



ETHNICITY AND PREBENDAL POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The study Ethnicity and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria espoused that ethnicity and prebendal politics through the manifestation of political control of state apparatus in favour of a particular ethnic group or groups that are opportune to be in political authority has inevitably created a dangerous politics of prebendalism. This has posed fundamental challenges to merit in the selection of appointments and promotion in civil service, national integration, voting patterns and nation-building in Nigeria. The major objectives of this study were: to explain how ethnicity and prebendal politics affected the selection of appointment on merit into governance in Nigeria, to access how ethnicity and prebendalism affect national integration in Nigeria, to examine the impact of ethnicity and prebendal politics on voting pattern in Nigeria and to evaluate the effects of ethnicity and prebendal politics on nation building in Nigeria. The study adopted Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interview methods, which allow for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding ethnicity and prebendal politics. The study relied on the primary and secondary sources of data. Data were analysed qualitatively and supported by Focus Group Discussions and a semi-structured interview approach, small groups of participants from various sectors, such as academics, traditional rulers, bureaucrats, civil society organizations, and policymakers gathered to explore their perspectives on ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria. The study employed four theoretical frameworks, namely the group theory, elitist theory, primordial theory and prebendal theory. Thus, the prebendal theory was considered a more relevant theoretical review of analysis for the study. The study findings revealed that ethnicity profoundly influences nepotism in governance appointments in Nigeria, creating a significant encumbrance of the country's development. Ethnic favouritism is pervasive, as political elites often prioritize appointments based on ethnic and personal connections over merit or qualifications and then use state resources to cater for the interest of their loyalist. The study recommended among others institutionalization of merit-based appointments, strengthening the anti-corruption mechanisms, encouragement of civic education and fostering national integration initiatives will help to mitigate the issues and challenges arising from ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Ethnicity, Primordialism, Prebendalism, Prebendary, Prebend, Politics.



INTRODUCTION

The composition of the Nigerian state, to a large extent, has contributed adversely in no small measure to the degree of political setback and lack of cohesion among the ethnic nationalities in the country. This resentment is grossly reflected in the political relationship which existed between and among the major ethnic nationalities in the country, which was deeply driven by sowing discords, contempt, rivalry, suspicion, hatred, appointment lopsidedness, and lingering fear of domination by the major ethnic nationalities in the country. This precarious situation is visible across most nations on the African continent and is bedevilled with incessant political violence and serious ethnic crises with the attendant manifestation of prebendal politics. The nature of politics naturally involves the coordination of peaceful human co-existence. Given its central place in human existence, politics has a vital role in fostering better living conditions for the citizens of any nation if the right set of people are elected or selected into government. But when politics is wrongly pursued with wrong intentions and motives, political power becomes a destructive tool in the hands of political leaders. The practice of politics is the field of greatest conflict in human society; this proposition is not surprising since political power serves as a tributary of all other power be it industrial power, social power or economic power (Kolawole, 1997).

Ethnicity is a concept that is behavioural in form and conflicting in content. Intellectual discovery in the studies on Nigeria's ethnic configuration is confronted with complexity, contradictions and fluidity which often lend misconceptions in analyzing the phenomenon. The intellectual argument that the study of Nigerian politics is a study of ethnic affinity and interactions has been broadly elucidated (Nnoli, 1978; Joseph, 1992). The expanding kinds of literature on ethnicity in Nigeria however reinforces its relevance in understanding the unit and systemic analysis of politics in Nigeria. Ethnicity is a problem engendering disunity in Nigeria.

The manifestation of this permeates all aspects of national life in the political, economic and social sense. On the national level, it is the problem of ethnicity in terms of "balancing" in arriving at major national issues. Joseph (1992:32) recounts that one common item of information about Nigeria that is widely shared today, apart from the fact that it is an exporter of petroleum, is that it is made up of large ethnic groups often in conflict with each other. Thus, raging debates on the increasing rate of inter and intra-ethnic strife and hostility in Nigeria abound. A fundamental challenge in immediate post-colonial Nigeria was the ability of the emergent political elite within disparate ethnic groups to evolve a true national leadership. At the time of independence, Nigeria had about 250 ethnic groups which were divided into three regions: the Northern Region, the Eastern Region and the Western Region. In addition, there was the relatively tiny Federal Capital Territory. The Northern region alone was bigger in terms of surface and in terms of population than the three other components put together (Graf, 1978).

