

ETHNICITY, NEPOTISM AND NATIONAL SECURITY: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's multifaceted problems responsible for its underdevelopment have been ascribed to numerous issues among which are: ethnicity and nepotism and their implications on national security. This study therefore explores the historical influence of ethnicity on political and social dynamics in Nigeria and its effects on national security, along with the pervasive impact of nepotism on governance and decision-making. Using qualitative method of data collection, a combination of in-depth interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with a diverse group of twenty participants and two groups of seven (7) participants for the FGD, the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants reveal a balanced gender distribution and a wide age range, ensuring a comprehensive perspective. The study found that the intertwining of ethnicity and nepotism in Nigerian politics has profound implications for national security, contributing to ethno-religious conflicts and resource-based disputes. Moreover, the study reveals the adverse effects of ethnicity, including secessionist movements, cries of marginalization, and rising crime rates, as manifestations of ethnic identities that have led to a prioritization of ethnic group identity over national citizenship. It concluded that addressing the impact of ethnicity and nepotism on national security in Nigeria is critical for fostering stability, unity, and sustainable development. The study recommends promoting meritocracy, enhancing transparency and public oversight, strengthening institutions, raising public awareness, reforming legislation, and encouraging leadership to set a positive example. These measures are essential to mitigate the adverse effects of ethnicity and nepotism and promote a fair and equitable system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Nepotism, National Security, Nigeria, Governance.

Introduction

Nigeria, often colloquially referred to as the "Giant of Africa" due to its vast population, economic potential, and burgeoning market, stands as a nation characterized by an unparalleled degree of diversity. This diversity finds expression in various facets, encompassing ethnic, religious, and cultural distinctions that permeate its societal fabric. Remarkably, Nigeria is home to an extensive mosaic of over 250 distinct ethnic groups, each endowed with its own linguistic, customary, and traditional nuances. While this diversity undoubtedly represents a fount of strength and cultural opulence, it has also, regrettably, been a perennial source of tension, conflict, and security challenges within the nation. As astutely observed in a report co-funded by the European Union and authored by the Friedrich Ebert

Stiftung (2021), the ethnic strife in Nigeria is but one of several security conundrums bedeviling the country, painting a picture of Nigeria as a nation in a state of internal strife.

The intricate interplay of ethnicity, nepotism, and national security in Nigeria has attracted significant scholarly and policy scrutiny. Ethnicity has carved its place deeply into the societal tapestry of Nigeria. The nation is demarcated by three primary ethnic conglomerates: the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the Southwest, and the Igbo in the Southeast, complemented by a plethora of smaller ethnic enclaves. Historically, ethnic identities have constituted an indispensable facet of Nigerian society, imprinting themselves upon individual and collective identities, as well as political affiliations. These ethnic affiliations often extend their influence into the realms of resource allocation, political representation, and access to economic opportunities, thereby breeding competition and the potential for discord (Falola, 1999).

In a similar vein, political leaders and elites have recurrently faced allegations of leveraging their positions to advance the interests of individuals hailing from their ethnic or regional backgrounds, thereby perpetuating a cycle of ethnic favoritism. This practice not only corrodes the edifice of meritocracy but also exacerbates ethnic tensions while eroding trust in governmental institutions. Evidently, the challenges stemming from ethnicity, religious extremism, corruption, identity-based politics, and the practice of prebendalism have collectively birthed pernicious security threats and social instability that afflict Nigeria's nascent democracy. The struggle for political supremacy, control over the reins of power, and the equitable distribution of the nation's resources, among other contentious issues, has consistently heightened insecurity and sown the seeds of divisiveness (Chinedu, 2017).

It is against this intricate backdrop that this study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the issues surrounding ethnicity, nepotism, and national security, along with an analysis of the prospects for addressing these multifaceted challenges in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The issues of ethnicity, nepotism, and national security in Nigeria coalesce to form a multifaceted and interconnected set of challenges that necessitate meticulous scrutiny. Nigeria, renowned for its status as one of the world's most ethnically diverse nations, grapples with the adverse ramifications stemming from ethnic cleavages, favoritism, and their potential repercussions on national security (Okolie, 2015). The nation boasts a staggering array of over 250 ethnic groups, each characterized by its distinctive cultural, linguistic, and historical attributes. While ethnic diversity can be a source of strength, it has concurrently engendered divisions and conflicts within the Nigerian landscape, as attested by Ukiwo and Akinwotu (2017).

