

## **Ethnic Mobilization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: The 2015 Presidential Election and the Anti-Nation Syndrome (Ans)**

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**Abstract:** *Ethnic mobilization in contemporary Nigerian politics is throwing up a trend in which Presidential candidacies are taken as pacification of aggrieved and agitating ethnic political blocs and zones or regions. Instead of encouraging well-heeled, enlightened and capable patriots from diverse parts of the country to seek presidential office, members of the political class through their political parties, especially, the dominant parties reserved their presidential tickets for candidates from preferred (or particularly favoured) political zones and ethnic blocs as part of the strategies for winning presidential elections. The citizens on the other hand, vote for presidential candidates of their ethnic or regional stock. The study interrogated the centrality of the role of ethnic mobilization in the election of Nigeria's presidents since 1999 when Nigeria returned from military rule to the so-called democratic rule. What are the consequences of what seemingly looks like parochial and anti-nation building political behaviour both on the part of the electorate and the vote-seeking politicians? The study interrogated the degree to which ethnic and religious interests and forces were implicated in the emergence of presidential candidates since 1999 to 2015.*

**Keywords:** *Nigeria, Fourth Republic, Ethnic Mobilization, Religion and Presidential Elections.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria with well over three hundred ethnic groups is a melting pot of inter-group relations. The diversities manifest in all fronts: culture, religion, economy, history, social practices and of course, politics. While diversities are not peculiar to Nigeria, what however, may have come up stunningly in the Nigerian equation is the inability of the political class to turn Nigeria's diversities to strength and leverage such strength for progressive national development. The diversities in Nigeria oil the differences amongst the ethnic groups and identities to tipping points in such ways that critical observers of Nigerian politics wonder how Nigeria manages to survive as a corporate entity even after the civil war which lasted between 1967 and 1970. This is so because it seems the lessons from the events that precipitated the civil war have not been learnt half a century after that devastating human carnage. Nigeria perpetually sits on the edge of a precipice, always like a dynamite waiting to detonate.

Critical among the numerous ills confronting Nigeria since its birth as a country is the question of group identity and ethnic division. Ethnic division has since metamorphosed into deep-seating ethnic consciousness among the varied ethnic groups and citizens. Nigerians have become acutely conscious of their ethnic identities and very willing to employ any strategy, whether lawful or unlawful to defend and protect the totality of the interests of their ethnic groups. Rivalries between ethnic groups which began from the onset of interactions of the cultural identities which form modern Nigeria is said to predate the intervention of Europe in the socio-political development of Africa over six centuries ago. While the British inherited the ethnic diversities which constitute modern Nigeria, it is not far from the truth that Britain's effort to build a corporate Nigerian entity for their economic benefit and exploitation facilitated the enthronement of the politicization of ethnic interactions among the various ethnic groups who lived in the territories which Britain coupled together to create the modern Nigeria. From the beginning, the diverse groups forcefully put together to create the modern Nigerian state found themselves in a competitive race for advantage and supremacy over one another.

The beginning of competitive struggle for material advantage by varied groups set the stage for ethnic politics. As some scholars have suggested, little wonder that ethnic consciousness begets the authoritative allocation of values as those in authoritative political offices positioned themselves and their ethnic groups for higher goals and advantages: Clifford Geertz articulates the primacy of primordial sentiments in ethnic politics thus:

*The network of primordial alliances and opposition is a dense, intricate, but yet precisely articulated one, the product, in most cases, of centuries of gradual crystallization. The unfamiliar civil state, born yesterday from the merger remains of an exhausted colonial regime, is superimposed from this fine spun and living conserved texture of pride and suspicion, and must somehow contrive to weave into the fabric of modern politics.(Geertz 1963, 43).*

Primordial sentiments, it has been noted by scholars, are by definition as well as by observation manifest and politically salient in Nigerian society.(Akpekpe, 1996:69). The logic of ethnic mobilization in politics, especially, in new states like Nigeria, is rationalized thus;

*It is reasonable for ethnicity to dominate political conflict in societies in which ethnic communities are politically organized. The communities have permanent and separate historical developments, separate social institutions, customs and practices, and separate language. When several of those communities are agglomerated into a single political entity, it is only natural that the local politician used his community as base of operations (Akpekpe 1996, 69-70).*

The expectation of an emergent state crystallizing from the web of multiple ethnic identities is the ambition to build a virile, united and stable state from the looming diversities. The founding fathers of the Nigerian state had the vision to build a united, stable and socially just Nigerian nation where no man is oppressed. Contemporary rulers of Nigeria often lay claim to building a Nigeria, though, culturally, religiously and socially diversified into a united, strong and stable federal state. Even successive Nigerian constitutions of 1960 to the 1999 constitution currently in use since the Fourth Republic commenced emphasized the mission to build a united Nigeria where **Social Justice** shall reign. Chapter two of the 1999 constitution listed the fundamental objectives and directive principles policy and outlined the scheme and methodology of how Nigeria can work towards enthroning social justice and equity. Yet, Nigeria, as in the beginning in 1960, in the early days of state-nationhood remained divisive, unstable, fragile, and probably failing as a state.

While there are multiple factors responsible for the crises of governance, leadership, followership and development in contemporary Nigeria, this study is specifically focused on the mobilization of ethnic, geopolitical, regional and religious sentiments by politicians in Nigeria to prosecute presidential elections. Such appeals to ethnic forces are actually not new to Nigerian politics. The politics of the First Republic, 1960 – 1966 was marred by ethnicization of the democratization process. As a matter of fact, the recurring divisive north – south geopolitical scheme in Nigeria's national leadership elections, which started at independence in 1960 has leapfrogged into what observers and critics view as dangerous trends in the political development of Nigeria. The leapfrogging of this divisive scheme in the Fourth Republic, 1999 to date reaps through national politics as dangerous trends which centrifugal forces and separatists from various ethnic groups are holding onto to threaten the security and cooperate existence of Nigeria. Yet, ethnic group identities predate the birth of Nigeria as a cooperate state.

Since the 1940's, ethnic politics and the conscious mobilization of ethnicity for political advantage (ethnic mobilization) has increasingly transformed to an alarming level. As a scholar observed, the ethnic virus has been one of most important causes of social crisis and political instability in Nigeria. (Otiye 1990, 51) Ethnic consciousness and mobilization are however, more pronounced and exploited by the political class in the jostle for power and the control of political offices. The jostle for power is often characterized by hostilities, particularly at the federal level (national level – the presidency) and needless to say that acquisition of political office is tantamount to access to state resources.

