

## **ETHNIC POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study interrogates “Ethnic politics and democratic growth in Nigeria”. Ethnic politics continue to pose a security threat to democratic growth in Nigeria which affects promotion of good governance and democracy in the country. Today, many ethnic regions in Nigeria continue to use ethnicity as a resource for political manipulation and entrepreneurship, resulting in dominant ethnic groups excluding minority groups within national policies that reflect the interests and activities of the national majority. The objective of this study is to interrogate ethnic politics in Nigeria, unveiling how it affects democratic growth in the country. The researcher applied Game theory in analyzing the research. The methodology used by the researcher is qualitative research method as the researcher employed secondary data.

**Key Words: Democracy, Democratic growth, Ethnicity, Politics.**

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a federal constitutional republic comprising of 36 states and its federal capital, Abuja. Nigeria as a nation is a constituent of several nationalities. There are over 250 ethnic groups and the major ones are Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. It is however very disturbing that Nigerians have become slaves to their ethnic origins instead of harnessing these diversities towards national development. Nigerians are fanatics when it comes to ethnicity. It is therefore not surprising for a Nigerian to get angry because he/she is wrongly associated with another tribe. This is not the true reflection of a federal nation. “One of the sociological problems hindering the growth of the nation is an multi-ethnicity”. In addition, before the coming of the white man, the various ethnic groups were inter-dependent but they did not constitute themselves into one society. It was in 1914 that they were amalgamated. Nigeria is a British creation by uniting the various entities into a single country called the federal republic of Nigeria. Some Nigerians are of the view that “Nigeria is a forced marriage which did not receive the approval of the couples involved” Nigeria Heros Furthermore, whatever is done in Nigeria always has an ethnic undertone be It, politics, employment and provision of social amenities. Tribal affiliations are always very strong and visible. Over the years, since independence there have been cases of ethnic violence resulting from allegiance to one’s ethnic group and this has not worked well for the development of the country. It is very common in Nigeria for an ‘Igbo landlord’ to turn down a would-be tenant simply because he is ‘Hausa’. The problem president Jonathan is presently facing within and outside his party, is ethnicity otherwise known as zoning. Most northern elites have said times without number that it is the time of the north to govern the affairs of the country. When politicians lose elections, or are in one political crisis or the other, they tend to devise strategies which will appeal to their people. For example, the recent statement made by a former Niger Delta militant, Asari Dokubo, who has threatened fire and brimstone if Jonathan loses the 2015 elections. Political parties in the pre-independence era, were based on ethnic factors.

Nnoli (1978: 5) defines ethnicity as a “social phenomenon associated with (communal) Competition among members of different ethnic groups”. While ‘ethnic groups’, are social Formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries and membership Especially language, culture or both, with language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa. An evaluation

and understanding of the political development in Nigeria requires a consideration of the impact of ethnicity. Without doubt, one can say that ethnicity influences political development in Nigeria as several events and activities such as the civil war, creation of states and the formation of political parties can best be explained from the ethnic perspective. In Nigeria there are a lot of ethnic groups numbering more than two hundred and fifty. Ethnic politics as it is seen in Nigeri affects democratic growth of the country. In Nigeria there are three major ethnic groups which include Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Each of these major ethnic groups battle for political supremacy. Unfortunately democracy is considered as a game of number which culminated to what Igbos are going through in the country. For instance in the just concluded 2019 presidential election in Nigeria, the best candidate came from Igbo land but had no good hope of winning the election because of ethnic politics. The best candidates Prof. Kingsley Muogalu has served in United Nations for 17 years, he also served as Deputy Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, very young and vibrant but was not a contender because of ethnic politics. From 1999 to date no Igbo man has occupied the number one position in Nigeria. It appears it is a taboo for an Igbo man to become the president of Nigeria. Meanwhile it clear that an Igbo man has the competence and capability of developing Nigeria. The Yorubas are trying their best to cope with the situation, by the grace of God they have tested the number one position from 1999 to 2007 and the difference was very clear. The Hausas/Fulanis have always dominated politics in Nigeria. Because of the numerical strenght of Hausa people it is very easy for them to dominate Nigeria political system.

