

## Politics, Ethnic Diversities and the Future of Nigeria's Federation

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**ABSTRACT:** The chapter is qualitative in nature as it relied on secondary data. It was found that it was because of increasing relevance of state in the distribution of resources that intensify process of political competition among diverse ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, making pertinent for the use of ethnic identity to mobilise support for ethnic ascendance to political power. It was found that through this process, the weaker ethnic groups tend to be marginalised and excluded by the strong ethnic group, and this risen animosity and deepen suspicious among the diverse ethnic groups that made up of the Nigerian federal state. Consequently, this aggravate the formation of ethnic inclined association agitating for better political inclusion and sometimes, threats of secession. The situation that further overheating the polity, which endangers the corporate existence of the Nigerian federal state. To ensure the survival of the Nigerian federal state, the paper recommended that ethnic politics should be avoided by ensuring other ethnic groups are accommodating in the running of state's affairs. It was concluded that the survival of the Nigerian federal state largely dependent on the willingness of the entire ethnic groups to come together and be cemented as one indivisible.

**KEY WORDS:** Diversities, Ethnic, Federalism, Political Agitation, Secession

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### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic pluralist society. It is the ethnic heterogeneity nature of the Nigerian state that make federalism the most appropriate political framework for the country. After gaining an independent in 1960, the three regions, the Northern, Western and Eastern were not only politically, economically, geographically and educationally imbalance but were dominated by three major ethnic groups namely Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. This has been the feature of Nigerian federation and sources of debates and tensions that creates discordant relations among social groups. The Northern region constituted more than half of the country because of its population and land area, but it was educationally and economically backward compared to the two regions. This creates a situation where each region was constantly at move to dominate one another. The Northern region used its relative population advantage to manipulate political power and the authority over distribution of national resources, which they saw it as a counter veiling factor to the economic and educational dominance of the Western and Eastern regions. On the other hand, the Western and Eastern regions, who felt aggrieved with the political hegemony of the North despite their economic and educational advantage, found relevant to the use of ethnic divides to oppose this political dominance (Jega, 2003). The minorities, who were sidelined both at the regional and national politics, also resolved to the use of ethnicity and the resource control to kept on harboring for better inclusion in the national politics.

Since then political mobilisation of ethnicity and sometime in combined with religion pluralism has continued to shape the dynamic of politics in the country. Even though in the first republic, the major political parties namely: the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) were all regionally-based, but they were also allied to a particular ethnic nationality and religion for political mobilisation. For instance, NPC as a dominant party in the North region with the motto: "One North, One People, and One Destiny", was not only regarded as a political party of Hausas/Fulanis, but it was also allied to Islam because the region is believed to be a strong Islamic base. And this is despite the present of minorities such as Kanuri, Nupe, Tiv and other religious faiths in the region. In the Eastern region, the NCNC was for the Igbos because of it is a strong Christian base, specifically Catholicism. In the Western region, the AG, and later the New Nigerian Democratic Party (NNDP) was for Yorubas, and even though there are Muslim faith but it is a strong Christian alliance largely Protestantism.

Regrettably, this was extended to the second and fourth republics, albeit it was not pronounced, as in the first republic. For example, the political parties were replicant of that of the first republic as in the West, Yoruba dominated the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), in the East, the Igbos dominated the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), while Hausa/Fulani mostly went for the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), People's Redemption Party (PRP) and Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP). Although, there were exceptional cases where political party attract members from different ethnic groups base on its ideological disposition. The NPN, for example, which was regarded as elitist party and believed to had a strong northern base, but as Okediji's (2003) aptly observed "...attracted

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wealthy individuals from the other dominant ethnic groups" (p.193). The same for People's Democratic Party (PDP), one of the first-three political parties that were formed with the return of democracy in 1999, which not only dominate the politics of South-east and South-south, but also attract members from elite circle from different parts of the country. But for All (later Nigerians was added) People's Party (APP/ANPP), it was regarded as Hausa/Fulani political party and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) for Yorubas.

