Ethno-Regional Cleavages and Voting Behaviour in the 2015 General Elections: Issues and Challenges for Democratisation and Nation Building

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ABSTRACT

The relative significance of social cleavages as determinant of voting behaviour and political participation has received considerable attention in the literature (Dodds and Khosa 2001; Daddieh and Fair 2002; Norris 2003). Structural theorists argue that social identity, particularly ethnicity exerts a strong influence upon voting choices (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Horowitz 1985; Dodds and Khosa 2001).

The results of the 2015 general elections clearly portrayed the dominance of ethno-regional sentiments as determinants of voting behaviour and political participation across the country. From the presidential through gubernatorial, national and state assemblies' elections, aspirants were largely chosen on the basis of ethno-regional identities. In the presidential election, the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-regional identity. Similarly, the incumbent president received en masse votes from his ethno-regional zones.

The study of ethno-regional cleavage and voting behaviour in the 2015 general elections is significant, not just for analyzing political participation, but also for its potential consequences for democratization and nation building. The paper argues that where ascribed ethno-regional loyalties are strong, they "generate party systems reflecting rigid group boundaries and tend to exacerbate ethnic conflict" (Horowitz 1985:291).This tendency has not only hindered the development of national parties, but also the development of national identity. Ethnic groups competing for political positions could easily evoke ethnic-focussed conflicts with dire consequences for democratic stability and national survival. Empirical evidences are largely drawn from previous elections in Nigeria and the recently concluded 2015 general elections.

Keywords: social cleavages, voting behaviour, ethnicity, democratisation, nation building

Introduction

Among the various attributes of democracy, competitive election is the feature most easily identifiable and most widely recognised around the world. The core institution of modern liberal democracy whereby the right of the people to self-government can be exercised is competitive and participatory election. The extent to which elections fulfill that mission is to a significant extent dependent on citizens' rationale for how they behave at the polls. If voters' behaviour is determined by non-evaluative rationales, then the purpose of self-rule by representative government is defeated. Competitive elections are arguably a precondition for the other political benefits that a democratic system may confer on its citizens and they are a valuable yardstick for analysing and distinguishing a democratic polity.

Although elections and democracy are not synonymous; nonetheless, elections remain fundamental, not only for the installation of democratic governments, but also for broader democratic consolidation (Olayode 2004:87). The regularity, openness, and acceptability of elections signal whether basic constitutional, behavioural and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule. Recording the occurrence of a second competitive election can at least confirm that democratic gains have not been completely reversed by military coup.

The thesis of democratic consolidation advanced by Huntington (1991:266-267) adopted a procedural minimalist definition using a 'two–turn over test'. This in effect means the successful handing over of power by the winner of the first election to the winner of later elections. Although, Nigeria had already passed the 'two-turn over test' by the successful democratic transitions experienced in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 respectively; the 2015 general elections would mark the first time in the nation's turbulent political

history that a relatively peaceful transition from an incumbent president to an opposition candidate would take place.

The results of the 2015 general elections clearly revealed the preponderance of ethno-regional sentiments as determinants of voting behaviour and political participation across the country. From the presidential through gubernatorial, national and state assemblies' elections, aspirants were largely chosen on the basis of ethno-regional identities. In the presidential election, the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-regional identity. Similarly, the incumbent president received en masse votes from his ethno-regional zones.

In addition to being the most competitive election in Nigeria since independence, the 2015 general elections were held amid rising tensions on account of terror attacks by the Boko Haram Insurgent group. Ahead of the elections, there had been increasing tension between the north and the south due to what the northerners perceived as their 'lost opportunity' to reclaim the presidency and reverse the continued economic marginalization of their region. All these factors exacerbated the traditional ethnic, regional, and religious cleavages that have defined Nigerian politics since independence.

Democracy is defined in this paper, as a political system characterized by popular participation, competition for executive office, and institutional check on power (Siegle, 2004). It also refers to an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote (Gerring, 2005). Democracy involves how citizens express views physically or the general population is empowered to control their decision making process (Minier, 2001). Voting behaviour is defined as a set of personal electoral

activities, including participation in electoral campaigns, turnout at the polls, and choosing for whom to vote (Bratton, 2013).