Statement of the problem

In developing countries, group-based inequalities are often and deliberately created and further institutionalized through politicking strategies that give some groups greater access to state resources and elected political offices. In order to understand citizens' political attitudes in Africa and Nigeria in particular, scholars of various persuasions have tended to prioritize ethnicity and prebendal politics reflecting the effect on citizens' access to or acquisition of public and private resources. This is because public funds are delivered on ethnic lines,



benefiting groups that hold the presidency or are part of national ruling coalitions (Burgess, Jedwab, Miguel, & Morjaria, 2015; Franck & Rainier, 2012; Kramon & Posner, 2013).

Hence, Nigeria as a nation is plagued by an avalanche of issues and challenges relating to ethnicity that gave rise to prebendal politics. Right from amalgamation, ethnicity has always been the hallmark of the Nigerian political system. So, whoever becomes the president for example is not based on whether the person has the capacity to deliver the dividends of democracy that will make life more meaningful to the Nigerian populace but, rather based on ethnic colouration. The selection of people to key positions is determined by ethnicity and not meritocracy. The politicization of ethnicity in a heterogeneous society of Nigeria comprising over 450 ethnic nationalities has inevitably created a dangerous politics of prebendalism resulting in issues of selection of appointment on merit, national integration, nation building and voting behavioural patterns by major ethnic groups. This trajectory has made some other acclaimed minority groups aggrieved through this process which most times culminated in crises, killings, arson and willful destabilization of the political process before, during and after the electioneering process in Nigeria.

Nigeria is the most populous black nation with over 250 ethnic groups and several sub-groups (Olayode; 2015:13). Despite these predominant features, the country's political scene was dominated by three major ethnic groups, namely Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. Other sub-groups exist but are regarded as minorities. The existence of sub-groups among the large and dominant groups raises the fear of dominance of the minority groups and even amongst the major ethnic groups because of prebendal politics. Consequently, politics is played by these ethnic groups and sub-groups in such a manner as to maintain the domination by the majority groups or to prevent and resist domination by the minority groups with the prevalence of prebendal politics and its accrued primordial gains attached to the offices of those selected to come and enjoy state coffers because it's their time. Prebendalism further makes the people in government invite their cohorts to come and benefit from state coffers which, further breeds corruption, runs against development and makes national cohesion very difficult, if not almost impossible to achieve.

Undoubtedly, prebendal politics has become the dominant and defining feature, of Nigerian politics. The democratic culture has been adversely circumscribed and profoundly constrained by ethnicity and prebendal politics. Given this scenario, the institutions of the state are not being significantly used to advance the interest of and wellbeing of the Nigerian populace but rather used as manipulative instruments consciously used by political elites to steal from the state coffers for the politician's personal aggrandizement and other primordial gains. The ethnic factor and prebendal orientation are detrimental to the existence of Nigeria as a multi-nation state and democratic culture as well. The intensity of ethnic rivalry in Nigeria has affected adversely the nature, type and effectiveness of political leadership required to chart the course of governance. Ethnic affiliation and prebendal politics have restricted competent individuals that would have enhanced good governance from emerging because a premium is placed heavily on parochial sentiment of which ethnic group the leaders come from as a prerequisite for elections or selection of political leaders for public office.



Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate how ethnicity and prebendal politics have impacted the nature of politics in Nigeria.

This research study has the following cardinal objectives.

To explain how ethnicity and prebendal politics affected the selection of appointment on merit into governance in Nigeria.

. To access how ethnicity and prebendalism affect national integration in Nigeria.

To examine the impact of ethnicity and prebendal politics on voting patterns in Nigeria.

To evaluate the effects of ethnicity and prebendal politics on nation-building in Nigeria

Research Questions

For purposes of this study, the following research questions will guide us:

How has ethnicity and prebendal politics affected the selection of appointments on merit into governance in Nigeria?

How has ethnicity and prebendal politics affected national integration in Nigeria?

What is the impact of ethnicity and prebendal politics on voting patterns in Nigeria?

What are the effects of ethnicity and prebendal politics on nation-building in Nigeria?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it shall examine ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria. The study shall have academic and theoretical significance. Academically, the study shall contribute to the gaps in the existing literature and for the benefit of future researchers. Despite the efforts of scholars of various persuasions in the study of ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria, most of those researchers have not exhaustively conceived the relationship between ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria. Theoretically, this study will serve as a starting point for further studies in the analysis of the interface between ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria.

