
ELECTIONS AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, PROBLEMS, AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The conduct of elections remains one of the most tortuous and sensitive exercises in Nigeria's political history. Undoubtedly, it has impaired the nation's aspiration in building enduring peace, unity, and stability that will engender mutual co-existence of its disparate ethnic groups. The expectation that elected public officers would deepen democracy and provide transparent and accountable leadership through good governance and the creation of an avenue for people to freely participate in the decision-making process of the country have not been met. Rather than produce leaders and followers that would bring about national cohesion and patriotism among the citizenry, elections have tended to expose fault-lines among ethnic/tribal, regional and religious cleavages at the expense of national interest and nation-building. Although this is the prevailing trend in the annals of the electoral contestation in Nigeria's history, it is the authors' contention that recent events, especially the 2011 and 2015 elections, have put the country's unity on the slippery slope of disintegration. This view is reinforced with the emergence of several centrifugal forces like the Boko Haram terrorist agitations in the country's Northeast, and separatist activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-eastern region on the grounds that are not unconnected with electoral contest or loss by political elites along ethno-religious and regional lines. While these incidences may not be totally orchestrated by the conduct, contest, and outcomes of elections alone, the consistency of coincidence of resurgence of violence after the conduct of elections in the country is notable. Therefore, using secondary and survey data, we explore the issues, problems, and prospects of elections and nation-building in an emerging democracy like Nigeria. This is with the hope of providing policy priorities on how to use elections for nation-building.

Keywords: Elections, Nation-Building, Democracy, Ethnicity/Tribalism

Introduction

Globally, competitive elections and electoral processes are seen by many as core components of liberal democracy as well as conduits through which democratic governance can be guaranteed (Egwemi, 2013). However, in spite of this, the election

has created an atmosphere of bitterness and tension in many countries, including advanced democracies like the United States and several European states, as the outcomes of November 2016 and the recent 2017 elections in the United States and France have shown respectively. In Africa, manifestations of violent conflicts in form of *coup d'états* and inter-intra ethnic tensions which are mainly driven by ethno-religious and class identities in the several African states (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Kenya, Benin Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, and South Sudan), are largely influenced by elections. Indeed, Nigeria is not an exception to electoral conflict. In fact, while electoral disputes are easily resolved on national interest grounds by matured democracies, in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, it has reinforced discontent, mistrust, suspicion and violent conflicts. Most times, a campaign of terror *qua* secessionist threats such as are currently being witnessed by the Boko Haram terrorist group in the North-eastern part of Nigeria and self-determination agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in South-eastern region, are deeply rooted in non-inclusive politics of the country's electoral democracy.

For instance, historicising the negative impact of elections on the country's quest to achieve unity and nation-building, the collapse of Nigeria's First and Second Republics was largely attributable to challenges and controversies that trailed the conduct of the 1964/65 Federal and Western Region elections. The 1983 General Elections debacle was no exception. Many have observed that elections not only encumber the country's efforts toward the task of nation-building, but to a large extent, provided certain elements within the military, the required excuse to often truncate the nation's democracy (Joseph, 1991). Until now, the consequences of these actions on the nation's democratic growth are still widely felt and acknowledged (Ojiako 1981; Ademoyega 1981; and Joseph 1991).

Particularly in Nigeria, past events in the country's political history indicated that elections constitute one major challenge, militating against the collective effort in nation-building. For instance, while Chief Obafemi Awolowo's role in the process leading to the cross-carpeting of many members of former Western regional parliament from Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe's National Convention of the Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in 1959 was seen by many as the origin of ethnic and divisive politics in Nigeria (see Achebe, 2012). The Northernisation policy of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) by late Sir Ahmadu Bello (*The Nation*, 2014 online; Ojo, 2009), further bifurcated the country.

