

Management of Identity Politics and Sectarian Conflicts: Emerging Issues Towards Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the re-emergence of democracy in 1999 and despite efforts by subsequent administrations to unite the different sections in the country, there were unabated sectarian conflicts and identity politics that have unprecedented effects on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The study employed mixed method and results revealed that nation was engulfed with politics of identity and divisions along sectional cleavages which produced ineffectual democratic consolidation. The study concluded that what constitutes Nigeria was a combination of many cultures and sectional identity groups; yet, their interests have played a major role in determining most of the philosophies and decisions in conflict management and the understanding towards democratic governance. The study recommended a constitutional review towards restructuring; an improved electioneering process; citizenship by residence, educational enlightenment to manage identity politics and sectarian conflicts and entronement of the rule of law to ensure fairness, equity, and justice.

Keywords: *Identity politics, Sectarian Conflicts, Democratic Consolidation, Culture, Religion, Ethnic Group*

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Background to the Study

Nigeria's socio-political setting can be demarcated into two large significant divides: North and South. This remarkable arrangement framed the reason for Nigeria's historical and socio-political problems such as sectional and identity conflicts which the country is presently passing through (Turaki, 2014). Besides the lopsided nature of Nigeria's federal set-up, which has over the years generated the fear of political domination among various socio-political identities and sectional groups, the colonial Federal Constitution ignored the question of unequal representation of regions and sectional groups. This action, particularly between 1954 and 1966, failed to create a stable, just and participatory socio-political order. In essence, the colonial federal structure of Nigeria has many socio-political problems, such as the imbalances in the political structure, the disparities among different sectional groups, inequality in revenue allocations and citizenship problem. By this arrangement, the colonialists not only set the stage for future inequalities, but they also fostered resentment and hindered such open and honest conversations that could have dealt with conflict hotbeds long before independence (Ijagbemi, 1992; Turaki, 2014; Sulaiman, 2016).

Although, these foundational conflicts hot-beds were steered by Nigerians with intense negotiations at conferences that eventually ended in independence and the adoption of a federal system of government with the regions as federating units, yet, these negotiations redefined the architecture of Nigeria from the commercial intention to sectional compartmentation. The correspondent effects, moreover, focus on the origination of the identity mishap and disunity that pervades Nigeria State, and from that point onward, it appears there was no concrete effort to redressing some of the issues so essential and central to the continued peaceful existence of the citizenry. Nigeria seems not to have risen out of the colonial imbalances and sectional categorizations, which are but an imposition by the colonialists. This perhaps has been responsible for profound politics of identity through disenfranchisement, fears of continuous domination by one ethnic group, sharp rivalry for political positions, mistrust and unhealthy sectional support (Osagbae and Suberu, 2005; Salawu, 2010; Turaki, 2014).

The problematic in this study is that despite colonial incursion into the formation of Nigeria, the many identities and sectional mixtures that shape Nigeria's socio-political structure ought to have birthed a stronger and more prosperous democratic architecture (Alemika and Okoye, 2002; Mercy, 2012; Wonah, 2010). Since independence, however, one of the most challenging tasks confronting the Nigeria State was a functional management technique of pluralist induced conflicts. Rather than cooperating or uniting, the over 300 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria found themselves in an unhealthy competition and rivalry for most of the country's post-independence life (Gbemisola, 2012; Osagbae and Suberu, 2005). Empirically, Nigeria appears to have been tilted more towards identity prone contention than collaboration. These scenarios had produced different conflicts with varied degree of resentment amongst different ethnic nationalities and thus call to test the ability of the Nigeria leadership to constructively and decisively manage identity politics and sectarian conflicts especially in lieu of the multi-ethnic and heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian State.

In essence, the objectives are to examine empirical issues regarding management of identity politics and sectarian conflicts in Nigeria and emerging issues towards a better democratic consolidation process. This study specifically, 1. Explore how the government can manage the influence of identity in politics. 2. Highlight how government at all levels can effectively manage sectarian conflicts, and 3. Examine possible ways that can be adopted in achieving a more robust democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Interdisciplinary studies on identity politics emphasize that identity refers to commonalities and differences at the same time. There may be a multiplicity of identities for an individual or groups. However, such a multiplicity is a reason for tension and disagreement in both social action and self-representation. Çancı and Odukoya (2016) for example asserts that identity must be distinguished from role-sets, that is, identity processes are placed at the core of an individual and yet at the center of the culture of his community. In essence, the character of an individual is enshrined in its identity, “psychological givens” and in social roles. One of the central aspects of distinctiveness especially for people of African origin such as Nigeria is ethnic, cultural, religious and political identity. They all have a common reflective set of conditions representing beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of positive identification (Austin, and Dutt, 2015; Festus, 2015; Keller, 2014; Nafikov and Fazliev, 2016).