Before independence in 1960, nationalist movements were seen to be focused and had a common enemy which was colonialism. No sooner had the political class achieved the aim of ending colonialism that it retooled nationalism with parochial focus on the capture of state power for economic benefits. Politicians from different ethnic stocks, especially, those from the dominant tripod structure of the composite nationalities, –i.e Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo strategized to corner state resources to themselves and their ethnic blocs. The struggle for political power was bloody, bitter and barbaric. It gave impetus to the spread of ethnic groups' consciousness, rivalry and ethnic politics. Individual political leaders of varied ethnic groups took advantage of

other ethnic nationalities which were not fortunate to have their sons and daughters in top political offices. As ethnic consciousness gained ascendance overtime, politicians with selfish ambitions and bad motives gradually emerged and insisted on fanning the embers of ethnicity with the aim of gaining cheap popularity and capturing political power for self-aggrandizement and the socio-economic empowerment of close members of their ethnic stock. Politics of ideological principles was consciously ignored by politicians and their supporters. Today, ethnic politics is loudest when leadership recruitment is on at all levels of public office – both in the bureaucracy and the political structure. However, ethnic mobilization and consciousness are more pronounced at the presidential level.

Ethnic mobilization for electoral purposes may have unwittingly imposed poor leadership fate, particularly, at the presidential level on the country. Ethnic mobilizations during presidential elections hardly allow capable hands to vie for the presidency. And the country is the worst for it. What is more, the ethnicization of the democratic process and the entire political process is getting worse in the Fourth Republic. The unconstitutional, but mischievously designed scheme of the ruling class promotes what in local parlance in Nigeria is known as “turn-by-turn” presidency. This “Turn-by-Turn” Political arrangement is also the case at the states and local government levels. Late professor Omo-Omoruyi<sup>1</sup>, a Nigerian political scientist who was the Director General of the defunct Centre for Democratic studies (CDS) once described this method of political recruitment as a “bobby- trap”. This appears to be the case now as political parties nominate presidential candidates on the basis of the ethnic origin and religious backgrounds of candidates. The “Turn-by-Turn” arrangement may be preventing the political recruitment net across the nooks and crannies of the country for resourceful leaders to emerge. Moreso, it is resulting in deeper conflicts among the contending disparate ethnic nationalities. With leading ethnic champions and their political sons and daughters who they throw up for political offices coming unprepared for the task of leadership, and of course, such incompetent political recruits at all levels, with few exceptions, pursuing self-interest, Nigeria is worse for it.

Also, since the mid-1990s, ethnic nationalities through their socio-cultural and political groups in the various states and zones of the country have struggled against marginalization, deprivation and gross underdevelopment. This has resulted in militant advocacies for more attention from the federal government (the centre). Such groups include the Yoruba social-cultural group known as Odua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and the Indigenous People of Biafra (MASSOB) / (IPOB) and the recent group in the north, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), defending and protecting their cows in such ways and manners that result in mass killing of farmers and other rural people. Various ethnic groups now view the capture of state power as a means to self-actualization. Ethno-religious politics in its current manifestation in Nigeria is taking a dangerous dimension and impacting presidential elections in ways and forms that threaten national security and unity.

## **II. Review of Relevant Literature and Theoretical Frameworks**

The issue of ethnicity – the functional and dysfunctional role of ethnic consciousness in the political development of Nigeria since the colonial times to contemporary times has been exhaustively discussed in a plethora of literature. The phenomenon of urbanization enamoured by fast emerging urban centres such as Port Harcourt, Enugu, Calabar, Benin City, Lagos, Ibadan, Jos, Kano, Kaduna and Maiduguri acted as frontiers of opportunities, magnetizing armies of rural people of different linguistic descent, religious and socio-cultural diversities. Ethnically heterogeneous, the emergent cities presented a perfect area of ethnic harmonization on the one hand and distinct ethnic consciousness on the other hand (Onwuka 2004, 72-73). Earlier researchers and commentators on the ethnic question in Nigeria have made the point that modern ethnic politics in Nigeria originated from interactions amongst ethnic groups in the emerging urban centers. James Coleman and Okwudiba Nnoli respectively pointed to the influential roles of migration and urbanization in the ethnic consciousness that pervade modern Nigeria. According to Coleman;

*When migrants increased and socio-economic competition with the host became more distinct, relations were strained, and in relation, both migrants and hosts organized themselves along communal lines in order to safeguard their interests in the struggle for scarce and unequally distributed resources. In the 1920s as a result, kinship and communal unions sprang up in the main urban centers of Nigeria. They were known by various names such as the Owerri Divisional Union, Calabar Improvement League, Igbirra Progress Union, and Urhobo Renascent Convention. Others include the Egba*

*Society, which was formed in Lagos in 1918, to promote the interests of Egbaland, the Yoruba Language society, formed in 1942 (Coleman 1971, 345-346)*

Other ethnic groups were not left out as they also formed parallel associations. Nnoli described the phenomenon thus:

*The various groups were too poorly educated to compete against the colonial administration for socio-economic resources, they turned their competitive energies against each other, the resultant struggle produced frustration, and the unsuccessful ethnic group found it easy and convenient to blame the successful ethnic groups for their plight. The result was that the various ethnic groups used their positions to secure jobs for their members or at least the news about job opportunities for them. This state of affairs resulted in unequal levels of unemployment and income, as well as social status among the various ethnic groups. Attempts by the various ethnic groups to escape the negative effects of this situation led to the further strengthening of communal associations, marking the beginning of ethnicity and ethnicization of socio-political life in the emerging country called Nigeria. (Nnoli 1978, 6)*

The trajectory of ethnic politics and ethnic mobilization in Nigeria is well articulated in the thesis above. Nigerian Political history clearly records the organization of politics and the struggle for power by the leading politicians from the competing ethnic groups around the immodest struggle and rivalry for values and material resources. Therefore, each ethnic nationality and its political leaders or those who claim to lead and speak for the nationalities became more concerned with the material resources and values which they can corner for their ethnic groups and for themselves. In this wild chase after material benefits by the competing ethnic groups national politics became fully ethnicized and so it seems to be in the last 60 years of Nigerian independence. As Nnoli correctly postulated, "the result was that the various ethnic groups used their positions to secure jobs for their members or at least the news about job opportunities to them". (Nnoli 1978, 9)

From this humble beginning of "fellow-feelings" of ethnic groups and associations for their kits and kins, came forth the ethnicization of socio-political life in the emerging Nigeria. Ever since, politics became organized around ethnic sentiments and ethnic domination. Critical to this pattern of politics of ethnic struggles for political power, economic power and social and cultural supremacy over others was the foundation of primitive accumulation of state funds by leading ethnic politicians, who saw their privileged positions as means of enriching themselves, family members, "loyal" supporters and friends to the detriment of the majority of Nigerians.

Scholars have indeed theorized on the phenomenon of ethnic politics and mobilization in Nigerian politics from various perspectives, resulting on massive extant literature on the national question. Ogugua (2004) examined the politicization of ethnicity and identity politics. He argued that politicization of politics is on-going in Nigeria. In his view, ethnicity is behavioural in form and conflictive in content; while ethnocentrism is attitudinal in form, and perceptual in content. Ethnicity is characterized by common consciousness of being one, in relation to other ethnic groups relevant within a polity, which accounts for inter-ethnic competition for resources which are scarce, marginalization, alienation, misery, or struggle, etc. (Ogugua 2004, 82). He ignored the unfolding reality in the Nigerian political arena where ethnic mobilization is becoming a veritable tool for leadership recruitment, indeed, presidential recruitment in successive elections in the Fourth Republic.

