



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.

INTRODUCTION

The experience in Nigeria so far, is that as the nation aspires for socio-economic transformation, growth and development, parochial considerations based on ethnic colourations tend to impede the quest for unity which is a basic ingredient for development. As such, developmental strategies have to take into consideration the multi-ethnic nature of the country. Added to the ethnic impediment is the adoption of multi-party democracy which has tended to deepen the divide among the numerous ethnic groups with the cry of marginalisation of one group by the other. From the First Republic to date, the twin elements of ethnicity and multi-party politics have had negative consequences on Nigeria's political system. The country has witnessed several ethnic and religious conflicts; conflicts over control of national resources; communal clashes; electoral crises; and others. Some ethnic groups have expressed the desire for secession which is

against the spirit of nationhood. Thus, national integration has proven to be difficult.

There is an on-going debate among many scholars and students of diverse social science disciplines as to whether ethnicity and democracy are complementary or opposing concepts with regards to challenges of democratisation and development in developed countries and developing countries, especially of Africa. Although ethnic conflicts have been observed in some developed countries of the West, African countries, most of which were colonial creations have been engulfed in intra-state conflicts triggered by ethnic politics at different times in the post-independence period. Arguably, democracy provides opportunities for different ethnic groups in a state 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 (Aminu and Ogbonnaya 2015). However, such competition may become unhealthy and violent and lead to conflict which is detrimental to the democratisation and development processes (Ibeanu 2000: 55-59; Agbu 2011: 7-10; Salawu and Hassan 2011). Aminu and Ogbonnaya (2015) state pointedly that

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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 paper contributes to the discourse on ethnicity and multi-party democracy with a view to examining how Nigeria has fared as an ethnically divided state since independence in 1960. In other words, the paper looks at how ethnicity has impacted on democracy with the hope of providing meaningful suggestions for a way forward in promoting national integration and unity in Nigeria. The second section of this paper presents conceptual and theoretical discourses on ethnicity, democracy and party politics. The third section presents critical discussions on the subject matter in a thematic discourse analysis format. It examines: the phenomenon of ethnicity in Nigerian politics, party politics in Nigeria, and the consequences of ethnicity and multi-party democracy on Nigerian polity. The fourth section titled 'Beyond the Parochial Public' represents the researchers' modest effort in providing suggestions aimed at fostering national cohesion in a disparate multi-ethnic and multi-party polity. The argument in this section is anchored on the reality that ethnicity as a concept is not a problem. Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and ethnic diversities could actually be managed and effectively exploited to propel the country's development. Concluding remarks on the paper are hereafter presented in the fifth section.

Objectives

There is a growing literature on issues of ethnicity, democracy and development in Nigeria as different scholars present differing arguments centred on ethnic politics and lack of democracy as critical issues which have impeded Nigeria's development process. This paper contributes to such discourses and argues that Nigeria's development is dependent on the ability of its political leadership not only to manage the challenges posed by ethnicity but also to promote genuine democracy. Thus, the search for responsible and committed leadership in Nigeria is justifiable. The researchers provide meaningful recommendations on factors that could trigger unity and development in Nigeria as the nation looks forward to another transition period in 2019.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This is a desk research work on the issue of ethnicity and multi-party democracy in Nigeria. It examines critically the work of scholars who have written extensively on issues of governance, politics and development in Nigeria. Particularly, scholarly work focusing on problems of federalism, inter-governmental relations, state creation and democratisation in Nigeria were reviewed in line with the subject matter and objective of the paper. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles, newspapers, committee, conference, workshop and seminar reports, and institutional lectures. Reliable internet materials were also handy for reference purposes. For the purpose of data analysis, a thematic discourse analysis format was utilised in order to explore both political and economic issues. Discourse analysis enables researchers to analyse "social phenomenon that is qualitative, interpretive and constructionist" (Hardy et al. 2004: 19). It enabled the researchers to analyse, interpret and connect the issues examined in this paper with previous discourses.

OBSERVATIONS

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourses

Ethnicity

An ethnic group, according to Thompson (2004: 60) 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 share a common language. Based on this definition, it is possible to identify ethnically plural societies. A plural society, according to Mazrui (2008: 39) is "one which has multiple groups defined ethnically, racially, religiously, culturally or by other parameters." Nigeria is a plural society. The country's plurality is pronounced considering that it is composed of ethnically diverse communities. The terms – ethnic pluralism, ethnicity, ethnic diversity and ethnicism are commonly used in discourses relating to countries composed of multi-ethnic groups such as those in Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, many studies have been done to explore the complexities and challenges associated with the country's diversities, how these have been managed over the

years and the future of the Nigerian state as a corporate entity (see Onyeoziri 2002; Omotola 2009; Iyanga 2018).

