

ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION: A REVIEW OF NIGERIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE, 1966-2023

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Abstract

The absence of true democracy has been a reoccurrence issue in Nigeria and this has disintegrated her national unity as a nation and left her politically unstable. Ethnic identity and sectorial cleavage of political power have schism Nigeria political structure. The design of the study was a descriptive survey. The study was carried out in Igboeze South local government of Enugu State. The population of the study was 100 participants which comprises among the party leaders and members, traditional rulers, political aspirants and eligible voters within these communities. Fifteen items questionnaire was constructed to elicit information from the respondents on a 5 point rating scale. A multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was employed in the data analysis. The result showed that ethnicity has a significant impact on national disintegration amongs ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.03$, $P < .05$), among others. The paper recommends, restructuring of the values and ethnos that govern Nigeria national identity, inclusive governance and true federalism thereby undo the colonist imperialist structure which has been the backbone of ethnocentrism in Nigeria political sphere.

Key words: Ethnicity, National disintegration, Democracy, Political structure

Introduction

Historically, Nigeria as a nation has existed as nation-state before the amalgamation in 1914 by Lord Fredrick Lugard the governor-general of Nigeria then. The nation-state had several ethnic nationalities which made up its region. From time immemorial, even before the advent of colonial masters, ethnic identity defined the scope of political intercourse among the heterogeneous societies in Nigeria prior to the amalgamation (Ebegbulem, 2017). However, the amalgamation of these nation-states, which are structure culturally and ethnical different, breeds the emergent of regionalism that precipitates ethnic consciousness among these different groups, coupled with the interest of the colonial master towards preference of one group against the other for easy administration (Nnoli 1980).

One may put forward, that regional disintegration in Nigeria, as result of the unwanted marriage of the amalgamation by the colonial master which created rivalry and unequal

political representation, unfair structures in the affairs of the national interest that even exist till date. Thus, this event created a monster of ethnic loyalty which antagonize collective desires for unity and development as manifested in the form of ethnicity, tribalism, politics of ethnocentrism, civil strives, corruption etc. The outcome of these false marriage by Lord Lugard, created a uniformed nation without unity among its regions and instead of integrating the people of Nigeria, it breeds ethnic loyalty and preference among the peoples of Nigeria (The Nation, 2023 p.53).

The absence of national unity metamorphosed ethnic ideology into competitiveness. This further created rivalry, nepotism and ethnic divide among Nigeria populace. This would be an act of political folly for Nigerians to disregard the dynamics of majority–minority ethnic conflicts in their respective states. Kwasua(2013 p.67), posits that Nigeria as "a nation held hostage to preventable events of tragic nature and at the front burner repeatedly are questions we have refused to face squarely: Who we are, where we belong, what we represent, what does Nigeria mean to us, do we want to remain one, and how"? Nigeria as a multi-cultural society has been faced with ethnical cleavages in all facet of its region and this has hindered peaceful integration of its multiple regions into nationhood. Mendie (2015 p.73), was of this view when he stated that “multiculturalism is overtly and covertly sustained by strong charges of the several coexisting ethnic systems of symbols”. Interpreting Mendie's position, one will rightly say that ethnic identity and cleavage has been the fabrics of socio-political and economic indices of Nigerians. This is because average citizens of Nigerian will rightly choose to be identified by its ethnic cleavage than the entity called Nigeria, thereby the loyalty to the state or nation has been transferred to its ethnic cleavage. This ethnic loyalty increased the in-group and out-group consciousness. Therefore, creating social distance between groups in the country. Thus this work was set to propose a solution to the menace of ethnicity and national disintegration which has derailed dividends of true democracy in the political structure of Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this paper was to evaluate national disintegration in Nigeria from 1966 to 2023 and identify possible obstacles impeding on smooth integration among its region politically. Specifically, the paper was set out to:

- (a) Examine the extent ethnicity has impacted on national integration of Nigerians.
- (b) To ascertain relationship between ethnic identity and political structure that has affected the brotherly-hood of Nigerians as a nation with a view to suggesting the way forward.