Ethnic and regional politics had been nurtured since colonial era with new trends and dimensions taking place in the contemporary era. Political parties and candidates are easily perceived as representatives of a particular ethnic or religious group and voting pattern in Nigeria largely mirrors the various cleavages in the country – North-South, Christian-Muslim, among others. The dominant role of ethnicity in Nigerian democratic and partisan politics and the struggle for political power has been reflected through the results of previous elections from the First Republic to the recently concluded 2015 general elections. Thus, ethno-regional cleavages have continued to remain a major determinant of electoral outcome and related political issues with attendant implications for democratisation and nation building in Nigeria.

The study of ethno-regional cleavages and voting behaviour in the 2015 general elections is significant, not just for analyzing political participation, but also for its potential consequences for democratization and nation building. This paper argues that where ascribed ethno-regional loyalties are strong, they "generate party systems reflecting rigid group boundaries and tend to exacerbate ethnic conflict" (Horowitz 1985:291). Horowitz regards ethnicity as a particular problem for the usual process of bargaining and compromise that characterize normal politics in representative democracies because ethnicity is "ascriptive, and therefore more segmented, pillorized and rigid than social identities which are more flexible and fluid, or even self-selected, such as those based on class or shared ideological beliefs" (Horowitz 1985:293). This tendency has hindered the development of national parties, national identity and democratic culture. Ethnic groups competing for political positions could easily evoke

ethnic-focussed conflicts with dire consequences for democratic stability and national survival.

Methodology

This paper examines ethno-regional cleavages as determinants of voting behaviour in the recently concluded 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The paper adopts analytical, descriptive approach, using interpretative historical and empirical facts and records. The methods involved collection and assembling of data from secondary sources, either published or unpublished materials. Data were obtained through review of relevant text materials and documents of the political history and electoral development in Nigeria. Data collected were further analyzed through events observed during the conduct of past elections in the country. Considering the focus of the subject matter on ethno-regional cleavages as determinants of voting behaviour, the paper is situated within the theoretical framework of structural approach as advanced by Lipset and Rokkan (1967); Donald Horowitz (1985); Dodds andKhosa (2001); Daddieh and Fair (2002); among others. Structural theorists argue that social identity, particularly ethnicity exerts a strong influence upon voting choices and party support in traditional agrarian societies, characterized by low levels of education and minimal access to the news media. This phenomenon is important, not just for understanding the basis of electoral behaviour, but also because of its potential consequences for the process of democratization and nation building.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ethno-regional Cleavages

Ethno-regional cleavage is the division or polarization of voters into voting blocks along the line of ethnic identities and regional affiliations. Ethno-regionalism relies on both

claims of regional identity and ethnic distinction as basis for political mobilisation and participation. Ethno-regional cleavages are the national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious divisions that affect political allegiances and policies. Ethnic nationalism is the mobilisation of ethnic groups by using language, ethno-history, religion, traditions and customs for political purposes. In other words, through the rediscovery of an ethnic past, national identity could inspire ethnic communities to claim some political rights as nations within a nation-state. (Isiksal 2002:9). A belief in common historical evolution provides an inheritance of symbols, heroes, events, values, and hierarchies and confirms the social identities for separating both insiders and outsiders (Ake, 2000:93). Ethno-nationalism is defined in this study as people's loyalty to and identification with a particular ethnic nationality groups within a nation state for the purpose of mobilisation for collective social, political and economic interests.

Voting Behaviour

Voting is the basic decision-making process in a democracy by which citizens choose candidates for public office or the formal recording of opinion of a group on any subject. In either sense, it is a means of transforming numerous individual opinions into a coherent and collective basis for decision. Voting behaviour is defined as a set of personal electoral activities, including participation in electoral campaigns, turnout at the polls, and choosing for whom to vote (Bratton, 2013). Voting behavior is likely influenced by a multiplicity of factors; it is not merely the impact of one cleavage on vote choices – e.g., the strength of class or religious or ethnic voting, or whichever is the strongest of them – but rather the combined impact of all persistent divisions in the electorate that can be expected to influenced the pattern of voting.

A number of different theoretical approaches to the explanation of voting behaviour can be distinguished in the literature. Structural (or sociological) approaches concentrate on

the relationship between individual and social structure. These approaches situate voting in a social context, and examine the effects of variables such as social class, language, nationalism, religion, and rural-urban contrasts on voting. Ecological (or aggregate statistical) approaches relate voting patterns to the characteristic features of a geographical area (ward, constituency, state, or whatever). Social psychological approaches relate voting decisions to the voter's psychological predispositions or attitudes, for example his or her party identification, attitudes to candidates, and such like. Finally, rational-choice approaches attempt to explain voting behaviour as the outcome of a series of instrumental cost-benefit calculations by the individual, assessing the relative desirability of specific electoral outcomes in terms of the issues addressed and policies espoused by the different parties or candidates. Each of these broad approaches tends to be associated with different research techniques and each makes different assumptions about what motivates political behaviour.

