



## **The Issues behind Agitations, Conflict and War: A Case of Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria serves as a destination for marketing of goods and services, as such, her strategic position in Africa calls for concern on political, social and economic issues that may bedeviled the growth and development of the country. Nigeria as a country went through numerous challenges in the past such as the military takeover of political governance, from 1966-1979, and 1983-1999 when the military officers were in power. They handed over power in 1999 during the return to civilian rule. The paper seeks to investigate the issues behind the agitations in Nigeria that led to conflicts during the 2011 general elections and the agitations after 2015 general elections. The paper made use of qualitative approach through the conduct of interviews, use of internet sources such as academic journals, online newspapers and review of previous literature as sources of data collection. The findings reveals that, conflicts arising from the 2011 general elections led to the continuous attacks on the Nigerian State by the Boko Haram insurgents, and the defeat of the incumbent president in 2015 general elections led to the new agitation for the secession of Biafra from the Nigerian state.

**Keywords:** Social-economic Development, Crisis Management, National Security and War

**JEL Classifications:** H1, H12, H56

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria has the highest population in Africa with over 170 million people and the most populous Black Country on the planet earth. The country's population serves as a strategic point of call to many countries in and outside Africa. To some of the countries within and outside the African continent, Nigeria serves as a place for market with her endowed population which also represents great potentials through human resources (Terwase et al., 2014). The country's political history cannot be traced without mentioning the British colonial rule especially during the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by the then British leader, Lord Lugard. The Northern part of the country is where one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality is domiciled. Whereas, the Igbo and the Yoruba ethnic nationalities are domiciled in the Southern part of the country, however, the country's minorities

are both found in the North and Southern part of the country (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008).

The colonial rule brought together the ethnic nationalities into a whole as one entity known as Nigeria. This commitment became the substance of integrating the people from different backgrounds such as different cultural affiliations, different religion and language communication which the introduction of English language became an instrument for communication between the people. The country gained her independence in 1960 after the colonial leadership handed over power to the nationalists. However, the country started facing a different music when the struggle for ethnic identity and dominance set in rather than the promotion of national unity, national integration and national interest. Such ethnic interest became paramount and thus, fosters the promotion of ethnic identity above national identity and national interest. This was seen during the first military coup that took place in

1966 where the Igbo military officers from the present South-East region staged a coup that against the Northern political and religious leaders who were killed during the first military coup such as, the Sultan of Sokoto who was also the Premier of the Northern region, Sir Ahmadu Bello and the killing of the first and only Prime Minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. This was the beginning of political confrontation against ethnic nationalities and the struggle for political dominance in the Nigerian political stage. The first coup was later countered by another coup led by the Northern military officers who also went after the Igbo officers in the military (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008).

The military stirred the affairs of the country took another dimension where they lasted in the corridors of power from 1966 down to 1979 when the leadership of General Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to a democratically elected president on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1979, and that brought in President Shehu Shagari from Sokoto State. The military again through another organized coup cut short the civilian rule in 1983 and that formed their stay in power up to 1999 when they finally handed over power to a democratically elected government under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 1999 (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008). To this, we will discuss the issues that led to series of agitations during the return to democratic rule from 1999 to 2015 out of the 16 years of civilian rule in Nigeria.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The work sought:

- i. To investigate the issues behind the agitations in Nigeria that led to conflicts during the 2011 general elections.
- ii. To understand the issues that led to the new agitations after 2015 general elections as well as the call for secession of the South-East region to create the Republic of Biafra.
- iii. To recommend strategic measures that can lead to resolving all forms of political agitations rounding the power tussle between ethnic nationalities, religious and regional backgrounds in Nigeria.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1. Population and Sample

The research in view of the qualitative approach, made use of eight respondents during the conduct of interviews for the purpose of data collection as primary sources. The researcher made use of six selected states such as Kaduna, Benue Taraba, Rivers, Oyo and Enugu to represents the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

### 3.2. Sources of Data

The paper made use of oral interview consisting of semi-structured and unstructured interviews as sources of primary data collection, while the secondary data sources consisted of academic journals, internet sources using online newspapers and the review of previous literature.

