

Reconfiguring the Nigerian Political System: Issues and Perspective: Chuma Adilieje

ABSTRACT

The disappearance of some structural imperatives of the compromises made by the indigenous Nigerian leaders in the process of the evolution of the Nigerian state has led to the emergence and persistence of other contradictions that continues to define the character of governance, intra-state relations and the general functioning of the Nigerian political system. In the context of the foregoing has emerged the crisis of state, in many instances occasioned by the inability of the state to remain above the clash of partisan interests. Thus, the contradictions and inadequacies of the existing political system portend danger for the sustained survival of Nigeria.

This paper therefore, examines the fundamental features of the Nigerian political system, and , interrogates the theoretical bases for the explanation and understanding the Nigerian political system. It establishes and highlights some of the fundamental and philosophical directions of change, most of which basically point towards the search for equity, stability, legitimacy and peaceful development in the Nigerian political system.

INTRODUCTION

The attempt to understand and explain the fundamental nature of the Nigerian political system and processes of socio-political life in Nigeria, has attracted a considerable level of concern and focus of scholars before now. Yet, critical questions over the nature, structure, problems and the way forward for the Nigerian political system remain unanswered. The further question of how adequate the established or yet to be established structure of the Nigerian political system is, especially in respect of the challenges of self maintenance/adjustment; and the guarantee of national unity, equity, stability, and development will depend on whether such a system can be brought into congruence with the fundamental realities of the Nigerian political process. The question of nationhood in Nigeria has remained an elusive goal, adversely affected by centrality of the intense and persistent struggle to control and exploit public offices of the state; ethnicity; regionalism; communal conflicts, religious bigotry; inequitable control and distribution of national resources; the predisposition to preatorianism; and the tendency towards absolutization of state power even in a civil democratic setting. The country is thus yet to significantly transcend the trappings associated with the notion of the state as mere 'geographical expression.'

Nigeria is made up of composite of groups that are significantly different in social structure, political system, ethnicity, cultural and geographical endowments etc. A creation of British imperialism, the amalgamation of the country in 1914 under colonial

rule saw the emergence of primordial loyalties within the context of collective state interest, and thus the emergence and persistence of other contradictions that continue to define the character of governance, intra-state relations and the general functioning of the Nigerian Federal Political System. In the context of the foregoing has emerged also, the intense struggle for an ever-greater share in state power by individuals and groups and indeed for access to the important state resources. The crisis of state or of the legitimacy of government in the face of whole exclusion of groups and indeed the majority of the people from the arena of power, has called to question the adequacy of the present political system in Nigeria.

The inability of the state to remain above the clash of partisan interest has often resulted to resistance or what has been described as the crisis of legitimacy. The apparent disappearance of the compromises made in the process of the evolution of the Nigerian state that saw the emergence of the Federal structure (in which there was the reconciliation of the diverse cultures of the plural society with the demands of national unity) portends danger for the sustained survival of Nigeria. The purpose of this paper is basically to explore the theoretical basis for understanding the Nigerian political system. Except for the fundamental/philosophical directions of change process which this paper will recommend, another equally important task will be to lay bare the fundamental features of the Nigerian political system, and by extension, the understanding of the present realities might advance the search for stability, equity, legitimacy and peaceful development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the systems theory as the framework for analysis. A system is a component of units with identifiable boundaries interacting with each other in the external environment. System analysis generally involves a study of a set of interrelated variables as distinguished from the environment of the set, as well as the mechanism by which the set is maintained during environmental disturbances.

Easton (1967) defined political system as 'that system of interaction in any society through which binding authoritative allocation are made or implemented.' His system model comprises of (I) input, which consists of demands and support (II) the conversion is the process through which demands are converted into decision or policies before they enter the political (III) the output that is the response of the political system to the demand made upon it. They are the authoritative political decisions. (IV) The feedback is the consequent input, which results from the output of the system.

