

HOW ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE THREATENS DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is a phenomenon used by the colonial masters the British, as a divide and conquers tactics for their administrative conveniences which later becomes a weapon of destruction by the Nigerian political actors in their bid to acquire economic and political power in order to sustain personal interest. This article explores the theoretical perspective on ethnicity and highlight on the concept of political violence with Lijphart's convocational democracy models, in addition, the nature of ethno-political identities in Nigeria are discussed, the article therefore argues that the factors of ethno-political disparities in Nigeria causes the risen incident of violence and threaten its nascent democracy, because ethnicity in Nigeria is viewed as an element of acquiring wealth and power struggle.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Political violence, Nigeria, Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has witnessed the transition from the military regime for a quite long time to a democratic system of government since the year 1999, Nigeria failed to resolve its ethno-religious and political violence which contributed to the weakening of democratic governance and national integration. As a multi-ethnic nation, with diverse religious and cultural background the political system is expected to cope with and control both human and natural resources effectively, but in contrast this diversity becomes the source of ethno-religious and political violence. The issue of ethno-religious violence have tended to occur constantly in Nigeria since during the period of fourth republic 1999 where organized ethnically based actions with their ethnic and regional agenda escalate into series of violent conflict (Edlyne 2002: 15-18). Studying ethnicity as a political characteristic one has to consider the following questions: Does the concept of ethnicity be regarded as a means for the political actors to depend their political interest? Why then any political struggle in Nigeria is often misinterpreted as an ethnic or religious struggle? Is there any empirical findings outline a relationship between the social construction of ethnic identities and the probability of ethnic violence?

This study argue that, the main causes of violence are more of social and political characteristics simply because, multy-religious divided societies are more prone to conflict escalation than countries where people have conflicting demand for natural resources with understanding among the diverse interest groups. Why? Because people who tend to act with religious identity could be found very difficult to resolve their differences example Nigeria, which has intra religious sect and denominations in both Islam and Christianity. That is why Haralambos (2006) proposed that, people had a "primordial" attachment to either their territory or religion. He also expressed

that this attachment includes a strong and emotional ties which emanate from socialization and a basic sociocultural belief for the purpose of identity and belonging.

ETHNICITY

The establishment of ethno-regionalism had a significant impact in Nigerian political arena. Theoretically, Ake (2000) content that, even the formations of political parties, their manifestos, system of leadership and campaign strategies were originated from ethnic and geographical dimensions. An ethnic nationality refers to people who agree to share a common language, their cultural ideology and self identity.

While Alulo (2003) observed that since the beginning of democratic system of government during the first republic Nigerian political parties were forms into regional position supporting the three major ethnic groups the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. In similar vein, the third republic of Nigerian democracy follows the same train. Furthermore, the model indicates clearly that Nigerians are more loyal to their ethnic background than their state.

The phenomenon of ethnicity becomes the most essential aspect of national identity in Nigerian politics, because people are more prone to their identity than being a Nigerian (Suberu and Osaghae 2005).

Lewis and Bratton (2000) observed that, majority of Nigerians in their survey prepare to be label by their ethnic background. However, “Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kinship, traditional entity than the class solidarities of the workplace”. They also opined that what is more, “religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class identities” as evidenced in the fact that “whereas those who identify with religious and ethnic communities are almost universally proud of their group identities...those who see themselves as members of a social class are somewhat more equivocal about their pride”. Suberu and Osaghae (2005) concludes that looking at the historical antecedent of Nigeria and the effect of colonialism the challenges is not a point of surprise but to adhere into unity in diversity.

DEMOCRACY

Democracy as an ideology can be viewed as a kind of philosophical phenomenon of the system of government that sets a high premium on the essential right of the people, law and order, right of representation and many more deserving conditions. Sartori (1987:34), contend that, democracy is applicable when the relationships between the governed and government are cordial by the principles of good service delivery to the people and not the people at the service to the nation. For Sithole (1994) democracy is a system of government where the power to control and authority in a state is assigned to those people elected to represent the entire society through an electoral process within an approved tenure ship. (p.153) Government is based on the consent of the governed. In democratic society, people are sovereign, that is, they are the highest form of political authority. Political power is authorised by majority of people to the leaders of government, this power is not a permanent position, and it is only a regime of tenure ship. Politics is a game of majority therefore no any policy or laws will be enacted without the endorsement of majority parliamentary members. On the other hand the rights of minority's members in the house are protected at all level. For Gilley and Platter the people are free to criticize their elected leaders and representatives, and to observe how they conduct the business

of government. Elected representatives at the national and local levels are expected to listen to the people and respond to their needs and suggestions (Gilley, 2009; Plattner, 2010).