The issue of ethnic fragmentation raises pertinent inquiries regarding the Nigerian state's capacity to maintain a cohesive front and instill a sense of national identity—a perennial predicament that permeates Nigerian politics, governance, and public administration (Okonkwo, 2003). This prevailing practice erodes the principles of meritocracy, fosters corruption, and perpetuates the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, thereby

laying the groundwork for potential resentment among marginalized segments of the populace, as documented by Ojo (2015). It is imperative to recognize that the confluence of ethnic tensions and nepotism holds the potential to escalate into grave national security threats. The competition for finite resources, political dominance, and influence may culminate in ethnocentric violence, insurgencies, and secessionist movements, as expounded upon by Mustapha (2009). These security challenges not only imperil the lives and well-being of Nigerian citizens but also act as impediments to economic progress and foreign investments.

Nigeria's institutional apparatus, spanning law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and the civil service, has grappled with pronounced difficulties in effectively addressing issues that revolve around ethnicity and nepotism, as underscored by Ukpanah (2018). Feeble institutional capacities serve to exacerbate these predicaments by permitting individuals and groups to act with impunity. An in-depth comprehension of the historical backdrop and socio-political determinants that have catalyzed the perpetuation of ethnicity and nepotism within Nigeria is indispensable. Historical grievances, vestiges of colonial rule, and the uneven distribution of power and resources have further entrenched these issues, casting a long shadow over Nigeria's socio-political landscape.

The consequential impact of ethnicity and nepotism on economic development cannot be underestimated. These issues act as deterrents to foreign investments, stifle economic growth, and perpetuate the cycle of poverty, all of which bear direct implications for national security, as elucidated by Nwankwo (2014). Consequently, this study endeavors to delve into these pressing predicaments, their contemporary manifestations, and potential remedies to the challenges posed by ethnicity, nepotism, and their far-reaching influence on national security within the context of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were provided to guide the study:

1. How has ethnicity historically influenced political and social dynamics in Nigeria, and what are the contemporary manifestations of ethnic identity in the country?
2. To what extent does nepotism affect governance and decision-making processes in Nigeria, particularly in terms of appointments, resource allocation, and political representation?
3. What are the prospects and policy options for mitigating the adverse effects of ethnicity and nepotism on national security in Nigeria?

Research Objectives:

The general objective of this study is to examine issues of ethnicity, nepotism and national security and prospects in Nigeria, why the specific objectives are to:

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of historical and contemporary literature on ethnicity in Nigeria, including its role in shaping political affiliations, social identities, and conflict dynamics.
2. Analyze the extent and impact of nepotism in Nigerian politics and governance, with a focus on its implications for meritocracy, political stability, and social cohesion.

3. Explore potential policy interventions and prospects for fostering inclusivity, social cohesion, and effective governance in Nigeria, with a view to addressing the negative effects of ethnicity and nepotism on national security.

Literature Review

This section involves the review of relevant literature, work of other scholars and theories and relevant factual issues and principles were held to support the study.

Concept of Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a concept of intricate complexity and multifaceted nature that traverses various dimensions of human identity, culture, and social organization. At its core, ethnicity pertains to a set of shared attributes, including but not limited to language, religion, customs, and historical narratives, which serve to differentiate one group of individuals from another within a broader societal context. This sociocultural construct is not merely a passive characteristic but often assumes an active and integral role in shaping the individuals' sense of self-identity and informs their patterns of social interaction and behavior.

To elucidate the term further, ethnicity can be succinctly delineated as "a social category of people who share a common culture, incorporating traditions, language, religion, and other cultural elements, and who perceive themselves as a distinct group within the broader societal framework" (Henslin, 2018). This definition encapsulates the essence of ethnicity as a dynamic and socially constructed phenomenon, where individuals belonging to a particular ethnic group identify themselves in relation to shared cultural markers and perceive a sense of belonging to a distinct social collective.

The salience of ethnicity in policy and practice, particularly in the context of Nigeria, is manifest in various facets of the nation's governance, socio-political landscape, and intergroup dynamics. Nigeria is a diverse nation characterized by a multitude of ethnic groups, each with its unique cultural attributes and historical narratives. Ethnicity has been a pivotal factor in the country's political landscape, impacting power-sharing arrangements, resource allocation, and political mobilization. Understanding the intricate interplay between ethnicity and policy and practice in Nigeria is paramount for devising equitable and inclusive governance strategies that address the nation's diversity while fostering social cohesion and national unity.

