

## Research Article

# An Overview of the Challenges of Peace and National Integration in Nigeria Politics

Jibrin Ubale Yahaya<sup>1</sup> and Musa Mohammed Bello<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Email: jibrinubaleyahaya@gmail.com; musamohammedbello@gmail.com

**Received:** Jul 27, 2019

**Accepted:** Aug 3, 2019

**Published:** Aug 7, 2019

**Abstract:** This journey of Nation-Statehood in Nigerian starts from the pre-colonial days of European conquest, then independence era to the end of Military regimes and consolidation of democracy. This paper has raised a question of states hood and their various political configurations which has been a long-standing subject of political philosophy and discussion from the formation of the old states hood of the Western and South in Nigeria politics. However, most societies that attained independence from Western colonialism in the mid-twentieth century has their own peculiar problems Nigeria is not an exemption as complex society with over 180 Million population and over 300 ethnic tribal groups under the excessive control of Central Government called Federal Government with little impact from States and Local Government to provide enable environment of peace and integration that has created a serious tension of various conflicts and lack trust between the various ethnic group to live in peace and harmony since the Nigeria independence in 1960s. The Primary focus of this paper is to connect political aspects of peace and national integration as a very important tool of sustainable development. This paper has suggested for Nigeria as country to live in peace and national integration the burden would be in the hands of leaders and citizens through providing a leaders that are patriotic to the maintenance of peaceful living and promotion of national integration by ensuring policies that can enhance to meet the demands of all ethnic groups through fairness, equity, justice and operating of good governance while the citizens should perceive other tribes as a brother keeps in the journey of nation building.

**Keywords:** Peace, Nation Building, Ethnic Groups and Social Tensions.

## Introduction

The case of Nigeria politics has been encounter with various types of problems like ethnic conflicts, religious conflict, agitation for independence nation like Biafra State, Farmers/ Herdsmen crisis in Middle belt, South East, North-West, Military coups, Niger Delta militant, Area Boys thugs in Lagos, Boko Haram insurgency particularly in the North East and issues of kidder napping in different part of the country all these issues state above has become a havoc to the democratic process and operation of good governance for every long time in Nigeria.

However, since from its independence in 1960s, these challenges of national integration and formation of new nation-states hood has been a subject of much interest and study to many scholars. As the process ongoing, with varying outcomes, half a century after independence in the early 1950s, the interest in understanding the complex evolutionary process so as to contribute to its advancement remains a subject of intense concern is given added urgency with the tendency in the upsurge of fractionalization along ethno-cultural and confessional

lines in recent times. Development along these lines, while global in expression, is a matter of great concern in Nigeria, partly because of Nigerians heritage of multiple pluralisms.

The process of nation-state hood formation in post-independence Nigeria from the perspective of political systems and ideologies that were devised and used for the national construction work during the early years after independence are still in active. Two major systems are identified and reviewed in terms of their application to processes of national integration and state formation. These were African Socialist Republicanism and Western Parliamentary Republicanism.

The African Socialist Republicanism experiments were attempted by various African Countries such as Guinea–Conakry, Egypt, Tanzania, Kenya, Mali, Ghana and Senegal. These came under different designations like pragmatic socialism, positive socialism, democratic socialism, realist socialism, African socialism and revolutionary socialism. The leaders of these particular countries wanted to achieve three objectives (1) First was to build political and social systems that were partially connected with African traditional political and social systems; (2) To give their societies common ideologies or social belief system to enhance national integration and promote cohesion; and third to pursue egalitarian social development processes.

On the other hand, a number of countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Uganda, Sierra-Leone, the Gambia and Congo did not bother to create new systems but merely maintained and used the formal system inherited from colonialism–Western Parliamentary Republicanism, with its veneer of western democracy. Whatever, system the various African (Nigerian) leaders and state chose, the challenges were the same, and how to create institutions, processes, and attitudes that would foster national integration and see the emergence of new nation-states.

Consequently, they all had to attend to the same problems of the construction of new administrative systems, new physical and transport infrastructures and new educational and economic systems to address their need. In both emergent political systems, some leaders often attempted to stay in power for long periods through various mechanisms. These included the creation of one party or single party system, banning of multi-party systems and suppression of oppositional perspectives and groups, including repressions, detention trial and illegal imprisonment of oppositional perspectives and groups. These new states and leaders faced the profound challenges of creating a new inclusionary mechanism to accommodate and represent their diverse peoples which they inherited.