### 3.3. Technique of Data Analysis

This research work employed historical and interpretative analysis. The research equally used content analysis and transcription of

data sources for the purpose of enhancing deeper understanding of the research work.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 4.1. Lessons from 2011 General Elections

The country over the years witnessed series of changes in the political affairs and leadership of Nigeria. These periods of the country's leadership was thus, viewed from the perspectives of which region does the leader comes from, of what religion is he or she, and of what ethnic nationality is he from? These are the views that shaped the understanding of the country's leadership and that promoted ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria. In understanding these issues as it shaped the political atmosphere of the country, we will focused on some of the sub-topic below for more understanding as such issues led to agitations, conflict and war in Nigeria's democratic rule especially in 2011 and 2015 general elections.

#### 4.1.1. The military era

Nigeria's military rule was characterized as the period of Northern hegemony in Nigeria where out of the totality of the military leaders from 1966 to 1999 exception of the democratic rule from 1979 to 1983 which was led by an elected President, Shehu Shagari. The Northern hegemonic rule started under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon who ruled from 1966 to 1975, another Northern military leader, General Murtala Mohammed came into power through another coup in 1975 though was later assassinated in 1976. The military under General Obasanjo ruled from 1976 to 1979 when he handed over to an elected government led by President Shehu Shagari. He was overthrown in 1983 by the military government and that prolonged the stay of the military in power. As such, the North led the country from 1966 to 1975, 1979 to 1999 while the South had ruled the country only from 1976 to 1979 under General Olusegun Obasanjo, and the 3 months of Chief Ernest Shonekan as the Head of Interim National Government from August, 1993 to November, 1993 both leaders are Yoruba men from the present South-West region (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008).

#### 4.1.2. Civilian rule

Political agitations from the Southern part of the country especially the South-West region led to the country's return to democratic rule in 1999. Attempts were made to return the political power from the hands of the military to the civilian and democratically elected government. These attempts were seen during the General Ibrahim Babangida led administration from 1985 to 1993 where elections were conducted and that brought in the third republic. Although, at the federal level, the annulment of the June 12, presidential elections in 1993 which was believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O Abiola, a Yoruba Man from the South-West, led to series of agitations for the military to hand over power to a democratically elected government (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008).

After, the annulment, the military still lasted in power till 1999 when they returned the power to the civilian government. The 1999 presidential election was zoned to the Southern part of the country since the country experienced the Northern hegemonic

rule during the military. Again, the South-West had agitated for Presidential power where they could rule the country haven annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential elections that were believed to have been won by Chief Abiola from the South-West. As such, no single Northerner contested for the position of the president in 1999 since that seat was zoned to the South-West and the two presidential candidates were all from the South-West, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the people's democratic party (PDP) and Chief Olu Falae, a joint candidate of all people party and alliance for democracy (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008).

President Olusegun Obasanjo won the presidential elections and he ruled from 1999 to 2007 given it a period of 8 years and two consecutive terms. After his rule, the presidency was zoned to the North since the South had ruled for two terms of 8 years. This principle of zoning and rotation of presidency was enshrined into the PDP constitution in order to give equal participation, justice, fairness to all the zones especially the power sharing formula between the North and South. When power returned to the Northern part of the country in 2007, President Yar'Adua was elected as the country's leader and of the Fulani ethnic nationality from the North. His tenure in office was short-lived as a result of ill-health which resulted to his death in office on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2010.

