

## **NATIONAL QUESTION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of the present democratic dispensation in May, 1999, has thrown up some new demands and challenges on the political landscape in the country. This study examines the influence of the national question on democratic consolidation in Nigeria from the perspective of the theory of federalism. The research design was largely qualitative and descriptive, using data from existing literature. The study established that Nigeria's federalism from the outset had some inbuilt problems that may be regarded as constituting the national question, such as ethno-religious conflicts, endless minority agitation for state creation, political corruption, power sharing, resource allocation, etc. The study equally reveals that in spite of the advances that have been made through various reforms by every successive administration to reduce the negative influence of the national question in Nigeria, there is no concrete solution to the problems. The study concludes that national questions and democratic consolidation are mutually self-reinforcing and are facing a common threat. The more these common threats are combated and Nigeria resolves to true federalism, the more the influence of the national question fizzles out, the more the nation is built, and the more Nigeria's democracy becomes consolidated. The study advocated for a strong productive base and strong commitment to social welfare, at least a comprehensive, anticipatory and well-focused policy that would eliminate crises and poverty in the faces of the average Nigerian.

**Keywords:** National question, Democracy, Federalism and Democratic Consolidation

### **Introduction**

One of the challenges facing the Nigerian state is how to consolidate its emerging democracy that evolved in May, 1999. Democracy and federalism involve the challenges and dilemmas associated with the relationship generated in the historical development of Nigeria. The national question remains an albatross for the survival of the Nigeria nation. Apart from many other critical issues rocking the nation, such as revenue, allocation, resource control, corruption, power sharing, religious violence, population census, election malpractices, minority agitation for state creation, and federal charter principle, the national question, has become a major challenge to the nation (Olaleye, 2005:101). Afinotan (cited in Awuudu, 2012:59) observed in ria structural foundation upon which Nigeria as a modern post-colonial state was built as a colonial legacy was bequeathed to the local elites as the new rulers of their realm, was not only faulty, it was incurably deficient. This structural foundation concerns first, the delectation and delimitation of natural boundaries.

Thus as Agagu (1998:38) had observed:

Nigeria as a heterogeneous state was created by colonial fiat. A situation, which involved bringing incompatible nationalities and groups under one umbrella

without any opportunity given to these various groups to negotiate their mode of association....

The differences in political values and traditions of the component units of the Nigerian federation constitute a major issue to be resolved, while the content of the National questions has continued to expand since the early 1950s given the failure of military rule in most of African state, the current democratic dispensation has a lot of challenges for its survival and stability (Na'abba 2002:18)

The national question in Nigeria, according to Ayodele (2022:5), is viewed as “the question of whether relations among peoples conscious of their separate identities shall be based on hostility dominating are a program of liquidation or whether they shall be based on liberty, equality and fraternity”. He argued further that, the national question can be viewed from two dimensions, which are more or less two sides of a coin, namely: inter-group relationship and class relations. From the first dimension, the national question is concerned with how the political union of diverse ethnic groups or nations or people, who are conscious of their diversities, should be ordered and run. It is about how a state made up of diverse nations (*or ethnic groups of people*) should order relations among its constituent parts. It is about whether relations among the diverse groups should be geared towards integrating the groups into a single nation or granting self determination to them. The national question normally arises when groups within the political union (*the state*) seek advantages over others, try to dominate others or seek for some measure of independence or self-determination. Toyo1993:3) aptly puts in thus:

national question as the question that arises when a culturally integrated and self-conscious group of people seek advantages over others or seek a measure of self-determination. It concerns the constitution of different peoples into a nation or the self-determination of integrity of a group identified as a nation.

Thus, in broad terms, from the dimension of inter-groups (*ethnic*) relations, the national question is concerned with determining the appropriate composition of a state and the correct basis of relations among the diverse ethnic groups making up the state so as to resolve or remove the tensions and contradictions which may manifest in forms of fear of marginalization, dominating, inequality, unfairness, and justice in inter-ethnic groups relation (Anyanwu, 1993:28; Ntalaja, 1987:68 and Adejumobi, 2003:2). In other words, it is about whether or not the state should remain together as presently constituted in order to be viable and strong but yet just, equitable and fair to all constituents of the state or it should be reconstituted before it can achieve the same set of objectives. The root of this problem is captured by Onimode (2001:63) When he argued, that the origin of the national question is traceable to the lumping together of starkly disparate ethnic groups in a state

The major issues in the national question in Nigeria from the inter-ethnic dimension as summarized by Adejumobi (2000:63) are as follows:

- (i) What should be the component units and ties of government in the Nigeria federation?
- (ii) How should the component units be constituted, based on ethnic contiguity or administrative expediency?
- (iii) How should political power and administrative responsibilities be shared among levels and tiers of government?
- (iv) How should the ownership of economic resources of economic resources be structured in the Nigerian federation?
- (v) What should be acceptable formulae for sharing federally collected revenue?
- (vi) What should be the nature of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria?
- (vii) What level of inequality or poverty is acceptable within the Nigerian state?

