

**POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING AS A TOOL FOR
ENHANCING DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGING
INSECURITY ARISING FROM ETHNO-RELIGIOUS
DIVERSITY IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Nigeria is a plural society comprising people from diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious identities. These diversities have always influenced political decisions. There is a rising perception of lopsidedness in making political decisions in Nigeria. Therefore, political restructuring has been one of Nigeria's most pressing national issues over the last decade. Nigeria currently operates a federal system in which the federal government wields enormous power while the federating units serve as mere subordinates. There are calls from certain quarters for the country's political restructuring. To fully determine the foregoing, the study used historical research methodology, in which existing data on political restructuring were thoroughly reviewed. This allowed the researcher to examine the restructuring debate in the light of Nigeria's cultural and ethnic identities which has highlighted ethnic and religious diversity. The inability to positively tap from these diversities is causing insecurity within the country and is hampering the development of Nigeria. In the context of this study, political restructuring refers to the decentralization of political power in the country in order to ensure political balance among various ethnic and religious groups. According to the findings, the fundamental issues that prompted the call for restructuring include ethnic diversity, religious pluralism, and

marginalization in the country's political equation. These have fueled ethno-religious conflicts and insecurity that have ravaged the development of the country. As a result, the paper suggests a political structure in which the federating units are given the authority to manage their affairs in accordance with their ethnic and religious affiliations.

Keywords: Religion, Ethnic Diversity, Political Restructuring and National Development.

Introduction

One of the burning national issues in the last decade in Nigeria is the issue of political restructuring. Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversities have always influenced political decisions since her amalgamation in 1914. Several administrations have fashioned out different political structures for the country. Currently, Nigeria operates a federal system which the federal government wields enormous powers while the federating units are mere subordinates. In recent times, there has been clamour from different quarters for the political restructuring of the country. To exhaustively ascertain the above, the study employed historical research methodology, where existing data on political restructuring were thoroughly reviewed. This enabled the researcher to examine the restructuring debate in the light of the country's ethnic and religious diversities which has given rise to ethno-religious conflicts prior and post amalgamation. Political restructuring in the context of this study is the decentralization of political power in the country to ensure political balance among various ethnic and religious groups.

Political reorganization is required for Nigeria's development to be sustainable. Recent years have seen the theme of political reconstruction continue to rule the national conversation, making it difficult to build a shared understanding that will be acceptable to everybody. This is a result of the country's diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion. Since the country's union in 1914, Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity has always had an impact on political decisions. Different political systems have been created for the nation by a number of administrations, both colonial and post-independence (Abubakar, 2013). Different viewpoints on political restructuring exist, but ultimately, a just and egalitarian

society must be maintained for the nation's various ethnic and religious communities. Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity has given birth to ethno-religious conflicts in recent times, resulting in the loss of lives and destruction of property and undermining the country's rapid progress. However, the basic challenges that prompted the desire for political restructuring include ethnic variety, religious pluralism, and marginalization in the country's political equation. These have sparked ethno-religious wars that have caused much damage to the country. The study is based on fundamental issues such as religion and ethnic diversity that necessitate political reorganization and affect the rate of growth in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Religion

Religion as a notion lacks a widely recognized definition. It is defined in a variety of ways, and researchers' definitions differ. As a result, Agha (2012) observes that "every scholar, including sages and students, who attempts to define religion faces some difficulties." Various attempts have been made to define religion. Religion, according to Pearsall (2011), is the belief in and worship of a superhuman ruling power, particularly a personal God or gods. Similarly, Agha (2012) argues that "religion is the conscious or unconscious belief in spiritual beings and elements (natural forces) with powers." Religion, according to Adeniyi (2013), is a set of facts, regulations, and ceremonies that subordinate man to the transcendent deity. In the context of this study, religion refers to a specific system of faith and worship, most notably Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous worship systems. Religion is an essential component of all human societies. It contributes to the shaping of society's individual and communal existence. Religious preferences cannot be ignored in the governing of any society. Religion influences all systems in society, including political institutions.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity is a hugely complicated topic that presents several interpretations. According to Osaghae (2012), ethnicity is a social formation that is based on activities that are specific to a certain culture as well as a particular set of symbols and cosmology. Okwudiba (2010) views ethnicity as a phenomenon linked to interactions between