Yar'Adua's death brought in President Goodluck Jonathan who was the Vice-President to power as the country's new leader, and first from the South-South zone to have ruled the country. The North had anticipated President Jonathan not to contest in the 2011 general elections after the period of 4 years that brought him into presidency through a joint ticket North/South as Yar'Adua/Jonathan ticket. However, Jonathan thought otherwise, he neglected his party's constitutional zoning arrangement believed to have contested since the Nigerian constitution does not recognized zoning/rotation of presidency arrangement. This created an atmosphere that brought in the re-emergence of the Boko Haram attacks in the Northern part of the country (Neji, 2015; Ukaibe, 2015; Brimah, 2014; Newsrescue, 2014; Nwabughio, 2013). The North agitated for Presidency to rule the country for another 4 years before power would return back to the South, they felt since they the North, willingly handed over power to the South in 1999 without contesting for the seat of the president in 1999, power had stayed in the South from 1999 to 2007, same should occur in the North where power would reside in the North from 2007 to 2015 making a period of 8 years as it was in the Southern part of the country. These agitations could not hold water since President Jonathan went ahead and contested and eventually won the general elections in 2011 but never witnessed peace and political stability in the country, till again he contested in 2015 general elections and he was defeated by the opposition party whose candidate was from the Northern part of the country (Oche, 2015; Ukaibe, 2015; Terwase et al., 2015).

## 4.2. The Renewed Quest for Biafra Republic

### 4.2.1. Rotation of presidency

Since zoning and rotation of presidency was no longer respected within the then ruling political party, the PDP, it was truncated in 2011 and that also gave another avenue for the incumbent President Jonathan to have contested in the 2015 general election against the

wish of the Northern political block (Awopeju et al., 2012). The work of Terwase et al., (2015) observed that, the truncated zoning arrangement created a vacuum where the South-West was sidelined through the power equation in 2011 top positions in the country such as the President, Vice-President, President of the Senate, Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Secretary to the Federal Government and the Chairman of the Ruling Political Party were all scrambled by other zones.

The South-West in 2015 general elections forged a common union with the North to beat the incumbent president in the elections by supporting the opposition political party, the All Progressive Congress while the South-South zone and the South-East zones united to vote for the incumbent President Jonathan. His defeat during the elections led to another fallout from the Nigerian power equation and that became an introduction to the new agitation for the creation of the Republic of Biafra by the South-East youths through protest within the major towns and capital cities of the South-Eastern states. Biafra agitations were in the past carried out from 1967 to 1970 during the Nigerian civil war. The quest for secession from Nigeria to establish the Republic of Biafra led to the first civil war in Nigeria, and it was led by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008). The war saw the death of so many Igbo people from the present day South-East. Since the end of the Nigeria's civil war in 1970, no Igbo man have occupied the position of the President of Nigeria and that is the core area of their agitations that they may have the opportunity to rule the country like other major ethnic groups in Nigeria such as the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani. As such, the position of the President be zoned to them, the South-East in order to have an Igbo President in Power (Table 1).

### 4.2.2. Social-economic issues

Igbo as one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria sought for the top jobs in the country through agitations and such agitations are carried out by some of their organized groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), their leader, Ralph Uwazuruike noted that MASSOB was established in 1999 and at that time some of the top jobs in the country were not occupied by the Igbo ethnic nationality in Nigeria. He further pointed out that, out of the 16 years (1999-2015) of the return to democratic rule, only the seat of the President of Nigeria that is yet to be occupied by an Igbo. The MASSOB leader also noted that they will continue their agitations

**Table 1: No zoning arrangements during the 2015-2016 leadership positioning**

S. No.	Political office	Geopolitical zone	Duration
1	President	North-West	2015-2019
2	Vice President	South-West	2015-2019
3	Senate President	North-Central	2015-2019
4	Speaker of Federal House of Representatives	North-East	2015-2019
5	Secretary to the Federal Government	North-East	2015-2019
6	Chairman of the Ruling Party	South-South	2015-2019

Source: Yerima et al. (2016)

until issues such as Igbo South-East presidency among others would be achieved (Ndidi, 2015).