Historical Roots of Ethnicity in Nigeria

Ethnicity has played a pivotal and enduring role in shaping the intricate tapestry of political and social dynamics in Nigeria throughout its history. This influence can be traced back to the pre-colonial era and has persisted as a significant factor in contemporary Nigerian society. This section will explore how ethnicity has historically influenced political and social dynamics in Nigeria, drawing on historical events and scholarly insights.

1. Pre-Colonial Era: Ethnicity's deep historical roots in Nigeria are evident in the multitude of distinct ethnic groups that inhabited various regions of the country. Each of these ethnic groups had its own distinct political structures, cultural practices, and forms of governance,

contributing to the rich diversity of pre-colonial Nigeria. The country was a mosaic of kingdoms, empires, and city-states, each intricately associated with specific ethnic groups. These entities engaged in trade, diplomacy, and conflicts, with ethnicity serving as a fundamental basis for identity and alliances (Nnoli, 1980).

2. Colonial Era: The arrival of European colonial powers in Nigeria in the late 19th century marked a significant turning point in the influence of ethnicity on political dynamics. The colonial administration, employing a divide-and-rule strategy, exploited ethnic divisions to maintain control over the territory. Ethnic identities were reinforced through the utilization of indirect rule, a system that often appointed traditional leaders based on their ethnic affiliations. This colonial legacy left an indelible impact on Nigeria's post-independence political landscape (Falola, 2001; Nnoli, 1978).

3. Post-Independence Politics: Despite gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria continued to grapple with the legacy of ethnic divisions (Osaghae, 1998). Ethnicity became a prominent feature of Nigerian politics, with political parties often organized along ethnic lines (Suberu, 2001). The First Republic (1963-1966) witnessed intense ethnic competition for political power, as various ethnic-based parties vied for control. The census crisis of 1962-1963, marred by allegations of ethnic bias, further exacerbated ethnic tensions.

4. Ethnic-Based Violence: Ethnicity has regrettably served as a catalyst for violence and conflict in Nigeria's history. The Biafra War (1967-1970) stands as a tragic testament to this reality, triggered by ethnic and regional tensions and resulting in a devastating conflict that claimed countless lives (Gowon, 1969). Additionally, ethnic and religious clashes in various regions, such as the Jos Plateau and the Niger Delta, have been exacerbated by historical ethnic grievances (Watts, 2008).

5. Contemporary Politics: In contemporary Nigerian politics, ethnicity continues to wield significant influence, shaping voting patterns, political alliances, and power dynamics (Ukiwo, 2006). Political leaders often draw support from their ethnic bases, and elections can be marked by ethnic mobilization and identity politics (Isike, 2017). This ethnicized politics can, however, undermine the development of a sense of national identity and cohesion. Scholars have extensively studied the influence of ethnicity on Nigerian politics and society. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" elucidates how ethnicity has been harnessed to construct identities and group allegiances in Nigeria (Anderson, 1983). Furthermore, Horowitz's theory of "ethnic conflict" underscores the role of ethnicity in fueling conflicts, especially when political institutions are unable to effectively manage diversity (Horowitz, 1985).

Nepotism

Nepotism is a pervasive social and political phenomenon that reflects the favoritism exhibited by individuals in positions of power or authority toward their family members or close friends. This practice, while not exclusive to any particular context, is often carried out at the expense of principles such as impartiality, fairness, and meritocracy. This academic discussion

explores the concept of nepotism, drawing on definitions and examples, with a specific focus on its manifestation in the realm of politics.

Defining Nepotism: Nepotism can be succinctly defined as "the practice of favoring relatives or close friends, especially by those in power or authority, in matters of employment, promotion, or decision-making, often regardless of their qualifications or abilities" (Merriam-Webster). This definition underscores the core elements of nepotism: the exercise of power or influence by individuals in positions of authority to benefit their personal connections, often bypassing objective criteria like qualifications and abilities.

The Pervasive Nature of Nepotism: A Multifaceted Phenomenon

Nepotism is a phenomenon that transcends geographical boundaries and permeates various sectors of human society. Its pervasive nature is evident across diverse domains, including politics, business, academia, and beyond. This academic discussion delves into the ubiquity of nepotism and its manifestations, with a specific emphasis on its prevalence in the political sphere.

