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Ethnic Cleavages in Nigeria: The Bane of Good Governance

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Abstract: ***The ethnic configuration in Nigeria has constituted a problem to the unity of the country, right from the eve of independence when it became clear that Nigeria will be granted independence. This study 'Ethnic Cleavages in Nigeria: The Bane of Good Governance" examines the struggle between the ethnic groups for dominance, the interface between the ethnic agenda and governance, and to ascertain the persistence of misgovernance in the country. It employ qualitative content analysis to elicit data for the study. What are the rootcauses of misgovernance in Nigeria? Why have the ethnic groups persistently pitched themselves against each other when there are measures put in place to address ethnicity in the country? The political elite in governance explicitly and implicitly preached the ethnic agenda which has kept us divided along ethnic line since independence, inhibiting good governance. A restructuring of governance is required to give greater fiscal autonomy and responsibility to the federating units, and a new constitution that will be a product of the people, define the way we co-exist must be put in place, as well as a viable, persistent and engaging civil society to address the menace of ethnicity in Nigeria.***

Keywords: Ethnic Cleavages, Governance, Good Governance, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic configurations in Nigeria have constituted an intractable problem to good governance in the country, pitching the ethnic groups against each other. The political elite who inherited the colonial state have conceptualized governance as transferring resources from civic public to primordial public (Adeyanju 2014). Right from the eve of independence, when it became clear Nigeria was going to gain independence; ethnocentric interests began to play out. At independence in the first republic, not even the first republic political parties were left out, as none of them had a national outlook, with the major parties accused of being characterized with ethnic agenda. The ethnic struggle for dominance paved way for the first coup detat, which eventually led to the civil war in 1967.

Having survived the civil war, it was thought the ethnic character of our politics would give

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way for a United Nigeria, but it got exacerbated with the military disrupting the democratic process again in the second republic. The ethnic struggle has inhibited good governance, and makes the people vulnerable for exploitation and deplorable conditions of life. As discernible from this study, governance in Nigeria is a platform that gives the enablement to access the national cake, hence the struggle to occupy the political space has intensified in the fourth republic. However, it is pitiable and appalling that impoverished ethnic public continue to applaud their kinsmen in government even when such corruptly acquired wealth is not translated to improving their living conditions. As the struggle for ethnic dominance gets messy in the fourth republic, good governance gets further away. The old order of playing politics still prevails even in the face of promoting good governance (Habuetal 2012).

Conceptual Clarification

Political Cleavage: A cleavage is a historically determined social or cultural line which divides citizens within a society into groups with differing political interests, resulting in political conflict among these groups.

Bane: with regards to the study under review, it is referred to something thatis particularly effective in causing trouble or worry.

Good governance: Good Governance is an approach to government that is committed to creating a system founded in justice and peace that protects individual's human rights and civil liberties.

Conflict: This is a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and even sometimes perceptions.

Ethnicity: is a grouping of people who identify with each other on the basis of shared attributes that distinguish them from other groups such as a common set of traditions, ancestry, language, history, society, culture, nation, religion or social treatment within their residing area.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this paper is qualitative content analysis. Journals, textbooks, and press materials were analysed for the extraction of data for this work.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the conflict theory, Conflict theory which was propounded in 1848 by Karl Marx, a 19th century political philosopher explains that society is in a continuous state of conflict, because of diverse groups in it, who compete for limited resources. Conflict theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than by consensus and conformity (Adam 2020). The theory explains here, the competition between the ethnic groups to ascend the position of governance and abuses the power attached to such offices to enrich self, family, cronies and sometimes extend a vestige of such illicitly and corruptly acquired wealth to one's ethnic group/kinsmen or do them some favour. These ethnic elites have continued to engage in unhealthy competition over the years, inhibiting good governance and exerting an unimaginable burden on the masses.

Hegemonic power and the political marginalization have created a very serious vacuum in Nigeria political space.

