Democracy and Ethnic Identity in Nigeria: Navigating the Tensions between National and Ethnic Loyalties

Charles Berebon

ABSTRACT

Abstract— Efforts by successive Nigerian administrations to foster national integration and development have frequently fallen short, leading to a fractured relationship among the federating units. This may be attributed to the lack of a defined national ideology or shared tradition. However, it's important to note that many nations did not start with full cohesion; instead, national unity often emerges over time through gradual reforms that address the flaws within the national framework. The persistence of narrow nationalist movements in Nigeria, especially since independence, is concerning, as history shows a consistent pattern of agitations. These take forms such as the defense of minority and religious rights or ethnic mobilization, and the Fourth Republic has continued to reflect these complex dynamics. Leaders from one region or ethnic background often encounter dissent from other groups, signaling resistance to perceived marginalization. While protest against ineffective governance is justified, questions remain about the motives behind these movements, as they may not always be driven by a genuine commitment to national unity, making a resolution appear distant. This paper explores the motivations behind these enduring nationalist sentiments to assess their implications for national development. Relying largely on secondary data, as well as accounts from witnesses and historical sources, the study uses a descriptive approach to examine each phenomenon. The instrumentalist theory provides a framework for analysis, suggesting that the prevailing pattern of ethnic-based protest is unlikely to subside soon. Many citizens continue to feel aligned with their ethnic roots, often prioritizing them over national identity. Establishing a sincere democratic system that includes all voices can help alleviate the intensity of these divisions.

Keywords: National integration; Ethnic mobilization; Democratic processes; Marginalization.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's democratic evolution has been marked by several key issues, including calls for a Sovereign National Conference, militancy in the Niger Delta, concerns over marginalization and disparities in the military and federal civil service, as well as poverty, corruption, terrorism, and the unequal distribution of power across government levels. These issues have also fueled ongoing demands for constitutional review since the Fourth Republic (Agbu, 2000). Compounding these challenges is the lack of internal democracy within political parties, which ideally serve as central institutions of democracy. Many political parties display ethnic biases, especially during conventions and post-primary elections, further illustrating the weakness of ideological consistency (Agbu, 2000).

In Nigeria, political parties have historically struggled to adopt strong ideological identities, which may explain their vulnerability to shifting loyalties. Instances when parties have attempted to outline clear ideologies have often highlighted the contrast between radical and conservative approaches. For example, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), led by Mallam Aminu Kano, broke away from the Northern People's Congress (NPC), advocating for social change driven by the common people rather than the elite (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Similarly, the Zikist Movement, a youth group within the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) influenced by Fabian Socialist principles, reflected a distinct ideological approach, akin to the NEPU's 1950 Sawaba Declaration (Chukwumerije, 2009). These splits within Nigerian parties echo earlier ideological divides, such as the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions within the Russian Social Democrats in 1903, highlighting how ideological differences, rather than shared values, often shape political movements (Alade, 1997).

Ideology is generally seen as essential for political parties to establish identity, viability, and coherence. However, Nigerian political parties have often lacked consistent ideologies, tending instead toward flexible stances driven by a desire for power, rather than strong philosophical foundations (Egwu, 2015). In Nigeria, political thought has been more reactive to current political structures than focused on envisioning an ideal society. This reactionary mindset means democratic ideals have been used mainly for political mobilization, diluting the institutions essential for democracy. The frequent ethnic affiliations that overshadow political objectives indicate a lack of cohesive national vision.

From the colonial period, Nigerians showed an understanding of fundamental freedoms, such as self-determination and the right to participate in governance. Early nationalist movements, spurred by exposure to these principles, emphasized freedom from colonial domination and inclusion in political processes. The formation of the National Congress for British West Africa (NCBWA), which secured voting rights, inspired the emergence of political parties aimed at contesting legislative elections (Iweriebor, 2014). Despite regional variations among political groups, the shared goal was self-rule and democratic participation, with a national framework where these rights could be exercised.

Six decades post-independence, the concept of nationhood and democratic ideals remains limited and often influenced by ethnic interests. Ethnic concerns often drive the current demand for restructuring, echoing pre-independence debates. This trend suggests that Nigeria's democratic ambitions may have become muddled by ethnic nationalism. Questions remain about whether Nigeria is experiencing a form of neo-colonialism or whether democratic processes have bypassed true consolidation.

