

# Political Elite, Ethnic Politics and Leadership Deficit in Nigeria

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**Abstract-** The Nigerian political system is marked by divisions along ethnic, class and religious lines. Deliberate manipulation of these primordial identity symbols to gain political advantage in an electoral contest has been a recurring phenomenon of Nigerian politics since independence in 1960. State apparatus has always been used by rational self-interested leaders to amass power, control social values, and distribute resources based on differentiated ethnic group support. As a matter of fact Nigerian elites often develop patron-client relations based on ethnic or regional commonalities. The result of this phenomenon has been a lack of patriotic leadership with nationalistic tendencies and equity-induced service delivery in the political firmament of the country. This essay therefore, examines the nature and character of the country's political elites in relation to ethnic politics, and how these have impacted on the existing federal structure.

**Index Terms-** Ethnicity, Political Elite, Leadership, Politics

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Republic of Nigeria became independent on 1 October 1960, mainly as a federation of three regions, corresponding roughly to the three largest ethnic identities of the country: the Hausa and Fulani (29 percent of the population), concentrated in the far north and neighboring country of Niger; the Yoruba (21 percent) of southwestern Nigeria; and the Igbo (18 percent) in the southeastern portion of the country. Under the founding constitution, each of the three regions retained a substantial measure of self-government, while the federal government was given exclusive powers in defense and security, foreign relations, and commercial and fiscal policies. It is important to recognize, however, that in addition to the three main ethnic identities mentioned above, there are hundreds of ethno-linguistic entities throughout Nigeria- including Ijaw (10 percent of the population), Kanuri (4 percent), Ibibio (4 percent) and Tiv (2 percent)- who have at times been historically marginalized and underrepresented among the political and economic elite (Forest, 2012:19).

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation state with a rich heritage of socio-cultural diversities; the multiplicity in language and culture across the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria has made it easy for regional groupings to establish themselves for the purpose of identifying with one another and pursuing peculiar interests. This phenomenon has been particularly strengthened by the role of language as a potent instrument for preserving and transmitting the people's traditional norms and values. The regional social groups in perspective may be traced to the pre-colonial configurations of the geographical territory known as Nigeria

today. The formation of these social groups have been greatly influenced by ethnic and cultural ties and affinities that existed amongst the people who shared a common ancestry or who have been linked by social values and cultural traits, tribe, religion, commerce, friendly relationships or conflicts even before the colonial era (Aliyu, 2012:6).

Nigeria has always faced the dilemma of forging a nation out of all of its complex diversity while ensuring that no ethnic group, religion or geographical region could ever come to dominate- or be marginalized by- the rest of the country. Nigeria has had four constitutions since independence, and each of them has been crafted around core provisions designed to strike the finest possible balance in the allocation of political power and government resources (HRW, 2006:8). Lewis (2006:89), however, contends that the ruling elites and public institutions have not provided essential collective goods, such as physical infrastructure, the rule of law, or legitimate symbols of state authority and political community. One of the most contentious problems is democracy. Nigerians tenaciously maintain aspirations for democratic rule, as evidenced in the recurring political struggles since independence and in public attitudes toward government. Democracy has proven elusive if not chimerical, as cycles of civilian and military government have been punctuated by false starts, failed transitions, and recurring challenges to stable rule. Elected regimes have faltered over precarious institutions, factionalism among elites, and pervasive corruption.

## Conceptualising Ethnicity, Political Elites and Ethnic Politics

Sanda (1976) defines an ethnic group as consisting of interacting members, who defined themselves as belonging to a named or labeled social group with whose interest they identify, and which manifests certain aspects of a unique culture while constituting a part of a wider society. Rose (1965) also defines an ethnic group as those whose members share a unique social and cultural heritage, passed from one generation to the other. Ethnicity, therefore, refers to differences of language, religion, color, ancestry, and/or culture to which social meanings are attributed and around which identity and group formation occurs (Nagel, 1995). According to Barth (cited in Nagel, 1995), ethnicity can be the result of self-identification or ascription.

