
ETHNIC POLITICS AND NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS: 2023 PRESIDENTIAL AND GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The democratization process in Nigeria has been deeply influenced by the pervasive role of ethnic politics, presenting a complex and multifaceted challenge to the consolidation of a strong and inclusive democratic system. The 2023 General and Gubernatorial Elections in Lagos State presents a stage for a need to understand the implications of ethnic politics on the democratization process, particularly in a diverse and politically significant region like Lagos. Using the ex post facto research design, as well as the Social Identity Theory and Rational Choice Theory as theoretical lenses guiding the study, the paper employed documentary source to explore the dynamics between ethnic politics and Nigeria's democratization process. The study revealed that ethnic identity is often used as a basis for political mobilization, leading to a wide range of consequences in electoral processes. The 2023 general elections in Lagos State were marred by political violence rooted in ethnic tensions, resulting in voter intimidation and disenfranchisement. Although ethnicity played a significant role in political mobilization, it did not significantly influence the final electoral outcomes. This makes the post 2023 election period an avenue for Nigeria to address the challenges posed by ethnicity and to strengthen democratic institutions. The study thus, recommends the strengthening of the electoral institutions, the introduction of Bank Verification Number (BVN) and national ID as means of voter identification, and also, promotion of civic education and voter sensitization among others as key steps towards fostering inclusive and credible elections.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Political violence, National unity, Democratization, Nigerian election

Introduction

Nigeria, a nation with a rich cultural tapestry and diverse ethnic groups, has been undergoing a transformative democratization process since the transition from military rule to civilian governance in 1999 (Adebanwi 2016; Suberu, 2017; Akinola, 2018). The democratization journey has been marked by significant challenges and achievements. One crucial aspect that has consistently influenced its trajectory is the role of ethnic politics (Jibrin, 2022). Ethnicity has been an integral part of Nigeria's political landscape, shaping voter behavior, political mobilization, and governance patterns for decades (Adebanwi, 2021). The nation's population is comprised of over two hundred and fifty distinct ethnic groups, each with its unique cultural heritage and political aspirations. As Nigeria embraced democracy, ethnic politics emerged as a potent force, often intersecting with economic disparities, regional interests, and identity consciousness (Seberu, 2022). The use of ethnic identity as a basis for political mobilization has been a persistent feature in Nigerian politics. Political actors often exploit ethnic affiliations to mobilize support, appealing to shared cultural values, historical narratives, and communal interests (Akinola, 2018; Omotola 2020). Over the years in Nigeria, Ethnic identity served as a powerful tool to galvanize voters, especially in regions with significant ethnic concentrations (Adenanwi, 2021). Such mobilization strategies may influence voting behavior, candidate selection, and the distribution of political power.

While ethnic quotas and gerrymandering have been employed in Nigeria's electoral system to ensure that members of certain ethnic groups are adequately represented in government. And while these measures aim to address historical imbalances and foster inclusivity, they may also lead to questions about meritocracy, fairness, and the potential perpetuation of ethnic divisions (Obadare, 2016; Suberu, 2022) which might lead to conflicts. The occurrence of ethnic violence or conflict poses a significant challenge to Nigeria's democratization process. Competition for resources, political power, and socio-economic opportunities among different ethnic groups has, at times, escalated into violence and unrest (Suberu, 2022). Such incidents can undermine the democratic principles of peaceful coexistence and equitable representation.

The 2023 Presidential and Gubernatorial Elections presented a critical juncture for testing Nigeria's democratization process. Lagos State, being one of the nation's political and economic nerve centers, served as an important case study to explore the dynamics between ethnic politics and democratization. This study therefore sheds light on the impact of ethnicity-driven behaviors, policies, and social relations on democratic institutions and outcomes of the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections particularly in the context of Lagos State which serves as one of Nigeria's key political and economic hubs.

Statement of the Problem

The democratization process in Nigeria has been deeply influenced by the pervasive role of ethnic politics, presenting a complex and multifaceted challenge to the consolidation of a strong and inclusive democratic system. The 2023 Presidential and Gubernatorial Elections in Lagos State presents a stage for a need to understand the implications of ethnicity politics on the democratization process, particularly in a diverse and politically significant region like Lagos.