Smith (1992;120) noted that ethnicity, ethnic identity, or ethnic consciousness is the independent variable that leads to political assertiveness and separatism, regardless of the existence of inequality or dominance, thereby finding expression in the emergence of militant ethnic organizations like Odua People's Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, etc.

(Uwakwa 2004, 63) traced the evolution of nationalism and categorized it into macro-nationalism, micro-nationalism and sub-nationalism. He identified the role that leading actors played in the evolution of nationalism and the deterioration into ethnic rivalry, for which he blamed the collapse of the Nigerian Youth Movement.

(Ereke and Ogedengbe 2016, 102) argued that there was no ethnic mobilization and ethnic consciousness in the politics of Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), even till when the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) emerged from the nucleus of the NNDP. They also contended that the membership spread of both the NNDP

and the NYM was national in character with no ethnic colouration. Fwatshak described the national spread of the NYM thus:

*The NYM therefore became a precursor of a truly national political party with branches in Ibadan.,Ijebu-Ode, Warri, Benin, Aba, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Jos, Kaduna, Zaria, and Kano. Members of this movement were Nnamdi Azitiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ernest Ikoli, K.A. Abayomi, and Samuel Akinsanya among others. Thus, politics at this time was nationalist struggle for political independence from colonialism (Fawatshak 2009, 96).*

However, the non-ethnic character of Nigerian politics at the beginning changed as succession intrigues torn the NYM apart. Henceforth, party politics in Nigeria over the years took ethnic dimension and colouration. The formation of NCNC (1944), AG (1951) and NPC (1953) heralded the new wave of ethnic mobilization in Nigerian politics. Minority ethnic groups too were absorbed into the politics of the time – the highway of ethnicity and ethnic mobilization. The minorities in the Middle Belt founded the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) headed by J. S. Tarka. The Efik/Ibibio group formed the United National Independence Party (UNIP) which was in response to the Igbo dominated politics in the Eastern region which led to the expulsion of Eyo Ita from the NCNC with agony. Ever since then, political parties have continued to toe ethnic lines ( Ereke and Ogedengbe 2016, 118).

To bring the section to a close, it is important to reflect on two works. First the work of S.O. Akpeke:

*In the case of politicization of ethnic communities, chaos is the typical state of affairs, with the momentarily advantaged elite, often the military, taking steps to receive that advantage indefinitely. The logic inherent in the process of democratic competition is compelling. Democracy, at least, as it is known in the West, cannot be sustained under conditions of intense, salient preferences because outcomes are valued more than procedural norms. Constrained by the preference of its citizens, the Nigerian society does not provide fertile democratic values or stability. (Akpeke 1996, 76)*

The political situation in Nigeria today vindicates the claims above. Ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization are ready tools which advantaged groups are using to dominate and cream off values and material benefits to the disadvantage of less privileged groups. The political class also lashed on ethnic sentiments as mobilizational tool to secure powers, and retain such powers, even in the face of incompetence. And so, ethnic consciousness works greatly to the benefit of the advantaged elite and ethnic group(s) in pluralist Nigeria. The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria – Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo give Nigeria the tripod stand of its politics. Are there accruing material benefits for citizens of the tripod? The political class from the tripod, especially the Hausa-Fulani political bloc and the Yoruba political bloc are the inheritor-elites who decide the fate of Nigeria.

Second is the work of Okwudiba Nnoli who rejected the modernization perspective that describe ethnicity as an absolute identity, ignoring the class dimension in their analyses which gives a more profound and better understanding of ethnicity. With the Marxist Political Economy framework, he assessed ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization in Nigeria, and exposed the underbelly of the phenomena thus: “communal associations proliferated and urban dwellers increasingly flocked to them, interaction and inter-individual socio-economic competition began to be translated into competition among communal unions” (Nnoli 1978, 140). The interactions and inter-individual socio-economic competitions which translated into competition among communal unions have been monumentally transformed today in Nigerian politics in such ways that emerging elites of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, posing as the “saviour of their ethnic groups” found the Nigerian state a huge “honey-pot”. Thus, the “honey pot” became the veritable attraction of elite in politics, who helped themselves to some huge scales of the national wealth. Nigerian politics is about “how much you can loot from the state”, and members of your ethnic stock will welcome you home as a hero or heroine.

The state is thus at the mercy of ethnic champions who loot the Nigerian treasury for their capital build-up and pretend to be defending their ethnic stocks. And so, the electorate fall cheaply for the crumbs that fall from their ethnic champions’ tables and take up daggers, knives and guns to defend their ethnic leaders after voting for them in elections or helping them to rig elections to enable them gain access to the national treasury. In Nigeria, Ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization facilitate the pockets of wars and ethnic cleansings that are currently going on. The outcomes are the chaos and crises in Nigeria today. The ethnicization of official



corruption and the insistence by some politicians that this misfortune of a promising country should continue ad infinitum form part of the national question. It is also critical for the governance problematic in Nigeria today.

### **III. Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria, since independence in 1960 has witnessed a number of military interventions, which account for the Four Republics. Although the Third Republic was aborted by former military president Ibrahim Babangida, some scholars argue that it should still count as a Republic since elections were held. Since the commencement of the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999, it appears ethnic politics is becoming a critical variable in political leadership recruitment – especially in the selection of presidential candidates. Instead of encouraging capable and experienced persons from different parts of the federation to seek presidential office, the political class through the agency of political parties, often reserved presidential tickets for geo-political zones, ethnic stocks and religious affiliations as the decisive stratagem for winning presidential elections. The citizens also vote in their millions for presidential candidates of their ethnic stock. Ethnicity and religion have become critical variables in political recruitment and political mobilization in Nigeria's democratic process. This unwritten rules of zoning presidential office and other offices in the polity to pre-judge politicians of preferred ethnic extractions and geopolitical spreads is problematic for the democratization process in Nigeria. It makes supposedly national political leaders ethnicists and champions of ethnic nationalities rather than as national leaders who should have popular acceptance across the country and tower above primordial ethnic sentiments. Most importantly, is the narrowing and constriction of the political space to the detriment of the country's development. What is more, it may have contributed immensely to the divisive character of the Nigerian state, its malleable institutions and ethnic bigotry of the citizenry. It may also have spiraled the cut-throat struggle for political power by leading ethnic jingoists with the aim to capture the centre of gravity in Abuja. There by taking political brinkmanship to avoidable heights, threatening to balkanize the budding nation – state. But just how deep can the asymmetric nature of the ethnic rivalries for political power, especially, at the centre threaten the nation's stability leaves scholars and watchers alike greatly disturbed. The study attempts to answer the following research questions: (i) were ethnic interests implicated in the emergence of presidential candidates in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015?: (ii) to what extent did ethnicity and ethnic mobilization influence the outcome of the 2015 presidential election?: and finally, (iii) can ethnic mobilization of votes and other political values bring about national development and foregrounds equity, social justice, peace and unity in the polity?