Today, political conflict has further widen serious ethnic agitations as there exist increase

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fragmentation of the nationalist forces and the growth of ethnic antagonism which is clearly visible in the resurgence of the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) in the East, and the secessionist calling for the Oduduwa nation in the West (Akpan, 2020, p 8).

Governance in Nigeria

Governance in Nigeria has taken various forms, from the colonial state to contemporary Nigeria. It is an indispensible truism that, the many woes of colonial Nigeria and the challenges of post – independence Nigeria, are attributed to colonialism, especiallyby the ruling political elite. This in itself is an aberration and a misconception, as this does not depict the current realities on ground. However, this is not to imply that the evils of colonialism did not transcend Nigeria's independence in 1960. The many evils of colonialism have continued to manifest themselves in various spheres of local and national life of the people. Rodney (2009, p 247) argues that, the statistics which show that Africa today is underdeveloped are the statistics representing the state of affairs at the end of colonialism. Governance in Nigeria, from independence to date, and in both military and democratic governments have not really reflected the essence of governance. The people have continued to suffer neglect and misgovernance, occasioned by those who have promised them good governance and the good life. Governance in Nigeria, from the first republic to contemporary Nigeria has not really offered much to the people,who gave it legitimacy, (Fiemotonghaetal 2021). This pitiable and helpless situation has characterized Nigerian politics, and this is clearly a silent conspiracy of the governing elite against the people, which is fast becoming acceptable practice, with a structural network transcending the national political sphere to state and local governments. Several defining factors are responsible for the menace of misgovernance in Nigeria, but all could be anchored on political corruption, whose origin could be traced to premorial sentiments. To put it in a proper dimension, political corruption was the precursor and the historical antecedent to bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria, (Habuetal 2012). Political corruption is indispensably the determining and enabling factor that engenders misgovernance in Nigeria, it has been nurtured, strengthened and consolidated, over decades of elite rule in the country. There is a common perception in public domains that, with the current state ofgovernance, where strong and viable institutions and the rule of law are last disappearing, the governing elite have implicitly impoverished the people and structured governance in such a way to always subject the people to their dictates, hence there is a consent of silence by the people even when the state is conspicuously mismanaged. Analyzing the state of governance in Nigeria, (Habuetal, 2012), posits that, it is not an overstatement that corruption hasdevalued the quality of Nigerian democracy, as well as the quality of the lives of Nigerians

Ethnic Politics in Nigeria

Ethnic cleavages in Africa that pre-dated colonialism were unique, and operated their distinctive political systems, relatively successfully. By the time independence was achieved in the early 1960s, the centrifugal tendencies had grown strong in many countries (for instance in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Ivory Coast etc) to threathen not only the transition to independence but, more importantly, the political viability of the new governments (Abraham 2011, P. 47). Ethnic politics in Nigeria took a new dimension right from the First Republic, with the ethnic groups, especially the dominant ones engaged in battle for the dominance of governance, pitching centrifugal ethnic interests against a centripetal national interest. As Obi