Agbu (2011: 9) asserts that although it may be less difficult to define what an ethnic group is, the definition is challenged in cases of conflict or competition in interactions between two groups or more. This explains the problems associated with different ethnic groups co-existing together. Indeed, while features such as common ancestry, culture and traditions among others, define ethnic groups, the term ethnicity has been identified as a “social construct” by many scholars (Agbu 2011: 9; Lergo 2011: 88; Adetiba and Rahim 2012: 657). Its importance is pronounced in creating distinctions in societies. As Lergo (2011: 88) notes, “ethnicity is more fluid and broad in modern societies and less in traditional societies. Ethnicity is reminiscent of the caste system in India. It is a closed classificatory system.” Ethnicity represents a force that binds people together. People become very much aware of their belongingness to different groups from others and are therefore loyal to their ethnic groups. Individuals cling to their ethnic origins even when they probably are able to speak other languages (Lergo 2011: 88).

Scholarly views about ethnicity are rooted on theoretical postulations. The ‘Modernisation Theory’ in explaining ethnicity saw greater integration among people as societies grew and experience modernisation. For the modernisation theorists, therefore, individuals would be willing to shift their loyalties and affiliations away from their parochial ethnic identities to that of the larger society (Agbu 2011: 16). This way, the state is regarded as a “confluence of individual wills and places it above the particular interests of any specific group” (Agbu 2011: 16). The modernisation theory is weak in accounting for the inability of most states in the developed and developing world especially of Africa to elicit citizens’ loyalties and address associated challenges posed by ethnicity. The Primordial School, in its own interpretation, emphasizes the common elements that distinguish different ethnic groups as the key factors to be considered in defining ethnicity. In essence, the ethnic bonds that exist among individuals could motivate them to make sacrifices in the interest of the group (Kenneth 1998; Williams 2015). This line of argument influences discussions relating to the effect of ethnicity on “political and economic

outcomes and processes” (Chandra 2010: 3) such as on multi-party democracy as examined in this paper. Likewise, primordialism has been critiqued for failing to recognise that “ethnic identities and attachments are subject to innovation, revision and revitalisation” (Kenneth 1998: 20). Ethnicity, according to the instrumental line of argument is a “social construct”. Individuals do not have single identities as claimed by primordialism (Chandra 2010; see also Williams 2015). Ethnicity provides the platform whereby different individuals mobilise primarily to actualise economic goals. This explanation is relevant in the African context where different groups cry about marginalisation with regards to the distribution of national resources (Ebegbulem 2011: 87-88).

Ethnicity has become a popular subject of intellectual exploration to scholars in different fields both in developed and developing countries particularly of Africa, as it is often considered a prominent factor in the governance and development processes of many countries. As Ajayi and Owumi (2013: 927) observe, it would not be easy to identify a country that is not affected by issues triggered by ethnicity but some countries’ situations are particularly striking because of the lessons they provide regarding the impact of ethnicity on national development. While ethnicity is a politically neutral concept and does not pose any danger to democracy or development but rather could positively engender development where interactions and interrelationships are healthy, it is the politicisation and manipulation of ethnicity that poses a problem (Agbu 2011; Salawu and Hassan 2011: 29; Adetiba and Rahim 2012: 658). Interestingly however, many writers tend to emphasise the negative aspects of ethnicity as against its positive elements.

Multi-ethnic states are often prone to conflictual and competitive relationships as different communities struggle to control political power and other economic resources of the state and this constitutes an impediment to political and socio-economic development (Ojie and Ewghrudjakpor 2009: 7-8; Iyanga 2018: 299-310). It is the role of the state to act as a 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 (Iyanga 2018). Realising the objective of 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 (Nhema 2004).

Instructively, governments of divided societies such as America, Switzerland, Nigeria, and others have adopted different strategies to ameliorate the problems posed by diversities and promote broad based participation beyond ethnic and parochial considerations. These include adopting the federal system of government, promoting multi-party democracy and its associated norms and values, and creation of states and local governments as is the case in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, while these management strategies are valuable, they have brought about other problems that have further exacerbated ethnic tensions. These problems could be linked to the nature of the state in question, politics and its political leadership. The concern of this paper is to examine the failures in Nigeria as the country continues in dire need of national integration and development.