Since the conduct of the first election in 1923, following the introduction of elective principle by Clifford Constitution in 1922, which guaranteed elections of four Nigerians (three representing Lagos and one Calabar) to the central legislature, elections have continued to polarise rather than unify the people of Nigeria and the

polity. This was further aggravated by activities of many political parties with sectional, rather than national appeal. As Obiyan (1999) has argued, in democratic societies and a particularly federal system like Nigeria, political parties should provide a common umbrella for people of diverse ethno-religious, linguistic and geographical background to seek the elective post. To him, parties should function as bridges that link people of diverse interests with a view to serve as agents of nation-building.

However, in Nigeria, rather than ensuring the cohesiveness and unification of the country's heterogeneous and multi-ethnic diversities and take concrete steps in bridging certain observable differences in terms of ethnic, geographical, religious and linguistic cleavages; elections and electoral contests, have been reduced to 'winners take all.' This has engendered politics of bitterness. For example, while many supporters of former President Goodluck Jonathan's administration hold the views that the viciousness of Boko Haram fighters from 2011 to 2015 was a clear declaration of war in a bid of 'making the country ungovernable for a southerner' by some northern elites/establishments (Adeniyi, 2017), Nigeria's current Minister of Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), recently accused opposition parties, particularly members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that lost the 2015 elections (whom he described as 'looters of the country's treasury') as being behind the upsurge in IPOB secessionist agitations (*Vanguard*, 2017). Thus, it is for such a reason that Kabir Mato argued that party politics and democracy in Nigeria have often been characterised by enormous challenges making nation-building difficult (Mato, 2012). Accusations and counter-accusations have not made efforts at nation-building arduous but also unappealing. Therefore, many see elections and electoral processes as opportunities for ruling elites to deploy the apparatus of the state to promote parochial and primordial interests of a particular group/class over the public good. In other words, access to state power becomes a zero-sum game to political elites to achieve the maximum benefits for self, family, class, ethnic or tribal grouping. In this respect, the focus of candidates and the electorate during and after elections in Nigeria often shift from national to individual, ethnic, tribal, religious and regional projects. Hence, Nigeria has for long been a victim of what Femi Mimiko would call, the *terra nullius* – 'without an owner' complex. This has created a marriage of strange bedfellows between elections and nation-building in Nigeria.

Conceptualising Elections and Nation-Building

Like other concepts in social sciences, elections and nation-building do not subject themselves to precise and universally acknowledged definitions. This is so due to cultural and ideological persuasions of scholars. Accordingly, Afolabi defined

elections as ‘a process of achieving a particular goal or aim for individuals and groups within a state, especially in the control of governmental power. In fact, elections serve as a source of political authority’ (Afolabi, 2011:2). Indeed, the key variables involved in an election are the issues of choice and the right to vote. Also, an election can be defined as a formal political exercise of selecting a leader by the electorate, who it is believed, will represent their interests in public office. It is a political method of accepting or rejecting the political proposition of a person who presents himself/herself to represent the people in parliament and other positions in government by voting.

Elections have become the most acceptable way of leadership recruitment globally and more profoundly, among democratic societies. Due to wide subscription, acceptability and legitimacy, elections afford governments, societies that had hitherto remained unperturbed to electoral democracy to now embrace it. Therefore, for most countries in Africa, and particularly Nigeria, that had unabashedly experienced military autocracy, electoral democracy has been established towards the end of the 20th century. In some of these countries, especially in Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Togo, Gabon, Uganda, the D.R. Congo, Burkina Faso and the Gambia (until the collapse of Presidents Blaise Compaore and Yahya Jammeh regimes respectively), rather than deepening democracy and entrenching good governance, elections were (and are still) perceived by these autocratic leaders as veneers to pretend that they are compliant to democratic ethos. The pretence of many of these African ‘new democracies’ is intended to satisfy international lending agencies while trumpeting that they are part of the ‘third wave’ of democratisation in Africa (Huntington, 1991).