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and Abonyi, explains:
Most political issues in Nigeria are still seen from the ethnic perspective, thereby giving relevance to ethnic Jingoists and war lords. Political offices and appointments are seen as battlefields among the various ethnic groups, where the battle is fought with all the available weaponery a group can muster (Oba &Obonyi, in Obi &Obiajulu 2004, p 206). Chronologically, politics in Nigeria has been characterized by ethnocentrism, with ethnic divisions and configurations that are parochial in outlook and subservient to the ethnic agenda. This struggle for dominance by the ethnic groups has left the minority ethnic groups gasping for breath, and caught in the web of marginalization, overwhelmed by unacceptable living conditions. In a bid to address this anomaly and give succor to the minorities, the 1999 constitution provided for the Federal character principle in sections 14(3) and (4) of the constitution. Gen. SaniAbacha, acknowledging the recommendation for the establishing of a federal character commission on 1st October 1995, stated that the commission would serve as a step towards correcting the imbalances that have affected sections of the country. Ekeh and Osaghge (1989), emphasizes that, the Federal character is a distributive principle which is aimed at preventing the domination of government, and its resources by people from only one ethnic group or a few groups and at guaranteeing to every ethnics groups, access to power and resources. Though the principle sought to address the problems of ethnicity, and assuage the feelings of minorities, its implementation and genuineness of purpose of its operators are still lacking in contentsas government appointments do not truly reflect the federal character of the state. Though it is also argued that, sharing political appointments and public offices based on ethnic enclaves rather than competence gives room for mediocrity in governance, and helps retard our collective pace. Evidently, the government of President MuhammaduBuharihas been accused severally for making appointments based on ethnic configurations, and with the government responding to these claims. As Nasir, (2021) reports in premiumtimesng.com, "President MuhammaduBuhari stated that all appointments he makes are strictly based on merit and not based on ethnic or regional balance'.On the appointment of Yahaya Faruk as the Chief of Army Staff, the Presidentemphasized that, he cannot favour those who have spent shorter years in service above those with longer years. The Statement of the President is faulty in its entirety, as YahayaFaruk was a far junior officer in the military hierarchy before his appointment. The Chief of Army Staff, Lt- Gen YahayaFaruk's appointment contradicts this position of the President, as he was picked over many of his senior colleagues;It is heart-rending that ethnic politics continue to dominate governance leaving us more divided along primordial lines.

Governance and Ethnic Agenda
The intractable problem of ethnicity has continued to beset governance in Nigeria, even before independence. Infact the struggle between the ethnic groups delayed the country's independence due to the fear of Southern domination displayed by the northern delegates in Lagos when they opposed Anthony Enahoro's motion for self-government in 1956 (Obi and Obiajulu, 2004). The First Republic set the pace for the second, third failed, and fourth republics. The major political parties in the first republic, were engulfed and characterized with ethnic sentiments manifesting the ethnic agenda. The Northern people's Congress (NPC) which was formed bythe Jamma-Arewa (Hausa/Fulani) ethnic groups was dominant in the north, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) dominated in eastern Nigeria, while the Action Group (AG) was dominant in Western Nigeria. All the parties were formed

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along ethniclines. Apparently, the British colonial administration's ethnic policy and the regional autonomy reinforced the division of the country, a factor which contributed to ethnic-regional character of governance in Nigeria today (Igbuzor, 2011). Evidently, none of the parties in the first republic had a national outlook.

The people are the essence of governance and are central in especially democratic systems of governance all over the world. Through governance public goods are managed and distributed, though ethnic interests manifest in various ways explicitly or implicitly, inarguablyit is the platform of governance that gives a leeway for the maximization of the ethnic agenda in Nigeria.Conscious of the enormous rights and privilegesthose in government enjoy, and the power they demonstrate,ethnic groups and nationals jostle for governmental positions with desperation with all arsenals at their disposal, to acquire political power and avail themselves of these enormous privileges and power. However, it is discerning that, the force with which they project the ethnic agenda gets gradually abated when they are on the throne of power, hence it is argued that projection of the ethnic agenda is a political rhetoric to attain political power, as the political offices ethnic nationals occupy do not reflect on the ethnic groups. To continue to ride on the ethnic platform, ethnic nationals in government continue to preach the ethnic agenda, without tangible dividents for the ethnic groups they represent. The troubling trend today in the country, is that, ethnic nationals, just want to see their ethnic groups play the leading role among competing ethnic groups. They see themselves first as nationals of their ethnic groups before seeing themselves as Nigerians. In 1960, after the Northern People's Congress (NPC) won the majority seats in the House of Representatives, Ahmadu Bello the sarduana of Sokotowas called as the leader of the party to form the government as the prime minister but he declined, creating room for Sir AbubakarTafewaBalewa. Ndu2002,explains that, Ahmadu Bello, leader of the NPC, declined because he preferred to serve the Hausa ethnic group, and that he was an Hausa man before he became a Nigerian. Governance in Nigeria today, is a clear case of conscious exclusion of thepeople that gives it legitimacy, as good governance has eluded the Nigerian state. The ethnicdiversity of the country is more a threat today than a national pride,obviously the struggle for ethnic dominance is intensifying in unprecedented proportions in the fourth republic. The plea to address the menance of the Fulani killer herdsmen, who have continued to ravage the length and breadth of especially Southern Nigeria has not elicited meaningful response from the Federal Government. The President who is a Fulani man is smeared, and the popular belief isthat, this in itself is another attempt to further the ethnic agenda. While the government and security agencies are pampering killer herdsmen and bandits, who havebecome more emboldened, the regime has been going after propagators of secession in the country especially in the south (Adelani, 2021).

