

EFFECT OF SECTORIAL DIVIDES IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN NIGERIA

Okpanachi, Elijah Ojochonu
Department Of Philosophy,
Federal University Of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
Phone Number: +234837550889
Email: Eltonia4u@gmail.com

Abstract

Nigeria's democracy has been fragile and fluctuating since independence. Successive governments have struggled to create a sense of national unity in a complex country whose borders were drawn by British colonialists, incorporating about 250 ethnic groups. There are three major ethnic groups in the country: the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbos. The British granted Nigeria independence in 1960, they left behind a paradoxical legacy of colonial rule. The paper argues the effect pre-independence regional and religious divides have had on the development of democracy in Nigeria. It traces the evolution of the country from pre-colonial times to the present day and how the colonial divides have affected democracy in post-independence Nigeria due to religious /ethnic influences on politics in post-independence Nigeria.

Keywords: colonial, Colonialism, Regional, Religion, Nigeria, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbos

Introduction

The sectorial divide in Nigeria's democracy has had a major effect on the country's political landscape. Since independence in 1960, the country has been largely divided between North and South, with the majority population in the North and the oil-rich economy in the South. This has resulted in a power struggle between these two main sectors that has been at the forefront of politics in the country.

This divide has led to a lack of unity amongst the people, with each region vying for power and resources. This has also created economic and social inequality between the two regions resulting in an unequal distribution of resources. This unequal distribution of resources has hindered Nigeria's ability to develop a strong and stable democracy, as it has further entrenched the divide between the two regions and created an atmosphere of distrust.

In addition, the sectorial divide has also hindered the effectiveness of the democratic process, as the various groups cannot come together and work collaboratively towards common goals. This has led to increased levels of corruption, as the power struggle between the two regions has resulted in the lack of accountability of the government and its institutions.

The current politics of Nigeria has been hugely influenced by the sectorial divide, and it has become a major obstacle to the development of democracy in the country. In order to improve the democratic process and create a more unified and equitable society, it is essential that the divide between the two regions is addressed. This can be done through various strategies, such as providing equal access to resources, improving the infrastructure in the north so that both regions can benefit, and encouraging collaboration and dialogue between the two regions.

Nigeria is home to about 250 ethno-linguistic groups. Three main ethnic groups, however, make up the majority of the country's population. They are the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. The Hausa/Fulani live in northern Nigeria and make up about 21 percent. Cities with a significant Hausa population include Kano, Sokoto, and Kaduna. The Yoruba live in southwestern Nigeria and make up about 20 percent of the population. The cities with the largest concentration of Yoruba people are Ile-Ife, Lagos, and Ibadan. The Igbo live in southeastern Nigeria and make up about 17 percent of Nigeria's total population. This ethnic group is concentrated in Enugu and Owerri. Most of the major cities in Nigeria, however, have significant populations of all three ethnic groups. (Falola and Genova xxxii) An estimated one-third of Nigerians belong to minority groups, which include the Tiv, Nupe, Igala, and Jukun in the Middle Belt and the Ijo, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Annang, Efiks and Ibibio in the Niger Delta. The minority groups have protested over the past several decades for greater political representation and a larger monetary share in federal revenue allocation schemes. Although more than 200 languages are spoken in Nigeria, the official language is English. Most schools and businesses operate in English. Outside of these settings, however, most Nigerians prefer to speak an indigenous language or pidgin English. Nigeria's indigenous languages belong to the Bantu, Chadic, and Niger-Congo language families. The Niger-Congo languages include Edo, Igbo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Yoruba.

According to Falola and Genova:

Many languages spoken in Nigeria are dialects of another language. For example, Yoruba is the root language for the dialects of Igala and Itsekiri. The development of pidgin and mingling of different language families in Nigeria indicates the extent to which Nigerian communities and kingdoms interacted with their African neighbors and Europeans traders (211). For Falola and Genova, much of this blending also comes from a long history of urban centers and migration patterns.

