

NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL UNITY

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Abstract

The task of unifying the various ethnic, religious, political and socio-economic groupings in Nigeria has remained a daunting national challenge more than hundred years after amalgamation in 1914. This is particularly puzzling considering that all government regimes since independence in 1960 have made national unity their important agenda. Concomitant programmes, policies and mantras including institutionalization of the federal character principle, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), unity schools, national symbols, National Orientation Agency (NOA), and mantras such as “*the unity of the nation is not negotiable*”, among others, have been adopted to facilitate national unity in Nigeria. Yet the gap between the various groupings seems wider as the nation is still plagued with ethnic rivalry, religious intolerance, political exclusion, quest for self-determination, power sharing and violent agitations, to mention a few. This paper explored the challenges of national unity in Nigeria after one hundred years of existence. Employing the Choice theory, documentary data sources and qualitative data analysis, the paper contends that the challenges to national unity in Nigeria appear to persist because of the manipulations of political, ethnic and religious elites due to pecuniary gains and enduring rivalry over the control of state power. The result showed that unity remains a scarce commodity in Nigeria because of the manner elites conceived and implement policies to reinforce primordial loyalties. As a result, government policies and projects are narrowly conceived and implemented to favour selected groups and communities. This heightens disagreements and controversies among the diverse peoples and communities, threatening the nation’s existence and development.

Keywords: elite, ethnic and religious groups, unity

1. INTRODUCTION

Unifying the diverse ethnic, religious, political and economic groupings in Nigeria for development remains the greatest challenge facing Nigeria as a nation. According to Atiku (2017), unity is still a scarce resource among Nigerian peoples due to the manner the country was created by the British colonial authorities and the failure of the Nigerian elite to create a true and viable nation out of these diversities. Nigeria was created by the British with the amalgamation of Northern, Southern protectorates and Lagos Colony in 1914. The amalgamation led to the creation of a mosaic country with over 350 ethnic, religious and economics groups that compete for space and attempt to coexist, in spite of obvious differences in culture, aptitudes and level of development (Sagaya, 2008). This, according Ojo (2009), created unique problems not experienced by any state in the world, past or present. This problem, for Onifade and Mhonopi (2013), is how to achieve solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of the nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice

reigns. Osibanjo (2019) argues that diversity in and of itself is not a problem; it is what is done with it that matters. According to him, whether or not sociocultural variety results in strife or collective success entirely depends on how a society chooses to manage it. However, disagreements and controversies over the best political structure to be adopted, size and responsibility of government, the nature of relationship between and among component units, the type and system of government, as well as how resources are acquired and shared, have become a recurring feature of the Nigerian state. This lack of unity has been part and parcel of Nigeria's chequered history, threatening the existence and stability of the nation.

According to Adibile (2015), British colonialists and early national leaders employed the ethno-religious strategies to reach political and socio-economic ends. Atiku (2017) observes that during the First Republic national political leaders, at some point found it easy to mobilize, capture and consolidate power as regional and ethnic champions. Since then, traditional, education, political, economic, religious, and military elite have continued to manipulate the masses and bases for their selfish ambitions. This, perhaps, has become a major source of disquiet, anxiety, frustration and a veritable obstacle to national development.

Atiku (2017) posits that successive governments have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to address the problem of lack of unity and the tendency toward primordial attachments through deliberate policies and programmes. For instance, following the end of the Nigerian civil war on 15th January, 1970; General Gowon expressed the need to pursue national unity and integration: "We desired to preserve the territorial integrity and unity [national integration] of Nigeria (Gowon, 1970). President Shehu Shagari's Inaugural Speech in 1979 also recognised the need to bring the various ethnic groups in Nigeria together, proclaiming that the slogan of "One Nation, One Destiny" shall be translated into reality (Shagari, 1979). Crucially, Chapter II, Article 15, sub-section 2 of the 1999 Constitution stated that national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the ground of place of origin, sex, religion, ethnic or linguistic associations or ties shall be prohibited (FGN, 1999).

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle, and State Creation were adopted to achieve this goal (Alapiki, 2005). Despite these, the challenge of unity has persisted partly because of the inability of Nigerian elites to steadily provide good governance; harness the many benefits of diverse ethnic, religious and economic groups as a source of strength rather than weakness. Consequently, after more than 100 years of statehood and almost sixty years of political Independence the search for national integration, stability, peace, order and development remains a dream. It is perhaps in recognition of this that Awolowo referred to Nigeria as "mere geographical expression" not a nation (Awolowo, 1981).