### **IV. Research Propositions**

The following research propositions were formulated:

- i. ethnic interests were implicated in the processes that led to the emergence of presidential candidates in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015:
- ii. the 2015 presidential election witnessed the heightening of ethnic mobilization in presidential elections since 1999.
- iii. ethnic mobilization and ethnic sentiments in the election of presidential candidates are central to the threats to national security in Nigeria today, and finally;
- iv. ethnic mobilization and ethnic consciousness in the choice of Nigeria's presidents since 1999 constrict the political space and throw up incompetent and inexperienced politicians as presidents to the detriment of national development and progress

### **V. Research Design and Methodology**

The study adopted the trend research design. This design enables investigations to be carried out based on careful observation of available data to identify certain patterns and draw conclusion. It facilitates the prediction of outcomes. In the study, we examined the trend and preceding political activities that herald the selection of presidential candidates by the dominant political parties since 1999 to 2015. We isolate the dominant issues and factors which influenced the choice of the flag bearers of political parties. Also, influential and topical issues which influenced the voting pattern of the electorate in the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections were examined.

### **VI. Data Presentation, Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

Relevant data collected in the course of the study were analyzed in line with the research questions that the study set out to answer. Four case studies, two from the north, one each from the south-west and south-south were examined. The case studies are the build-up to the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo (Southwest), Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (South-South), Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (North-West), Muhammadu Buhari (North-West). In line with the research questions raised, the analyses determine whether the hypotheses are accepted or rejected.

## **6.1 Build up to the 1999 – 2007 Obasanjo Presidency**

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo is of the Yoruba ethnic extraction, from Ogun State in South-Western Nigeria. The Yoruba occupy the Western region of Nigeria, and it constitutes several distinct sub-groups like the Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ijebu, Ketu and Ondo (Law 1973, 207). The introduction of regionalism in the 1940s made the Yoruba see themselves as owning the region, thereby merging ethnic and regional identities as one (Falola 2006). The Yoruba felt that their progress in education and social advancement would pave the way for them to lead Nigeria. (Ukeje and Adebaniwe 2008). However, efforts by two Yoruba elite, – Obafemi Awolowo and M.K.O. Abiola at winning the presidential elections in the First, Second and Third republics failed. The Yoruba blamed the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani elite for frustrating the ambitions of their sons, (Ibrahim 1999 2003, 60-72). The Yoruba are quick to accuse the Igbo and northern elites of the conspiracy to deny them access to power after the 1959 general elections, which kept the Yoruba out of power, and eventually, capitalized on a split in the Action Group to destroy the party, and to imprison Obafemi Awolowo and his supporters in 1963.

Analysis of the build-up to the Olusegun Obasanjo presidency will be incomplete without mentioning the annulment by Ibrahim Babangida, a northern military ruler, of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which M.K.O. Abiola, a Yoruba man, was the presumed winner. This greatly provoked the Yoruba elite, (Abegunrin 2006). To appease the Yoruba, Ibrahim Babangida, the ruling, self-styled military president appointed Chief Ernest Shonekan, a respected Yoruba businessman as the Head of an Interim National Government (ING) when he exited from office as military ruler on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, 1993 due to great national protests against the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. This was opposed by many Yoruba elite, and Nigerians from other parts of the country who insisted on the upholding of the June 12, 1993 presidential election results.

But on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 1993, another military General of northern ethnic stock, Sani Abacha toppled the Shonekan Government. Sani Abacha appointed prominent Yoruba elites into his military government to pacify the Yoruba. But this could not halt the opposition. Abacha then adopted repressive tactics – assassinations, imprisonments, and harassments of Yoruba elites and Nigerians from other ethnic groups in the country who opposed his military dictatorship.

In order to create a united front and defend the Yoruba interest, a group, led by former governor of the old Ondo state, Adekunle Ajasin formed the Egbe Afenifere, a socio-cultural cum political movement, made up of mainly politicians of Yoruba ethnic extraction. Also, another political movement, with a national outlook as politicians from other parts of the country were members – the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) was also formed. Other Human Rights Organizations and pro-democracy groups were formed by Nigerian civil rights activists to pressurized the military governments of Ibrahim Babangida (1985 – 1993), Ernest Shonekan of ING (27<sup>th</sup> August 1993 to 17<sup>th</sup> November 1993), Sani Abacha (November 17 1993 to June 8, 1998) and Abdulsalam Abubakar (June 8, 1998 to 29 May, 1999) to de-annual the June 12, 1993 presidential elections result and swear in the presumed winner, M.K.O Abiola. But, all calls for such de-annulment was ignored by the successive military governments.

The Odua People's Congress (OPC) was also formed by a former presidential aspirant, of Yoruba ethnic origin, Fredrick Fasehun in 1994. Shortly after the formation of the OPC, a leadership tussle factionalized the group. The argument was over the best strategy for pursuing collective Yoruba agenda; that is “whether the group should participate in the 1998 – 1999 transition to civil rule programme”, when June 12, 1993 presidential elections remained inconclusive and the presumed winner, M.K.O Abiola died in custody in unexplainable circumstances. (Ukefe and Adebaniwe, 2008). Gani Adams led a splinter group, named “The Militant OPC” and adopted violent strategy and spearheaded violent clashes with other ethnic groups in major Yoruba towns and cities. The degree of violence that resulted from the activities of OPC strained inter-groups relations in Nigeria a great deal in unprecedented ways during the period.

During the military dictatorship of Sani Abacha (1993 – 1998), Olusegun Obasanjo, retired army general and former military ruler (1976 – 1999) criticized the human rights abuses of the Sani Abacha dictatorship. Himself and his deputy when he was military ruler, late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua were imprisoned by the Abacha regime for alleged involvement in an aborted coup based on testimonies obtained through tortures of some alleged coupists. Obasanjo was released only after Sani Abacha's sudden death on 8 June, 1998. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua died in jail.

In 1998 Abdulsalami Abubakar, a Military General and Sani Abacha's successor announced a new transition to civil rule programme. Abubakar released all political detainees and opened up the democratic space by lifting

the ban on political activities. The Nigerian ruling class – made up of retired military generals, business men and women, top politicians, prominent professionals and traditional rulers from across the ethnic nationalities decided to draft Olusegun Obasanjo, who was released from prison to contest the 1999 presidential election. This decision of the Nigerian political establishment led “unofficially” by Ibrahim Babangida<sup>1</sup>, the military dictator who annulled the free and fair June 12, 1993 presidential election was to further pacify the Yoruba ethnic nationality.

Obasanjo ran for the presidency as the candidate of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). He won the election with 62.6% of the total votes cast, sweeping the strongly Christian South-South Zone, South-East zone and the predominantly Muslim North. But decisively lost his home zone, the south west to his fellow Yoruba and Christian contender of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All People’s Party (APP) coalition, OluFalae.