Theoretical Framework

To understand this study effectively, relative deprivation theory was adopted for analysis of the work. The theory was attributed to Garry Runciman and Ted R. Gurr, (1970) in their seminal work on social inequality and social justice in a multicultural diverse nation respectively. Relative deprivation theory stems to explain the subjective dissatisfaction caused by one person's relative position to the situation or position of another. That is, if

the view that where expectation does not meet attainment in comparison with other sections of the society, the general tendency was for the aggrieved people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions. Argument of this theory suggests that the greater the discrepancy between what was sought and what is attainable, the greater the chances that anger and violence will result. More so, Gur (1970) argues that relative deprivation was a necessary condition for violence and defined it as a perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities. Invariably, value expectations are benefits, social amenities, goods, services and conditions of life to which people believe they have rightfully and lawfully entitled while value capabilities are general wellbeing, opportunities, cares, goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining and maintaining, if given the same equal social means available in the society.

In sequence of this argument, relative deprivation theory correlates within the context of ethnicity and national disintegration of the Nigeria nation. The colonial administrations and the amalgamation of 1914 brought a divisive colonial structure within a multicultural society and these ethnic tripartite divisions of Nigeria reinforce ethnic tensions between these unequally developed groups. The colonial division of Nigeria that reinforced ethnic groups raises ethno-political consciousness, and the development of ethnic/regional political parties which prevented the rise and success of Nigerian nationalism and integration, instead promoting ethnic nationalism as a means to gain political power.

Literature Review:

Ake (1992), Bola (2011) and Dike (2005), argued that nothing is inherently conflictual about ethnic differences but it leads to strife only when they are politicized, and it is elites who politicize ethnicity in their quest for power and political support. The foregoing argument is not out of place. It was the political elites that manipulated ethnicity for their selfish desires. In the words of Momoh (2000 p.89) "ethnicity serves the interest of the ruling class that replaced the departed colonialists, even though it is a colonial creation". The link between ethnicity and politics appears both obvious and automatic in relatively new states with the effect of ethnicity so prevalent and the consequences of their inter-ethnic conflicts so evident and transparent, it is little wonder that it has come to be seen in Nigeria as a serious obstacle to liberal and ideal democracy. Ethnicity was undoubtedly a very powerful weapon for the production of political leaders in Nigeria. Nweke (1995), believed that they were seen and regarded as "small gods" by many ethnic subjects with different myths surrounded and protected these leaders. Ebegbulem (2010) also hypothesized that the higher the status positions of a person, the greater the following: the tendency for that person to internalize responsibility for an approved state of affairs, the tendency to attribute good intentions with respect to his positive actions relevant to the status dimension as justified. Ethnic attribution in Nigeria has direct relationship with status of the person concerned. To an average Yoruba man, whatever the late Awolowo did or said was good, constructive and well intentioned. He was seen and regarded as the father of the Yoruba nation. The same is true of other ethnic groups and their leaders. Each leader was seen by his people "as the founder of peace and good will to their people". Ethnic attribution is often used by most Nigerian politicians for rationalizing failure and frustrating fate and for invasion of political opponents. As most politicians became increasingly successful, ethnic attribution decreases as source of anchor

or explanation of fate.

On the other hand, as these politicians are displaced from the center or in high government positions, they highly attribute their failures to ethnicity. These politicians often rally their subjects and explain failure in terms of ethnic victimization which is often used as instruments for retaliation, hostility, chaos, upheaval and protests. This attribution pattern is dangerous for the country Nigeria as a nation. Most often, governmental stakeholders such as ministers, state commissioners, ambassadors, directors of public companies, heads of parastatals, governors, and political contractors rationalize their failures in this way.