Additionally, in any democratic dispensation, the governed has right to be involved concerning policies affecting their lives, to make an observation or reservation from the side of leaders elect, and to contribute their own opinions and political interests. Conducting elections is one of the important aspects of democracy which is vested to all members of the society. Voting is just a way of electing leaders from respectful political parties where the citizens has a constitutional right to chose candidate, to either participate in rallies and campaign, elections have been expressed by various scholars as a critical test of the government's commitment to democratic system, (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Ogundiya, 2010).

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The comparative literature on consociational democracy largely revolves around the work of Arend Lijphart, among others. This literature discusses in detail how consociational fail to address the consequences of political elites domination and economic interest in democratic system of government. For Lijphart elite-centered research has emphasized the political determinants of consociational success, it is reasonable to apply it to failure as well. According to consociational theorists especially Lijphart, failure usually arises when the elites including the political actors refuse to accept, understand and compromise with other faction, or if the power-sharing arrangements no longer unite the diverse ethnic group in the society, for instance the failure of power-sharing in Nigeria between the ruling elite of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). The issue of power among the northern part and the southern part of Nigeria has significantly identified the new agenda of Nigeria's modern political direction which can be traced, to the British colonial masters who claim the merger as an administrative convenience in 1914. However from the period of 1999 during the fourth republic regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo there has been a de-facto power sharing agreement, which is called "zoning formula," among the whole region in the country, it means that the seat of the president in Nigeria should be rotate within the geo-political regions after every two tenure ship if voted in to power.

The ruling party (PDP), which has dominated Nigerian politics for more than a decade, nominated late Alh Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, former governor of Katsina state in northern Nigeria, as its presidential candidate, after the demise of late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua' in office in 2010, his vice president, Goodluck Jonathan, held from the southern part of Nigeria, took office to complete the remaining term, which the ruling PDP neglected the power-sharing agreement and nominated him to re-contest for the seat and won election in the April 2011 presidential election.

Various scholars on democratic dispensation shared much with Lijphart's remarked on the strategic selection of political actors. The most important issue in Nigerian context today is how to bring peace, unity and reduce the economic hardship, coupled with ethno-religious and political violence. As scholars identified various models in addressing ethno-religion and political conflict it seem to opine that these models are not working well in the Nigerian geo-political lines. Sequentially, Lijphart identified four models: (a) Power sharing, that support total coalition among the majority and the minority groups. This approach has been proved unrealistic in totality because still the majority are in control of the lucrative post and neglecting the minority as well in Nigeria; in contrast politicization occurs as a result of two overlapping factors: the interests of elites and group competition for scarce resources.(b) Hegemonic control,

the dominating influence by one political group over society is even on the increase in Nigerian society against any opposition group, this model prove to be unrealistic in the political history of Nigeria. For Lijphart's (1984) all multi-ethnic nations are, 'profoundly divided along religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or racial lines. He also opined that, 'virtually made up of separate sub-societies each with its own political party, its own interest group and its own means of communication. In these societies, 'flexibility necessary for a popular democracy would be lacking. Under these situation the ruling majority would be not only undemocratic, but also becomes dangerous, because those marginalized minorities are constantly denied access to power would feel excluded; and would stop showing allegiance to the government causes conflicts to escalate (Lijphart, 1984: 22-23).

In addition, the challenges for sustainable and political development in Nigeria today is nothing more than the issue of government economic policies which reflect the personal interest of political actors and the policy markers.

(c) Federalism, One of the consequences of forced integration, is that the issue of federalism in Nigeria failed to unite people under one single entity because the ethno-political systems of inequality, marginalisation and religious diversity has been the long history of agitation over the 'oppressed', and 'marginalized' groups who are the minorities, these phenomenon leads to fear of minority status, negative remembrances and images, lack of adequate constitutional protections and breakdown in stratification patterns (d) Arbitration, these models consist of an external or internal arbitrator for resolving violence, however considering the phenomenon of diversity in ethno-religious lines in most African countries and Nigeria in particular, therefore this model is not applicable because it does not yield any positive result, (Lemarchand, 1995). Given the complexity of ethno-religious and political nature of Nigeria, it appears that the solution will only emerge through the commitment of competing groups in Nigeria to forge a pact to establish an institution that will not exclude any group (Aborisade and Mundt, 1999). As concludes by Rothschild, in a hegemonial system one ethnic segment dominates the others, wields preponderant coercive power, and arrogates to itself most of the benefits of the state, (Rothschild, 1979, 132-135).