Thus, in the 1999 presidential election, the Nigerian political establishment and the military Junta of Abdulsalami Abubakar contrived a political situation that made it possible for only two prominent Yoruba sons – *Obasanjo and Falae as the only contestants for the presidential election. This was to further pacify the Yoruba ethnic stock for the injustice done by Ibrahim Babangida and his conspirators against the Yoruba son, M.K.O Abiola who won the June 12, 1993 presidential election. This was the beginning of the use of the presidential office as a pacificatory trophy to ethnic nationalities who are perceived to have been unjustly treated in the country.* Democracy was being guided. But the Yoruba refused to fall for this “political settlement” of the military establishment led by officers of the Northern extraction in the first place. Obasanjo won all the same. Democracy and race to the presidential office was seen as a “pacificatory trophy”. *Ethnicization and turn-by-turn presidential tickets was institutionalized.* Obasanjo was re-elected in the 2003 presidential election that witnessed violent ethnic and religious overtones after defeating his major opponent, a fellow retired military general and former military ruler (Dec 1983 – August 1985), MuhammaduBuhari. Being a Muslim and a popular son of the Fulani ethnic stock, Buhari drew his support base from the north. Obasanjo won 61.8% of the total votes. He defeated Buhari by a difference of more than 11 million votes.

## **6.2 The Build-up to the 2007 – 2010 Umaru Musa Yar’adua Presidency**

According to (Madunagu1994, 32), “the northern region is dominated by the aristocracies and ruling elite of Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri and Nupe ethnic groups – the ruling elite which the British met and conquered in the areas which later became Northern protectorate”. The region draw its strength, resilience and cohesion especially from a common religion – Islam and a lingua franca; Hausa (Paden 1997, 65). During the First Republic, the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), a party considered as an instrument of Hausa-Fulani Oligarchy won both federal and regional elections. Since then, northern elite dominated most regimes, both civilian and military until 1999 when Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba was elected president. The election of Obasanjo, many Nigerians believed, was a concession by the North to the South West Yoruba pressure for a change from northern leadership, most especially against the background of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by a Yoruba, M.K.O Abiola. Ibrahim Babangida, a military ruler from the northern political establishment (bloc) annulled the election. Having given its support to Obasanjo, the northern elite expected a trade-off but Obasanjo adopted a hardline posture. On several occasions, Obasanjo initiated policies that irritated the northern elites. Minabere observed thus:

*A case in point was the decision soon after his (Obasanjo) inauguration in May 1999 to retire hundreds of senior officers in an attempt to rid the military of personnel who had become accustomed to perquisites of political power. The northern elite believed they were disproportionately affected because of the preponderance of northerners in top military positions who were forcibly retired (Minabere2000, 121).*

However, Obasanjo had explained that his decision was a strategic policy option to prevent military coups in the Fourth Republic. Politically exposed military officers who have become very rich and influential in and outside the country may be tempted to violently intervene in the politics of Nigeria when democracy experiences a hilt. The decision was applauded by civil society activists and many other Nigerians who crave for political stability and enduring democratic values and institutions. The northern elite also felt shortchanged in other areas, particularly in the distribution of political positions in Obasanjo’s cabinet.

In March 2000, Emirs, former Heads of State and other prominent northerners founded the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) which gave the northern elite a united voice in Nigerian politics. The ACF positioned itself at the



forefront of the engagement between the northern elite on one hand and the government and elite from other parts of Nigeria on the other hand. In many occasions the ACF expressed the northern resentment of Obasanjo's policy. It is believed by many that the introduction of sharia by several northern states is also an expression of the resentment against the Obasanjo administration. A pro-sharia pamphlet distributed there by a group that identified itself as "concerned muslims" after the Kaduna riots contained a litany of complaints against Obasanjo.

The fact that many prominent northerners took public positions against the Federal Government's suspension of sharia suggests the political dimension of the crisis. By virtue of the long occupation of the presidential seat (both in military and democratic regimes) the northern elite developed an affinity for state power, and thus perceived it as their birth right. To the northern elite, the Obasanjo presidency was a "loan" to the south to pacify and assuage anxieties that have built-up over the years, including the June 12, 1993 electoral debacle. The ceding of power to the south west had to be accommodated and endured when it lasted. This was evident in the eight years administration of Obasanjo (1999 – 2007) with the provocative promulgation of Sharia Laws, religious riots and threats of impeachment – all of which created tension in the body polity of the nation. In the end, all of these created a situation in which the return of power to the north was in the interest of peace for all.

### **6.3 Build-up to the 2010 – 2015 Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Presidency**

Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Nigeria's president between May 2010 and May 2015 is from the Niger Delta region otherwise known as the south-south zone. The Niger Delta region consists of the six states of the south-south zone, namely: Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers states. The people of the Niger Delta are extremely heterogeneous ethnically and culturally.

In spite of their ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, they share common historical experiences which frame their collective identity. The development of the region was shaped by mobilization and resistance against British colonialists, and threat of internal colonialism by Igbo and Yoruba ethnic stocks (especially by the elite of these major ethnic groups) as well as the post-colonial Nigerian state. During the colonial era, the Niger Delta ethnic groups were split between the Eastern and Western regions, and brought under Igbo and Yoruba domination in the regions. Saro-Wiwa, a writer succinctly puts it thus:

*The "servant-master" relationship that existed between the Niger-Deltans and the British during the colonial era was carried over to the post-colonial period, but this time, the masters were Igbo and Yoruba elite. As a result, the initial resistance to British domination was also transformed to resistance against Igbo and Yoruba domination in the region. (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 52)*

The fear of Igbo and Yoruba domination led to political co-operation between the people of the Niger Delta and their northern counterparts. One can indeed without fear of contradiction infer that the creation of the Mid-West region in 1963 through a referendum and subsequently, other states in the Niger Delta considerably freed the area from Igbo and Yoruba domination. Subsequently, people of the Niger Delta have redirected their struggles to the issues of oil and development.

The recent struggle by the people of the Niger-Delta is shaped by the rise of oil economy in Nigeria, and an oil consciousness directed at getting more benefits from the product. The growing realization of the value of oil in the global market as well as the deplorable socio-economic situation in the Niger Delta have forced the people of the area to emphasize their economic strength vis-à-vis the political dominance by the three dominant groups. (Ibrahim 2003, 74)

Under this circumstance, some political activists of the Niger Delta extraction have adopted militant nationalism involving "sabotage, seizure and lockouts" vandalizing of oil wells, pipelines, and other installations; hostage – taking and kidnapping of workers of multinational corporations and direct confrontation with agents of state – soldiers, police and other security agencies" (Osaghae 2001, 33). The approach threatened oil production in the country and Nigeria's revenue generation capacity. Attempts by the Nigerian state to use military power to repress the struggles have triggered a backlash, leading to further escalation of violence.