Democratisation

Many scholars have attempted a conceptual definition of democratisation from different angles; however, there is no conventional agreed definition to the concept and features of its constitutive elements. Adopting a comprehensive approach, Nwabueze (1993:11) defines democratisation as 'not only a concept, nor is it synonymous with multi-partyism, but also concerned with certain conditions of other things such as a virile civil society, a democratic society, a free- society, a just society, equal treatment of all citizens by the state, an ordered, stable society infused with the spirit of liberty, justice and equality'. Nwabueze's stated thesis is that democratisation requires that the society, economy, politics, the constitution of the state, the electoral system and the practise of the government be democratised. Olukoshi (1996) opined that democratisation is a process without a finite limit and whose content and vitality at any point in time is reflective of the balance of social forces in a given social system. He

further adds further that there is no such thing as a 'full' and 'pure' democracy, since 'the democratic process is constantly being renewed in international and local scales' (Olukoshi, 1996:13).

For the purpose of this paper, democratisation is broadly conceived as a multi faceted process that leads to the construction of a stable democratic system of governance, incorporating such elements as political participation, economic and social justice, free and fair elections. The process of democratisation begins with political challenges to authoritarian regimes, advances through the political struggles over liberation, and requires the installation of a freely elected government. It concludes only when democratic rules becomes firmly institutionalised as well as valued by political actors at large. In other words, democratisation is a protracted process, which could unfold over several generations

Nation Building

Nation-building has always been a highly complex term, encompassing the description of historical experiences, a set of assumptions about "development" of Third World societies (Hippler 2002:2) A normative approach to nation-building perceives it as a strategy, generally for development originating from the "modernization theory" of Third World development of the 1950's and 1960's (Hippler 2002:4). Its starting point was the assumption, that successful development (following the Western, especially European model) is linked to specific political pre-conditions, like a functioning national government and state as agents of change and development. Also seen as crucial was an integration of societies along "national" lines, and the overcoming of "pre-modern" or "primordial" communities, often sweepingly termed "tribal" (Hippler 2002:3). Three different – though interlinked – processes of nation-building commonly

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identified in the literature are: creation of an integrating ideology; creation of an integrated society and a common identity; and creation of a functioning state apparatus (Hippler 2002).

Nation-building is defined in this paper as a process of collective identity formation with a view to legitimizing public power within a given territory. This is an essentially indigenous process which often not only projects a meaningful future but also draws on existing traditions, institutions, and customs, redefining them as national characteristics to support the nation's claim to sovereignty and uniqueness. A successful nation-building process produces a cultural projection of the nation containing a certain set of assumptions, values and beliefs which can function as the legitimizing foundation of a state structure

Nation-building is always a work-in-progress; a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention. Nation-building has many important aspects. Firstly, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is also about building institutions which symbolize the political entity – institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all else, however, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. Nation-building is therefore about building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose (Gambari, 2008).

Theoretical and Empirical Review of Voting Behaviour

The analysis of voting behaviour invariably focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. Voting behaviour is usually explained from three competing and overlapping paradigms. Sociological theory or the Columbia School (Lazarsfield et al., 1944; Lipset 1960); Psychosocial or the Michigan School (Campbell et al. 1960); and the Rational Choice perspectives (Downs 1957; Fiorina, 1981).

The sociological approaches concentrate on the relationship between individual and social structure; it places the vote in a social context and examine the effects on voting of such variables as social class, language, nationalism, religion, and rural-urban contrasts. The sociological approach to voting behaviour started with the influential studies undertaken by the Columbia school which carried out the first systematic surveys of the American electorates in four landmark studies of the presidential elections of 1940, 1948, 1952, and 1956. These studies mark the establishment of scholarly survey-based research on voting behaviour. The sociological school (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and McPhee 1954; Zuckerman 1982, Rose and Urwin 1969, Lijphart 1980) emphasized the group basis of voting. It indicates the fact that although particular individuals deal with politics, it refers much more to group and general purposes and interests. The citizens who select the candidates who appear in the elections, although they make personal (individual) decision, cannot be entirely isolated from the adherence to certain collective characteristics, such as social status, friends and the remaining interactions that are contact point with politics.