Arising from the above, it can aptly argue that even though it is extremely difficult to de-link the dynamic of politics in the Nigeria with religious and regional pluralism, but their expression can largely reduce in ethnic lexes. This is because as Okediji (2003) vividly noted, they are not only dependent on but navigate around ethnically affiliation. Ethnicity has increasingly used as strong weapon for political mobilisation than any other forms of identities. The use of ethnicity to gain political support grant favour to and skew advantage for Hausa/Fulani to wield more supremacy in the Nigerian political space by ascending to power and control over resources distribution owing to its large population as elective democracy is a game of a number. This, particularly, in the context of 'winner-takes-all' syndrome would promote discrimination, marginalisation or exclusion of groups from the political process. The nagging political situation has increasingly challenged the existing of the Nigerian federal state as it brought about ethnic solidarities and consciousness rather than national solidarities and consciousness, capable of undermining the process of national unity and cohesion. Ethnicity, thus, has almost salience other identities, and continues to shape and define the nature of Nigerian politics. The dynamic of Nigerian politics cannot be adequately understood outside the context of ethnic consciousness, which inevitable remains potent instrument for and prominent source of political tension that give the Nigerian politics the characteristic of uncertainty.

Today, there is growing perceived ethnic domination, marginalisation and exclusion in the political affairs of the country, particularly with the changing hitherto source of revenue for the state to rent petroleum after the discovery of oil in 1970s. It should be recalled that the political struggles among ethnic groups from 1950s to the late 1960s was how to control a federal state in which its economic base was largely dependent on export of surplus from cash crop production. This intensifies ethnic enmity and mistrust that recently exacerbate the sudden upsurge of ethnically inclined associations that either stimulate the old agitations or demands for the new ones, which invariably overheated the polity and undermined the process of strengthening the federal system in Nigeria. The argument of this paper is that the character of political elites in the context of heterogeneity nature of Nigerian society has nurtured ethnic politics, which continue to shape the dynamic of the country politics and determine the nature of political struggle among the diverse groups. Even though, the paper believes that there is nothing wrong with one ethnic group agitating for better inclusion in the political and resources distribution process in their countries if such can improve the proficiency of the federal system. But the Nigerian situation has given birth to unfriendly relations that lead the progeny of political agitations, demands for secession and autonomy of groups from the Nigerian federal state, which invariably undermining the federal system.

### Federalism: Conceptual and Theoretical Exposition

Federalism is a fluid concept that attract varies definitions. For Alli (2003), federalism is an administrative and political system whereby component units come together to become one but keep control over some certain affairs. Defining the concept in such way as he notes could bring the functioning benefits that can be derived from the system of federal arrangement, which include ability to share powers among the component units and the centre and at the same time the component units not only remain independent but coordinate their affairs without interference of each other. Federalism is all about 'shared rule with self-rule' (Mu'azzam, 2021), and it restrains the centralisation of power under the control of single authority. Elazar (1987 cited in Dare, 2003, p.91) sees federalism as a specific form of union that encourage self-rule plus shared rule. The appeal of federalism is to ensure administrative autonomy and the right of the component units to exist and legislate on certain responsibilities assigned to them through the constitutional arrangement. Federalism engenders long lasting unity by avoiding animosity and mistrust that would lead to conflict among the ethnic nationalities but promotes unity as it opts for a sharing of power and responsibilities between the centre and the regions, which the regions retaining their autonomy and identities, and which would ultimately bring about stable environment necessary for economic prosperity. The objective of federal system, Jega (2021) notes, "...is non-conflictual management of diversity and sharing of power and resources for stable societal progress and socioeconomic development" (p.3-4).

The reason for the adoption of federal system in Nigeria different in many aspects from countries like Brazil. The idea for adopting federal politics in Nigeria is about management of diversities (Gana & Egwu, 2003). The concern is political unity in order to prevent or at least minimise the potential for political conflict and tension that would be emitted due to complex nature of the Nigerian society, and not because of, as Okediji (2003) noted, management of large territory by bringing the diverse nationalities together and forge for a national integration. The desired political unity and friendly relations cannot be achieved unless effective mechanism that would facilitate the accommodation of the diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic composition has put in place. The pluralist nature of Nigeria poses challenges that are, to use Ibrahim (2003a) lurid phrase, "...relating to access to political power and petroleum rent, and problems of equity and social justice posed by the domination of political power by one group" (p. 135).

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These deepen animosities and hatred, drive more groups to seek for their political future through ethnically based associations, and often with the renouncement of commitment to the Nigerian federal state.