Thus, the people of Nigeria came together as they recognized the discrepancies of British policy. "The problem of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria came with the advent of colonialism. This happened when disparate, autonomous, heterogeneous and sub-national groups were merged to form a nation. Again, the colonialists created structural imbalances within the nation in terms of socio-economic projects, social development, and establishment of administrative centres. This imbalance deepened the antipathies between the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1980; Young, 1993 and Aluko, 1998)." The Nigerian nationalists' goal of achieving an independent sovereign state of Nigeria was achieved in 1960 when Nigeria declared its independence and British colonial rule ended. Nigeria's government had sought to unify the various peoples and regions of Nigeria since the country's independence in 1960.

Chief Akinjide in one of his articles in Nigerian tribune titled "*Nigerian Amalgamation is a Fraud*" published 2013, he proves that:

It was only on the paper that Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria were amalgamated, and never the people were amalgamated. Chief Akinjide believes that northern and the southern Nigeria were amalgamated on paper in the sole interest of the westerners (the Europeans) for their economic benefits and never for the economic benefits of Nigeria (61).

Ota and Ecoma regrettably argued on the same line that:

The peculiarity of the Nigerian situation has accentuated rather than reduced

ethnic, religious, and regional dichotomy. In the long-run, Nigeria has had to contend with the challenges of achieving real national integration which is a sine qua non for nation building and development (278)

It is obvious that pre-independence regional and religious divides indeed having a significant impact on democracy in Nigeria.

Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in Pre-colonial Nigeria

Before the British came to colonize the geographical area that later became Nigeria, the peoples had interacted through trade, marriage, and cultural exchanges. Before colonialism, Religion and Politics were major factors responsible for maintaining peace, stability and order and were the basis of authority and power for the rulers and religion was used to maintain law and order. Religious sanctions help to check criminal behaviours, to promote good and law-abiding citizens. According to Oladiti:

Before the advent of colonialism, political power was a sacred trust, exercised for the common good of the society. Institutions such as kings, age-grades, guilds, associations, secret societies, and open societies were religious organizations as well as political agencies that helped to maintain law and order by suppressing tension and clashes of interest among the people. (72).

The existed shared values and attitudes were gradually eroded by colonialism and ethnicity and religious friction birthed. Ota and Ecoma rightly argued that 'the country's recent history is replete with references to the ethnic, regional, religious, and even racial differences between its various peoples. In the main, these are part of the inheritance of British colonialism which saw such differences as a convenient platform for actualizing the British colonial policy of divide-and-rule. Unfortunately, contemporary politics in Nigeria has continued to emphasize these differences without much conscious efforts at a historical articulation of the harmonious inter-ethnic relations among and between Nigerian peoples prior to British colonialism (277).

Colonial Divides and Formation of Political Parties

Nigeria was under British colonial rule for nearly a century. British colonial rule not only defined Nigeria's present-day boundaries, but also incited ethnic and religious friction. Nigeria gained its independence in 1960 only to slide into a three-year civil war. Since 1970, Nigeria's political past has been comprised of alternating periods of democratic and military rule. Many scholars attribute Nigeria's current situation to the universal issues of uneven development, financial mismanagement, and manipulation of religious and ethnic affiliations for the purpose of political gain. (Toyin Falola Ann Genova xxx) Historical dictionary of Nigeria Scarecrow Press, INC. USA 2009.

To buttress further, Richard Akinola in his book titled *"Fellow Countrymen-the story of Coup D'etats in Nigeria"* quoted Chief Richard Akinjide (SAN) that:

When the North formed a political party, the Northern leaders called it Northern People's Congress (NPC). They didn't call it Nigeria's people Congress. That was in accordance with the dictum and policies of Lugard.

When Aminu Kano formed his own party, it was called Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), not Nigerian Elements Progressive Union. It was only Awolowo and Zik who were not a complete fraud. It was created not in the interest of Nigeria or Nigerians but in the interest of the British (220).

Schwarz as quoted by Diamond posited that democratic order collapsed because the historic competing nationalisms of Nigeria's three largest tribal nations were never successfully reconciled and united into an overarching Nigerian identity (Schwarz, 66). Democracy in Britain and the US was not evolved to, and 'was never intended and has never managed to settle the range of questions, the whole position of tribes, the domination of the country by one or two areas, ... open to political determination in Nigeria' (Mackintosh, 619).

