common origins and interests. Thus, according to him, an ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people but a self-conscious collection of people, united or closely related by shared experiences and a common history. Agiri (1997) on his part defined ethnicity as a group dynamism. He argued that ethnic group consists of people characterized by cultural criteria of symbols including language, value system and normative behaviour and whose members are anchored in a particular part or state or territory. In essence, ethnicity is all about social classification emerging from within relationship.

Yinger (1994), identified three ingredients that should be reflected in any definition of an ethnic group, namely: that a group is perceived by others in the society to be different in some combination of the following traits- language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture; that member perceive themselves as being different in a number of ways from other groups; and that they participate in shared activities built around their real or mythical common origin and culture.

Though ethnicity is emotion and identity driven, it remains latent until it is manipulated by those Blagojevic (ibid) described as political entrepreneurs, otherwise called politicians to achieve their own particular ends. Politicians have the tendency or propensity to manipulate and exploit ethnicity for maximum political advantage without minding the negative implications of such actions for national stability. This manipulation of ethnicity is feasible because; as Horowitz (1985: 59) argued, “ethnicity embodies an element of emotional intensity that can be readily aroused when the group’s interests are thought to be at stake”. There is no gainsaying the fact of political application of ethnicity being rampant in Africa. For example, Suberu (1994) contended that ethnic and regional polarization went a long way to bring to inglorious end Nigeria’s First Republic, while Amoo (1997) also observed that events in Africa since independence indicates that during periods of political crises, ethnic ties are by far more important to individuals than civil ties. He further drew our attention to the fact that the two forces that operate at the core of politics in Africa are ethnic groups and political parties.

In 2004, Washington Quarterly published a report of a dozen independent scholars that analyzed the fate of democracies and dictatorships around the globe from 1995 to 2002. The summary of the report is relevant to this discuss as follows:

- Economic, ethnic and regional effects have only a modest impact on a country’s risk of political instability. Rather, stability is overwhelmingly determined by a country’s pattern of political competition and political authority.
- The key to maintaining stability lie in the development of democratic institutions that promotes fair and open competition avoids political polarization and factionalism and impose substantial constraint on executive authority.
- Wealth and the absence of communal tensions certainly help, but a country does not have to be rich or homogeneous to be democratic and stable.
- Compared to other factors such as rapid urbanization, economic down-turn, and ethnic tensions which can create turmoil in any particular nation, political institutions and the patterns of political behaviour that evolve around them determine a country’s resistance to instability. Countries with most vulnerable institutions face relative odds or near-term political crises that are higher by roughly eight to two dozen times.
- Among such elements as independence and effectiveness of legislatures and judiciaries, levels of corruption, the degree of political rights and civil liberties afforded to citizens, and whether state where parliamentary or presidential, the ones with the greatest impact on the risks of instability were

found to be the character of political institution among other political groups followed by the power of the chief executive.

- Regimes that combine nominally democratic rule with factionalized political competition and a dominant chief executive are more volatile and more associated with odds of instability.
- Factionalized political competition has been distinguished with three main characteristics namely: parochialism, polarization and mobilization. Parochialism is with reference to a political landscape in which the major political parties focus on the interest of relatively close social or communal groups rather than on the interest of nation as a whole and show clear favouritism towards group insiders [as in the case of the killings by the Fulani herders and the inaction of government towards them]. In the case of polarization, this occurs when competition over central authority becomes an uncompromising winner- take-all–struggle. Mobilization is evident when rival groups pursue their parochial interest through frequent and sometimes violent collective action.

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATIONS

The work adopted the pluralist cum relative deprivation theories of conflict. The pluralist theory poses that conflict is inevitable in a pluralist political society where various groups struggle for political power Cohen (1996), Bell (1996). A pluralist society can be defined as the existence of segmented sociological groups which can establish effective cultural and political cohesion within the society on the basis of that group's identity. On the hand, the relative deprivation theory is the perception by actors of the discrepancy between their value expectation and their value capabilities Gurr (1980). Value expectations are goods, and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled, while value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping; Gurr argues that relative deprivation was central to the occurrence of revolutions. Political instability on results from deprivation when combined with a believe that conditions are worse than they could and should be. The most explosive situation is when a period of rising expectations is followed by a decline in the ability of the regime to meet those demands, Ikpe (2010). Heywood (2002) has argued that the notion of relative deprivation is significant because it draws to the fact that the people's perception of their position is more important than by their objective circumstances, what is crucial to him, is how people evaluate their conditions relative either to the recent past or to what other people have.

PUBLIC POLICY

There is no generally accepted definition of what constitutes public policy amongst policy analyst and practitioners. This means that, there are many definitions of public policy. However, many have attempted an unsatisfactory definition. For Thomas Dye (1975), Public Policy is what the government chooses to do or not to do. Robert Eyestone (1975) defines public policy broadly as the relationship of a government unit to its environment. Richard Rose (1969) avers that policy be considered as a series of more or less related activities alongside their consequences for those concerned rather than concrete decisions. While Anderson (1979), on his part has clearly pointed out that public policy is a propulsive cause of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern.