The inability to entrench in the Nigerian political system, an effective mechanism that can enable it cope with the demands and dynamics of the systemic issues, as well as, the turbulence in the environment generally, in terms of effecting necessary structural/institutional changes and re-ordering the system goals as and when may be required, has entrenched strong tendency towards instability which perennially is manifested through different dimensions of conflicts and violence that pose serious threats to continued existence of the Nigerian political system. There are inherent structural and systemic contradictions that though well recognized as great challenges to systemic stability,

remain unresolved essentially, because conventional channels for such have failed to provide the desirable solutions.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Scholars differ in their theoretical perceptions and explanations of the political system. Two major theoretical perspectives have emerged in this context: the orthodox/liberal and the political economy/materialist persuasions. A major preoccupation of the orthodox application of system analysis to the understanding of politics is to underscore the applicability of the scientific study of politics, in which case political life is regarded as a system of interaction between various components, as well as to seek to provide theoretical basis for explaining political phenomena such as instability, social tension, conflicts, or violence. Orthodox analysis political system has focused mainly on the works of Talcon Parsons and levy (structural-functionalism), David Easton (systems theory), Harold Laswell and Karl Deustch etc. Parsons and levy demonstrates the assumptions of the liberal school about the political system by stating that:

All system have structures which can be identified and that the parts of elements of these structures perform functions (hence, structural-functionalism) within the system which have meaning only in terms of the working of the system as an active entity for their existence, and are in turn, linked in such a way as to be also dependent on each other for their activity (cited in Omolle, 1994).

Gabriel Almond (1960) identified four essential elements in structural functionalism of political systems as legitimate patterns of interaction: (a) some structures may be specialized than others in terms of the number of functions they perform; (b) whatever the difference between system and structures, the same political functions are performed in all political systems (c) political structures perform multiple functions; and (d) all political systems are characterized by a culture, the latter which is a mixture of the traditional and the modern. Apter has underscored the primacy of the 'relation... between the authority of a government and the degree of support that it is able to engender' as an essential element in a political system. He proposed another important element in a political system, by identifying a government, which establishes:

A particular forms of relationship between the levels of coercion which characterizes the political system and society and the amount of information which is allowed to percolate through them and the amount of both information and coercion is related to the extent of hierarchy and the kind of values characteristic of the governmental order... the relationship between information and coercion determines the degree of choice which is open to government (Cited in Omell, 1994: 81).

This perspective is closely related to Deutshe's cybernetics which emphasizes the

capacity of a political system to establish a 'communication network that produces action in response to an input of information and includes the results of its own action in the information by which it modifies its subsequent behaviour. (Ibid) Easton argues that the internal and external environments of a political system are vital to the political life of the system, owing to pressures and demands made on the system by the two environments that in any case may be hostile or conducive. Dahl, (1961) identifies power, authority and influence as essential elements in political system. Power without influence is a lame concept. But for the avoidance of naked force and brute coercion in power relations, the exercise of power must be backed up with authority and legitimacy. Laski (1967) adopted a conceptual approach to the study of the political system by examining the concepts of the state, sovereignty, rights of individuals, equality, authority, political and economic institutions etc. which he considered vital for any policy formulations in the system. However, the orthodox perspective has been criticized for lacking in analytical attention to the dynamics and non-super structural variables significant to the survival of a political system.