#### **Ethnic Politics of Culture and Identity in Nigeria**

In the pre-colonial era and since the independence of Nigeria, ethnicity played and still playing manifest and latent roles in the body politics of Nigeria. As Otite (1990) observed and quite rightly too, the ethnic virus has been one of the most important causes of social crisis and political instability in Nigeria; and ethnicity has been perceived in general as a major obstacle to the overall political and economic development of the country. Nnoli (1978) defined ethnicity as a "social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups."He further explained that ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries and that an ethnic group may not necessarily linguistically or culturally homogenous. Osaghae (1995) defined ethnicity as the employment of mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or co-operation. However, Azeez (2004) views ethnicity as a sense of people hood that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and common aspiration. Nigeria is a plural society and it is made up of over 250 ethnic groups with many sub-groups three ethnic groups - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo - dominate the political landscape. All other ethnic groups are swept under the carpet. This has created sub-nationalism. Ekeh (1973) has argued that ethnicity has flourished because the Nigerian elite who inherited the colonial state have conceptualized development as transferring resources from the civil public to the primordial pubic it is against this background that this writer would x-ray in a laconic manner the interplay of ethnicity in the body politics of Nigeria in pre-independence era and from independence till date.

In pre-independence era, party politics in Nigeria was based on ethnic factor thus one can say that it was during this period in question that the seed of ethnic politics was sown, germinated in the first republic and the products started spreading during the 3rd and 4th republics. For example, the Action Group as a party developed from a Yoruba Cultural Association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the NCNC was closely allied with the Igbo Union while the NPC developed from Jamiyyar Arewa. Thus the leadership of the aforementioned parties was along ethnic cleavages. The A.G. was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba; the NCNC leadership fell on Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo while NPC was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, a Fulani. Even to a large extent, the colonial administrative arrangement in Nigeria during the colonial period encouraged ethnic politics. The 1946

Richard Constitution had divided Nigeria into three regions for administrative convenience which is directly associated with the three major ethnic groups - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo.

It is not surprising therefore that the first political parties were formed along ethnic lines. During the first republic, politics was organized in the same way as during the pre-colonial era. The three political parties that existed during the pre-independence era also came into lime light and dominated the landscape; although other parties sprang up. These included Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) by Aminu Kano; United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Joseph Tarka, NPC by Sir Ahamdu Bello; A.G. by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and NCNC led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. There was no radical departure from those of the pre-colonial era as the parties had ethnic colouration in terms of leadership and regional affiliations. However, it was in the 2nd republic that regionalism was played down a bit. The 1979 constitution stipulated that for a political party to be registered, it must be national in outlook i.e. wide geographical spread across the country. The new political parties that were registered had their leadership replicated along ethnic lines as in the first republic. Thus, Obafemi Awolowo retained the leadership of A.G. which metamorphosed into UPN; Nnamdi Azikiwe controlled the Igbo speaking areas under NPP which is an offshoot of the old NCNC. NPN dominated the Hausa/Fulani areas; PRP in Hausa speaking while GNPP led by Ibrahim Waziri controlled the Kanuri speaking area. Therefore, ethnic colouration and affiliation played out in political party's formation and operation during the 2nd Republic. Voting patterns followed ethnic lines in the elections. It should be pointed out that political party formation had a different dimension in the third republic which was midwived by President Ibrahim Babangida government. Two political parties were formed and funded by the government. These were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). Even though these parties were established by government, ethno-religious cleavages were visible in the membership and composition of the two parties. While the SDP favoured the southerners, NRC was a party for the Hausa Fulani North as could be observed from their operation.

In the current political dispensation of the Fourth Republic ethnic colouration has reared its ugly head. With ANPP considered as a party predominantly occupied by the Hausa/Fulani and AD as direct successor to Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action group and Unity Party of Nigeria and as a result dominated the six Yoruba speaking states of Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo Osun and Oyo until 2003 when it lost all the states except Lagos. The ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is being perceived as to have deviated a bit from the usual ethno-religious dominated party politics of the past with their membership and formation cutting across the clime of Nigeria. However in the 2011 general elections, ethnic and regional politics started to play itself out. With the demise of Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'adua some people in the North felt power should not shift to the south and they started kicking against the presidency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. The new parties on contest like APGA is seen as Igbo party; ACN as a re-incarnation of A.G. or UPN which is Yoruba based, CPC and ANPP are seen as the party of Hausa/Fulani affiliations. It is only the PDP that to some extent has national outlook but the insistence on certain part of the country to produce the 2011 presidency has shown that ethnic and religious politics is still with us and will continue to plague the body politics and unity of Nigeria as a sovereign state.

### **Ethnic Minority Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria**

According to Rotimi Suberu (2006), a key feature of recent Nigerian politics is the strident agitation by ethnic minority communities, and other presumably disadvantaged groups, over what is now widely referred to as the "national question". This study seeks to undertake an analysis of two of the most

turbulent cases of ethnic minority tensions and protests in contemporary Nigeria, paying particular attention to their implications for federal democratic processes and prospects.