In this vein, Adejumobi (op.cit 67) asserts that these problems arose out of the management of the Nigerian federalism based on the desire to attain “unity in diversity” and building of one nation with one destiny.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this research Is to examine the impact of the national question and the nature of the federal structure on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. In order to achieve this major aim, the following objectives are set to;

- (i) examine the prospect of democratic consolidation in a pluralistic society;
- (ii) investigate the problem arising from the national question;
- (iii) assess the effects of national question and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria; and
- (iv) make suggestion towards maintaining a sustained democratic federal structure in Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **National question**

As a “clinched”, National question has generated intense animated intellectual discourse, and it has gained immense popularity among scholars, analysts and activists. Though, it enjoys universal appeal, it means different things to different people at different times. Most attempts aimed at conceptualizing it end up reducing it to identify based contestations for resources and benefits of the state that, to a large or small extent, threaten the stability of the state (Oyediran, 2017:114). Such conceptions tend to view the national question as resulting primarily from the struggle (and sometimes, conflicts) between the various units that comprise a state.

In Nigeria, the inter racial or ethnic-dimension to the national question can be viewed from two perspectives, the external and internal (Toyo,1993:15-16). The external aspect of Nigeria's National question was noticeable during the British colonial period. During the independence struggles, the major national question was "How to attain self- rule independence and full sovereignty from the white rule. Today, the external aspect to this question comes in a slightly different form". How do we go beyond nominal or flag independence? When and how shall we go beyond being a supplier of raw materials e.g. crude oil to the western industrial countries? When and how shall we be able to make our education, banking and industrial policies on our own 'unassisted' by the world Bank and IMF?. All these are valid national questions from the external perspectives.

On this premise Ajayi (1992:14 ) puts the national question in the Nigerian context as a perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same rights and privileges, access to power and own equitable share of national resources, debate as to whether our constitution facilitates or inhibits our march to nation hood, or whether the goal itself is mistaken and we should seek other political arrangements to facilitate our search for legitimacy and development.

### **Democracy**

There is an avalanche of theoretical postulations about the concept of democracy that sound so attractive; while this will be examine during review of the existing literature later the study, it is pertinent here to clearly relate democracy to national question to suit the focus and the aim of the study. The choice of democracy used in this study rest heavily on centripetal type of variants of democracy as state by Kolawole (2004:53). According to him, centripetal democracy to some extent is embedded in consensus of goal-values; where the substantial areas of division among the competing parties and elites are minimal and are indeed easily resolvable. The implication of this is that a conducive atmosphere for peace. Security and development is created and sustained. Prewosk (cited in Anifowose 1999) asserts that, at minimum democracy involves both the provision of means to pursue the representation of diverse interests in government and institutionalization of mechanisms to hold rulers accountable to the public while, including mechanisms that allow for the peaceful removal of governments from power. From the above, democracy can be synonymous to peaceful governance. This implies that democracy, as a system of seen as government that guarantees equal opportunity and rule of law, and these can only thrive in a peaceful state devoid of rancor and acrimony.

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Almond and Verba (1963:122) defined Democratic consolidation as the process by which a new democracy matures, in a way that means it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism without an external shock. They stressed further that democratic consolidation is located within the values and attitudes which emerge with, and work to sustain. Participatory democratic institutions relate

to the manners in which people within people within a polity view their relationships with others vis-à-vis their own interests.