Moreover, the concept of identity politics signifies an extensive variety of political activism and conjecturing founded in the collective practices of the injustice of members of a particular social group. Wonah (2017), describes identity politics to mean a group of persons who have in common certain traits, features, cultural realities, economic status, political affiliations etc. that they employ to advance their interests. It thus means that identity politics theorize around belief systems, tailored manifestos, or party affiliation, identity-political formations characteristically intended to secure the political freedom of a particular set of people marginalized within its larger framework. These markers distinguish a group from other groups and place that group on a different pedigree depending on the way it portrays and establishes its identity in its association with other groups. To the researcher, the assertion of identity politics finds expression within the context of an individual or group's identifiable interest. Consequently, it is concretized and actualized not only by the availability of resources but also by the effective and efficient mechanism of resource distribution thus the interactions between the divide of identity aligns with the outcome of having a broader directional and political development. This notion of divisive identity brought about sectional differences and tensions which invariably result in sectarian conflicts.

Sectarian conflict can be defined as the process through which all forms of sectional identity (ethnic, religious, economics, social, class etc.) are perceived through a political lens. Basically, it means an extreme devotion to a particular group, especially in religion, ethnic, and political affiliations. LeVan (2013) submits that over the last decade, sectarian conflicts or sectarianism has increased in the world especially in the Middle East and

Africa and influenced regional politics. The increase in sectarian conflicts in most countries around the world suggests that the political elite accepts some of the ideas and demands of the sectarian groups, or, at least take the position that the conflicts that these groups often engage in can be ignored because the individuals who are targeted are not politically, socially, or economically strong. Some authors such as Onwe (2014), Boer (2004) posit that some of the factors at the root of most sectarian conflicts particularly in the Northern Nigeria is internal colonization and indigenism and socio/political-economic issues that have continuously provoked conflicts between the dominance of indigenous minority tribes, who are mostly Christians by the majority Hausa/Fulani, the majority of whom are Muslims. However, Nwaomah (2011) and Okoye (2013) observe that the resurgence of the ethnic/cultural identity of the minority and indigenous ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria - who now resent economic and political domination of the Hausa/Fulani, have also contributed to the crises.

Two trends are visible from the discourse on identity politics and sectarian conflict. The first emphasizes the contribution of sectarianism, while the second focuses on the nature of politics of identity in democratization. Whether seen from the primordial, instrumentalist, or constructivist perspective, group identity and sectarianism are perceived as integrally conflict prone. Claude Ake, who offers a strong critique of this perspective, argues that the term "ethnic (sectarian) conflict" has, for this reason, become too popular, pointing out that sectarianism or identity relations need not be always conflicting. Evidence of harmonious coexistence between sectional groups, both in traditional and industrial societies, exposes the assumption that group identity necessarily results in conflict (Ake, 2000; Jinadu, 1994; Singer, 1994). Some scholars, however, suggest a perspective which interrogates the conditions under which sectarianism results in conflict as queried by Stavenhagen (as cited in Ake, 2000).

Consequently, the entry points of group identity into democratization are two. A sectional group may intervene to resist democratization and sustain the status quo while another wants democratization to struggle for incorporation and reverse its marginalization or exclusion from incorporation and reverse its marginalization or exclusion from power. For the researcher, Nigeria as a nation is neither here nor there because, while some parts of the country especially the Northern States want to embrace the former, the west, and perhaps the east tilts towards the latter; a struggle for emancipation. This, however, is not unconnected with the political and religious orientation of the two divides. Additionally, the way that democratization offers groups a chance to hold onto power makes it inclined to conflict, particularly where the premium put on power is excessively high and the guidelines for political challenge have not been standardized, causing political gladiators to favor efficiency norms to legitimacy norms. Sectarianism and politics of identity through religious manipulations become tools deployed for the acquisition of power. If this is the case, Ake (2000) dares to say that it is misleading to label what has been happening in several African countries, particularly in Nigeria, as sectarian conflict.