However, ethnic groups can assume different political and economic positions under varied leadership ties with state authority. The instrumentalist variant of ethnicity appears with far-reaching insight about leadership's conduct that straddles ethnic communities and state institutions. Ethnic elites are said to manipulate ethnic identities with the objective of satisfying individual or group objectives (Chazan 1986; Horowitz 1985 cited in Kifordu, 2011:431-432). From a competition standpoint,

elites deploy the ethnic group's social, political, and cultural resources to enhance their competitiveness and access political power. A second instrumentalist strand assumes ethnic leaders are purposive agents driven by their 'desire for wealth, power and prestige' (Hutchinson and Smith 199 cited in *ibid*). The African elites, who are bent on hanging on to power at all cost and for the purpose of primitive accumulation, have perfected the art of political expediency even when these acts threaten the stability of their countries. But in all these cases, there is always a hidden hand of external interests, who would like to retain the status quo or where they support political change, and then their preference is always contradictory to the wish to the people.

Even in democratic institutions, ethnicity would create a bias in the process of elaborating social choice (Robinson, 2001), and would decrease the weight of general interest in the determinants of votes. The mechanism at stake is thus the following: ethnic membership determines individual's identity, preferences and choices; since the ethnic group is different (and generally narrower) from the political group (the State or the nation), the definition of individual identity by ethnic determinants weakens the sense of collective interest that conditions the existence of an efficient democratic State. As argued by Osaghae (2006:4):

A coupling of ethnicity with the state is more intriguing than a first sight consideration might suggest. To be sure, ethnicity has implications for, and impacts upon, the state, and vice versa, in a variety of mostly troubling and challenging, if not threatening ways, but the nature of this interface has to be explained because politicized ethnicity is more of a dependent variable than an independent variable or a given.

This trend may have been rooted in the nature of clientelism in most African states following Independence (affected by several regime characteristics), as observed by van de Walle (2009:6). Though many African states inherited parliamentary rule at independence, power was soon concentrated in a relatively powerful presidency, whose considerable formal powers as defined by the constitution were in fact often dwarfed by their even greater informal and *de facto* ones. Powers of appointment, control of the national budget, and discretion over policy implementation with little oversight was not only concentrated in the office of the presidency, it was often actually controlled by the president himself and a tiny cadre of top politicians, who were often above the law for all intents and purposes. Similarly, the executive branch dominated the other branches of government, with a subservient and pliant legislature and a weak, unprofessional and politicized judiciary. Second, Africa's post-colonial regimes were authoritarian. With the notable exceptions of Botswana and Mauritius, the countries in the region held very few elections, and civil and political rights were rarely observed, as is attested to by the very low democracy ratings for these countries in regime databases such as Freedom House or Polity (*ibid*:7).

Another related concept is the political class. By the 'political class', it is meant those who draw their livelihood not from the Market but from the State. The political class is the parasitic class that acquires its livelihood via the 'political means'- through 'confiscation, taxation, and other forms of coercion'. Their victims- the productive class- are those who make their living through peaceful and honest means of any sort,

such as a worker or an entrepreneur. The elites are not simply those who have the most; they could not have the most if not for their positions in the great institutions. For such institutions are the necessary bases of power, of wealth and of prestige and at the same time, the chief means of exercising power, of acquiring wealth, and cashing in the higher claims for prestige (Mills 1956/2000 cited in Kifordu, 2011:35). The Nigerian experience seems to offer various examples of institutional interventions by influential political actors who capitalize, say, on changing circumstances and extant institutional resources, to access and extend office power in exclusion of other aspirants.

Elite politics is, therefore, different when ethno-regional differences are very politically salient (Cameroon or Nigeria) than in countries which may be ethnically diverse but in which ethnicity is not polarized (Tanzania or Senegal), let alone when there is ethnic homogeneity (Lesotho or Botswana). The political process tends to be unstable with ethnic heterogeneity. Elites make claims on ethnic identity as a way of securing votes. As a result there continues to be an absence of programmatic debate around policy in elections and campaigns are conducted almost entirely on the basis of personal and ethno-regional support (van de Walle 2006 cited in Orner and Hewitt, 2006:14).