As noted above, the concept of nation-building is mired in a definitional quagmire. However, the term is mostly used interchangeably with national integration. For Rustow (1972), a nation is a human group whose members place loyalty to the group over any other conflicting loyalties. He goes further to describe nation-building as the sum total of public policy designed to create a nation. Therefore, in any modern state, the most acceptable policy and way to create a nation are through free, fair and credible elections. However, apart from having an election as a universal criterion, the process of nation-building varies from country to country in the light of different historical backgrounds and prevailing socio-political circumstances. Nation building for some countries took the form of gradual evolution, while for others; it began with wars of independence as this is the case in many African countries. However, it is debatable whether nation-building has succeeded after independence from colonial masters. For Adeniran, nation-building is the creation or recreation of a political community with a relevant economic system and the search for cohesive and enduring ethics capable

of making the individual identify with the political community (Adeniran, 1985). He lists the following as preconditions for the attainment of the goal of nation-building:

- (1) High level of consciousness with regard to the meaning and purpose of the nation-state;
- (2) Institutionalised (self-propelling) norms and practices which guarantee equal rights and opportunities for all citizens; and
- (3) A structured culture of popular control of the means of production and distribution which condition the pattern of social relations.

Two dimensions of nation-building are often alluded to: the *vertical* and *horizontal* dimensions. While the vertical dimension has to do with the acceptance of central government or power as a symbol of the nation, the horizontal dimension involves the acceptance of a sense of belonging to a political community by members of the polity.

National integration has been described as the building of a nation-state out of disparate social, economic, religious, ethnic and geographic elements (Ogunjemite, 1987). For Sklar, it is the creation of higher loyalties that supersede parochial loyalties to sub-national communities, tribes, languages, groups, and regions (Sklar, 1976). It is apparent from the foregoing that nation-building and national integration connote one and the same process in the life of a nation. The underlying theme that runs through both concepts is that of building loyalty. Hence, many writers use the concepts interchangeably and this is so used in this paper.

The Conduct of Elections in Nigeria: Historical Overview

Generally, the impracticality of direct democracy, as obtainable in ancient Greek city-states, specifically Athens and Sparta, due to an explosion of population growth, the expanse of the geographical size of the modern state system, and the adoption of universal adult suffrage, gave rise to electoral/representative democracy in modern history. The prevalence of participatory democracy which replaced Greek discriminatory democratic practices aided the acceptance of electoral democracy. Today, elections conducted on the precept of universal suffrage have been accepted as the best method of leadership recruitment in democratic societies including Nigeria. Arising from this, the Nigerian nationalist leaders who criticised the Nigerian Council of Lord Lugard as a merely ‘European Club’, due to its domination by European officers and its Eurocentric spirit, demanded for the representation of the people in colonial government through electoral means (Afolabi, 2015; Alao, 2008: 11 and Udoma, 1995: 115). This agitation, which culminated into the drafting of the Clifford Constitution of 1922, introduced the elective principle. Therefore, the first election in the political history of Nigeria took place in 1923 when four Nigerians were elected

to the central legislative council, three from Lagos and one from Calabar (Afolabi and Quadri, 2015). Since then, several elections have taken place in the country, years of military interventions and dictatorship notwithstanding. For instance, from independence in 1960 up to 2011, the country had had about ten national elections to elect leaders at various levels of government.

Nigeria's first post-independence election took place in 1964. This was followed by the 1965 Western Regional Election that was marred with allegations of high levels of irregularities that degenerated to unprecedented arson. There was a total breakdown of law and order due to the bitter rivalry between supporters of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's party, the Action Group (AG) and those of the breakaway, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), led by Chief Samuel Akintola. The violent confrontations between the groups spelt the death knell of the First Republic when young officers of the Nigerian Army, led by Major Kaduna Chukwuma Nzeogwu violently toppled the Federal Government on 15 January, 1966 (Ademoyega, 1981, Afolabi, 2011).