### **The Attraction of Democracy**

Democracy, its presence and its consolidation is largely attracting serious attentions in the recent times. Thus, democracy keeps evolving between its theories and actual practice, which has considerable differences. The controversy within its conceptualization is not as a result of 'dearth' of analysis, but a very varying ecological application of the universal syndrome outing across everywhere and virtually, all the independent countries of the world now proclaim their commitment to one of representative democracy or the other (Oluwasanmi, 2023:21) it only shows that democracy in practice, has its own attractions and ideals especially when it is compared with the autocratic and regimented nature of the various military regimes. Moreover, the universal relevance of democracy calls for understanding of the concept. Yet, no political term as Finer (1976:67) points out, has been so subjected to contradictory operational definition of democracy. Even, a transparently despotic regime may still claim to be democratic. However, majority of views tend to see democracy from its popular participation perspective, from which the power to vote and to enthrone a government flows.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework of analysis for this study is the theory of federalism as an analytical tool within which the Nigeria national question could be readily located and meaningfully discussed. The reasons for the establishment of federations, how systems change over time, how best to conceptualize the structure of modern federal system, the complex linkages between different levels of government and different agencies received better attention within the theory of federalism. The concept of federalism has attracted considerable attention from scholars of different persuasions, especially both as a concept and as tools of analysis in the social sciences. However, the various definitions all fall into four main perspectives- legalistic, socio-cultural, bargaining and procedural.

In his analysis, Kenneth Wheare, often credited with laying the foundation for the contemporary intellectual discussion of federalism, sees the concept as

...the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinate and independent (Wheare, 1963).

Where's postulation has been quite enduring and it basically indicates that a federal state is a conglomeration of several states, which are equal before a common law. The equality is based on legality and therefore at par with each other. However, this position has been criticized as being too legalistic and rigid. The excessive legality of the definition is in the sense that it places too



much emphasis on constitutional determinism. However, his definition has become a blueprint for other theorists on federalism.

William Livingston, looking beyond the Wheare's postulation, defines the concept of federalism from socio-cultural cum political perspective. According to him,

... the essence of federalism lies not in the institutional or constitutional structure but in the society itself. Federal government is a device by which the federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected (Livingston, cited in Olaniyan, 2006:23-24)

To Livingston, the conceptualization of federalism must go beyond the constitutional arrangement. It must include the socio-cultural cum political character of the federating society. In essence therefore, Livingston, sees the formation of federal system as a product of the imperativeness of the society and not necessary in legal provision alone.

Another view entirely, Carl Friedrich sees federalism as a process, which has the tendency to oscillate between aggregation and desegregation. In his words,

Federalism is the process of federalizing as well as the particular pattern and design which the inter group relations exhibit at a particular time (Friedrich cited in Olaniyan, 2006:23-24).

The position of Friedrich appears imprecise and confusing as his definition fits into virtually all societies. This is borne out of the fact that his definition offers an open-ended postulation of the concept of federalism. However, the strength of his analysis is in the fact it allows, according to Adele Jinadu (1979:17) a more understanding of recent developments in federal government, which Wheare's postulation would not have accommodated.

William Riker, in his analysis, sees federalism as an end product of bargaining arrangement arrived at by the component units that make up the federation. According to Riker, such bargaining are arrived at through the earnest desire of the political leaders of the component units

To expand their territorial control, usually to meet an external military or diplomatic aggression and aggrandizement or the availability of some external military-diplomatic threat or opportunity (Riker, 1964).

Even though the scholars differ in their postulations, they are all united in accepting the presence of diversified interests and or heterogeneity in the composition of the society as the main reason for the emergence of federal society. This probably informed Shridath Ramphal to observe that federalism per se is neither a political ideology nor the handiwork of "reflective philosophers or postulation of didactic political scientists", but often a product of necessity sharpened and panel

beaten by experimentation for solving problems relating to the coexistence of diversified people in a particular area (Ramphal, 1979:). But to say federalism is not an ideology is to miss the point. It is clearly ideological and philosophical in the same vein as other 'isms'. This is in the sense that it is prescriptive and equally normative. Its practice is based on some philosophies. O. B. C. Nwolise (2005:116), has adumbrated some of these philosophies as including the followings:

- a. The existence of more than one level of government (central government), as power and functions are vertically shared among the federal, regional, or state, as well as the local governments, with each having its own constitution.
- b. The powers and functions of each level of government are derived not from the central government but directly from the constitution, and are separated vertically between the tiers of government.
- c. These powers are usually explicitly embedded in the legislative lists, exclusive (for the federal government), concurrent (for the federal and states/regions), and residual (for regions/states or local governments).
- d. The existence of written and rigid constitutions, and separation of powers among the various organs of government.
- e. Balanced sizes of federation components.
- f. Adequate funds to enable each component unit and the federal government operate.
- g. Dispersed authority since the different tiers of government have their respective functions.
- h. Resources in regions or states are controlled by the states and agreed quantum paid into the central pool.
- i. The various levels of government operate as coordinates and equals, instead of subordinates or super-ordinates (Nwolise, 2005:116).

