ETHNIC POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA AND MALI: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Nigeria and Mali since political independence in 1960 has been basking in the euphoria of ethnic politics; where one must belong to the mainstream of ethnic politics for political relevance. Ethnic politics has continued to pose a security threat to democratic growth in Nigeria and Mali which affects the promotion of good governance and democracy in the country. Nigeria and Mali are a multi-ethnic state with differences in its socio-political and economic development all of which have resulted in conflicts and counter-conflicts. Today, many ethnic regions in Nigeria and Mali continue to use ethnicity as a resource for political manipulation and entrepreneurship, resulting in dominant ethnic groups excluding minority groups within national policies that reflect the interests and activities of the national majority. Against this backdrop, the objective of this study is to examine ethnic politics and democratic governance in Nigeria and Mali, unveiling how it affects democratic growth in these two countries. The methodology used is the qualitative research method. Secondary method of data collection from books, journals, and web-based material were utilised. Theoretically, the study adopted social identity theory. This study argues that Nigeria's and Mali's political problem hinges on the negative consequences of ethnic politics in the two countries. The findings showed that the distinctive code of conduct that depicts fairness and equity has eluded Nigerians and Malians thereby leading to behavioural derailment and attitudinal change in our political system and culture. Political actors from various regions neither pursue issues of national interest nor are active in politics of patronage and clientage.

Keywords: Democratic Governance, Democracy, Ethnicity, Governance and Politics

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Introduction

This paper examines the issue of ethnic politics and their implications for democratic governance in Nigeria and Mali. Ethnic politics and distrust is identified as the bane of former democratic experiments in Nigeria. Moreover, ethnicity in Nigeria and Mali has assumed disturbing new dimensions. The most crucial of these are the issues of marginalization and agitations by ethnic minorities. Marginalization breeds suspicion, distrust, heightens ethnic tensions and may eventually lead to conflict over the sharing and allocation of power and national resources.

Democratic tradition, which is imperative for development, cannot blossom in the context of ethnic politics. Thus, marginalization, whether apparent or real, has the potential for disrupting the drive towards democracy. With cries for marginalization so rife among ethnic groups, a need arises to address the issue squarely. This is particularly important given that Nigeria and Mali are presently engaged in another attempt at democracy. Ethnic politics in whatever form need to be resolved in order to allow for democracy to thrive.

Conceptual clarification
Ethnicity

In contemporary heterogeneous societies ethnic group affiliation gives each member of that society an ethnic identity. Ethnicity, like any other social science concept, has several definitions. According to Afkhami (2012, p. 6) 'ethnicity describes a collective identity and is based on the assumption that a collectivity has its roots in common ancestry, heritage, religion, culture, nationality, language and a territory'. To Nnoli, (1978, p. 5) ethnicity is a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups. These definitions suggest that ethnicity is characterized by social-cultural phenomena including ancestral descent, culture and norms and the feeling of nationhood. This suggests that ethnicity can only exist in heterogeneous societies.

Politics

Politics means different things to different people. *Politics*, and related terms like *political* and *politician*, can have both positive and negative connotations. The Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that humans were "political animals" in that only by engaging in politics could humans reach their highest potential. Yet often, the terms *political* and *politician* can be used in disparaging ways to refer to individuals using trickery or manipulation to obtain or preserve their status or authority. More formally, a politician is someone running for elective office or serving in it or as a person who is using

the skills of a politician in other social interaction. A political actor is anyone who is engaged in political activity. Politics involves all the actions of government and all the people who work for, serve, or challenge it.

Democracy

Democracy is derived from the Greek words, namely *"Demos"*, and *"Kratos"*. *Demos* has the meaning of the people or audience, while *Kratos* has the meaning of government. There are several definitions of democracy according to experts, as follows: C.F. Strong defines democracy as a system of government in which the majority of the adult population participates in politics on the basis of a representative system. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a system of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Aristotle defines democracy as the freedom of every citizen. Harris Soche defines democracy as a form of people's government. In other words, the people are the holders of power in the government who have the right to regulate, defend, and protect themselves from coercion from their representatives.

Characteristics of Democracy

The characteristics that describe a government based on a democratic system are reflected in the following:

i. In running the government, the government is based on the people's will and interests.

ii. The government applies constitutional characteristics related to the interests, will or power of the people written in the constitution and laws of the country.

iii. The government applies the context of representation, the characteristics of democracy related to people's sovereignty that will be represented by several people who have been elected by the people themselves.

iv. The characteristics of democracy have to do with general elections, which are a political activity carried out to choose parties in government.

v. Democracy in a party characteristic as a medium or a means to be part of implementing a democratic system.

vi. Democracy in terms of power is the division and separation of power.

vii. Democracy in the nature of responsibility is the responsibility of parties who have been elected to participate in the implementation of a democratic system.

Governance

Wadak and Jatau (2020) defines governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". True democracy rest on good governance and the major determinant of whether governance is a good or bad is not dependant on effective policy formulation alone, but also on how the policy brought about growth, stability and more importantly, the extent at which it enhances the overall well-being of the citizens.

Democratic Governance

Democratic governance on the other hand involves a system where power is vested in the people, exercised through representatives chosen in free and fair elections, and characterized by the rule of law, respect for human rights, and citizen participation.