Construction of strong federalism requires guarantee of the rights of individuals and groups that made up of component units, and ensuring that their participation in the process of decision-making is not disrespected. It is fact that, the evolution of Nigeria's federalism has link with the colonial conquer but it has increasingly shaping by the relations among the diverse ethnic groups that made up of the country in relation to unfolding political struggles over who is to rule as those that control political power also have authority over distribution of national wealth. The trajectory and pain about Nigeria's experience with federalism today, is that, it has undermined the important purpose for which it was adopted, that is, accommodating the diverse ethnic groups in sharing power and national resources, and forge for stable socioeconomic development. Despite the challenges face by the Nigerian federal state, federalism remains relevance for the survival of Nigeria as an entity, partly because of its inherently pluralist character.

### Ethnic Politics and Political Agitations in Nigeria: Background

The history of Nigerian political development has been ravaged with ethnic politics, struggle for better political inclusion and vociferous calls for secession among the marginalised groups. The increasing number of representatives in the Central and Regional Houses of Assemblies under colonial constitutions had expanded space for political participation. This heightened political struggle between ethnic groups to dominate the political space and to advance their economic interests. Even the political parties and associations formed at that time were to profile ethno-regional vendetta. Some of the political parties as noted by Kuna (2001) include the NPC, which was until its formation in 1951, a cultural organisation formed from the union of associations such as the *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa A Yau* (JMA), the *Jam'iyyar Jam'ar Arewa* (JJA), the Sokoto Youth Social Circle (SYSC), the Bauchi General Improvement Union (BGIU) and the Citizens Association of Kano (CAK). Paden (1986) notes that the activities of NPC since its formation were jittery towards working for the interests of the people of Northern region irrespective of their religion, language and party affiliation with a motto: "One North, One People, and One Destiny". The AG which dominated the Western region politics between 1950s to early 1960s, was formed from the Pan-Yoruba cultural organisation, *Egbe-Omo-Odudua* (Alli, 2003), to fight for the common course of the descendants of *Odudua* in the Nigeria's socio-economic and political milieu. The NCNC, was in its case, tilted towards the Igbo ethnic group of the Eastern region (Alli, 2003).

The ethnic minority which were weak in the unfolding electoral and regional politics, too could not do otherwise but to form political parties and associations in line of ethnic divides. These included the Borno Youth Movement (BYM) for Kanuri, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) for Tiv and the Niger-Delta Congress (NDC) for the people of Niger-Delta area. And often than not, they allied with other political parties controlled by the majority ethnic groups formed outside their region to safeguard the minorities interests in the highly ethnicised electoral politics (Abdullahi, 2021). The UMBC, for example, which was formed to safeguard the interest of the ethnic minorities of the Middle Belt of the Northern region, went into alliance with other parties from other regions to form United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). It is important to note that, there was ethnic suspicion, mistrust and animosity within the minorities also. This caused difficulties for the minorities to unite and fought for a common goal in the face of ethnically dominated politics, and it was responsible for the growing unpopular of the UMBC among some minorities in the region, which made it weak and incapable to compete favourably with the dominant party in the region, the NPC (Abdullahi, 2019).

The manner at which these political parties and associations were formed reflects the dynamism of power struggle among the different ethnic nationalities at the regional level and the centre. Indeed, it was within this context that the political elites from different ethnic background contested and strived to advance their interests. The major regional parties first exerted their dominance in their respective politico-geographical and ethnic strongholds. Second, in attempt to expand political dominance beyond areas of control, especially to the centre and possibly to other regions, political parties come into alliance. The Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) was formed by the NPC, the NNDP, the Mid-West Democratic Front and the Niger-Delta Congress (NDC), while the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) formed by the AG, the NCNC, the NEPU and the UMBC. Despite this, Nigerian elites are still mindful of ethnic consideration when it comes to politics as the struggle for power continued to centre around ethno-regional interests (Ashafa, 2002; Ibodje & Dode, 2007). This is because ethnicity constituted predetermine factors that guarantee access to power, source for aversion and political uproar that mostly occurred in 1950s and 1960s with load of negative consequences on the country.