This was solely to minimize the exploitation of difference, the use and abuse of diversity, thereby reducing inter-group conflicts that could generate crises, instability and even threats to the new nations' territorial integrity. The challenges of the national-state hood formation after independence overwhelmed the early leaders due to enormity of the task and the variety of work that had to be done in the political, social, economic, cultural, infrastructural and educational spheres.

Thus, the new states faced serious multiple challenges of the establishment and construction of virtually all infrastructures of a new state and at the same time had to manage the relationships among the various ethno–national groups in the country so as to foster a sense of belonging. In addition, economic challenges remained as they did not move their economies outside the inherited colonial economic system. They were therefore unable to

sustain the social facilities they built, expand them or create sufficient jobs to address unemployment and other social issues.

All these factors most of the times led to disruptive inter-group competition, conflict, instability and threats to these countries' survival. It was in this context that military groups seized power in many African (Nigeria) countries and ruled for over three decades between the 1960s and 1990s with first military coup in 1966 killing many First Republic leaders to 1999 the return of democracy by General Abdusalam Abubakar to the elected President Olusegun Obasanjo. All the military regimes commonly claimed a messianic mission to rescue their countries. However, it is important to note or stress that despite their claim to a revolutionary mantle, they were of different political and ideological orientations as follows: reformist, ethnic and revolutionary.

In practice, they were not often able to accomplish their stated objected due to the enormity of the task and their own ideological limitations. The military's longevity in power and inability to move forward often aroused opposition movements that campaigned for liberalization and democratization. These eventually led to the exit of numerous military regimes from the 1980s onwards and the emergence of new democratic regimes. By the time the African Union Charter was adopted on May 26, 2001, it outlawed forceful and undemocratic takeover of power on the continent.

### **Challenges of Nation-Statehood in Nigerian Politics**

Historically, the nation-state hood has always involved the processes of political integration of various pre-existing groups that should result in the emergence of a new political community. Given the variety of ethno-cultural groups that often come together or are brought together to form a nation and political leaders in the past have always had to design frameworks and strategies to lead to the emergence of cohesive political communities that are accepted and taken for granted by subjects and citizens as their 'own' specific nation-state. One thing has defined the entirety of human history is the constancy of change within the wheel of time. What the entire process of nation-state hood means is the continuous shifting, fusion and diffusion of human populations and territories. So every human society has, in the course of time, undergone tremendous changes and at any given time remains in transition. In no other part of the world does the task of defining and properly articulating these problems of common existence in an integrated political community seem as pressing as on Nigeria (African) continent.

### **Ethnic and Tribal Differences**

This is the primary challenge which faced Nigeria (African) people and leaders in contemporary times as they attempted to form new state hood after the European colonial rule. Due to the distinctive process of state hood in Nigeria and the relatively new-born nature of these politics, the predisposition to atavistic ethnic sectionalism remains an ongoing challenge over fifty years after 'independence'.

In most cases, the sectionalization is along ethnic and religious lines, although increasingly, economic or rather class and social factors are also beginning to play important roles. Evaluating the trend line of Nigerian politics requires a critical yet realistic perspective about many barriers confronting Nigerian as nation-state. Indeed, in addition to overcoming the authoritarian legacies of colonial and military rule, the enormous size, ethnic diversity and political complexity of Nigeria would daunt even the most talented and committed democratic reformers. When compared against perilous situations of neighboring states (e.g.

Ivory Coast, Chad, Sudan, Congo), the fact is that, Nigeria survives as a united and democratic nation-state today is a big achievement. But in recent times, those elements that bind the country together have beginning to fades and the foundation of Nigeria as nation-states is seriously shaking.

On this note; it has been argued that, it is not entirely surprising that the nation has witnessed a series of successive ethnic rivalries which challenges the national integration efforts of the federal and states are becoming inadequate. Rather, it is argued that as long as the Nigerian elites continue to comport themselves in this contradictory way, so long will ethno-regional groups such as Arewa People's Congress (APC), O'odua People's Congress (OPC), Ohaneze Ndigbo, Ijaw Youth Movement, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and Egbesu, continue to find popular support and blossom in the country (Olu Adeyemi (2007). We become to be in danger by political elites from these ethnic groups are using the umbrella of regional voluntary associations to promote their political interest in disguise that urge the emergence of violence and disintegration in Nigeria.