. Clarification of Terms

Ethnicity: The term ethnicity refers to members of a particular precinct who

exhibits common traits and attitudinal parameters evident in certain traits such as language, religion, culture, food, history, orientation and inclination towards the future in behavioural patterns.

Primordialism: The term primordialism is perceived as undue manipulation of primordial sentiment evident through ethnic sectionalism, religious beliefs for political purposes and extreme dominance.



Prebendalism: Prebendalism refers to political systems in which elected officials and government workers feel they have a right to a share of government revenues, and they use them to benefit supporters, co-religionists and members of their ethnic group.

Prebendary: A prebendary is a member of the Catholic or Anglican clergy, a form of canon with a role in the administration of a cathedral or collegiate church. When attending services, prebendaries sit in particular seats, usually at the back of the choir stalls, known as prebendal stalls.

Prebend: Prebend is the portion of the revenue of a cathedral or collegiate church granted to a canon or member of the church as a stipends.

Politics: This is the act of distribution of power through the people to their leaders through various means such as elections, selections and appointments.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Adeleke and Charles (2015) examined how ethnicity and ethnic politics have hindered political development in Nigeria. The country, with over 300 ethnic groups, multiple dialects, and diverse cultural and religious practices, was amalgamated under British colonial rule in 1914. Despite adopting a federal system with 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria remains largely structured around three dominant ethnic groups: the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, and Igbo. These groups dominate the struggle for political and economic resources, creating a polarized political environment. The hegemony and rivalry among these major ethnic groups have created divisions that undermine political cohesion and development. Additionally, intra-ethnic conflicts further complicate the political landscape, as minority groups are often sidelined or manipulated for political gains. The study found that alliances among political parties are frequently formed along ethnic lines, rather than ideological or policy-based considerations, leading to electoral outcomes influenced more by ethnic sentiments than national interests. The effects of ethnic politics include the rise of incompetent leaders who lack the commitment to national development, a failure to select leaders with broad national appeal and the promotion of self-serving and corrupt individuals. These dynamics have allowed corruption to become entrenched in government, perpetuating poverty for millions of Nigerians. The financial impact of this corruption is substantial, with an estimated £20 billion (about \$500 billion) misappropriated since independence funds that could have been used for development but instead benefited a few ethnic elites. The study suggests that to achieve meaningful national unity and development, Nigeria must transcend ethnic divisions and embrace a spirit of oneness. Ending ethnic politics and fostering inclusivity are essential for progress, stability, and integration.

A study conducted between 1999 and 2015 by Chinedu (2018), assessed the challenges posed by ethnicity, identity-based politics, and prebendalism on Nigeria's security and social stability. It revealed that Nigeria struggles with a range of issues, including ethnic divisions, politicization of identity, security threats, religious conflicts, corruption, nepotism, and prebendalism. These elements collectively generate social tensions, fostering unhealthy competition, especially among elites from the three major ethnic groups Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba—who vie for control over national resources and political leadership. Such competition disrupts socio-economic development and threatens national security. The



research indicates that the dominance of these major ethnic groups results in persistent conflicts among their elites, undermining peaceful coexistence and social stability. Ethno-religious divides have sometimes escalated into violent conflicts, assuming terrorist dimensions, such as the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram in the North. The violent clashes between Christian and Muslim communities are often politically manipulated, further exacerbating insecurity across the country. Prebendalism, characterized by the distribution of state resources based on ethnic patronage, worsens corruption and hampers effective governance. The perception of public office as a reward for ethnic loyalty undermines merit-based public service delivery, leading to inefficiencies and deepening poverty. The persistence of such issues contributes to heightened insecurity, as marginalized groups increasingly resort to violence in response to exclusion and perceived inequality. The study concludes that the intertwined issues of ethnicity, identity politics, and prebendalism are primary obstacles to achieving security and social stability in Nigeria. They foster a fragmented society, threaten national unity, and push the country closer to potential disintegration. The study recommends implementing reforms to foster inclusive governance, reduce corruption through stronger institutions, and encourage interethnic dialogue to alleviate political and social tensions.

Joseph O. and Peace A. (2018) conducted a study titled *Ethnicity and Multi-party Democracy: The Nigerian Experience*, which explored how Nigeria's pluralistic nature impacts its political landscape. With a population exceeding 140 million and more than 370 ethnic groups, Nigeria's diversity is often portrayed as a source of strength. However, ethnic consciousness, factionalism, and divisive politics have consistently overshadowed efforts to build a cohesive national identity, posing significant challenges to the country's corporate existence. The study highlighted that while Nigerian governments have frequently emphasized unity in diversity, these efforts have been undermined by deep-seated ethnic rivalries.