The persistent lack of national solidarity raises key questions: Why has independence not fostered a strong sense of nationhood in Nigeria? What aspects of nationalism continue to fragment loyalty to the central government? Are there realistic prospects for state survival, national cohesion, and sustainable development? This research aims to investigate these underlying factors hindering the ideal of a unified Nigerian nation and assess how independence has shaped national unity. It will explore the factors sustaining narrow sub-national identities and evaluate the potential for achieving genuine national solidarity and development.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS
Ideology
The concept of ideology was first introduced by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy on May 23, 1797, to denote a systematic study of ideas, policies, emotions, and sensory experiences (Johari, 2013; Omotola, 2009; Nnoli, 2003). Ideology typically refers to a set of values and goals, rigidly defined and ardently upheld, which provides a sense of identity and direction for individuals or groups (Phillips, 1964). It functions as a stable foundation that shapes political parties' stances and legitimizes their actions, including how they manage conflicts. Although often resistant to change, ideologies can serve almost sacred roles similar to religious beliefs and can be central to the cohesion, strength, and commitment of a political party. They also distinguish political parties within a political system (Vassallo & Wilcox, 2006; Volkens & Klingemann, 2002). Ideology can act as a motivating force for social change, mobilizing support for a transformation of the existing order or even a complete overhaul.

In Western democracies, for instance, liberalism (with its focus on individualism) and conservatism (with a welfare-oriented approach) have coexisted as dominant ideologies, particularly in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. Nigeria, however, is often said to lack a unified ideological foundation, not because it has no values, but due to the absence of a universally accepted set of principles or heritage around which policies consistently converge (Phillips, 1962). This lack of common historical or cultural heritage may explain the flexibility of Nigeria's political parties, which are often more adaptable to changing circumstances than to sustained philosophical ideals. This raises a fundamental question: what ideological principles, if any, truly underpin Nigeria's political parties?

Inspired by Western liberal democracy, Nigerian nationalists adopted this model as a framework for nation-building. However, some thinkers, like Fukuyama (2006), have argued that even Western democracy may be nearing a plateau, representing, in his view, the final stage of humanity's ideological journey. According to Fukuyama, Western liberal democracy symbolizes the peak of governance, promoting universal freedom under the rule of law and operating with the consent of the people (Fukuyama, 2006). In contrast, African ideological expressions have generally been more reactive than those in the West, manifesting in nationalistic forms rather than predictive models like Western capitalism or Eastern socialism. Examples include Julius Nyerere's concept of *Ujamaa* in Tanzania (Campbell, 1972) and Muammar Gaddafi's "Third Universal Theory" or "Third World Alternative" (Gaddafi, 1976).

Nigerian political parties have traditionally struggled to adopt cohesive ideologies, as they are often driven more by a quest for power than by ideological fidelity, leading to flexible rather than consistent policies (Egwu, 2015). Parties in Nigeria have sometimes leaned on vague interpretations of liberalism and free-market principles, such as "Fabian Socialism," not out of conviction but rather to serve the interests of specific groups or appeal to wealthy supporters. These adaptations may have also been influenced by colonial interests, which aimed to pacify nationalist movements and delay independence (Chukwumerije, 2009). As a result, Nigerian political parties were arguably molded to align with Western interests, inheriting a political orientation shaped by colonial legacies. Scholars have widely attributed Nigeria's lack of ideological coherence to the enduring influence of colonialism. Kwanashie (2011) argues that colonialism, by design, hindered the development of a unified Nigerian identity, reinforcing pre-existing divisions and introducing new ones that obstructed nation-building. Egwu (2015) similarly asserts that the colonial state's fragmented governance approach—distinctly organizing rural and urban areas—exacerbated ethnic divides, while the state itself perpetuated these divisions. In parallel, Akinrinade (2016) claims that the Western-educated elite continued to perpetuate colonial ideologies under the guise of modernization, further sustaining ideologies imposed from the outside.

Ethnicity

Chazan's concept, as discussed by Agbu (2011), views ethnicity through an anthropological lens, seeing it as a shared perception of common origin, history, memory, identity, and unity—qualities built around mutual standards, values, goals, and aspirations. This anthropological perspective emphasizes ethnicity as rooted in shared culture and heritage. Additionally, Nnoli's (1978, cited in Agbu, 2011) definition frames ethnicity as a social phenomenon arising from interactions among different ethnic groups, highlighting the relational aspect of ethnicity.