In 1979, in its determination to restore democratic rule in the country, Murtala Obasanjo's military regime undertook a transition programme that led to the conduct of elections in 1979 by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). Interestingly, the same military that subverted democracy in 1966, restored it in 1979. The 1979 elections were followed by that of 1983. However, the Second Republic was soon swept again by the military when Major-General Muhammadu Buhari overthrew Shagari's government on 31 December, 1983, on account of flawed elections. After the collapse of the Second Republic, the election did not hold in the country again until in the early 1990s. This was when President Ibrahim Babangida's regime conducted elections. First, into Local Government Areas, States, and National Assembly and later, the famous 12 June, 1993, Presidential Elections, which was eventually annulled by the military. The annulment of June 12 election disarticulated the efforts made towards nation-building and complicated efforts towards electoral democracy. Elections eventually took place in February 1997 under General Sani Abacha's government into Local Government Areas and State legislatures before his sudden death in June 1997. In his bid to restore democratic civilian rule, General Abdulsalami Abubakar conducted elections that ushered in the present Fourth Republic, in 1999. Subsequent elections took place in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 respectively. The underlying drive behind the elections is the urgent need to build a strong and virile nation. As can be seen from above, the role of elections in nurturing and as well as truncating democratic rule and undermining nation-building is evident in Nigeria's political history.

Despite its huge human population, abundant oil resources and other mineral deposits that would have to make its unity and sense of nationhood strong, Nigeria's corporate existence is constantly under threat of imminent disintegration and collapse.

This is exemplified by ongoing activities of Nnamdi Kanu's IPOB, and the Movement of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Indigenous Movement (BIM) with threats of Biafra secessionism, including the counter threat on Igbo residents in Northern Nigeria through a quit notice issued by Arewa Youth Congress (AYC). This no doubt, led to the militarisation of the country by the government under different military operational codenames like *Operation Python Dance I and II (Egwu Eke I and II)* in Southeast, *Operation Crocodile Smile I and II* in the Niger Delta and parts of Southwest, *Operation Lafia Dole* in Northeast, *Operation Scorpion Stings* in Northwest, *Operation Whirl Stroke* in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and Zamfara states.

It should be noted that this heightened insecurity is as a result of entrenched corrupt practices and audacious impunity in the country's electoral processes, management, and administration. Writing on this, Kaiser's (2005) apt submission is instructive here. To him,

The case of Nigeria provides useful insights into the challenges that face countries throughout the 'developing world.' While the sprawling West African country is best known in the popular press for its large oil reserves, the corrupt use of high-level positions to gain personal wealth (often referred to as a (sic) prebendalism) and political instability. Nigeria's experiences are far more complex than these depictions portray.

In agreement with the above, and analysing the challenges confronting nation-building in Nigeria's democratic set-up, Mimiko (2006: 1-21 cited in Mimiko, 2010: 47-48) contended that:

Nigeria is basically 'a social formation that is defined by its failures'.... It is a personification for an abundance of resources, including enormous human capacity that is largely paralysed by mis-governance and perfunctory commitment to the corporate good by a (sic) increasingly rapacious and insensitive (ruling) elite. It has thus, to all intents and purposes become a standing embarrassment to all decent people.... The country has undergone at least six political democratisation programmes since decolonisation in 1960, yet it remains at best a 'demacradura' (limited democracy) and has experimented with variants of economic reforms since 1977 yet remains incapable of tackling poverty.... She has written, at least, six constitutions and experimented with five since 1960, yet constitutionalism remains a mirage. **With several democratisation, programmes came quite a number of elections and many a time, attempts to foster national unity, yet she remains divided along with primordial inclinations** (emphasis ours).

Judging from the foregoing, Adebola (2006: 279) noted that in spite of Nigeria's oil riches, its myriad of problems inhibit development drive and even threaten its continued existence as a sovereign state. Except for a change of mind and attitude about elections presently seen within the context of parochial and selfish ends, Nigeria's drive to national unity can be an exercise in futility as fragmentation is potent among the citizenry with destabilising capabilities. Be that as it may, elections must not only be seen as litmus tests for entrenching democracy but must also be seen and appreciated as an exercise towards nation-building and reconciliation.