In most cases, religion is attached to ethnicity as a political tool. During the presidential election in April 2011, the Muslim North rallied round Retired General Muhammad Buhari as a consensus candidate while the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan garnered support from the Christian faithful who constitute the major population Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups. Before the result of the said election was announced which was to be in favour of Goodluck Jonathan, the Northern youths in Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri and Bauchi started rioting, burning of churches and killing innocent Christians as a way of venting their anger against the election victory of Goodluck Jonathan.

Historical Incidence of Ethnicity in Nigeria

From the amalgamation of 1914, Nigeria has gone through ethnic and national unrest which has affected her national unity and integration of its region as a nation.

Among this national unrest are:

- The military coups of 1966 and the civil war of 1967
- Formation of ethnic-based political party systems
- Sectorial power cleavage.

The Military Coups of 1966 and Civil War of 1967

The 1966 Nigeria coup d'état began on 15 January, when rebellious Nigerian soldiers led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Emmanuel Ifeajuna killed 22 people including the prime minister of Nigeria, many senior politicians, many senior Army officers and officials on protective duty which are mostly non-Igbo ethnic origin. The coup plotters attacked also some Northern and Southern cities (Kaduna, Ibadan and Lagos), while blockading the Niger and Benue River within a two-day span of time before the coup plotters were subdued by Nigeria soldiers. The Major General Officer commanding the Nigeria Army, Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi was compelled to take control of the government of the country as the Head of States and his ascendancy to the power was deemed a conspiracy by the coup plotters who were mainly Igbo officers, to pave way for Aguiyi-Ironsi to become Head of States.

Ethnic tensions increased after the military coup of January 1966. The coup was seen by the Northerners as an attempt by the Igbo to dominate the country. This led to a counter coup led by the Northerners few months later (July 28, 1966) which was masterminded by Lt. Colonel Murtala Muhammed and many Northern military officers in reaction of the killings of Northerners politicians and Officers by the purported killings of the 15th January 1966 coup that was referred as the Southern plotted coup. In the counter coup, Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo

Major General who was the then Head of States was killed and widespread killings were unleashed against the Igbos in the Northern part of the country. Frightened by the counter coup and the onslaught against Igbos in the Northern regions Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, an officer commanding the Eastern region (Igbo ethnic extraction) declared its independence as the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 to avoid being marginalized within the Nigerian states. The Nigerian government, under the leadership of Lt Colonel Yakubu Gowon launched a "police action" to recapture the secessionist region as it sees Ojukwu's action as a rebellion and promised to stop it. By this, "fighting broke out between federal military forces and the Biafran recruited forces on July 6, 1967, with Gowon ordering police action in a war which he and other top federal military officers believed would not last long. (Osaghae, 2002).

Formation of Ethnic-Based Political Party Systems

Before and after the civil war of 1967, political party formation in Nigeria has followed the lines of ethnic cleavages as argued by Falola and Heaton, (2008 p.368) as follows: "political parties can be traced to the Clifford constitution of 1922 that introduced the legislative council alongside the elective principles in Lagos and Calabar". By this elective principle, Clifford constitution introduced unequal representation which negates the true norms and principles of democratic governance. The Clifford constitution of 1922, in its totality can be ascribed as a self-imposed enactment that undermines the principle of proportional representation, as it only allocated one unofficial seat to Calabar and three to Lagos colony. This unequal representation introduced by Clifford constitution raised the tradition of under-representation and exclusive politics in Nigeria political conundrum, thereby political ideology and principles in Nigeria are basically an expression of ethno-regional associations which consequently influenced the character of the political parties that emerged subsequently as cited by Liebowitz and Ibrahim (2013).

Before the Nigerian civil war, most politicians and political parties were formed on ethnic basis, e.g. the defunct National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) with its taproot in the then Eastern Region led by late Chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, The Action Group with its stronghold in the then Western Region led by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Nigerian People's Congress (NPC) with its stronghold in the then Northern Region led by late Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. These leaders used intensive ethnic propaganda coupled with intimidation to win fierce loyalty and support from followers. By way of ethnic pressure and consciousness, politicians ganged along ethnic cleavages to gain recognitions thereby fanning ethnic differences and identity to the detriment of nationhood.