Some prominent thinkers argue that family connections hold a significant social value, which they describe as "primordial." This notion suggests that the ties of kinship carry an intrinsic, almost mystical importance. Additionally, ethnicity is often mobilized as a historical and political tool by the ruling class to shape state power and democratic structures (Egwu, 2015). In this context, ethnicity may be deployed to serve "ethnic interests" or to advance other goals not directly linked to ethnicity. Therefore, this research focuses on exploring how ethnicity, ethnic nationalism, and democracy intersect as ideological foundations in political power dynamics and competition. Following Omotola's (2009) insights, it also investigates how these elements shape political boundaries, differentiating various social groups and organizations.

Nationalism

Nationalism is a complex concept, often serving as an ideological tool used by dominant states to unify their populations (Balber and Wellerstein, 1988). The term encompasses multiple meanings: a love for one's country, a defense of national identity and pride, and sometimes an aggressive or exclusionary pursuit of these ideals, often to the detriment of other nations. Nationalism tends to reinforce ethnocentrism within the group, while fostering xenophobia towards outsiders. Psychologically, it creates a perceived bond between individuals and their nation, presenting the nation as an extended family.

Historically, nationalists have sometimes collaborated with colonial authorities to eliminate perceived internal threats. In Northern Nigeria, for instance, nationalism initially targeted Southern Nigerians rather than Europeans, with Northern leaders willing to accept colonial rule temporarily if it meant preventing Southern dominance in government structures (Kwanashie, 2011). This dynamic arose from the structural organization of the colonial economy rather than purely ethnic motivations. Scholars have sometimes applied a class-based interpretation to Nigerian politics in the late colonial and post-colonial periods, though this interpretation often aligns with Coleman's framework, which views colonialism as a driver of modernization and nationalism as a consequence of that process.

In both narrow and broad senses, ideology and ethnicity drive nationalist sentiments, shaping the structure and nature of social and political groups. Political parties in Nigeria were initially rooted in ethnic allegiance, aiming to secure greater representation for their communities under colonial rule. This trend has continued into the present, with party formation often motivated by ethnic considerations, leading to conflicts, protests, and sometimes violence, as witnessed in the 1967-70 Civil War. It is worth examining whether this narrow form of nationalism is typical in all diverse societies or if it is more common in societies with strong internal divisions.

In Nigeria, the absence of a strong ideological foundation in political parties has led to a flexible, often inconsistent nationalism. Nationalism in this context becomes a tool for mobilizing support along linguistic, religious, and ethnic lines, rather than an

ideology grounded in common goals or shared aspirations (Kwanashie, 2011; Egwu, 2015).

AN OVERVIEW OFIDEOLOGY, ETHNICITY, NATIONALISM AND PARTY POLITICS IN NIGERIA
Trends and Trajectory

The earliest forms of political organization in Nigeria emerged as a response to colonial ordinances, such as the Newspaper Ordinance of 1903 and the Seditious Offences Ordinance of 1909 (Iweriebor, 2014). According to Iweriebor (2014), Nigerians possess a social democratic culture and tradition grounded in conventions that promote participation and contribution to policy formulation. The intelligentsia of the 1920s led movements such as the People's Union (PU), the Nigerian Reform Association (NRA), the Nigerian branches of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). This era also saw the establishment of Herbert Macaulay's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), aimed at enforcing the social rights of Nigerians. Founded in 1923, the NNDP was Nigeria's first political party, formed to contest elections for the new Legislative Council. Key nationalist figures included Herbert Macaulay, Joseph Egerton Shyngle, Eric Moore, C.C. Adeniyi-Jones, Dr. Adeyemo Alakija, and Dr. J.T. Caulcrick (Iweriebor, 2014). The NNDP's objectives included securing the welfare and safety of the populace and striving for democracy "until the realization of its ambition of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Iweriebor, 2014).

Between the 1930s and 1950s, other political parties emerged, including the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (NCNC), the Zikist Movement (ZM), the Northern Elements Progressive Association (NEPA), F.O. Coker's Nigerian Labour Party (NLP), the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Action Group (AG), the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) (Iweriebor, 2014). Many of these parties were criticized for having limited, self-serving objectives, primarily focused on countering the colonial government's attempts to gain legitimacy through a restricted franchise that only included Lagos and Calabar, as outlined in the Clifford Constitution. The NPC was characterized as an elitist and conservative party, whereas the AG and NCNC were more progressive and welfare-oriented, rooted in socialist ideologies and driven by a commitment to the nationalist struggle. The ideological ambiguity among these parties is further exemplified by the alliance formed during the First Republic between the NPC and the NCNC, which were ideologically incompatible.