From the above, one could see that federalism provides an organizational framework for the achievement of political unity within a population with characteristic diversities and variations. Under this arrangement, separate regional political units (often refer to as state or provinces) are combine for limited, specified purposes under an over-reaching administration, but in such a way that the government of each separate regional unit maintains its integrity substantial autonomy (Oluwsanmi, 2022). Curiously, the emergence of federalism in Nigeria was neither a product of sustained agitation, bargaining nor profound intellectual discursion, at least at the genesis. At best, it could be described as an end product of British conquest, which began with the annexation of Lagos in 1861 and ended with the European powers partitioned African among themselves with such ferocity that the process was labeled “the scramble for African”. The partition was so arbitrarily done that peoples of multi-racial origin, diverse and wide cultural backgrounds were lumped together as a nation. Thus, the natural affinity hither to existing between people was effectively replaced by artificial geographical divisions imposed upon them

by the colonial administrators there by laid a faulty foundation for Nigeria federalism (Oluwsanmi,2005:1).

The basic point however, is that the Nigerian state as we have it, is a colonial creation. (Osaghae, 2002:4, Oshuntokun, 1979:91). It is a conurbation of assorted people occupying various clans and territories before their amalgamation (Nwolise, 2005:117, Olowu. 1995:207). The amalgamation took two forms. The amalgamation into two halves- south and northern protectorates and the final amalgamation into an entity called Nigeria till date.

## **Contemporary Issues in Nigeria's National Question and Democratic Consolidation**

### **Ethnic and Religious Violence: Causes and Effects**

Nigeria is an ethnicity-oriented country. In fact, the loyalty of the average Nigerian is first to his ethnic group before the nation itself. There are, at least, 250 ethnic groups in the country and each is out to outshine or outsmart the other in the power game, particularly the big three: Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. This has been the situation since the nation's amalgamation in 1914. The elite pursue their class interests by the use of ethnic symbols and boundaries in the struggle for power and wealth. Consequently, Crawford Young (1982) sees ethnicity, particularly in Nigeria, as "instrumentalities of survival", Individuals that are desirous of occupying strategic political positions which are quite scarce and could only be captured or occupied through counterfeit process often hide and seek solace under their ethnic groups. In this connection, Richard Joseph (1991:7) notes that "Ethnicity owes its continuous vitality to the keen nature of the struggle for power and resources" in a context of scarcity, insecurity and a lack of confidence in official norms and regulations. It is, thus, very clear that competition for positions, appointments, advancement and the control of government apparatus in the Nigerian state influences and accelerates the ethicizing of the country. The elite, who are the major beneficiaries of the politics of ethnicity often, encourage communal solidarity and mobilization against the elite of other ethnic groups to make their access to power and by extension private wealth accumulation possible.

Nigeria has demonstrated a very high propensity for ethnic and religious violence in the past three decades. In more recent times, however, there has been a dramatic upsurge in expressions, the hardening of ethno-regional tension and the proliferation of ethnic militias that have unleashed varying degrees of violence and terror on the polity (Ojo, 2006:370). In spite of concerted efforts, being made to curtail ethnic wars in Nigeria, the problem has been on the increase, especially since the return of democracy in May, 1999. Moreover, arising from the problems of the national question is lack of tolerance, which usually leads to tension among the federating units. Also, the and crisis management capacity of the so-called federating units is low (Oghan-lyam,1998:110).

Ikengah-Metuh (1994:48) identifies three broad types of religious violence Nigeria viz:



- ( i)intra-religious disturbances which denominations or sects; occur between different
- (ii) inter-religious conflicts prevalent between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimensions,
- (iii) inter-religious conflicts which, though, have socio-economic origin, end up in the form of religious conflicts.

He expressed further, that in Nigeria; most inter-religious disturbances usually develop into inter-ethnic conflicts, even where they began as a purely religious disagreement. The reverse is also often the case; some socio-ethnic conflicts are deflected and fought out under inter-religious banner.