Although differences exist among writers over the origin, nature and perception of the role of the state, there is a seeming convergence of views on the actual meaning of the state, this is with regards to the manifest features of the relevant institution. The state refers to the political entities that exercise sovereignty over a specified territory, it possesses as its distinguishing feature, the monopoly control over the legitimate use of force. Further, liberal scholars defines the state from the limited perspective of their own paradigm, as a set of neutral institutions that exist for the purpose of regulating the various conflicting interest or of group struggle in the value allocation process in the society. There is however, a major shift in the analysis of the structure of the political system between the liberal and radical paradigms. Further insights can be gleaned from the works of notable authors as B.J. Dudley, Samuel Huntington, and Aristide Zolberg are worth summarizing as they correspond in many ways to the arguments advanced by the liberal scholars regarding the polity. Accordingly, Dudley (1973) was concerned essentially with structural issues, order and political instability. Generally, his focused on how to create state structures which can in turn create political order, brings to the fore the view of politics as a game, the analogy of politics as a game being that every game is governed by rules and so is politics. That politics is governed by rules follows the philosophy that politics is expected to create order in the society (state of nature). Dudley, (Ibid) delineated two sets of rules in politics: (a) the structural rules are the fixed or rigid rules that exist to regulate human freedom and therefore determine the stability of the game. To bring about order there is the needs to redesign rules that regulate absolute freedom through the constitution and therefore prevent anarchy of freedom that is typical of the state of nature. These constitute rules define the boundaries within which politics must be played (b) Regulative rules are the flexible rules and are processual in nature. They are those rules that can bend without breaking or altering the structural rules, and are also permissible within the game. In some sense the structure may create processes since it determines what kind of process that is possible. Under the weight of attack the

structural rules may collapse or find a way or reforming itself to equilibrium. The changes in structure also bring about consequential changes in the processes.

The term 'enduring parameters' have been used by some scholars to highlight the defining features of the structure of Nigerian politics which the former Military President Gen. Babangida referred to as the 'settled issue' or the so called 'no go area(s)' in Nigerian politics (i.e. Nigerian federalism, Security of the Nigerian state and two party systems). These issues are perceived as being serious enough to cause fundamental disruptions once they are affected.

A central concern of Huntington (1968) in his study of 'political order in changing societies' is with the phenomenon of political change not so much with the historical processes that brought about the change. A typical changing society is an unstable society, i.e. one moving from tradition to modern society. When changes occur, it signals a situation of instability, the society may therefore experience stress and trauma in the process of change. His concern was therefore not only on how explain but also to prescribe how the society can move to situation of stable order. What makes a society stable or unstable is a function of its institution. While in state societies political system are strong and are capable of withstanding strains with the political institution having acquired values and stability. In the case of unstable societies that are undergoing changes its political institution will appear to be experiencing some form of weakness in terms of their capacity to perform the functions of government. Lucian Pye (1973:4, cited in Dudley, 1973:4; see also Adilieje, 2005:385) in his book 'Politics, Personality and Nation Building' referred to two theories of instability in his analysis of Burma's political instability: psychosocial theory and systemic theory. He argued that behaviour is a product of socialization process and therefore it is helpful to picture the individual passing through three interactive processes which condition his approach to political choice and action: basic socialization process, political recruitment (Ibid). Stability, instability and events can be thus explained in terms of one of the processes of socialization.

This sociological variant assumes a generally stratified social system in which conflict relation often exists between different generational groups. It is argued that in these 'new states' where the first generation of nationalists has had to adopt an extremely radical posture in their struggle for independence the states are more likely to be politically unstable. Since stability is taken to be a function of legitimacy of existing institutions it would seem to follow that in an unstable state these are not infact institutions.

Zolberg (1973) has suggested that in the 'new states there is scarcely any reality to political organization and processes, in that constitutional arrangements for example has had little reality beyond their physical existence as a set of written symbols of government. Focusing on political institutions and the concept of power deflation he argued like Huntington in his study of the structure of conflict in West Africa that as institutions undergo changes within the society political power became deflated. The power and legitimacy of government began to deflate with the reaction of people to the

failure of government to fulfill promises and meet with the demands of the people. The government experiencing deflation of power also reacts and this degenerates into exercise of raw power through regression leading most times to violence and even forceful overthrow of the government/military incursion in politics.