Cross-Sectoral and Cross-Regional Nepotism: Nepotism's reach extends far beyond the confines of specific sectors or geographic regions. It is a multifaceted social and political phenomenon that knows no boundaries, affecting individuals and communities worldwide. Nepotism can be observed in various sectors, including politics, business, and academia (Johnson, 2013; Mok, 2013). This universality underscores its significance and the need for comprehensive understanding and mitigation.

Nepotism in Politics: One of the most salient arenas where nepotism is frequently observed is in the realm of politics. Elected officials, politicians, and leaders in government sometimes exhibit preferential treatment toward their family members when making key appointments or decisions (Olusakin, 2013). This practice manifests in several forms, including the appointment of relatives to influential government positions, advocating for their election to political offices, or facilitating their involvement in lucrative government contracts (Elgie&Moestrup, 2015).

Nepotism in politics, the practice of favoring family members or close associates in positions of power or authority, carries substantial implications for democratic governance, accountability, and transparency. This academic discussion explores the far-reaching consequences of nepotism in politics, emphasizing how it can undermine key democratic principles, including meritocracy, impartiality, and the alignment of decisions with the public interest.

Undermining Meritocracy and Impartiality: Nepotism fundamentally contradicts the principles of meritocracy and impartiality that are critical for the functioning of democratic systems. Meritocracy ensures that individuals are selected for roles and positions based on their qualifications, skills, and competence, rather than their personal relationships. Impartiality, on the other hand, demands that decisions and actions taken by public officials are free from bias or favoritism.

Nepotism disrupts these principles by placing individuals in positions of power not because of their qualifications or capabilities but rather due to their familial or personal connections. As a result, those appointed may lack the necessary expertise or experience for the roles they occupy, which can lead to inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and a decline in the quality of governance (Elgie&Moestrup, 2015).

1. Extent of Nepotism in Nigerian Politics:

Nigeria, like many other nations, grapples with the issue of nepotism in its political landscape. Nepotism, the practice of favoring family members or close associates in political appointments and decision-making, has been a subject of concern and scrutiny in Nigerian politics. This academic discussion assesses the extent of nepotism in Nigerian politics, highlighting its complexities and implications.

- **Measuring the Extent of Nepotism:** Quantifying the extent of nepotism in Nigerian politics can be challenging due to its subtle and sometimes covert nature. Nepotism may manifest in various forms, including the appointment of family members to key government positions, facilitation of their political careers, or involvement in government contracts (Olusakin, 2013). These practices often occur behind closed doors, making it difficult to obtain comprehensive data on their prevalence. For instance several high-profile instances in Nigerian politics have drawn attention to nepotistic tendencies. The appointment of family members to influential positions, such as ministerial roles or advisory positions, has been criticized as an example of nepotism (BBC, 2020). Additionally, the elevation of close associates or political allies to prominent roles, without clear merit-based criteria, has raised questions about the extent of nepotism in political decision-making.
- **Complex Factors at Play:** Understanding the extent of nepotism in Nigerian politics requires a nuanced examination of the factors contributing to its persistence. Factors such as patronage networks, ethnic affiliations, and political dynasties can play a role in perpetuating nepotistic practices (Olusakin, 2013). Additionally, the historical context of Nigerian politics, characterized by a legacy of regionalism and ethnic diversity, has influenced the dynamics of nepotism.
- **Implications for Democracy and Governance:** Nepotism in Nigerian politics has far-reaching implications for democratic governance. It can erode public trust in institutions, undermine meritocracy, and hinder the development of effective and accountable government (Aigbokhan, 2000). Moreover, it may contribute to perceptions of corruption and favoritism, which can erode the legitimacy of political leaders and institutions (Olusakin, 2013).

2. Impact on Meritocracy

Nepotism erodes the principles of meritocracy and competence-based appointments. Appointing individuals based on personal connections rather than qualifications can result in ineffective governance and a lack of accountability (Ikelegbe, 2008).

3. Political Stability and Social Cohesion

Nepotism contributes to political instability and social divisions. When a significant portion of the population perceives that government decisions are made to favour a particular group, leading to protests, unrest, and a loss of trust in public institutions (Yusuf, 2013 and Odeyemi 2013).