The study's two case-studies will involve recent and ongoing ethnic minority agitations among the oil-producing communities of Rivers State and the non-Hausa-Fulani peoples of southern Zaria in Kaduna State. The two instances of ethnic minority tensions will be linked both to an elucidation of the broader structural dimensions of the minorities and nationalities' question in the Nigerian federation today, and to a discussion of the options and prospects for managing ethnic conflicts in the interest of enhanced federal stability, greater inter-ethnic equity and reciprocity, and constructive and creative governance. Recent movements for liberalization and/or democratization in Nigeria and other culturally fragmented societies have been accompanied by an intensification of divisive and destructive centrifugal fissures and pressures. Indeed, according to two observers, "perhaps the most serious challenge both to the consolidation of new democracies and to the health of well-established ones is posed by the problem of ethnic conflict" (Plattner and Diamond, 1993:17). The culmination of Mikhail Gorbachev's federal democratic reforms in the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the ethnic and religious conflagrations that are consuming components of the former Yugoslavia, are only two of the more poignant examples of communal polarization and conflict in democratizing societies in the world today (Gleason, 1992; Mihajlov, 1991). Even India, which is one of the few consistently democratic nations in the Third World, is currently threatened by a crisis of "ungovernability and deinstitutionalization" arising from a growing wave of religious fundamentalism and communal agitation (Varshney, 1992).

In Nigeria, political developments since the beginning of the aborted programme of transition to the Third Republic in 1986 have highlighted the precarious and contentious state of the country's multiethnic federal system. In particular, there has been a growing wave of mobilization and opposition by ethnic minority groups against their perceived marginalization, exploitation and subjugation in the Nigerian federation. This ethnic minority ferment has engendered violent conflicts, involving thousands of fatalities, in the oil producing areas of the Delta region in southern Nigeria and the middle-belt region of northern Nigeria. On a more benign note, this communal ferment has provoked intensive associational activity among the country's ethnic minority groups. Among the more prominent ethnic associations established in the last six years to defend or advance minority rights can be numbered such groups as the Middle Belt Forum, the Southern Minorities Forum, the Association of Minority States, the Committee of Oil Producing Areas, the Nigerian chapter of the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa, the Ijaw Ethnic National Rights Protection Organization, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Movement for Reparation to Oloibiri (MORETO).

Quite obviously, any systematic consideration of the problems and prospects of democratic governance in Nigeria today would need to come to terms with the challenges and dilemmas of ethnic-based conflicts and tensions. This study is primarily designed to analyse such sectionally based challenges to federal governance and democracy in Nigeria.

An extensive body of literature exists on ethnic conflicts and minority problems (Young, 1976; Amersfoort, 1978; Thornberry, 1980; Horowitz, 1985; Rupesinghe, 1987; Welsh, 1993), on the problems and prospects of democracy in culturally segmented societies (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972; Lijphart, 1977), and on the Nigerian experience with democracy, ethnic conflicts and minority politics (Tseayo, 1975; Sanda, 1976; Okpu, 1977; Nnoli, 1978; Osaghae, 1986, 1991; Diamond, 1988; Akande, 1988; Olowu, 1991). There is, however, no recent systematic academic treatment of the problems of ethnic minority groups in the context of the recent programmes of democratic transition in

Nigeria. The broader theoretical and comparative question as to the feasibility and long-term viability of democracy and related institutional solutions under conditions of deep ethnic conflicts is also yet to be discussed fully or resolved definitively. Indeed, according to one observer, "the majority of ethnic problems are still unresolved and theory building on ethnic conflict resolution is still in its beginning" (Hettne, 1987:1).

Ethnic conflicts have long been recognized as one of the more fundamental threats to institutional stability, political order and state cohesion in the multi-ethnic societies of the Third World (Diamond, 1987). However, authors have differed in their interpretations or explanations of the sources and nature of these conflicts. Depending on the analytical inclinations of particular authors, and on the specificities and dynamics of particular conflict situations, ethnic conflicts have been attributed variously to the emotional power of "primordial givens" or cultural ties, the struggle for relative group worth, mass-based resource competition, electoral mobilization, elite manipulation, false consciousness and/or defective political institutions and inequitable state policies (Diamond, 1987; Doornbos, 1991). There is, however, a general acknowledgement of the inherent complexity, ubiquity, ambiguity, volatility and fluidity of the ethnic phenomenon. At the conceptual level, some analysts have tried to come to terms with this ambiguity by making a distinction among ethnic group, ethnic pluralism and ethnicity.

