

## **POWER POLITICS, ETHNIC CHAUVINISM AND SUCCESSION CRISIS: THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2011 ELECTIONS AND THE FEAR FOR 2015 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Going by the experience of past elections in Nigeria since the commencement of the current democratic dispensation in 1999, this paper examined the interplay among power politics, ethnic chauvinism and succession crisis in Nigeria and conclude that the incidents of politically motivated violence prior to, during and after general elections would seem to be a major discerning characteristic of power play among ethno-political elites in Nigeria. However, this phenomenon has now introduced various security risks to the game of politics in Nigeria such as flourishing primordial culture to the disadvantage of civic culture (a motivation for widespread civil disobedience among the citizens), political assassination, arms stockpiling, extortions, frauds and election riggings. With the near-extreme pattern of ethnic orientation towards power relationships and successions in Nigeria, the fear expressed in this paper is that, if this trend should continue the current fragile democratic system may be truncated in no time later than 2015 general elections. Perhaps, the country may suffer reversal to the gory days of military dictatorship or face a break up.

**Keywords:** Power politics, Ethnicity, Succession crisis, Electoral violence, Political elites

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is no doubt a complex country given its numerous ethnic groups with varied cultural characteristics and interest. Ayida (1987) traces the genesis of the political problems of Nigeria to the British colonial policy. According to him, the British had wrongly assumed that for any political arrangement in Nigeria to succeed, it must satisfy the “aspirations of the three major ethnic groups; the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Ibos in the East” (Ayida, 1987). This forms the basis of the tripod theory of power in Nigeria. Unfortunately, in an attempt to satisfy the wishes and aspirations of the majorities (so-called Wazobias) the wishes and stabilizing roles of the minorities that once constituted about 45% of the total population of the country were ignored. The party system that were later developed followed this tripod power structure, and even with the creation of more states and local government areas, these three dominant ethnic groups still remain at the center stage (Adebisi, 1990).

Within this divisive colonial structure, ethnic tensions emerged between these unequally developed groups primarily in the 1950s. 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 (Ebegbulem, 2011).

As ethnic consciousness motivated the majority ethnic groups to develop regional political parties which stimulated inter-ethnic tensions, ethnic politics inevitably became the main deterrent to Nigerian nationalism (Ebegbulem, 2011). In each region, a party dominated by members of the majority ethnic group obtained office and provided services and patronage for the group (Cooper, 2002). The Hausa/Fulani led the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU); In the East, the Igbos formed the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC); the Yorubas formed the Action Group (AG), a regional political party dedicated to strengthening ethnic politics in the west (Coleman, 1960). This reflected an attempt by the regional elites to carve out economic spheres for themselves. The regional elites succeeded in creating the false impression that the political parties were the champions of the interests of the various ethnic groups. They openly used emotive ethnic symbols and played on alleged ethnic conflicts to canvass for votes. Their struggles for power and positions generated antagonism and hostility along ethnic Attoh divide (and Soyombo, 2010).

Obviously, ethnicity affected the foundation stone laying of party politics in Nigeria since independence in 1960. For instance, During the First Republic, three major political parties contested in the 1959 General Elections: Action Group (AG), Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and National Council for Nigerian Citizen (NCNC). The AG which was launched by Awolowo in 1951 as a political party emerged from the Pan-Yoruba Organization, Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa) organized by Chief Awolowo in 1948 (Ayatse and Iorhen, 2013). The AG was purely a Yoruba based party... In March 1951, the AG was declared as a Western Region Political Organization (Ajene, 1996:196).

In the Northern Region, the Western Nigeria experience repeated itself. The Hausa/Fulani cultural/ethnic organization, Jamyyan Mutanen Arewa became a political party known as the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The north was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello who was also the political leaders of NPC. In the Eastern Nigeria Region, the Igbo ethnic Union the Igbo State Union which was headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe became a political party for the East, known as (National Council for Nigeria and Citizens NCNC) (Ayatse and Iorhen, 2013).

What then follow after independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960 was the incidences of ethnic and prebendal politics as were evident in the power struggle between the three dominant parties, notably Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with its base among the Yorubas of the Southwest; the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe with its base among the Igbos of the Southeast; the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) led by Sir Ahmadu Bello with its base among the Hausa-Fulani in the Northern part of the country.

Nnoli (1980) was of the view that, their propaganda emphasized alleged conflict of interests among the various groups with each party claiming to be protecting and advancing the interests of the ethnic nationalities. However, the covert reasons for deploying ethnic propaganda to canvass for votes had always been the diversion of national resources to the elites in each region, and to increase its spheres of influence while weakening those of its opponents (Attoh and Soyombo, 2010).

This tripod balance reverberated again in the Second Republic with the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo holding sway in the Southwest.

The bulk of its loyalists were former disciples of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The party was dominated by the Yorubas. The Nigeria People's Party (NPP), led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, like the NCNC, held sway in the Igbo states of Southeastern Nigeria while the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which had a more national outlook, had its major support base in the North and reflected the legacies of the defunct NPC (Ebegbulem, 2011).