There is a major shift in the analysis of the structure between the liberal and radical paradigms and especially over what is to be done. Much of radical analysis is derived from Karl Marx's analysis of economic structure of the society from which political questions can be inferred, for example 'how does the way the economy of a society is structured affect the distribution of power in the society.' Marx reduced the numerous variable contained in the orthodox matrix to essentially 'the relationship between the economic basis and political, legal and ideological super-structures.' The guiding compass that led Marx to this position can best be summarized in his own words:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production, which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material production forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general (cited in Omelle 1994; see also Lenin, 1976)

The collapses of feudalism, colonialism on the one hand, and the endemic contradictions and violence etc. in the capitalist political system on the other, point to the inevitability of instability. Marx analysis gives primacy to material conditions. The emphasis of politics as being basically about allocation of resources is secondary to production thus bringing the issue to the realm of economics. Since the high point of the definition of politics is the allocation of values, the economic structure has consequences for the analysis of allocation. The Marxists thus argued that politics must go beyond the allocation to also focus on production. The radical perspective sees the state as a partisan actor and a creation of the bourgeois class, and exists to sustain the interest of this class. This perspective is diametrically opposed to the liberal notion that state is a neutral actor by asserting that the capacity of the state for autonomous action; in contrast it considered the state as an entity circumscribed by the ruling class who created it to sub-serve its own interests. The fierce struggle for the acquisition of state power in a developing country like Nigeria, results from the dominant role of the state in social life of these societies. The primacy of state power has made consideration of other issues less important. For instance, economic decisions are invariably made on political considerations consequently National wealth is tendentially disassociated from the effort from productive capitalist enterprise. This in turn deprives Nigerian capitalism of development impetus. Ake (1981) observed that the Nigerian political problems is a composite of first, political instability problems; second, ethnic problems, given that ethnic consciousness has become politicized and constituted political condition for making political claims consequently pushing the tone of politics to the extreme; and third, class issue which

arises from the gap between the few rich, often members of the political class and poor masses. This results in the failure of the political class to mobilize the masses for any serious national purpose, and the apathy, cynicism, and hostility of the masses. The inevitable failure of development strategies favours the parasitic elite that are in control of state power. Joseph (1991:39-40) has gone a step further to add military and economic structure of Nigerian society to this problem list. In addition, and interwoven with these elements is what he termed *prébendal politics*: basically, a refined way of pursuing personal and reference group interests through the pursuit and use of state offices. The success or failure of any political system in Nigeria he asserts will depend on its capacity to control, harness and yet liberate the energies that flow through these channels.

THE NATURE OF THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Arising from previous efforts to study the Nigerian political system is the varied characterization of the Nigerian state. Consequently, the Nigerian State has been described as 'a rentier state', a 'failed state', a 'praetorian state', and a 'pensile state' etc. The study of the Nigerian political system would however require the understanding of the nature of the colonial state. The Nigerian political system has its precursor in the colonial Nigerian state thus it did not emerge as a result of the desire of the people of Nigeria. It was strategic colonial instruments for the administrative and organizational control under British imperialism that saw the amalgamation of the country in 1914 and later the introduction of the federal system. The *raison d'être* of the colonial state was therefore the exploitation, domination and subjugation of the people of Nigeria in order to realize the objectives of colonialism with minimum cost. While the colonial state was an instrument of the metropolitan government superintending a capitalist home economy, the Nigerian society was essentially subsistent in production and depended largely on agricultural production with minimal trade and exchange. This was however destroyed in order to facilitate the imperialist capitalist expansion and exploitation.

The Nigerian federal system presented three major structural – functional features (Bach 1997:371) clearly 'Dominant was the tri-polar regional division of the country with an in-built asymmetry resulting from physical, demographic and constitutional dominance of the northern parts. The second, characteristic was a formally open and competitive political system together with regionally based political parties and the tendency towards one party-system through entrenched control of the regional governments and parastatals. A third feature was Nigeria's revenue allocation formula, based on the derivative principle this naturally created discrepancies in the resources available to the region as well as varying degrees of authority vis-à-vis the central government's financial grants'. This cluster of parameters generated access to political and economic resources at the federal level. The tension that ensued eventually led to violence and the January 15 1966 coup d'état. Constitutional reforms envisaged palliating the excesses of regionalism and tribalism only exacerbated pre-existing cleavages and led to the outbreak of civil war.