The problem at hand revolves around the potential consequences of ethnic-driven behaviours, policies, and social relations on the core indicators of Nigeria's democratization process. The prevalence of ethnic identity as a basis for political mobilization, occurrences of ethnic

violence or conflict, and the existence of ethnic discrimination or prejudice are significant considerations that may have shaped the electoral outcomes and democratic quality of the 2023 elections.

Therefore, the paper delved into how these indicators influence various aspects of Nigeria's democratization process, such as the level of political participation, the outcomes of elections, the quality of democracy, the level of ethnic polarization, and the occurrence of political violence.

Understanding the extent and nature of these influences is crucial to identifying potential challenges and opportunities for consolidating a robust democratic system in Nigeria and fostering social cohesion and inclusivity.

Given the historical significance of ethnic politics in Nigeria, and considering Lagos State's position as a politically and economically influential region, it is imperative to address the potential ramifications of ethnic-driven politics on democratic stability and governance. Thus, this study unraveled the intricate connections between ethnic politics and Nigeria's democratization process, providing valuable insights that can guide policy formulation, electoral reforms, and measures to promote a more inclusive and vibrant democratic future for the nation. Hence, the study raised the following research questions:

1. How did ethnic identity as a basis of political mobilization influence voter behavior and political outcomes in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State?
2. To what extent did incidents of political violence rooted in ethnic tension influence electoral participation, democratic stability, and the overall democratization process in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State?
3. What are the implications of ethnic politics on the consolidation of democratic institutions and practices in Lagos State post 2023 elections?

Research objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the impact of ethnic politics on Nigeria's democratization process, with a specific focus on the 2023 Presidential and Gubernatorial Elections in Lagos State. The research aims to understand the role of ethnic identity in political mobilization, the consequences of political violence rooted in ethnic tension, and the implications of ethnic politics on the consolidation of democratic institutions post the 2023 elections.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess how ethnic identity, as a basis for political mobilization, influences voter behavior and political outcomes during the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State.
2. To determine the extent to which incidents of political violence rooted in ethnic tension impact electoral participation, democratic stability, and the overall democratization process in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State.
3. To examine the implications of ethnicity politics on the consolidation of democratic institutions and practices in Lagos State post 2023 elections.

Literature Review

Ethnicity has been an integral part of Nigeria's political landscape for decades. The country is home to over two hundred and fifty distinct ethnic groups, each with its own unique cultural heritage and political aspirations (Jibrin, 2022). As Nigeria embraced democracy in 1999, ethnic politics emerged as a potent force, often intersecting with economic disparities, regional interests, and identity consciousness. The concept of Ethnic Politics as defined by Brubaker (2002) is the use of ethnic identity to achieve political goals, such as gaining access to power, resources, or representation. In a similar vein, Suberu (2022) defined it as "The mobilization of ethnic identity for political purposes". Other scholars like Kinola (2018) see it as "The use of ethnic identity as a basis for political mobilization, political competition, and the distribution of political power." In a similar vein, Omotola (2020) expressly described it as "The intersection of ethnicity and politics, whereby ethnic identity is used to mobilize support for political candidates or parties, to shape public policy, or to achieve other political goals". These definitions also aligns with Jibrin (2022) who sees it as the political process by which ethnic groups compete for power and resources, and by which ethnic identity is used to mobilize support for political candidates or parties. These definitions were aptly summarized by one of the pioneers of the study of Ethnic Politics Nnoli (1978) where he presents ethnic politics as the mobilization of ethnic identity for political purposes.

On the other front, democratisation can be defined and described in many ways as an ongoing process (Umezurike, 2012). Diamond (2019) defines "Democratization as a process of political change that involves the transition from an authoritarian or non-democratic political system to a democratic one." Levitsky & Way (2010) described it as the process by which a country becomes more democratic, or by which a democratic system becomes more consolidated." For Carothers (2002), democratization is a process by which a country's political institutions become more representative, accountable, and participatory." These definitions highlight the different aspects of democratization. For instance, Diamond (2019) measures democratization by looking at the level of political participation, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights. Levitsky & Way (2010) measure democratization by looking at the level of electoral competition, the degree of civil society freedom, and the strength of the rule of law. Carothers (2002) measures democratization by looking at the level of political representation, the accountability of elected officials, and the level of citizen participation in government. In all, Umezurike (2012) comprehensively explained democratization as "a process by which a political system, initially characterized by minimal popular participation, competition and accountability, gradually evolves into a system in which such participation, competition and accountability are progressively extended to all major political actors and institutions, in such a manner as to make the system increasingly responsive to the demands and aspirations of the people" highlighting some key aspects that: It is a process, not an event like something that happens overnight. It is a gradual process of political change that takes place over time; that it involves the extension of popular participation, competition, and accountability. Democratization means that more people have a say in how they are governed. It also means that there is more competition between different political actors, and that those actors are more accountable to the people. And that it is a process of making the political system more responsive to the demands and aspirations of the people. Meaning that the political system is more responsive to the needs of the people. This also means that the government is more likely to take into account the views of the people when making decisions.

