

Ethnicity, Multi-party Democracy and Development of Nigeria

L.C. Nnamani

Enugu State University of Science and Technology Nigeria

Email: drlcnnamani@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Nigeria's strength, fame and hierarchy depend on her pluralist composition and human/natural endowment. Nevertheless, the reality is that ethnic consciousness, fractionalization, chauvinism and divisive politics have beclouded the intended unity, nationhood, cooperate existence and progressive development. The adoption of multi-party democratic practice tend to deepen and aggravate polarization. Several issues from such polarity include insecurity of lives and property, corruption, tribalism, ethnic and religious crises, violet competition, political instability ecetra. This work used both primary and secondary sources to obtain the data. It also used modernization theory as its theoretical framework. The researcher found that Nigeria's quest for development is a function of many variables like responsible and committed political leadership that would effectively manage and moderate the divisive tendencies such as ethnicity.

Such leadership should place national interest, unity, merit above myopic considerations like parochial ethic and party affiliations.

Keywords: Ethnicity, multi-party, democracy, development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian political system has gone through different phases from the pre-independence era through the period of nationalism until the present Fourth Republic. During the pre-independence years, the nationalists and the founding fathers struggled to ensure that African nations gained their independence. In order to achieve the independence, political parties were formed as platforms and tools for fighting the much needed independence in the continent. In Nigeria, the political parties were formed based on the major regions in the country then. The northern region had the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP); the Western region formed the Action Group (AG) while the Eastern region had National Council of Nigerians and Cameroons (NCNC), which was later named National Council of Nigerian Citizens.

Political parties are the instrument with the responsibilities of aggregating, educating the citizens and presenting candidates during elections. Through aggregating people, political parties ensure national integration in a

democratic setting and that fosters development.

From the First Republic to date ethnicity and multi-party politics have had both positive and negative consequences on Nigeria's political systems.

The nation has witnessed many ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts over the control and management of national resources. There have also been communal clashes, electoral crises ectra.

Many social scientists and students in Africa debate as whether ethnicity and democracy are complementary or opposing concepts, regarding their challenges of democratization and development.

Democracy provides opportunities for different ethnic groups in a nation to compete for political power and participate in governmental affairs and as such, is a positive strategy to ameliorate the challenges of multi-ethnic societies [1]. However, such competition may become unhealthy and violent and lead to conflict which is detrimental to the democratisation and development process [2]: [3] [4], [5] stated that in Nigeria, as in

other ethnically divided societies, studies have shown that multi-party arrangements whether in a presidential or parliamentary system of government are confronted with a lot of crises.

This work contributes to the discourse on ethnicacy and multi-party democracy and development of Nigeria. This is because Nigeria being an ethnically divided nation since independence in 1960 needs to develop more. Put differently, the work looked at how ethnicity has impacted on democracy and development.

This study employed both primary (use of questionnaire, interview and observations) and secondary (textbooks, journals, magazines, newspaper, online materials) sources of data.

Ethnicity

[6] stated that ethnicity is a community of people who believe that they possess a common identity based on issues of origin, kinship ties, historical experiences, traditions and culture, and perhaps shares a common language. [7] stated that a plural society is one which has multiple groups defined ethnically, racially, religiously, culturally or by other parameters. Nigeria is a plural society because it is composed of ethnically diverse communities. The terms - ethnic pluralism, ethnicity, ethnic diversity and ethnicism are commonly used interchangeably to countries composed of multi ethnic groups.

Theoretical Framework

This work used the 'Modernization Theory' in explaining ethnicity. It sees integration among people as societies grow and experience modernization. Modernization theorists, attest that individuals would be willing to shift their loyalties and affiliations away from their parochial ethnic identities to that of a large society [8]. Therefore the state is regarded as a "confluence of individuals who place it above the particular interests. Multiple-ethnic nations are often prone to conflictual and competitive relationships as different groups struggle

Objectives

There are various literature on issues of ethnicacy, democracy and development in Nigeria as different authors present differing arguments on ethnic politics and lack of democracy as critical issues that impede Nigeria development. This researcher contributes to such discourse and argue that Nigeria development is dependent on ability of our political leaders not only to manage the challenges posed by ethnicity but also to promote genuine democracy and development. Recommendations on factors that could trigger unity and development in Nigeria were presented.

METHODOLOGY

to control political power and economic resources of the state and this constitute an impediment to political and socio-economic development [5]: [6]. It is the role of the state to act as neutral force in ensuring that individuals' loyalty to their sub national units does not constitute a threat to the performance of their civic responsibilities and hence affect civic politics [5]. National integration, unity and development however depends on how the state ensures equity and fairness in distributing national resources and the ability of its leadership to effectively engage with civil society and accommodate various interests [3].