The fear of being marginalised by the north elites once the South elites assume dominance over the country political affairs with the departure of the British may be part of the reasons for their unwilling to support the motion for self-government tabled by Mr Anthony Enahoro in the Federal House of Representatives in 1956. But for the South, the refusal of the North to support the motion was seen as a delay tactics for independent, and chagrined by the outcome made the Lagos crown to booed the northern delegates. In a wake of disenchantment, the members of the Northern House of Chiefs and Northern House of Assembly on behalf of the region jointly presented eight points agenda calling for the dissolution of the federation and the formation in its place confederation as a condition for the north to continue to be part of the country (Alli, 2003). Thus, the inability of the indigenous political leaders

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to reform the inherited colonial state structures that was not politically inclusive to effectively accommodate the diversities deepened ethnic politics after independence. Even issue of national important like 1962/63 census had to be polluted simply because of ethno-regional interest as its constituted determining factor for the number of representatives from the region largely dominated by a particular ethnic nationality into the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos. The disenchantment arising from this deepened animosity among the diverse ethnic groups and led to threat for secession by Michael Okpara, the Premier of the Eastern Region in 1964 (Tamunno, 1991, cited in Ibrahim, 2003b p.50).

The revolt by the group of young military officers in January 15 largely from the Igbo ethnic extraction was agitation against the perceived discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation of Igbos in the country's political affairs. However, instead of the military revolt against alleged Hausa/Fulani political domination to bring to an end of ethnic hatred, it rather deepened it as most of those that were killed during the revolt were non-Igbo, and the political leadership that emerge after the rebellion was under an Igbo man, General Johnson Agunyi Ironsi. This sound rigid to the people of the north, who perceived the rebellion as a planned to execute Igbo's agenda, that is, to dominate the country, and this become so vivid with the promulgation of Decree No 34 of 1966 that change federal to unitary systems. On the other hand, the minority ethnic nationalities in the Niger-Delta, the emergence of Igbo as a political head of the country with the fail military coup in 1966 as Ibrahim (2003b) argues was a calculated attempt to dominate other minorities in the South-east. The situation led to declaration of Independent of the Niger-Delta People's Republic by Isaac Boro.

The perceived ethnic bias in the execution of the fail coup and transformation of Nigeria to a unitary state, and the inability of the military government to punish the coup plotters resulted to counter coup of July 1966 in which General Ironsi was killed. The resulted to violent attacks on people of different ethnic background outside the regions of their origin and the calls for separation of the country, what was popularly called in the North as *A WARE*, which later exploded into a full-blown civil war that claimed thousands of civilians' lives. Though, Nigeria had come out from the civil war stronger than before by making the centre more powerful because of the restructuring of the country into tiny states that cannot challenge the federal power, and swelling-up of the federal purse due to increase in revenue that was accrued to the state (Ibrahim, 2021). But the worse had already being done as the war had further caused division and deepened ethnic hatred that still troubling the country.

Thus, with the return of electoral process in 1979, the misfortunes that undermined the political development previously manifested against. The enmity of the activities performed by the political parties bear a resemblance to that of the first republic as most of the political parties that emerged after the lifting of ban of politics were dominated by different ethnic nationalities. For instance, the UPN was seen as Yoruba party, the GNPP for Kanuri and the NPP for the Igbos. In addition, the attitude of political elites had shaped the dynamic of politics of the second republic, leading to the sack of the regime by the military in December 1983. The agitation for actualisation of June 12, 1993 presidential election by the Yoruba ethnic nationality purported to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola and annulled by Ibrahim B. Babangida military regime had also shaken the foundation of Nigeria's nationhood, pushing it to the point of imminent collapse.

From the discussion above, one can aptly argued that Nigeria is deeply divided along ethnic line, and this since before independence has been leveraged claim to political representation. And Ibrahim (2003b) remains us that when ethno-regional domination emerges as a central to politics, two broad issues are posed. "The first ...is the control of political power and its instruments such as armed force and judiciary. The second is the control of economic power and resources" (pp.45-46). The two broad issues have been the sources of political tension and confrontations among social groups, leading to agitations and threats of secession even after self-rule in 1960.