Ethnic Identity and Political Mobilization

Ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to a group that is based on shared cultural traits, such as language, religion, or common ancestry (Hutchinson & Smith, 2014). While political mobilization is the process of getting people involved in political activity. When these two concepts intersect, it can lead to the phenomenon of ethnic political mobilization (Bhavnani, 2013). Bhavnani (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of political mobilization. She argues that political mobilization is a process that involves the activation of people's political identities and the mobilization of their resources for political action. She identifies a number of different factors that can contribute to political mobilization, including the presence of political opportunities, the existence of political organizations, and the level of political consciousness. Ethnic political mobilization is the use of ethnic identity to mobilize people for political purposes. This can include activities such as voting for candidates of a particular ethnic group, participating in protests or demonstrations, or supporting ethnic-based political parties (Chandra, 2004).

Brubaker (2002), Chandra (2004), Wimmer (2008) all identified several factors that could contribute towards ethnic mobilization and they include: The presence of ethnic cleavages (which are social divisions that exist between different ethnic groups). These cleavages can be based on factors such as language, religion, or region. When ethnic cleavages are strong, they can make it easier for political leaders to mobilize people on the basis of ethnic identity. The existence of ethnic political parties (political parties that are based on a particular ethnic group) helps in mobilizing people on the basis of ethnic identity, and also, the perception of threat: when people feel that their ethnic group is under threat, they may be more likely to become politically mobilized. This threat can be real or perceived. Furthermore, the availability of political opportunities which makes it possible for people to engage in political activities. When political opportunities are available, people are more likely to become politically mobilized (Wimmer, 2008).

Meanwhile, there are factors that can lead to a number of consequences as rightly observed by Suberu (2022), Omotola (2021) and Adebani (2021) such as the election of ethnic-based political leaders, contribution to political instability, violence between different ethnic groups and difficulty in building a cohesive and stable democracy. They affirmed that the relationship between ethnic political mobilization is complex and multifaceted. From this stand point, a better understanding of this relationship is therefore necessary in order to understand the dynamics of ethnic politics and the challenges of building democracy in an ethnically diverse society like Nigeria and Lagos in particular.

Political Violence and Ethnic Tensions in Nigerian Elections

Political violence and ethnic tensions have been a recurring feature of Nigerian elections since independence in 1960 (Suberu, 2022). These tensions have been fueled by a number of factors, such as Ethnic diversity. As observed by (Omotola, 2020 and Adebani, 2021), Nigeria is a multiethnic country with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with different languages, cultures, and historical experiences, hence, such diversity in most cases, make it difficult to build a cohesive national identity which could lead to conflict between different ethnic groups. Another factor is the country's history of military rule. Suberu (2022) observed that Nigeria having been ruled by the military government for more than thirty years of its history of independence, has led to a culture of impunity and disregard for the rule of law. This has made it easier for the political leaders to use violence to achieve their goals. Additionally, is the weakness of the democratic institutions. Adebani (2021) and Omotola (2020) explained that Nigeria's democratic institutions are weak and underdeveloped, and this

makes it difficult to resolve political disputes through peaceful means. This has led to series of violence in the past where different groups compete for power. For instance, they explained that the 2015 elections in Nigeria were violent with over a hundred people killed in pre-election violence and election-related violence (Omotola, 2020; Adebaniwi, 2021; Suberu 2022). The 2019 elections were also marred with violence with over five hundred persons killed (Suberu, 2022).

Despite these factors, a number of ways to address political violence and ethnic tension exists. For instance Adebaniwi (2021) suggests the promotion of national unity through education, media campaign and other initiatives that promote a common Nigerian Identity. Suberu (2022) professes the strengthening of the democratic institutions by improving the rule of law, strengthening the judiciary, and increasing transparency and accountability in government. And other measures such as addressing the root causes of the conflicts such as addressing poverty, inequality, lack of access to education and healthcare.