The Second Republic was little or no improvement upon the experience of the First Republic in terms of ethnicism. The Second Republic political parties were but reincarnations of the ethnically aligned parties of the First Republic. Both their formation and leadership conspicuously reflected ethnic affiliation of the leading political elites. This does not mean that the parties of the Second Republic absolutely did not enjoy membership from other ethnic groups outside their domain, but where they did; such memberships were weak and insignificant. Just as in the 1960, political contest assumed extremely violent dimensions with neither magnanimous victors nor gallant losers as the victorious Northern dominated National Party of Nigeria (NPN) employed state apparatus to wreck opposition parties and enfeeble rival hegemonic ethnic groups (Ojo and Fawole 2004). Instead of breaking down existing prejudices and barriers among the groups, politics in the opinion of the Political Bureau was largely a resurrection of old leadership, schooled in the politics of intrigue, insincerity, deceit and the manipulation of ethnic and regional sentiments to sustain themselves in power (The Report of the Political Bureau 1987). The problem of ethnic politics, particularly the reckless struggle by the ethnically inclined political leaders to gain control at the centre, and controversies that surrounded the general elections of 1979 and 1983 contributed largely to the demise of the Second Republic (Salawu and Hassan, 2010).

The military regime of Ibrahim Babangida seized power in 1984 and attempted to eradicate this tripod divide in party politics in Nigeria by establishing the Social Democracy Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) as the two major political parties in the botched Third Republic. The Babangida government thought that by having only two political parties available to the Big Three, voting might focus on ideologies rather than ethnicity and regionalism (Lergo, 2011).

But the 1993-presidential election reportedly won by Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, a Yoruba and SDP candidate, was annulled by the very regime that had formed the two parties, coerced Nigerians to register to vote, and had organized and supervised the elections. Abiola's election seemed to have succeeded in reducing voting behaviour along ethnic and regional lines, as he was a Muslim from the South who had won where northerners had dominated before him. In fact, with the exception of the predominant Igbo states, Abiola won states from all regions and ethnic groups in the country; he had even won in Kano State where his rival presidential candidate (Alhaji Bashir Tofa of National Republican Convention) hailed from (Lergo, 1996).

This approach by the military and coupled with the emergence of M.K.O. Abiola, who was considered to be truly a national figure with little or no passion for ethnicity, as the Presidential candidate of the SDP, was close to eradicating ethnic values in party politics in Nigeria but for the unfortunate annulment of the elections. It must be noted that the annulment generated intense ethnic, populist and regional antipathy particularly in the Southwestern part of the country and further reinforced the contention that there existed a northern oligarchy ready at all times to resist any power shift away from the North. According to Burkhalter (1993), the tragedy of the crisis then is that Nigerians all over the country who in the election of 1993 seemed to have overcome a legacy of ethnic conflict and regional barrier to vote Chief Abiola have been forced once again to narrow their sight and put ethnic identity first, rather than their citizenship as Nigerians.

The tendency to hold on to power by the military truncated the Third Republic democratic experiment (Mahmudat, 2010). Contest for political supremacy has been seen as a means of gaining access to the national wealth. Nigeria's brand of prebendal politics is "an unremitting and unconstrained struggle for possession and access to state offices, with the chief aim of procuring direct communal or other sectional group (Joseph 1991). There was no time in history of Military's such abuses in power in Nigeria worse than Sani Abacha era (November 1994 – June 1998).

The military under the leadership of Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1998, after the death of General Sani Abacha, began a short and brief transition to civil rule. At the end of the usual alignment and realignments as well as merger, 26 political associations sought for provisional registration, only nine parties were provisionally registered. After the Local Government elections, three political parties amongst them well fully registered to contest the elections. They are the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP) later known as All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Yet, by 29th May 1999 when the democratic process was concluded with the installation of the PDP government with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emerging as the executive president of the federation; the ethnic colouration of the past experiments still manifested in the present. With ANPP considered as a party predominantly occupied by the Hausa/Fulani and AD as the direct successor to Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group and Unity Party of Nigeria, and as a result, dominated the six Yoruba speaking states of Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo until 2003 when it lost all the states except Lagos to the PDP while Obasanjo was re-elected to a second-term in office.

The election of Obasanjo as President under the PDP was a smart move by the northern elites, including the military, as it had been agreed by the ruling party, the PDP, and Obasanjo himself that he would be succeeded by a northern candidate after two terms in office. He was widely considered a northern protégé, and his sponsorship was regarded as compensation to the Yoruba for the cavalier manner in which the military under the administration of General Babangida had annulled the election in June, 1993, of Chief Moshood Abiola as the president of Nigeria (The Nation, 2013), and the consequent death of Chief Abiola in detention on the eve of his much-celebrated planned release in July 1998.

Following his successive two-term of eight years of presidency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo during 2007 presidential elections, and in accordance with the zoning agreement in his ruling party, the PDP, nominated, anointed and supported Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'dua, a northerner and erstwhile Governor of Katsina State as his own successor in an election widely reported both by local and international election monitors as the worst in history of democratic elections in the World.