people of various ethnic backgrounds. According to him, an ethnic group is a social structure that is distinguished by the communal nature of its borders. Similar to this, Mbogu (2014) claims that ethnicity is a construct that nations use to further their goals and aspirations. He states further that ethnicity is viewed as a popular phenomenon and has never been a domain of the elite. The fact is that the elites frequently use ethnic identity as a tool to accomplish their goals. They use ethnicity as a ruse to gain political and economic clout, which is obviously harmful to the credulous and uninformed followers. Ethnicity is characterized by a few integrative elements. They consist of myths with a common origin, geography, language, culture, and religion. Umezina (2012) goes on to say that ethnic identity is "a feeling of belonging and continuity in being, resulting from an act of self-ascription and/or ascription by others to a group of people who claim both common ancestry and a common cultural tradition." This is in light of the reasons mentioned above.

Religion and Ethnic Diversity in Nigeria

With an estimated population of about 200 million, Nigeria is a diversified nation that is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and unmistakably heterogeneous (Ejikeme, 2016). The cultural and religious behaviors of the populace clearly reflect these differences. For instance, there are millions of followers of the two main religions spread out across the more than 400 identified ethnic groups in the nation (Albert, 2012). Additionally, some faiths have ethnic roots that specify how followers should act in a particular society. Aminu (2016) argues in favor of the aforementioned claim by saying that "religious ethics are merely principles that guide religions and set the standard for what is and isn't acceptable behavior." The majority of Nigerians practice Islam and Christianity, although it is well known that there are disparities in how they interpret these two religions on an intragroup and an intergroup basis. According to all indications, Nigeria as a country since 1960 has not been able to achieve her established aims of uniting the numerous ethnic groups in all spheres of society, including socially, economically, and politically. The lack of unity brought on by ethnic and religious conflict could be considered one of the contributing elements to this reality. The colonial era is when ethnicity first emerged, and it has harmed Nigerians.

Political leaders have frequently elevated their religious conviction to the highest echelons of the nation's administration. For instance, the question of Nigeria joining the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), the elevation of the Sharia into the legal and political structure, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was established among others (Enwerem, 2015). The common misunderstanding that religion cannot bring unity should be erased for religion and ethnicity to achieve national cohesion. The affirmation in Okwueze (2013) is that "the agencies of ethnicity and religion must work in close and harmonious cooperation" in order to realize man's integrative effort and ensure national unity. This is only possible when there is peaceful coexistence amongst different ethnic and religious groups.

Religion and Ethnic Diversity: Implication on National Development

In Nigeria, ethnic and religious variety has posed challenges for national cohesion and growth, and to a significant extent, it has weakened those boundaries. The majority of the disputes in Nigeria, however, have blatantly obvious ethnic and religious undertones. When he claims that religion and ethnicity as they manifest in Nigeria have evolved into crucial components in ethno-religious conflicts, Mbogu (2014) amply supports the aforementioned assertion. People have encountered discrimination based on their religion or ethnicity on a variety of levels; they complain about past and present marginalization and call for religious and ethnic rights in their states. Worst of all, states actively incorporate race and religion into political debate and policy. When the fundamental causes of these dangers are exposed, the difficulties outlined above and their associated repercussions can be comprehended.

In Nigeria, ethnicity among different ethnic groups has spread to the point that it is used to attract federal resources solely to serve the interests of a particular region at the expense of others and the greater good (Mbogu, 2014). The sense of patriotism in Nigeria has been seriously questioned by ethno-religious diversity, thus it should be seen as a component of constructing the country. Nigeria is still in this condition many years after gaining political independence. The nation has never truly known peace. It has a murky past filled with dangers of one kind or another.