Democracy

Democracy does not lend itself to a universal definition. It is a broad concept used generally to refer to particular ways in which relations are organised between those who govern and those who are being governed (Schmidt 2002: 147; Akinyemi 2017: 137-139). According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992: 1):

Democracy as ideology is the philosophy of governance which sets 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 processes of governance. These institutions and the procedures of governance that they elicit tend to foster consensus whilst simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for the ideology of democracy.

The mark of democratic regimes, according to Schmidt (2002: 147) is “government of the people, by the people (or elected representatives of the people) and for the people” (quoting Abraham Lincoln’s famous definition of popular government). Democracy is a system of government that promotes majority rule; one in

which citizens determine, through elections, who become their leaders. The liberal democracy model shows the emphasis of democracy on social justice, political liberties and popular or public participation in governmental affairs (see Venter 2009: 28). Liberal democracy does not entail only elections at particular intervals, but also the rule of law, individual rights and freedoms; constitutional checks and balances; transparency and accountability of political officials (Leon 2010: 5). While emphasising 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 ensures participation of all citizens. In essence, inclusive democracy, in addition to promoting broad-based participation in a political system advocates for equity and justice to instill democratic culture (see Salih 2003:1-30).

Democracy is a system of government that exists in line with the dictates of the social contract between state and society, as such, it could be argued that the seeming collapse of this contractual relationship in many African countries is what has led to different vices which have impeded the democratisation process and thus presented as obstacles to development. All definitions of democracy emphasise the participation of the people either directly or indirectly in the policy making process of government — an important element which could lead to the realisation of development. This is perhaps one of the reasons why most regimes want to be tagged ‘democratic’.

Notwithstanding the positive values associated with democracy, this system of government has its weaknesses and may not necessarily guarantee development (see Sankatsing 2004; Akinyemi 2017). Democracy is a contested concept among scholars especially in Africa. It is regarded as ‘illusive’ (Akopari 2003: 1) or rather ‘elusive’ (Venter 2009: 29) due to the inadequacies and failures of Africa’s democratic experiments. African leaders have not only failed to put in place effective structures and institutions necessary to consolidate democratic governance, most regimes either fail to institute democratic norms or abide by democratic principles. With few exceptions however, the conduct of elections are characterised by violence while cases of election rigging are often reported (see Santaksing 2004; Venter 2009; Akinyemi 2017).

Not only is democracy equated with the conduct of elections, it is an issue of concern that the “values and ideals of liberal democratic governance have been misconstrued, even perverted, or negated by often corrupt political leaderships; leaderships interested neither in democracy and good governance, nor in the pluralistic dividends multi-party systems are supposed to deliver” (Venter 2009: 39).

The leadership and policy failures in Africa; corruption; poor state and society relations; weak institutions; poor public service delivery; poor socio-economic conditions and associated challenges of nation-building; intra-state and inter-state conflicts in Africa are outcomes of lack of democracy and good political governance. Therefore, the debates on what democracy and good governance concepts entail notwithstanding, there is a general understanding that Africa will only develop under a system that promotes democratic norms and values and good governance. As Venter (2003: 321) asserted, “those regimes which have nearly destroyed the unity (Sani Abacha’s Nigeria, Hassan Al Bashir’s Sudan, and Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe) or even the existence of their states (Samuel Doe’s Liberia, and Siyad Barre’s Somalia) have all been autocratic.”

Political Party and Party System

Since democracy indicates a form of direct or indirect participation of the people in governmental affairs, a corollary to it is the political party which represents the medium through which the individuals become part of the democratic process of their country. Scholars such as Agbaje (1999), Matlosa (2007) and Omodia (2009) and others have observed that the survival of any democratic system is predicated on the existence of a virile party system. It then means that party system is fundamental to the proper working of a political system.

A political party refers to a group of individuals bound together by common interests and desire to take up, through the process of contesting elections, the political powers of a state and with its team of leaders steer the running of government with the expectation of implementing policies that conform to the group’s programme (Hofmeister and Grabow 2011: 8). As Agbaje (1999: 195) asserts, the interest of a political party is essentially “the pursuit, capture

and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices” (see also Aigbe 2016). To achieve its goals therefore, a political party has its principles and an ideology which guides the group and a programme which it proposes to execute once the party is victorious in the election (Hofmeister and Grabow 2011). Although, as Molomo (2003: 302) opines, not all parties declare their manifestos before elections, the document provides a yardstick for assessing how they have performed at the end of every political tenure. Also, for the purpose of elections, a party nominates its candidates to represent the group (Hofmeister and Grabow 2011).