For instance, writing on India's distinction as the largest democracy in the world, yet a democracy not properly functioning, Singh (2013) attributed this to the conduct of elections in the country. Ordinarily, rather than being seen as mere periodic political rituals, elections and democracy are supposed to play a complementary role. This is because manipulated elections install fragile democracy with a legitimacy crisis that can cause disaffection between the leadership and a large segment of the society. To this end, Singh (2013:1) argues that,

Elections are the most important and integral part of politics in a democratic system of governance. While politics is the art and practice of dealing with political power, the election is a process of legitimisation of such power. Democracy can indeed function only upon this faith that elections are free and fair and not rigged and manipulated, that they are effective instruments of ascertaining popular will both in reality and in form and are not mere rituals calculated to generate illusion of difference to mass opinion, it cannot survive without free and fair elections.

The reason for the expected intimacy between elections and democracy is not far-fetched. According to Jinadu (1997), elections are central to competitive politics. They are central because, ideally, they provide an opportunity for yesterday's winners to become today's losers and for yesterday's losers to become today's winners.

Similarly, Luqman (2009) acknowledged the fact that elections remain an integral part of the attempt at democratisation and nation-building. Yet, failed elections, or those marred with malpractices have been responsible for making Nigeria's democracy what Heywood described in 2002 as 'the game in town' (Obiyan and Awofeso, n.d.: 330). To Obiyan and Awofeso, Nigeria's democracy cannot be said to be consolidated after many years of uninterrupted democratic experience since 1999. On this premise, they opined that 'Nigeria is still within the ambit of countries with new democracies'. In his opinion, Luqman (2009) argued that 'an election is at the heart of democracy and democratisation processes and this has become widely acknowledged. An election performs indispensable roles and thereby remains central to the whole essence of the democratic process.' However, he further stressed that, experience has shown that the democratic process in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, has witnessed a general collapse in the past due to fraudulent and mismanagement of the elections.

But it should be noted that the conduct of elections and the electoral process are fraught with problems across the globe. However, these problems are particularly more endemic in developing democracies, including Nigeria. However, states with similar democratic experience as Nigeria are not only learning to minimise electoral malfeasance but are also using electoral democracy to build a united, prosperous, stable and peaceful society. Examples of such countries in Africa include South Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Mauritius, and post-1994 genocide Rwanda, among others.

Nation-Building and Underlying Exposition: The Nigerian Experience

As explained earlier, the concept of nation-building is synonymously used with the term ‘national integration,’ although some scholars have attempted to view them as different from each other. This has compelled Stephanie Neumann to describe such a dichotomy as an academic jargon (Neumann, 1976: 277). Nevertheless, the importance attached to attempts, both individual and collective, aimed at uniting the people of Nigeria; their views, attitudes, value systems and behaviours towards building a United State. This is meant to serve as a recipe for engendering peace, unity and common solidarity. Furthermore, this is done to foster a spirit of love, tolerance, patriotic and nationalistic zeal aimed at encouraging the development of the country where all citizens will be free from poverty, want, fear, intimidation, and even death. Thus, nation-building is significant as a multi-faceted approach to putting the country on the path of political stability, liberty, sustainable growth and development with respect to fundamental human rights. This is where the role of elections becomes important as a bridge-building mechanism.