Fundamentally, safeguarding democratic persistence is an essential and most widespread objective for democratic consolidation drive. Conroy-Krutz and Kerr (2015) postulates that the ultimate goal of democratic continuity is to serve as a general-legitimizing method which gives a firm direction, respectability, and sustaining the unity of purpose to any examination into the problems of democratic consolidation. Besides, the term democratic consolidation denotes a process as well as its outcome. Therefore, it leads scholars such as Mercy (2012), Obakhedo and Imhanlahimi (2010) and Schedler (2015) to collapse the two constructs to defining the outcome by the process, that is, to explain democratic consolidation by what it takes to accomplish it. Out of this result, expansionary descriptions equate democratic consolidation with whatever happens to identity and sectarianism as its necessary condition such as self-enforcing rules, popular legitimacy, and elite consensus and party-building which are germane to having a robust democratic consolidation.

This paper, agreeing with most authors submits that democratic consolidation finds out factors that are crucial for a democracy to become consolidated. That is a democratic order, where the basic tenets of democracy such as separation of powers, universal suffrage, freedom of speech and the press, equality before the law, an independent judiciary, and the right of opposition are allowed to flourish. Also, the clear-cut electoral process is not subject to the notions and fancies of one or a group of persons as posited by Oyebode (2009). Although democracy is not new in most countries of the world, what transpires in many African States such as Nigeria is that several attempts at democratic enthronement have been thwarted by the political class and the ruling elite. From the first republic till the 2015 general elections in Nigeria for instance, some stakeholders in the nations electioneering process have deliberately worked the progression through electoral fraud (rigging, ballot stuffing, falsification of results etc.), ethnic and religious politics, voters' apathy, dysfunctional democratic institutions, corruption in public life, poverty, and most recently in the 2018 Ekiti and Osun State governorship elections, monetization of politics (vote buying) is all that characterized the country's electioneering process.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Marc Howard Ross psycho-cultural conflict theory developed in 1995. The role of culturally-induced conflict is emphasized by this theory. The basic need of man in the society, according to this theory, is identity and when it is denied, the result is conflicts. The theory's position is that although there are different forms of identities, the one that is based on people's ethnic origin and the cultures that are acquired from the ethnic origin is imperative to explaining violent conflict (Ross, 1995). Identity is concerned with group judgments, decisions and motives thus it is seen as the reason for social conflicts. The above submission does not mean that conflicts are inevitable anytime there are ethnic and cultural differences. Psycho-cultural theoretical interpretations entrenched in ethnicity explains the psychological roots and core of cultural, which make ethnic-identity more profound in society. Marc Howard Ross, based on psycho-cultural interpretations of conflict theory, defines ethno-sectional identity as an offshoot of shared,

group deep commitment and interconnectivity of group members' relationships with others, their motives, and their actions thus ethno-sectional identity cannot be replaced but can be made unprejudiced and more accepted.

Psycho-cultural conflict theorists argue that social conflicts that take long to resolve becomes a possibility when some groups are discriminated against or deprived of the satisfaction of their basic and psychological needs on the basis of their identity. Although, theorists in this school of thought sees recognition and protection of identity as the most important but there are other needs such as economic freedom, food, security, self-esteem etc. and as noted by Creighton (1991), social conflicts are identity driven and grows out of the feelings of neglects, powerlessness and memories of past persecution.

A history of humiliation, oppression, victimization, feelings of inferiority and other forms of experiences that propel people to resort to retribution particularly in the northern part of Nigeria constitute part of what Rothschild and Groth (1995), referred to as the "pathological dimensions of ethnicity". Additionally, ethno-sectional conflict involves the essential fundamentals of each group's identity and incites distrust about real and potential opposition. However, it is not just a political occasion but a show that challenge the very presence of the group by challenging its identity, moreover, conflicts that are caused by a crisis of identity are usually the most dangerous and violent since identity is an unshakable sense of self-worth. This elucidates why ethnic and sectional conflicts are very problematic to resolve (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010)