Lazarsfeld, Berelson and McPhee (1954) particularly emphasize the role of the family and the political socialization at the expense of the remaining social impacts, which

were considered dominant in a certain time period. The assumption here is that majority of people vote according to their original political predisposition. The problem with this theory, however, is that if vote choice was determined solely by the stable sociological factors, election results will remain unchanged for a very long time.

Another influential work under the sociological paradigm is that of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) who argued that not only do group identities influence voting behaviour, but that cleavage structures determine the number of political parties in a given polity. In other words, political parties evolve in response to the interests of social cleavages. In this manner politics is a matter of group interests. Since social groups are not political actors, they are represented by political organizations and their guidance (political elites).

While many scholars have employed variety of analytical models to examine voting behaviour empirically, this paper adopts the social cleavage theory within the broader structural model. Specifically, social cleavage theory claims that social identities determine voting choices for any given individual or social group. Ethnic ties based on kinship and family, language and dialect, tribal customs and local communities, as well as shared religious faiths, have long been regarded as playing a critical role in party politics and electoral democracies in sub-Saharan Africa (Horowitz, 1985).

Arguably, one of the most influential perspectives concerning the relationship between ethnicity, party systems, and voting behavior in developing societies was provided by Donald Horowitz (1985, 1993). Horowitz argues that the bond of ethnicity has a strong direct impact on electoral behaviour in ethnically-segmented societies, generating a long-term psychological sense of party loyalty anchoring citizens to parties, where casting a vote becomes an expression of group identity (Norris and Mattes 2003). In many African societies, ethnic mobilization, whether for political party formation,

electoral campaigns or patronage, is widespread and, when combined with economic disparity and inequitable access to political power, has actually become a source of long-drawn-out conflicts, with far reaching destabilization effects.

While ethnicity has long been understood as playing a crucial role in structuring party politics in Africa; some recent studies have suggested that the impact of ethnic identities is extremely complex and variable. For example, Erdmann (2007) in a study of Zambia reports that ethnicity matters for voter alignment and even more so for party affiliation. The survey results indicate that ethnicity or ethno-political identity matters but certainly not the only factor that accounts for election outcomes. In a study of Uganda, Conroy-Krutz (2013) shows that goods distribution and ethnicity become less important as constituents gain more political information. Although Norris and Mattes (2003) find that ethnicity does play key role in determining support for ruling parties, it was equally discovered that ethnicity is not always the primary cleavage in African politics. Furthermore, in Ghana, Lindberg and Morrison (2007: 34) conclude that 'clientelistic and ethnic predisposed voting are minor features' of the electorate. Similarly, albeit more cautious, Michael Bratton and his colleagues raise doubts – again based on individual survey data of the Afrobarometer from several countries – as to whether political parties are formed 'primarily along ethnic lines'. They 'suspect' that party formation is 'more pluralistic' than 'concerns about ethnic fragmentation would have one believe' (Bratton et al 2005: 257). At the same time, they refrain from suggesting other variables for explaining voting behaviour in Africa.

However, Kevin S. Fridy from his empirical analysis of the Ghanaian elections concludes that ethnicity seems to be an 'extremely significant although not deciding factor in Ghanaian elections' (Fridy 2007: 302). In addition, results from the analysis of individual survey data collected in Zambia suggested that though ethnicity is

significant for voter alignment and for party affiliation'; 'ethno-political' identity is certainly one of the factors that accounts for election outcomes in Zambia' (Erdmann 2007: 28). Erdmann (2007) also noted that the relevance of ethnicity for the formation of party systems and voter alignment is not a uniform pattern across Africa. In the light of recent findings in many African countries, Camp (2010) suggests that ethnicity should not be abandoned as a determinant of the vote choice but the way it is analyzed must obviously be refined.

Ethno-Regional Cleavages in Nigerian Politics

Nigeria is a plural society made up of over 250 ethnic groups with many sub-groups. Three major ethnic groups - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo - dominate the political landscape while other ethnic groups are regarded as minorities. This has created sub-nationalism. Ekeh (1973) has argued that ethnicity has flourished because the Nigerian elite who inherited the colonial state have conceptualized development as transferring resources from the civil public to the primordial pubic.