The adoption of a multi-party democratic system has further deepened these divisions, resulting in several crises, including insecurity, corruption, tribalism, political and constitutional instability, and violent competition for power. The study argued that these issues have had a detrimental effect on Nigeria's development process, as ethnic and religious conflicts continue to threaten social and political stability. According to the study, addressing Nigeria's development challenges requires committed and responsible political leadership capable of managing the complexities of ethnicity and promoting genuine democratic values. The researchers concluded that prioritizing national considerations above parochial ethnic and party affiliations is essential for fostering unity, stability, and progress in the country.

Demarest (2020), conducted a study on "Men of the People? Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria's Fourth Republic National Assembly," Demarest explored the intricacies of corruption within Nigeria's legislative framework during the Fourth Republic. Despite the National Assembly's growing assertiveness, lawmakers have persisted in engaging in considerable rent-seeking and corrupt activities. While these behaviours are often seen as obstacles to democratization, the study presents an unexpected argument: individual access to public resources might bolster legislative independence. Analyzing data from the 8th National Assembly (2015–2019), Demarest discovered a positive correlation between lucrative committee positions and the number of bills and motions sponsored by legislators. Although many legislative actions were motivated by self-interest, some did enhance accountability and uphold the rule of law. This trend indicates that legislators' access to financial advantages is influenced not by their allegiance to the president, but by their connections with Assembly leadership and bureaucratic entities. Consequently, the increased financial resources empower



legislators to assume a more independent stance within the political landscape. The findings highlight a complex relationship between corruption and democratic governance in Nigeria, suggesting that while prebendal practices are typically seen as detrimental to democracy, they can, in certain instances, promote legislative autonomy. Nonetheless, this raises concerns regarding the long-term viability of democratic institutions when shaped by rent-seeking activities that may erode public trust in governance.

Emeka (2023) conducted a study titled *Democracy and the Challenges of Ethnicity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: An Evaluation*, focusing on how democracy in Nigeria faces significant challenges from ethnically driven factors such as "our turn" syndrome, claims of marginalization, and fear of domination among various ethnic groups. These factors significantly impact democratic processes and hinder national development. The study employed a qualitative approach, analyzing data sourced mainly from secondary materials through content analysis. It used the theory of democracy as its framework to evaluate how ethnic divisions affect democratic practices in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study argues that, despite democracy's global acceptance as an ideal system of governance, its dividends in Nigeria—such as peace, unity, and development—are marginal compared to other nations due to the negative influence of ethnic politics. Ethnic divisions often fuel political rivalries, disrupt the democratic process, and perpetuate conflicts over political appointments and resource allocation. The persistent influence of ethnicity impedes the realization of a unified national identity, making it difficult to implement policies that foster socio-economic development across all regions. To address these challenges, Emeka (2023) suggests that Nigeria's ethnic diversity should be viewed as a strength rather than a divisive factor. The study recommends adopting governance structures that minimize ethnic competition, promote inclusiveness, and ensure equitable distribution of resources. By doing so, Nigeria can enhance its chances of achieving democratic stability and developmental progress.

Felix and Bassey (2020) conducted a study titled *Prebendal Politics and Development in Cross River State, Nigeria*, which examines the detrimental effects of prebendalism on development efforts within the state. Prebendal politics refers to a system where public officeholders use their positions for personal gain and favour their supporters rather than serving the broader public interest. This practice often results in the mismanagement of resources, lack of accountability, and the prioritization of individual or group interests over public welfare. The study highlights that in Cross River State, prebendalism has become entrenched, manifesting in the biased appointment of public officials, awarding of government contracts, and the siting of developmental projects. The dominance of selfish political interests hampers significant developmental progress in the state, as policies and projects tend to favour certain groups or individuals rather than addressing the state's broader developmental needs. Using a qualitative research approach, Felix and Bassey (2020) relied on secondary data sources and content analysis to assess the prevalence of prebendal politics in the state. The findings suggest that this practice has not only undermined governance norms and principles but has also stalled development, resulting in a lack of meaningful progress across various sectors. The study advocates for reforms aimed at instilling public service values and merit-based systems in managing public affairs, not only in Cross River State but also throughout Nigeria. By promoting meritocracy and reducing the influence of patron-client networks, there is potential for more equitable and sustainable development.