Prior to the 2007 general elections, another political party, Action Congress (AC) (later became Action Congress of Nigeria), was formed out of the AD, which ironically adopted the sitting Vice-President, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku as its presidential candidate, running against the preferred candidate of the ruling party, a manifestation of the fallout between President Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku informed by the role played by the latter in the aborted ambition of the former to have a third term in office. Although the elections were widely condemned, Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'dua was returned as the elected president in May 29 2007.

While the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was however seen to have deviated a bit from the usual ethno-religious dominated party politics of the past with their membership and formation cutting across the clime of Nigeria (Ademola, 2009), the illness and subsequent death of President Yar'dua in office in May 2010, resuscitated the ethnic and regional politics with the adoption of Dr Goodluck Jonathan, a southern minority of Ijaw extraction as president shrouded

in controversies and ethno-political tension. The resultant bitter politics of ethnic and sectional dimension patterned the contest for, conduct and outcome of the 2011 elections.

### **Theoretical Discourse**

Seeking theoretical understanding of the intensity of power struggle and overbearing influence of ethnicity on electoral politics in Nigeria, two fundamental theories come to fore. The attitudes and orientation of the political gladiators can be captured by the theory of the elites or Elite theory, while their interest and political behaviour can be accounted for, by the Marxist Political Economy Theory.

The elite theory has a long history. The major proponents of the theory are Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels, Joseph Schumpeter, James Burnham, Giovanni Sartori, Raymond Aron and Karl Mannheim, among others (Mahajan, 1988). A recent but apparent addition to this theory is Chris Hayes.

Elite theory is premised on a number of assumptions:

- The society consists of two categories: the selected few, who are capable and, therefore, have the right to supreme leadership; and the vast masses of people who are desired to be ruled;
- That the majority of human beings are apathetic, indolent and slavishly uninformed about what goes on in the administrative system and permanently incapable of self government. That is, the elite decides on the structure, the personnel, the process of public policies of the administrative system;
- Hence, the structure, substance and output of the administrative system may be viewed as the preferences and values of the governing elite (Dowse and Hughes, 1983).

These manipulative devices of the masses by the political elites according to the elite theorists exist because the elites are better organized and possess class consciousness when compared to the masses (Robert, 1976). In the Nigerian State, the manipulative process is a complex one that threatens the survival of the polity not only because of the contradiction of interests amongst the elites as a result of hedonistic manifestations, but also because the political elites tend to manipulate ethno-religious sentiments as tools for the acquisition of political support (Omodia, 2009).

In broad terms, members of the Nigerian state are divided into two: the elite and the non-elite. The latter are the followers, comprising the middle class, the low income earners and the masses, the 'talakawas' who constitute the majority who are not involved in the taking of political decisions but those the elites use cunningness to lure and bribe in order to get their votes (Afuape, 2012). The elites, however, are the privileged members of the society who are in the minority and who have influence, power, prestige, wealth and belong to high socio-economic status. They are those who take political decisions and are also involved, to use David Easton's popular expression, in the authoritative allocation of values (Ibid).

The elite theory as popularized by Vilfredo, Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Wright Mills among others (Varma, 1975), no doubt vividly explains the Nigerian electoral cum political system considering the fact that most political parties that exist in the present democratic dispensation could either be classified as cadre or elite parties which manipulates the sentiments of the masses for the selfish objective of acquiring economic base.

There is problem with power relations in Nigeria politics. As events and reactions in the ongoing democratic dispensation have shown, the northern elites are not comfortable that power is not in their hands. The propaganda of the Northern oligarchy is that the South has always being in control of economic power and to balance the equation, the North must hold on the

political power. Since the inception of the fourth republic the Northern elites have begun to rock the boat. This is accompanied by cries of marginalization all the time. The fact that power has often been monopolized by the three dominant ethnic nationalities has also meant that the minority groups have been marginalized in the rat race for power. Again, power at the centre and the resources that comes with it in Nigeria is too attractive (Aluko, and Ajani, 2009). This thus makes the competition for power so fierce, because if an ethnic group loses at the centre, it has lost all. This is more so because politics is a zero-sum game in Nigeria. The way power is obtained and used in Nigeria is usually in terms of what the various ethnic nationalities can benefit. But in many instances in the past, power has been used to pursue sectional or parochial interests. Marginalization of some groups will inevitably arouse consciousness and then sensitize such groups for action, resistance, apathy and other related negative vices.

With intensive competition among Nigerian elites for control of the spoils of office, politics become a winner-takes-all affair. The political parties in control in each region easily became weapons in the hands of major nationality groups for the continued marginalization of the minorities. Oppressed minorities began seeking succor and solace in the opposition parties with inevitable consequences of the politicization of ethnicity. The expulsion of Eyo Ita, a minority Efik, from the Igbo dominated National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1952 resulted in Eastern Region minorities forming the rival National Independent Party, with Eyo Ita as president (Ojo and Fawole, 2004).

Similarly, the political quarrel between E.O. Eyo and Azikiwe in 1955 over the latter's handling of the Public Commission of Inquiry into Bribery and Corruption. Eyo accused Azikiwe of financial malfeasance in transferring massive public funds into the African Continental Bank, precipitating a tribunal of inquiry which found the NCNC leader guilty. Expelled from the NCNC because of this accusation he found a haven in the party for the ethnic minorities of the region (Nnoli, 1978).