The Second Republic witnessed a mere rebranding of old political parties under new names, including the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), which replaced the NPC, AG, and NCNC, respectively. Other parties, such as the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), along with the Nigerian Advance Party

(NAP), also emerged. Political instability characterized this period, marked by significant realignments and coalitions. For instance, the formation of the so-called forum of "progressive" governors, composed of the PRP, GNPP, NPP, and UPN, was short-lived. The ruling NPN leveraged its federal power and patronage to attract defectors from other parties, successfully wooing the NPP of the East, in a manner reminiscent of alliances formed during the First Republic. The NPP and GNPP were seen as liberal in ideology, advocating for a mixed economy, while the NPN emphasized a free-market system and respect for traditional institutions. The PRP emerged as the most radical party, espousing a populist, anti-neocolonial agenda focused on social revolution and income redistribution. In contrast, the UPN, characterized as disciplined and socialist/welfarist in orientation, championed free education and healthcare delivery (Ojo, 2014; Omotola, 2009).

The experiences of the botched Third Republic revolved around the official formation of parties orchestrated by the state after various experiments with different political associations (Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991, in Omotola, 2009). The military government imposed the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) as the primary political parties, with the former leaning slightly left and the latter slightly right (Omoruyi, 2002, in Omotola, 2009). This arrangement was perceived as part of a broader agenda to maintain military power (Osaghae, 1998, in Omotola, 2009). Ideally, the existence of two political parties should reflect two fundamentally different ideological camps, similar to the Labour and Conservative parties in Britain or the Democrats and Republicans in the USA. However, this was not the case for the SDP and NRC in Nigeria; while one was somewhat left-leaning and the other right-leaning, both lacked significant ideological distinctions (Jinadu, 2012).

The political landscape of the Fourth Republic has been marked by further complications. The PDP, for instance, has drawn its founders from a wide array of political persuasions—conservatives, radicals, and progressives (Omoruyi, 2002, in Omotola, 2009). Although the PDP and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) were status quo parties with capitalist and conservative leanings, and the Action Democratic Party (AD) appeared progressive and radical, none has established clear policy positions that could foster popular mobilization or legitimize their actions (Omotola, 2009). This situation reflects a pattern of adversarial elite behavior, often characterized by irreconcilable differences among party leaders.

A notable issue in contemporary Nigerian politics is the diminishing clarity of the left/right divide, leading to conflicts centered more on personalities, ethnic identities, and geopolitical zones rather than ideological principles in mobilization strategies (Egwu, 2015). Furthermore, since 1999, all political parties have imposed liberal economic policies supported by Bretton Woods institutions, undermining the social democratic ideals outlined in Chapter Two of the Nigerian Constitution, which articulates the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy expected to guide party manifestos and programs (Egwu, 2015).

In essence, the Nigerian political experience presents a paradox reflective of Gunnar Myrdal's concept of the "hanging state" or the "over-developed state." While Western liberal democracy appears to be on a path toward an ideological endpoint, as suggested by Fukuyama (2006), it exposes a vacuum in the ideological landscape of Africa. Fukuyama's notion of the "end of history" posits that humanity's ideological evolution culminates in the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of governance. The state emerging at this historical juncture is defined as liberal insofar as it recognizes and safeguards individuals' rights through a legal framework, and democratic in its reliance on the consent of the governed (Fukuyama, 2006). However, African ideals have often manifested in reactionary forms, primarily articulated through nationalism, rather than as proactive alternatives to Western capitalism or Eastern socialism.

Military Rule

Out of Nigeria's sixty-two years of independence, the military has held power for a significant duration—both in terms of time and the immense wealth accrued during this period, particularly during the oil boom of the 1970s, which marked the peak of Nigeria's economic prosperity. The Nigerian military first seized power in an unprecedented coup in 1966, leading to the appointment of General Aguiyi Ironsi as Head of State. This was followed by a counter-coup that brought General Yakubu Gowon to power. In 1975, General Murtala Muhammed took control of the government, as General Gowon had failed to fulfill his promise of transitioning to civilian rule. The transition program initiated by General Muhammed, along with General Olusegun Obasanjo, began on July 20, 1975, following the termination of Gowon's regime due to perceived ineptitude and low performance.

As part of his strategy to secure legitimacy, General Muhammed pledged to hand over power to a democratically elected civilian government by October 1, 1979, after successfully implementing his transition timetable. However, General Muhammed was assassinated by Colonel Dimka in an abortive coup on February 13, 1976. Following his death, General Obasanjo quickly took over and proceeded to implement the transition programs, aiming to return power to civilians by the set date.
On September 21, 1978, the ban on political parties was lifted, leading to the registration of five political parties by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO): the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), and the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) (Omotola, 2009).