Nigeria's great cultural diversity, however, is not in itself the reason why consensus and nation unity remains elusive. Class differences between the few rich (of all ethnicities) and the masses of the poor create an environment in which culture-based competition flourishes. Grinding poverty amidst a centralized, oil-dependent economy, combined with the centralization of political power in the hands of the executive, exacerbate cultural differences and promote intense political competition. This economic and political centralization promotes a zero sum perspective on politics that deepens the divisions among Nigerians. This makes it harder to achieve consensus on issues of common good and the nation-state aspirations for a United Nigeria.

### **Power Allocation between North and the Southern Region**

The key issue of federalism has been at the heart of the struggle for consensus. Getting this right has historically been the most difficult stumbling block to national unity and integration. Nigeria has had four constitutions since independence (1963, 1979, 1989 and 1999), reflecting an ongoing debate over the allocation of political power and government resources. The state and local governments are dependent on federal government transfers for 70-80 percent of their revenues and resources are allocated according to federal criteria. As the number of claimants on the system has multiplied, so have the number of states and LGAs. Nigerian federalism thus has evolved in a manner which has less to do with ensuring the autonomy of its component states and localities, and more with the elaborate distribution of federal largesse downwards. Likewise, the current constitution also indicates that the public political positions be allocated according to the federal character principle, as enshrined by Article 14(3) and monitored by the Federal Character Commission (FCC).

Since 1999, Nigeria has not yet transited to a legal system or political culture that can be described as fully democratic. A disconnect between the legal and political processes has been a direct consequence of the military's approach to governance. The result has been citizens being subjects to arbitrary government decisions. In the absence of effective legal recourse, citizens rely on their personal contacts and networks with elites or influential government officials. To move away from the extra-judicial means of pressing for political demands will require a different orientation towards respecting the rule of law regardless of who is in power.

On disturbing development undermining the rule of law and building on the old authoritarian patterns, however, is the rise of ethnic-based militias across several sections of the country. Gangs of armed youths purporting to protect the interests of the Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Hausa or other groups have been active in various capacities over the past couple years. The most notorious of these has been the Boko Haram Insurgent, operating in the Northeast, but there have also been much smaller and more localized groups springing up.

Politics in Nigeria is still largely an elite game, along the lines presented above: rich, male and old. This closed system is propagated by what Nigerians refer to as the “sit tight” or incumbency syndrome, in which elected officers refuse to relinquish their seats in government despite their poor performance, and utilize any means to stay in office. Not only does this result in an inadequate circulation of elites, but it also perpetuate systematic discrimination against three primary groups: Women, the poor and non-indigenes.

### **Issues of Indigene and Settlers Syndrome**

Another key barrier to integration in Nigeria’s democracy is the widespread discrimination against citizens known as no indigenes, no matter how strong their ties to the communities in which they live. All Nigerians are officially classified into two types of citizens: those who can trace their ethnic and genealogical roots back to the people who are said to have originally settled there (indigenes), and those whose ancestors came from elsewhere. There is no way for a non-indigene to become an indigene, no matter how strong or long-lasting the ties to the communities in which they are resident. As a matter of policy, many states refuse to employ non-indigenes in the civil service and exclude them from academic scholarships.

The rights that are systematically denied to non-indigenes run directly counter to the constitution’s guarantee of freedom against discrimination and remain a source of considerable resentment questions about national integration among many Nigerians, especially as demographic changes in the country continue to take place, such as internal migration.

### **Corruption**

Corruption is still the stock-in-trade of Nigerian democracy, rooted in the centralized, clientelistic nature of politics described above. Political elites misappropriate considerable public funds for their personal gain, while most of their constituents lack access to potable water and many other socio-economic infrastructures and services. There is a big problem with the wage structure of the bloated civil service (not to mention not being paid on time), which is filled with patronage hires.

Consequently, many Nigerians are forced to resort to petty corruption simply to survive. The key to cementing the country’s patronage system through corrupt procurements is the handing out of government contracts to political favorites. This has been in the case for contracts for building roads, schools, hospitals and for the supply of electricity, water and medicines, etc. Nigeria was ranked as the most corrupt place on earth in 2003, but its relative ranking has since been upgraded to 152<sup>nd</sup> out of 159 countries.