The already volatile situation was aggravated by the Supreme Court judgment which settled the on-shore-of-shore dichotomy in favour of the Federal Government. The crisis has since taken some ethnic colouration. The oil-producing states in the south-south want a political solution to the crisis but the states in the north wants the

status quo to remain. The choice of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan by president Olusegun Obasanjo to run as vice presidential candidate in 2007 was not unconnected with the attempts of the Nigerian political establishment (the ruling elite from the various ethnic groups) to pacify an already agitated Niger Delta region. Decades of marginalization of oil communities by foreign oil corporations working with successive governments sparked unrest leading to militant activities, the series of struggles and attacks by militant groups led to the emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Kidnappings of oil workers, bombing and vandalization of oil pipelines and installations in 2007 all worked together in propping up Goodluck Jonathan as vice-presidential candidate to the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

Although, not without some protests and wranglings from the ruling elite, particularly from those of the northern political establishment, it was the same sentiment of the marginalization of the Niger Delta People that afforded Jonathan substantive presidential office when President Yar'Adua died on May 5, 2010 after a protracted illness. PDP insiders regarded Jonathan as a politician without a strong and powerful political base, coming from the minorities of the minorities.

It is perceived that Nigeria's many groups of power brookers agreed to let Jonathan become acting president only because he was not seen as a threat to their interests, even when the 1999 constitution guaranteed him automatic ascension to the office of president in the event of the inability of the president to function. In fact, there was serious opposition to conferring this constitutional right to then vice President Jonathan. The northern elite wanted an extra-constitutional measure that would ensure that another north-westermer emerged as replacement to the late President Yar'Adua. This mindset informed the reluctance and opposition to ratifying the vice-president as acting president as stipulated in the constitution. Eventually, thoughts of "political contraption" gave way to constitutionalism, and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan assumed the role of Acting President, and following the death of President Yar'Adua in 2010, he became substantive president.

#### **6.4 Build-up to the 2015 Muhammadu Buhari Presidency**

As the 2015 general elections approached, northern elite in both the PDP and the other political parties insisted that it was the north's turn to produce the president of Nigeria that year. In the build-up to the elections, Ibrahim Coomassie, the chairman of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in a good will message delivered on his behalf by Barrister Solomon Dalung, urged northerners not to allow themselves to be divided by the artificial differences created by politicians. Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC)<sup>2</sup>, a party formed from a merger of several parties such as Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), a faction of People's Democratic Party (PDP) was making his fourth attempt at the presidency. He contested the presidential elections in 2003, 2007, 2011 before the 2015 election which he won.

When Jonathan won the 2011 election, there were riots in the north. Deadly election-related and communal violence erupted following the April 2011 presidential election, which according to Human Rights Watch, left more than 800 people dead. The violence began with widespread protests by supporters of Muhammadu Buhari, the main opposition candidate from the north. The protest degenerated into violent riots and sectarian killings in the northern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara (Human Rights Watch 2011) The perception in the North was that Buhari won the election against the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan from the Southern minority. The core northern states voted for Buhari against Jonathan. (See figure 1: 2011 Presidential election results as released by INEC)

	PDP	CPC	ACN	ANPP
ABIA	1,175,984	3,743	4,392	1,455
ADAMAWA	508,314	344,526	32,786	2,706
AKWA-IBOM	1,165,629	5,348	54,148	2,000
ANAMBRA	1,145,169	4,223	3,537	975
BAUCHI	258,404	1,315,209	16,674	8,777
BAYELSA	504,811	691	370	136
BENUE	694,776	109,680	223,007	8,592
BORNO	207,075	909,763	7,533	37,279
CROSS RIVER	709,382	4,002	5,839	2,521
DELTA	1,378,851	8,960	13,110	2,746

EBONYI	480,592	1,025	1,112	14,296
EDO	542,173	17,795	54,242	2,174
EKITI	185,009	2,689	116,981	1,482
ENUGU	802,144	3,753	1,755	1,111
FCT	253,444	131,576	2,327	3,170
GOMBE	290,376	495,898	3,420	136
IMO	1,381,357	7,591	14,821	2,520
JIGAWA	491,252	663,994	17,353	7,676
KADUNA	1,190,179	1,334,244	11,278	17,301
KANO	440,666	1,624,543	42,353	526,310
KATSINA	428,392	1,163,919	10,945	6,342
KEBBI	369,198	501,453	26,171	3,298
KOGI	399,816	132,201	6,516	16,491
KWARA	268,243	83,603	52,432	1,672
LAGOS	1,281,688	189,983	427,203	8,941
NASARAWA	408,997	278,390	1,204	1,047
NIGER	321,429	652,574	13,344	7,138
OGUN	309,177	17,654	199,555	2,969
ONDO	387,376	11,890	74,253	6,741
OSUN	188,409	6,997	299,711	3,617
OYO	484,758	92,396	252,240	7,156
PLATEAU	1,029,865	356,551	10,181	5,235
RIVERS	1,817,762	13,182	16,382	1,449
SOKOTO	309,057	540,769	20,144	5,063
TARABA	451,354	257,986	17,791	1,203
YOBE	117,128	337,537	6,069	143,179
ZAMFARA	238,180	624,515	17,970	46,554
TOTAL	22,616,416	12,250,853	2,079,151	911,455

*Figure 1: 2011 presidential election results. Source: INEC 2011.*

After three previous attempts at the presidency in 2003, 2007, 2011, Muhammadu Buhari finally moved into Aso Rock, Nigeria's presidential palace as the president of Nigeria on May 29, 2015. Buhari contested on the platform of the APC, and polled a total of 15,416,221 votes (INEC 2015) to defeat the incumbent and candidate of the PDP, Goodluck Jonathan, who got 12,853,162 votes (INEC 2015). Buhari won the highest number of votes in 21 states while Jonathan prevailed in 15 states and Abuja. Buhari also met the constitutional requirements to be declared president-elect by getting more than one quarter of the votes in 27 states. Buhari won in Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara – all northern states and the southern states of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo. Jonathan won in Rivers, Imo, Enugu, Ekiti, Edo, Delta, Ebonyi, Cross River, Bayelsa, Anambra, Akwa-Ibom, Abia – all southern states. The northern states where he won are Plateau, Taraba and Nasarawa states. He also won in the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). (See figure 2: 2015 presidential election results as released by INEC). Buhari's victory makes it the second time since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy when a military officer and former military Head of state would become Nigeria's president.