For Claude Ake, national integration is seen by the extent an individual develops in the course of political interaction as well as by the behaviour legitimised by these norms (Ake, 1967: 3). Deutsch *et al.*, (1966: 2) viewed it as ‘the attainment within a territory of a sense of community and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to issue for a long time dependable expectation of peaceful change among its populations.’ Coleman and Roseberg Jr. (1964) observe that national integration involves two broad subsuming processes/dimensions – political and territorial integration. To them, while political integration involves ‘progressive bridging of the elite-mass gap on the vertical plane, territorial integration refers to the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions in the process of creating a homogenous territorial political community.’ This is in consonance with the views of Peter Eisinger and that of Lewis Ogunjenite. According to Eisinger, national integration deals with a situation where diverse groups in a political system have been successful in developing common institutions and norms by which to settle conflicts peacefully, or pursue collective goals cooperatively, depends on the situations (Eisinger, 1976: 53). Similarly, Ogunjenite (1987) opined that national integration within the context of the Nigerian State implies the building of a nation-state out of disparate socio-economic, religious, ethnic and geographical elements. He further

argued that this encompasses the translation of diffuse and unorganised sentiments of nationalism into the spirit of citizenship through the creation of state institutions that can translate into policy and programmes in line with the aspirations of the citizenry. Invariably, Ogunjinite (1987) was of the view that national integration underscores conscious efforts to weld together a plural society to stimulate development without necessarily compromising ethnic identity. To him, nation-building is in agreement with the aphorism of ‘unity in diversity.’

Therefore, national integration involves conscious efforts among members of a particular group or society towards imbibing norms, values and sentiments that bind together individuals and groups within a society. A conscious and deliberate programme of action and government policy have a role to play in national integration. A critical role played by members of such a society to see themselves as one is also important. For us, national integration is a precursor to nation-building, as efforts towards national integration will be meaningless if not geared to nation-building. Also, national integration and nation-building are both single and multi-ethnic societies. For example, Somalia has shown that being a single ethnic *cum*, religion is no antidote to problems of national integration and nation-building. Furthermore, we contend that national integration and nation-building, singly and jointly, can and should take place at two levels namely; societal and governmental. While the governmental approach will be in the form of public policy and orientation, the societal approach will be in the form of political socialisation and propagation of values, norms, and symbols conducive to national integration.

In a plural society like Nigeria, with differences in culture, tradition, language and value systems, the task of nation-building, though difficult, is necessary to ensure peace, unity, and stability. The ties to ethnic identity rather than national loyalty are strong. In this regard, Ojo (2009) argued that Nigeria must contend with the challenge of national integration considering its numerous and diverse ethnic groups. For instance, out of about 1000 ethnic groups in Africa, 445 of them, including over 510 languages, are found in Nigeria alone. This makes the country one of the most ethnically diverse countries on the continent and perhaps, globally (see Kirk-Green, 1969; Suberu, 1998; Mabogunje, 1998; Ojo, 2002; Oxford Business Group, 2012). But as reported by Eghosa Osaghae (cited in Ojo, 2009: 4), the fact that a country is diverse does not necessarily make it divided, troublesome or difficult to manage. To him, a heterogeneous nation-state like Nigeria is divided and difficult to integrate due to power configuration, unequal access to power and mismanagement of state resources. Also, the extent to which political elites mobilise and politicise these differences are part of the reasons for the failure to achieve nation-building in Nigeria. Moreover, given the allure of office and the personification of state power, elections, which serve as a platform for getting into governmental offices, have become a destabilising tool.

It is instructive that Nigeria, which owes its existence to the imperialistic

activities of Britain, was birthed with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914. With independence from colonialism in 1960, its artificial origins and problems of nationhood emerged. This implies that despite its heterogeneity in terms of ethnic nationalities, the people are supposed to coalesce into a cohesive socio-political whole. This was in the belief that various ethnic nationalities lumped together by the colonialists, would give up loyalty to primordial identities and form a nation-state (Olukoju, 1997: 12–13).