### **The Future of Nigeria's Federal State in the Context of Ethnic Politics since 1999**

Since the emergence of present political dispensation in 1999, Nigeria continues to witness antipathies among its diverse ethnic nationalities over the control of political leadership as group that felt being marginalised always move to reprimand the dominant ethnic group for conspiracy of political domination. The anger usually expresses on the exclusivity nature of the political system, intensifies lack of mutual trust and understanding among the diverse ethnic nationalities. Put differently, the struggle over who is to rule and have control over distribution of national wealth among the social groups has further aggravated ethnic mistrust and continued to shape the dynamic and nature of the country's democratic politics. This has been a source of national concern. From the beginning, the emergence of the three political parties, the AD, the APP/ANPP and PDP, and perhaps with exception of PDP, were turned and moved towards ethnically inclined political parties. AD, for instance, was more accepted by Yoruba and become a dominant party in the South-west in 1999 before it was later override by PDP, while APP was predominately seen as a party of a particular ethnic group, the Hausa/Fulani. Indeed, the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo and Olu Falaye, who both are Yoruba, and Umar Shinkafi from Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups as presidential candidates of the PDP, AD and APP, respectively, was evident that ethnic politics has begun to find its way back into Nigerian politics as minority ethnic nationalities were deliberately sidelined. Though, in the build-up to 1999 presidential election, there were temporally ethnic alliance between AD and APP, but such was for political reason, that is, how to defeat PDP, and not means to bring members of different political parties with different ethnic

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background together and forge for national harmony and strong federal system in Nigeria.

The decision took by the Northern politicians in the PDP not only to withdraw from the 1999 presidential race but also to zone the presidency to the Southwest was done in order to heal the wound resulted from the annulment of the June 12 presidential election. Their believe is that this gesture would change the perception of Yorubas over agitation for self-determination. With the support of the military oligarchy from the north, as Bako (2002) observed, this pave way for emergence of retired General Olusegun Obasanjo from Yoruba ethnic group as the PDP presidential flag bearer. Obasanjo who was portray as one of the country's nationalists and a leader above any ethnic sentiments and bias was expected to use his vast experience in building a united and strong nation where ethnic interest would be subsumed into national interest that would have direct consequence on bettering the living standard of the people. Despite being rejected by his kinsmen for scoring least votes in the South-west compare to the North and East, Obasanjo emerged as the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Contrarily to what was expected, soon after sworn-in as a president elect, "...Obasanjo has made overtone to his kinsmen in a bid to build a political base for himself" (The New Humanitarian, 2002, para.16). In the process exacerbated ethnic sentiments by over pampering his ethnic nationality with juicy appointments such as Minister of Power, while non-Yoruba ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa/Fulani that brought him to power were said to be marginalised and excluded, dented mutual relations and understanding among diverse ethnic groups.

President Obasanjo in his bid for re-election in 2003 seeks for the support of his Yoruba kinsmen, who rather vowed not to do so until their demand for a Sovereign National Conference, which would determine the future of Nigeria, is taken account of and included in his political programme. This has re-awakened the primordial and ethnic sentiments that had trailed the country, resonated because of the interests of political elites. No wonder, attempt by Obasanjo to elongate his stay in office by another term, popularly known as 'Third Term Agenda', met with serious resistance from the northern political elites, who considered it as a deliberate effort to implement the hiding agenda of the Yoruba ethnic nationality. They did not only kick against Obasanjo's agenda but insisted that power must shift back to the North as purportedly agreed under the power shift accord agreed by the party members. For the South-south politicians, who are minorities, felt that because of the years of marginalisation and exclusiveness of the southern minorities in the country's political affairs, they deserve to rule at least to 'counter balance the power hegemony' of other ethnic groups. In the middle of this tumult, in addition, to the disappointment of Obasanjo to actualise his dream under the 'Third Term' agenda, led to the handpicking of Umar Musa Yar'adua, a Muslim from the Hausa/Fulani ethnic nationality as the PDP presidential candidate, while Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, a Christian from the South-south minority made the running mate. This ended of upsetting other aspirants vying for the same seat, especially from the South minorities, who felt disappointed with the whole situation and accused the North for deliberate attempt to continue dominating the Nigerian political space, frustrate the appetite for mutual trust, hence pose challenge to the stability of the country.