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State	APC	PDP	APA	ACPN	CPP	AD	ADC	PPN	NCP	AA	UPP	KOWA	UDP	HOPE
Abia	13,394	368,303	2,766	2,194	1,046	448	569	424	745	315	330	173	213	125
Adamawa	374,701	251,664	1,549	1,166	819	595	1,012	1,163	1,212	495	334	752	289	267
Akwabom	58,411	953,304	384	443	412	474	608	327	381	1,600	144	160	224	192
Anambra	17,926	660,762	2,303	1,259	1,279	475	534	537	887	547	1,121	311	286	357
Bauchi	931,598	86,085	964	232	391	173	189	128	207	131	37	128	29	46
Bayelsa	5,194	361,209	70	38	44	69	116	62	95	45	35	52	20	18
Benue	373,961	303,737	945	1,464	567	254	539	439	683	315	74	105	66	115
Borno	473,543	25,640	878	243	310	392	201	143	107	145	41	158	31	88
Cross River	28,368	414,863	532	514	381	709	749	864	930	279	1,487	312	289	237
Delta	48,910	1,211,405	478	916	813	735	888	393	670	1,473	261	311	354	166
Ebonyi	19,518	323,653	2,452	1,214	2,345	1,133	2,704	1,168	1,890	426	4,859	913	624	989
Edo	208,469	286,869	709	1,284	325	450	512	729	516	159	72	175	160	22
Ekiti	120,331	176,466	482	538	330	854	424	388	377	94	145	108	60	94
Enugu	14,157	553,003	715	479	237	269	478	407	761	441	290	203	1,623	110
Gombe	361,245	96,873	773	192	407	169	247	157	227	104	37	97	25	46
Imo	133,253	559,185	2,236	956	733	757	1,617	414	784	533	1,917	158	264	157
Jigawa	885,988	142,904	2,527	540	1,553	587	375	853	548	394	197	423	338	337
Kaduna	1,127,760	484,085	1,611	424	824	273	546	549	754	218	78	176	79	105
Kano	1,903,999	215,779	2,770	778	1,552	708	657	485	697	426	156	288	234	292
Katsina	1,345,441	98,937	1,671	402	976	283	498	254	330	183	72	215	117	47
Kebbi	567,883	100,972	2,685	361	1,794	450	472	547	519	214	238	448	207	213
Kogi	264,851	149,987	1,001	1,089	967	427	761	476	399	700	156	190	180	144
Kwara	302,146	132,602	1,165	817	910	520	438	325	394	248	102	214	81	118
Nassarawa	236,838	273,460	310	95	131	74	105	164	222	40	33	48	23	4
Niger	657,678	149,222	2,006	441	1,264	403	614	449	550	307	118	305	116	198
Ogun	308,290	207,950	1,930	3,072	978	1,927	1,364	4,339	815	584	597	432	562	332
Ondo	299,889	251,368	1,139	2,406	1,012	1,237	1,227	734	846	386	221	223	184	184
Osun	383,603	249,929	1,306	1,731	1,029	1,667	937	599	767	377	159	255	124	132
Oyo	528,620	303,376	4,468	8,979	6,674	6,282	5,000	2,842	1,895	6,331	3,665	1,312	1,069	839
Plateau	429,140	549,615	618	391	237	279	406	554	693	178	29	138	54	56
Rivers	69,238	1,487,075	513	525	577	1,104	1,031	492	565	1,066	156	2,274	303	542
Sokoto	671,926	152,199	3,482	535	1,894	714	762	605	686	249	180	475	269	283
Taraba	261,326	310,800	1,306	811	1,033	586	320	680	876	962	439	153	224	161
Yobe	446,265	25,526	632	164	329	213	112	101	120	101	32	104	30	67
Zamfara	612,202	144,833	1,310	238	655	290	294	374	404	125	68	122	93	14
FCT	146,399	157,195	674	342	347	240	288	269	473	139	96	165	95	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,424,921</b>	<b>12,853,162</b>	<b>53,537</b>	<b>40,311</b>	<b>36,300</b>	<b>30,673</b>	<b>29,666</b>	<b>24,475</b>	<b>24,455</b>	<b>22,125</b>	<b>18,220</b>	<b>13,076</b>	<b>9,208</b>	<b>7,435</b>

**Figure 2: 2015 Presidential election results. Source: INEC 2015**



## **VII. Discussion of Findings: Research Questions Answered: And Verification of Research Propositions**

If the approach to politics as the determination of who benefits from the control and exercise of political power is taken into consideration in the Nigerian political context, it becomes clear from observing the trend in the manipulation of ethnic and regional cum religious sentiments by the country's leading political elite (the political class) that ethnic politics and the mobilization of ethnic sentiments are widespread due largely to the consciousness and perception of the state in Nigeria as an instrument or means for improved material gains, standard of living and the development of one's ethnic group at the expense of other groups. While the colonial origin of modern ethnic politics in Nigeria is not disputed, its current manifestations in the politics of the Fourth Republic (1999 to date) are reaching the heights of political brinkmanship, and consequently threatening national survival. The inability of the political leadership, particularly, at the national (and specifically presidential) level to deliberately address the concerns and demands of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria is politically incorrect, and largely responsible for the instability and crisis that define Nigeria today. What is dominant is that the political class use the state to pursue regional and other parochial interests. This manifest in the concentration of governmental attention in terms of infrastructures and other resources in the regions of the ethnic group in power. Choice political appointments are also given to politicians who come from the ethnic group of the president. These are recurring decimals in Nigeria's presidential politics.

Agitations, violence and various dimensions of brinkmanship are employed by virtually all politicians from virtually all ethnic groups, especially the majority ethnic groups that make up Nigeria in their bid to capture presidential power at the centre, and use the accruing power for their ethnic groups' advantage. While the ethnic group incumbent in office try to retain power by all means, the ethnic groups outside power equally employed subterfuge, brinkmanship and even violence where necessary to capture political power. After Muhammadu Buhari was defeated by Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 presidential election, and in the wake of the violence that followed, Muhammadu Buhari in 2012 was quoted to have threatened that if 2015 presidential election is rigged by the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan government, Nigeria will be soaked in blood. According to a newspaper report of the threat:

*Buhari spoke in Hausa while addressing members of the CPC (Congress for Progressive Change) (his party) from Niger State who paid him a courtesy visit in Kaduna. He also warned that 2015 would be bloody if the elections were not transparent... Buhari who painted a gory picture of Nigeria as that of a hound and a monkey engaged in a battle for survival said: "God willing, by 2015 something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election, or if 2011 (alleged rigging) should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood" (Vanguard Newspaper 2012, 1-2).*

Similarly, Yoruba ethnic nationality activists and Niger Delta militant activists and their political leaders used threat perceptions in 1993, 1999, 2010 and 2011 respectively to secure presidential powers for their scions. Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan won the 1999 and 2011 presidential elections. Ethnic interests were indeed implicated in the emergence of presidential candidates in Nigeria from 1999 to 2015. This is so because the various ethnic groups and their leaders see the state as a means to an end. For the political class, the state is the only viable business in town.