An ethnic group is regarded generally as a social collectivity whose members not only shares such objective characteristics as language, core-territory, ancestral myths, culture, religion and/or political organization, but also has some subjective consciousness or perception of common descent or identity. This subjective sense of common identity is, however, almost always developed only in contexts involving relationships among two or more ethnic groups. In other words, ethnic identity results from contact rather than isolation. Ethnic pluralism, therefore, refers to the existence of two or more ethnic groups within a territorial society or political community, usually a nation- state.

Ethnic pluralism is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for ethnicity. What then is ethnicity? Most analysts use this term to refer specifically to the mobilization and politicization of ethnic group identity in situations of competitive or conflictual ethnic pluralism. Ethnic minority problems are an example of ethnicity or ethnic conflict. While a lot of conceptual and ideological confusion surrounds the term "minority", most writers agree that minorities are culturally distinctive and relatively cohesive groups which occupy a position of numerical inferiority *and/or* sociopolitical subordination vis-a-vis other cultural sections in the society (Amersfoort, 1978). According to one useful United Nations source, minorities are groups that are: numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population, and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language (cited in Thornberry, 1980:257).

According to Hans van Amersfoort (1978: 228-232), minority groups differ according to whether they are geographically concentrated or dispersed, whether they seek participation in, or isolation from, the wider political system, and whether the policies of the majority groups are designed to achieve the emancipation, continued subordination or elimination of such minorities. Whatever may be their specific contexts or dimensions, however, there can be little doubt that minority problems represent the most common, disruptive and explosive examples of ethnic conflict situations.

The most comprehensive and compelling recent examination of ethnic minority issues is to be found in Ted Robert Gurr's *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict*. Gurr (1993:123) identifies several conditions that have contributed to the animation or mobilization of ethnic minority grievances since 1945. These conditions include:

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- unequal treatment of minority communities by dominant or "mainstream" groups;
- competition with other groups for access to power in new states;
- the contagious effect of ethno-political activism elsewhere;
- patterns of state building, political power and economic development that channel communal energies into either protest or rebellion; and
- the emergence of new ethnic minority elites who are willing to, and are adept at, mobilizing their constituents in response to changing political developments, opportunities and resources.

Gurr adopts a rather broad definition of ethnic minorities.

According to him and his collaborators, minorities are communal groups which experience systematic discrimination in a state, and have taken political action in support of their collective interests. Using this general definition, Gurr distinguishes between five types of ethnic minority groups; namely, ethnonationalists, indigenous peoples, ethnoclasses, militant or politicized sects, and communal contenders.

- Ethnonationalists — These are relatively large, regionally concentrated peoples who historically were autonomous and who have pursued separatist objectives at some time during the last half-century. Examples of ethnonationalists include the Quebecois of Canada, the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey and Iran and the Basques, Bretons and Corsicans of Spain and/or France.
- Indigenous peoples — These are conquered descendants of the original inhabitants of a region who typically live a pre-industrial existence in peripheral regions, practice subsistence agriculture or herding, and have cultures that are sharply distinct from those of dominant groups. Examples of indigenous peoples include native Americans, Australian Aborigines, the Masai and San of Africa, Nagas and Santals in India, and Dayaks in Northern Borneo. Some other indigenous peoples, such as the Kurds, may also be cross-classified as ethnonationalists because they have developed a sense of nationhood and have supported separatist movements during the past half-century.
- Ethnoclasses are ethnically or culturally distinct peoples, usually descended from slaves or immigrants, with special economic roles, usually of an inferior status. Ethnoclasses in the advanced industrial societies include the Muslim minority in France, blacks in Britain and the United States, Koreans in Japan, and many Afro-American groups in Latin America. In the Third World, however, ethnoclasses sometimes are economically advantaged but politically restricted merchants and professionals, like the Chinese of Malaysia and the residual European and Asian minorities in Eastern and Southern Africa. Common to most ethnoclasses is the demand for more economic opportunities or public services, and greater political participation.
- Militant or politicized sects are communal groups whose political status and activities are centred on the defence of their religious beliefs. Militant sects include Islamic minorities in societies dominated by other religious traditions (such as the Turks of Germany, the Muslim Albanians of the former Yugoslavia, Arabs in Israel, and Malay Muslims in Thailand), the antagonistic Sunni, Shi'i and Druze communities in Lebanon, the Shi'i groups in Sunni-dominated Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Copts in Egypt, Baha'is in Iran, Catholics of Northern Ireland, the Central Asian Muslims of the former USSR, and Kashmiris and Sikhs in India. Virtually all of these politicized religious communities can be cross-classified as indigenous peoples, ethnonationalists, ethnoclasses or even communal contenders.
- Communal contenders — These are culturally distinct groups in heterogeneous societies in which no single group constitutes a demographic majority of the population and virtually all groups hold or seek a share in state power. Communal contenders are of two types:

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- *Advantaged communal contenders:* These are culturally distinct groups with political or economic advantages over other groups in a heterogeneous society.
- *Disadvantaged communal contenders:* These are groups who are subject to political or economic discrimination or both.

In societies where communal contenders predominate, political power at the centre is often based on shifting inter-group coalitions. These coalitions use a mix of concessions, co-optation and repression to maintain their dominant position. Most African societies, including Nigeria, are dominated by communal contenders.

Obviously, the key drawback in Gurr's categories is that they are not mutually exclusive. Any given ethnic group can be cross-classified into two or more of the categories delineated by Gurr, which are defined by an unwieldy combination of the objective conditions and predominant political goals of ethnic groups. The complexity of the conditions and fluidity of the goals invariably lend an element of uncertainty, fluidity and controversy to the classification. Moreover, Gurr's volume gives inadequate recognition to the relational and contextual character of the concept of ethnic minority. Any ethnic group which is at risk of discriminatory treatment or collective adversity is regarded by Gurr and his collaborators as an ethnic minority. This not only makes virtually every ethnic group a minority, but also leads to conclusions which may tend to be patently misplaced in specific contexts or cases. For instance, the only ethnic minority groups listed for Nigeria in the Gurr volume are the Hausa-Fulani and Ibo, which are cross-classified as militant sect/communal contender and ethnonationalist/communal contender respectively.

While this categorization is analytically consistent with Gurr's overall conceptual framework, it is patently incongruent with Nigerian usages and realities. Technically speaking, every ethnic group in Nigeria is a minority "communal contender" since no single group constitutes a demographic majority of the population. Nevertheless, the term ethnic minority groups is now universally used in Nigeria to designate all the 250-odd ethnic groups in the country excepting the three largest ethnic formations of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo, who collectively comprise about two-thirds of the country's population. Designating the Hausa-Fulani and Ibo as "minorities" would, therefore, appear rather strange and preposterous to the student of Nigerian politics. What all this implies is the need to take local usages, realities, perceptions and specificities more seriously in defining an "ethnic minority". And this can only be accomplished through detailed analyses or studies of specific countries, rather than through a global survey, although the latter can be an invaluable source of theoretical and comparative insights.

An arguably more useful framework for the present study is provided by Kumar Rupesinghe (1987:533) who isolates the following features of many ethnic conflicts in the modern world, especially the Third World:

- They are protracted social conflicts. Protracted social conflicts are long drawn out social processes which combine ethnicity with a demand for economic redistribution. In such conflicts, it is difficult to distinguish between needs, interest and security.
- They involve a conflict between the periphery and the centre in which a dominant or hegemonic ethnic group or coalition controls the central state apparatus at the expense of peripheral ethnic sections. Some writers use the concept of internal colonialism to describe this process.
- These ethnic conflicts occur in segmented, deeply divided societies of an open type.
- They also occur in unranked ethnic stratification systems. According to Joseph Rotschild (1981) and Donald Horowitz (1985), ranked ethnic systems are based upon the coincidence of

social class with ethnic groups. Where the two categories do not coincide (i.e., where ethnic groups are cross-class), it is possible to speak of unranked ethnic groups. Horowitz, in particular, suggests that ethnic and class conflict coincide when ethnicity and class coincide in ranked systems. Ethnic conflict, however, impedes or obscures class conflict when ethnic groups crosscut classes, as occurs in unranked systems.

- Ethnic conflicts epitomize a defective state or a state that is bound by, or enmeshed in, primordial loyalties. Caught in the "ethnic trap", such a defective state is unable to act impartially or equitably towards its diverse ethnic constituencies, and its policies invariably serve to exacerbate, rather than moderate, divisive conflicts.
- Both Ted Gurr and Kumar Rupesinghe give considerable attention to institutional mechanisms for managing and resolving ethnic conflicts, or for reforming the "defective" multi-ethnic state. Both authors seem to agree that the institutions and policies of democracy, devolution and power-sharing are essential for the accommodation, deflection or resolution of ethnic minority grievances. According to Gurr (1993:75):

... democratic states are more likely to protect the civil and political rights of minorities; Marxist-Leninist states, to control their expression; Middle-Eastern and Asian regimes, to deny them; and Latin American regimes to ignore them.