The introduction of the federal system was also meant to enhance unity and

regional autonomy etc. The system has however undergone adjustments sometimes considered inimical to the achievement of these objectives, along this line has emerged major contradictions that has to do with the apparent disappearance of the defining features in respect of devolution of power, revenue allocation and resource derivation towards recentralization that took roots under prolonged years of military rule. There has emerged in Nigeria 'new patterns of intra-elite competition during the 1970s, a trend which has developed independently from the replacement of a west minister model by an executive presidential system or the alternation between civilian and military regimes' (Ibid).

The creation of new states in Nigeria has exacerbated the fluid patterns of alignment as number of states increased over the years and also broadened the interplay of geo-ethnic forces. The major impetus and sustaining bases for this trend has been the crude oil export receipts that have taken government attention off other productive activities. Joseph (1991:79) points out that the real essence of the Nigerian polity during the years of military government, was a civil military diarchy on two levels: first, an overt political one with power-sharing between soldiers and civilian politicians, and second, a more structured and perhaps significant one in which the pre-existing civil bureaucracy became enmeshed at its highest level with the military bureaucracy, both of which jealously guarded their corporate identities while making the most of this temporary union. The inheritors of state power in Nigeria in July 1966 saw their duty as being that of rescuing the Nigerian federation from dismemberment and achieving the rapid return of power to civilians despite the departure of many Easterners from the Northern parts of the country following wide spread massacre. Owing to the failure to achieve the reintegration of the Eastern Region through diplomatic efforts, the longer they stayed in power under prolonged crisis, the more their perception of their duty broadened.

In a way regional governments lost their position as engines for generation of a 'rising class' as it were during the 1950s and post independence years, while location of national wealth shifted from the regions to the centre. 'Compounding the apparent absence of any limits to the state's financial capacity was the fact that the military government throughout the post civil war decade had no generative theory of the limits to government action'. Politics as an unremitting and unconstrained struggle for the possession and access to state offices, with the chief aim of procuring direct material benefits to oneself and one's acknowledge communal group (prebendalism) became pronounced as transitional military regime (1975-79) sought to lay basic infrastructure of a stable political order? And in effect alter dominant pattern of socio political behaviour. (Ibid: 74-75).

In plural society's authority, power and regulation are of crucial significance in maintaining, controlling, and co-ordination. While demonstrating cultural barriers to democracy Lijphart (1977:1) echoes a classical theorist of liberal government 'cultural diversity or pluralism automatically imposes the structural necessity for domination by one of the cultural sections ... necessitates non democratic regulation of group relationship' (see also Joseph 1991:21). The growth of systematic abuse of state offices

and resources for individual and group interests as the 'expected', and then the rewarding of this practice in the interaction of clients and patrons, politicians and constituencies, even while it is condemned rhetorically in aggregate and abstract (see Diamond, 1997: 582-3), heightened the spate of fierce sectional competition and the tendentious absolutization as a means of maximizing the gains of state power.

The level of antagonism in political conflicts in Nigeria might decline if politics and government were to become less salient, less important as a source of advantages and disadvantages (Dahl; 1973:22). Akinyemi (2002) has alluded to the point that the rise of ethnic militias for example, in plural societies like Nigeria is the result of fractured structures and the failed or failing mechanism for dealing with pluralism. The pseudo-federal system he argued is best articulated by the Nigerian model that also provides a classic case of the rise of ethnic militias as a function of the breakdown of Nigerian federalism. Federalism entails recognition of the existence of major structures with sufficient difference as to warrant some concrete separateness. Military intervention has had two consequences for national question. First, was the destruction of the federal system and adoption of a pseudo-federal system reflecting its belief that only over-centralized system with powerful centre can contain the competing nationalities of Nigeria. The second consequence a derivative of the first reaffirms the description of the Nigerian army as an ethnic militia in an unclassical form. The other nationalities in Nigeria regard the post military constitution as un-federal and a design to enhance the power potentials and the interest of the Hausa-Fulani. Clearly, this has substantially truncated the guarantee of autonomy in the system that was negotiated at independence.