BACKGROUND OF ETHNO-POLITICAL IDENTITIES IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 130 million people consists of multi-ethnic groups, religious diversities, and also a multi-cultural society. Historically, the country can be traced to pre-colonial times when there were "elaborate systems of governance, which varied in scale and complexity depending on their geographical environment, available military technology, economic, spiritual and moral force." (Political Bureau Report, 1987). There were various kingdoms and empires such as the Yoruba kingdom, the Benin kingdom, the Fulani emirate, the Igbo traditional system, the Urhobo gerontocratic system etc. All these changed with the conquest of Lagos in 1861 by the British and the subsequent amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria in 1914. As a result of a lot of struggle, Nigeria gained independence in 1960.

The First Republic headed by Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa ruled for six years as a parliamentary system of government the military regime took over authoritative control through a bloody coup in 1966. This regime experience counter coup among the military leaders spending up to thirteen years with four different heads of state from January 1966 to July 1966 General . J.T. Aguiyi Ironsi, Yakubu Gowon took over from July 1966 to July, 1975; while

General Murtala Ramat Muhammad headed from July, 1975 to February, 1976 and finally General Olusegun Obasanjo, from February, 1976 to October, 1979 and handed over the administration in the year 1979 to elected government. The Second Republic headed by Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari with a Presidential system of Government lasted for only one regime (four years) and the military took over again in 1983. The military ruled for another sixteen years under four military rulers (Gen Muhammadu Buhari: 1984-1985, Ibrahim Babangida: 1985-1993, Sanni Abacha: 1994-1998 and Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar: 1998-1999) and an illegal contraption called Interim National Government headed by Ernest Shonekan. The military handed over power on 29th May, 1999 to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who was a military ruler from 1976-1979. Thus out of the 42 years of post-independence Nigeria, the military has ruled for 29 years. It has been argued that "Nigeria's political misfortunes in the past and the failure to evolve a united, prosperous and just nation can be blamed partly on inadequate and defective structures and institutions as well as on the orientation which British colonialism bequeathed to the young nation at independence and the reluctance of succeeding Nigerian governments to tackle these problems decisively." (Political Bureau Report, 1987).

The development of a primordial phenomenon is based on the perspectives derived from sociological, anthropological, economic, and psychological variables which include regional areas, means of livelihood, kinship, customs or ways of life, religion, language and literature, and organization (Hall, 1979; Rothschild, 1981). Group "markers" initially create an avenue for "collective identity system" which constitutes moral and cultural values and beliefs, common perceptions and interpretations of historical events, and a set of well-defined rituals that reinforce and perpetuate this consciousness (Spicer, 1971).

Ethnicity then can be conceptualized as a set of ascribed and acquired characteristics that derive principally from an individual's birth and upbringing although physical appearance may be relevant it is, in essence, composed of psychological elements that are not only self-perceptions, but also other groups' perceptions.

These elements cannot be shed or significantly altered as easily as purely acquired or adopted characteristics such as occupation. The individual is forever "stigmatized" by his or her group of origin, and if ethnic and political divisions coincide, the switching of ethno political affiliations is a rare occurrence (Connor, 1977; Esman, 1977; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972; Rothschild, 1981). Thus, political divisions based on ethnic identities are, it can be argued, qualitatively different from those based on individuals' socioeconomic characteristics or adopted ideology.

Therefore, so many factors can be cited to support the above argument. Horowitz (1985: 131-135, 223, 345, 565) found, for instance, that ethnic politics typically does not concern "material interest," but symbolic claims, which often are not amenable to compromise. Dutter (1981) and Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) argued that, theoretically and empirically, the idea of electoral process, voting and even the campaign strategies are clearly different in plural societies.

CHALLENGES OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN NIGERIA

The ethnic and religious composition of Nigeria and its manipulation by the political elite has posed a lot of challenges to governance and security in Nigeria. This has been aggravated by the failure of the state to perform its core duties of maintaining law and order, justice and providing social services to the people. For instance, the failure of the state has led to the emergence of ethnic militias in several parts of the country such as the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Baakasi Boys and the emergence of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria.