This paper is of the view that this situation has been created and sustained by the elite that are the main beneficiaries of the impasse. It is therefore most expedient for this paper to identify the challenges that have continued to threaten the corporate existence of the Nigerian state in spite of many constitutional provisions, programmes and policies to promote national unity.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of national unity in the context of the paper will be used interchangeably with national integration, nation-building and national cohesion. According to Eme-Uche (2012), national unity portends a feeling of common purpose that bind peoples of diverse cultures, colours and ethnic nationalities together as one. It is achieving cohesion between groups of diverse backgrounds that have come together for a common purpose. Duverger in Ojo (2009) defined national unity as the process of unifying the various segments of a society to make it harmonious based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. Also, Jacob & Tenue in Ojo (2009) conceive national unity as a cordial relationship existing among members of a political community. It can also mean a state of mind or disposition that is cohesive, committed to acting to achieve mutual goals. Morrison *et al.* (n.d.) argue that national unity is the process by which members of a social system develop linkages and location so that the boundaries of the system persist over time and the boundaries of sub-systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process, members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community. The quest for national unity has been the most prevalent agenda of all governments of Nigeria since independence. Efforts to attain national unity have been from socio-economic, political and psychological fronts and which have not engendered national unity; indeed, the quest for national unity in Nigeria appears intractable.

Encyclopaedia Britannica defined amalgamation as the uniting of two or more entities to form a new entity which could be in terms of business organizations with similar or different products and services. Politically, it could be a combination of two or more nations, cultures and civilizations to form a single entity or sovereign nation. Ikedikwa (2014) conceives it as the fusing of two or more entities to create a new entity such that it

would appear that the *base entities cease to exist*.

The study employed the public choice theory as the framework of analysis. The theory aims to understand and predict the behaviour of politicians and bureaucrats in the polity by utilizing analytical tools of development based on the postulate of rational choice. In public choice, individuals, interest groups, bureaucrats and politicians are assumed to seek self-interest as in the market place. Decisions made depend on the situation as each group attempts to maximize net benefits. The benefits can take the form of monetary or non-monetary rewards.

The public choice theory argues that politicians and bureaucrats are rational agents. This means that they try to maximize their interests first and produce goods for others as a by-product. Public choice originated as a distinctive field of specialization through the works of Buchanan and Tullock (1962), who defined it as politics without romance. The general belief is that participants in the political sphere aspire to promote the common good. It is assumed that public officials (legislators, bureaucrats, etc.) have first and foremost, public interests and faithfully carry out the will of the people. Shughart (2008) notes that in the conventional "public interest" view, public officials are portrayed as benevolent "public servants" who faithfully carry out the "will of the people" according to laid down rules and regulations. This is important in explaining how the elites take advantage of their positions and relationships with political leadership to frame and implement policies and policies that largely appeal and benefit their ethnic, religious and political bases at the exclusion of the larger constituents of the nation.

The qualitative method of research is used in the study. It is used to describe events as they are recorded. Bodgan and Biklen (1982) defined the qualitative methods as "working with data, organizing, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and what to tell others". Simon (2011) posits that qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, which means that critical themes emerge out of the data. Simon (2011) further point that qualitative studies requires some creativity, since the challenge is to place raw data into logical, meaningful categories; to examine them in holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others.

3. AMALGAMATION AND THE CREATION OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

According to Eric (2016), the balkanization of Africa by European powers which culminated to the 1885 Berlin conference laid the foundation for contemporary states in Africa, including Nigeria. Ikelegbe (1995) observes that the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 marked a turning point in the evolution of the entity called Nigeria. The effect of this development was the fusion of diverse political entities including the Hausa-Fulani, Oyo and Kanem Bornu empires, the Igbo republican states and the Benin kingdom, among others, into one entity called Nigeria (Eric, 2016). Amalgamation broadened the national boundaries and merged north and south into one country. According to Ikelegbe (1995), the end result was not to actually have a new territory per se, but was for economic exploitation. Eric (2016) posits that due to the amalgamation, the coals of Enugu, tin of Jos, hides and skins of Hadejia and Maiduguri, cotton from Gusau, cocoa and oil palm from Ibadan were all carted to Europe. The merger, therefore, became more pertinent for administrative convenience; to stop internal animosity among the different nationalities, and more importantly, reduce administrative costs. It ignored the need to integrate the various peoples that coalesced to form the new administrative entity. Indeed, national integration is important for national development as it would blur and ameliorate ethnic, religious, political and cultural differences and enable the people to acquire a sense of shared citizenship and common national consciousness. However, this has not been the case since the political arrangement at the time preserved "tribal identities" thereby promoting regional politics and thus, made national unity more difficult. It appears that even when Lord Lugard proposed the unification of the country to become "Mega-Nigeria", the British never really faced up to the real issue of the national integration in the country they had created (Mazrui, 2007, p.3). Umar (2000, p.65) asserts that when the British Colonialists took political control of Nigeria, they decided for their administrative convenience to amalgamate the nationalities. Under their artificial creation, the spirit of nationalism is difficult to inculcate.