### **Identifying the Nature/Magnitude of Leadership Deficit and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria**

Ideologically, as argued by Marxists, the ruling class determines the form and content of the means of production as well as the distribution and consumption of national wealth. Marxists argue that it is the ruling class that controls state power. In Nigeria, however, the debate over this phenomenon has regrettably acquired an ethnic flavour because of the concentration of state power in the hands of a specific group. Territorial disputes, access to power and wealth, to employment and education, and to social services and resource control are some of the causes of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. In the absence of a national, ideologically oriented party representing concrete class interests of Nigerians across the ethnic divide, ethnic-based political movements have filled the void to challenge the present distribution of power and wealth, demanding a restructuring of the political system in such a way that will grant them equitable access to these properties (Natufe, 2001).

Ake (1996: 31) has given a clear distinction between the ruling class and the government. He avers that both are related but also distinct in a very concrete way. The ruling class is in power while the government is only in office. The government is the small group in charge of the major institutions of the state, particularly the legislative and administrative machinery. The ruling class is all the power centres- political cultural religious, economic- that constitute the existing political domination. For instance, in the case of Nigeria, the ruling class includes all the powerful traditional leaders, the major religious leaders, the higher ranks of the coercive institutions such as the military, the police and the judiciary, international capital and the wealthy Nigerians who command the economy. Unfortunately the increasing misery and alienation arising from their corrupt and incompetent rule is threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria rather than promising their revolutionary liquidation.

It is undeniable and almost incontrovertible that many Nigerians today attribute our parlous state to clueless and

visionless leaders at all levels, especially at the centre (Ekundayo, 2012:18). The overwhelming view is that over the past eighty years, the colonialists, politicians who replaced them, military rulers who ousted the latter, and the civilians who took over power from the military, have consistently manipulated the differences among ethnic formations for their own selfish interests. These interests are fuelled by greed (Nnoli, 2007:43). The scourge of ethnicity had been a common feature in the country's party politics and the drive towards achieving democracy. It is a fact that since the colonial era, Nigeria's national identity has been at odds with the more exclusive ethnic identities (Azeez, 2009:3). According to Nnoli (2007:37) the history of ethnic politics in the country has shown that it is quite divisive. This divisiveness has plagued all efforts at national development, especially the national population's sense of solidarity, and its morale and commitment to hard work. It has generated tension and insecurity that have exploded into conflict and violence, notably the civil war of 1967-1970.

One important factor that makes it easy for the elites to manipulate ethnicity to serve their parochial interest is the system of multi-party, single-member electoral process in Nigeria which encourages ethnic chauvinism. The case is so because most of the constituencies in Nigeria are conterminous with ethnic homeland. As such, it is easy for candidates to contest elections without any program but their ethnic credentials of being 'the son of the soil'. In this case, they utilize ethnic appeals and idioms to solicit votes, emphasizing the neglect of their respective ethnic groups of which they promise to rectify on assumption of office, thus promoting the 'us versus them' syndrome (IDEA, 2000). Though elite politics is the primary source of ethnic mobilization, there is, nevertheless, a large reservoir of ethnic consciousness in the wider society. A 2000 survey of public opinion found that ethnicity is the strongest type of identity among Nigerians: 48.2 per cent of the survey sample identified themselves in ethnic terms, compared to 28.4 per cent who chose class or occupational identities and 21 per cent who chose a religious identity. This ethnic consciousness notwithstanding, 97.2 per cent of the sample also expressed pride in being Nigerian (Lewis and Bratton 2000:iii cited in Mustapha, 2006:7). The present-day Nigerian public sphere, as noted by Nkwachukwu (2008:6), is dominated by elites from five major *ethno-regional* groups – the North, Yoruba, Igbo, Niger Delta, and Middle Belt. The ethno-regional elite groups in Nigeria fit into a hierarchy of status and power based on their political influence.