Most Nigerians are concerned about the situation because it appears that such confrontations are occurring in Nigeria more frequently lately. Nigerians continue to face threats from some intolerable social realities that continue to undermine the country's integrity and togetherness. Particularly in Northern Nigeria, ethno-religious violence and anxieties have fundamentally changed how people interpret and think about trust as the cornerstone of peaceful coexistence. For instance, in the more than fifty recorded ethno-religious confrontations in that region of Nigeria between 1976 and 2009, "over 100,000 people had lost their lives and property worth billions of Naira were destroyed" (News watch, November 2, 2009; Eliagwu, 2014). Political, social, economic, and psychological losses and sorrows were left behind by these battles, which also hurt and poisoned long-standing ties among Nigerians. Nigerians of all religious backgrounds are beginning to feel extremely vulnerable and helpless in some areas of the nation. The spirit of integration and unification, which is about the peaceful cohabitation, unity, and harmony of Nigeria's varied people, had been harmed by these disputes.

Political party creation in Nigeria is one of the unfavourable effects of ethnic waves. None of the several political parties established in Nigeria had a distinct political vision, objective, or platform. This is due to the role that ethnic chauvinism played in their creation. In this regard, Ngele (2008) argues that "distinct affiliations of the parties with ethnic and religious-based organisations and a lack of reasonable support in areas outside the ethnic origin of their founders" were characteristics of the emergence of political parties in Nigeria. As a result, the government does not face any pressure to start programmes that will help the realisation of the national interest. With this in mind, it is evident that ethnic and religious diversity has a tendency to cause division, which is not only terrible but also has a significant impact on the Nigerian nation. It gives Nigeria a terrible reputation abroad and scares away international investors who would help our state become more industrialised.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Need for Political Restructuring in Nigeria

According to Salawu (2010), ethno-religious conflict refers to a situation in which there is no cordial relationship, mistrust and fear, and a propensity for violent confrontation between members of different ethnic or religious groups in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Due to the propensity of members of the many ethnic and religious groups for violent clashes, there is typically a high level of mutual suspicion and fear in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Nigeria. Idike and Eme (2015) state that, in terms of ties between the many ethnic and religious groups, Nigeria is clearly a highly tense country. The fabric of nationhood, the components of citizenship identity, and the ties that bind them together have all been strained to the brink by a number of interconnected crises (p. 76).

Conflicts over ethnic and religious divisions have occurred in several places of Nigeria since the country gained independence in 1960. According to Fawole and Bello (2011), notable ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria include the Bulumkutu Christian-Muslim riots (1982), Maitatsine Christian-Muslim riots (1982), Jimeta Yola Crisis religious disturbance (1984), Zango Kataf crisis in Kaduna State (1992), and Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim Christian skirmishes (1981).

The Sharia crisis stood out among the ethno-religious conflicts that occurred in the nation. The Islamic Sharia legal system was implemented in Zamfara State on February 11, 2000. It was then introduced in a total of eleven additional Northern Nigerian States, including the States of Katsina, Kano, Sokoto, Bauchi, Niger, Gombe, Jigawa, Borno, Kebbi, Yobe, and Kaduna (Ede, 2017). In each instance, the implementation of Sharia law was accompanied by disagreements that sparked a string of crises that resulted in a large number of fatalities and population displacement.

In Kaduna, which may be equally populated by Christians and Muslims, the tension led to extremely violent conflicts in February and May 2000 that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Muslims and Christians, including a Catholic priest and a lawmaker (Ehusani, 2012). Over 63,000

people were forced to flee Kaduna and its surroundings as a result of the riots, which killed at least 3,000 people (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2007). In the midst of the fighting, these displaced people took shelter in the police and army barracks, which were seen as the safest locations. Although the Muslim majority in the state has long used the Sharia legal system, the Sharia conflicts of 2000 were brought on by the Christian residents' fear that doing so would convert Kaduna State into a Muslim state (Alao & Mavalla, 2016). Similar Sharia-related riots broke out in some areas of Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, Niger, and Nasarawa States between February 2000 and March 2002.