Furthermore, candidates for political positions are picked by the elites. The primaries are a mere forum for ratification. This informed the leadership crisis within the PDP following the demise of Umar Musa Yar'Adua in Aso Rock in May, 2010 and following Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's declaration of his intention to contest for the office of the president in 2011 (Afuape, 2012). At a point, a group led by former Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) governor and former Minister under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma emerged in the North with the dual aim of insisting on a Northern president and also picking a Northern candidate among the Northern presidential candidates within the PDP. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, a former vice-president, was picked among the Northern candidates that included the former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) who annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election adjudged universally to be credible, free and fair and who, Omoruyi (2012), advised to quit politics; and the former governor of Kwara state, Dr Bukola Saraki. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was, however, defeated by Dr Goodluck Jonathan at the PDP presidential primaries. The other prominent Northern candidates were General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, a former governor of Kano state and presidential candidate of All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). None of these presidential candidates was able to defeat Dr Goodluck Jonathan at the polls. This explains the series of protests and killings in the North following the elections, ostensibly sponsored by the defeated candidates and their supporters, allegedly including a serving senator, Aliyu Ndume (Chiedozie, 2012; Nwankwo, 2012).

Another theory that has helped in the understanding of Nigeria's political cum democratic predicament, and more importantly the issue of ethnic chauvinism and electoral violence is

political economy. Karl Marx's conception of political economy captures Nigeria as a rentier, patrimonial and patrimonial state.

The Marxists propounded an economic theory based on capitalist society. That every society, whatever its stage of historical development rest on economic foundation; the mode of production, this in turn has two elements, the forces of production and the social relations of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society. That at a certain stage of its development, the material forces of production in the society comes into conflict with the property relations (Omoyibo, 2012). That this antagonism and conflict is inevitable between these two classes, and would result as class consciousness and militant class action develop in the overthrow of the existing system. In The Communist Manifesto of 1848, Marx posits, "*the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle...without conflict, no progress, this is the law which civilization has followed to the present day*".

Marx specifically claim that the source of power in the society lays in the economic infrastructure, that the forces of production are owned and controlled by a minority, the ruling class. That the relationship to the forces of production, produces the bases of its domination and exploitation in the society, and the state plays an historic important role in maintaining this social structure. That is while he asserts, "*the state is but a committee for the managing of the common affairs of whole bourgeoisie...*" (Engels, 1919).

The Nigerian state is a rentier state without a production base where the forces of production and social relations of production are embedded. Hence the objective conditions to create social mechanisms for a productive economy that will usher a class struggle between the two class professed by Marx is lacking. Class consciousness is weak in the Nigerian society, because of the relative nature of the economy that is mostly peasantry in nature and it depends on rents from mainly oil exploit to run the state. As such, the totality of the consciousness of the people in Nigeria is determined and geared towards the state for survival hence the emergence of a rentier economy without a production base to create class consciousness which is a basic within the Marxian paradigm for societal transformation (Omoyibo, 2012).

However, this structure had its root from the colonial era, which was a deliberate policy by the colonialist to debase their colonial states from productive capacities in order to export and entrenched capitalism. The productive forces were weakening given no room for productive activities which led to clientele patronage on government and political positions. Soludo (2000) has placed this into a proper perspective when he opined that "*in Nigeria, the excessive dependence on oil has compounded by the concentration of the commanding heights of the economy in the hands of Government. Government then became the fastest and cheapest means of making quick money, a rentier state emerged, intensifying the politics of 'sharing' rather than 'production'. This created a horde of 'rent-entrepreneur', that is 'Big men' without any productive source of livelihood except proximity to state power*". He further asserted that majority of Nigerian elite do nothing for living other than government patronage and this has led to distortion of the value system.

This led credence to P. P. Ekeh' theory of two publics, Prebendalism popularized by Richard Joseph and Gurnal Myrdal's soft state thesis. For instance, Ekeh (1975) argued that one of the most striking impacts of colonialism was the emergence of two public realms, the primordial and civic public realms which, related differently with the private realm in terms of morality. For Nigeria, and generally for Africa, Ekeh (1975) has argued; only rights (i.e. benefits) are expected from the state by its citizens, who owe duties (responsibilities) to a native sector. The former forms the basis of an "amoral civic public realm", and the latter a "moral primordial public

realm". Therefore, the civic public realm was associated with illegitimate and exploitative colonial rule and had no moral linkages with the private realm. It was an amoral public realm in which cheating the system was considered a patriotic duty (Ifidon 1996). The result is that as the same actors operate in the two realms, the state apparatus is employed to fatten the nest of the primordial public, thereby making corruption, nepotism and ethnicity to mention a few the hallmark of the civic public (Osaghae 1988).

Few scholars are likely to dispute Richard Joseph's linking of corruption and the fall of the Nigerian Second Republic to the prebendalisation of state power. In what seem to be a re-characterization of Ekeh's theory, Joseph contends that "The politics of competition over allocation of resources, or what in Nigeria is called 'the national cake', has its most dire consequences the transformation of the offices of the state into prebends..." According to the theory of Prebendalism, state offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by office holders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups.