This development has served as the foundation for perpetuating ethnic identities in Nigeria's political landscape. It is evidenced by intense regionalization of politics and therefore made national integration and unity almost impossible. Sequel to this is the problem of unity in diversity, patriotism and national integration. Most of the works on the discourse of the Nigeria's political history contends that the British Colonial policies that metamorphosed into 1914 Amalgamation were counterproductive to the national integration in Post-colonial Nigeria.

It has been argued severally that the British government had no degree of commitment in creating an

enduring Nigerian state either because of its personal interest or indecisiveness to lay a more solid foundation for effective integration. This strategy was later sustained in the country's political landscape leading to intra-class struggle fragility and failure in nation-building and integration. Osuntokun and Afigbo describe the 1914 Amalgamation as divisive in its purpose (Afigbo, 2003:46), aimed at dichotomizing the country from its inception to keep its northern and southern segments apart by an imaginary, artificially created boundary and consequently to disunite them in interest, attitude, outlook and vision. From this view point, it is contended that the 1914 Amalgamation rather created a north-south dichotomy that was maintained in the governmental structure established for the administration of the unified country. Paradoxically, the 1914 Amalgamation has not been followed by a general redrawing of the boundaries of the administrative divisions of the unified entity as was done in the case of protectorate of southern Nigeria and the colony of Lagos in 1906. The result of this paradox created bedeviling imbalance between Northern and Southern Nigeria with the former encompassing 75 per cent of the land area and 60 per cent of the population of the country (Nwabueze, 2014). Akinjide (2000) notes that from the time amalgamation in 1914 to independence in 1960, the British intentionally allowed minimum contact between the North and South; an action that exacerbated the differences between the two regions. Coleman (1972) reported that the first Governor of Nigeria, Lord Lugard who supervised the amalgamation famously stated "the North and South are like oil and water, they will never mix". The import of this statement is that the task of unifying Nigerian people and culture was at best daunting, if not impossible. To maintain this disunity, the British colonial employed the policy of "divide and rule", which deepened the differences between the various ethnic groups under the guise of the preservation of cultural and religious practices of the different ethnic groups within the territory. This scheme was perfected through the instrumentality of the colonial constitutions.

On October 1, 1960 Nigeria became an independent nation and in 1963 a Republic within the Commonwealth. The government of this emergent nation was based on a weak coalition between the NCNC and NPC with the AG in opposition. The political crises that dominated this era in Nigeria's political history were impelled by disagreements over the 1962/63 census that were allegedly atrociously rigged in favour of Northern Nigeria, the intra-party ideological crisis within the AG that polarized the party between Chief S.A. Akintola who was the Premier of the Western region and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the opposition leader at the federal parliament. In view of the foregoing, a state of emergency was declared in Western Nigeria and subsequently, Chief O. Awolowo was incarcerated for alleged treasonable felony. There were also other violent crises that were prompted by the controversial results of the 1964 and 1965 federal and Western region elections. The political elite set Nigerians of different ethnic nationalities against each other because of their selfish and inordinate political ambitions. Consequently, the birth of a new nation-Nigeria- also marked the birth of intense ethnic nationalism which has deepened over the past fifty-nine years of political independence. It defined the character party politics, employment into the Federal Public Service, business transactions, recruitment of political leadership and governance. It became evident that the federal government could not maintain law and order. In view of the above, the Nigeria's first republic collapsed through a coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, this was shortly followed by a counter coup led by Northern military officers. The experiences and events that preceded the civil war and the civil war are common knowledge and speak for themselves. According to the defunct Biafra leader, Late Dim Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, on the pogrom unleashed on the Easterners, Nigeria committed many crimes against her nationalities which in the end made complete nonsense of her claim to unity. Nigeria persecuted and slaughtered her minorities. Over the years many scholars on the subject and ordinary Nigerians have continued to wonder whether keeping Nigeria one was worth the carnage of the civil war; especially when the people of the then Eastern Nigeria had expressed their desire to be independent; hence, the war to keep the then Eastern Nigeria a component of Nigeria has been seen as aggressive altruism by scholars, groups and persons that subscribe to the right to self-determination by any group like the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Movement for the Survival Of Ogoni People (MOSOP). More so, given that General Yakubu Gowon that declared and fought the civil war had publicly declared that "suffice it to say that putting all considerations to the test; political, economic as well as social, there is no basis for Nigerian unity, which has been rocked, not only once but several times (Republic Report, 1996).

At the end of the civil war in 1970, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Nine-Point Programme of Rehabilitation, **Reconciliation** and Reconstruction of the war affected areas with an underlying slogan of "No Victor No Vanquished" (Adigwe, 1974). All these were efforts at re-integrating the former Eastern Region back into the mainstream of Nigeria's political space. This was the first post-civil war effort at fostering national unity. However; the wounds and losses of the civil war in human and material resources were so deep and enormous that programmes, slogans paid only lip-service to them.