Theoretical framework

The paper anchors on two theoretical frameworks as lenses for our investigation and understanding of ethnic politics and Nigeria's democratization process in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State. The Social Identity theory as propounded by the social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s provided ways to understand how individuals develop and maintain their social identity, a part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from their membership in various social groups as ethnicity, nationality, religion or gender.

The theory is anchored on three basic tenets:

- 1) Social categorization: that individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into different social groups based on shared characteristics such as ethnicity. And this categorization lead to a distinction between "in-group" (group which the individual belong) and the "out-group" (group which the individual does not belong to).
- 2) Social identification: that once individuals categorize themselves as part of a particular social group, they tend to identify with that group. This identification becomes an important aspect of their self-concept and contributes a sense of self-esteem and social identity.
- 3) Social comparison: that individuals engage in social comparison between their in-group and out-group to enhance their self-esteem. They may perceive their in-group more positively and out-group more negatively, leading to in-group favouritism and potentially leading to discrimination or prejudice toward the out-group.

In the contest of our study, social identity theory provides a guide to help understand how ethnic identities influence political mobilization, voting behaviour and political outcomes. In terms of social categorization, the theory suggests that individuals in Lagos may categorize themselves based on their ethnic identities leading to distinct ethnic in-groups (for instance, the Yoruba ethnic group).

In terms of social Identification, the theory suggests that as individuals identify with their ethnic in-groups, they may become more politically engaged and supportive of candidates or parties that align with their ethnic interest. This identification may lead to increased political participation and the transformation of ethnic-based political alliances.

On the other hand, the Rational Choice Theory which originated from the Economics discipline with John Stuart Mill in the 19th century as its pioneer, has been widely used in the social sciences, and refined and developed by numerous scholars over the years such as Anthony Downs (1957), Mancur Olsen (1965) and James Wilson (1980). The rational choice theory is a theory that assumes that individuals make decisions based on their own self-interest. The basic tenets of this theory are 1). Rationality: that individuals are rational actors who make decisions based on their preferences, interests and available information. Individuals are assumed to be goal-oriented and maximize their self-interests.

2). Utility maximization: that rational actors are driven by utility maximization, meaning they make choices that provide the greatest benefit and the least costs. These choices are made after weighing the potential outcomes and their respective probabilities.

3). Cost Benefit analysis: rational choice theory involves a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals compare the benefits they expect to gain from an action to the cost they anticipate. The decision is then made based on the net gain.

4) Self-interest: that individuals act in their own self-interest and strive to achieve the outcomes that serve their personal goal and objectives. In application, the rational choice theory enables us to understand and explain voter behavior as it suggests that voters in Lagos State will carefully weigh their potential benefits and cost associated with voting for candidates from different ethnic backgrounds. The individuals may consider how their ethnic identity aligns with the political agendas of a candidate and party to make rational choice that serve their preference and interest. 5. Political mobilization: political actors such as candidates and parties are also expected to engage in rational decision-making. They may strategically use ethnic politics as a means to mobilize and appeal to specific voter segments based on their ethnic affiliations, aiming to maximize electoral support and achieve their political goals.

6. Ethnic voting pattern: Rational choice theory may help explain the emergence of ethnic voting patterns in the elections. Rational actors may perceive candidates from their own ethnic group as more likely to represent and advance their interests, leading to in-group favoritism and potentially influencing the electoral outcomes.

Research Method

The study employed the ex-post facto research design. This is also known as the “after-the fact” research design. It is a type of observational study where the researcher investigates the relationships between the independent and dependent variables after they have already occurred or have been naturally manipulated. In this type of research design the researcher does not have control over the independent variable; they are simply observed as they occur or have occurred. This research design is most suitable in situations where it is not possible or ethical to manipulate the independent variable. From these antecedents, the ex-post facto research design allowed us to critically examine ethnic politics and Nigeria’s democratization process in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State. The study further employed the documentary source as the method of data collection where books, journals, news articles and reports were copiously examined. In that front, the content analysis method was used to draw conclusions from the various sources examined.