Nigerian electoral choice is largely based on ethnic considerations as successive elections from the colonial era through the post-independence period to the current Fourth Republican election have been seriously undermined by ethno-regional cleavages. Party politics in Nigeria during the colonial era was based on ethnic factor and one can assert that the seed of ethnic politics was sown at this period, germinated in the First Republic and the products started spreading during the 3rd and 4th Republics. For example, the Action Group (AG) as a party developed from a Yoruba Cultural Association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) was closely allied with the Igbo Union while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) developed from Jamiyyar Arewa. The leadership of the aforementioned political parties was along ethnic cleavages. The A.G. was led by Chief

Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba; the NCNC leadership fell on Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo while NPC was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, an Hausa- Fulani.

Even to a large extent, the colonial administrative arrangement in Nigeria during the colonial period encouraged ethnic politics. The 1946 Richard Constitution had divided Nigeria into three regions for administrative convenience, directly associated with the three major ethnic groups - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. It is not surprising therefore that the first political parties were formed along ethnic lines. During the first republic, politics was organized in the same way as during the pre-colonial era. The three political parties that existed during the pre-independence era also came into lime right and dominated the landscape; although other parties sprang up. These included Northern Elements Progressive union (NEPU) by Aminu Kano; and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Joseph Tarka. There was no radical department from those of the pre-colonial era as the parties had ethnic coloration in terms of leadership and regional affiliations. However, it was in the second republic that regionalism was played down a bit. The 1979 constitution stipulated that for a political party to be registered, it must be national in outlook i.e. wide geographical spread across the country.

Table 1: Political Parties and their Ethno-regional Bases (1951-1966)

POLITICAL PARTY	POLITICAL LEADERS	REGIONAL BASE	ETHNIC SUPPORT
Northern People's Congress (NPC)	Sir Ahmadu Bello	North	Hausa/Fulani
Action Group (AG)	Chief Obafemi Awolowo	West	Yoruba
National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)	Dr Nnamdi Azikwe	East	Igbo, Edo and Yoruba
Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU)	Alhaji Aminu Kano	North	Hausa/Fulani (Poor people)

United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)	Joseph Tarka	Middle Belt	Tiv, Biron
Dynamic Party(DP)	Dr Chike Obi	East	Igbo
Nigeria National Democratic Party(NNDP)	Chief Samuel Akintola	West	Yoruba

Source: Adapted from Nnabuihe, Aghemalo and Okebukwu (2014)

During the second republic, the new political parties that were registered had their leadership replicated along ethnic lines like the first republic. Thus, A.G. metamorphosed into UPN under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo ; Nnamdi Azikiwe retained controlled of the Igbos under NPP which is an offshoot of the old NCNC. NPN dominated the Hausa/Fulani areas; PRP in Hausa speaking while GNPP led by Ibrahim Waziri controlled the Kanuri speaking area. Therefore, ethnic coloration and affiliation played out in political parties' formation and electoral behaviour during the second Republic as voting patterns followed ethnic lines in the elections.

Table 2: Ethnic Voting Pattern in the First and Second Republics (1979-1983)

State	Victorious Party 1979 Election	1983 Election	Ethnic Base	Party Leader	First Republic Party	Party Leader
Anambra	NPP	NPP	East	Dr Azikwe	NCNC	Dr Azikwe
Bauchi	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji Shagari	NPC	Ahmadu Bello
Bendel	UPN	UPN	West	Obafemi Awolowo	AG	Obafemi Awolowo
Benue	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji Shagari	NPC	Ahmadu Bello
Bornu	GNPP	NPN	North	Waziri	BYM	Waziri
Cross River	NPP	NPP	East	Dr Azikwe	NCNC	Dr Azikwe
Gongola	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji	NPC	Ahmadu

				Shagari		Bello
Imo	UPN	UPN	East	Obafemi Awolowo	AG	Obafemi Awolowo
Kaduna	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji Shagari	NPC	Ahmadu Bello
Kano	PRP	PRP	North	Aminu Kano	NEPU	Aminu Kano
Kwara	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji Shagari	NPC	Ahmadu Bello
Lagos	UPN	UPN	West	Obafemi Awolowo	AG	Obafemi Awolowo
Niger	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji Shagari	NPC	Ahmadu Bello
Ogun	UPN	UPN	West	Obafemi Awolowo	AG	Obafemi Awolowo
Ondo	UPN	UPN	West	Obafemi Awolowo	AG	Obafemi Awolowo
Oyo	UPN	UPN	West	Obafemi Awolowo	AG	Obafemi Awolowo
Plateau	NPN	NPN	North	Alhaji Shagari	NPC	Ahmadu Bello