Meanwhile, it has been documented that the nature of violent conflict in the world is changing in recent times particularly in terms of the causes of the conflict and the form of its expression (Bloomfield and Reilly, 1998). According to Harris and Reilly, one of the most dramatic changes has been the trend away from traditional inter-State conflict (that is, a war between sovereign states) and towards intra- state conflict (that is one which takes place between factions within an existing state) (Harris and Reilly, 1998). They argued that conflicts originating largely within states combines two powerful elements: potent identity based factors, based on differences in race, religion, culture, language and so on with perceived imbalance in the distribution of economic, political and social resources (Harris and Reilly, 1998).

Scholars have written on the politicization and manipulation of ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria (Otite, 1990; Nnoli, 1978). In the past twenty years, there is a resurgence of ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria. It is instructive to note that this resurgence coincided with economic crisis experienced in Nigeria and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Ihonvbere, 1993; Osaghae, 1995 and Egwu, 1998). Shawalu has argued that the sources of conflict in Nigeria include militarism, absence and distortions of democracy, economic problem, collapse of the educational sector, the growing army of almajirai1, security inadequacy, intensification of micro nationalism, absence of justice and equity and weakness of Civil Society groups (Shawalu, 2000). One common thread that runs through the writings of scholars is the argument that most ethnic clashes in Nigeria often have religious dimensions (Okafor, 1997; Alemika, 2000 and Okoye, 2000).

Federalism is a process of power sharing within various segments of people because the method allows for power to be shared among so many regions. Federalism involves the devolution of power by the centre to regional units and a formal distinction between the powers of the central government and the powers of the federal units (Coakley 1993:15). A federal arrangement can increase the confidence of the conflicting ethnic groups and allow them to feel less threatened by other ethnic groups (Lake & Rothschild 1996:61-63).

Federalism in real sense associated with various problems. First, federalism usually refers to the devolution of powers to a specific geographical region and is thus only a solution where the conflicting ethnic groups are territorially based (Welsh 1993:77). There are some forms of non-territorial partitions, such as the cultural councils of Belgium (Cohen 1997:610), but generally federalism is taken to involve devolution to a particular geographical area he argued.