In the subsequent elections, President Shehu Shagari emerged victorious, but his win was contested by the UPN on grounds of irregularities, leading to claims that the election results were not credible. Without awaiting the outcome of any judicial processes, General Obasanjo handed over power on October 1, 1979. However, just three months into his second term, General Muhammadu Buhari seized control in a coup d'état. After twenty months of rule, characterized by harsh measures that banned

political activities and closed land borders, Buhari was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida on August 27, 1985.General Babangida initiated political activities aimed at transitioning to civilian rule in 1992 (Omotola, 2009). Nevertheless, despite conducting what was hailed as a popular, free, and fair election, the results were annulled, denying M.K.O. Abiola his mandate. In the wake of widespread protests, General Babangida "stepped aside" for a transitional government, which was subsequently overthrown by General Sani Abacha in 1993, leading to a significant decline in Nigeria's political landscape.

On July 20, 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar announced the termination of Abacha's transition program and introduced a new plan that would culminate in the transfer of power to elected civilians by May 29, 1999. To oversee the registration of political parties, voters, and the conduct of elections, a new electoral body known as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established (Egwu, 2015).

The Civil War

The Nigerian Civil War played a significant role in shaping the country's political landscape, leaving a lasting impact on Nigeria's internal and international relations, both positively and negatively. In September 1966, the military coup and subsequent counter-coup heightened ethnic tensions, leading to the massacre of Igbo Christians in the northern region (Okolo, 2010). In response to this violence and the electoral fraud that had precipitated the initial military coup, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military governor of the Southeast, declared the independence of the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 (Okolo, 2010).

The failure of the Aburi Accord led to the outbreak of war on July 6, 1967, which lasted for thirty months. During this period, four neighboring countries provided support to Biafra, allowing the use of their ports for the delivery of military supplies and equipment to Biafran forces. While the war prompted Nigeria to enhance its internal integration efforts through the Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction regime, it also taught the country valuable lessons that fueled its commitment to fostering cordial international relations.

The Minority Issues

The struggle for minority rights in Nigeria began intensifying in the 1950s due to the real or perceived fear of marginalization by dominant ethnic groups, which had benefited from colonial patronage. This was particularly evident in the regional arrangements that favored the three major ethnic groups. In response to these concerns, the colonial government established the Willink Minority Commission in 1957, which produced a report known as the Bill of Rights, modeled after the European Convention on Human Rights (Izuagie, 2016).

A critical question that arises from this context is how best to ensure the representation of minority groups through inclusion and good governance. Unfortunately, neither the Bill of Rights nor the subsequent creation of states—which

some minority groups later attained—has adequately alleviated these longstanding apprehensions.

The June 12 Legacy

The credibility of the June 12, 1993, election, widely regarded as the most free, fair, and popular election in Nigerian history, stemmed from its broad appeal across ethnic and religious lines, along with the support of the majority of Nigerians (Okorie, 2020). Several factors contributed to this credibility, including the choice of candidates, widespread poverty, and, most significantly, the frustration with military rule. It is evident that the lack of ideological cohesion among Nigerian political parties can be traced back to the absence of transformative leaders akin to Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, or Julius Nyerere, who spearheaded freedom movements in their respective nations. The process of independence revealed a degree of dissension among Nigerians; some segments of the population appeared to be comfortable with the colonial system and were not eager to pursue freedom.

As the elections approached, the political parties, although spawned by governmental designs, seemed to possess distinct ideological identities and represented diverse ethnic and religious interests. However, the insincerity of the government was starkly highlighted by the annulment of the election results. The specter of this betrayal may continue to haunt Nigeria well into the future.

Niger Delta Militancy

Another significant dynamic in Nigeria's political landscape has been the militancy in the Niger Delta region, which represents a violent form of minority agitation. This movement began in the 1960s under the leadership of Isaac Boro and reached a peak in 1998 with the Kaiama Declaration by the Ijaw Youth Council, demanding that oil companies suspend exploration due to land degradation (Otoghile & Eghweree, 2010; Otoghile & Okonmah, 2009).

The agitation intensified, culminating in the execution of the "Ogoni 9," a group of activists whose deaths plunged Nigeria into a severe crisis in its international relations. The government's subsequent response involved a military crackdown on various militant groups, but these measures proved largely ineffective as militant activities continued to disrupt oil production and, consequently, government revenue. It was not until the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua established a technical committee and offered amnesty to militants willing to surrender their arms that the crisis began to subside (Otoghile & Eghweree, 2010).