Proponents of the theory of ethnic competition have traced Nigeria's tragedy not to the mere fact of ethnic pluralism, nor to primordial culture tensions or historical legacies of conflict, but to the ethnic competition that was generated by socioeconomic and political modernization (Melson and Wolpe, 274-326). This perspective has also recognized the polarizing effect of the coinciding cleavages that resulted from the drawing of regional boundaries and then, inevitably, party divisions as well atop the major, tripartite ethnic division. Other analyses have centered around political structure. (Whitaker 81) has attributed the primary responsibility for democratic failure to the strains and contradictions in the constitutional structure, which in generating coinciding cleavages, consolidating regional inequalities, and assigning such immense powers to so few regions encouraged ethnic political mobilization, made regional dominance the prerequisite and the basis for intense national political competition, and so only heightened regional and cultural insecurity. Prominent analyses of the time noted the destabilising contradiction between the federal structure, which allocated the dominant share of government power to the more populous North, and the social structure, in which the South's vast advantage in education and economic development gave it the natural power advantage and claim (Sklar, 166). To the tragically flawed federal structure (Kirk-Greene 24) traces not only the failure of the Republic but also the civil war.

Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria

It is clear that ethnic divisions have existed since colonial era. Conflicts or tensions have been present and grievances nursed for generations. The factors which have given rise to contemporary ethno-nationalism can be sought in the failure or inability of the Nigeria government to serve the national community and to meet the needs of its minority populations in terms of an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. Pamir argued that Economic deprivation and disparity, as witnessed in numerous cases, has often acted as a powerful catalyst igniting the flame of nationalist revolt and in crystallizing a sense of ethnic identity. Not only does the denial of cultural and political rights and the lack of active power-sharing for minority groups through constitutional arrangements fail to close the poverty gap, but this failure combines, in some cases, with frustration over the slow development of democratic forms of government, combination that helps to explain some of the political bases for ethnic resurgence (Pamir 197).

Furthermore, the tendency of the modern nation state to resort to political discrimination. For example, discrimination against the East rekindled the agitation by the region to secede from

the country and establish an independent state of Biafra. The political movement in this direction is the Indigenous People of Biafra, which is led by Nnamdi Kanu. A similar body has also emerged in the West led by Sunday Igboho, who agitated sovereignty of the Yoruba nation. Thus, O'Connell is of the opinion that:

A synthesis of ethnic and institutional explanations stresses the failure of political integration - rooted in the colonial legacy of flawed institutional arrangements, regional disparities and restricted political process-while conceptualizing 'tribalism' somewhat distinctively as rooted in the ethnic competition between elites (O'Connell, 70).

A similar synthetic analysis gives still stronger emphasis to the elite basis of ethnic competition for resources and rewards (Post and Vickers, 193).

Sklar, as quoted by Larry Williams exposes the relationship of the twin causes of Nigeria politics, tribalism and regionalism, to the process of class formation. From this perspective, the cause of democratic failure is rooted in the use of tribalist ideologies and oppressive regional power 'by the new men of power in furtherance of their own special interests which are, time and again, the constitutive interests of emerging social classes' (16). Ethnic conflict, and even ethnic socio-economic competition, are thus seen as only proximate causes, underlying which is the phenomenon of class action, and the political repression necessary to protect it. By contrast, the dependency perspective traces political instability in Nigeria to an external source of class dominance - the social and economic contradictions imposed by colonial, and subsequently neocolonial, capitalist economic relations (Williams, 16).

The decades preceding Nigerian Independence had featured conflict within the nationalist movement far more intense than anything it had waged against British colonial rule. The artificial nature of the country, the absence of any colonial effort to inculcate a sense of nationhood, in fact the deliberate encouragement of regional identities and separation, further worked against the development of a sense of national unity and identity. By Independence, the challenge of integrating Nigeria around a common, overarching sense of nationhood still remained. So also did many of the major issues of the previous decade: minority demands for new states, the AG's determination to break the monolithic power of the North, and the North's endeavour to redress its socioeconomic disadvantage, which was beginning to produce 'a considerable number of Northern recruits' in the upper ranks of the Federal Civil Service 'who would *Conspiracy of Optimism* 75 not qualify by normal standards' (B. Williams, 4).