Concerns about the nation's security have been raised by the formation and operations of the deadly Islamic group known as Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria (Banjo, 2016). Mohammed Yusuf established the gang in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. Yusuf believed in a strong, fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and that Muslims in Nigeria were forced to adopt a Western, non-Islamic way of life by British colonialists who founded the country. He built a religious complex including a mosque and an Islamic school that drew underprivileged Muslim families from all over Nigeria and its neighbours. The centre served as a hub for terrorist recruitment and had the political objective of establishing an Islamic state (Ede, 2017).

Since Yusuf did not publicly teach violence in the beginning, the group was not violent (Kukah, 2015). However, after being attacked by Nigerian security forces in 2009 and having Mohammed Yusuf killed as a result, the group turned violent and began wreaking havoc by bombing public and religious buildings. After remaining underground for more than a year, Boko Haram reemerged in 2010 with assassinations and a significant jail raid. Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's deputy who the authorities believed was slain in the 2009 rebellion, started to appear in videos as the new commander of the group. Attacks increased in sophistication and lethality over time, especially when explosives were used.

The operations of the Fulani Militia are another facet of the ethno-religious conflict that has killed so many people in Nigeria recently. The

Middle Belt of Nigeria (Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Taraba States) has been plagued by intercommunal violence for many years and is now extending to other states as local farming communities and nomadic herdsman compete with one another (Oladeji, 2015). Local farmers and Fulani herders have continued to engage in violent clashes, which have resulted in the destruction of homes, farm lands, and communities. In Benue State, more than 100 communities were pillaged by alleged Fulani herders in 2012 alone, according to Human Rights Watch (2015), which also reported that more than 1000 people were slain between December 2014 and July 2015.

In January 2013, ten people were killed and about five thousand people were displaced when Fulani herders raided various villages in Nasarawa State. About 33 persons were slain in a new attack on a few villages in Nasarawa State in November 2014 (Nebie, 2014). In 2016, there were more armed Fulani herdsman attacks. According to Duru (2016), 7,000 people were expelled from six communities in Benue State's Agatu Local Government Area in February 2016 as a result of a violent attack by Fulani herdsman. Ameh (2016) noted that no military or security presence was felt despite the herdsman's frequent gunfire. He said that around 200 people were killed and that many homes were destroyed.

The armed herders attacked Agatu once again in April 2016. At least 300 people were killed in the violence, according to statistics from the Emergency Management Agency for Benue State. The statistics further indicates that approximately 10,000 people were relocated from the communities in the Local Government Area and property worth millions of Naira was damaged (Abujah, 2016). On April 11, 2016, Fulani herders in Taraba State raided the communities of Angai and Ndole in the Gashak Local Council Area. Numerous people escaped to the adjoining Cameroun Republic and nearby Local Council Areas, while 44 people were slain (Tsoka, 2016). In addition, Uzodinma (2016b) notes Fulani herdsman assault in Enugu State in April 2016. On April 25, 2016, herdsman assaulted Ukpabi Nimbo in the Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area, murdering nearly 40 people. Survivors ran away to nearby communities. Another attack by Fulani herdsman took place at Umuchigbo Community in Enugu East Local Government Area of

Enugu State two days after the incident in Ukpabi Nimbo (Uzodinma, 2016).

It is very evident that the herdsmen's violent adventures are growing more and more worrisome. They have essentially left their mark everywhere throughout the nation. The villages have suffered greatly as a result of their most recent excursions.

The different ethno-religious conflicts illustrate the glaring incompetence and ineffectiveness of the Nigerian security agencies in protecting the lives and property of the population (Yakassai, 2016). They were a significant and powerful driver for socio-political instability. The country's highly centralised security system, in which the states and local governments have little or no authority over the security apparatus, might be blamed for this. This necessitates the political reconstruction of the nation in order to establish state police capable of enforcing unique laws within the federating units.