Political parties perform important functions such as regulating and resolving conflicts which arise particularly among groups competing for political offices in a democratic society (Omitola 2003; Omitola 2009). Parties provide the citizens of a state the medium to influence politics and participate in political decision making processes. They do this by educating the citizens about the political process, how elections are conducted and their roles during elections. Thus, without parties, citizens will be denied the opportunity, in a modern democratic society of determining those who hold political offices and by extension, make policies that affect their lives (Aigbe 2016).

Considering the functions performed by political parties, they are the important institutions that ensure the stability of a modernising political system (Huntington 1968; see also Omodia 2009). As an important institution in a democratic society, a political party requires resources not only to undertake campaigns successfully, but also to ensure its political visibility among the voting public. Molomo (2003: 317) notes that “by any standard, the freeness and fairness of an election is measured by, among other variables, the ability of political parties to compete equally for political support.” In other words, the party system which represents how the different political parties are organised and relate with each other, is an important determinant of the political stability of a state.

There are different forms of party system which ranges from one-party to two-party system and the multi-party system. Where there is only one party functioning in a state, either because the others have been prevented from doing so or one party is so popular that all citizens

join it, it means it is a one-party system. The two-party system refers to a situation where there are at least two strong parties and government periodically alternates between the two. The multi-party system represents the political party arrangement whereby more than two political parties are recognised and allowed to operate within the polity. Each of these party systems has its own merits and demerits, for example, the one-party system is discouraged as it tends towards dictatorship while the multi-party system is accepted in a country with diverse ethnic, religious or interest groups as it tends to ensure unity in diversity. There is, perhaps, the argument that good governance principles such as political accountability, popular participation can be better promoted in a multi-party democracy (Salih 2003:1-3; Matlosa 2007; Omodia 2009; Aigbe 2016).

While the role of political parties are more or less the same in both developed and developing countries, Salih (2003:1-3) writes that parties' performance and the manner in which they compete for control of political power, are conditioned by several factors – political, social and economic. In different countries, the strength of their performance also varies (Matlosa 2007). This is the case of developing countries especially of Africa where socio-economic factors such as poverty and cultural factors have affected the functioning of political parties in contrast with what obtains in the developed countries of the West.

Most parties in Africa trace their origin to those which were formed during the period when countries fought for independence. Bofo-Arthur (2003: 236-237) adds that the various military interventions in politics at different periods in the history of many African countries and the desire to establish one-party states by most African leaders in the early independence period had its toll on the effective functioning and sustainability of political parties. African political parties are ethnically based as political elites, organised under different groups compete for political power and national resources of the state without deserved interest in the welfare of their people. Such competition has led to ethnic conflicts in various parts of the African continent (Omotola 2009; Aigbe 2016; Akinyemi 2017). This has severely affected the quest for national integration, democratisation and the development. Although since the 1990s,

democracy began to take its root in most African countries and political parties began to flourish, some governments still reflect autocratic tendencies; seeking to continue in office beyond constitutionally required terms, they create conditions for conflicts. The resultant effect of ethnically based party politics, military incursion in politics and other socio-economic factors is that so far, African political parties have been lacking in understanding and performing their legitimate functions.

The researchers now turn their attention to one area of concern in this paper which is to examine how ethnicity and multi-party democracy complement and contradict each other and their outcomes based on Nigeria's experience since achieving independence in 1960.

DISCUSSION

The Phenomenon of Ethnicity in Nigerian Politics

Nigeria's pluralism obtains from the ethnically diverse groups of people with different historical backgrounds and origin, culture and tradition. With a population of over 140 million and 374 ethnic groups as recorded by Otite (1990: 175), this speaks of extensive diversity or plurality of ethnic configuration. In the North, the Hausa/Fulani represents the largest ethnic group while Igbo represents the largest ethnic group in the East and the Yoruba the largest ethnic group in the West. If these four ethnic groups are removed from 374, the implication is that about 370 ethnic groups represent the minorities in Nigeria who are clamouring for recognition and contesting with the major ethnic groups in matters of national attention and decision making.