As to the degree to which ethnic mobilization influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential election, the point should be made that it was to a considerable degree. First, the countdown to the 2015 presidential election generated hate speeches, innuendoes and threat of violence from both the ethnic blocs of incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan and the opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari. While President Jonathan's kinsmen in the nucleus of the many militant organizations in the Niger Delta threatened that if Jonathan is defeated there will be no Nigeria anymore, Buhari's ethnic umbrella body of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) urged northern politicians not to allow themselves to be divided by artificial differences created by politicians. Buhari himself had warned that "if what happened in 2011 (alleged rigging) happens again in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood". What is more, the final outcome of the 2015 presidential election revealed the northerners heed the call of the ACF and voted massively for their son, Muhammadu Buhari. He won the elections overwhelmingly in all the states in the North except in Plateau, Taraba and

Nassarawa states (– all Middle Belt States). Yet, he got the constitutionally required number of states from these three states. And his party the APC is in power in these states except Taraba State where PDP is in power. Similarly, Goodluck Jonathan won all the states in the south-south (his geopolitical zone) and the south-east which are predominantly Christians and with southern fellow-feelings.

The question of whether ethnic mobilization of votes and other political values can engender national development and foreground equity, social justice, peace and unity in Nigeria is problematic. This is so because of current political developments in Nigeria. Since the 2015 presidential election and the eventual swearing-in of Muhammadu Buhari as Nigeria's fourth elected president in the Fourth Republic, the country has become more divisive than ever. The evidences abound. The Boko Haram insurgency has continued, with Christians in the north as targets of violent killings and attacks in spite of the federal government's intense effort at fighting the insurgents. And as if the Boko Haram insurgency is not bad enough, there is renewed incessant farmers-herdsmen clashes in different parts of the country, especially in the Christian parts of the Middle Belt region – plateau and Benue states. Hundreds of farmers have been killed by the herders and their houses burnt down. Similarly, herders have been killed by some farmers. The herders are Muslim Fulani cattle rearers while the farmers are majorly Christians and some Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds in the Middle Belt. The federal government is finding it difficult to address the murderous behaviour of the Fulani herdsmen. What is more, there are other anti-social behaviours all over the country such as kidnapping of innocent citizens by criminal groups, inter-communal clashes, corruption of public officials and several others. Politicians have continued to beat divisive drums of north-south divide, and it is becoming very difficult to attain national consensus on issues. Ethnic mobilization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is denying the country great potentials and putting the citizens at great risk of ethnic small wars and even religious wars. The Federal Government must work towards national unity rather than encouraging or allowing politicians and some religious leaders to continue to beat drums of ethnic and religious divisions.

Finally, evidences abound from the study that the ethnic mobilization and ethnic sentiments that characterized the 2015 presidential elections threaten national security. Members of the political class in the six geopolitical zones embarked on the mobilization of ethnic sentiments and subtle emotional appeals to their ethnic groups as potent strategy for winning elections. While this is going on at the national level, it is equally going on at the state and local government levels. That is why there is so much religious, social, cultural intolerance among the peoples at the grassroots. Some politicians mobilize their ethnic groups militarily and equipped them.

Separatist groups like the Arewa Youth Movement in the north, the Odudua Peoples Congress (OPC) and the Yoruba nation movement in the South West, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) / Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers (NDV) and several small militant groups in the south are catching in on the ethnicization of politics in Nigeria to leverage their separatist activities, which sometimes are bloody and disrupting social cohesion in the country.

### **VIII. Summary and Conclusion**

The study sets out to examine ethnic mobilization in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: The 2015 presidential election in perspective. The findings reveal the following:

- ethno-regional and religious interests were implicated in the processes that led to the emergence of presidential candidates in Nigeria since the Fourth Republic commenced in 1999;
- the presidential office in Nigeria is used by the political class as an instrument for pacifying aggrieved and agitating ethnic regional groups;
- ethno-regional and religious groups view militant and violent agitations, riots, and even insurgency as viable means to capture state power and corner state resources for their use;
- contemporary ethnic politics in Nigeria stems from the grievances and agitations of the different ethno-regional and religious groups due to the failure of state actors and political leadership, particularly at the presidential level to operate above primordial ethnic sentiments, and provide good and accountable leadership for all Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds;
- in Nigeria, national integration is often frustrated by centrifugal forces and the dominant political economy which emphasizes distribution and consumption of material resources rather than productive economic endeavours;
- ethnicity and religion have become potent factors in the recruitment of political leadership in Nigeria and political mobilization in the so-called democratic process;
- poverty and economic underdevelopment are at the centre of ethno-regional cum religious consciousness and youth restiveness, and finally;

- Nigeria is sitting on a time-bomb of ethno-regional and religious conflicts due to the manipulations of these variables by presidential power-seekers, which if not addressed, may explode anytime.

### **IX. Recommendations**

Based on the findings, we make the following recommendations;

- a. In the context in which everybody is for himself or herself, and each ethnic group pursuing its own agenda, there is *anti-nation syndrome* (ANS) which may eventually destroy Nigeria. And the idea of Nigeria is gradually fading as people emphasize their ethnic identity as against Nigerian (national) identity. However, the point should be made that all may not be lost yet if the process that produced presidential candidates are changed to reflect merit, capability and popular choice of the people;
- b. The problem of ethnic politics and ethnic mobilization in Nigeria can be addressed by first, fashioning out methods of attaining poverty reduction and creating economic opportunities for the teeming population. Poverty and lack of economic opportunities are at the centre of ethno-regional and religious consciousness among the citizens, especially among the teeming youths;
- c. There should be more credible commitments of the political class to a system of merit as against ethno-regional and religious considerations. Governments at all levels should commit to this by deliberately working to change the orientation of citizens that it is only when one of their own ethnic man or woman is in office as president or governor or local government chair that they can obtain material benefits from the state;
- d. There should be greater efforts on the part of the government at creating equal opportunities for virtually all citizens irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds so that they can begin to develop a sense of belonging to Nigeria rather than to ethnic groups. Chapter Two, Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of state policy of the 1999 constitution should be justiciable. Nigerians should be able to compel governments by legal instruments at the three levels – Federal, state and local government councils to implement projects and programmes that can transform their lives economically;
- e. Finally, and perhaps, more critical, is the self-evident truth that the Nigerian federalism and practice of power-sharing between the centre and the federating units is not realistic. It is lopsided, there are so much powers at the centre (federal government) to the detriment of the federating units (the states). Conscious efforts should be made by the political class and the present President Muhammadu Buhari administration to devolve more powers to the states, especially revenue and security powers. Thus, the country should allow fiscal federalism rather than the present near-fiscal unitarism.

### **Notes**

1. Prof. Omo-omuruyi made this point in a private discussion with the lead author in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria on March 20, 1994.
2. Retired General Ibrahim Babangida was alleged to have persuaded the leading politicians in the country to support retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military head of state (1976-1979) to work for the election of General Obasanjo in the presidential election of 1999.
3. APC- All Progressive Congress (the ruling party in Nigeria since May 29, 2015 to date); CPC – Congress for progressive change (President Buhari's Party); APGA – All Progressive Grand Alliance (the party in Igbo land, South –East zone founded by the Late Chief Emeka Ojukwu, the leader of the defunct Republic of Biafra); PDP – Peoples Democratic Party (the former ruling party in Nigeria, 1999-2015).
4. INEC - Independent National Electoral Commission, the body that conducts national elections in Nigeria.

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