From the common view, ethnicity has played a vital role in the nation's democratic rule from the first republic till the third and fourth electoral government and it is rearing its ugly head through elite manipulations as argued by Ugwu and Chukwuemeka, (2000). The Nigeria structure of leadership and membership of the parties equally manifests ethnic affiliations. More so, in the present dispensation the three major reigning political parties have their linings towed in ethnic leverages. These political parties are: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC), "the ruling party" and All Progressives Grand Alliance

(APGA). The All Progressives Congress party of Nigeria is predominantly the party of the western and northern Nigeria. The People's Democratic Party were apparently predominated by the south-south and south west region with the flame of some northern region while All Progressives Grand Alliance, as a party is purely for the south-east region of Nigeria, namely Imo, Anambra and Abia States has been a footage for the APGA dominated region which makes it impossible for other political parties to win elections in these States. Therefore, aftermath of this paradigm is party cross-carpeting which paves way for other parties to steal political mandate of their opponents that dominates such regions. This situation remained menace till 2023 general elections where ethnicity, religion and high rate of corruptive tendencies overturn Nigerian democracy unborn. The political alignments remained what Awolowo said: East for the Easterners, North for the Northerners and West for the Westerners, (Nigerian Tribune, 2009 p.18). Ethnicity has been a character threat at democracy in Nigeria.

Sectorial Power Cleavage

The lack of ideological political parties in Nigeria (Bola, 2011) provides a fertile ground for political homongers and party flatterers to have field days as they massage the ego of unprincipled appointees even in the face of unpopular decisions and policies. For instance, in Kogi State 2011 governorship election, such sycophant displayed between political aspirants and relish schism among them to enhance their enrichment. That is, there were claims that the outgoing governor, Ibrahim Idris had the intention of making his son-in-law his successor by undermining the wish of the majority of PDP members in the state. Also in Imo State 2019 governorship election, the outgoing governor, Rochas Okorochoa employed state power in making his son-in-law his successor without minding what the citizens felt about him or think. When people get disenchanted by the infamous acts of the incumbent(s), the corollary of it is that people become estranged from the polity given that their views and interests do not count. As such, there would be a decline in participation in political processes thereby the true internal democratic values which propels the essence of citizen participation has been boycotted. When incumbents turn Octopus and dominate all affairs of the party and/or government, some aggrieved party members “cross-carpet” to other political parties as means of check and balances to the tyranny leadership of the incumbent. No wonder, Ebegbulem (2017), identify this tyrant cleavage of political power as an abuse of democratic development which had absurd consequence on political spectrum of Nigeria. More so, the annulled 12 June 1993 elections in Nigeria by Babangida were based on ethnicity. However, when the election was annulled, ethnicity set in as Southerners protested over the annulment which they saw as designed to scheme a Southerner (M.K.O. Abiola) out from becoming the president of Nigeria.

Methodology

The population of this study was drawn from Igboeze South local government area of Enugu State with an estimated population figure at about 211,500 according to 2022 projection population of Bureau of statistics of Nigerian town and city. A total sample of 100 participants from communities in the chosen towns, villages and regions of the local government area which had participated in electoral process were selected and this

comprises traditional leaders, political leaders and office holders, traders, civil servant and eligible voters within the communities of the study. This number provides statistical valid data for meeting the study objectives. Moreover, it is a number that can be sustained with the time, material and human resources at the disposal of the researcher.

The instrument used for the study was questionnaire developed by the researcher and validated by experts in the field of peace and conflict studies, from University of Nigeria Nsukka. It has two domains: domain one measures national unity in Nigeria. It has six questions which are structured to obtain the respondents opinion on the extent ethnicity has impacted on national integration of Nigerians and domain two measures the relationship of ethnic consciousness and political structures towards national integration among Nigeria populace. It has nine structured questions.