This is hardly surprising because there is a very strong correlation between ethnic and religious boundaries in Nigeria's plural setting. The tendency for the boundary between the two forms of identity to collapse during moments of conflicts and violence have been emphasized in the phrase, "ethno-religious" violence. Taking a survey of ethno-religious conflicts from 1999 till date shows that they are worrisome development, which threaten harmonious co-existence and jeopardize the unity of the Nigerian nation state and its fledgling democratic experiment far more than any other challenges of democratic consolidation.

Afolabi (2004:79) argued that the liberalization and the opening up of the political space, which characterized the transition from military tyranny to democracy offers the immediate explanation of the pervasive outbreak of sectarian communal violence in the country. He argued further that the enthronement of the present fourth republic gives individuals and groups alike, the right to demand for reforms in the running of the Nigeria Federation, which hitherto, had been created in favour of the three major ethnic groups, the Hausa/Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo who have, by their sheer size and territorial advantage(s), lorded it over the remaining over 250 minority ethnic groups in the country

The above situation reveals the cause of perpetual agitation against for creation of more states fear of dominating of the minority groups by the majority. This unnecessary suspicion that usually leads to tension and contradictions in the federation called Nigeria. From data gathered, ethnic conflicts have persisted in all geo-political zones of the country. From the southern west zone of the country in Ondo state, the Ilaje and Arogbo Ijaw have been fighting tribal wars since September 1998 till August 5, 1999 when a partial ceasefire was achieved. Ondo State government had to set up a 24-man committee to work out the process of resolving the crisis permanently. The effects of these was grievous on the people, within one week of the conflict, which involved the use of sophisticated weapons, they eventually succeeded in destroying about 45 communities with more than 1,000 people killed, while 18,000 people were displaced. (Newswatch, August 30, 1999),

Equally, Ogun State, also in the south-western part has not been spared the orgy of ethnic violence. In August 1999, "Area Boys" hijacked the annual 'Oro festival in Sagamu, which triggered off clashes between Yoruba and Hausa. At the end of the clash which started on the night of July 17, 1999, Moses Ogunlaja, then the LISA of Sagamu and the Chairman, Press Briefing Committee on the crisis, reported the killing of Sagamu indigenes and burning of over 120 vehicles belonging to them. On the part of Hausa, they lost not fewer than 120 lives in the clash. (Tell Newspaper, Sept 5, 1999).

In the eastern parts of the country, protracted fratricidal conflict among the three contiguous communities of Aguleri, Umuleri and Umuoba Anam of Anambra East local government area of the state, had left the area so badly devastated, as several hundreds of lives, houses and economic valuables including motor vehicles were lost. This led to the setting up of a commission of enquiry headed by Moses. O. Nweje, a retired Judge. (The Nigerian Tribune, August 24, 2000).

The recommendations of the commission were yet to be implemented before war broke out years later in April 1999. Ohaneze Ndigbo, the Pan-Igbo cultural association - which has been assisting to restore peace in the area said over 1,000 people have so far been killed. A communiqué issued in April when a peace committee set up by the group met with leaders of the three warring communities, read thus "a conflict that has claimed over 1,000 lives and reduced over 500,000 citizens of Nigeria to refugee status in their fatherland is grave enough to attract a rapid intervention by a sensitive and responsive government (Newswatch, May 2, 1999).

In Warri, Delta State, in the mid-western part of the country, the war that the 1997 creation of Warri south-west local government sparked off claimed many lives and properties were destroyed. The State government had to impose a curfew on the warring communities before peace could return. (The News, 29, June 1998).

Furthermore, by October 27, 1999, the Northern elite responded appropriately to their perceived marginalization (especially in terms of political appointments) by the Obasanjo regime by the adoption and implementation of strict Sharia Law in 12 northern states in Nigeria which negates section 10 of the 1999 constitution which states that "The government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion" (Ige, 1994:52). The northern elite believe that ethnicity and religion must be used to advance their narrow and restricted interests. The most far reaching impact of the introduction of the Islamic code was the widespread religious violence in many northern cities, such as Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, Taraba and many other states in the northern part of the country.

It is important to note that the ethno-religious war in Jos, the Plateau State capital, in the recent time is perhaps the most complex and sophisticated in Nigeria. The situation in that area degenerated that a state of emergency was declared during the second term of Obasanjo regime.