Democracy

Democracy is a broad concept used generally to refer to particular ways in which relations are organized between those who govern and those who are being governed [1]: [2]. According to [3] stated:

Democracy as ideology is the philosophy of governance which set a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizen, the rule of law, the right to property, the flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. Democracy as politics is concerned with institutions and process of governance. These institutions and the

procedure of governance that they elicit tend to foster consensus whilst simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for the ideology of democracy.

Democratic regime is "government of the people, by the people (or elected representative of the people) and for the people" (quoting Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of popular governance). Democracy is a system of governance that promotes majority rule; one in which citizens determine, through elections, who become their leaders. The liberal democracy shows emphasis on social justice, political liberties and popular or public participation in governmental affairs [4] Liberal democracy also emphasizes the rule of law, individual rights and freedoms; constitutional checks and balances; transparency and accountability of political officials. [6], while emphasizing that in a liberal democracy model individual differences on religious, ethnic or geographical bases are overlooked. It has been noted that the inclusive democracy protects minority rights better and ensure participation of all citizens.

Democracy is a system of government that exists in line with the dictates of the social contract between state and society.

Political Party

The roles of political parties are similar or the same in both developed and developing countries. Political parties performance and the way they compete for control of political power are determined by political, social and economic factors. In Africa socio-economic factors like poverty and cultural factors affect the functioning of political parties in contrast with what obtains in the developed countries of the West.

Most political parties in African nations trace their origin/pattern of issues to those which were formed during the quest for the country's independence. [5] added that the various military interventions in politics at different periods in the history of many African countries had its toll on the effective functioning and sustainability of political parties. Many

African political parties are ethnically based as political elites, organize and aggregate under different groups, compete for political power and control of national resources of the state, without much interest in the welfare of their people. Such competitions have led to ethnic conflicts in various parts of the continent. These issues have severely affected the quest for national integration, unity, democratisation and development.

The resultant effects of ethnically based party politics, military incursion in politics and other socio-economic and cultural factors are that many. African political parties including those in Nigeria, score low in the performance of their expected roles especially in development activities.

Sermiento-Mirwaldth stated that a political party should possess the following ingredients:

- a. An organization: An entity with legal personality (that is, can sue and be sued) established for the purpose of achieving a combination of set goals. It is meant to conduct the business of winning elections and control of government. It may also be construed under the system theory, in which political party as an organization will be seen as a compendium of hierarchical unit(s) of structure with horizontal (co-ordinate) and vertical (super-ordinate) jurisdictions
- b. Agreeable people: A political party is an organization of persons who are more or less agreed on certain principles of governance especially on some important matters of public policy.
- c. Aim: A party's chief aim, notwithstanding how it is clothed or the strategy utilised, is to control the reins of government. This is done by passing through a disciplined procedure of scrupulous internal democratic practices, organized party primaries or selection process, thorough education of electorates

- on party manifestoes, and eventually campaigning vigorously for election.
- d. Public Policy: Political party is a body whose members make concerted efforts to implement their policies and programmes by constitutional means.
 - e. Effective governance machinery: The idea is that political parties have basic similarities in that they parade arrays of qualified and eligible personalities capable of controlling and running the machinery of government, have strategies in place to secure a stable base of mass popular support, and create internal mechanisms for controlling funding, information and nominations for public acceptance
 - f. Function: Every party has functional means with which it mobilize ordinary citizens, either to vote or to achieve some other political goal, recruit fresh leaders and socialize older ones in the art of political relevance and expediency, even in one-party states and provide a long-lasting sense of party identification.
 - g. Public Interest: Parties' programmes are formulated in such a way as to propagate the aggregative interests of a good number of citizens. It is objectionable for a party to articulate her rule with a view to serving parochial interest(s) or of a section of a state no matter how big. Suffice to add that this is a feature observed more in breach in many developing countries where there are sectional parties or religious parties.
 - h. Democratic principles: A party must inculcate the observance of the tenets of rule of law and strive to propagate only constitutional means of securing victory in elections and work within the framework of the constitution and electoral statutes. To function as acceptable political party in a

democratic state, a party must eschew sharp practices or election manhandling, the use of force or revolutionary means, and undue advantages over other political parties.

[7] stated that the advantage often found in multi-party system are:

1. There is perceived safety and security of having to choose from a good number of parties, broadening not only the choice but also representation of political interest. While other party system restrict choice, the existence of many parties give the electorates a wider cleavage to determine how their ideological beliefs can be abundantly represented.
2. Multi-partism is best suited for countries with high diversity like Nigeria to evolve representative democracy.