Design and Statistics

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. A multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was employed in the data analysis.

Results

Table 1. Regression Table showing the model summary, Beta (β) coefficient and significant levels on the relationship between ethnicity and national disintegration among Nigerians.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta β	T	R	R ²	AR ²
Ethnicity	.11	.05	.20	2.03*	.20	.04	.03

Dependent variable: National integration

Regression Table above shows that ethnicity has a significant impact on national disintegration among Nigerians ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.03$, $P < .05$). Meanwhile the model summary indicates that the strength of relationship between ethnicity and national disintegration, which indicates that ethnicity contributes about only 3% variance on national disintegration among Nigerian

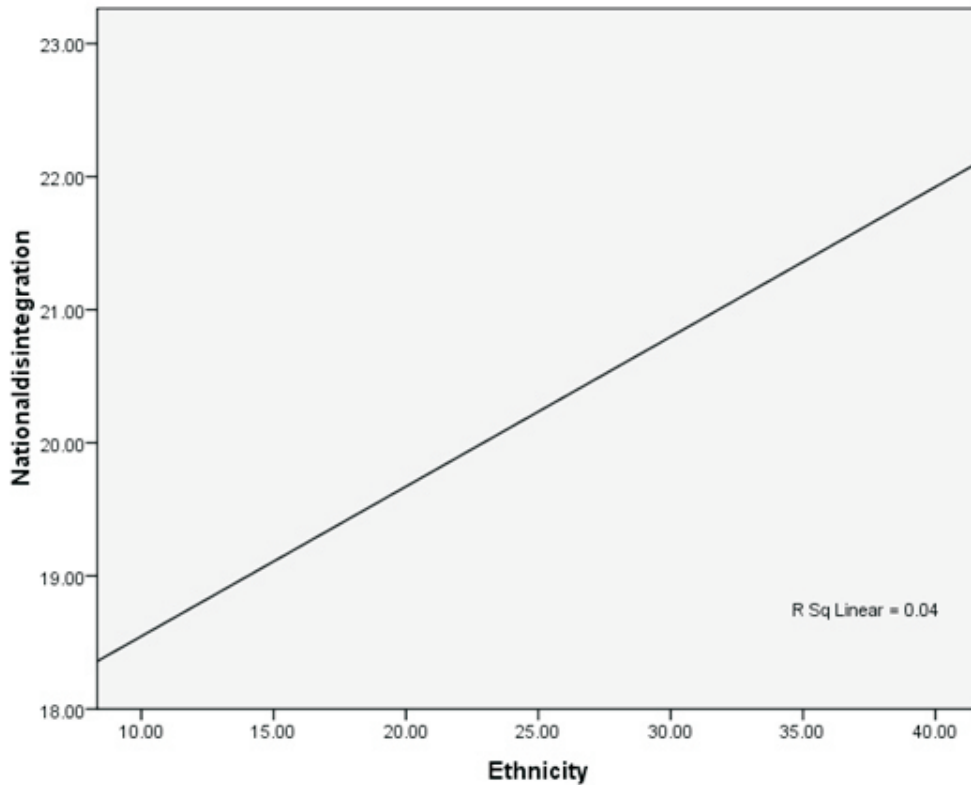


Fig 1. Role of ethnicity on national integration among Nigerians

Figure 1 show the role of ethnicity on national disintegration among Nigerians. The graph indicates a positive interaction plot. It shows that the more ethnic conscious Nigerians are the more the nation disintegrate as a result of disunity among its political sphere thereby true democratic ethnos and values could not be transited to the general polity.