Therefore, the political elite use social identities such as ethnicity for particularistic purpose. The ethnic identity becomes a mobilizing mechanism to access political power, consolidate dominance and economic control (Dudley 1973; Osaghae 1995). Consequently, it is not impossible for power to be used for personal or group aggrandizements (Ogundiya, 2009).

### **Power Politics, Ethnic Chauvinism and Succession Crisis; Aftermath of 2011 Elections**

Between years 2009 and 2010, Nigeria suffered a devastating constitutional and leadership crisis stemming from the unconstitutional manner in which the illness and the eventual death of the erstwhile President, Umar Musa Yar'dua was managed by the ruling class.

The constitutional and political crises was ostensibly infuriated by ethno-regional suspicion which pit some Northern political elements against the choice of a Southern minority as Vice-President to take over power from the then ailing President, a Northern majority. In the midst of it all, the National Assembly eventually resolved that the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan should become acting President in February 2010 using a common law rule, the "doctrine of necessity," which had no precedent in law and was not explicitly backed by the constitution. Following the eventual death of President Yar'dua in May 2010, the National Assembly passed a resolution which for the first time in Nigeria's political history, paved way for the emergence of member of a minority group in person of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Goodluck Jonathan was a little known and self-effacing politician from an assertive ethnic group, the Ijaw of the Niger Delta region.

The succession rolls took a frustrating dimension during the 2011 elections. The intra-party consensus within the ruling Peoples Democratic Party meant that power rotates between the North and South every two terms (8 years). This arrangement was believed to have made power transition in 2007 from a Southern Christian President, Olusegun Obasanjo (after the completion of his two-terms of eight years, 1999-2007) to a Northern Muslim President, Umar Musa Yar'dua a smooth success, which meant that following the death of the latter midway, the flag bearer of the party for the 2011 election was scheduled to be a Northerner, as to complete the second term of the North's turn in presidency. The desire and claim of fundamental human right by President Goodluck Jonathan to contest the 2011 elections therefore violated the existent intra-party consensus and led to massive political tension within the ruling party and beyond ahead, during and after the 2011 elections.



Before the PDP primaries, the northern political elites led by Adamu Ciroma fanned the embers of ethnic politics. In their bid to stop Jonathan from winning the PDP primaries, they adopted Atiku Abubakar as the consensus presidential candidate of the North. This and other preemptive measures, however, could not stop Goodluck Jonathan from emerging as the presidential candidate of the PDP and the eventual winner of 2011 elections, despite the fact that the three other major political parties in the elections, Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) presented Northerners as their presidential flag bearers. While Muhammadu Buhari flagged the banner of CPC, Nuhu Ribadu did for ACN, and Ibrahim Shekarau for the ANPP.

Prior to the elections proper, on October 1, 2010, during the official commemorative ceremonies of Nigeria's fiftieth independence anniversary in its capital, Abuja, car bombs exploded that killed and maimed a number of persons. Such episodes seemed evocative of this country modern history: the twinning of hope and disaster (Joseph, 2010). Following the bombing and the subsequent arrest and interrogation of the Director General of Babangida campaign organization, Raymond Dokpesi, there were calls for him to quit the race. In December 2010, bombs went off in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State during a gubernatorial campaign rally. There were also bombings and shootings in the North blamed on Boko Haram. Politicians and police said that the campaign of violence was aimed to disrupt the election. Several talks of making the country ungovernable if the North should lose the presidency to the South were common headlines on the front page of newspapers. The CPC presidential candidate also urged his supporters to make sure that should the presidential election be rigged, blood should flow and the evidence is as clear as Boko Haram's intensified bloody hostilities in the North.

It was therefore not surprising that while the April 2011 election was heralded as among the fairest in Nigeria's history, it was also among the bloodiest (Vanguard, 2011). The presidential election divided the country along ethnic and religious lines. As election results trickled in on April 17, and it became clear that Muhammed Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change had lost, his supporters took to the streets of Northern towns and cities to protest what they alleged to be the rigging of the results (Tribune, 2011). The violence began with widespread protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, following the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan.

The protesters started burning tires, and the protests soon turned into riots. The rioting quickly degenerated into sectarian and ethnic bloodletting across some Northern states. Muslim rioters targeted and killed Christians and members of ethnic groups from southern Nigeria, who were perceived to have supported the ruling party, burning their churches, shops, and homes. The rioters also attacked police stations and ruling party and electoral commission offices. In predominately Christian communities in Kaduna State, mobs of Christians retaliated by killing Muslims and burning their mosques and properties (Vanguard, 2011).