Result

The result of our examination is presented along the following Sub-themes:

1) Ethnic identity as a basis for political mobilization and influence in the political outcome of the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections. The 2023 Presidential elections though successful, was characterized as having many cases of irregularities which included the widespread use of multiple voting, lack of transparency, the absence of party agents at the polling stations and the intimidation of voters (European Union Election Observation Mission, EUEOM, 2023; Vanguard, 2023). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the body responsible for conducting elections in Nigeria, also acknowledged that there were some irregularities in the 2023 elections. In a statement issued on February 25, 2023, INEC said that it had received "reports of some irregularities" and that it was "investigating these reports" (Foundations of Investigative Journalism, FIJ, 2023). The Presidential election according to INEC Saw Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared the winner of the presidential elections under the banner of the All Progressive Congress (APC) with 8,794,726 of 37.6% of the votes, while Atiku Abubakar under the political party banner of the People's Democratic Party,(PDP) came in second place with 6,984,520 of 29.8%, and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), in third place with 6,101,533 of 26.1%; while the New Nigeria People's Party, NNPP flag bearer, Rabiu Kwankwaso emerged fourth position with 1,496,687 of 6.4 % (Aljazeera, 2023).

During the buildup of the presidential elections, debates and rallies were conducted where the party flag bearers expressed their manifestos on what to do for the country. Along that line, interests began to shape along some fronts. From the rationalist point, a lot of Nigerian had hopes to elect a competent leader who will take the country forward. The choice of a political candidate became greatly influenced by interests. Among which were core objective interest for a competent leader to improve the state of thing in the country. Other interests were economic, based on what the individual stood to gain when their preferred candidate is elected into office, and the third was ethnic interests, where individuals and groups organized themselves along ethnic lines in other to see that their candidate who is from their ethnic group emerges victorious. This is often accompanied with the mindset that a victorious candidate from one's ethnic background would invariable mean much and better opportunities among their in-groups looking at it from both perspectives.

In the context of the general election, the rational choice of political leaders remained dominant as exemplified in the election outcome of the presidential election in Lagos State as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Presidential Result Outcome in Lagos State (In Percentage)

Political Party	Election Result
APC	572,606 46.21
PDP	75,750 6.11
LP	582,454 47
NNPP	8, 442 0.68

Source: Vanguard (2023)

Table 1 shows that though political mobilization along ethnic lines was high, it did not influence the political outcome of the presidential election in Lagos State.

On the gubernatorial front, however, the experiences of the presidential election led to massive mobilization along ethnic lines among the in-groups and those considered the out-groups. This led to many reported cases of ethnic and political violence, deliberate disenfranchisement and voter intimidation (EUEOM, 2023). The APC popular candidate

Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who received 762,134 votes emerged victorious; while Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour came in second with 312,329 votes. Olajide Adediran came in third with 235,295 votes and Abdulrasaq Balogun came in fourth with 125,523 votes. Though, ethnicity as a basis of political mobilization witnessed widespread reports during the gubernatorial election, it did not significantly affect the political outcome of the gubernatorial election as inherently the major contenders were of the same ethnic group.

2) Political Violence rooted in ethnic tension and its impact on electoral participation and democratic stability: There was no doubt, the extent of political violence rooted in ethnicity witnessed in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections was troubling (Etim, 2023). Etin (2023) narrated an incident where the in-groups singled out the out-groups and some members of the in-group suspected of being members of the out group based on their looks out of voting lines and were assaulted. He described it as eerily reminiscent of the hounding and persecution of the Jews in Germany in the 1930s. Events such as these impact negatively on the democratization process of the country where the respect for human rights and the rule of law ought to be upheld. The government institutions were faced with the challenge of providing security, and guaranty orderly conduct of its elections in all the voting areas. Voter intimidation led to the abstinence of voting of a significant number of the electorates in Lagos State. And those who defied intimidation were bodily harmed or maimed. A classic case was the case of Jennifer Seifegha, who was injured in the eye during the 2023 Lagos State gubernatorial elections. Seifegha was attacked by political thugs at the Nuru/Oniwo Ward, Polling Unit 065, in Surulere while she was waiting to vote. She was hit with a bottle, which resulted in a severe injury to her eye (Odunsi, 2023). The attack on Seifegha has been condemned by many people, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Lagos State government. INEC has said that it is investigating the attack, and the Lagos State government has promised to bring the perpetrators to justice. Seifegha's case is just one example of the violence that has been reported during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. There have been many other reports of violence, including the killing of voters and the destruction of polling stations (EUEOM, 2023). Be that as it may, there is no perfect and ideal condition even in the so-called mature democracies.