Discussion

The results of regression shows that ethnicity has a significant impact on national integration among Nigerians ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.03$, $P < .05$). This suggests that ethnicity was not necessarily the sole problem of Nigeria's disintegration but the way Nigerians chose to abuse their ethnic differences for various selfish interests. This is in line with the argument of Nnoli (1980), which states that ethnicity means "interaction among members of many diverse groups". This suggests that ethnicity as a social phenomenon intrinsically has nothing wrong with it but the attitudes towards ethnicity creates an avenue for healthy or unhealthy competitions in a multi-ethnic nation, which in-turn

yields to economic development or underdevelopment, for instance the period after Nigeria independence saw a healthy competition between major ethnic groups in Nigeria on agricultural products, south and west led in cocoa production, northern region led on groundnut and cereals while palm products and roots crops dominated the economy of the south-east which in-turn increased the nation gross domestic products.

More so, as it relates to the objectives of this study, it found that ethnic consciousness has nothing wrong in it but the attitudes of Nigerians towards political issues, undermines basic values and ethos of democratic processes. Therefore, time and again the outcome of elections shrinks the fundamental democratic dividends to the citizens. This makes political structures and politics in Nigeria an egoistic mask of ethnic and religious praxis that undermines national integration and unity.

In furtherance to the second objective of the study, it was found that Nigerian political structure, since independence has towed the line of ethnic cleavages which precipitated to ethnic based party or political formation, with utmost intention and interest of sectorial cleavage of political powers and this has undermined fairness in the overall good in democratic integration of regions in Nigeria. As a result of this, agitations for ethnic identity and resource control among the minority enclave groups catapult enormous desire of in-group and out-group stereotypic relationship among regional enclaves. This conformed with the findings of Ebegbulem (2011: p.247), which states, "As a result of ethnic and regional tensions resulting from uneven socio-economic development in the North, East and West, ethnic consciousness influenced the formation of regional political parties and was and still is the main deterrent to Nigerian unity".

In summary, Nigeria as a multicultural nation has been faced with ethnic loyalty and cleavage in all facet of its region. This has streamlined the formation and development of political structures and synergies within its geographical regions. Anticipating this from the view point of Dauda and Avidime, (2007), they argued that multiculturalism is overtly and covertly sustained by strong charges of the several coexisting ethnic systems of symbols. Buttressing more on this position, one will rightly say that ethnic identity and cleavage has been the indices of Nigerian socio-political fabrics. Because an average citizen of Nigeria will rightly choose to be identified by its ethnic cleavage than the entity called Nigeria. This shifts national political loyalty of the state or nation to ethnic identity, consciousness and interest. As ethnic loyalty increases, the in-group and out-group consciousness, breeds an internalized social distances between geo-political regions of Nigeria which negatively affects the political conundrums among ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Recommendations

If, from an instrumental perspective of ethnicity, their goal of nationalism is to achieve some political ends within the state, then Nigeria should develop an effective state policy which will encourage and enable every ethnic group to participate equally in political arena. According to Sandra (2003), an effective state is one that is able to encourage

nationalist settlement within its population. this sentence suggests that the national interest should not be geared towards ethnic sentiments rather state should be able to manipulate ethnic identities in its own interest to combat unhealthy rifts and ethnic differences that exist among communities in Nigeria. Moreover, the education system should enshrine in the school curriculum a formal course of study on the diversity of culture, religion and identity differences among the various peoples of Nigeria, this will help to streamline Nigeria's socio-political, economic and religious ideological differences and undo our bottled ethnocentric ideology of our ethnic preference and identity.

Conclusion

Any nation that lacks unity may find it difficult to function maximally as a nation. The structural conflicts that exist in Nigeria political structure is a detriment to the peaceful co-existence of Nigerians as a state. In the words of Alemika, (2011 p.213) “violence, particularly political violence, represents a disturbance movement to the political equilibrium and peaceful co-existence of the citizen”. In line with Alemika's position, it was found that, these challenges are not unique to a particular geo-political zone in Nigeria but it cuts across the general polity of the Nigeria-nation thereby impacting negatively to the national interest of the citizens' well-being and undermined political development of Nigerian states within its regions.

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