The colonial tripartite division of Nigeria prevented a Nigerian nationalistic movement, manipulating geographical boundaries to reinforce separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power; this structure along with other administrative decisions emphasized ethnic nationalism and regional politics, resulting from significant uneven development within each region. The colonial division of Nigeria that reinforced ethnic groups, the rise of ethno-political consciousness, and the development of ethnic/regional political parties demonstrated that the British administration intentionally prevented the rise and success of Nigerian nationalism, instead promoting regionalism as a means to gain political power. As noted by Ake (cited in Olayiwola, 2012:4), since 1954 when the foundation of classical federation for Nigeria was laid, the system is still far from being problem-

free. The story is one of both political and governmental instability. Afigbo (1999, 13) posits that:

The origins of Nigeria's federalism lie not in the pluralities and geographical regions or of the ethnic nationalities, but in the plurality of colonial administrative traditions imposed by the British. Different administrative traditions were especially evident in the northern and southern regions of Nigeria. These traditions produced regional rivalry and conflict that were entrenched in the Nigerian polity by the process of consolidation and nation building. After independence, these regional rivalries became the basis for triggering the conflicts between economic and ethnic areas present in Nigeria's federal system and for creating more states in attempts to accommodate various groups' interest.

Ake (1996:25) identifies the ethnic problem as one aspect of the political question in Nigeria. According to him, this reflects the antagonistic competition between the ethnic groups associated with the framing of politics in the mould of ethnic coalitions who see their claims as largely exclusive. The core of the problem is that ethnic consciousness has become politicized and constituted into political coalitions making exclusive political claims so that the tone of politics is extreme. It is natural, he notes further, that there should be ethnic consciousness in Nigeria and this is not necessarily bad. Nigerian industrialization is still very rudimentary; the overwhelming majority of Nigerians live in rural areas, and from the soil, so to speak. The natural basis of identification of this mode of existence is ethnicity. Also the colonial legacy in Nigeria had made ethnicity highly useful. The colonial government took hardly any interest in social welfare; eventually ethnic associations stepped in to remedy this situation. Ethnic consciousness is made all the more pervasive by the way society has structured all interactions, as Forest (2012:40) pungently notes:

Indeed, ethnic identity impacts daily life throughout the country. All official papers and documents identify a person's place of birth. Any forms that a person needs to fill out (e.g., applying for a driver's permit or university admission, opening a bank account, leasing a home, et cetera) requires them to indicate their place of birth, not where they currently live, regardless of how long they have lived there. From the person's birthplace information, assumptions are made about that person's ethnicity, which then directly impacts their quality of life. Preferential treatment in all aspects of daily life including access to jobs, education, housing, and public services is given to individuals whose ethnicity is indigenous to the local area.

Despite the fact that all citizens possess equal civic rights, the federal quota system, which to a large extent determines access to offices and institutions, by and large has a strong discriminatory effect. Furthermore, the very concept of indigeneness is discriminatory against "non-indigenes" of a federal state; for example, immigrants from other federal states (BTI, 2012:5). Nnoli (1994) is of the view that ethnic identity is an outcome of the desire of individuals to organise themselves in such a way that will underscore their ability to compete in situations where there is social system that creates the urgency in them to compete with one another for state resources and political position. This is indicative of the reality that if not for the issues of state resources and political largesse in Nigeria, the

ethnicity problem would not have assumed the dimension it has now. It was for this same reason that the 1999 constitution of the country encourages the principle of federal character in the appointment of officials into public institutions to forestall any feeling of marginalisation of any ethnic group.

There are peculiar problems and challenges; a fundamental one being leadership deficit. This fact has been established by the chairman of the Northern States Governors' Forum, Babangida Aliyu (2012:5-6) as he opines that leadership deficit has over the years exposed Nigeria to high-level of corruption, bad governance, political instability and a cyclical legitimacy crisis. Consequently, national development has been slow and the political environment uncertain. This problem started at independence and it was characterized by powerful regional governments and a weak centre with each region striving to ensure qualitative, competitive and pragmatic leadership and service delivery. However, this trend was reversed in favour of the Federal Government following the first coup of 1966, the civil war (1967- 1970), coups, counter-coups and failed transition programmes. All these resulted in poor planning, which exacerbated corruption, poverty and declining national interest.