SOME DYNAMICS OF NIGERIAN POLITICS IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

The political landscape of Nigeria during the Fourth Republic has been marked by several significant undercurrents, including calls for a sovereign national conference, the Sharia Law debate in the early years, various ethnic movements such as the Indigenous People of Biafra, the Odua Peoples' Congress, and the Arewa Consultative

Forum, as well as the Boko Haram insurgency and other forms of criminal activity, alongside demands for restructuring. Historically, Sharia Law has been a longstanding feature in northern Nigeria, particularly within the emirate councils, predating both colonial rule and independence. However, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria explicitly declares the country a secular state. In a controversial move in the year 2000, Sani Yerima, then governor of Zamfara State, declared Sharia as the state religion, prompting 11 other northern states to follow suit (Okekeocha & Ewoh, 2013). The fact that President Obasanjo, a southerner, was in office during this period raises questions about the sincerity of these actions.

The demand for a sovereign national conference was likely fueled by the experiences of the Benin Republic and the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election by General Ibrahim Babangida. This agitation persisted for a significant portion of the first 12 years of the Fourth Republic, culminating in national conferences convened by Presidents Obasanjo and Jonathan in 2005 and 2014, respectively (Cheri, 2014). A key question arising from this demand was the issue of sovereignty in the context of an elected parliament, although the Pro National Conference Group (PRONACO) did not view the conference as genuinely sovereign. Nevertheless, the tension surrounding the issue was somewhat alleviated.

Founded on August 29, 1994, the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) aimed to assert the rights of the Yoruba people against a military regime perceived to be dominated by the northern elite. The group engaged in protests and utilized international media to advocate for its cause (Abdulazeez, 2020). This movement led to the formation of the Campaign for Democracy and the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). However, a division arose within the OPC regarding the acceptance of General Abacha's transition program, particularly between the two leaders, Fasehun and Adams (Abdulazeez, 2020). Ideologically, this movement reflected ethnic nationalism aimed at opposing leadership perceived as marginalizing certain groups rather than providing a coherent strategy for governance.

The activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), particularly under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu since 2012, have intensified as a radical effort to pursue self-determination in line with international law. Their actions have caused significant concern for the Nigerian government, leading to the group's proscription in September 2017 (Jonah et al., 2021). The push for Biafra has been consistent since the Nigerian Civil War, evolving in intensity and visibility over the years. A critical question remains whether the prospect of an Igbo presidency would be sufficient to mitigate or eliminate this agitation. While this idea may have once held promise for reconciliation, it has taken on a more troubling significance in recent years.

The Boko Haram insurgency, along with other forms of criminality in northeastern Nigeria, escalated significantly during this period. The group gained notoriety in 2009, particularly after the extrajudicial killing of its leader, Muhammed Yusuf (Falode, 2016). The insurgency evolved into both a national and international crisis, characterized more by doctrinal and religious motivations than by ethnic conflict. The human cost and

widespread destruction associated with Boko Haram have made it one of the most devastating challenges Nigeria has faced in recent decades. The concept of restructuring has gained prominence in Nigerian discourse, tracing its roots back to post-colonial discussions. It is often interpreted as a critique of the excessive centralization of power and resource management by the Federal Government, which diverges from the principles of federalism. Furthermore, it highlights the imbalances in military and civil service structures that favor certain regions over others (Mathew, 2017, cited in Iwegbu & Uwaifo, 2020). Different groups interpret restructuring in varied ways: for many in eastern Nigeria, it signifies a pathway to secession; for the Yoruba in the west, it implies regional autonomy and resource control, a sentiment echoed in the South-South region as well.

It is evident that calls for restructuring frequently emerge from opposition groups whose members are not currently in power. The motivations behind these calls, along with the resistance to them, are often politically driven, aimed at advancing self-interests even amid the rhetoric of national unity (Baba & Aeysinghe, 2017, in Othman, Osman & Mohammed, 2019).

THE THEORY

The concept of instrumentalism encompasses a range of approaches that posit ethnicity as a product of economic, social, or political processes, characterizing it as a flexible and adaptable tool. Ethnic groups do not have fixed boundaries; instead, they are collective entities that can change in size based on evolving circumstances. Individuals are not permanently assigned to a single ethnic group and may simultaneously belong to multiple groups. Consequently, ethnicity is viewed as dynamic (Ogbu, 2011).