Political Restructuring: A Prerequisite to National Development

According to Bello (2017), restructuring is the act of altering the inter-relationships between the system's component elements and changing the number of parts that make up a system in order to improve the performance of the entire system. In the context of a country, restructuring necessitates rethinking the connection between the populace and the government, which includes reexamining the structures and systems of governance as enshrined in the constitution (Dimeji, 2017). Political restructuring is one of the aspects of restructuring. According to Amadiet al. (2017), political restructuring is the formula on which economic resources and political power are shared or dispersed among the Nigerian elite is subject to all modifications, revisions, and cosmetic manipulations.

Political restructuring in Nigeria also entails decreasing the central government's involvement in areas like fiscal policies, military defence, foreign policy, immigration, and national elections. In the context of this study, political restructuring refers to the decentralisation of political power in the nation to maintain political equality among the many ethnic

and religious groups. It aims to establish an institutional framework for a more equal and equitable distribution of the political sphere among the nation's various ethnic and religious groupings.

The renewed desire for Nigeria's political reform is the result of a number of factors. Marginalisation, disregard for the federal character concept, ethnic diversity, and religious pluralism in Nigeria are a few of the problems.

1. Marginalization and disregard for the federal character: In recent years, several groups and regions of the nation have complained about marginalisation in the political system of the nation (Elaigwu, 2014). People lament their marginalisation when it comes to appointments to important positions in the nation. The allotment of projects for development and the distribution of tax money to the government are both marginalised. In the country, there has been prejudice, favouritism, nepotism, and tribalism. People in positions of power frequently favour their own racial and religious communities at the expense of others. The failure to uphold the federal character principle, which is written in the nation's constitution, leads to marginalisation.

Equity in the sharing of the nation's resources and positions is required by the federal character principle. The Buhari-led administration has a more evident lack of respect to the federal character idea. According to Abah and Nwokwu (2017), the long-standing assault on federalist principles, coupled with the apparent abuse of the federal character principle enshrined in the Nigerian constitution by the Buhari-led administration in the areas of key position appointments and alleged marginalisation and neglect of some sections of the country, may have caused Nigerians to become more aware of the urgent need to restructure the Nigerian Federation.

There can be no denying that such obvious flaws in the country's policy have led to demonstrations, agitations, and patriotic appeals for the political system in Nigeria to be restructured.

2. Ethnic Diversity: Nigeria is a multicultural nation made up of

different ethnicities. According to Echiegu (2014), Nigeria has more than 250 different ethnic nations, with the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba being its three major ethnic groups. The diversity of the nation's ethnic nations encouraged colonial powers to implement federalism in Nigeria. Because it grants the constituent units a degree of autonomy to handle their own local problems in areas within their jurisdictions, since federalism is seen as a form of government that promotes unity in diversity (Abah&Nwokwu, 2017). Every plural society must operate a system that can foster a sense of belonging for all nationalities, thus, fostering unity in diversity, due to the tearing force that ethnic diversity has on any given society. According to Amadi et al. (2017), "the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity in any political society make political restructuring imperative so as to maintain unity in diversity in the system".

3. Religious Diversity: Nigeria is diverse in terms of both religious affiliations and ethnic nations. The three main religions practised in Nigeria are African Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity (Farayibi, 2017). Different ethnic groups are linked with various religions in Nigeria due to the intimate ties between the ethnic and religious aspects of the country. The Igbo in Southern Nigeria are predominately Christians, the Yoruba are a mixture of Christians and Muslims, and the Hausa/Fulani are affiliated with Islam. Before the arrival of the foreign religions of Islam and Christianity, the people's native religion was, nonetheless, the African Traditional Religion.

Given that the majority of the conflicts in the country have their roots in this religious plurality, there is a need to give religion a significant role in rebuilding Nigeria.