Ikelegbe (1969) on his part sees public policy as an integrated program of action which an actor (or groups of actors) is accustomed to or intends to undertake in response to given problems or situations with which he is confronted. Operationally, public policy (ies) is the purposeful actions taken by the government in solving a matter which could be social, economic or political for the overall benefit of the citizens in order to sustain the polity.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

One of the core values that could drive sustainable development is primarily the preoccupation of the leader in the drive towards sustainable development which will give every citizen a stake in the country and its future and mobilize them towards it. For Yaw (2000) social justice although divided into several races (nations), a fair and even-handed policy would get them to live peacefully together especially if such hardships (zoning Presidency) were shared equally and not carried mainly by the minority groups.

Ofoeze (2000) a liberal scholar sees development simply as a means; attainment and qualitative realization of a state of affairs characterized by adequate and equitable distribution of social services (economic and political), qualitative human happiness and welfare and mastery of his environment as well as free individual participation in the affairs of the state or simply (the satisfaction of basic needs) in an economically, politically and structural societies.

Planning sustainable development involves conscious and deliberate efforts to influence, direct and control the path of progress based on some activities which affects direct and active interference in activities.

METHODOLOGY

This work uses the historical descriptive method.

MANIFESTATION OF ETHNIC POLITICS ON DEMOCRATIC INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA

Inter-ethnic interactions in Nigeria have been one of the conflicts caused by ethnic chauvinism which manifests in the form of ethnic nationalism. The mode of governance in which Nigeria achieved her independence was civil democracy. Nigeria from 1960 has experimented three republican governments and at times punctuated by long spells of military rule. The incessant incursions by the military have made democratic culture a difficult task. Among the resultant negative consequences as observed by Babangida (2002) were wastages of enormous human and material resources on ethnically inspired violence, clashes and even battles as a result of the fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property, increasing gaps in social relations amongst ethnic nationalities, suspicion and hate for one another. Also ethnic nationalism has brought about offspring of Militias, Maitatsine, Boko Haram, etc.

Structural formation of the three regions north, east

TABLE I: NIGERIA’S HEADS OF GOVERNMENT FROM (1960-2023)

S/N	Name	State	Zone	Tenure	Duration
1	Sir Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	North East	Oct, 60 - Jan. 66	5years, 4months
2	Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi	Abia	South East	Jan. 66 -Jul. 66	6months
3	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	Plateau	North Central	Jul. 66 – July, 75	9years
4	Gen. Murtala Mohammed	Kano	North West	Jul. 75- Feb., 76	7months
5	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	Ogun	South West	Feb., 75- Oct, 79	3years, 7months
6	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	Sokoto	North West	Oct., 79 – Jan. 84	4Years, 4 Months
7	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	Katsina	North West	Jan., 84 – Aug, 85	1Year, 8 Months
8	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	Niger	North Central	Aug., 85 – Aug; 93	8Years
9	Mr Ernest Shonekan	Ogun	South West	Aug., 93 –Nov., 93	3 Months
10	Gen. Sani Abacha	Kano	North West	Nov., 93 –Jun., 98	4Years, 7 Months
11	Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar	Niger	North Central	Jun., 98 – May, 99	11 Months
12	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	Ogun	South West	May, 99 – May, 07	8 Years
13	Alhaji Umar Yar Adua	Katsina	North West	May, 07 – May, 10	3 Years
14	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	Bayelsa	South South	May, 10 – May, 15	5 Years
15	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	Katsina	North West	May, 15 – May, 23	8 Years
16	President Bola Ahmed Tinubu	Lagos	South West	May 29, 2023 till date	1 Month
			Total	62 Years 8Months	753 Months

Source: Author’s compilation 2023

TABLE II: CUMULATIVE DURATION OF GEOPOLITICAL ZONES BY PERCENTAGE

S/N	ZONE	CUMULATIVE DURATION	PERCENTAGE
1	North West	21 Years 4Months	35.1
2	North Central	17 Years 11Months	28.6
3	South West	11Years 10 Months	19
4	North East	5Years 4 Months	8.5
5	South South	5 Years	8.0
6	South East	6 Months	0.8
	Total	753 Months	100

Source: Author’s compilation 2023

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the Table 1 above, it is discovered that the Northern Zones has dominated the Socio-Political Space of Nigeria. Undoubtedly, Sir Tafawa Balewa from the North East, Bauchi took over the helm of power from

October, 1960 to January, 1966, a total of five years and four months. General Aguiyi Ironsi of Abia (South East) took over through a coup de tat and could only survive for six months, January to July, 1966. General Yakubu Gowon from Plateau (North Central) overthrew him also through a barren of the gun and stabilized for nine years between July, 1966 to July 1975.