The point is not that democratic states are insulated against ethnic minority problems and grievances. Rather, it is that the framework of democratic pluralism facilitates the *peaceful* and *ordered* expression and accommodation of ethnic minority problems. Thus, while autocracy is "a political condition distinctly associated with ethnic rebellion" (Harff, 1993:219), "institutionalized democracy facilitates non-violent communal protest and inhibits communal rebellion" (Gurr, 1993:138).

In essence, Gurr contends that:

... western democracies have devised strategies of accommodation that have contributed to a substantial decline in most kinds of ethnic conflict. Among the specific reforms are guarantees of full civil and political rights for ethnoclasses, programs designed to alleviate their poverty, recognition and resources for minority cultures and languages, and greater autonomy and state subsidies (Gurr, 1993:290).

Devolution can be regarded as the territorial twin of democracy. Like democracy, devolution provides institutional opportunities of regional/local self-governance for minority communities, thereby transforming potentially destructive conflicts into positive inter-regional competition. Gurr (1993:299) identifies five types of devolutionary arrangements on the basis of the extent of autonomy or authority devolved to the communal group; confederalism, federalism, regional autonomism, regional administrative decentralization and community autonomism. The major aim of power-sharing, also known as consociational democracy, is to mitigate the disadvantageous effects of majoritarian democracy on vulnerable ethnic minority groups. In the words of Rupesinghe (1987:538). Consociated democracy represents an alternative to what may be called a majority democracy-where the individual citizen is the most important political unit, and political legitimacy is won on the basis of support from the majority of individual citizens. The starting point for a consociated model is groups, for example ethnic or religious ones. A consociated system of government means that political decisions are based on collaboration between representatives from these different groups.

According to Arend Lijphart (1977, 1990), consociational democracy or the power-sharing approach is characterized by two primary attributes — (i) the participation of the representatives of all significant groups in the government of the country and; (ii) a high degree of autonomy for these groups — and

two secondary properties — (iii) proportionality in resource allocation, political representation and bureaucratic appointments and (iv) minority veto. According to Lijphart (1990:503), "power-sharing is not complete unless all four (characteristics) are included, and it cannot work well — and certainly not optimally — if one or more are missing." Thus, the two secondary attributes of power-sharing are no less important for the protection of minorities than the two primary attributes of inter-segmental participation in government and ethnic autonomy:

... proportionality is especially important as a guarantee for the fair representation of ethnic minorities. But... minority veto — the fourth characteristic of power-sharing — is the ultimate weapon that minorities need to protect their vital interests. Even when a minority participates in a power-sharing executive, it may well be outvoted or overruled by the majority. This may not present a problem when only minor matters are being decided, but when a minority's vital interests are at stake, the veto provides essential protection. The veto power clearly contains the danger that the entire power-sharing system can be undermined if one or more minorities overuse or abuse their veto power. It works best when it is not used too often and only with regard to issues of fundamental importance (Lijphart, 1990:495).

The assumed contradiction between majoritarian democracy and consociational democracy echoes a similar tension between individual and civil rights, on the one hand, and minority or group rights, on the other. This tension is, however, often more apparent than real. Indeed, the two sets of rights are basically compatible. Thus, the United Nations' regime on individual and civil rights includes a provision for non-discrimination against ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, even as it recognises the rights of persons belonging to cultural minorities to "enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language" (Thornberry, 1980:256). In essence, minority group rights are additional to, and not a substitute for, human rights on a non-discrimination basis. As Thornberry (1980:254) eloquently puts it:

Both kinds of rights are ultimately and equally 'human' in that a legal regime which guarantees both is capable of doing more complete justice to man in his cultural setting, rather than as being shorn of any cultural peculiarities. They are connected also in that a certain minimum of rights — human rights — are a necessary precondition for the exercise of any further rights... It must be mentioned finally that for many minority groups an effective regime of human rights and non-discrimination is all that is needed, insofar as it helps to eliminate barriers to their integration or assimilation into a wider society. Thornberry's observations are particularly relevant in the Nigerian context where ethnic minority groups have been preoccupied more with obtaining equitable treatment vis-a-vis the majority ethnicities, than with demanding special rights or protection.