Kaduna State, which is divided along religious and ethnic lines, suffered the highest death toll during the three days of rioting. The Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups, most of whom are Muslim, make up the majority in northern Kaduna State, while southern Kaduna State is dominated by predominately Christian ethnic groups (Bloomberg, 2011). In the city of Kaduna, the state capital, the river that intersects the city serves as a symbolic divider for the largely segregated city, state, and nation. Human Rights Watch estimates that in northern Kaduna State, at least 180 people, and possibly more, were killed in the cities of Kaduna and Zaria and their surrounding suburbs. According to media reports and journalists interviewed by Human Rights Watch, dozens of people were also killed during riots in the other northern states (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

In Bauchi State, rioters targeted members of the National Youth Corps Service, who served as ad-hoc election staff. According to media reports and journalists interviewed by Human Rights Watch, on the afternoon of April 17 in Giade, a rural town in northern Bauchi State, rioters attacked the youth corps members in the town. The youth corps members, who were from southern Nigeria, ran to the local police station to seek refuge, but the rioters stormed the police station (PM News, 2011). The mob killed the police officer on duty and burned down the police station. They raped two of the female youth corps members then hacked them to death with machetes, along with five male youth corps members. In total, rioters killed ten youth corps members in the state (Ibid).

The events prior, during and aftermath of the 2011 elections reinforced the notion that the power elites rely heavily on ethnic politics to sustain their relevance in the political arena. An obvious evidence of sheer differences rooted in language, religion and way of life (Chinaka, 2012). The Northerners have dominated the center of leadership as a birth-right assumed to be handed to them by our colonial masters. Hence, they feel as the older brother, to forever rule over their younger brothers.

### **Power Politics, Ethnic Chauvinism and Succession Crisis, the Fear for 2015 Elections**

Following the undesirable violence and the loss of innocent lives after the 2011 Presidential election, many are doubtful of the ability of Nigerians to control events in 2015. Some pessimists doubt the existence of Nigeria as a country between the year 2014 and 2015. In the run up to the 2011 general elections, many magazines and newspapers predicted that the presidential elections scheduled for April 2011 would be very violent. A month later, the outcome was about a thousand Nigerians were massacred. Once again, the most populous nation in Africa is on the march to another general election; and from all indications, the 2015 may yet become the bloodiest in the political history of Nigeria. The rumblings in the ruling party over the one term agreement- purportedly signed by the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan (Dos Santos, 2013), is pitching the North against the South.

From North to South, East to West, the ruling PDP is embroiled in deep crisis. National Chairman, Alhaji Bamanga Tukur to whom the President is uncompromisingly disposed is at war with a powerful group within the Party. The dissenting group tagged, the 'New PDP', composed of at least seven serving Governors including the Governor of the President's sister-state of origin, Rivers, serving members of the National and States' Legislatures, Party financiers, heavy former political office holders including an ex-President, ex-Vice president and other strong Party stalwarts.

The chairmanship of the Nigerian Governors' Forum has also become a big factor in the race towards 2015 elections. This very powerful group could determine who the next president of Nigeria becomes. In 2010, Jonathan had to enter into a controversial deal with them in order to win both the PDP primaries and the general elections. Now ahead of 2015, some of the big elements in the Forum are at cross-purposes with the President over his 2015 ambition. The President himself is leaving nothing to chances, as he deployed his strategists to destabilize the much-powerful Forum ahead of the 2015 race. The NGF election held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2013, in which the Rivers State Governor, Rotimi Amaechi, and a member of the 'New PDP' was re-elected as chairman produced a lot of drama as pro-presidency governors (contentiously 16 of the 36 members) in the Forum led by Akwa Ibom's Godswill Akpabio rejected the result and subsequently recognized Jonah Jang of Plateau State as the Chairman of their own faction of the Forum, thereby producing two factions of the Forum till date.

Another manifestation of the brewing apprehension towards the 2015 elections is the unfolding political and constitutional imbroglio in Rivers State. The perceived clash of ambitions over the presidential slot in 2015 have put second-term serving Governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi against President Jonathan both of whom hailed from the same geo-political zone of South-South. Governor Amaechi is believed to be nursing ambition of becoming vice president in 2015 against President Jonathan's perceived commitment to running for a second term in office in 2015. The resultant effect of this conflict of interest is an increasing level of political and constitutional crises in Rivers State. For instance, the bloody clash between the emergent factions in the Rivers State House of Assembly during an attempt to impeach the speaker led to the suspension of the state legislature by the National Legislature and the consequent take over of legislative business in Rivers State by the federal lawmakers, pending the amicable resolution of the ugly crisis, which seem to be screwed up at the moment, as both sides have maintained adamant status. Similarly, while working by the veto of the President through the Inspector General of Police, the commissioner of Police in Rivers State, Joseph Mbu has practically taken over as the *de facto* governor. He attacks perceived supporters of the Governor with impunity, as human rights abuses in the state reaches for the climax.

Joined in the fray against the second term ambition of President Jonathan are some governors in the ruling PDP, mainly from the North, alleging that President Jonathan, a Southern Christian from the volatile oil-rich Niger Delta, signed an agreement to serve as President for only one term (2011-2015) and give a free-way for a Northern candidate to replace him. However, as it appears that the President is not willing to honour the pact if at all it existed; it has been widely discussed and rumored that the Northern faction within the PDP, which strongly supported Jonathan's election in 2011, might withdraw support for the incumbent President in a favour of a Northern Muslim candidate in 2015. A leading figure among these Governors, Babangida Muazu Aliyu of Niger State, claimed that it was agreed that Jonathan would serve only one term of four years and that all that present at the parley signed the agreement. Reiterating the fact that when Jonathan went to Kampala in Uganda, he also said he was going to serve a single term (The Sun, 2013). Apart from the one term agreement issue, there are other factors which indicate such outcome: the widespread corruption and religious violence are alienating Nigerians, mostly Northerners, who witness lack of economic development, high levels of unemployment, lack of positive future perspectives and failure by government in protecting the lives of innocent civilians. All of this is fed with the will by Northern politicians to allocate political power over economic affairs and collecting material benefits- since independence political office has been closely linked to attaining economic/material benefits in Nigeria (Dos Santos, 2013).