Nevertheless, he added that

Multi-party system often operates within the following demerits:

1. Multiparty systems lead to incurrent policy atmosphere due to frequent change in ruling party. Every party that gets to power would probably start afresh it tries to implement its agenda.
2. The presence of many parties could result in the formation of coalition government and its accompanied lack of trust and silent but often critical acrimony within the government in power.
3. Proliferation of political parties, some of which may never win any election but which exist for ego boosting sake, do sap the resources of the nation.

Wasteful spending on to many political parties. In Nigeria and many other multi-party states, countless parties are formed with constitutional compliances for the sole purpose of receiving the statutory annual subvention from the government. Much of these funds are utilized for the maintenance of party offices rather than boosting the electoral values of the parties.

Ethnicity, Nigeria Politics and Development

Nigeria is composed of ethnically diverse groups of people with different historical background, origin, culture and tradition. With a population of over 180 million and 300 ethnic groups, it has in the North, the Hausa/Fulani which represents the largest ethnic group, there Igbos represent the largest ethnic group in the East and the Yorubas the largest ethnic group in the west.

Since Nigeria attained independence in 1960, several issues experienced in the country include state creation; revenue allocation; lack of trust among constituent units; election rigging, restiveness/militancy as witnessed in the Niger Delta, ethno-religious violence, inter-ethnic violence, inability of some ethnic groups to attain certain desired political offices etc. The fact is that while some minority groups cry of marginalization in accessing political power; some clamoring to be independent while the major groups are afraid of losing political, economic and cultural dominance and would fight to sustain such dominance [8]. This shows that the different groups in Nigeria, in one way or the other, are less concerned with the national questions/ issues.

Nigerian leaderships have been weak in performing as an impartial actor in

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hereby recommended that the government of Nigeria should evolve means of performing above the interest of any ethnic group and strive to place the interest of the entire country first, in order to achieve the needed development. These include the following

- (a) The true principle of real federalism must be adhered to, so that, each ethnic nationality should be duly given its recognition as a unit of the grouping and no federating unit should be too powerful to dominate others. Political power should be shared satisfactorily among the component ethno-cultural communities, and resources for development to be

protecting the interests of its diverse population; ensuring equitable distribution of national resources; promoting national integration and unity, as well as actualizing national development goals. This inability to function as an independent force, standing above society, and effectively neutralising competing interests in the nation, creates a yawning gap which is the major challenge. Ethnicity has been found to be the most powerful force shaping the political and social relations in Nigeria and brings about conflicts and distrust among the groups.

Consequently, the country has witnessed several ethnic conflicts which have threatened its corporate existence despite the strategies employed by successive Nigerian government like: adoption the federal system of government, state creation and creation of local governments at various period in Nigeria history, promotion of democratic norms and values etc. Furthermore, multi-party democracy which has been adopted in Nigeria at different periods in its history has fuelled the political challenges of the country's democratic experiments especially the fourth republic which is over two decades have not translated into its political development and improved standard of living for the citizenry.

distributed equitably. An example is the rotation of the office of the President of Nigeria among the six geo-political zones.

- (b) The Nigeria government should prioritise the effective implementation of policies which address the needs and the choices of its citizens like creating employment for the youths, human capital development, reducing poverty and improving the welfare of the people.
- (c) It is using democratic framework and where good governance is promoted that true federalism would be enhanced. The government should be willing and

committed to consolidating democratic rules and norms.

- (d) Two party system should be experimented upon as it has

worked well in many developed nations

REFERENCES

1. Jiboku J.O. and Jiboku P.A. (2018) Ethnicity and Multi-party Democracy: The Nigerian Experience *Journal of Social Sciences* 55 (1-3).
2. Obasanjo O, Mabogmijc A 1992. *Elements of Democracy*. Abeokula: African Leadership Forum Publications. Obi C 2001. The Changing Forms of Identity Politics
3. Omitola B 2003. Intra party and inter party crises in Nigerian politics: Implications for the sustainability of the Fourth Republic. *International Review of Politics and Development*, 1(1): 143-152.
4. Omodia SM 2009. Political party elections and democratic survival in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3(3): 35-42.
5. Omoiola JS 2009. Nigerian political parties and political ideology. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 1(3): 612-634.
6. Osaghae E 1995. Managing multiple minority problems in a divided society: The Nigerian experience. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33 (1): 1-24.
7. Otite O. 1990 *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Shaneson, CI Ltd.
8. Young C 1994. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.