The events in the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections impacted negatively on the rights of people, the government institutions, and trust on people's beliefs in the democratic norms of the country. However, largely, democratization is a process, and the events that transpired in the 2023 general elections in Lagos State created room for further improvements.

3) The Implications of ethnic politics on the consolidation of democratic institutions and practices in Lagos State:

From the post 2023 presidential and gubernatorial election, the implications of ethnic politics are complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, while ethnicity can be a powerful force for mobilization and participation in elections, ethnicity can also be a source of division and conflict. In Lagos State, there have been cases of violence and intimidation against voters from minority ethnic groups (Etim, 2023). This raises concerns that ethnicity could be used to undermine the democratic process. The consolidation of democratic institutions and practices in Lagos State post 2023 elections will depend on how ethnicity is managed. If ethnicity is used as a tool for mobilization and participation, it can be a positive force for democracy. However, if ethnicity is used to divide and intimidate voters, it then undermines the democratic process.

Summary of Major Findings

1) Ethnic identity as a basis for political mobilization and influence:

Ethnic identity played a significant role in political mobilization during the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos State. Political actors exploited ethnic affiliations to mobilize support, appealing to shared cultural values, historical narratives, and communal interests. While ethnic mobilization was evident, it did not significantly influence the political outcome of the presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State.

2) Political violence rooted in ethnic tensions and its impact:

The 2023 general elections witnessed political violence rooted in ethnicity, leading to cases of voter intimidation, assault, and even deaths in some instances. Political violence negatively impacted electoral participation, as many voters abstained from voting due to fear or intimidation.

The incidents of violence raised concerns about the respect for human rights, the rule of law, and the ability of government institutions to provide security during elections.

3) Implications on the consolidation of democratic institutions:

The use of ethnicity for political mobilization can be a double-edged sword. While it can increase political participation, it also has the potential to create division and conflict. The post-2023 election period provides an opportunity for Nigeria to address the challenges posed by ethnic politics and strengthen democratic institutions. Managing ethnicity in politics is crucial for the consolidation of democratic practices, ensuring inclusivity, and fostering social cohesion in the country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2023 Presidential and gubernatorial elections in Lagos State showcased the complex interplay between ethnic politics and democratization. While ethnic identity influenced political mobilization, it did not significantly alter the electoral outcomes. However, the incidents of political violence rooted in ethnic tensions highlight the need for better security measures, respect for human rights and transparent electoral processes to foster a robust democratic system in Nigeria. Managing ethnic politics effectively is essential for building a cohesive and inclusive democracy in the country.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the effect of ethnic politics on Nigeria's democratization process.

1. The strengthening of Nigeria's electoral institutions, by enhancing the capacity and total independence of INEC, there will be more free, fair and credible elections. Transparent electoral process will bolster public trust and reduce the potential for violence and dispute.

2. That the Bank Verification Number BVN, with the National ID should be used as the means for voter identification and voting. This permits authenticity, and avoid unnecessary duplication of resources and time. This mechanism will also prevent under aged voting and multiple voting.

3. That the government of Nigeria should implement targeted electoral reforms to address the role of ethnic politics in the election process. Reforms may include enhanced voter education,

introduction of campaign finance regulations to ensure a level playing field for all candidates and measures to reduce ethnic based political mobilization.

4. The government and concerned stakeholders should also make compulsory, civic education and voter sensitization programmes to promote a culture of inclusivity, informed decision-making, and active participation in the democratic process. These initiatives should emphasize the importance of voting based on merit, policies and qualifications rather than ethnic affiliations.

5. The government and the concerned stakeholders should develop and implement conflict resolution and peace building initiatives to address ethnic tensions and violence arising from electoral processes. Engage local communities, religious leaders, and civil society organizations to promote dialogue and reconciliation among different ethnic groups.

6. The government should prioritize socio-economic development policies that address inequalities and improve living standards across all regions and ethnic groups. Reducing disparities can reduce the appeal of ethnic-based politics by providing citizens with tangible benefits from democratic governance.

7. The government and stakeholders should strengthen the rule of law by ensuring the rule of law is upheld and that perpetrators of electoral violence and intimidation are brought to justice. Impartial and efficient legal processes will deter future acts of violence and foster trust in the judicial system.

By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards mitigating the negative effect of ethnic politics on Nigeria's democratization process. A concerted effort is needed to promote an inclusive and stable democracy that values meritocracy, diversity, and peaceful coexistence among all citizens.

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