Again the MASSOB leader, Ralph Uwazuruike, called for the release unconditionally of the Director of Radio Biafra, London, Nnamdi Kanu, who was arrested by the Nigerian security operatives. That the Radio Biafra was established by MASSOB as a medium to showcase the issues affecting the Igbo people such as marginalization, however, the Director of the Radio Biafra was using the radio to propagate news outside the context of its set ideals as well as its objectives (Ndidi, 2015).

It is also noted that, the Igbo are marginalized in the area of provision of job opportunities, the South-East as neglected by the Federal Government though allegedly, the government spent billions in awarding contracts on the poor state of roads within the region while the roads remain poor in their condition and as such, it calls for the Federal Government to probe the contracts that were awarded. Also, it was noted that, the region is bedeviled with high rate of unemployed youths within South-East and the region is also affected by flooding and erosion prompting the cutting of other communities. Another factor regarding the agitations is in line with poor distribution of Nigeria's resources to the South-East zone (Ohazulike, 2015).

It is well-known in Nigeria that, through agitations the Niger Delta militants from the South-South geopolitical zone sought for the attention of the Federal Government and the international community to address the issues that bedeviled the growth and development of their region. Such agitations yielded fruits since the militants were called upon to drop their weapons against the government in order to enable the government to look into the issues. The government further granted the Niger Delta militants Amnesty program as well as created the Federal Ministry of the Niger Delta to see into ways of solving the problems sounding the region (Ohazulike, 2015).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research work attempted in bringing to the fore the issues that were tabled through agitations from one ethnic nationality to the other as well as from one zone/region to the other both in the past and present. These agitations, some were politically motivated while some lie within the social-economic context and dimension. In the 1960's the country witnessed agitations that later turned into violence and war as seen during the military coups that occurred in 1966 and the civil war in 1967-1970.

The military regimes were the days of the Nigeria's constant agitations for the return to civil rule especially in 1993 when the June 12, presidential elections were annulled by the then military government led by General Ibrahim Babangida. Subsequently, the agitations continued until the military finally handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1999. The South-West spent the period of 8 years rule under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, who ruled from 1999 to 2007. The seat of the president was zoned to the South-West in order to rest their agitation for presidency after the June 12, 1993 presidential

elections was annulled. Power sharing between the North and South led to the return of power to the North in 2007 after southern leadership of 8 years. President Yar'Adua took over power from Obasanjo in 2007 but later died in 2010 and that led to another power shift to the South through President Jonathan whose contest in 2011 general election brought in violent attacks in the North. The North had agitated to rule from 2007 to 2015 but that dream was not achieved.

Nigeria, thus witnessed series of agitations but some of these agitations led to carrying of arms against the Nigerian state such as the Boko Haram attacks in the Northern part of the country 2009 to date (2015 under study) and the Niger Delta militants that also took arms before they were granted Amnesty program which led to their dropping of arms against Nigeria. After the 2015 general elections, another dimension of agitation arose from the South-East region for secession from Nigerian state and to achieve the creation of the Republic of Biafra which was fought for in 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war and this would take us to recommendations.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to have a peaceful country where the people irrespective of their political affiliations, religious and ethnic backgrounds, the paper recommends that, adoption of the early-warning mechanism by the federal government of Nigeria as stipulated in the work of Terwase et al. (2015) as observed that, issues that may escalate into war should be taken care of at the early stage especially as the people agitate. Jobs should be created for the youths who are mostly used during agitations through protest and carrying of arms against the government. Such youthful energy should be enhanced into what will benefit the state rather than allowing them to be used against the state. The Federal government of Nigeria with the collaboration of the National Assembly should amend the Nigerian constitution so that it will accommodate zoning/rotation of presidency across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. This would promote peace, unity, national integration and political stability in the country. Like in the case of the Boko Haram, it started in Nigeria but today it has taken another dimension where their attacks has escalated to other countries in Africa such as Republic of Chad, Cameroon and Niger. It therefore, evolves an international dimension of security threat to Africa.

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