In Nigeria, identity is a bond that connects individuals through discerned shared experiences and common future purposes. This study explores sectarian conflicts through the lens of identity and the concepts of psycho-cultural interpretations, that is, shared orientation deeply held among people that belong to the same identity and group narratives. Most of the conflicts that have paraded the Nigerian nation especially after post-colonial period have been identity driven because many sections of the nation do not see themselves as belonging to the center but a section of the nation. The nation's political calculations and interpretations had been a subject of who, where and how a section takes advantage over the rest. Psycho-cultural attributes are diverging actions that includes non-negotiable cultural characteristics, threats, claims and/or rights that become important because of their connections to core metaphors and group narratives that embody a group's identity. In most sectarian conflicts in Nigeria, psycho-cultural attributes arise over competition that motivates intractable dimensions of the conflicts which cannot be solved by an appeal, general rules or higher authority.

However, the theory is not without some flaws. For instance, the theory makes a general assumption of people having the same identity but it fails to see that some sectional groups have identities with profound history while others do not and that a few sections or groups have consistent identities while others have dynamic identities. Equally, the solid articulation of cultural identity and its affinity to prompt conflicts and war rely on the context rather than a flat hypothesis. More so, the theory fails to note that identity

cannot be lobbied unless an underlying core of memories, meaning or experience moves people to collective action; something Milton J. Esman, in his book *Ethnic Politics* (1987), said can be located on a range between adaptations and primitive historical stabilities.

Methodology

The subject scope focuses on the management of identity politics and sectarian conflicts towards achieving a better consolidated democracy in Nigeria. In this context, however, was on Benue and Kaduna states. The two states were selected because they have a versed history of identity politics that has overtime motivated sectional conflicts between their many ethnic and sectional groups. In Kaduna, for instance, there had been many reported conflicts between the Hausa-Fulani Muslims and the Christian Southern Kaduna ethnic minorities, while in Benue, there had been conflicts between farmers and herders especially in recent times, as well as conflicts and segregation between the predominant Tiv and other ethnic groups such as the Jukuns, Idoma and Igede arising from politics of difference. The time frame for the study (1999-2018) was a time that the country for the first time experienced an uninterrupted transition from one civilian rule to another.

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative approach employs the use of the survey research design, which involves the use of questionnaire. A total number of six hundred and seventy-seven (648) copies of questionnaires were administered to respondents in their respective offices, farm settlements, markets stores/shops, religious places of worship, local assemblies, and related locations but six hundred (600) copies) was retrieved. The qualitative approach employed a semi-structured interview that was purposely conducted among opinion leaders. Also, to give the interviewee's a clear understanding of the questions of the study, indigenous languages of Hausa, Idoma, Tiv, pidgin etc. was used.

Discussion of Findings

The following findings are based on the stipulated objectives of the study. For the purpose of simplicity, they are explained into subheadings as follows:

Table 1: Analysis of Management of Identity Politics and Sectarian Conflicts to Achieve Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Survey Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strong Disagree	Mean	SD
Despite having various people from different community occupying leadership roles in governance, there must be impartiality in dealing with identity prone sectarian conflicts	236(39.4)	245(40.8)	90(15.0)	24(4.0)	5(0.8)	3.88	1.37
There must be a constant review of ways and approaches to governance and quality leadership in the public domain	54(30.2)	54(30.2)	16(8.9)	28(15.6)	27(15.1)	3.88	1.37
Government should root Nigerian polity in institutions rather than personality	263(43.8)	184(30.7)	85(14.2)	35(5.8)	33(5.5)	3.84	1.40
Government at all levels must modify their approaches to handling sectarian conflicts by going beyond pacifying to reconciling and engaging conflicting parties to sustain their relationships through logical conflict interventions processes	44(24.6)	63(35.2)	22(12.3)	40(22.3)	10(5.6)	3.78	1.42
Government must work hard to develop a unique but national socio-political identity from her many ethnic classifications	204(34.0)	248(41.3)	102(17.0)	38(6.3)	8(1.3)	3.74	1.39
The same measure of rule of law must be followed in all engagement of governance across ethnic, sectional or identity borders	160(26.7)	301(50.2)	108(18.0)	27(4.5)	4(0.7)	3.67	1.36
Government must adopt various ways of solving or intervening on different conflict situations because different conflicts need different approaches	200(33.3)	242(40.3)	117(19.5)	32(5.3)	9(1.5)	3.67	1.45
Leadership must strive to promote democratic culture instead of characters that are based on sectional preferences	178(29.7)	260(43.3)	108(18.0)	38(6.3)	16(2.7)	3.64	1.40
The relationship between ethnic groups must not be seen as a particular group having political or economic advantages over the other ethnic groups	41(43)	48(26.8)	36(20.1)	40(2.3)	14(7.8)	3.63	1.45
Solving sectarian conflicts should entail preventive rather than responsive strategies	210(35.0)	210(35.0)	130(21.7)	43(7.2)	7(1.2)	3.60	1.51
The current policy and responses to sectarian conflicts and identity questions need to be re-examined to function better	192(32.0)	230(38.3)	132(22.0)	38(6.3)	8(1.3)	3.57	1.50
Political elite must adopt culture of transparency, non-partisanship and effectiveness in governance	44(24.6)	69(38.5)	30(16.8)	28(15.6)	8(4.5)	3.56	1.50
Leadership or institutions at all levels must act and be seen to be unbiased in dealing with all section of the nation	180(30.0)	244(40.7)	131(21.8)	29(4.8)	16(2.7)	3.54	1.49
Government must encourage philosophy based on African cultural ethos rather than on laws or western ideologies alone to solving identity induced sectarian conflicts	208(34.7)	198(33.0)	146(24.3)	40(6.7)	8(1.3)	3.52	1.56
There must be proactive measure to monitoring conflicts dynamics so as to preventing minor disagreement before it matures to a negative conflict	34(19.0)	56(31.3)	36(20.1)	38(21.2)	15(8.4)	3.50	1.52
Average						3.67	1.45

Source: Field Data, 2019

Managing the Influence of Identity in Politics

The results in table 1 shows that one of the effective ways of managing the interplay of identity politics is impartiality in dealing with identity-prone sectarian conflicts, This is evident considering that 39.4% of all the respondents (Strongly agree), 40.8% (Agree) making a total of 80.2% of the respondents in agreement that despite having various

people from different community occupying leadership roles in governance, there must be impartiality in dealing with identity prone sectarian conflicts. The position of Kwaja (2011) was in agreement with this result when he concludes that rising inequality between the rich and poor is responsible for ethno-religious and sectarian conflicts in Nigeria since the enthronement of democratic rule in 1999.

Moreover, the resilience demonstrated by Nigerians over the years has somehow prevented the disintegration of the country despite the resultant effect of identity politics, but much is in demand from the citizenry because the possibility of division is still felt in the air. Some interviewees posit that the roles political elite plays are to a great extent liable for the achievement or disappointment in this venture. The work of Degia (2016) on identity construction of an Ethno-Religious nation like Nigeria, for instance, captures how a nation could manage identity politics particularly through consolidation of ethnic solidarity. John Bird (1999) in Degia (2016) when commenting on ethnic solidarity contends that religious revitalization can be a consequence of the cultural defense, acting as an underwriter of ethnic group identity thus maintaining a religious commitment is also a way to maintaining other aspects of identity. The interviewees submitted that in Nigeria, confounding variables, for example, the assembly of religious directions with ethnic differences has joined with the insatiable demeanor of the elites, just as their intentional and stubborn controls, to make things significantly harder to oversee as well as confined. Without a doubt, to uplift common feelings of dread and doubts of the "other", to fortify view of domination and marginalization by the "other", and to raise unbending boundaries to cordial and peaceful inter-ethnic, inter-communal and inter-religious relationship all have an elitist involvement. In this respect, and in a comparative context, the Nigerian elite seem to be grossly deficiency of an enlightened self-interest group.

The findings further reveal that 60.4% of the respondents believe there must be a constant review of ways and approaches to governance and quality of leadership in the public domain and that government polity must be rooted in institutions rather than personality. Many of the respondents posits that government at all levels must modify their approaches to handling sectarian conflicts by going beyond pacifying to reconciling and engaging conflicting parties to sustain their relationships through logical conflict interventions processes. The work of Kwaja (2011) also supports this finding when he concludes in his work that the flimsiness of the institutions of the state in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, corruption, gross abuse of human rights, environmental degradation, disputes over land, among others, are the underlying causes of ethno-religious and sectarian violence in Nigeria. Identity politics is a major factor in political mobilization and politics is the allocation of resources through institutionalized means for bringing together and protection of the various interests in the nation (Wonah, 2017). Moreover, the convocation of a national dialogue is essentially inescapable according to the interviewees. The findings of Akturk (2015) advocates that if at all, theories of nationalism, that has its root and experience in European ideology of ethnicity or linguistic need to be revised to match and explain the religious nationalism that is predominant in some developing nations like Nigeria.