As good governance continues to found lacking by the majority of Nigerians who live without access to basic public services, other organizations have stepped in to fill the void. Religious organizations, such as the Pentecostal Churches, now provide a range of social services that government generally provides, and Islamic religious schools have also sprung up in the north. This has actually provided some promising new means to try to address the



potentials for inter-communal conflict, whereby inter-faith organizations have been offering means for dialogue between groups. The governance dimension continues to be dominated by the ramifications of corruption and the difficulties in eradicating what has become a part of the system itself.

These problems are symptomatic of a broader, overarching democratic governance problem in Nigeria, which relates to an oligarchic control of political power both formal and informal by unaccountable political elites. This oligarchic control of political power contributes to patterns of inefficient centralization, a dearth of meaningful representation within the political system, and a culture of impunity that dates back to military rule. This has created a stark gap between the rulers and the ruled, leading to a general dissatisfaction and cynicism regarding governance combined with growing sentiments of injustice which are fuelled by attempts to manipulate ethno-religious rivalries. This directly threatens political stability, which is extraordinarily fragile. A breakdown in stability could undermine ongoing for national integration.

### **Mechanisms Adopted by Nigerian Governments towards Stronger Nation-States**

**The Constitution:** As an integrative measure, the federal government abolished the regional constitutions and evolved a single document for the whole country. Equally, several provisions were enshrined in all the constitutions adopted thereafter including the current 1999 constitution, such as articles that are expected to promote national integration.

**Federalism:** Federalism is a system in which government powers that exist in a state are shared constitutionally between the central authority and that of the component or federating units. Through this, the concept of national integration is given expression.

As opined by Obafemi Awolowo, “if a country is bilingual or multilingual, the constitution must be federal and the constituent states must be organized on linguistic basis.” He goes further to stress that “only a truly federal constitution can unite Nigeria and generate harmony amongst its diverse racial and linguistic groups (Fagbamigbe, 1981: 4-5).

Basically, the amalgamation of the North and South in 1914 laid the historical foundation for federalism in Nigeria and the outcomes of constitutional conference agreed on the use of federalism as an ideal system for the country.

**National Anthem:** A national anthem is intended to evoke a feeling of patriotism and make people of that country work for the progress, unity and growth of the country. Usually it contains the ideals and traits which the country intends to impart to its citizens. It is intended to help citizens to growth to love and serve their country and reminds them of other responsibilities to the country.

**Revenue Allocation:** To further strengthen national integration, revenues which are generated are pooled into a common fund and shared thereafter to all tiers of government using agreed parameters (See Section 162 (2) of the 1990 Constitution).

**Establishment of Political Parties:** Ethnically based political parties were known to be harbinger of distrust and violence. To avoid this and encourage national integration, section 222 (b) of the 1999 Constitution slates: ‘The members of the association are open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic group.’ Also section 223 (2b) of the said constitution states that “the members of the

executive committee or other governing body of the political party shall be deemed to reflect the federal character of Nigeria.”

**Federal Character Principle:** This is a strategy adopted by the government at all levels to ensure equal distribution of scarce resources to all diverse groups that make up Nigeria, that no group dominates and controls the resources to the detriment of the others. Consequently, appointments, sitting of industries, schools and provision of social amenities, etc are made in a way to allow every group to participate in the system. The Central Philosophy is to diffuse primordial sentiments, create an enabling environment for peaceful co-existence and engineer the process of national integration (Okibe, 2000:194). As expressed in the moribund 1979 Constitution, the federal character principle states:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or form a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies (Section 14 (3) of the 1979 Constitution).

Equally, the 1979 Constitution (and the 1999 Constitution) enjoins that the affairs of the central, state, local government areas, government parastatals, etc. shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the diversity of the peoples within its area of authority with the over-riding intention to unite and integrate them.

**State Creation:** Decree No. 14 of 1967 introduced by the Gen. Yakubu Gowon’s regime created twelve states in Nigeria on May 27, 1967: six in the North and six in the South. This move was made to satisfy the yearnings of Nigerians for state creation since colonial times. The government equally felt that such decision will help strengthen national unity. Along this tread, by 2009, the numbers of states have risen to thirty-six with the tendency of increasing further.