The sworn-in of the Vice-President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as president of Nigeria with the demised of Yar'adua, who spent less than four years of one of the two possible terms as president, marked another history in the political development of Nigeria because it was the first time that one from ethnic minority of the South-south ascend to that political position. But despite that, to borrow Suberu (Undated) vivid phrase, the country has continued to witness "...growing mobilisation and polarisation of ethno-regional resentments over the control of national leadership positions, especially the highly prized and powerful presidency..." (p. 2). This is because the ascending of Jonathan to presidency has vexed the northern politicians, who expressly faulted the former President Obasanjo for chosen 'Yar'adua in the first instance to contest for 2007 presidential election knowingly well that he was sick. To their believed, it was well calculated plan to strategically pave way for the emergence of Southern minority as president. As such, the decision of President Jonathan to contest for the 2011 president election was viewed by northern politicians as a betrayal of trust as it has violated the political compromise and bargaining for power shift entered by the members of then ruling party, PDP. This resuscitate the agitation for power shift back to the North, consequently deepened political tensions, caused panic that made many people of different ethnic background to fled back to their respective places of origin prior to the conduct of the election. The situation that produced a conducive environment for the outburst of the April 2011 post-presidential election violence, which was facilitated by the declaration of Jonathan as the winner of the presidential election against Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC), a Muslim from the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group (Abdullahi, 2019). Arising from this was strengthening ethnic divides of 'us vs them' syndrome that serve as a landmine waiting to be exploded for the disintegration of the country.

Even though, one may argue that political compromise and bargaining of power shift entered by then ruling party members, PDP violates the constitutional provision and it limits franchise, that is, the right to vote and be voted for. But such political compromise and bargaining of power shift if really adopted with all the sincerity, it could prevent the continuation as claimed by other ethnic groups the ascendance of Hausa/Fulani ethnic nationality to power. Rather, it would encourage all-inclusive politics that would likely engender mutual trust, national harmony and stability of polity, which believe at the end would strengthen the Nigerian federation.

The desire of President Jonathan to re-contest in the 2015 general elections for his second tenure come with resistance mainly from the Northern politicians, who insisted that north must be allowed to complete its tenure. This culminated to split of PDP into 'Old

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and New PDP', which the Old PDP consisted of mainly northern politicians, who were later decamped to All Progressive Congress (APC), which is an alliance of ethnically dominant political parties. These include: the ANPP, the CPC, which drew their members from Hausa/Fulani ethnic nationality, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), which members were mainly Yoruba and had its dominance in the West, and with some fractions of All Progressive Grant Alliance (APGA), which members were mainly drawn from Igbo. The alliance of these opposition political parties to form APC is for political reason that revolved around how to defeat PDP that had persistently dominated the centre, instead of cementing the diversities to forge for the national unity and integration that would effectively guarantee the stability of the Nigerian federal state but further risking the existence of the country.

At no other time has agitation for better political inclusion and ethnic independent become more effervescent than during the reign of President Muhammadu Buhari of APC, facilitating due to the proliferation and deepen activities of ethnically inclined associations like the Pan-Yoruba ethnic association, the *Afenifere*, the Nigerian Indigenous Nationalities Alliance for Self-Determination (NINAS), and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB). For the *Afenifere*, the demand to address its grievances over what it called unbalanced structure of the Nigerian federal state and lack of inclusive governance can be put in two different forms: First, to continue for the demand of exclusive political space that would guarantee Yoruba ethnic nationality an independent nation - the *Oduduwa* Republic out of the present Nigerian federal state. Second, the demand for the Sovereign National Conference (SNC) that would decide the future of the Nigerian federal state largely by restructuring the present federal arrangement. For IPOB, the agitation is about separation from the present Nigerian state. This has recently built-up to and reached its climax of aggressiveness and ungovernability as it marked by violence attacks on non-Igbo ethnic nationalities, particularly of the northern background, and on the security agents, installations and symbol of national unity, the Nigerian flags. Such terrible activities in the call for agitation for Independent State of Biafra could not solve but only worsen the unfriendly relations among diverse ethnic nationalities, and set for the inertia pushing the Nigerian multi-ethnic federal state on the verge of collapsing.

Thus, as the 2023 general elections draw nearer, there have been intense political posturing, permutation and firework in the sections of the country. For example, in attempt to ensure power shift to the south, the Southern Governors met twice in 2021, while their Northern counterpart insisted that democracy is a game of number as such, whoever secure the highest vote would emerge as the next president with the completion of term of office of President Buhari. The decamping of Peter Obi from PDP to Labour Party (LP), and who later emerges as its presidential flag bearer, was seen as a challenge to the political dominance of other ethnic groups by Igbos. Generally, the emergence of Atiku Abubakar as PDP presidential flag bearer after the dollar's rain during the party's primary was seen not only by the Igbos but also the minorities from the South-south as a betrayal by the people of the north, and lack of cooperation among the people of the South-south and South-east to speak with one voice and champion the course of their political agitations in the Nigerian federal state. This means their continual domination, marginalisation and exclusion in the politics of this country. While, for the Yorubas, one can argue that the emergence of Ahmed Bola Tinubu as APC presidential flag bearer, despite fail attempt by some party members to enforce Ahmed Lawal from the north as a consensus candidate, was a relief and effort towards becoming president of the federal republic by their illustrious son.