Ethnicity has had a significant impact on the development of democracy in Nigeria. Despite the potential for constructive mobilization provided by ethnicity, it has also been used to stifle the growth of democracy and impede the functioning of democratic institutions in the country. inclusive approach to politics that seeks to transcend ethnic boundaries is necessary for the country to make further progress toward democratic consolidation.

Religion and Democracy in Nigeria

It is very difficult in the modern world to ignore the presence of religion in public affairs. Virtually on a daily basis, the media provide instances demonstrating that the people, institutions, and ideas that make up the religious sphere have a continuing and important relevance to the political realm. Religion further divided the peoples of Nigeria, but religious (Kirk-Green 127) as noted that:

The Origins of Crisis cleavage was generally less significant than ethnicity and region. Where religion was a factor in social and political conflict, it typically reflected broader cultural conflict, as in the Middle Belt, which contained 'vigorous concentrations of Christianity among groups of resolute animists' (cited in Diamond, 25).

Diamond also quoted Young when he argues that:

In the East, Islam was virtually absent while Christianity claimed a high proportion of the population, especially among Igbos. Where religion might have functioned to crosscut ethnicity, among the Yoruba - who were fairly evenly split between Christianity and Islam - failed to do so, because Islam took a different, less encompassing form in the South (251). Thus, as a result, 'Hausa and Yoruba pray at different mosques, and Islam does not function as a crosscutting interethnic solidarity structure' (cited in Young, 25). Diamond contended that within the Northern Region, Islam provided an overarching, transethnic identity throughout the upper North hence an important cultural bond for formation of a broader, more modern dominant class but it also encompassed sectarian cleavage (Diamond, 25).

Ethnic calculations remain deep, very much as before, only slightly altered to give the Yoruba greater visibility. This reverses the long trend that privileged the North and its quest for political domination, the short-lived fear of Igbo domination in the 1960s, and the secession and civil war that followed from 1967 to 1970. The rise of Chief M. K. O. Abiola in the early 1990s, his victory in the 1993 elections and the annulment of these elections by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida dominated Nigerian politics for the rest of the decade. Babangida allowed the formation of only two political parties (the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention). He maintained a strict hold on the press and stifled any public disapproval of his leadership. In fear of losing northern Muslim support, he made Nigeria a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which incensed Christian southerners. Babangida's handling of the election of 12 June 1993 convinced the world of his disregard for accountability and reliability. He annulled the election and imprisoned Chief M. K. Abiola when preliminary results suggested that Abiola might win. Had the elections succeeded, Nigeria would have started its Third Republic. Under severe pressure, Babangida formed the Interim National Government to take power and guide Nigeria toward democratic rule. (Falola and Genova xi)

The rise of General Abacha to power met with organized opposition among the Yoruba and pro-democracy movements. During Abacha's tenure, various Yoruba groups not only emerged to advocate democracy; some wanted secession or, at the very least, the renegotiation of the basis of the federation to give power to the different nationalities to shape their own policies, free of a powerful center. The discourse of democracy put ethnicity at its very center. It was no longer how a group of nationalists from different parts of the country would govern and bring progress, but how the representatives of the component units would share power and resources along ethnic lines. The assumption was that the military generals and politicians would always represent ethnic interests, and in this kind of arrangement, the North would always seek domination at the expense of others. If a number of Yoruba politicians had advocated forging alliances with the northerners, many now regarded them as 'dangerous enemies.'