**Rotational Presidency and Rotation of Power:** In its strong and determined desire to further strengthen the spirit of national unity, the still-born Gen. Sani Abacha’s 1995 constitution in section 229 (4), made provision for rotational presidency and rotation of power between the six geopolitical zones, as in:

- 1) North-Central: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and FCT
- 2) North-Eastern: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe
- 3) North-Western: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara
- 4) South-Eastern: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo
- 5) South-South: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers
- 6) South-Western: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has only attempted to give an overview of the situation in Nigeria in the last ten years. It has not been able to detail the performance or otherwise of the democratic experience in all these years in quantitative terms. But one thing that must be exposed in terms of assessing whether democracy has been able to enhance Peace and National Integration with its related basic problem which has already been highlighted as the inability of the political elites to understand and manage the system they are operating. Jega (2004:11) alluded to this when he observed that:

The inadequacy of the ruling class, in terms of lack of vision, competence, intellectual ability, democratic credentials and integrity, further complicates the situation in the sense that elected leaders have become patently incapable of addressing the economic crises and the perpetual instability in the system. They simply act like the proverbial ostrich, oblivious of what is happening around them and but busily engaged in graft and the advancement of selfish and parochial interests (Jega, 2004:11).

Corruption in Nigeria state manifest itself in the form of rent-seeking, fraud, embezzlement, misappropriation, bribery, extortion, holding, nepotism, violence, thuggery, pull-him-down attitude etc.

The first and foremost solution to the problem of democratic development is to develop a leadership that is intellectually sound, that is disposed to the knowledge of the socio-political and economic attributes of the nation, not the end visionless types that have ruled the country over the years and have squandered the enormous resources of the country. The country needs a leadership that must have national acceptance and one that must appeal to an undifferentiated public. Such leaders must mould around themselves the basic characteristics of charismatic's that would enable them to be national as against the regional or ethnic-based leadership that has been recruited for the country over the years.

Nigeria needs to look more inwards in the sense that it should create an ideology of development that is derived from its socio-political and economic horizons. Colonialism created for Nigeria a peripheral position in the international system of capitalism which till today has not given the country any direction for an ideological mould that would integrate and unify the country towards a peaceful, socio-political and economic order.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **References**

1. Ake, C. 1981. A Political Economy of Africa, Nigeria by Longman and in the United States by Longman Inc, New York.
2. Akin, O. 2005. Corruption and Economic Development: How Nigeria was underdeveloped by its Elites: Lagos: Woodhaven Nig. Ltd
3. Aliko, S. 1999. Public Accountability and National Development: A paper delivered at Nigerian Economic Society: Annual lecture.
4. Daniel, O. 1980. Imperialism and Dependency: Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
5. Economist intelligence Unit (1984) "Nigeria Country Profile."
6. Godknows, B.I. 2014. Perspective on Nation State Formation in Contemporary Africa, Trafford Publishing U.S.A. & Canada.
7. Gunder, F. 1969. Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution: New York: Monthly Review Press.
8. Jega, A.M. 2004. Democracy, Economic Crisis and Conflicts: A Review of the Nigerian Situation. The Quarterly Journal of Administration, Vol. xxxii, No. 1 March.
9. Jega, A.M. 2007. Democrac, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria. Ibadan: Spectrum Bks. Ltd.



10. Jega, A.M. 2007b. Nigeria After the 2007 Election: The Tasks Ahead, Keynote Address Presented by the International Conference on the Theme: Nigeria too rich for Dignity and the Law? Held at the Evangelische Academic, Loccum, Germany 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> June.
11. Nonli, E. 1980. Introduction to politics: Enugu Snap Press Ltd.
12. Odumegwu, O. 2001. Towards a greater Nigeria, Fourth Dimension, Enugu.
13. Otite, O. 1983. The Sociological study of corruption. In: Odekunle Femi (Ed.), Nigeria Corruption in Development Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
14. Ribadu, N. 2004. Address to NBA Annual Conference.
15. Rose-Ackerman, S. 1998. Corruption a Development. Annual World Bank Conference in Borisplekoyic and Michael Stiglitz (eds).
16. Seer, D. 1972. Development in a Divided World: London Penguin.
17. Tazi Vito, 1998. Corruption around the World: Causes.
18. Walter, R. 1972. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Tanzania Publishing Company.

**Citation:** Jibrin Ubale Yahaya and Musa Mohammed Bello. 2019. An Overview of the Challenges of Peace and National Integration in Nigeria Politics. International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research, 3(8): 20-28.

**Copyright:** ©2019 Jibrin Ubale Yahaya and Musa Mohammed Bello. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.