National Security Implications: The nexus between ethnicity, nepotism, and national security is profound. Ethnic favoritism in political appointments and resource allocation can breed resentment and grievances among marginalized groups, potentially fueling ethnic tensions and conflicts (Watts, 2008). These conflicts, if left unaddressed, pose a significant threat to national security.

Theoretical Framework

This paper presents a comprehensive examination of the intricate issues surrounding ethnicity and nepotism in Nigerian politics and governance, their implications for national security, and the prospects for policy interventions. To achieve this objective, we employ three prominent sociological theories: Social Identity Theory, Institutional Theory, and Conflict Theory, in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research goals. The Social Identity Theory, as outlined by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, is a social psychological framework that explores how individuals categorize themselves and others into distinct social groups and how these group affiliations influence behavior, attitudes, and intergroup relations. This theory posits that individuals who strongly identify with a particular social group tend to exhibit in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, particularly when their group identity is threatened or when competition arises between groups. In the context of Nigeria, the historical practice of categorizing individuals into distinct ethnic groups has been a fundamental component of social identity, resulting in the formation of in-groups and out-groups. For instance, the colonial administration's policy of indirect rule exacerbated ethnic divisions by reinforcing traditional leadership structures based on ethnic lines (Afigbo, 1972). In contemporary Nigeria, political affiliations are often closely tied to ethnic identities, with political parties frequently organized along ethnic lines, and individuals frequently casting their votes for candidates from their own ethnic group (Omotola, 2010). The 2023 general election in Nigeria serves as a recent illustration of these dynamics, where resource allocation, such as government positions and economic opportunities, is significantly influenced by ethnic identity, nepotism, and favoritism towards one's ethnic group, as evidenced in the Tinubu administration. This practice can lead to feelings of injustice and conflict between ethnic groups.

Institutional Theory, which emphasizes the role of institutions, both formal and informal, in shaping behavior, decision-making, and social norms, offers valuable insights into the perpetuation of nepotistic practices in Nigerian politics. It underscores that institutions are not mere formal structures but influential sets of rules, norms, and practices that profoundly shape individual and collective behavior. Moreover, historical antecedents of institutional failures play a pivotal role in encouraging nepotism in Nigerian politics (Peters, 2011). The role of formal and informal institutions in perpetuating or mitigating nepotistic practices within the political governance and institutional framework in Nigerian politics carries

significant implications for nepotism, as institutions shape behavior and power dynamics (Scott, 2014).

Conflict Theory, originally articulated by Marx in 1867, is utilized to explore potential policy interventions aimed at promoting inclusivity, social cohesion, and effective governance in Nigeria. This theory underscores the role of social inequality, power struggles, and historical materialism in influencing policy outcomes. To mitigate the adverse effects of ethnicity and nepotism on national security, policies must address social inequalities and power imbalances (Marx, 1867). Nigerian politics has been historically characterized by the dominance of certain ethno cultural groups and elites who control state resources and institutions (Ekeh, 1975). This power concentration has contributed to the marginalization of other groups and has been a source of political and social tensions. Historical materialism elucidates the influence of historical factors in shaping present power dynamics, with colonial legacies, economic exploitation, and control over vital resources profoundly impacting the distribution of power and resources in Nigeria (Olukoshi, 2002). Policy interventions must acknowledge the historical material conditions that have perpetuated power imbalances. By exploring policy interventions in Nigerian politics and recognizing the central role of social inequalities, historical materialism, class struggles, and the influence of social movements, policymakers can address the root causes of social conflicts, mitigate social tensions, and foster a more inclusive and harmonious Nigerian society.

The application of Social Identity Theory, Institutional Theory, and Conflict Theory to this study provides a multifaceted and comprehensive analysis of the issues surrounding ethnicity and nepotism in Nigerian politics. The insights derived from these theories will inform potential policy interventions aimed at promoting inclusivity, social cohesion, and effective governance, while addressing the negative consequences of ethnicity and nepotism on national security.

Methodology

This research employed a multifaceted approach, encompassing literature reviews, content analysis of historical and contemporary sources, and qualitative methods. To generate qualitative data, in-depth interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were utilized. The study was conducted in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State in Southwestern Nigeria. Ibadan was selected due to its cosmopolitan nature, characterized by a diverse population representing various ethnic groups, and its historical significance as the regional headquarters for Southwestern Nigeria since the colonial era. As of 2021, Ibadan had a total population of 3,649,000, with over 6 million people residing within its metropolitan area.