The 370 minor ethnic groups in Nigeria are not concentrated in one area but scattered all over the country; the minorities are more concentrated in the South-South and Middle Belt geo-political zones. While the major ethnic groups have often taken advantage of their population in national decisions, the minorities too have, from the colonial period, played vital role in the affairs of the country. For instance, a minority from the South, Anthony Enahoro was accredited to have moved the motion for Nigeria's independence in 1956. After independence, another minority from the Middle Belt, Yakubu

Gowon was saddled with the task of keeping the country together as one despite the threat of 30 months civil war. During the period 2011-2014, another minority from the South-South, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was the Vice President of Nigeria. However, with the cry of marginalisation and militancy, a lot still needs to be done to allay the fears of the minor ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Right from its emergence, the Nigerian state inherited one liability - it represented a forced combination of disparate parts - Colony of Lagos, and Southern and Northern Protectorates. The merging of formerly autonomous entities brought along with it a lot of challenges. The different groups were brought together without their consent. As such, the Nigerian state did not command the loyalty of the people as did their various ethnic groups. Basically, while pre-colonial Nigeria was composed of various ethnic formations with plural societies, ethnicity as a key factor in Nigerian politics derived from the colonial policies of the British government who, by their policy of "divide and rule" adopted different policies in the different groups that existed during this period. The divide and rule strategy was employed to create divisions among ethnic groups so as to prevent them from rising against the colonial powers (Irobi 2005; Iyanga 2018). Lergo (2011: 89) identifies that ethnic minorities as social constructions, became pronounced when in the mid-1940s the British created four distinct regions in Nigeria. The outcome of colonial policies was different in the different regions as the southern part of Nigeria was exposed to Western education than the north with dire consequences which lingered till the independence period in 1960.

Since Nigeria attained independence, several problems experienced in the state include those concerned with: 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 political offices and political instability. Thus, understanding the pattern of ethnic pluralism is crucial in analysing the causes of different conflicts in Nigeria (Diamond 1988: 21; see also Aigbe 2016). Of particular interest is the fact that while some minority groups cry of marginalisation in accessing political power of the state and are clamouring to be independent, the major groups are afraid of

losing political, economic and cultural dominance and would fight to sustain such dominance (Lergo 2011: 87). This shows that the different groups in Nigeria, in one way or the other, are concerned with the national question.

The Nigerian state has been weak in acting as an impartial actor in protecting the interests of its diverse population as equal citizens; ensuring equitable distribution of national resources; promoting national integration and unity and actualising national development goals. Its inability to act as an independent force standing above society and effectively mediating between competing interests in society creates a gap which is then bridged by the diverse ethnic groups and their organisations to mobilise for equal distribution of economic resources (Irobi 2005; see also Iyanga 2018). Thus, the various ethnic groups in Nigeria have become independent political actors competing for the loyalty of members in actualising group interests. Ethnicity has been found to be the most powerful force shaping the political and social relations in Nigeria. It brings about conflict and distrust among the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria – the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani and has led to equation of the Nigerian nation by the ethnic groups as a national cake to be shared among them.

Nigeria's ethnically diverse state presents a peculiar case in examining the negative effects of ethnicity on national governance and development process. The country has witnessed several ethnic conflicts which have threatened its corporate existence despite the strategies employed by successive Nigerian governments such as: adopting the federal system of government, state creation and creation of local governments at various periods in Nigeria's history and promotion of democratic norms and values despite the many years of military rule. It has continuously been emphasised that Nigerian federalism is based on ethnic and not geographical diversities and has tended to engender ethnic politics in the country (Vande 2012: 34). More so, multi-party democracy which has been adopted in Nigeria at different periods in its history instead of alleviating its ethnic problems, have further fuelled the political challenges of the state. The country's democratic experiments has thus far, not translated into its political development and improved standard of living for the citizenry.

Asserting that Nigeria faces serious challenges in addressing its ethnic problems, Osaghae (1998: 1-2) notes that “common stimuli like democratisation, ethnic prosperity or decline, and transformatory social processes all of which impact on ethnicity, produce different effects on ethnic groups.” In this paper, the researchers share the views of different scholars on the subject matter and further argue that Nigeria’s persistent socio-economic challenges and associated conflicts cannot be dissociated from the failure of the country’s political elites to promote good governance, emplace democratic norms and values, practice genuine federalism and implement deliberate and appropriate policies in line with the realities and needs of the country and its people (see Osaghae 1998; Salih 2003; Ajayi and Owumi 2013: 937; Iyanga 2018).