The strategists and sympathizers of the President have not rested over the raging issue either. The Special Adviser to the President on political matters, Ahmed Gulak dismissed the purported one-term limit pact as "frivolous" and a figment of imagination of the claimants while the Niger Delta ex-warlords, especially Asari Dokubo have continued to threaten that Nigeria would become history if their kinsman, President Jonathan should be denied serving second term in office. The seeming silence of the President himself over the contentious issues of his 2015 ambition and the accompanied political tension heightens the apprehension and uncertainties surrounding the 2015 elections and future of democracy in Nigeria.

Dos Santos (2013) highlighted the danger of the infighting within the ruling PDP may play. For him, if the President is forced out of office unceremoniously by the Northern oligarchy in 2015, his kinsmen may resume their militancy in the creeks at the level witnessed in the last decade. Such development will definitely scale down Nigeria's oil production which, in turn,

will inevitably slow down and cripple the economy of the country. As a result, the Federal Government may be forced to send in troops to the Niger Delta to quell the rebellion and giving the uncertainty that greeted the disarmament exercise under the Federal Government Amnesty Program for Niger Delta ex-militants, which makes it almost impossible to believe that the ex-militants were fully disarmed, a armed and violent confrontation may ensure between the Federal Government troops and the Niger Delta resurrecting militants, another civil war situation may unravel.

Niger Delta ex-militants have been appeased by a fragile amnesty program which has of late been weakened, given rise to renewed criminal activities. In addition, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), an umbrella group made up of several ethnically-formed smaller groups in the region, has recently expressed its resentment towards federal Government's intention to consider granting amnesty to Boko Haram, the Muslim militant group, which has been attacking Christians and Muslims alike in the North. MEND has promised to pay back in same coin, i.e. by bombing mosques and killing innocent Muslims especially in the South.

Book haram, an Islamic terrorist sect, whose wholesome violent activities in the Northern part has led to the declaration of partial emergency rule in three Northern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa and intensified joint-military actions in the affected areas by the Federal Government which is been seen as a political gimmick to disenfranchise a large number of eligible voters in the North (giving its huge influence) come 2015 under the justification of threat of insecurity.

Moreover, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (NASSOB), the Igbo-dominated organization, may feel tempted to take advantage of the situation and speeds its way towards declaring the creation of the Republic of Biafra. After the July 18, 2013, bombings at a bus car park in Kano, MASSOB, declared that tolerance was running out and if violence towards their kinsmen continues, they would take action (Punch, 2013), that will likely be against the Northerners resident in the South. The MASSOB's discontent for Nigeria remains very strong as the ambition of the South-East people to rule united Nigeria has remain elusive since the end of the civil war in 1970. The threat of reprisal action by MASSOB, as the threat by MEND, could only enrage the entire North and, in a way legitimize Boko Haram's actions in the eyes of Northern Muslims, politicians and civilians.

Now that the three main opposition political parties -Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) with a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)- have fused into one as – All Progressives Congress (APC), to constitute stronger opposition to the ruling PDP during 2015 elections, if Muhammed Buhari, a recurrent presidential candidate since 2003 emerges the flagbearer of the APC, giving his support base in the North and the overwhelming patronage enjoy by APC in the South West, the 2015 elections outcome may prove a stunt to PDP's and President Jonathan's dream of ruling beyond 2015. And in the event that the so called rule of incumbency manipulation comes to play, the attendant violent outcome may be enormous. Already in 2012, General Buhari (rtd) warned that if what he termed systematic manipulation of the 2011 elections repeat itself in 2015, Nigeria risks an Arab spring experience of some sort, "if what happened in 2011 (alleged rigging) should happen again in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood" (Sahara Reporters, 2015).

## Conclusion

In the midst of all these political calculations ahead of 2015 elections, Nigerians could only brace up for the worse as evidence of disastrous outcome in 2015 elections remain staring.

There is a lot of evidence to prove that politicians are already preparing for the 2015 presidential election, therefore, the need to mobilize support for personal and regional interests is taking toll on the performance of the government. The critical place of the 2015 presidential election will be seen from a North- South political perspective arising from the struggle for power between the North and South in Nigerian politics.

Across the six geopolitical zones, other factors will define the elections. These include the persisting state of insecurity from the insurgency and activities of militants and vigilante groups, the high stakes of election as a result of the availability of derivation revenues, the ethnic heterogeneity that makes elite consensus more difficult to attain, as well as the difficult environmental terrain that makes policing of elections a herculean task.

We might see once again crowds engaging in communal and even inter-ethnic/religious violence. Politicians, in the same way as they did in previous elections, will use their favourite method of gaining power, playing the ethnic card, 'it is them against us' syndrome.