Some instrumentalists argue that ethnic affiliation serves as a strategy to advance economic interests, suggesting that individuals are willing to change their group membership to enhance their sense of security or economic well-being. Marxist theorists have often regarded ethnicity as a form of false consciousness, a diversion employed by dominant groups to obscure material class interests. However, the persistence of ethnic ties in modern societies contradicts the predictions of Marxist theorists, who anticipated that these ties would gradually diminish, giving way to solidarity among the working class. The principal contribution of Marxist scholarship to the understanding of ethnicity is its ability to deconstruct it as a form of "false consciousness" while revealing its obscurantist role in social processes (Egwu, 2015).

According to instrumentalists, ethnicity is somewhat distorted and perpetuated by uneven economic exploitation, and it serves as a tool employed by individuals and groups. Ethnicity thrives primarily within the political process and is intrinsically linked to political affiliations, thus not necessarily leading to conflict (Agbu, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how ethnicity has historically overshadowed the ideological and nationalist frameworks guiding political parties in Nigeria, both before and after independence. Despite over sixty years of independence, there have been few notable changes in political party structures or in fostering national unity. Theoretical ideals regarding the nature and principles of political parties in Nigeria remain elusive, largely because the concept of nationhood itself lacks cohesion within these parties. Democracy, as a philosophical system, has not been deeply internalized in Nigeria, partly due to colonial administrative practices that enforced separate systems within the same colony, creating divisions rather than unity.

However, colonial influence alone does not fully explain the lack of a unified national vision or a shared ideology within Nigerian political parties. This absence of a common foundation around which solidarity can be built leaves parties ideologically ambiguous. Political parties, lacking a clear vision beyond the ambitions of their founders or leaders, cannot exceed the limitations of their leadership. In the current political environment, where party leaders can be figures with limited intellectual or ideological commitment, and elected executives dominate party power with nearly unchecked authority, the prospect of purposeful, visionary leadership remains distant. Ethnic nationalism, then, may persist as a powerful factor in Nigerian politics for the foreseeable future.

One critical area for further research is assessing the validity of claims of marginalization, which have prompted responses through ethnic mobilization. Additionally, the concentration of power in the hands of executives, their legal immunity, and the significant financial rewards of public office require reform. To counteract the influence of money in politics and reduce the intensity of "do-or-die" electoral contests, it may be necessary to rethink the roles and compensation of political officials. For example, executive roles could be more akin to those of institutional heads, while legislators could earn salaries comparable to Permanent Secretaries or university professors. By reorienting leadership toward national service rather than personal gain, Nigeria might reduce the appeal of financially motivated, highly competitive political campaigns.

REFERENCES

Abdulazeez, Y. (2013) Odua People"s Congress and the Changes in Nigeria"s Political and Security Structures. *Journal of Social Cultural and Political Protest*, 12 (2) 235-243 http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/14742837.2012.704175

Agbu, O. A. (2000) The Challenges of Democratisation in Nigeria"s Fourth Republic, Nigerian Forum, *A Journal of Opinion on World Affairs* (Special Issues on The Challenges of Democratisation in Nigeria, First Volume) Vol.21(3-4) pp.59-69

Agbu, O. A. (2011) Ethnicity and Democratisation in Africa: Challenges for Politics and Development.Uppsala: NordiskaAfrikainstitutet, Discussion Paper 62. www.nai.uu.se

Akinrinade, S, (2016) A Society Under Pressure: Thoughts on Leadership, Followership and

the Reinvention of the Nigerian State. *Journal of African History, Publication of the Historical Society of Nigeria.* Vol.25 Makurdi:

Alade, C. A. (1997) *Readings in Russian History from Tsarist Absolutism to the 1905 Revolution*. Lagos: Elmi Educational Ltd,

Campbell, S. and Rodney, W. (1972) "Tanzanian Ujamaa and Scientific Socialism", *African Review*, Dar es Salaam:www.marxists.org Assessed 10 May, 2017

Cheri, L. (2014) National Conference: Answering the Nigerian National Question. IOSR *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol.19 (5) 36-39 doi:10.9790/083719533639

Chukumerije, U. (2009) Nigerian Political Parties: The Need for Ideology. A Lecture Presented at the 26th Memorial Anniversary of Mallam Aminu Kano, held at Sa'adaZungur Auditorium, Mambayya House on April 17, accessed from www.gamji.com/news8583 on May 12.