A total of twenty in-depth interviews (IDI) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted. The participants were purposively selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives. The selection included ten relevant stakeholders and ten experts knowledgeable about Nigerian affairs. This diverse group was chosen to facilitate an exploration of the historical origins of ethnicity, the institutional mechanisms that sustain nepotism, and the class-based conflicts influencing policy responses. Additionally, they

provided real-world insights into the challenges and prospects of policy interventions in Nigeria.

Gender balance was maintained among the participants, with an equal representation of both male and female participants. The two FGDs comprised seven participants each, consisting of four males and three females in each group.

Qualitative data, gathered from Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), was analyzed using a manual content analysis approach and ethnographic summarization techniques.

Findings and discussion of results

The findings and discussion of results gathered through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions for this paper are thematically presented as follows:

Socio-demographic Information of Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the study's participants are as follows: there were ten (10) male and ten (10) female individuals, all falling within the age range of 20 to 65 years and beyond. The Focus Group Discussion also included individuals who possessed not only expertise but substantial experience.

Historical Influence of Ethnicity on Political and Social Dynamics in Nigeria

When questioned about the historical influence of ethnicity on political and social dynamics in Nigeria, one participant attributed it to the colonial legacy and the role of past leaders, particularly those who spearheaded Nigeria's struggle for independence. This participant contended that British policies of division and manipulation failed to ameliorate the existing issues but, instead, exacerbated the problems. This perpetuated malaise has had adverse repercussions on Nigeria's development and security.

Another participant asserted that ethnicity is a primary obstacle to Nigeria's progress and it is responsible for the pervasive insecurity experienced throughout the nation. The participant argued that ethnicity has permeated every sector and institution, whether public or private. It plays a determining role in resource allocation, appointments to key administrative positions, and various other services to the citizens. The merit-based selection process often yields to the influence of ethnicity in Nigeria.

The Focus Group Discussion interviewees noted that ethnic affiliations have significantly colored Nigeria's social dynamics from the time of colonialism. The colonialists, they argued, exacerbated matters by creating divisions among the people through policies of division and rule, often pitting one tribe against another overtly and covertly.

Likewise, members of the group attributed secessionist movements and the cries of marginalization, as reported in the media, along with the rising crime rates in the country, as manifestations of ethnic identities. They observed that citizens now prioritize their ethnic group identity over national citizenship. The various agitations preceding Nigeria's February

2023 general election, particularly those related to the choice of President Buhari's successor, have underscored the salience of regional, ethnic, and religious factors. The voting patterns during the elections and their aftermath reflect the profound divisions fueled by ethnicity and religion in Nigeria.

Relevant literature underscores how ethnicity became deeply entrenched during the colonial period, with its policies of division and rule continuing to impact Nigerian cohesiveness to this day. Ethnic divisions persisted after independence, with political parties often organized along ethnic lines (Nnoli, 1998). Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" helps explain how ethnicity is utilized to construct identities and group affiliations in Nigeria. Gbenga, B. (2020) maintained that since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, ethnic and political conflicts over political power and economic resources have been recurrent. From independence to the establishment of the Fourth Republic in May 1999 and to the present day, cases of ethnic and regional politics have been evident within major political parties.

Impact of Nepotism on Governance and Decision-Making in Nigeria

Regarding nepotism, one participant contended that nepotism is widespread, extending to personal relationships, but when it comes to governance and decision-making in Nigeria, it has reached an alarming level. Appointments, resource allocation, and political representation are heavily influenced by one's connection to those in power. The qualifications and merits of candidates for positions often take a back seat to their personal relationships with individuals in influential positions.

Another participant emphasized that achieving meaningful development in Nigeria requires individuals and communities to have connections to those in power, whether through familial ties or political alliances. She further illustrated her point with examples from former President Buhari's eight-year rule (2015-2023), during which he appointed individuals from his own ethnic group to key positions.

Reports from the Focus Group Discussion corroborate the submissions of most of the Key Informant Interview participants. It further elaborates on key appointments to the president's family and friends, and religious associates, regardless of the public outcry and the disenchantment it caused among the citizens. Other group members affirmed that nepotism plays a substantial role in the neglect of many communities, states, and regions in terms of resource allocation and development, exemplified by the decision to construct a railway line to neighboring Niger republic while parts of the country grapple with transportation problems.