Nigerian politics has been characterized as essentially 'ethnic politics' in which primordial identities ultimately determine political considerations and inter group relations. This view is diametrically opposed to the Marxist perspective which views ethnicity as 'a dependent variable, a form of false consciousness that serves to camouflage the more fundamental and objective interest of competing classes.' A more realistic analysis of the Nigerian politics would suggest that 'ethnicity' is fundamentally a political phenomenon that assumes the role of interest group on the intensive struggle between groups over the strategic positions of the state. The extensive development of corruption and nepotism highlight the neo-patrimonial slant/feature of the Nigeria state. 'Patterns of codification of the access to resources and intra-elite competition are simply more codified due to the introduction of consociational mechanisms. (Bach, 1977:385).

Nigerian launched another democratic experiment in 1999, but precisely because it lacks any real institutional mediation or restraint a democratic politics of prebendalism cannot possibly be stable' (Diamond, 1997:582). Despite this, Diamond (1997:584-585), cites Peter Ekeh's assertion that the culture of uncivicness that has deep roots in colonial rule and created major contradictions has also been shaped by the country's ethnic divisions, by its poverty and underdevelopment and by statism. 'Sweeping state control over the economy provided an enormously powerful inducement to selfish, corrupt, uncivil behaviour, because the stakes in holding power were so huge, and the cost of being out of power, in an economy that offered relatively few truly independent

opportunities for wealth accumulation, were so steep,'

In summary it is clear that analyses of the Nigerian political system would require the basic understanding of the crucial elements of its socio-political structure. Sambo (1997) has noted four basic elements of this structure of power relations that can be isolated thus: First, is the complexity of the Nigerian socio-political process that has to do with its heterogeneity. The country is an aggregation of the nations of diverse origin, culture, ecological zones, political systems etc. The complexity of the Nigerian society affected the diversity of economic, political and cultural processes that emerged in the colonial period as well as the pattern of development. It continues to shape the contemporary issues, and social behaviour and government action. A major implication of the complexity of the Nigerian political system is clear in the area of rational decision making which as rendered the principle of rationality incoherent and redundant. A second feature is the transitionality of the Nigerian political system Peter Ekeh (1975) has pointed to the fact that Nigeria is still under construction and yet to attain nationhood. Thus, it has yet to transit or transform itself from the pre-colonial primordial loyalties to a much more civic culture in the postcolonial period. There is an ascription of morality to the primordial public and inversely amorality to the civic public in Africa. Third, is the plural nature of the country, this is in terms of multiple allegiances of language, bonds of culture, bonds of religion, or social classes, and social classifications. These in effect form the basis of political mobilization and highlight the point about the feature of our plurality that concedes to instability and decay on Nigeria. Its manifestation in the civil and military bureaucracy for example highlights its deployment in the process 'by which social collectivities seek to maximize the rewards by increasing access to resources and opportunity to a limited circle of eligible and therefore to retain power through this process (social closure)'. The fourth deals with the fact of Nigeria's under development and dependency. The country's history of colonialism and its incorporation into the world capitalist system truncated its autonomous development led to its dependent development. There was a *raison d'être* for the establishment of the colonial state. The logic of capitalism entailed that one must continue to produce in order for capital to augment its value. The need for raw materials mechanized for production and market for the excess production led to acquisition of territory. To realize these goals the colonial state had to restructure the local economy to become monetized e.g. through introduction of taxation which were paid in currency. The economy was also subsequently, externally controlled through an exchange process in which case Nigerian peasant farmers had no control over what they produced (Ake 1981).