Obviously, no doubt, what the artificial creation of Nigeria did, according to Hansen (1987: 57–58), was to bring together people of different nationalities ‘under a single territorial and institutional framework and widened their social space as a result of greater inter-ethnic interaction through the institution and practice of the colonial system and thus created a common historical experience of economic exploitation, political and administrative oppression and cultural oppression.’ Adebola (2006), however, put it more succinctly that, ‘the peoples making up the country were not effectively integrated toward the end of evolving a true sense of national identity and commitment to the survival and development of the nation.’ Hence, it can be adduced that rather than creating the required national unity through the conduct of credible elections where leaders that preach national integration and reconciliation will emerge, elections in Nigeria have tended to further polarise the already seemingly disintegrated people along ethnic and religious lines. Political parties, most often, are ethnic in nature and attempts at forming national parties have not resolved critical, long-standing animosity and tribal rivalry for power. This, to all intents, attenuate the already fragile unity and stability the country has been grappling with.

To further highlight the precariousness of Nigeria’s effort towards enduring nation-building, positions of the country’s founding fathers and other writers are worth quoting here. According to Awolowo (1947: 47–48), in his oft-quoted epitaph of the country, ‘Nigeria is not a nation, it is a geographical expression, there are no ‘Nigerians’ in the same sense as there are ‘English’ or ‘Welsh’ or ‘French.’ The word ‘Nigeria’ is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.’

To Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the defunct Northern region, Nigeria was simply a ‘mistake’ while Tafawa Balewa, former Prime Minister described the amalgamation of the two protectorates of North and South as the ‘British intention for the country’ (Ojo, 2009: 36).

Even the British colonial authorities viewed Nigeria’s creation as an ‘accidental discharge’ of British policy. According to Sir Arthur Richard, one of the former Governor-Generals of colonial Nigeria,

The country is only the accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country or one nation socially or even economically. Socially and politically, there are deep differences between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the

same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different states of culture (Ojo, 2009: 37).

The existing division among the people in the country is more clearly articulated by Odion-Akhaine (2002: 20) when he argued that:

Nigerians have no common vision of a nation-state called Nigeria, no sense of citizenship. The name and the football team are about the only things that unite them. Even the footballers, however, brilliant individual players though they are, do not work as a team! It is the same in the country. The country still totters on as a toddler often pulled down by a joint identity and integration crisis.

Babawale (1991: 30) also noted, while writing on nation-building, that ‘many Nigerians deceive themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one; this is wrong. I am sorry to say that this presence of unity is artificial.’ The preceding statement has clearly captured the extent of Nigeria’s fragility and vulnerability to disintegration. Perhaps, no one captures the mood of helplessness of the country’s failure to achieve comprehensive and enduring nation-building effort than Weiner. According to Weiner (cited in Ogunjenite, 1987), the main challenge facing most developing nations like Nigeria is how to achieve national integration which he considered to be more pressing than economic development. This view is shared by many scholars who attributed socio-economic, political, legal and cultural well-being and development as well as peace and stability to national integration efforts. For instance, Ojo (2009:154) argued that national integration is more of a mirage in plural and divided societies than in homogenous ones because those in the former consider themselves as ‘biologically, culturally, linguistically and socially distinct from each other and most often see their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms’ (Cox, 1970).

Although Nigeria cannot be said to have a strategic platform or framework for achieving national integration and common solidarity for its numerous groups, it is our contention that elite corruption, fraudulent elections, and manipulation of ethnicity have impeded efforts towards nation-building. For instance, without prejudice to the salient motivation behind it, Decree No. 34 issued by the military regime of the late General Aguiyi-Ironsi in 1966 was meant to address the problem of division and tribal loyalty. The timing of the decree, the general disposition of the government and prevailing circumstances at the time made it appear not well thought out. General Gowon’s post-civil war establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) through Decree No. 24 of May 22, 1973, was primarily an attempt at nation-building and was designed to imbue in Nigerian youths the spirit of patriotism. The scheme makes it compulsory for all Nigerian graduates of youthful age below 30 years to serve in another community (or state) other than his/hers (except where it becomes necessary for such youths to serve in his or her state of origin due to certain conditions).