The data further reveal that government must develop a unique but national socio-political identity from her many ethnic classifications that would enshrine the rule of law in all engagement of governance across ethnic, sectional or identity borders. All the political parties through where the leaders emerged, according to the interviewees, should be ideologically based and must not be founded on religious, ethnic, or sectional outlook. Moreover, it must be by equal distribution of the “national cake”, political office as well as imbibe a culture that showcases good leadership by example. There should be no negligence nor room for sectional politics but a thorough restructure of the country by defining and defending the constitution for and against all without prejudice or favor. There are indices from the data analyzed that support national identity over sectional cleavages. For instance, more than 75.3% of the respondents agree to have a national identity through a unique but national socio-political identity from her many ethnic classifications while 76.9% equally supports the rule of law to drive home policy engagement of government, whereas 71% wants the Nigeria leadership to strive and promote democratic culture instead of characters that are based on sectional preferences. The work of Drobizheva (2017) supports these findings when he postulated that civic (national) identity is an important factor in reducing ethnic negativism.

Management of Sectarian Conflicts

The second objective was to highlight how government at all levels can effectively manage sectarian conflicts. The study affirms that in any problem-solving endeavor, it is important to analyze and understand its fundamental causes and their implications. For instance, in Nigeria, there are many but quite interrelated causes of sectarian conflicts. Shah, Ullah and Malik (2018) and other writers like Mavalla (2014), Çancı and Odukoya, 2016 contributed to the many factors that are responsible for sectarian conflicts. Many authors (Aliyu, 2009; Bamidele, 2015; Escobar, 2018; Gofwen 2004; Iwara 2006; Kwaja 2011; Salawu, 2010; Sulaiman, 2016; Shah, Ullah, and Malik, 2018; Sullivan, 2017; Mavalla, 2014; Njoku and Hamid, 2014; Omotosho, 2003; Osakwe, 2014) gave reasons from government negligence to sectarianism, negative politics towards sectional identity, oppression and domination. Other reasons are exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, favoritism, and prejudice as some of the predisposing factors.

To manage sectarian conflicts, the interviewees submit that the first step is to identify its nature and root cause. Although it is hard, however, it is not impossible because in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria, to encourage a solid bond of citizenship is necessary to accommodate its socio-cultural diversity. A major possible way forward is to redraft a constitution that would assist the citizens to live in peace and be tolerably with each other. Also, to accomplish a near-perfect model of citizenship and federalism, Nigerians and leadership require some skills, ingenuity, diplomacy, patient, and statesmanship. This is only possible if the governments at all levels consult each other to settle their differences before violent disagreement and negative conflicts erupt. Also, religious groups and ethno-regional groups must adopt early warning signs and preventive mediation system to attain peace. To attain this objective, courses about conflict and conflict management

should be included in all the tiers of education where Nigeria diversities are emphasized, promoted and represented for the good of the nation.

Furthermore, there must be constitutional provisions that give less power to the center (Federal Government). Nigerian constitutions give far too much power to the federal government, sometimes to the point of a dictator (Adesoji, 2017). It is necessary to correct this because apart from impeding negativism towards democratic consolidation principles, the concentration of power at the center gives politics an unhealthy intensity. Because the federal office, particularly the president is so powerful, those who compete for it readily resort to unlawful means, as if to indicate that for this particular office, the end justifies all the means. Again, this is the reason why the competition for power at the center takes on ethnic coloration all in the attempt to side-track other ethnic nationalities thereby leading to sectarian conflict.

The paper also reveals that leadership or institutions at all levels must act and be seen to be unbiased in dealing with all section of the nation. In fact, 43% of the respondents strongly agree that to manage identity politics and sectarian conflicts in achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria, the relationship between ethnic groups must not seem like one ethnic group has more advantage over other ethnic groups. This is in agreement with the submission of Shah, Ullah, and Malik (2018) that policies addressing the sincere grievances of the smaller ethnic group should be accepted. They also stress the complaints of smaller sectional groups in which the concentration of political and economic power has brought the political, economic, cultural manifestations of smaller groups to the ground and has obstructed their development. Equally, they affirm that ethnic dominance of groups, prejudicial distribution of resources and the central role of the political elites have marginalized smaller ethnic groups while the act of giving much importance only to the criterion of higher population is unjust and inequitable.