It is evidently clear that Nigeria's future is on shaky grounds as long as the problem of ethnic nationalism remains in place. That in spite of nationwide increase in violence revolving around ethno religious identities, Nigerian governments is still treating them as "residue of the past and are therefore reluctant to recognize the inevitability of the ethnic identities that divide the population of the overwhelming majority of the people in Nigeria. Today, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that ethnic divisions and the 'nationalism' attached to it are losing their importance in any part of the World. In the words of Sindjoun (2000) 'plural societies are not only places where we identify clash, they also include dynamics of overlapping and crossbreeding, multiple positions and multiple allegiances'.

From what has been discussed, the Nigerian state is composed of various ethnicities. The amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups into one nation called Nigeria by the British brought with it several problems. The major challenges which these artificial creations continue to face include how best to resolve and manage her political relations in a manner that is characteristic of the civilized societies of the world. Nigeria has performed poorly on the political plane as a result of which the country's economic and security performances have been predictably affected. All the efforts that should have been directed to establishing a sound economic order for economic self-reliance had been unintelligently expended on political power struggle, political anarchy and political 'thuggery', all of which are compounded by the factor of ethnicism.

Osadolor (1998) identifies the structural imbalance of Nigeria's federal framework, as the most potent source of fear of domination among various groups. This fear promotes competitive federalism, which intensified the politics of "winner takes all". Unless this fear is removed, ethnicism will continue to be a bane of democratization in Nigeria. The Federal Character principle is enshrined in the constitution to ensure social justice and equity particularly in distribution of federal positions. The principle needs to be properly reviewed to enable it perform integrative function without compromising merit. As rightly suggested by Babangida (2002), the quality, content, profile and temper of political leadership can go a long way either in undermining multiple ethnic nationalisms or in promoting national integration in Nigeria. More space should be provided for Nigerians to participate in the affairs of the country as well as those

of their various communities. This will go a long way reducing alienation, which oftentimes is a major promoter of ethnic nationalism.

For institutionalization of lasting democracy in Nigeria, her ethnic plurality notwithstanding, the wrongs of ethnicism must be righted. This can best be done by good governance. The nation needs a purposeful leadership that has a vision of how to place its citizens at the centre of political project without recourse to ethnic chauvinism and sees acquisition of political power as not an end in itself but a means for serving the collective welfare of its people regardless of their ethnic origin, a leadership that recognizes and respects the many peoples that make up this nation, and treats all communities as its constituency thereby allaying the fear of ethnic representation and domination.

For Nigeria to survive and for her democracy to thrive, the use of ethnic base for political contests should be totally discouraged. It is time for Nigerian to reject the political elite who exploit the fact of ethnic diversity. These diversities are not themselves problem per se, the problem is with the elites who emphasize those divisive factors that can disunite rather than unite us for self-based political gains. Elite using ethnic sentiments should be rejected. Nigerians needs leaders who will put national interest above sectional and parochial considerations.

There should be greater devolution of power to component units in the Federation and possibly power relations should be establish along ethnic lines. People should organize themselves as they desire. Such devolution of authority power allows for greater checks and balances as people are the managers of their own affairs.

The national resources should be shared on the principle of equity and the principle of derivation should be considered. Emphasis should be placed on relation of production rather than distribution. Effort should be geared towards gaining complete control of the economy to provide the needed economic base need for political control. It is necessary to widen the political space to be inclusive of all views and perspectives. Political participation and interests adequately represented must be guaranteed and encouraged in the national politics. There must be a de-emphasis on politics as the gateway to success; politics must be conceived as a self-less service to the nation.

Economic growth and development must be prioritized. Nigeria is blessed with both natural and human resources. There is need for the emergence of crops of leaders that has the political will to stir the affairs of the nation to achieve our national goal. National integration through unifying factor must be emphasized.

A formidable mechanism of national orientation towards ethnic tolerance and flexibility should be devised, while the existing ones such as the National Youth Service Scheme should be wholesomely reviewed. This effort should include an expressive collaboration with the media practitioners: The manner the media has been reporting and is likely to report political stories on ethnicity has implications for potential outbreak of violence. A cursory examination of newspapers reveals high levels of sensationalism which if left un-moderated will contribute to ethnic violence. Media practitioners should be exposed to training on reporting of political conflicts to mitigate risk of their reports becoming triggers for violence.

Sustained engagements among stakeholders such as the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, civil societies, local and international elections monitoring groups and observers, security agencies, religious groups, community and opinion leaders is central to re-instilling confidence in the people about the electoral process, coupled with political will on the part of governments at all levels in supporting peaceful and credible elections.

There is need to overhaul the weak justice system in the country, with specific reference to prosecuting perpetrators of electoral or political violence and checkmate the proliferation of

weapons and emergence of armed-non state actors. This is the only way that the entrenched culture of impunity in the country can be reversed.

All existing ethnic, religious and communal contentions should be properly managed to avoid escalation during election. All political parties should be persuaded to sign a peace memorandum, stating their commitment to eschew violence and work peacefully before, during and after the election

This is why the convocation of an all-ethnic national conference becomes inevitable if Nigeria as a single corporate entity will endure.

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