Theoretical Framework (**Social Identity Theory**)

Social identity theory originated from the British social psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. Social identity begins with the premise that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. The creation of group identities involves both the categorization of one's in-group with regard to an out-group and the tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group. The result is identification with a collective, depersonalized identity based on group membership and imbued with positive aspects. The theory posits that group membership helps people to instill meaning in social situations. Defining who they are and determining how they relate to others. The theory aimed at connecting cognitive processes and behavioral motivations. Initially, its main focus was on intergroup conflict and intergroup relations which more broadly hides sustainable development. For that reason, the theory was originally referred to as the social identity theory of intergroup relations. Henry Tajfel and John Turner elaborated on the theory by specifying how people interpret their own position in different social contexts and how that affects their perceptions of others (stereotyping), as well as their own behaviour in groups (social influence). According to the theory, group members may experience different kinds of identity threats leading to conflict that hinders sustainable development. Social identity is the major threat that occurs when the perceived competence of the group is devalued. Members of the group may also experience various forms of social identity threats, which take place in various ways such as when the moral behaviour of their group is called into question thereby resulting into conflicts. The latter form of threat is sometimes

experienced even by group members who in no way be held personally accountable for their actions.

Ethnic Politics and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Ethnic politics play a significant role in Nigeria's democratic governance, often posing challenges to national integration and stability. Nigerian is a multi-ethnic state with over 250 ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture, language and traditions.

For examples, the Niger Delta region is home to several ethnic groups, including the Ogoni, Ijaw and Itsekri. The region has experienced significant ethnic tensions and conflicts, particularly over the distribution of oil resources. Furthermore, the Biafran war of 1967-1970 was a devastating ethnic conflicts that pitted the Igbo people against the Nigerian Government. The conflict resulted in significant loss of life and property. Also, the Jos crisis is a longstanding ethnic conflicts between the Berom and Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in Plateau state. The conflict has resulted in significant violence and displacement.

Impact on democratic governance

Ethnic politics can lead to unequal representation and participation in democratic processes. Dominant ethnic groups often hold more power and influence, while smaller groups may feel marginalized or excluded. Ethnic tension and conflict can undermine democratic governance, leading to instability and even violence. Also, ethnic politics can lead to a lack of accountability and transparency, as ethnic groups may prioritize their own interests over national ones.

Ethnic Politics and Democratic Governance in Mali

Mali is a multi-ethnic country with a diverse population of around 20 ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture, language and tradition. Ethnic politics play a significant role in Mali's democratic governance, often posing challenges to national integration and stability.

For examples, the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali is longstanding ethnic conflict that has resulted in significant violence and displacement. The Tuareg people have long felt marginalized and excluded from political power and resources. Furthermore, the Bambara and Fulani ethnic groups have a longstanding rivalry that has led to conflicts over resources in the Keyes region.

Comparative analysis of ethnic politics and democratic governance in Nigeria and Mali

Nigeria colonial history has contributed significantly to its ethnic politics. The British colonial administration often favoured certain ethnic groups over other, creating tensions and rivalries that persist today. While Mali French colonial administration also favour certain ethnic groups. Colonial administrators favored Hausa/Fulani in Nigeria and also, Bambara ethnic group in Mali was massively favoured by the colonial administrators.

Competition for resources, such as oil and land has exacerbated ethnic tensions and conflicts in Nigeria as well as in Mali. Ethnic groups often feel that they are not receiving a fair share of resources or that their interests are being ignored. Ethnic groups in both countries (Nigeria and Mali) often fight for political power and influence, leading to tension and conflicts between groups. They fight for power by all means so that their ethnic group or tribes would in power so that they would be relevant to the system.

Nigeria has a long history of democratic governance, with a more established democratic system. Mali, on the other hand has experienced several military coups and has a more fragile democratic system. Nigeria is more stable democratically, since 1999, democratic governments elected by the majority of the masses are controlling the affairs of the country and currently, military government is in helm of affairs in Mali.

In Mali, traditional leaders play a significant role in local government and conflicts resolution. While in Nigeria, traditional leaders have less formal power but still wield significant influence. Nigeria has a more complex ethnic group dynamic, with over 250 ethnic groups. Mali has a smaller number of ethnic groups, but still experiences tensions between group like the Bambara, Fulani and Tuareq.

Federal Character Commission was established in Nigeria in the year 1996, this commission aims to promote fair representation and participation of all ethnic groups in government. While Mali established National Commission for Dialogue and Reconciliation in 2017, this commission aims to promote dialogue and reconciliation between ethnic groups. Regional council was also established by both countries to promote regional development and reduce ethnic tension.

Recommendations

Considering the problem emanated from ethnic politics in Nigeria and Mali, the following recommendations were considered as worthwhile:

1. Building inclusive institutions that represent diverse ethnic groups can help to promote national unity and reduce ethnic tensions;
2. Power-sharing arrangements can help to promote ethnic representation and participation in democratic institutions;
3. Recognizing and respecting cultural differences can help to promote social cohesion and reduce ethnic tensions;
4. Education and awareness programs can help to promote understanding and tolerance of ethnic differences;
5. Establishing conflict resolution mechanism can help to resolve ethnic conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

Ethnic politics dynamics influences the trajectory of democratic governance and the formulation of effective strategies to ensure its resilience is imperative. Contemporary conceptual framework such as Social Identity Theory, offers a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of ethnic politics, projecting its inquiry within the socio-political landscape of post-colonial Nigeria and Mali.

Through a rigorous analysis of power relations, institutional structures, and socio-economic factors, the paper advocate for measures such as constitutional reforms, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the promotion of inclusive governance to mitigate the adverse effects of ethnic politics. The work provides valuable insights that can inform policy interventions and contribute to the advancement of democratic governance in Nigeria and Mali. Sustainable democratic governance hinges on consolidating democratic values to enhance education, healthcare, and citizens' rights.

Effective governance requires adherence to democratic principles, while addressing ethnic politics demands structural reforms and constitutional amendments to ensure fairness and inclusivity and fostering peace, unity, and national integration, Nigeria and Mali can mitigate the detrimental effects of ethnic politics and sustain its democratic journey for sustainable development

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