The Quest for Good Governance

The search for good governance in Nigeria seem to be an exercise in futility with eachpassing government adjudged as worse off than its predecessor. Nigerians have continued to hear the phrase 'Good Governance' but they are yet to feel the impact of good governance, though good governance means different things to different political environments, the basic characteristics of good governance are yet to be found in Nigeria. Good governance entails the existence of strong institutions,an inclusive political environment, respect for minority rights, accountability, participatory governance, respect for rule of law, efficiency, and

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follows due process. If we see good governance as the involvement of citizens in governmental affairs, leading to good conception, formulation and implementation of policies through appropriate organs for the overall development of the country, then what is prevalent in Nigeria is a far cry. (Habuetal 2012). The political elite continue to use "good governance' as a campaign mantra to elicit the people's support, which in itself is a deceitful strategy. This is so because there is a culture ofnot fulfilling campaign promises, even when it is within the ambit of the economy to do so,hence it is argued in this paper that there is an implicit conspiracy by the political class to impoverish the people so as to continue their dominance of the political space. This is done in conjunction with the ethnic interest as a propelling force. In emphasizing this point Igwe 2021, succinctly stated, that, sub-saharanAfrican nations have experienced despotic rule in decades, leaders use power as an end in itself, rather than for the public good, they are indifferent to the progress of their citizens and employ poisonous social, racial and ethnic ideologies.

Findings

The Nigerian state has been characterized with the problem of misgovernance, right from independence in 1960, and this cannot be exonerated from the central factor of ethnicity in the country. The country has always been divided along ethnic lines, which is traceable in part to an irresponsible political class who conspicuously mismanages our common wealth, compelling others to see themselves as being marginalized. Nigeria's Federal system is a highly centralized system, and this has made the competition between the ethnic groups very tense at the centre. The non-implementation of public policies to the latter, like the Federal character principle which ordinarily would have addressed ethnic minority fears has also contributed to ethnic struggle in Nigeria. The defective 1999 constitution has also contributed to the imbalance of government, as it does not address the major issues affecting us as a people.

3. CONCLUSION

The intractable and age-long problem of ethnicity has kept Nigeria divided along ethnic lines even though the political leadership have always professed the country to be united in diversity, in order to assuage the pains of Nigerians. Misgovernance in the country is occationed by the persistent ethnic struggle for dominance of the political space which has placed a heavy burden on the masses. To nip ethnicity in the bud, governance must be restructured to give a greater responsibility to the federating units, to reduce the competition at the centre.A new constitution that will be a product of the people, that will define the way we co-exist is also required to ensure equity for all sections of the country.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to address the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria;

1. Governance should be decentralized to ease the tension at the centre.
2. Fiscal federalism should be entrenched, where the federating units will be empowered to exercise greater fiscal authority.
3. A new constitution is required to address the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria. A new constitution that will be a product of the people, enforceable and provide for ethnic

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minorities.

4. A verile, viable and persistent civil society that will be able to engage government head on should be encouraged, as it is applicable in developed democracies.

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