Alao (2013) posits that the interventions by the government to conflicts were often motivated by the scale of violence and not necessarily a proactive one. He proposes that the government should be proactive to respond to ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria to prevent structural and cultural contradictions that eventually led to the conflicts, direct violence or resurgence of it. The findings in this study shows that majority of the respondents (70%) believes that solving sectarian conflicts should entail preventive rather than responsive strategies and that the current policy and responses to sectarian conflicts and identity questions need to be re-examining to function better particularly through a rebirth of the political elite that must adopt a culture of transparency, non-partisanship, and effectiveness in governance.

Way Forward to Achieving a Better Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The interview conducted suggested that democracy and all democratic consolidation principles must be put to play by all stakeholders and elective representatives for a vital role at all levels of governance to promote democratic culture. Also, the Nigeria constitution should be reviewed to accommodate stiff penalty for those that fail to adhere

to the principle of a federal character. It must allow the rule of law at all levels. Political elites should be more patriotic to diffuse any form of sectional interest over national importance. The law should be applied with fairness irrespective of ethnic affiliation, political parties or religious groups. Leadership or institutions at all levels must act and be seen to be unbiased in dealing with all section of the nation just as Shah, Ullah, and Malik (2018) contends in their suggestion to managing diversity and national question that the state must develop a fair process of distribution of power between all the ethnic groups to maintain a balanced and unambiguous collective feeling as a people. The position of Wonah (2010) on party ideology, campaign and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and on national integration further supports this finding when he contends that those who represent the people must be those who arose from the electoral process as the popular choice of the electorates and secondly, governance must be based on the concept of the rule of law irrespective of status, class, or position in the society. Also, in agreement with the findings, Akande (2009) stresses that it is not an over-emphasis on our part as a nation to mobilize the state for a free and fair election which is fundamental to any democracy and to ensure justice, equity, and the rule of law.

Furthermore, interviewees suggested that some of the ways to manage identity politics and sectarian conflicts particularly to achieve a consolidated democracy is to understand that as relevant as the issues are, it is not, as is often believed that cultural, linguistic, or religious heterogeneity is dangerous to civil peace, rather, it is the refusal to accept this heterogeneity. The first thing, therefore, is for all Nigerian citizens to accept their diversities as a country. The works of Shah, Ullah, and Malik (2018) when commenting on how to manage diversity, stresses that a greater awareness of the obligations and attributes of pluralism is an urgent need to view others through the same lens. Also, the political elites must recognize the plural nature of the country and develop policies that accommodate ethnic heterogeneity, devolution of power, decentralization and equitability. Some form of power rotation or sharing must be institutionalized and entrenched in the constitution. As it seems a practice in Nigeria, it is counterproductive for any section (particularly the Northern Nigeria) to have sole control of power while others remain in servitude (Wonah, 2017). It is, however, frightening to note that the northern oligarchy has come to see power as their unchallengeable right. Moreover, for democracy to thrive there must be power rotation among the different ethnic nationalities. This must be accompanied by some form of power-sharing between the six geo-political zones that house the different nationalities in Nigeria so that no section of the country will feel cheated and marginalized at any point in time.

Similarly, the population of the states and not the landmass or geographical space must be used in the distribution of resources from the center. It is the people that matter and not the geographical space they occupy. This is why the present arrangements of using landmass as a yardstick for political and economic gain is not acceptable to the ethnic nationalities from the southern part of the country. Furthermore, a Two (or Three at most) Party system might be the best option for a country like Nigeria where people manipulate our diversity to cause trouble. The history of the political party and its formation in

Nigeria indicates that they are typically ethnic based. The only exception to this was the third republic when the military registered, only two political parties (SDP and NRC) on the recommendation of the Political Bureau. It is the position of this paper that if the 'Two-Party System' is entrenched into the Nigerian constitution, it will prevent the various ethnic nationalities from hijacking any of the two parties and this will reduce the impact of ethnicity in politics, hence, a more robust democracy will be achieved.