By the time of the fall of the first republic, the north had positioned itself for the monopoly of federal power by its domination of the military. It achieved dominant presence in the military through the quota recruitment principle which the NPC-led federal government caused to be adopted in the early 1960s. The north was thus easily able to use the military to keep her grip on political power for as long as it was fashionable to do so; and so much so that the northerners considered all electoral victories were null and void unless they reflected the north's political supremacy. That was the basis for the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election results (Isumonah, 2008). Babangida's abrogation of the 1993 elections and the arrest of the generally recognised winner, Chief M. K. O. Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim, outraged the population of the southwestern states, deepening disaffection between the Yoruba and the central government. His successor, General Abacha, aggravated these tensions by jailing Abiola, harassing prominent Yoruba, and crudely suppressing dissent- for example, through the assassination of Abiola's wife and the peremptory executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni activists from the Niger Delta. Abacha also supervised an opaque, convoluted constitutional reform in the mid-1990s, which exacerbated communal tensions. Beneath the rough stability imposed by military repression, growing discord was manifest in episodes of religious strife, recurrent violence in the south western states and the Niger Delta, intercommunity conflicts in the Middle Belt, and confrontations between the authorities and Islamists in several northern cities (Lewis, 2006:93).

Nigeria's leadership deficit has remained arguably the greatest clog in the wheel of national progress. With all the promise and potential to be the exemplar for Africa and, indeed, the entire black race, Nigeria is wracked by endemic poverty in the midst of phenomenal wealth. It showcases suffocating squalor, incredible ignorance and superstition as well as ravaging diseases aggravated by corruption, incompetence and leadership failure so much so that it is truly remarkable that Nigeria still remains on the geographical map of the world. A country where the best has continued to elude us while at the same time, the

very worst had somehow been avoided, Nigeria remained a potentially great country unable to actualize its potentialities. The failure to do so lies squarely with self-seeking, self-centred, self-opinionated and self-perpetuating leadership that had forced itself on the country's political landscape. Bereft of the great insight and foresight of Africa's first generation of post-colonial leaders, those that found themselves on the saddle of the largest concentration of people in the black world have not failed to amaze at their level of venality and banality so much so that the country had become the butt of cruel jokes within the diplomatic cocktail circuit (Oyebode, 2012). The quality of leaders that parade the political landscape particularly in this dispensation has been a major concern to public affairs commentators. For instance, Natufe (2006) submits that:

The quality of leadership determines the incorruptibility, accountability and transparency of the government. Compared to the calibre of leaders that had presided over state affairs in Nigeria's previous republics, the collection of leaders in the Fourth Republic (1999 - present) is the most corrupt, the least accountable, and the least qualified. In early 2003 President Obasanjo questioned where were the roads that his government had spent over 300 billion naira constructing. His confidant, Anthony Anenih was the minister responsible for that portfolio. Neither Obasanjo nor Anenih answered the question, but the public knew in whose pockets the money was diverted to.

In his classic essay on Nigeria, Achebe once wrote that: "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership. Leaders are, in the language of psychologists, role models. People look up to them and copy their actions, behaviour and even mannerisms. Therefore, if a leader lacks discipline, the effect is apt to spread automatically down to his followers" (Achebe, 1983). According to Nnoli (2007:32), instead of building across ethnic and religious differences, Nigerian politicians manipulate them for their selfish interests in political power and wealth. The truth, he submits, is that Nigeria is unfortunate to have bred politicians whose field of vision does not extend beyond their personal interest for power and wealth.

The leadership challenge viz-a-viz the type of personalities involved has also been captured by Akinlotan (2012:72) in respect of the Fourth Republic: Nigeria is enfeebled and humiliated by lack of dreamers and visionaries. Much more despairingly, for the past 55 years, primordial and even primitive considerations have been at the bottom of leadership selection in Nigeria. The PDP under Obasanjo was supposed to lay a solid foundation for Fourth Republic democracy, but due to the limitations of his vision, his temperamental unsuitability, and the constriction of his un-presidential heart, he was incapable of laying a foundation for a modern society he could not conceive. He worsened the problem by foisting the wrong kind of leadership on an equally prejudiced, fearful and passive electorate.

Although the Nigerian political elite is a product of Nigeria's tumultuous political history, more recently it has

become an ally of a highly politicized fraction of retired brass-hats that has been incorporated into the dominant ruling elite fraction. Thus, the political elite is both made up of ex-military officers that have now been civilianized, and civilians that have imbibed some of the aspects of militarized politics, particularly the use of force in politics. The result has been a partial militarization of the elite's political practices, opportunism, the resort to coercion or violence to pursue political projects, intolerance of opposition, and the wilful manipulation of political structures and processes to promote selfish and narrow ends. These tendencies can be gleaned from the ways in the former brass hats have become political and economic elites (Obi, 2009:9).