Also a repeat of these violence was witnessed recently that indeed created much tension in the country. The newspapers reported that over 500 people were killed and 2,000 people were

rendered homeless. Over 4,000 citizens in Nigeria were reduced to refugee status. The Nigeria police became helpless; soldiers were called in to quell the crisis with unquantifiable casualties. (Tell, March 16, 2009). The confusion in the state was so much that the Governor, Johah Jang. lamented that, "there is need for an alternative to such arrangement of central control of security agencies, I was helpless and incapacitated in the wake of the last episode of the senseless killing in the state". He stated further that he was helpless because governors, under the security arrangement in Nigeria, do not have control over the Army and Police. (The Nation, 16 March, 2010.)

The question arises, therefore, as to how much internal violence a democracy like Nigeria's can sustain or whether the violence itself can be sufficiently contained for democratic institutions to float above it relatively untouched. Violence not only drains government resources but also diverts its attention from the formulation of policies that would positively touch the life of the citizens.

It is argued that plurality and diversities are not necessarily the cause of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria, but that their manipulation by the unpatriotic elite to advance sectional interests, which are fundamentally opposed to the wishes and aspirations of the suffering masses. Without doubt, in an atmosphere of mass illiteracy, growing incidence of poverty and deprivations, the ethno-religious proponents will have a field day, and this is the reality the contemporary Nigeria portrays, which is indeed, a potential threat to democracy. The psychological dimension to the crisis concerns the assurance of the state of every citizen of his physical safety.

This is crucial because as Zabadi observes:

It is often asserted even at the level of individual that; self-preservation is the first law of nature. That unless one can be assured of his physical security or safety everything will be meaningless. (Zabadi, 2001:1).

Thus, the protective role of the state is paramount if democracy will be sustained. However, the various events of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria as reviewed and discussed in this section , shows that ethno-religious conflicts, in Nigeria are many and continue to increase in number. The frequency of these ethno-religious conflicts and their impact on the socio-economic life of the Nigerian people have always challenged the government and have thus demanded one from of management strategy or the other to put them under control.

### **Politics of State and Local Government Creation**

State creation has become one of the major stakes in politics and political contestation since independence in Nigeria (Omotoso, 1998:45). State creation has been one of the explosive, dominant and constantly discussed issues in the country. The agitation for creation of states in the country is traceable to two major factors access to power by the elite and the sharing of the national cake. This is what Rotimi Suberu refers to as "distributive politics in the country"

(Suberu, 1991: 500 & Suberu, 1999: 280). The agitation for states is seen as a sort of ethno-political economic strategy which considers the number of states and local governments from each ethnic group as an added advantage for a more equitable share of national resources (Omotoso, 2011:118). The resources of this country are shared on state and local government basis. Consequently, there is intense pressure and lobby for the creation of states and local governments within each ethnic group. For example, the Igbos (South-east) are not happy that it is the only ethnic group that has the least number of states among the six geo-political zones. This explains the persistent and unabated agitation of this ethnic group for creation of more states in their zone. This sort of agitation occurs in the view of F.J Ellah (1983:86) because the "ownership of state" is the "greatest asset" a tribe or ethnic group can have in the competition for national resources in the country. However, it should be clearly stated that agitation for state creation is also being fuelled by the elite for their own selfish motives often couched as communal benefits. Akhere Benjamin (1996) put this in perspective. According to him:

The creation of state like anything else in Nigeria was used by the Nigerian elite as another avenue for self-serving agitation...also an avenue for more opportunities for the elite, better prospects for influence and influential positions; for easier and more lucrative contracts for such elite merchants and better prospects for the restoration of glamour and high esteem for the traditional ruling elite....

State creation is of immense benefit to the elite and their support groups. So many people who are now permanent secretaries, vice chancellors, directors, governors, commissioners, senators, House of Representatives members, etc. would not have been if their states were not created. This fact has always provided and will always provide the fillips to the deep-rooted passion and intense agitation for creation of new states by the elites. Therefore, agitation for states in the country is fuelled by bourgeois elements with a view to gaining access to the economic resources and political offices of the state (Omotoso, 2005:522). A significant factor of the political history of Nigeria is that successive military regimes from their incursion into politics in 1966 until they departed in 1999 pressed state creation as a legitimizing and regime perpetuation mechanism. In an attempt to seek legitimacy for the illegitimate regimes, successive military governments in the country resorted to the creation of states and local governments. All, except one adjustment to the geo-political structure of the country, were carried out by military regimes. Yakubu Gowon altered the structure of the country from four regions to twelve states, while Murtala Mohammed increased the states to nineteen. Ibrahim Babangida carried out such exercises twice in 1987 and 1989, creating 21 and 30 state structures respectively. In 1996, Sani Abacha created additional 6 states making a total of 36 states as we now have in the country.