4. EFFORTS AT NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

By the time Nigeria won her independence from Britain in 1960, its artificial origin, coupled with other factors, had bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, one of which is the challenge of integrating, into a cohesive socio-political whole (Adebola, 2006). In view of this, the necessity for a political structure that will help cohesion had to be implemented. The adoption of a parliamentary system of government and existence of an opposition party following independence enabled equitable influence by the three major ethnic groups- Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. While the office of the Prime Minister and President were occupied by a northerner and an easterner respectively and the opposition was under the auspices of the south. This was no doubt a noble foundational effort for strong national unity but it came out to be futile at the eruption of the Nigerian Civil War (1966-1970). It could be acknowledged as the first major effort in pursuit for national integration. Since the pre-existing regional structure encouraged ethnic classifications and loyalty in Nigeria, the adopted new state structure was aimed at redirecting the loyalty and commitment of the citizens to the state instead of their ethnic affinities and organisation. Further, the adoption of a state structure in place of the regional structure in 1967 represents another attempt of unifying the nation.

The efforts at national unity include the adoption of a new constitution in 1999. (Eme-Uche, 2013). Sequel to the foregoing; the preamble of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria affirms that the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation. In addition, the motto of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress. In addition, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria made extensive provisions aimed at enthroning national unity. They include:

- The Federal Character Policy, the very essence of this policy is to foster unity amongst the federating units through equal representation of all sections of the nation at the federal level. The federal character policy justifies the adoption of the quota system in admissions into federal educational institutions, recruitment into the civil service, armed forces, and the leadership of political parties and appointment of political office holders as in Section 147(3). This provision is also guided by the principle of equality of federating units and also to engender national unity.
- Section 48 of the 1999 Constitution states that the Senate shall consist of three senators from each state and one from the FCT, Abuja. The Senate is composed on the principle of equality of states which is dominant feature of federating units that guarantees equality of status for the component states.
- According to Sections 221-223 of the 1999 constitution, all political parties, the officials and the pattern of party politics must be national in outlook. The essence of these provisions is to avert the emergence of regional or sectional political parties that would definitely represent sectional interests and therefore antithetical to national unity.
- The provisions on the election of the President strengthen the oneness of the Nigerian nation. According to Section 132(4) of the 1999 constitution, for the purpose of election to the office of the President, the whole federation shall be regarded as one constituency
- Chapter IV of the 1999 constitution is on the fundamental human rights of Nigerian citizens. This provision portends national unity because it's all inclusive and guarantees equality and equity which are essential components of national unity.

Other efforts of the various Nigerian governments to attain national unity are as below:

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme was introduced in 1973 to aid national integration in Nigeria as stated in Decree No. 23 of 1973 (supplanted by an Act in 2004). According to the Act, the aim of the scheme is among other things, to develop common ties among Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration" (NYSC, 2004). It was hoped that the scheme would assist in addressing problems of ethnic loyalties, mutual group suspicion and distrust, which have eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian society. The scheme is implemented such that fresh tertiary institution graduates are deployed to serve the nation in states or communities other than their states of origin with the intention of broadening their socio-cultural orientation and to instil the virtue of tolerance. However, this approach to national integration is rapidly turning to an avenue of disintegration among the various ethnic groups in the nation as parents and guardians now influence the posting of their wards to suitable parts of the nation mainly to ensure their security.

National symbols comprise ideas, objects and events that are national in character which are frequently employed by governments to secure legitimacy and foster national unity (Eme-Uche, 2010). In effect national symbols are acknowledged as objects of national identity and unity. Nigeria's national symbols include the constitution, national anthem, the national pledge of loyalty, objects, concepts, monuments, events, ideas, the Naira and all others that all Nigerians collectively identify with.

Socialization is an indispensable instrument for national unity. To that effect; over the years the federal government embarked on large scale socialization programmes to promote national unity. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) was saddled with the responsibility of re-orientation of Nigerians to engender patriotism and national unity amongst others. Also, the school curricula at all levels include social studies and citizenship education to impact civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions that engender national unity. The mass media (print and electronic) have also been involved in this process.

Despite the existence of these noble policies, constitutional provisions and programmes, there is little evidence to suggest that political, military, bureaucratic and religious elites have recognized their importance to national unity and development.

5. CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL UNITY

The problem of disunity among Nigerian peoples and groupings do not seem to emanate from lack of constitutional, political, cultural, educational and religious commitment to national integration and unity. Indeed, there have been commitments by successive government administrations to maintain and uphold the unity of the country. However, the problem seems to lie with the manner in which these policies and programmes have been implemented by the ruling elites. For instance, the utility of the federal character principle in the sustenance of the corporate existence of Nigeria, there has been incessant abuse of the principle especially in the recent time. In fact, no single issue appears to have attracted as much attention in the recent time as the issue of abuse of the federal character principle. Koneke (2019) observes that out of over 40 initial appointments the current President Muhammadu Buhari made, only a few persons from the southern region of the country were appointed. The South East Geopolitical Zone have largely been ignored from the Presidents appointments and key position of governments both at the executive, legislative and judiciary arms. Besides, the northern region appears to have enjoyed monopoly of heads of government since independence as shown in table one below;

Table 1. List of Heads of State by Region and States of Origin

S/N	NAMES	DATE	STATE	REGION
1.	Tafawa Balewa	Oct 1, 1960-Jan 15 1966	Bauchi	North-East
2.	J.T.U. Ironsi	Jan 15 1966-July 29, 1966	Abia	South-East
3.	Yakubu Gowon	July 29, 1966-July 29, 1975	Plateau	North-Central
4.	Murtala Mohammed	July 29, 1975-Feb 13, 1976	Kano	North-West
5.	Olusegun Obasanjo	Feb 13, 1976-Oct 1, 1979	Ogun	South-West
6.	Alh. Shehu Shagari	Oct. 1, 1979-Dec 31, 1983	Sokoto	North-West
7.	Muhammadu Buhari	Dec 31, 1983-Aug 27, 1985	Katsina	North-West
8.	Ibrahim Babangida	Aug 27, 1985-Aug 26, 1993	Niger	North-Central
9.	Ernest Shonekan	Aug 26, 1993-Nov. 17, 1993	Ogun	South-West
10.	Sani Abacha	Nov. 17, 1993-June, 8, 1998	Kano	North-West
11.	Abdulsalam Abubakar	June 8, 1998-May 29, 1999	Niger	North-Central
12.	Olusegun Obasanjo	May 29, 1999-May 29, 2007	Ogun	South-West
13.	Umaru-Musa Yar'Adua	May 29, 2007-May 5, 2010	Katsina	North-West
14.	Goodluck Jonathan	May 5, 2010 to 2013	Bayelsa	South-South
15.	Muhammadu Buhari	May 29, 2015 till date	Katsina	North-West

Source: Aluko, O. and Usman, S. (2016). Visiting the hippopotamus: National integration issues in Nigeria. *Romanian Journal of Regional Science Association*, 10(1).

Table 1 shows that political leadership in Nigeria has been dominated by northerners at the detriment of the south, particularly the south east. The greatest manifestation of this tendency is the implicit policy of reserving the political and top bureaucratic management positions in certain key ministries at the federal for people from certain parts of the country. The development further serves to reinforce the feeling of exclusion and marginalization. This northern domination of political leadership has been employed to undermine the

federal character principle.

Table 2 below shows the composition of the heads of executive, legislature and judiciary in Nigeria.

Table 2: Composition of Current Government Leadership by States of Origin

Name	Post	State	Region
President Mohamed Buhari	President	Katsina	North East
Yemi Osibanjo	Vice President	Osun	South West
Ahmed Ibrahim Lawal	Senate President	Yobe	
Obarisi Ovie Omo-Agege	Deputy Senate President	Delta State	South South
Femi Gbajabiamila	Speaker, House of Representatives	Lagos State	South West
Justice Ibrahim Tanko Muhammed	Chief Justice of Nigeria	Bauchi	North East

Source: Authors' compilation from various sources

The implication of excluding certain sections of the country from current leadership positions in Nigeria as reflected in Table 2 above is the danger of what Okonkwo (2009) described as the slogan of "East for the Easterners, West for the Westerners, and North for the Northerners. Nigeria for nobody. This means that whoever assumes leadership position exercises same for their base. Commenting on this, Omokri (2017) notes that those who thought the President was joking... when he said 'the constituents, for example, that gave me 97% cannot in all honesty be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5%' now know that our President was speaking the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Consequently, ethnic balancing in appointment of key officers at the judiciary, executive, legislature and military has been undermined.

More so, the heads of security agents in the country are also dominated by people of the northern region, reinforcing the exclusion of people of southern region. Table 2 below is a graphic representation of the dynamics of military leadership in Nigeria since independence.