Since 1966, efforts to reform inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria have had only limited success. For one, ensuring ethnic representation within the bureaucracy has not meant that the individual bureaucrat would be guided by ethnic or national considerations in the discharge of his or her duties. Bureaucratic and political power is frequently used for personal, and not collective, advancement. While reforms have fundamentally transformed the Nigerian state, they have yet to solve the problem of ethnic mobilization and conflict. As a consequence, there is still a plethora of grievances from various ethnic groups, particularly ethnic minority groups and the Igbo, but even the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani are not left out. Much of the politics of Nigeria after 1999 is informed by these inflamed passions (Mustapha 2003, Mustapha 2006:43).

This forms the basis of Osaghae's (2006:11) argument when he avers that "the real danger in placing elite accommodation above all other considerations is that it diverts attention away from the need to reduce or eliminate if possible, the underlying structural factors that foster and provoke genuine ethnic grievances and mobilizations. This is because the half-hearted attempts at winning and building support bases within groups, such as the expedient provision of social amenities and infrastructure, and appointment of elites from so-called marginalized, excluded, minority, and oppressed ethnic groups, all in the name of managing ethnicity, have not translated into less domination, marginalization or exclusion of the group as a whole".

### Concluding Remarks and Possible Solutions

Nigeria's tremendous potentials for development into a great country remain largely unexploited. The critical imperative is that Nigeria's leadership must undergo a revolutionary change of attitude and embrace good governance in all its aspects (Asiodu, 2012:21). While it is fairly easy for a leader to generate ambition, it is not quite as easy to generate vision; for vision, much more than ambition, comes from much studying, exposure to other civilizations, private character development, and an indefinable intuition and canniness that propel one into doing the right thing and making the right judgments (Akinlotan, 2012:72). It goes without saying that considerations of development and governance reform are secondary in the calculations of a patrimonial ruler. The ruler regards the state as his personal property- to be disposed off in any manner he deems fit (Balogun, 1999:59).

In his analysis of state reconstitution, Osaghae (2006:16-17) argues in favour of what he calls *positive ethnicity* as against *elite*

*ethnicity*. According to him, positive ethnicity is the form of ethnicity that does not rely on government patronage, and is participatory and development oriented. State reconstitution has to recognize and grant institutional expression to demands for local self-government and non-governmental developmental initiatives embodied in this form of ethnicity. This strand of ethnicity, which is territorial and decentralist is different from elite-directed ethnicity, which has extractive, predatory and self-serving orientations, and encourages the tendencies towards over-centralization and overbearing state power. Elite ethnicity is too narrow, expedient and unproductive to constitute the basis for reconstituting the state. Indeed, the over-emphasis on satisfying elite interests disguised as ethnic interests has been one of the main factors for the failure of ethnic management formulas in Africa.

It has been argued elsewhere that structural reforms should be made alongside the transformation of the political actors in the society. Having identified the fact that oligarchy-driven insecurity and instability have generated a strong and widespread sense of injustice among the Nigerian public, the US Agency for International Development (2006:vii) recommends four avenues through which the elite can be transformed:

1. Strengthen formal political institutions that foster a healthy balance of power among the elite: Clearly, efforts that bolster the relative power of the legislative and judicial branches against the executive branches are essential in this regard. Strengthening the powers of the states and local governments *vis-à-vis* the federal government is also essential, as is decentralization of presidential controls over public revenues. The enabling environment, however, is not yet as advanced as it could be for progress in this area, and the Government of Nigeria needs to first take some steps towards decentralization.

2. Strengthen the informal balance of power among the political elite through the development of viable political opposition and a vibrant civil society. At the same time, elite access to violent means must also be curtailed.

3. Strengthen formal institutional arrangements that encourage and force political elites to view the public interest as a personal political priority, particularly through credible elections, transparency, and accountability mechanisms. In addition, provide increased formal avenues for public participation in the policy process, through community associations and other local governance approaches.

4. Impact the informal relationships between elites and the public by strengthening public influence through an aggressive media, vibrant civil society, and improved economic status. Undermining elite access to violent means is also essential in this regard.