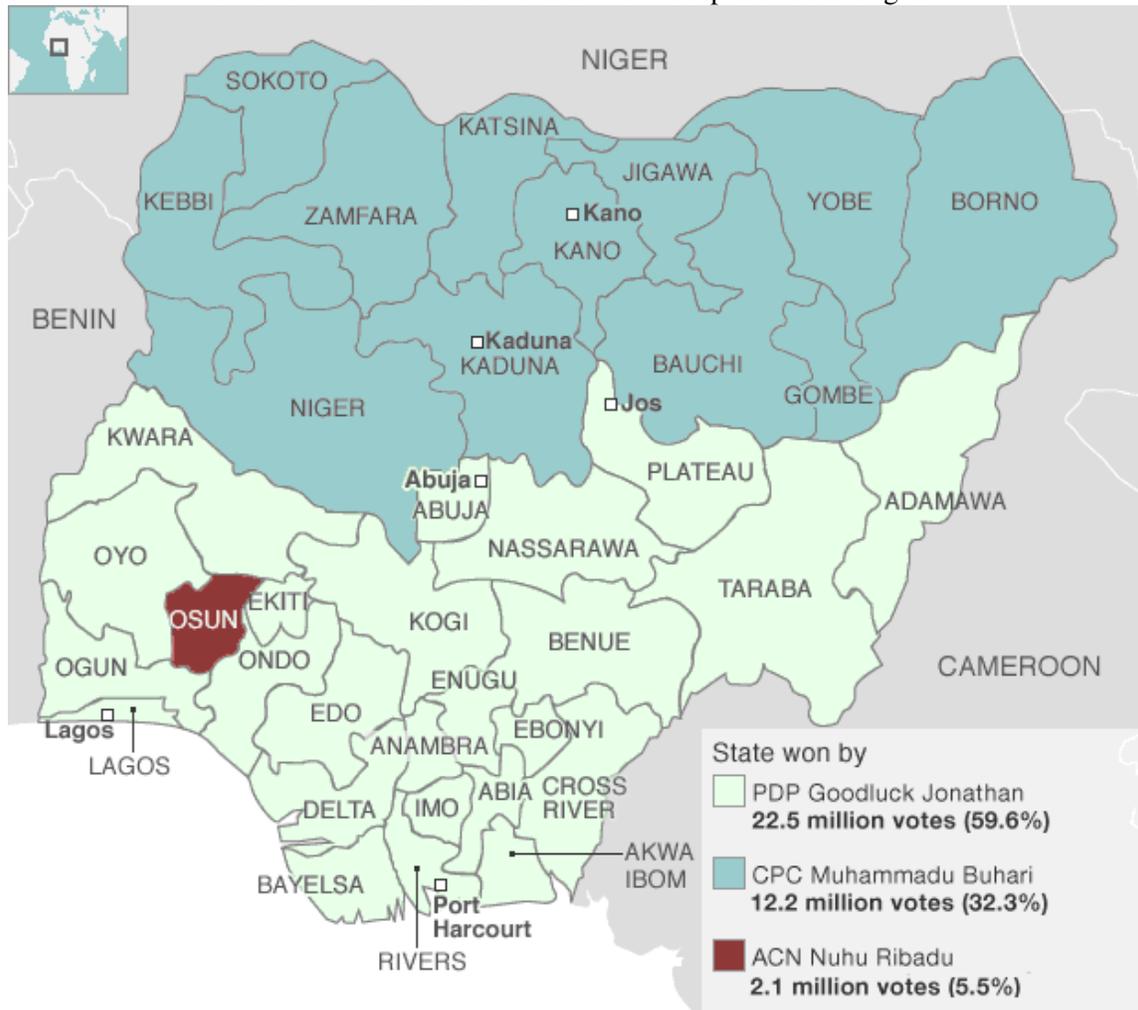
Nigeria today serves as an element of example in African countries that has experience the method of federal system of government. During independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted a federal constitution. The three regions established under British rule were maintained (Syngue 2000:819). Over the years a number of other regions were established, many of them in response to the demands of ethnic groups. By 1996, Nigeria had 36 different federal regions (Osaghae 1998a:294). Many scholars express their empirical support for the use of federalism in the resolution of ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Diamond (1988:324-325) describes the federal system as a “crucial resource” for Nigeria and argues that decentralised power and local autonomy are essential in Nigeria.

THE VIOLENCE OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF APRIL 2011 IN NIGERIA

The April 2011 election received commendations on the conduct and successful atmosphere by the international observers during the national and presidential elections, but very unfortunate the negative reactions follow by violence. The conduct of the election was at least fair than that of

2003 and that of 2007 respectively, several factors were responsible for the escalation of political violence. Kalu expressed that, the factors in Nigerian context has to do with ethnic and religious agitation, reckless manipulation of the electoral process, imposition of candidates by the political elites, poverty, intolerance and injustice. Violence erupt in northern Nigeria immediately after the announcement of the presidential election result which confirmed the victory of ruling party (PDP) headed by Goodluck Jonathan, Muslim majority contested the declaration in which some youth gang react on the April 17, 2011, the day after the presidential election, with supporters of General Buhari, a northern Muslim, alleging that the ruling party had rigged the election in support of President Jonathan, a southern Christian, were such agitation resulted to several killings, and other incidents of politically motivated violence. Within just four days Human Rights Watch, recorded about 800 people were killed and over 65,000 people were found to be temporarily internally displaced. In Kaduna state alone over 500 people were said to be killed in southern part of the state, with over 180 people also killed in the northern part respectively, this destruction includes burning of some villages in the areas between Muslim and Christian, in Bauchi state about ten INEC adhoc staff were killed who are serving as members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).

Table 2: Presidential Election Results of April 2011 in Nigeria



Source: BBC, adapted by CRS 2011.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian state has adopted a faulty strategy in curbing the challenges posed by ethnicity in its democracy, federalist system of government obviously allows for the plurality viewpoints therefore whenever people take up weapons against other group or against the state the good approach of federal system is then consider being defeated. As mention before, the phenomenon of ethnicity were formed in Nigerian society in response to divide and conquer method with marginalisation against the minority ethnic group by the political actors.

The challenges facing the recent elected government is where and how the administration of president Jonathan administration will put in place sustainable democratic atmosphere by branding the obvious elites and the Nigerians populace about peace, unity and economic development.

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