Source: Adapted from Nnabuihe, Aghemalo and Okebukwu (2014)

It should be pointed out that political party formation had a different dimension in the aborted third republic, midwived by President Ibrahim Babangida. Two political parties were formed and funded by the government. These were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). Even though these parties were established by government, ethno-religious cleavages were visible in the membership and composition of the two parties. While the SDP favoured the southerners, NRC was a party for the Hausa Fulani North as could be observed from their operation.

In the political dispensation of the Fourth Republic ethnic coloration has also reared its ugly head, with the ANPP considered as a party predominantly populated by the Hausa/Fulani and AD as direct successor to Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action group

and Unity Party of Nigeria. The AD dominated the six Yoruba speaking states of Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo Osun and Oyo until 2003 when it lost all the states except Lagos. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) was perceived to have deviated a bit from the usual ethno-religious dominated party politics of the past with their membership and formation cutting across the clime of Nigeria.

However in the 2011 general elections, ethnic and regional politics s also played itself out. With the demise of Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'adua, some people in the North felt power should not shift to the south and they started kicking against the presidency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. The new parties on contest like APGA is seen as Igbo party; ACN as a re-incarnation of A.G. or UPN which is Yoruba based, CPC and ANPP are seen as the party of Hausa/Fulani affiliations. While the PDP, to some extent seems to have national outlook but the insistence of the Northerner to produce the 2011 presidency had shown that ethno-regional cleavages have continued to plague the politics and unity of Nigeria as a sovereign state.

Ethno-Regional Cleavages and Voting Behaviour in the 2015 General Elections

The 2015 Nigerian general elections turned out to be as acrimonious, bitter and a hateful play of brinkmanship as that of the first republic. Ahead of the elections, ethno-regional and religious sentiments were stirred up across the country, threatening the very survival of the Nigeria state itself. The incumbent president rallied around himself ethno-regional supports of his minority kinsmen and the larger Igbos. Dangerous provocative and unguided statements were released, which heightened the tension across the country. Some of the rehabilitated ex-warlords of the Niger-Delta threatened to 'burn up the country' and returned back 'to the creeks to take up arms struggle' against the state, should their own son lose out of power. The incumbent presidents also sought supports from various ethno-regional groups like OPC, Afenifere, Egbe

Igbimo Agba Yoruba, among others. The former president equally paid several visits to many Christian organisations across the country to mobilise faithful voters to 'identify with their Christian brother'. In all these presidential campaigns and mobilisation, huge amount of money was alleged to have been used to induce voters' supports for his re-election.

The 2015 general elections were seen as a golden opportunity for the Northerner to wrestle back power, which they felt had been unjustly, denied them after the untimely demise of late President Yar'Ardua. The South-south minority groups also rallied behind the incumbent president to secure a second term of office for him.

The Yoruba of the South-west who felt marginalized under the incumbent president were quick to rally behind the opposition party that adopted their own son as the vice-presidential candidate. Across the length and breadth of the country, ethno-religion sentiments flared up and the presidential candidates of the leading political parties were prevailed upon to sign an accord (Abuja Peace Accord), committing themselves to maintaining peace before, during and after the elections. The leading presidential aspirants periodically kept returning to their ethno-regional bases for support and solidarity. The ember of ethnic sentiment was fanned out with dangerous misguided provocative statements. A famous one was recorded in Lagos where the paramount traditional ruler (Oba of Lagos) summoned the Ndigbo leaders to his palace and directed to 'vote for his anointed candidate' in the gubernatorial election or 'perish in the Lagos Lagoon'!

The general perception ahead of the 2015 general election was that the incumbent president was going into the electoral battle in a deficit and, therefore, disadvantaged position with regards to national security, corruption perception and indecisiveness.

And the fact that the presidential election had to be postponed by one and half months to enable the government confront the Boko Haram menace that late, even with the success it achieved, only helped to cement the perception and charges of weakness on national security, which the success of the military campaign did little to change. The damage had been done and it takes an awful long time for political wounds to heal.