In all these exercises, state creation is used as a sort of carrot by each military regime to mobilise support for the regime. For example. General Yakubu Gowon used it to pull the rug off the feet of Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu in his agitation for Biafra and as a strategy to win the civil war which had become inevitable. General Ibrahim Babangida used it as a strategy to retain the support of military elites elongate his military government and deceive Nigerians about his

unending transition programmes to civil rule (Omotoso, 2009:109). On the part of General Sani Abacha, it was used to mobilise support and buy legitimacy for his illegal, brutal and wicked regime.

### **Political Corruption**

The high incidence of corruption in Nigeria in spite of the establishment of many anti-corruption agencies possess a great challenges to good governance and has therefore, become an issue of public concern. The nature of electoral politics in the country is such that it is capital intensive. Consequently, it is extremely difficult for politicians to finance their electoral politics without raising enough funds to do so. In Nigeria, politics is money and money is politics. In other words, they both influence themselves. It is safe to say that politics has now become a sort of investment in the country. The realization of this fact influenced the desire of politicians to raise money at all cost to finance their elections, knowing full well that such money would be recouped thereafter. In Nigeria, there is a strong tendency to use state power for primitive and private accumulation purposes. This explains the desire to occupy political positions and the inability of Nigerians to let go of the positions when it is obvious that the occupier has already overstayed his/her welcome, particularly when such office holders are alleged to have soiled their hands. Instead of honorably resigning the position; Nigerians are fond of engaging the services of senior lawyers to frustrate the situation with technicalities in the law courts. As a result of the attraction of political offices and the benefits therein, it is almost a "sin" in the country to willingly relinquish political positions.

It can be said that due to the correlation of corrupt practices and advancement of political positions, no government or regime is genuinely committed to fighting corruption in Nigeria. What is noticeable is that each government, at best, pays only lip service and puts up a cosmetic show while fighting this social vice. No government has seriously moved against its supporters even when available records and facts show their involvement in corrupt practices but such a government is always quick to expose, fight and prosecute opposition members whose crime can be less grievous than that of its supporters. This is the situation in the country as each government has its sacred cows who are untouchable. This may explain the deep-rooted nature of corruption in the country's politics. Political, economic and judicial corruption are the three major types of corruption with major impact on the country's politics. Political corruption is about the manipulation of the political process through rigging, vote buying, collusion of electoral commission's officials with politicians to sabotage the electoral process, ballot stuffing, bribery of electoral officials etc. Economic corruption is about the involvement of people in sharp practices with a desire to cheat, defraud and outsmart the nation (Omotoso, 2006:335), while judicial corruption is about the manipulation and the miscarriage of justice having compromised those at the temple of justice (Omotoso, 2006:335).

All these forms of corruption are affecting and afflicting the nation to the extent that it induces political apathy on the part of the people and questions the legitimacy of those in power. In some



cases, most of those in power manipulated themselves to the positions through rigging, vote buying or judicial manipulation. It is a known fact in the country that only few politicians care to engage in political campaign to sell their candidacy and present manifestoes. Instead, they are busy mobilising fund to buy votes on the day of election, stockpiling money to hire the best lawyers at the level of Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN), to use technicalities to win the case at the election tribunals and retain the stolen mandate and mobilise fund to buy the conscience of corrupt judges to give favourable judgments to sustain them in power. This is a challenge to electoral politics and democratic governance as Nigerians are gradually losing interest in the process because, in the country, power goes to the highest bidder. The ballot is gradually becoming a commodity that can be openly bought and sold shamefully to the highest bidder. The slogan in Nigeria during elections particularly in South-western geo-political zone is 'Dibo ki o se 'be' literally meaning 'vote and cook soup'. This has shown how decadent things are if by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, electoral politics is still as barbaric, embarrassing and crude. This is in addition to the notion in the country that votes and election results are a ruse, as only three or five people at the election tribunal or court of law will overturn the results. This may not be far from the truth since most judicial officers have compromised their positions. So, as politicians stockpile money to buy votes, they must also take into consideration money to bribe judges. All these are inducing political apathy among Nigerians because they believe their votes do not count.