Table 3: Nigerian Chiefs of Army Staff Since Independence

Officer	Title	Period Served	Origin - Remarks
Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi	GOC NA	Feb.1965-Jan. 1966	South-East: Christian, Ibo, head of the FMG after the first military coup, killed during the second coup in July 1966
Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon	COAS	Jan. 1966-Jul. 1966	Middle Belt: Christian, Ngas (Angas) from Lur in the present-day Kanke Local Government Area of Plateau State. Head of the FMG from Jul. 1966 to July 1975
Lt. Col. Joseph Akaahan	COAS	Aug. 1966 - Jul. 1967	Middle Belt: Christian, Tiv from Benue State. Trained in Sandhurst, he died in a helicopter crash and was succeeded on an on an interim basis by Lt. Col. Iliyasu Bissala, another Christian from Plateau, like Yakubu Gowon. Iliyasu Bissala was himself executed for his role in the coup of Feb. 13, 1976.
Maj. Gen. Hassan Usman Katsina	COAS	Jan. 1968 - Jan. 1971	North: Muslim, Hausa-Fulani from Katsina, governor of the Northern Region of Nigeria from 1966-1967.
Maj. Gen. David Ejoor	COAS	Jan. 1971 - Jul. 1975	South-West: Christian, Edo, governor of the Mid-Western State of Nigeria during the Biafra War.
Lt. Gen. Theophilus Danjuma	COAS	Jul. 1975-Sept. 1979	Middle Belt: Christian, Jukun from Benue State. An ally, then an opponent to President Olusegun Obasanjo when the latter tried to amend the Constitution and be allowed to run for a third term in April 2007.
Lt. Gen. Alani Akinrinade	COAS	Oct. 1979-Apr. 1980	South-West: Christian, Yoruba from Osun State. He was a key actor in the final push which led to the surrender by the Biafran forces in January 1970. Appointed Minister of Agriculture (1985–1986), Industries (1988) and Transport (1989) in General Ibrahim Babangida's government, he later joined the opposition and became a member (then chair in 2012) of the National

			Democratic Coalition (NADECO) during the Sani Abacha regime.
Lt. Gen. Gibson Jalo	COAS	Apr. 1980 Oct. 1981	North: Muslim, Bachama from Adamawa State.
Lt. Gen. Mohammed Inuwa Wushishi	COAS	Oct. 1981- Dec. 1983	North: Muslim, Nupe from Niger State. After retirement, he chaired several boards of directors of big companies.
Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	COAS	Jan. 1984- Aug. 1985	North: Muslim, Gwarri from Minna, Niger State, head of FMG from August 1985 to August 1993.
Lt. Gen. Sani Abacha	COAS	Aug 1985- Sept. 1990	North: Muslim, Kanuri from Borno, settled in Kano. Head of FMG from Nov. 1993 until his death in June 1998.
Lt. Gen. Salihu Ibrahim	COAS	Sept. 1990 - Aug. 1993	North: Muslim, Yoruba from Kwara. After retirement, he chaired the boards of several companies.
Lt. Gen. Aliyu Mohammed 'Gusau'	COAS	Sept. 1993 - Nov. 1993	North: Muslim, Fulani from Gusau in Zamfara. Director of Military Intelligence from November 1979 to December 1983, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) from August 1985, Acting Director-General of the NSO (National Security Organization) from September 1985 to August 1986, Coordinator on National Security
			from August 1986 to December 1989. Later National Security Advisor of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (from May 1999) and Goodluck Jonathan (from March 2010). He competed in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) primaries for presidential candidate in 2006 and 2011.
Maj. Gen. Chris Alli	COAS	Nov. 1993 Aug. 1994	North: Christian, Epira from Kogi.
Maj. Gen. Alwali Kazir	COAS	Aug. 1994 Mar. 1996	North: Muslim, Fulani from Kwara.
Maj. Gen. Ishaya Rizi Bamaiyi	COAS	Mar. 1996 May 1999	North: Christian, Fulani from Kebbi.
Lt. Gen. Samuel Victor Leo Malu	COAS	May 1999 - Apr 2001	North: Christian (Catholic), Tiv from Benue. He used to be the Field Commander of the Economic Community of West African States Peace Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia in the beginning of the 1990s.
Lt. Gen. Alexander Oderuduo Ogomudia	COAS	Apr. 2001- June 2003	South: Christian, Isoko from Edo. Later Chief of the Defence Staff (CODS).
Lt. Gen. Martin Luther Agwai	COAS	June 2003 May 2006	North: Christian, Yoruba from Kaduna. Later Commander of the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur from May 2007 to Sept 2009. He was also Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) from November 2000 to November 2002. His wife, Ruth Agwai, was accused in 2009 of mismanagement of UN funds, which were diverted to the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA).
Lt. Gen. Owoye Andrew Azazi	COAS	June 2006 May 2007	South: Christian, Ijaw from Bayelsa. Later Chief of the Defence Staff (CODS). Very close to President Goodluck Jonathan

Lt. Gen. Luka Nyeh Yusuf	COAS	June 2007-Aug. 2008	North: Christian, Bara Kagoma from Kaduna (Jama'a Local Government Area). He was also the Chief of Staff of the Liberian Armed Forces in the mid-1990s. In Nigeria, he had to retire after a scandal involving the sale to militants of arms from the Central Command Depot, Kaduna armoury, which was under his command. These guns were used to kill soldiers in the Niger Delta. Yusuf then died in London in June 2009, after a long illness.
Lt. Gen. Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau	COAS	Aug. 2008-Sept. 2010	North: Muslim, Hausa-Fulani from Kano.
Lt. Gen. Onyeabor Azubuike Ihejirika	COAS	Sept. 2010Date	South: Christian, Ibo from Ovim, Isuikwato Local Government, Abia State. The first Ibo at this post since the Biafra War.
Maj. Gen. T. Y Burati	COAS	2015 till date	North: Muslim, Hausa-Fulani from Bornu.