The 2015 general election was not just about opposition party strategizing for election victory, which would be legitimate but something much deeper than that. This is about geo-political ethnic power grab at the expense of another or others that are otherwise entitled to it by virtue of extant power sharing tradition instituted by the PDP in the zoning of the Nigerian presidency rotationally amongst the six zones or alternately between North and South. By this arrangement, Jonathan or another Southerner would be entitled to another four years in office, adopted as a necessary adjunct to the nation's democratic tradition. However, this arrangement had already been compromised by the denial of the northerners' opportunity to complete the unfinished terms of late president Yar'Adua presidency.

Nigeria's political history would readily attest to the fact that the Yoruba ethnic group in the South/Western geo-political region or zone in Nigeria have always shunned the mainstream of Nigerian politics preferring instead to cling tenaciously to ethnic politicking and luxuriate in the comfort zone of its exclusive ethnic enclave in the Western region. Their aversion toward participation in Nigeria's mainstream politics and therefore fixation on regionalism is indeed legendary, and to a large extent, definitive of the broader Nigerian political history. All efforts in both pre- and post-independence Nigeria to lure and even coax the Yorubas into the mainstream at the center was violently repelled by mainstream Yoruba political elites in each and every

general elections right up to the 2007 presidential election. It's no secret that they have been fighting for regional autonomy rather than moving to the center

The 2015 general election can therefore be analysed in geo-ethnic conspiracies and betrayals between the South/West and the core North executing a strategic alliance to disrupt and upend the nation's political calculus. And this was helped in no small way by the historical ethnic cleavages between the Igbos and the Yorubas, making it a whole lot easier for the Yorubas to turn their backs on the Igbos. The reported outbursts of the Oba of Lagos threatening Ibos in Lagos to vote APC or else jump in the Lagos lagoon and perish lends credibility to this conspiracy theory.

Table 3: Results of the 2015 Presidential Election for the Two Leading Political Parties

State	APC	PDP
Abia	13,394	368,303
Adamawa	374,701	251,664
Akwa-Ibom	58,411	953, 304
Anambra	17,926	660,762
Bauchi	931,598	86,085
Bayelsa	5,194	361,209
Benue	373,961	303,737
Bornu	473,543	25,640
Cross-River	28,358	414,863
Delta	48,910	1,211,405
Ebonyi	19,518	373,653
Edo	208,469	286,869
Ekiti	120,331	176,466

Enugu	14,157	553,003
Gombe	361,245	96,873
Imo	133,253	559,185
Jigawa	885,998	142,904
Kaduna	1,127,760	484,085
Kano	1,903,999	215,779
Katsina	1,345,441	98,937
Kebbi	567,883	100,972
Kogi	264,451	149,987
Kwara	302,145	132,502
Lagos	792,460	632,327
Nasarawa	236,838	273,460
Niger	657,678	273,460
Ogun	308,290	149,222
Ondo	298,889	207,950
Osun	383,603	251,368
Oyo	528,620	249,929
Plateau	429,140	303,376
Rivers	69,238	1,487,075
Sokoto	671,926	152,199
Taraba	261,326	310,800
Yobe	446,265	25,526
Zamfara	612,202	144,833
FCT	146,399	157,195

Source: INEC Website

The analysis of results of the 2015 presidential election clearly reveals the dominance of ethno-regional cleavages in the voting patterns. From the above table, it is evident that the president and vice president elect received almost 90 per cent of their votes on the basis of ethno-regional identity. Similarly, the incumbent president received en masse votes from his ethno-regional zones.

Issues and Challenges of Ethno-Regional Cleavages and Voting for Democratisation and Nation Building

Liberal democracy, as Horowitz (1993:18) aptly observes, is about 'inclusion and exclusion, about access to power, about privileges that go with inclusion and the penalties that accompany exclusion'. In societies, where political mobilisation takes the form of ethnic grouping, winning and losing elections is not a simple matter as 'the game theory' that underlines the liberal democratic perspective might suggest. It means the exclusion of the losing ethnic groups, may be the majority or the minority, in perpetuity, from power and distribution of resources for development.

Concerning the issue of ethno-regional cleavages and the prospects for democratic consolidation, this paper argues that the expression of ethnicity itself is a measure of openness that liberal democratic environment accommodates. However, to the extent that ethno-nationalism is exclusive in intent and character, ethnicity could be dysfunctional for democracy, especially where majority insists on dominating power. One of the deductions from this paradox is that democracy may be difficult to consolidate in an atmosphere of 'unbridled ethnic claims and contestations' (Olayode, 2004:262).