It must add that, Nigeria has a legacy of the domination of corrupt elite over the economy and politics. Consequently, there is an intense struggle and stiff competition among the contending forces (political parties and their members) to benefit from the resources and power of the state. Therefore, the struggle for power in Nigeria is not about the development of the nation or the betterment of the material conditions of the people, but about further accumulation of wealth by the corrupt elites. Whenever government attempts to fighting corruption in the country, it is merely preventing other people (from other political parties) from having access to the resources and power of the state. To effectively do this, the party in power deploys all the coercive agencies of the state to intimidate, harass, blackmail, prosecute and if need be, silence vocal members of the opposition. These strategies have not changed since the First Republic either under military regimes or civilian governments.

### **Conclusion**

As long as Nigeria exists, there will be controversies, doubt and experimentation that may inhibit our search of stability, legitimacy and development, which is the hallmark of the code name-national question. The important thing is how Nigeria and Nigerians are able to understand these controversies and doubts, and provide a platform for moving forward, thereby creating another set of doubt and controversies. The implication is that the national question is a continuum in the development process, with each stage of development with its own set of issues bordering on national question. The need to achieve unity in diversity is crucial for development. It is, therefore, necessary for a good leadership in Nigeria that will ensure greater integration of the various nationalities; create a national identity; and promote decentralization of power and

responsibilities that will give every segment a sense of belonging. Restructuring of Nigeria should be done not marginalize any part of the country; rather, it would bring about true federalism, which would assuage most of our national problems and promote good governance.

### **Recommendations**

The contemporary situation in Nigeria now requires deliberate policy based programmes and actions to catalyse democratic consolidation. Such a policy will go a long way to maximize the grains already made in the area of national question and democratic consolidation. Since Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, ethno-religious conflicts are inevitable; hence the paper recommended thus;

Government should move from conflict resolution to the stage of conflict prevention through the provision of adequate and effective security in each state that will respond promptly to any ethno-religious insurgence; establishment of a functional and effective platform for ethno-religious leaders where grievances can be discussed before they escalate into ethno-religious crisis, while the government should strengthen the Nigeria inter-religious council (NIREC), which is already in existence; and above all, government should also resolve to be pluralistic, representative, and just in dealing with ethno-religious issues.

Moreover, there is a surfeit of aggrieved communities in the country, particularly in the areas where oil and other mineral resources are exploited. Federal government should, in addition to the “full” implementation of Niger Delta Technical Committee report in which Amnesty programme is one, should equally adopt the “Igbeti marble formula” by allocating shares (equalities) in oil companies/ventures to oil producing states, local governments and communities (to 25%) instead of retaining 13 percent derivation as is presently the case.

Moreover, with grinding poverty pervading a large part of the country, any slightest uproar is seized to vent spleen against the society by poor people, particularly youths who bear resentment in their hearts against the operating system. It is therefore, important that government at all levels should intensify more efforts to eradicate poverty. This is because it is when people are well to do, that they have more stakes in peace and security.

More importantly, from the disclosure, the lopsided nature of the country’s federation, which has invariably awarded a veto to a particular ethno-national group, whose dominance of the federation continues by other means even after a series of state creation, need to be restricted. There is need for decentralization of governance and the governance system in the country with a view to allowing the federating nits to be so not in name but indeed; and thereby be the basis of credible development purposes.

Specifically, Nigeria’s six geo-political zones should be constituted into zonal governments and made the federating units to which a substantial quantum of the powers and resources currently held by the federal government (including the police and sundry agencies of government) would be dissolved.

The zonal governments, each of which must have its own constitution albeit deriving existence from the national constitution can then decide how and through what structures to deliver governance at the local level.

Also, zoning of the nation into six ethno-regional units should be made constitutional rather a mere administrative affair. Each of the zones should be vested with the paraphernalia of government, to which state and local governments should be subordinated.

The above arrangement would represent a new, more powerful and thus attractive level of government for which power-seekers can compete and also serve to automatically weaken the Centre and make the regional governments true semi-autonomous federating units that can check excesses of an over bearing power of the federal government.

More also, allocation of authority to varying units of the policy is the soul of federalism. He stressed further that authority is about control of resources; the availability of which determines the equality of the lives of the people.

Finally, national question and democratic consolidation are mutually self-reinforcing and are facing common threats. The more these common threats are combated and Nigeria resolved to true federalism, the more the influences of national question fizzle out, the more the nation is built and the more Nigeria's democracy becomes consolidated.

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