Nigeria's experiences with ethnic minority problems have, as already noted, received fairly extended treatment in the literature. It is, however, generally recognized that ethnic minority politics and problems have received less scholarly attention than the conflicts between the three major ethnic conglomerations of Hausa/Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba (Okpu, 1977:166). Perhaps, this is because national politics in Nigeria have revolved largely around the competition among the "big three", with the ethnic minority groups being used as pawns in this three-player ethnic game.

Nevertheless, analysts agree that ethnic minority problems have been a decisive factor in the country's political turbulence and instability. Okpu (1977:169), for instance, contends that "... the differences between ethnic minority groups and the major political parties, and between the major political parties' themselves over the creation of ethnic minority states, were the root cause of political instability in the First Republic." Okpu's thesis is echoed by Osaghae (1986:155) who contends that "if the minorities problem had been effectively tackled and separate states created for the minorities, the First Republic

could have been saved.” This is because the creation of ethnic minority states could have moderated the destructive competition between the three large majority-dominated regions of the First Republic and ended the structural imbalance in the composition of the federation arising from the disproportionate size and population of the Northern region. The establishment of new states for ethnic minority groups could also have prevented the sporadic, and destabilizing, uprisings by ethnic minority groups protesting their inequitable and oppressive incorporation into the regional system.

It is generally acknowledged that the collapse of the First Republic in 1966 opened a new phase in majority — minority relations in Nigeria. In particular, the privileged access of several ethnic minority leaders to power under the military regime, the abrogation of the regional system, the creation of new states, the constitutional prohibition of ethnic chauvinist parties, and the introduction of the “federal character” principle (and related power-sharing arrangements) under the Second Republic (1979-83), have all combined to remove some of the more obnoxious sources and dimensions of the minorities’ problem in Nigerian politics. Nevertheless, ethnic minority agitations and protests against ethnic majority domination and oppression have persisted and even intensified in Nigeria in recent times. Indeed, in the words of Osaghae (1986:165), “the Nigerian Federation remains the majorities’ paradise... as the numerical minorities continue to be dominated, even oppressed.”

The Political Bureau, which was set up in 1986 to coordinate a national debate on the aborted transition to a third democratic republic in Nigeria, lamented the manner in which the process of state-building in Nigeria has reduced the nation’s ethno-religious minorities and other socio-economically vulnerable groups into constant objects of “neglect, oppression, social exploitation, domination, victimization, nepotism, discrimination and bigotry...” (Nigeria, 1986:201). Acknowledging the incompatibility of these oppressive tendencies with the national commitment to the establishment of a just and egalitarian society, the Political Bureau argued for a more direct and effective role for the Government in ensuring a fairer distribution of national resources and leadership positions, in enforcing the various constitutional provisions on human and socioeconomic rights, and in sustaining the principle of official neutrality or impartiality in religious affairs. The Political Bureau also recommended the immediate enactment of a national legal instrument on human, minority and socioeconomic rights, the protection of minority languages through explicit legislations in the states, and the establishment of inter-governmental advisory boards on minority problems (Nigeria, 1987:69). All of these recommendations were accepted or noted by the Federal Government (Nigeria, 1987b:69). Yet, the minorities issue has remained a source of turbulent agitation and violent conflict in the federation. Clearly, a more detailed and painstaking examination of the contemporary problems of ethnic and religious minorities in the Nigerian federation, and of the appropriate policy responses to these problems, is needed. This study hopes to make a preliminary contribution to such an inquiry.

The study undertook fairly detailed narrative and interpretative case studies of two of the most widely reported and politically turbulent instances of ethnic minority conflicts in Nigeria today, namely: (i) the spate of protests by oil-producing ethnic minority communities in Rivers State against alleged inhuman expropriation of their resources by the Federal Government and state-backed multinationals in the oil industry and; (ii) the communal uprisings by ethno-religious minorities in southern Kaduna (Zaria) against Hausa-Fulani politico-religious hegemony in the emirates of Zaria (Zazzau) and Jema’a.