Furthermore, the establishment of unity schools owned by the federal government across the federation is another strategy aimed at uniting Nigerians. This vision according to Ojo (2009), was deliberately designed to ‘catch them young.’ In addition, the movement of the nation’s seat of power from Lagos to a more central location in Abuja was targeted at uniting the Nigerian people. Even though there is no national language in the country, predilections of many to design ‘Wazobia’ as lingua franca for the country is an attempt to unite the country (Ojo, 2009: 86). Some of these efforts are in recognition of the need for nation-building by the government as crucial in enacting policies towards national integration and nation-building.

Also, at another level, recent societal trends are showing that there is a link between elections and nation-building. For instance, when asked if ‘it is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for and if it is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for’ during the last 2015 General Elections, many respondents in the *Afrobarometer* were unanimous in their response to the need to obey, no matter who won. This is necessary to bridge the gap arising from polarising elections. In another instance, the reactions of respondents in *Afrobarometer* indicated a strong willingness to obey any government in power in the country whether the government had their support during the election or not (Afrobarometer, 2015).

Conclusion and Way Forward

Having looked at the issues and problems involved in elections and nation-building, it is our contention that, rather than allowing elections to produce leaders with a national pedigree that can encourage unity, peace, stability, and development, elections in Nigeria have been used to widen disaffections and breed intolerance among the incongruent ethnic groups. To this extent, Nigeria’s unity has been what Furnival (1948) described as people who mix but do not combine. According to Furnival (1948), Nigerians are ‘in the strictest sense a medley of peoples, for they mix but do not combine.’ Yet, this does not have to be so. However, the news coming from *Afrobarometer* is cheering. This is because elections could serve as a platform for nation-building if well handled. This would enable dividends of democracy to accrue to Nigerians. To achieve nation-building through elections, the paper makes the following recommendations.

Firstly, political elites and politicians alike, must, as a matter of importance, allow national rather than parochial interests to influence their actions and inactions. There must be an attitudinal change towards elections and the electoral process. This means that instead of seeing elections as a zero-sum game, the choice of the electorate must be respected as expressed through ballots. This would hasten the process towards nation-building. In furtherance of this, followers and citizenry must support and participate in nation-building. It is a collective responsibility. The unity and stability of the country must be placed above personal ethnic, regional and group interests. To achieve this, a system of sanctions and rewards should be instituted to streamline human proclivity to self-interest.

Secondly, the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other election management bodies (EMBs) must live above board acting up to their constitutional mandate and responsibilities. The EMB must be fair to all parties and candidates contesting elections without fear or favour. Rather than being biased, it must provide a level playing ground for all and sundry. It behooves on EMB (INEC) to ensure credible elections on the basis of ‘one man, one vote,’ consolidating on the success achieved during the 2015 General Elections. As the country moves forward in its political history, the electoral agency must learn from the mistakes and fall-outs of its concluded governorship elections in 2016 where there were cases of vote buying. Constitutional, institutional and financial independence must be granted to Nigeria’s EMB, to achieve the above-listed objectives. Likewise, internally, the electoral body must purge itself of bad eggs that are undermining the noble intentions of the body. Those found culpable should be prosecuted.

Thirdly, all relevant integrative government agencies and frameworks such as the NYSC must be strengthened to achieve their mandates.

Fourthly, Nigerians must realise that in spite of cultural, linguistic, religious and tribal differences, tolerance, love and respect for one another, would help the country. Therefore, there must be a collective push for nation-building through ‘unity in diversity.’ Instead of seeing negatives in the differences, people should develop a positive attitude that discards suspicion and mistrust. This calls for attitudinal change.

Finally, on the part of the government, for genuine effort towards enduring nation-building to yield desired results, including emergency measures must be declared on issues that divide the country. Such include unemployment, insecurity, and poverty. Introducing measures that include giving incentives to youths, farming, encouragement of entrepreneurial studies/skills and building of strong national security institutions are steps in the right direction. The dire situations discussed in this paper, in terms of lack of national integration, is common in most African countries and must be unacceptable to governments. Critical efforts must be stepped up to resolved electoral debacles and problems of nation-building in Nigeria and many states in Africa.

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