Democracy and Party Politics in Nigeria

One area where ethnicity has been made manifest in Nigeria’s political system right from its independence has been its party system. The political history of Nigeria is characterised mainly of the multi-party structure from the colonial period to present day except during the aborted Third Republic when two-party system was adopted. Nigerians believed in the progress and development which democracy would bring as political leaders were elected into regional assemblies or into the parliament to represent the people and Nigeria marched to independence (Dara 2010). Despite the use of the multi-party system, Nigeria’s democratic experience has been poor and concerning. The history of Nigeria’s party system is synonymous with crisis. Inter-party and intra-party crises have characterised the nation’s political system and most often these crises, fuelled by the desire to control national resources by ethnic groups in Nigeria, have led to violent political contests which often resulted to frequent military coup d’états witnessed in the Nigerian polity (Iyanga 2018). The rivalry, distrust and lack of cooperation that characterised the relationship between the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria led to the use by each ethnic group of its region as a basis for political activity. This has made many scholars such as, Odukoya (2013: 127) to refer to politics in Nigeria as a “dirty game”, just as party politics is considered to be “acrimonious”.

By 1951, the three dominant political parties in Nigeria were based in each of the regions headed by the leaders in each of the regions. These parties had obtained most of their support from their ethnic groups as they fought to take over power from the colonial powers (Odukoya 2013; Iyanga 2018). The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe dominated political activities in the eastern region and was then seen as the Igbo party. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC) was the major political party in the north while in the western region the Action Group (AG) existed for the Yoruba people. The three parties had large supporters. Other political parties which were formed within the three regions were not as popular as these major political parties.

The campaigns which were made among the various political parties for the elections held before independence were intense as the different ethnic groups struggled to dominate each other. The political elites failed to uphold the ideals of a Nigerian state but gave in to individual private interests as the struggle for independence continued. Olisa et al. (1990) reported that not only were the federal elections of 1959 marked by inter-ethnic hostilities and claims of fraudulent practices, the General Election of 1964 and the Western Regional Elections of 1965 had accounts of about 2000 deaths and 5000 houses that were burnt down. The political instability in the country as a result of the elections led to the collapse of the first republic and subsequently the first military take-over of political power on January 15, 1966 (Olisa et al. 1990; Dara 2010). As the military took over, Nigeria was plunged into a 30 month civil war when the Igbos threatened to break-away from the federation (Iyanga 2018). More so, the discovery of oil in commercial quantities presented another phase to the problem in Nigeria (Dara 2010). Instead of assisting the country’s effort to promote national integration and improving the lives of their subjects, political elites furthering their private interests and supposedly group interests, engaged in prebendal politics with negative consequences for national development (Dara 2010; Odukoya 2013). One of the effects of poor governance has been the crisis in the Niger Delta (Obi 2001; Dara 2010).

The political parties that emerged in the Second Republic (1979-1983) although were broad based, some of them resembled those formed

during the First Republic. They were ethnic-based parties which depended on their ethnic/regional bases for support. Hence, the period was also marked by conflict (Odukoya 2013). The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian People's Party (NPP), Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) and People's Redemption Party (PRP) to a large extent, obtained more support from the various regions/states where they were based. To this end, the 1979 general elections which took place to usher in civilian administration after the military had ruled the country for 13 years were marked by political violence and corruption. The 1983 general elections were also reported to have been fraudulent. More people lost their lives as a result of the conflicts and violence than was recorded in the first republic (Olisa et al. 1990; Omitola 2003).

The Third Republic which was truncated by the Babangida Regime was characterised by not only the "absence of rule of law and constitutionalism but also artificial creation of political parties and the regimentalisation of political party formation" (Odukoya 2013: 139). The Babangida Regime which came to power through a coup d'état in 1985 had its transition programme and political agenda. The regime refused to recognise the political parties in existence and instead went ahead to create two political parties - the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) by fiat (Agbu 1998: 244-245). This was a challenge to Nigeria's democracy. In fact, the highpoint of abuse of power was recorded when the Babangida Administration annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential elections won by Moshood Abiola and set up an interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan (Agbu 1998: 246). The interim government however came to an end when Abacha took over power on 17 November 1993. Amuwo et al. (2001) in their book *Nigeria during the Abacha Years (1993-1998)* documented the crisis of democracy and governance under the Abacha Administration. The sudden death of General Sani Abacha on 8 June 1998 brought General Abdulsalam Abubakar to power on 9 June 1998.