Source: Author's compilation from various sources

Table 3 shows that Military officers from the north have dominated the leadership of the military as Chief of Army Staff (COAS). Out of the 25 indigenous COAS's appointed since 1960, only 8 officers are from regions other than the north. The northern hegemony over security does not seem to augur well for the confidence of citizens from other regions as they regard such developments as strategies for intimidation. This fact is not lost in the hasty proscription of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement by the Buhari administration in collaboration with Service Chiefs without south-eastern representation. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a secessionist movement based in South East Nigeria with the aim of restoring the defunct Biafra, albeit, through peaceful means. The objective of the group, inter alia, is to push for, facilitate and advocate the Igbo's right to self-determination while advocating "for the right and fundamental freedom of the remnants of the Biafrans who are scattered in all parts of the world as refugees and people in self-exile". Generally, the agitation for the restoration of Biafra is a product of the failure of the Nigerian government to create a sustainable transitional justice system after the 30 months Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970).

In view of the above; some scholars have concluded that the basis for unity in Nigeria does not exist. However, the contrasting view is that these challenges endure principally because of government's actions and inactions that present as government's inability to safeguard human rights and the undue manipulation of the gullible masses by the elites to their advantage.

Allegations of marginalization/victimization of minority groups/political opposition within the various states and at the national level are rife. These constitute major barriers to the quest for national unity by encouraging divisiveness and parochialism through transferring loyalty from the nation to the local units, states, religious and ethnic groups at the expense of the Nigerian state. The result is the unending demands for creation of more states that are sponsored by the political elites from all zones of the country. The ongoing Confab has recommended the creation of nineteen additional states without consideration for their viability. This move is an elite strategy to create political empires for themselves.

Intra and inter party squabbles have characterized party politics in Nigeria since independence. Such squabbles, in some cases, have escalated to violence along ethnic and religious lines. The controversy generated by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) zoning formula and the consequent election of President Goodluck Jonathan as the PDP flag bearer for the 2011 Presidential elections, presented and is still a daunting challenge to national unity. Also; members of the opposition and even party members have at different times alleged that they were victimized for expressing contrary political opinion on national or state issues. This is irrespective of the fundamental rights and freedoms in Chapter IV and the provisions on political party and party politics in sections 221-223 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria.

Since independence the conduct the political parties during elections in Nigeria have been highly divisive, fraught with bitterness and unprecedented violence. The latest is the pre- and post-election violence in various parts of the nation after the 2011 elections.

The intemperate utterances and general disposition of the elite class in governance and politics have been major snags to national unity. This dates from the pre-independence period when Nigeria's fore bearers

resorted to vitriolic utterances in their desperation to control national power on independence. This disposition was characteristic of all the political leaders from independence to the collapse the first republic, through the military regimes to the return to civil rule in 1999 and the present dispensation. The conception of the ruling class (military or civil) of what constitute national unity has been determined by their selfish agenda.

Sequel to the above, Obasanjo (2011) observes that the nation cannot talk of national unity when people who benefitted immensely from the country in different ways do not preach peace. Recent divisive utterances credited to northern political leaders on President Goodluck Jonathan's candidacy and the 2011 election engendered bitterness. The effect their intemperate utterances on their supporters and the implications for national unity cannot be over emphasized in view of the post 2011 elections violence.

The Niger Delta Question and the issue of Resource Control (extreme derivation) against a minimum of 13% as the basis of revenue allocation is a major sore point. Resource Allocation is crucial to national unity. The consistent and intense demand for a fair, just and equitable revenue allocation formula by the Niger Delta region and the reform of the basis of sharing revenue between the federal government, states and local governments is a major challenge to national unity. This will continue to be if these issues are not resolved. The refusal of the Northern delegates to the 2014 National Confab to approve increasing the percentage of the allocation to the Niger Delta region from a minimum of 13% as provided in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to 18% without a rider of 5% allocation to the North Eastern zone because of the ravaging impact of the Boko Haram insurgency is a clear indication of how insensitive the political elite are to the plight of the masses who are the victims of their political antics

Closely related to resource allocation is the issue of equity in distribution of the national cake. National unity will remain a mirage if majority of the populace continue to live in abject poverty. The majority of Nigerians that are alienated from the national wealth constitute a threat to national unity.

Some media organizations have persistently fanned the ambers of disunity in Nigeria. This is so because despite the Freedom of Information Act; the media is yet to enjoy freedom of expression. The owners of the media largely determine the position of the media organization on any issue. To this effect, most of the media organizations protect the interests of their sponsors at the expense of national unity.