Existing academic literature also references the detrimental impact of nepotism on Nigeria. Dami, C. D. (2021) views nepotism as a form of corruption hindering development, and citing Achebe (1983:42), in lamenting the socio-political corruption in Nigeria, describes the nation as "a nation for sale," controlled by various unethical elements. This has led to a failed state marked by social injustice, poverty, disharmony, and ethno-religious turbulence.

Furthermore, the intertwining of ethnicity and nepotism in Nigerian politics and governance has significant implications for national security. This connection is associated with a range of security challenges, including ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based disputes, and insurgent movements like Boko Haram in the North and militancy in the Niger Delta. These conflicts often draw upon ethnic grievances, further fracturing the nation and undermining its stability.

Prospects and policy options for mitigating the adverse effects of ethnicity and nepotism on national security in Nigeria

In light of these challenges, the paper explores the prospects and policy options for mitigating the adverse effects of ethnicity and nepotism on national security in Nigeria. One perspective suggests promoting a national consciousness among all citizens, emphasizing meritocracy and capacity as a means to address the country's security challenges effectively.

Another viewpoint argues that the political class should cease the practice of using ethnicity and nepotism as a basis for allocating resources and appointments in public offices. It highlights the need to avoid replicating the precedents set by past administrations that utilized ethnicity, religion, and nepotism, as observed in the current Tinubu administration's skewing of positions toward his ethnic group and region.

Nevertheless, the participants in the focus group discussion underscore the importance of adhering to existing laws and the Nigeria 1999 federal constitution, especially regarding the Federal Character principle in appointments and resource allocation. Some participants contend that the blame does not lie with the extant laws but with the political class, which continues to benefit from the application of ethnicity and nepotism, disregarding the grievances of marginalized groups and those advocating for change. This has severe consequences for national security and development.

Existing literature demonstrates that addressing the adverse effects of ethnicity and nepotism on national security in Nigeria is a multifaceted challenge, yet it is crucial for fostering stability, unity, and sustainable development. Osaghae, E. E. (1999) suggests that policies promoting inclusivity and equitable resource distribution can alleviate ethnic grievances and reduce the appeal of ethnic-based violence. Nwankwo, N. (2015) emphasizes the importance of building strong and impartial institutions that prioritize meritocracy over nepotism to restore trust in governance. Similarly, Adigun, S. (2018) advocates for policies enforcing and strengthening merit-based criteria for appointments in public institutions, ensuring that qualifications take precedence over nepotistic considerations. Additionally, enhancing transparency and public oversight in resource allocation processes, as well as making information about government contracts, projects, and resource distribution readily accessible to the public, as suggested by Adeyemo, D. (2013), can be a valuable policy option for reducing conflicts rooted in ethnic and nepotistic practices.

Conclusion

The historical influence of ethnicity on political and social dynamics in Nigeria is undeniable. It has deep roots in the colonial legacy, which exploited divisions among the Nigerian people

and sowed the seeds of ethnic tensions. This legacy persists, manifesting in widespread ethnic affiliations that shape resource allocation, appointments, and various aspects of governance. The salience of regional, ethnic, and religious factors during elections and the enduring divisions in the nation underline the profound impact of ethnicity on Nigeria's social and political landscape.

Nepotism, too, has emerged as a significant issue in Nigeria, particularly concerning governance and decision-making. It has reached alarming levels, leading to appointments and resource allocations based on personal relationships rather than qualifications or merit. This practice has not only undermined development but has also contributed to widespread corruption and public disenchantment. Above all, ethnicity and nepotism have adversely impacted on the heightening insecurity besieging Nigeria nation.

Recommendations

1. **Champion Meritocracy:** Advocate for a transition to merit-based selection processes in appointments and resource allocation, prioritizing qualifications and competencies over personal connections or ethnic affiliations.
2. **Enhance Transparency and Oversight:** Strengthen transparency and public oversight in resource allocation processes, ensuring that information on government contracts, projects, and resource distribution is easily accessible to the public to combat nepotism and promote fair resource allocation.
3. **Fortify Institutional Integrity:** Establish strong and impartial institutions committed to meritocracy and free from political interference, focusing on the nation's best interests.
4. **Promote Education and Awareness:** Raise awareness among citizens about the importance of unity and meritocracy over ethnicity through educational campaigns and programs, shifting the focus from ethnic identity to national citizenship.

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