Ethnicity/Religion and Military coup d'état

From its start, the First Republic functioned on shaky ground. Tension among regions and within the central government muddled Nigeria's first stretch of independence. In January 1966, Nigeria's first military coup d'état took place. Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi's first order of business was to dismantle the regional structure. In response, the Northern Region refused to cooperate. In May, a pogrom against Igbos living in the North erupted. This massacre was followed by a mass exodus of Igbos to southeastern Nigeria. At the end of July, another coup d'état by northern soldiers took place. Some deliberations occurred before settling on General Yakubu Gowon as the new head of state. This arrangement did not please all regional leaders. Chief Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, in particular, refused to recognize Gowon's authority. As governor of the Eastern Region, Ojukwu felt a responsibility to the Igbo people to declare the region independent in May 1967. (Falola and Genova xxxvii) A series of negotiations between Ojukwu and Gowon failed. To defend its independence, Ojukwu's Republic of Biafra prepared for war with the federal government.

Civil war erupted in July 1967 and lasted until January 1970 between the two sides. Nigeria's civil war was one of Africa's first. The degree of bloodshed and impact on civilians shocked the world. Scholars suggest that the duration of the war was tied to the amount of declared and undeclared assistance from such outside powers as France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and neighboring Francophone African countries.

Ultimately, the war resulted in high casualties and starvation in Biafra. The International Red Cross responded to the crisis by attempting to supply food to starving people in Biafra. By early January 1970, Biafra had lost a significant amount of territory, including the city of Owerri, the Biafran nerve center. On 12 January 1970, Biafra surrendered. The civil war gravely damaged Nigeria's economy and reputation. The conflict between ethnicities in Nigeria has continued to this day, with various groups vying for control of state resources and power. In addition, the country has seen several military coups, with more recent examples including the 1983 coup which overthrew President Shehu Shagari and the 1999 coup led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar which ended the rule of General Sani Abacha. Overall, Nigeria's ethnic diversity and long history of military coups have had a significant impact on the country. The coups and the struggle for control of power and resources have often been linked to conflicts between ethnicities, which has caused significant disruption and instability in the country.

Northern dominance of political power

According to Uche, since the attainment of political independence in Nigeria, the North has dominated the governance of the country even though they contribute the least to the national purse. Such political control has ensured that the majority of revenue generated in the south are spent in the North. Despite this, the Northern region government adopted the northernisation policy, which prioritised the employment of foreigners over southerners in the region. Based on the above, it is not surprising that the dominant control of political power by the North has become a very contentious issue in Nigeria.

Uche further posited that from independence in 1960 to 1992, only 2 southerners had ruled Nigeria: General Aguiyi Ironsi (January to July 1966) and General Olusegun Obasanjo (February 1976 to September 1979). The murder of General Ironsi in 1966 culminated in the mass killing of easterners in the North. The attempt by the oil-rich East to secede and establish the

state of Biafra was crushed mainly because the northern leadership had the full support of the British Government which prioritised its oil interests in Nigeria (Uche, 111–135).

In 1992, Moshood Abiola, a millionaire Muslim from the West, won the presidential elections. This was annulled by the then military President, General Babangida, who was from the North. Widespread riots in the West however forced Babangida to step aside and cede power to an interim president from the West that he selected: Ernest Shonekan. He lasted only three months in office before he was overthrown by a northern military officer, General Sani Abacha. When Abacha mysteriously died in 1998, another northern officer, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, became Head of State. Shortly after that, international pressure led by the West was mounted on Abiola to renounce his mandate. When he failed to do this, he mysteriously died in detention in the presence of a highlevel US delegation. The riots generated by Abiola's death, however, forced the northern military leaders to agree to hand over power to a democratically elected president from the West. Their choice was Olusegun Obasanjo, with whom they had worked well in the past.

Effects of sectorial divides in the democratic process in Nigeria.

The sectorial divides in the democratic process in Nigeria can have several effects. Some of the key effects are:

- i. **Fragmented Political Landscape:** Sectorial divides often lead to the formation of multiple political parties representing different interests and sectors of society. This can create a fragmented political landscape, making it challenging to form a majority government and leading to coalition governments or unstable political environments.
- ii. **Voting Patterns:** Sectorial divides can influence voting patterns as individuals tend to align themselves with candidates or parties that align with their particular sectorial interests. This can result in voting based on ethnicity, religion, or regional affiliations rather than the candidate's qualifications or policy positions, undermining the principle of meritocracy.
- iii. **Political Instability:** When sectorial divides are deep-rooted and conflicts arise between different sectors, it can lead to political instability and even violence. Competing interests can result in protests, demonstrations, and clashes between different groups, thereby jeopardizing the democratic process and social cohesion.
- iv. **Policy Paralysis:** Sectorial divides can hinder policy formulation and implementation. If elected officials prioritize the demands of their particular sector over the collective interests of the nation, policy-making can become gridlocked, resulting in ineffective governance and limited progress in addressing national challenges.
- v. **Inequality and Exclusion:** Sectorial divides can perpetuate social inequalities and exclusion. When certain sectors feel marginalized or underrepresented in the democratic process, it can deepen existing social divisions and create a sense of exclusion for those sectors, leading to a lack of inclusivity in decision-making and resource allocation.

Addressing sectorial divides and their negative effects on the democratic process in Nigeria requires efforts to promote inclusivity, national unity, and dialogue among different sectors. Creating platforms for constructive engagement, promoting diversity in leadership, and enhancing civic education can help bridge sectorial gaps and foster a more inclusive democratic system.

Conclusion

Addressing sectorial divides in the democratic process requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including political leaders, civil society organizations, and citizens. Promoting inclusivity, dialogue, and equal representation can help bridge these divides and strengthen the democratic process in Nigeria.

No society can grow in the atmosphere of ethnic/religious violence which, more often than not, has political undertone. The influence of ethnicity and religion on politics has, at various times, threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. The pre-independence regional and religious divisions remain a major obstacle to the development of democracy in Nigeria, and that these issues must be addressed if the country is to achieve its full democratic potential. For full democratic potentials to be actualized, greater educational and cultural initiatives that focus on abolishing stereotypes and reducing social exclusion must be in place and legal reforms should be implemented which should be aimed at reducing the number of political appointees and ensure that decisions are taken after consultation with all stake holders because the pre-colonial regional and religious divides have indeed encouraged a majoritarian system of government, which has had a tendency to limit the scope for discussion and compromise.

References

C. Uche, 'Oil, British interests and the Nigerian civil war', Journal of African History, Vol. 49, 2008.

Diamond Lary [Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa](#), Boydell & Brewer Print publication year: 2004.

Ota, E.N & Ecoma, C.S (2021). The Presentness of the Past: Pre-Colonial Inter-Ethnic Relations and the Challenges of National Integration in Contemporary Nigeria. Saudi J. Humanities Soc Sci, 6(8): 277-284

Falola and Genova, *Historical dictionary of Nigeria* Scarecrow Press, INC. USA 2009

Mackintosh, John P. *Federalism in Nigeria*, *Political Studies: Nigerian Government and Politics*, Northwestern, University Press, 1962.

Paden, J. *Communal Competition, Conflict* Melson, Robert. 'Nigerian Politics and the General Strike of 1964', 1970.

Nnoli, O. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, 1978.

O'Connell, James. *The Politics and Administration of Nigerian Government*,

- Frederick A. Praeger, 1962 *and Violence in Kano*, in Melson and Wolpe, University of California Press, 1971.
- Richard, A. (2000) “*Fellow Countrymen- the story of Coup D'etats in Nigeria*” Reflections on the Origin of Nigeria's Problems by Richard Akinjide
- Robert I. Rotberg and Ali A. Mazrui, *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Oladiti, Abiodun Akeem. *Religion and Politics in Pre-Colonial Nigeria*, Cogito Bucharest Vol. 6, 2014.
- Williams, BA. (1960) 'Where Does Nigeria Go from Here?' *Africa Report* 5(10).
- Sklar, Richard L. and Whitaker, C. S. (1966) '*The Federal Republic of Nigeria*', in Gwendolen M. Carter (ed.), *National Unity and Regionalism in Eight African States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Umotong, Iniobong Daniel and Mebiri, Innocent Iyeka. *National Development in Nigeria: The Elitist Role*. In **African Journal of Culture, Philosophy and Society: Aworom Annang, Volume 2 Number 1 September, 2012**. Published by Department of Classics and Philosophy, University of Cape Coast, Ghana (P. 55–65).