With regard to the electoral system, the proportional representation model has been advanced to be more suitable for countries with deep ethnic, regional, religious or other emotional and polarizing divisions. The choice of electoral system is a crucial decision in creating a democracy (Lijphart 1991 and Hydén 1993, cited in Hansson, 2001). Proportional representation is an electoral system which allocates parliamentary seats to parties according to their share of the national votes. Apart from being more inclusive than the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system, it ensures representation for the minorities whose votes carry no electoral weight under the

majoritarian principle of the FPTP regime (Animashaun, 2010:18). According to Hansson (2001:3) a country aiming to achieve the widest democracy possible would tend to favour proportional representation. For Diamond (2000) where cleavage groups are sharply defined and group identities (and inter-group insecurities and suspicions) deeply felt- as they are in most of Africa- the overriding imperative is to avoid broad and indefinite exclusion from power of any significant group. If democracy is to retain the loyalty of all major ethnic parties and groups to the constitutional system, each group must feel it has a stake in the system. To achieve this, institutional designers must do several things. First, they need to provide incentives for different groups to form coalitions or pool votes in national politics, ideally in ways that will give rise to multi-ethnic parties. Second, they need to distribute power vertically, so that territorially-based groups can have some control over their own affairs and pressure on the political centre is relieved and diffused. And third, they need to ensure that all ethnic and nationality groups have political equality. In particular, no one should be denied equal citizenship in the state because of nationality or ethnicity. He argues further:

With proportional representation, as in South Africa, votes are not wasted, so parties have an incentive to construct ethnically (or racially, or regionally) inclusive lists of candidates, and thus to reach out, integratively, to develop a political base among groups that are predominantly represented by rival parties...A parliamentary system is more fluid and less zero-sum. It more naturally encourages the formation of coalitions where (as is the case in most African states) no party wins an absolute majority, and it is less susceptible to the aggrandizement and abuse of executive power (Diamond, 2000).

The choice of federalism for Nigeria since 1954 when the country was still under colonial rule, subjugation and imperialism, has been described as automatic. But on each occasion it was clear that the choice was based on a wrong premise. Federalism was adopted as a form of territorial democracy. Nigeria represents a polity with a federal constitution to some extent but non-federal practice. This is perhaps the greatest bane of Nigerian federalism. The British left a legacy of federalism in Nigeria not as an act of faith but as an act of convenience to a nation which Napoleon correctly dubbed a nation of shop-keepers (Ayoade, 2010 cited in Olayiwola, 2012:5).

Redefining the basis for the country's continued existence by all major stakeholders has been a long recurring debate. According to Okoye (2007) it should be obvious that what Nigeria really needs now is not a "political reform", or a mere tinkering with the quasi-federal constitutions of 1979, 1995, and 1999 imposed on Nigerians mostly by self serving ruling military officers drawn predominantly from a section of the country. To that extent, the proponents of a sovereign national conference do have a strong and valid point. What the Nigerian political class must now do is to renegotiate, from scratch, the very basis of the future coexistence of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, taking into account all the experiences of governance since independence. Participation in a conference for this purpose must necessarily be by representatives of ethnic and other interests groups elected in a transparent manner. Fayemi (2012:16) avers that the over-concentration of powers in the Federal Centre must give way to

devolution and decentralisation of power and authority. A critical fundamental political restructuring of the Nigerian Federation is an unavoidable step that must be taken to generate the basis for the creation and sustenance of a participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive national governance and one that is based on the rule of law. Fayemi notes further:

Those who are clamouring for this kind of change are fundamentally concerned with how to create a country that is strong, stable and liveable, one that is diverse but united, and one which, through good governance, ensures life more abundant for all. Such a good life that is provided by good governance is neither bound to ethnicity nor to religious affiliation (ibid).

The decentralization of government functions is often implemented in order to improve governance by bringing government closer to the people. Because people tend to be more involved in local politics, follow local news, and vote in local elections, decentralization can harness these tendencies and create participatory and responsive local government (CIPE, 2004:17). As argued by Cintora (2009:17), local governance and decentralization can diffuse inter-group tensions, protect the rights of vulnerable groups by increasing their participation in decision-making and can reduce corruption and government ineffectiveness by increasing transparency and the quality of local needs assessments.

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