The choice of the two case-studies was influenced not only by the need to include the most visible and violent instances of ethnic minority conflicts, but also by a desire to give adequate recognition to the divergent regional and sociopolitical circumstances of Nigeria’s minorities. Analyses of the two selected cases of ethnic minority conflicts have been guided by the need to illuminate the following set of themes or issues:

- the specific sources of the conflict;
- the actors and issues involved in the conflict;
- the policies and institutional arrangements that have been used to manage the conflict;
- the impact of such policies and arrangements;
- the nature and prospects of alternative policies and arrangements for reducing or resolving the conflict; and
- the general outlook on ethnic minority politics, federalism and democracy in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### **Group Theory**

Group theory is the study of groups. Groups are sets equipped with an operation (like multiplication, addition, or composition) that satisfies certain basic properties. In this study the group theory explains why the party politics and formation of political association and organisations in Nigeria has been greatly influenced and driven by ethnic sentiments, ethnicity and ethnic interests. Why dominant political parties right from the colonial period represented the major and dominant ethnic groups and why minor or small political parties are products of the minorities even till today e.g. PDP, ANPP, CPC, AC, APGA all representing or dominated by Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Ibos respectively and using these parties as an instrument of their ethnic groups to maintain a stronghold on political power and a platform to influence national interest in their favour.

Furthermore, the constant struggle and contest for state control in Nigeria- between and among ethnic groups wearing the masks of political parties corresponds with the claim and idea of the group theory that no group has a claim on the general will of the people. The term ethnicity and ethnic group are derived from the Greek word *ethnos* normally translated to mean nations. The term refers currently to people thought to have common ancestry who share a distinctive culture. An ethnic group is a group of people whose members identify with each other through a common heritage consisting of a common culture including a shared language or dialect. The process that results in the emergence of ethnicity is called *ethno genesis*. Among the first to bring the term “ethnic group” into social sciences was the German sociologist Marx Weber (1922) who defined it as those human groups that entertain a subjective believe in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation or migration; this belief must be important for group formation, furthermore, it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists. Weber maintained that ethnic groups are artificial i.e. a social construct because they were based on subjective belief. The relivance of this theory to the study can not actually be over-emphasised. Nigeria is patitioned into group; these groups have different ethnic and religious affiliations which were brought into the political system of democracy in Nigeria. In Nigeria the group politicians belong to is a determining factor to win elections.

#### **Ways of solving the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria**

To overcome the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria and reach the principle goal of national unity, it is necessary to unite people in as many aspects of life as it is possible. There are five ways of solving the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria that can unite the nation on the governmental and social level and promote democratic growth in Nigeria.

1. Economic cooperation: It is necessary to provide the citizens with the universal system of goods and unite regions depending on the natural resources. For example, the Edo supply country with cocoa, but receive sugar cane from the Sokoto people. The same interaction can be introduced in the other sectors of the economy.

2. Political and state cooperation: The creation of common political parties and the creation of road and railway transport connection between the lands of different ethnic groups must be taken into

account. Besides, the government itself has to start thinking, how can ethnic conflict be resolved and the government has to be interested in solving the current problems of ethnicity. There must be representatives of all (and even minor) cultures in the parliament to satisfy the interests of all people of Nigeria.

3. Youth education: It is more difficult to influence the opinion of senior people who can still somehow (maybe because of personal reasons) support ethnic conflict in Nigeria than to influence the formation of another worldview of the young people. The subject of intercultural interaction must be included in the curriculum. Children have to attend the meeting with the representatives of other Nigerian cultures. There they can exchange the history of cultures, the cultural experience, beliefs, food recipes, cultural heritage, and traditions. Nothing stops aggression, discrimination, and hatred better than broad worldview provided by education.

4. Secular activities: The organisation of national festivals, celebration, the introduction of traditional holidays and even religion will contribute to the possible solutions to ethnic conflicts. It is not easy to change or modify ethnic habits, but it is indispensable to do the best to find common traits in all cultures and assure people that they have to find a compromise and accept changes in favour of Nigeria's unity.

5. Inter-tribal marriage: The encouraging of intercultural marriage on the governmental level will surely solve the problems of ethnicity. Intercultural tribes can be supported financially and officially congratulated to show respect to people who contribute to the creation of a united Nigerian nation.

### **Conclusion**

Ethnic politics has actually affected positive democratic growth in Nigeria. The type of leaders produced in Nigeria is leaders with ethnic attachment. Democracy which has been widely defined as government of the people by the people and for the people is supposed to give the people an ample opportunity to elect credible leaders not minding his or her ethnic or religious affiliation. In Nigeria democracy is not growing very fast owing to the adverse effects of ethnic politics. During the 2015 general election in Nigeria, some political analysts predicted the fall of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan emphasising that he is from a minority ethnic group, at the end of the election, Jonathan lost to somebody from majority ethnic group, not long after President Buhari resumed office, and Nigerians started complaining again about harshness and all that. So ethnicity has led Nigerians into electing leaders with poor leadership background there enthroning mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy.

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