The orientations of the socializing agents have tremendous effects on the outcome of the socialization process. Unfortunately; the outcomes of the socialization process in Nigeria have been antithetical to national unity. They have sown distrust, divisiveness, destructive stereotypes that breed ethnic and religious intolerance, rationalize violence as with the Boko Haram insurgency, and promote discrimination on gender, ethnic, state and religious lines. The personal experiences of citizens and antecedents of the Nigerian state are also very potent agents of socialization; for instance, the families that their loved ones were maimed or gruesomely murdered by Islamic fundamentalist will never believe in national unity. The personal experiences of these Nigerians have far reaching effects on the orientations and attitudes to Nigerians from other ethnic, cultural and religious groups and their level of loyalty to the nation.

The status of the National Youth Service Corps as an instrument for national unity has been queried in the event of the gruesome murder of corps members during the post 2011 election crisis and the sectarian violence perpetrated against hapless corps members by the Boko Haram Islamist in some Northern states of Nigeria. Many Nigerians have called for the outright repealing of the NYSC Act. Afe Babalola (2012) argues that; national unity cannot be brought about by sending by students to states where security of lives cannot be guaranteed. It requires more than sending hapless youth to premature death. Also, Okochie (2012) writes that although the NYSC was instituted as an instrument for national unity; events of the past few years have resulted to frantic calls for the scrapping the programme because it had become an object of mockery and rejection. It is not a surprise that because of the harrowing experiences of the corps members they do not preach the "gospel of national unity". This is a huge drag to the efforts at national unity; given that these groups of Nigerians are the future of the nation.

The arguments for the creation of more states were to balance the federal structure, even development, allaying the fears of marginalization by the minority and fostering unity through diversity. Unfortunately, the outcomes contradict the laudable intentions for creating more states. Creation of more states had resulted to discrimination on the basis of states; hence statism has become a contending phenomenon in Nigerian politics which has been strengthened by the policy of indigeneity that has polarized residents of a state into indigenes and non-indigenes. The indigenes enjoy full rights of the state while the non-indigenes do not; this is definitely against national unity.

The role of the political elite, their utterances and desperation to win elections at all costs is responsible for pre- and post-election violence in Nigeria. Their tendency to fall back to religious and ethnic sentiments when

they lose elections remains a challenge for national unity.

Low literacy levels of the generality of Nigerians is a cog in the wheel of the democratic process. According to the National Literacy Survey (2010) the North East and North West Zones of Nigeria have very low literacy levels of 46.07% and 31.7% respectively, with Bauchi and Bornu at 26.6% and 38.8% in the North East and Kano with 27.8% and Zamfara with 26.2% literacy levels in the North West Zone. The statistics figure would have increased geometrically with schools closed in parts of the Northeast and North West Zones because of security challenges. These zones are the flash points for Islamic fundamentalism, insurgency and political restiveness by illiterate political and religious bigots... This strengthens the argument that the level of literacy has consequences for the political behaviour of citizens. Illiterate persons are excluded from the mainstream of political process. They are ruthlessly manipulated by the political elite to unleash mayhem for their personal agenda at the expense of national unity (Eme-Uche, 2014).

6. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell; all the efforts by the various governments to surmount the challenges of national unity have not yielded the desired cohesion between and within the different entities that make up Nigeria after almost sixty years of independence. This calls for a change in the approach or strategy if the political leadership is sincere in her quest for national unity. It is therefore pertinent to join Late Sunny Okoson (1947-2008) to ask, "Which Way Nigeria?" Which way forward? What constitutes national unity in Nigeria's context? and lastly, what are the prospects for national unity?

Sequel to the above; it is evident that structural, constitutional and policy initiatives cannot engender national unity without appreciable change in the value orientation (mindset) and material conditions of the citizenry. This brings the issue of the mindset of Nigerians to the fore. National unity will remain a mirage without appreciable change in the mindset that blames colonialism for the challenges of national unity, of the elite on what constitutes national unity and how to attain it. Also significant is the change of the mindset of ordinary Nigerians which is the outcome of the warped socialization process and unbridled manipulation of the citizenry by the elite. The role of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in the process cannot be over emphasized. The Agency should be well funded to enable it realize its mandate through a value re-orientation programme that focuses on fostering national unity.

For the change in the mindset of Nigerians to be attained and sustained; the problem of social inequality must be addressed; there has to be an appreciable and corresponding change in the material conditions of the citizens. To achieve social equality the safety nets of the society must be sustained viz:

The above challenges are not exhaustive but if addressed will definitely enhance the prospects for national unity in Nigeria. Specifically, the elite dimension of the challenges of national unity deserves special attention. The eradication of illiteracy and poverty should receive adequate attention. This will free majority of the citizenry from the manipulations of self-serving political elite that have continuously exploited them as cannon fodders against their political opponents each time they lose elections or do not achieve their political aspirations thereby fanning the ambers of disunity.

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