Egwu S. (2015) Technology of Power and Dramaturgy of Politics: Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. UniJos Inaugural Lecture Series 72, Jos. July 9,

Eniemeh, M. E. Ibrahim, S. Y. (2011) Ethnic Politics and Nigerian Democracy: The Way Forward, *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* (IJRISS) VOL: 5 (II) February, pp. 177-186

Falode, J. A. (2016) The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War 2010-2015. A Strategic Analysis. *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol.10 (1) 41-52

Falola, T. and Heaton, M. M. (2008) A History of Nigeria. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.www.cambridge.org/9780526081575. Retrieved on 11 May, 2017

Falola, Toyin. and Heaton, M. Mathew, A History of Nigeria, United Kingdom:2008. Cambridge University Press. www.cambridge.org/9780526081575. accessed on 11/5/2017 5.00p.m

Fukuyama, F. (2006) The End of History? In Chan, S. and Moore, C. (Eds) *Theories of International Relations*. Vol.II *Approaches to International Relations: Pluralism*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. pp.313-

Iwegbu, C. J. &Uwaifo, E. C., (2020) The Principle of Effective and Efficient Restructuring and the Future of the Nigerian Nation: The Role of Social Science Education. *UJAH* Vol.21 (3) 2020 (Special Edition) 47-65 http://dx.doi./org/10.4314/ujah.v21i3.3

Iweriebor, E. (2014) Origins of Nigeria's Democratic Traditions, The Struggle for Rights and Freedom: 1880s-1960. In Uhomoibhi, M. &Iweriebor, E. (Eds) *Strengthening Democratic Traditions and Institutions in Nigeria*. Abuja: Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Izuagie, L. (2019) The Willink Minority Commission and Minority Rights in Nigeria, *Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, August (EJOTMAS) Doi:10.4314/ejotmas.v5i1-2.16 accessed 20221023 at

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308531248

Jinadu, A. L. (2012) Theoretical Perspectives on Nigeria's Foreign Policy. In Anyaoku E. ed.

of Nigeria's Foreign Policy: Issues and Perspectives, Lagos: Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations and Nigerian Institute of International Affairs,

Johari, J. C. (2013) Contemporary Political Theory, New Dimensions, Basic Concepts and Major Trends, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, (Reprint)

Jonah, O. I., Ochuba O. O., Onuoha, I. J. O. &Onu, P. A., (2021) Biafra Separatism and National ecurity in Nigeria. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy:* Vol. 11 (2) 546-573

Kwanashie, G. A. (2011) Nationalism and Nation-Building: Some Observations on the Nigerian Experience under Colonial Rule, in Seminar Series, History Department, ABU Zaria.

Llobera, J. R.(1999) Recent Theories of Nationalism, University College London WP núm.

164 Institut de Ciències Polítiquesi Socials Barcelona

Nnoli, O. (2003) Introduction to Politics. Enugu: PACREP, Revised 2nd Edition.

Ojo, E. O. (2014) The Military and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Positive Skepticism and Negative Optimism. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Volume 15, (4)

Okekeocha, C. & Ewoh, A. I. E. (2013) Questioning the Constitutionality of Sharia Law in some Nigerian States. African Social Science Review, Vol.6 (1) 15-28 http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/assr/vol6/iss1/2

Okolo, P. O. (2010) The Nigerian Civil War: Its Causes and Lessons for the Future. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358969803

Okorie, E. N. (2020) Okorie, Annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election and the Elusive Question of Democracy in Nigeria. *South East Political Review* (SEPSR) Vol.5 (1)

Omotola, S. (2009) Nigerian Political Parties and Political Ideology, *Research Gate*. https://www.researchgate.net.publication/40542718

Othman, M. F., Osman, N. & Mohammed, I. S., (2019) Restructuring Nigeria: The Dilemma and Critical Issues. *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies* Vol.5 (1) June, 79-98 doi:10.26710/jbsee.v5i1.567 Otoghile A. &Okonmah, I. E. (2009) Influencing Local Terrorism in Nigeria‟s Niger Delta: Militants or the Joint Task Force. *Nigerian Forum A Journal of Opinion on World Affairs*. Vol. 30 (11-12) 369-387

Otoghile, A. & Eghweree, C. (2010)Niger Delta Crisis, Resource Control and Nigerian Federalism; A Short Treatise. *Nigerian Forum A Journal of Opinion on World Affairs*. Vol. 31 (1-2) January – February. 5-28

Pamir, P. (1997) Nationalism, Ethnicity and Democracy: Contemporary Manifestations. *TheInternational Journal of Peace Studies*, gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijp/vol2_2/pamir.html

Philips, C. S. Fr. (1964) *The Development of Nigerian Foreign Policy*, USA: Northwestern University Press,

Quaddafi, 1976-79 Translated from Arabic by Kovalev NG Moscow: infra pp4-38. See 911truth.net/other-books/muammar. Retrieved 10/5/2017 11.00p.m