RECONFIGURING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Any attempt at recreating an enduring political system in Nigeria must seek to bring such a system into congruence with the realities of the fundamental processes of the Nigerian political life, and therefore provide the systemic wherewithal for counteracting the problems that are evident in the preceding analyses. There is the need to satisfy the basic aspirations of the citizens and groups as well as, to reconstruct the present politically-oriented antagonistic relationship between the superstructures and the

economic basis upon which the system thrives. The primacy of the economic/productive component of the system must be stressed and elevated over the superstructure which constitute mainly of the consumer sector of a political system.

A major concern that is at centre of Nigerian politics is the danger of creating a permanent minority that looms even in the operation of a democratic dispensation. As a way out, consociational theorists have suggested recognition that the aims of democratic government sometimes require the modification of certain fundamental democratic practices. As Lipset has further argued 'a stable democracy requires a situation in which the major political parties include supporters from many segments of the population. A system in which the support of different parties corresponds too closely to basic social divisions cannot continue to operate on democratic basis, for it reflects a state of conflict so intense and 'clear cut' as to rule out compromise' (See Joseph, op. cit: 25). Additionally, Nordlinger (1972; see also Joseph, *ibid*) identified six conflict regulating practice representing a departure from orthodox or pure majoritarianism for 'deeply divided societies': (a) a stable governing coalition (b) the principle of proportionality (c) the mutual veto (d) purposive depoliticization (e) compromising on divisive issues, and (f) the practice of unilateral concessions (*Ibid*). Similarly, Lijphart (*Op.Cit.*) contends that in societies where all decisions are perceived as entailing high stakes as we have noted of Nigeria, 'strict majority rule places a strain on the unity and peace of the system.'

A salient question of whether a shift from the dominant normative model of democracy can be achieved in Nigeria without negating the fundamental tenets of democratic practice is a dominant concern against consociationalism. In this regard attempt must be made to move away from undue focus on the behaviour of political elites and on their capacity to 'establish a viable pluralistic state by a process of mutual forbearance and accommodation.' (Daalder, 1971:355).

Owing to the rhetoric commitment of Nigerians to democracy, it would appear that the enthronement of strong democratic political culture within the context of reformed state structures that guarantees real administrative and fiscal federalism represents the only viable option for a stable political system in the future. What makes a shift to peaceful competition possible in the face of turbulent political experience, vicious circle of unciviness, distrust, long history of coercion, corruption, abuse of office, domination, and conflict, is the establishment of strong institutions in which contending elites can place their faith and trust. The existence of strong and enduring institutions is required to discourage unethical conduct in public life, regulate the general conduct of political office holders, and ensure the observance of the rule of law in political, economic and social life. This therefore supposes that all state institutions be made to function outside the influence and or, interference of individual political officers and other agencies, in order to ensure that the state rises above partisanship. Such institutions as the Police; National Assembly; Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC); Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) etc. serve public interest better as independent agencies of the state

functioning outside political control.

Clearly any consistent policy for nurturing Nigerian National integration, must involve consolidating the Nigerian federal structure. The perennial intrusion and dominance of the military in the Nigerian body politic has undermined the federal structure affected state institutions, due mainly to the insistence of the military regimes on the military chain of command in governance (Ajayi,1992:14); and the sectional dimensions of government, policies and administrative processes; violations of the spirit of federalism and other structural/legal provisions, the military practice of ruling by decree that heightens the acute tendency towards over-centralization and unlimited exercise of state power mainly in the overriding interest of dominant section of the military elite in the country. There is therefore the compelling need to erect safeguards against military coup d'etats. One of such methods is the option of the restructuring military formations, equipments and their command system with the overall objective of striking ethnic and geo-political balance in Nigeria's military institutions and eliminate the lopsided nature of access to instruments of coercion.