Evidence available to us suggests that most Nigerians do in some way think of themselves as Nigerians. However, their ethnic identification matters more as a source

of pride (e.g., we Igbo) and even more importantly as a source of dislike and division (e.g., you Yoruba).

The three largest groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) have virtually nothing in common politically, socially, or historically. The overwhelming majority of Nigerians only speak their "home" language, and if they learn another, it is invariably English and not one of the other indigenous tongues. The different groups live separately, either in their traditional regions or in ethnic enclaves in the few cities that are ethnically mixed. Closely paralleling ethnicity is religion. Religion is nowhere near as important as ethnicity in most of the south, where, for instance, Yoruba Muslims tend to act politically as Yorubas more often than as Muslims.

Finally, there is the region itself, which to some degree transcends both religion and ethnicity in even broader fears the north has about the south and vice versa. As we saw earlier, many northerners are afraid that southern (or modern) cultural values and economic practices will undermine their way of life. Southerners, by contrast, fear that a northern majority could seize power and leave them a permanent and aggrieved minority. Nigeria is by no means the only country divided along these lines; other countries are even more fragmented with a similar pattern of overlapping cleavages but they have avoided the destructive controversies that have plagued Nigerian politics.

Ethnic heterogeneity is a reality of life in most African societies with the possible exceptions of Somalia, Tunisia, Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. While such heterogeneity may provide a colourful cultural diversity, politically; it may constitute a liability and impede the nation-building process unless wisely and carefully handled. Ethnic groups competing for resources, positions, and political dominance could easily evoke ethnic-focussed conflict with dire consequences for democratic stability. Thus, there is a need for political vision and statesmanship, capable of dousing tensions

generated from ethno-regional diversities, and thereby developing a political community where equality and justice prevail

One way of ensuring stability in multi-ethnic polities is to introduce accommodation and power-sharing formulae to moderate the possible 'exclusiveness and lopsidedness of unfettered democracy'. An arrangement that would open up opportunities to disadvantaged communities ought to be designed. In this case, all nationalities, religious, social, and cultural groups should have a stake in the system and work together for its preservation. Constitutional measures and provisions should be made to resolve the nationality question. Such issues as minority rights, religious status of the state, equality of rights, citizens' duties and obligations to the state should be clearly spelt out in the constitution. Constitutional provisions must deal with these issues sensitively, consciously allaying the fears and apprehension of minority groups, meeting their legitimate demands and involving them, in a meaningful and satisfying way, in the political systems that are evolved and in nation-building efforts.

Conclusion

Ethno-regional cleavages as discussed in this paper is partially a colonial legacy that have consistently defined Nigerian's political landscape since independence. A realistic approach to the lingering national question in Nigeria is the consolidation of democracy as a means of nation-building. Democracy thus enhances national integration, which is not only a flattening process of assimilation, but also embodies equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual peaceful co-existence, tolerance and forbearance among constituent peoples of the Nigeria.

While transitions towards democracy do not automatically guarantee rapid development and improved human right situations, democracy should however create

a window of opportunity where groups struggling for development and political rights would have better possibilities than before for realising their demands. Otherwise, there is the possibility of unstable democracies arising from a conflict between those who want to complete the democratisation process and those who want to halt it for 'being left behind and marginalized in the democratisation process.

Therefore, the need for 'real democracy' that provides economic and political rights as opposed to formal democracy (multi-partyism and ritualistic elections) can hardly be overstated. Yet, this is not to suggest a monolithic set of norms and institutions for all countries. Each country, according to its own traditions, socio-economic and political values, must collectively or through struggles create those institutions that serve it optimally

Consequently, for the sake of consolidating Nigeria's 'fragile democracy', there is a dire need for elected officials to re-examine the various demands made by different aggrieved groups and take a pragmatic approach in resolving them. In addition, constructive engagement of fundamental ways of restructuring and devolving powers for the survival of the state needs to be facilitated. The need to recognise ethnic differences, the need to nurture ways of ensuring enduring cordial relations among the various nationalities cannot be overemphasised. As Nigeria marches on in democratic experience, the resolution of the national question will pave the way for democratic consolidation and the emergence of true nation-state.

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