Going by the body language of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and speeches of some of the clerics, there is strong indication that religion divides would also be used to mobilise political support in 2023 presidential election. This would be accelerated due to the emergence of Muslim presidential flag bearers in the dominant political parties, PDP and APC, and in particular, the association has reservation on Muslim-Muslim ticket. This is apparently with the statement made by the Kaduna State chapter chairman of CAN and Northern official, Reverend John Joseph Hayab during a special prayer and political/security service programme in Kaduna on Sunday 7 August, 2022 that the Christians have already concluded not to vote for party with Muslim-Muslim ticket (*New Nigeria*, August 8, 2022, p.11). Thus, the mixed up of religious pluralist with ethnic sentiment would likely deepen the already ethnic divides, which would further endanger the existence of Nigeria as a single entity.

### Strengthening Federalism in Nigeria

It is noted from the discussion above that political agitations arose due to absence of political accommodation and lack of political tolerance, and this resulted to lack of mutual trust and understanding among the diverse ethnic nationalities. This has a link as Tamuno (1991, cited in Ibrahim, 2003b, p.49) noted with the clash of elites' interests, particularly over political power and resources control than those bothering the nation. The struggle for better inclusion and threats for secession is only throb whenever such interest is threatened. Arising from this, it can aptly argue that the ethnically heterogeneous nature of the post-colonial Nigeria has provided high potentiality for lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear among different groups, and this provoked the serious political agitation driven by elites to achieve their personal political interests. As mutual trust, national unity and harmony cannot be built unless when there are friendly relations and share of interest, values and aspirations among the diverse ethnic groups (Jega, 2022). These are keys for better, strong and sound federal system. The future of Nigerian federal state is at stake and unless concrete measures are put in place to address the challenges of ethnic politics and lack of accommodation, and all efforts should be geared towards reinforcing mutual trust and understanding among the diversities that can effectively make Nigerian state stronger. In line of this, the paper recommends that:

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1. The negative mobilisation of ethnic identity during political activities need to be reverted. Mobilisation for political support should be based on non-sentiments with high civility and decorum, and it would reinforce peace and stability in the country.
2. There is urgent need to address the deteriorated social relations between the diverse ethnic nationalities through improving socio-economic and security situation in the country and by encouraging more participation and accommodation of the diverse groups in the political process and in the distribution of the national resources.
3. Equality in the distribution of resources and inclusion of all and sundry in governance would bring about mutual trust and help in building national unity and integration in the country.
4. There must be respect of individual rights, the views and opinions of the diverse nationalities particularly the dominated ones must be heard and respected by others, and when fully institutionalised it would bring about desired peace, unity and understanding among different ethnic groups.
5. There is the need for good governance as this would ensure transparency and accountability in governance and, hence reduce corruption and by so doing foster economic equality and promote socio-economic development of all parts of the country.
6. There is the need for political tolerance and accommodation. Media outlet and civil society organisations should be involved in sensitising and effective mobilisation of Nigerians on the issue of political tolerance.
7. The country should be restructure by giving states/component units more power to effectively reduce the intense political struggle to the centre among ethnic nationalities.

## CONCLUSION

The paper examines the ethnic pluralist characteristic and the dynamic nature of Nigerian politics and how it renders federalism ineffective as evident by deepen intensity political struggle among ethnic groups that give rise ethnic strife and distrust. Since 1954 up till date, the challenge of federal project in Nigeria is not indifferent from the question of management of diversities and competition over who is to control political power and have authority over distribution of national resources decreed by ethnic differences. Indeed, as direct access to state power provide pathway to wealth, political competition among ethnic group become so intense and deepen. Arising from this, is suspicious and the fear of political supremacy one ethnic group over the others, which has given rise to political agitations and the demands for ethnic autonomy. The exclusion of other ethnic nationalities from the process of governance in the face of growing incompetence to provide socio-economic needs of the people and economic prosperity, accompanying by the ineptitude of the political leadership has further declined the legitimacy of the Nigerian federal state. This is evident because, today, more groups are now pursuing their political future in an ethically defined way and rebuff the existence of the entity called Nigeria.

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