Subsequently, General Murtala Mohammed of Kano (North West) ruled seven months from July 1975 to February, 1976. Then, General Olusegun Obasanjo from Ogun (South West) took over as a military man for three years and seven months, February, 1976 to October 1979. Alhaji Shehu Shagari, Sokoto (North West) was duly elected as the second Republic President under the National Republican Convention (NRC), for four years and four months, October, 1979 to January, 1984. He was overthrown in a palace coup by General Muhammadu Buhari, Katsina State (North West) in January, 1984 to August 1985, for a year and eight months.

General Ibrahim Babangida, Niger State (North Central) ruled through decrees from August 1985 to August 1993, a period of eight years and subsequently, stepped aside bringing Mr Ernest Shonekan, Ogun State (South West) as the Interim President of the Interim government for three months, between August to November, 1993. Thereafter, General Sani Abacha from Kano (North West) took over government in a coup and ruled from November 1993 to June 1998, a period of four years and seven months. He died while in office and General Abdusalami Abubakar of Niger State (North Central) was assigned as the most senior reliable Officer to maintain the peace of the country while setting the necessary paraphernalia for the transition of the Nation-State to civilian rule. He transmitted the country to civilian rule in a period of eleven months, January, 1998 to May, 1999 when he handed over power to the President Olusegun Obasanjo of Ogun (South West) who ruled after the successful transition for eight years, May 1999 to May, 2007.

Thereafter, Umaru Musa Yar Adua from Katsina State (North West) won elections and ruled from May 2007 to May 2010, a period of three years where he died in service. His Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Bayelsa State (South South) took over from May 2010 to May 2015, a period of five years. During the 2015 General Elections, General Muhammadu Buhari from Katsina (North West) of the All Progressive Congress won against the People Democratic Party Jonathan who conceded the defeat. According to him, "My Ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian". General Muhammadu Buhari ruled from May 2015 to May, 2023.

In the just concluded 2023 General Elections, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu won and was sworn into office in May, 2023.

It has been found out that the North West has rule the country for over thirty years and two months. The North Central, seventeen years and ten months, while the North East five years and four months, the South South, eight years, South East, six months and South West has ruled for eleven years and nine months.

The Northern Zones, Hausa/Fulani tribe has ruled for 53years and four months while the Southern zones, Yoruba and Igbos have ruled for only twenty years and three months.

Against this backdrop, the Country has experienced Socio-Economic and Political Insecurity. There has been no fairness in power. Some sections are not insecure. People can no longer go about their normal businesses. There are calls for cesation by some sets that have been marginalized because they have only had access to governance for less than a year.

For sustainable development to be achieved in all the ethnic groups that make up the country there is a call for policy suggestions that leadership should make sure that zoning of all political and elected offices should be enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended as well as the constitution of all the parties.

As a matter of Federal Character Principle, all zones from the North and South of the country must be allowed to contest based on the zoning and produce a President. A situation where one zone keeps producing President whether by fair or foul means should not be tolerated. For instance, we just saw the handing over of President Muhammadu Buhari from the North West to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the South West meaning that after a period of four or eight years as the case may be, the particular area to contest whether North Central or North East must be clearly stated so that no two zones is supposed to contest in a particular geopolitical zone.

TABLE III: POLICY SUGGESTION ON PRESIDENTIAL SHIFT TO GEO-POLITICAL ZONES

North West: Produced President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023)	North Central: Presidency moves only to North Central	North East: Presidency moves only to North East from South East, and only North East can contest.
↓	↓	↓
South West: Has Produced Bola Ahmed Tinubu	South East: From North Central moves Only to South East.	South South: Finally, Presidency moves to South South, and only South South can contest; and the cycle begins.
	↗	↗

Source: Author’s compilation 2023

In Table II above, it is quite obvious that the South East geo-political zone have only produced a President for six months in the last 62 years which is why they are calling for cessation of some part of the country. It is obvious that sustainable development cannot thrive in a boisterous environment. Against this background, leadership should make sure that there is a policy framework for a particular geopolitical zone to contest at a time in such a way that no other zone has the right to contest except that zone.

From table III above, we have seen North West produce a President and currently, it is in the South West. It behooves on leadership to enshrine in the constitution that it goes to the North Central only to contest, from there it moves to the South East, back to the North East and then to the South South and the cycle continues, to safeguard the country from any form of instability and disintegration.

CONCLUSION

This work has tried to look at the pluralists nature of the country as well as its democratic effect as a cause of political instability, the work submit that there is need for our leaders to eject political parochialism and undue loyalty to ethnic identity as the cause of instability in Nigeria. Effort should be shifted more on how critical supporting institution should play their roles effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be restructuring of the country as a matter of urgency. Sections of the constitution especially the exclusive lists should be reduced to six.
 - There should be political power sharing of political offices in every regime between four ethnic groups [north, south east and west] from the office of the president, VP, senate president, attorney general and chief justice of the federation, IGP, head of service of the federation etc. should go to different geopolitical groups at different times.
 - There should be complete devolution of the autonomy of the electoral body from the center to the states as is done in other climes.
 - There should be resource control by states.
- The military aided lopsidedness in by political structures should be addressed

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