Implications of Ethnic and Religious Diversity on National Development

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, achieving democracy has been hampered by the country's ethno-religious diversity. Nearly all facets of Nigerian political, economic, and social organisations exhibit ethnic emotion (Paul et al., 2017). In fact, ethno-religious diversity is to blame for the current low productivity and ineffectiveness the nation is

experiencing. The heterogeneous nature of Nigerian society is a result of tribal distinctions. This shows that although living in the same nation, the ethnic groups do not share the same wants, goals, and aspirations. It is understandable why Obafemi Awolowo believes that "Nigeria is merely a geographic expression". Yakubu Gowon stated, "There is no basis for unity." According to events since the country's independence, these statements are true, despite the lie included in the phrase "one Nigeria." Most frequently, ethnic attitudes that are required by the diversity of racial and religious groups take precedence over talent and abilities. For instance, "God fatherism" enters the picture in the appointment scenario, and one is required to favour his people whether or not they are competent.

Diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion has done a lot to damage Nigerian party politics' reputation and prestige. Since the Nigerian constitution was adopted in 1979, the "federal character" principle has worked to guarantee that appointments to public sector organisations fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the nation (Adamolekun, 2012). Whatever the motivations, these behaviours and utterances could raise doubt and lead to conflicts between the two major religions. Political restructuring is a technique for maintaining fairness in public service over professionalism and high achievement, according to this definition, which becomes a fact.

The different ethno-religious conflicts were a major contributor to sociopolitical unrest and the breakdown of the country (Abubakar, 2013). They discussed how the state's security was utterly inadequate and useless, making it impossible to ensure the safety of people and their property. Investment is discouraged by the unstable environment brought on by violent conflict. The economy stagnates, and the illusion of a democratic society divided equally is destroyed. However, the escalating ethno-religious crises in Nigeria is concerning, and future conflicts may be sparked by the memory of the current ones if they are not fully and immediately resolved. In fact, ethnicity and religion have a negative impact on the social, political, and economic development of the country.

Religious and political leaders must start putting more emphasis on the need to embrace peace in order to give solutions that bring about peace and advance national integration. Secularism is the best choice to keep peace and harmony as long as the nation maintains its multi-religious and ethno-linguistic heterogeneity. Without colonisation, there is no doubt that the problem of ethnic animosity between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria would have been virtually nonexistent (Akindele, 2013). The federal government should suppress the spirit of indigene- settler and federal character phenomena. In order to reorganise Nigerian society, it is also necessary to lessen religious fundamentalism.

Conclusion

Even while restructuring continues to be a recurring theme in Nigerian discourse, finding a consensus definition that is acceptable to all has grown to be difficult. This is a result of the country's diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion. Different viewpoints on political restructuring exist, but ultimately, a just and egalitarian society must be maintained for the nation's various ethnic and religious communities.

Without a doubt, the nation's current political system, in which the federal government exercises sweeping political authority to the detriment of the federating units, is not conducive to the growth and harmony of the country. Therefore, the nation should be reorganised to ensure that political authority and resources are distributed fairly among the many federating units. According to the ethnic and religious origins of Nigerians, this should be done.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that Nigeria's political system will ensure that the potential in our religious and ethnic life to advance the nation is harnessed. Without a doubt, restructuring will increase political stability and economic prosperity in the nation. A properly organised Nigeria will promote healthy competitions among the federating units, thereby, enabling each to develop at a higher rate. The finding stained showed that the fundamental issues that gave rise to the call for restructuring include ethnic diversity, religious pluralism and marginalization in the political equation of the country. These have fueled ethno- religious conflicts which have ravaged many parts of the

country. Therefore, the paper recommends a form of political structure in which the federating units should be given the powers to manage their affairs in line with their ethnic and religious affiliations.

Recommendations

1. To reflect the heterogeneous nature of the country, key positions in public institutions should be filled strictly in accordance with the federal character concept.
2. Each federating unit should have the freedom to conduct its affairs in accordance with its racial and religious connections as part of the restructuring of the Nigerian political system.
3. No religion or racial or ethnic group should receive preferential consideration during the rebuilding process.
4. There should be a greater devolution of authority and resources to the federating units. As a result, the federating units would be able to exert more control over the resources in their regions.
5. Minority ethnic groups should be protected and given due consideration throughout the restructuring project. This will give all citizens a sense of belonging irrespective of their places of origin.

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