



Ethnicity and Multi-party Democracy: The Nigerian Experience

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ABSTRACT Nigeria's fame and strength derives from its pluralist nature as it has a population of over 140 million and over 370 ethnic groups with diverse cultures, among other features. These portray the beauty of the country to the outside world and successive Nigerian governments have not ceased to preach the nation's desire to forge unity in diversity. However, the reality on ground is that ethnic consciousness, chauvinism, ethnic factionalisation and divisive politics have overshadowed the desire for nationhood to the detriment of the corporate existence of the country coupled with the adoption of multi-party democratic practice which has tended to deepen the polarisation. Several crises following from the above include: insecurity of lives and property, corruption, tribalism and nepotism, political and constitutional instabilities, ethnic and religious crises, violent competition for state power and public offices. These issues have impacted negatively on the country's development process. This paper argues that Nigeria's quest for development is tied solidly to a responsible and committed political leadership that would effectively manage the problems posed by ethnicity and promote genuine democracy. Thus, the paper calls for greater national consideration above parochial ethnic and party affiliations.