The military leaders had ruled Nigeria for 15 years since the Shehu Shagari's government was topped by General Muhammed Buhari in 1983. General Abdulsalam Abubakar's efforts which eventually led to the transfer of power to a demo-

cratically elected candidate in 1999 witnessed the registration of three political parties – The Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) and People's Democratic Party (PDP). These parties, in terms of their ideologies and make-up, showed some semblance with those of the first republic (Brown 2013: 178). The challenge of this decision to register only three parties at the Law Court led to the registration of about fifty political parties that we have today most of which are not known beyond the local environment of their leaders. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party who won the election became the second elected President after Shehu Shagari and was sworn in on 29 May, 1999. Since 1999 up until this present time, Nigeria has since continued under democratic rule.

Considering that electoral violence and conflicts from Nigeria's first republic to its fourth republics have led to the loss of thousands of lives and destruction of property, the obvious reality is that political parties in Nigeria have failed to perform their legitimate functions and multi-party system has failed to promote the values and norms of democracy. Although multi-party system has continued to be relevant in Nigeria, it is note-worthy to highlight the assertions made by Odukoya (2013: 141-142) that:

Most of the members of the political parties in the present dispensation are products of military authoritarian politics. Given this background, the authoritarian military traditions from which they were incubated were brought to bear on democratic political interactions with untoward implications. It is sad to note that the members of almost all the Nigerian political parties are strange bedfellows brought together solely by the desire for power.

Ethnic Plurality and Multi-party Democracy: Implications on the Nigerian Polity

There is no gain saying the fact that ethnicity and multi-party democracy have had debilitating consequences on the Nigerian polity since the achievement of independence in 1960. Key problems which have impeded efforts at democratisation, national integration and development in the country have been linked to the legacies of the country's colonial experience (Olaitan 2001; Aigbe 2016).

There is a growing literature on the history and problems of Nigerian government and politics. Ethnic consciousness and mutual suspicion among the different ethnic groups have become problems that impede meaningful economic development. There is corruption in high places. In his analysis, Ikejiaku (2009: 19) examines the negative effects of political corruption on efforts at establishing a democratic society and promoting good governance. Political corruption is endemic and severe and perpetuates Nigeria's crises of leadership and governance. Tribalism and nepotism have influenced the allocation of national resources. For instance, appointments of public officials more often than, are not based on merit and performance. There continues to be complaints about marginalisation in some ethnic groups. Indeed, colonial processes of evolving and consolidating ethnicity and ethnic consciousness have thus had implications for the national question in Nigeria.¹ The result of deep ethnic division and competition for power in Nigeria is that politics have become a zero-sum game where the winner takes all (Ake 1996; Amuwo 1998; Akinyemi 2017). Such ethnic behaviours are exhibited by both the followers and leadership of Nigerian political parties and have led to lawlessness, political violence and conflicts. In some cases, political opponents are murdered (Omitola 2003).

To this extent, Nigeria has a chequered political history bedeviled with the gory tales of instability, bad governance, domestic mismanagement, poor civil-society relations, intra-state conflicts all occasioned by the dominant forces of ethnic particularism, factionalisation, tribalism and nepotism coupled with the operation of multi-party democracy which have tended to divide the people. The lack of good governance and its associated tendencies in Nigeria have negative implications not only for national integration and socio-economic development but also for sub-regional and regional integration, peace, stability, security and development. Nigeria's problems, especially the persistent ethnic conflicts which in some cases, take on religious dimensions, have become matters of regional and global concerns. Despite its economic growth records in recent years, Nigeria remains a weak state. The government has failed to meet the needs of its large population despite its wealth in natural, material and human resources. Aborisade and Mundt (1998) assert that a key

point that continues to resonate in Nigerian political culture is that "the influence of the three major groups is a great cause of concern to the remaining fragmented minorities."

Beyond the Parochial Public

The levels of political, social, cultural, religious and economic challenges currently facing Nigeria are indicators of the urgent imperative for the government and people to take seriously the issue of national integration and unity, emphasising the issues that bring Nigerians together rather than those which tear them apart and forging unity in diversity. Many countries both in the developed and developing world are addressing their political and development challenges, identifying with the call to promote democracy and good governance and Nigeria cannot afford to lag behind in aligning with these trends. The following suggestions would provide a way forward for the country but the government and people must be determined to move beyond their parochial publics.