Lastly, politics was said to be too serious a business to be left for politicians alone, the project of the maintenance of law and order, the distribution of resources, the structuring of society, the protection of lives and property, the provision of social, economic, agricultural, industrial, and health infrastructures and the protection of the citizens from external attack, which make up governance, cannot and must not, be left entirely in the hands of those who are elected into power, or those who steal their way, rig their way or shoot their way into power, as often been some cases in Nigeria. The political elites and leadership at all level must allow smaller group to be allowed to be on the center stage of the political scene, enshrine true federalism and promote good governance through a proper electioneering process that will add value to selecting people-oriented leaders into public office. The position of Cohen (2004) in Shah et al (2018) buttress the importance of this submission. Cohen theorizes that when there is unfair treatment, socio-economic grievances, unfair representation in state institutions, and above all, not honoring the electoral mandate, the end result will always be disintegration which changes the political balance within the state, severely narrows cultural and social diversity, thus the balance of power would eventually shift away from secular mainstream forces.

Besides, some of the interviewees posit that citizenship should not be by birth or cultural affiliation but by residency and choice. For instance, a Northerner should be able to live and become a governor in Yoruba land and an Igbo man should be able to vie and become the same in the North. The notion of citizenship or citizen-hood as suggested by Keynan (2017) is that the state must recognize a multilevel civil identity of its citizens, not merely as a legal status, but as an intrinsic part of its overarching identity, which embraces all members of society equally, regardless of their distinct identities. He further reiterates that citizen-hood does not settle for accepting otherness by the majority nor for welcoming minority members to join the majority's identity but it calls for facilitating and In conclusion, as a people, the Nigeria state must look inward to advance those characters that are so much in the sociology of its existence. The transformation of its heritage, despite the exchange of cultural and technological disposition particularly in the perception of an African tradition, custom, and folktales that have taken back seats in the scheme of life must be rejigged to drive Nigeria's collective psychology. The failure in the transmission of values, ethos, moral mettle explains why Nigeria celebrate mediocrity as against values that define its culture but if as a nation Nigeria operates and apply emergency national task of rebirth and regenerations of ethos and morals, her democratic consolidation path would not only have a meaning but a desired direction. Furthermore, there is a need to readjust those heritages that defines her existence and sustenance for a long period of time before the advent of colonization. In essence, the findings reveal that

government must encourage philosophy based on African cultural ethos rather than on laws or western ideologies alone to solving identity induced sectarian conflicts. There is therefore a need for a proactive measure to monitoring conflicts dynamics so as to prevent minor disagreement before it matures to a negative conflict.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Some conclusions were drawn from this study on management of identity politics and sectarian conflicts towards a better democratic consolidation in Nigeria. First, the Nigerian nation which originated from an African traditional society has been beavered with politics of identity and with very deep divisions along socio-cultural sections, political affiliations, religion, ethnicity, geography and philosophy. This divisive nature of the Nigerian society affects how all sectional groups handle the issues of consolidation of the nation's democratic principles. Moreover, the study concludes that although what constitute Nigeria today was a combination of many cultural, sectional, and identity groups, but the nature and characteristics of identity politics especially as it relates to the connection between different sectional groups, their interests and intentions played a vital role in shaping most of the philosophies and decisions of the citizens particularly the support and understanding towards sectarian conflicts.

The paper therefore recommended that there should be a constitutional review to address “restructuring”, marginalization, resource control, federalism etc. Also, the nation's electioneering process must be improved upon to achieve one vote to one card and the votes must be made to count at all time. Furthermore, population of people and not the landmass or geographical space must be used in the distribution of resources while citizenship should not be by birth, ethnic, or cultural affiliation but by residency as practiced in other climes. Furthermore, both public and private educational institutions should include subjects and topics in their curriculum to enlighten the coming generation on the impact of identity politics and sectarian conflicts whereas the current democratic consolidation arrangement must be re-examined to function better. In addition, the executives, legislators, and judiciary arm of government must uphold tenets of democratic consolidation principles at all times by obeying and upholding the constitution irrespective of who is involved. They should also ensure justice, fairness and impartiality in managing the affair of the state, and whoever is found guilty must be made to account for his/her actions through laid down rules without victimization, favoritism, or hidden agenda.

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