In recognition of the problems of over concentration of power, in the central government, an urgent need exist for devolution of powers to the components units. Adequate consultation or study should however be undertaken before any such reforms in order to reflect the interest of the component units especially with regard to the provision of adequate financial/economic base for their operations. The issues concerning fiscal relations among the constituent units of the Nigerian federation that remain mostly unresolved are the divergence between assigned functions and tax powers, principle of horizontal and vertical revenue allocation, dependence of states and local governments on the federal sources of funding, the tendency towards concentration and federal presence in the states. The federal government controls value added tax and some other locally based taxes, which it has appropriate over time without significant compensation to the other tiers of government, there is a dominant opinion among many public commentators on the need to return the control of natural resources and other valuable sources of revenue to the states and restore the authority over on number of issue areas.

The dominance of the central government portends danger for a country that has witnessed significant proliferation of states from four regional federal structures to thirty-six state structure. A deliberate at strengthening of the existing six geo-political zones and their recognition for the purpose of social distribution values and state resources. The issues of rotation of political offices, appointments, and location of government facilities could be pursued equitably along this line. Diamond (1997:594) was categorical in the summation of his view on the likely direction of the Nigerian polity:

The scope of Nigeria's political challenges is such that halting the military's diabolic dialectics of endless transition is only the first and most modest step. Once civilian, constitutional rule returns to Nigeria ... Nigerian citizens and political alike must find a way to keep it, improve it, and make it work democratically. This will require a long, bold, difficult, and wrenching process of

institutional and social change, and no doubt, a keen sense of what is possible at any particular moment.

In another breadth Chinua Achebe conditioned his optimistic expectation of a virile democratic political system in Nigeria on the premise that 'one shining act of bold, selfless leadership at the top such as unambiguous refusal to be corrupt or to tolerate corruption at the fountain of authority, will radiate power sensation of well being and pride through every nerve and artery of national life.

CONCLUSION

The salience of ethnicity and religion in many political conflicts, including the rise of ethnic militias; as well as the general sense of insecurity have called to question the existing political system in Nigeria. The challenge of enthroning a virile, stable and enduring political system in Nigeria will aside from the requirement of positive political culture and the reconstruction of political institutions with a view to establishing a strong institutions properly positioned to regulate the conduct of public affairs in order to ensure the rule of law in political, social and economic life of Nigerians; will above all require the consultation and contribution of ordinary citizens in the design of any desirable political arrangement.

A presidential committee on the Review of the 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria was inaugurated in November 1999, soon after the inception of the fourth democratic republic in Nigeria. The committee recommended a number of constitutional reform, which this paper will, subscribe to, they include: an initial single tenure of five years for Presidents and Governors and four years for L.G.A. Chairman; the devolution of more powers to the states; public declaration of assets by public officers; substantial increase in derivation formula beyond the 13 percent minimum; independence of the judiciary; empowerment of Nigerians to resist military take over and the convocation of a National conference etc. Following the establishment of the National Political Reform conference in 2005, an opportunity came to bring together the various groups in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria to contribute to the redesigning of the political system Nigeria in order finally put to end, the cycle of political instability arising from distrust and the tendentious struggle for access of state offices as the platform for the appropriation of material benefits to oneself and one's acknowledged communal/ reference group.

Although many important compromises and decisions were reached by the conferees, the problem created by attempts of the Presidency under Obasanjo to surreptitiously maneuver a number of conference decisions as it sought desperately to ensure elongation of the tenure of President Obasanjo created serious credibility problem for the entire political reform exercise for which it was created, and in the end many important achievements/ recommendations of the conference was abandoned.*As Nigeria grapples with many fundamental contradictions, the search is therefore still on for the enthronement of a strong, stable and dynamic federal democratic political system, for the country.

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