Addressing the political and socio-economic problems faced by ethnic minorities will go a long way in reducing ethnic suspicions and fostering unity. If we must exist as a nation, due regard must be given to the plurality of our ethnic nationalities in which case, principles of true federalism must be adhered to, for instance, each ethnic nationality should be duly given its recognition as a unit of grouping and no federating unit should be too powerful as to dominate others. Political power will have to be shared satisfactorily among the component ethno-cultural communities and resources for development distributed equitably. The Nigerian government will need to prioritise the effective implementation of policies which address the needs and choices of its citizens. These include policies targeted at creating employment for the youth population, human capital development, reducing poverty and improving the welfare of the people.

Nigeria's experience with military rule from the early years in the post-independence period shows that the challenges posed by diversity cannot be effectively resolved except within a democracy. It is within a democratic framework where good governance is promoted that true federalism would be enhanced. The government of Nigeria should be willing and committed to consolidating democratic rule - abiding by

constitutional principles and institutionalising democratic norms and values. An open democratic society will empower Nigerians and will provide equal opportunity for every citizen to participate in governance and development processes. In short, democracy needs to be redefined and the necessary conditions for this system of government to flourish need to be put in place and existing ones strengthened.

As Nigerians look forward to another transition period in 2019, the role of civil society organisations (CSO) including the media in educating the masses about their responsibilities in ensuring that democracy prevails in the country needs to be consolidated. This presents a challenge to CSOs in Nigeria concerned with promoting democratic governance.

On the issue of democratic institutions, the researchers suggest in this paper that the two-party system be adopted in Nigeria as it was in the Third Republic considering the country's failures with the multi-party system. The two-party system has been adopted in advanced democracies and has worked well. The Nigerian situation is such that the multi-party system is open to several problems related with the country's diversities which it is intended to address.

It needs to be emphasised that quality governance at all levels is crucial for the survival of Nigeria as one indivisible nation. Nigeria is in need of political leaders who would rise above their individual and group interests to further the interests of the state. Nigeria cannot overcome its problems if the leaders and policymakers are not willing to accept the process of dialogue to resolve national issues, make sacrifices and shift grounds in making decisions that would affect national progress, peace, stability and security.

Building a new Nigeria which would manifest what Young (1994) calls the "behavioural imperatives of a state"² would also require intensified efforts in educating the people about the country's history, rich cultural heritage, ethnic diversities, development potential, and citizens' role and contributions to achieving good governance and sustainable development. Beyond this, improved education, enlightenment and sensitisation of the citizenry would promote the 'we-feeling' necessary for fostering national integration. The Nigerian government should also continue to exploit the opportunities created by sports, cultural events, unity schools, and redesign the Na-

tional Youth Service Corps Scheme to enhance a united Nigeria.

Finally, as a major regional power and part of the global community, the Nigerian government should not fail to harness effectively, the benefits accruable from regional initiatives such as those of the African Union – New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Peer Review Mechanism to improve governance and policy making processes.

CONCLUSION

This paper advanced the argument that ethnicity and multi-party democracy, as operated in Nigeria, has retarded the integration of the country and has continued to impede the attainment of national unity and development. Little wonder that Nigeria has continued to manifest several features of underdevelopment despite its wealth in natural, material and human resources. The researchers also highlighted that the Nigerian state has a hostile and illegitimate nature and has continuously failed to act as an independent force above the different groups over which it was imposed. There needs to be genuine efforts aimed at nation building, rebuilding the Nigerian state and enhancing its institutional capacity to perform expected roles and exercise autonomy over its society. Nigeria's survival and development as a viable nation depends not only on the sincere commitment and willingness of its political leadership to promote good governance, embrace democratic norms and values and practice true federalism but also develop strong national institutions capable of promoting sustainable growth and stability. The task of building a united Nigeria is an enormous one and does not leave behind such modernisers as the elites, the military, legislature, political parties, civil service, the law courts, civil society organisations and the media.

NOTES

¹ The national question in Nigeria relates to question as to "whether relations among peoples conscious of their separate identities shall be based on hostility, domination or a programme of liquidation, or whether they shall be based on liberty, equality and fraternity" (Eskor 1993).

² These are "hegemony, autonomy, security, legitimisation, revenue, and accumulation". The behavioural imperatives would enable the state as an actor to perform expected functions.

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