Imoh (2021) conducted a study titled *Democracy in Nigeria: Antithetical Issues 2015–2021*, which explores the challenges facing democratic practices in Nigeria, particularly concerning



fundamental human rights. The study highlights that while democracy is intended to uphold the rule of law and ensure freedoms, Nigeria's experience has diverged, with the government curtailing freedom of speech and expression. There have been numerous cases of journalists and social media influencers being arrested for exercising these rights. The pervasive control and regulation of mass media and communication channels further contradicts democratic ideals, leading to concerns about the erosion of fundamental freedoms. Using data from secondary sources, the study found that the general public perceives the government as not doing enough to curb practices that undermine democracy, such as vote buying, hate speech, and incitement. The findings suggest that Nigeria's democracy lacks robust protection for human rights, as evidenced by the frequent harassment of media professionals and restrictions on free expression. The study concludes that to foster a more democratic environment, Nigeria needs to guarantee freedom of expression, lift restrictions such as the ban on Twitter, cease harassment of journalists, and prosecute those involved in undemocratic practices like vote buying. The recommendations emphasize strengthening human rights protections and addressing governance practices that threaten the country's democratic trajectory.

=Theoretical Frameworks

Given the nature of the study, and more importantly, the comparative dimension of issues to be addressed, it is plausible to examine some theories as a framework for analyzing the data collected. "A theory or the triangulation of theories (depending on whether a single theory is comprehensive enough or not) in a research work is apt for analysis of this study. In other words, it is used for explaining the causation-effect of a phenomenon, and if possible, to make predictions" (Ogunnoiki, 2018:118). In comparative politics, there are several mainstream theories that can be used for analysing ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria, but for the purpose of this study, group theory and prebendal theory have been chosen as theoretical foundations of the study.

Group Theory

The major proponent of group theory was Arthur. F Bentley (1908). Group theory is associated with the study of how individual political actors assemble to form political groups that participate in politics and primarily influence government. The primary activities and active role of such groups include those which do not wield formal power such as voting blocs, interest groups, and political campaigns, and those which usually do, such as major political parties and governmental organizations. These groups are saddled with the responsibility to constantly compete for political power in a political system, and their interactions result in governmental structure and policy. A single individual's political identity may come from participation in a variety of political groups. Bentley held that interactions of such groups are the basis of political life, which determines legislation, administration and adjudication Bentley (1908). In his words, group theory helps to understand group activities only when such groups have strong internal cohesion. The group theory comprises the elitist perception and the pluralist conception of society. The assumption of this theory holds that the interactions of groups are the basis of political life (Bentley; 1908:22). The theorist emphasises the pluralistic and multi-ethnic nature of a state and that politics is a group affair and each group is competing against each other power. The group theory categorically helps to understand the pattern of a process involving a mass of activities and not a collection of individuals. Nigeria is a conglomeration of ethnic nationalities; each using ethnicity in pursuing ethnic agenda and interest of their ethnic groups are products and results of historical, political, and socio-



economic contexts. The activities of ethnic groups and the impact of ethnicity in Nigerian politics have affected governance in all entirety. The driving force was the personal taste for power by the political elite and an avid defence of their financial empires. Ethnicity thus served as a convenient cover-up for personal gains (Dlakwa; 1997:108).

The group theorist emphasized and recognizes the pluralistic and multi-ethnic nature of a state. Their argument is that politics is a group affair and each group is competing against each other power. For example, Nigeria is a conglomeration of ethnic groups, each pursuing the agenda and interest of their group and these groups are products and results of historical, political, socio-economic and various other contexts. The activities of the major ethnic nationalities and the impact of ethnicity in Nigeria politics have affected governance in all entirety. Ethnicity employing the vehicle of political parties generally lack institutionalization, they showcase a low level of organization and become even more available to be hijacked by a few party leaders who dictate to the majority (Ayoade; 2008:62). The criticism and applicability of the group theory is explicitly not been sufficient for analysis on issues of ethnicity primarily because it contends that while the group theory gives us insight into how groups function especially within socio-political groupings in achieving group consciousness, it failed to address critical and sensitive individual interest.

Elitist theory

This study adopts the elite theory in examining the overbearing influence of prebendal politics and ethnicity on Nigerian politics. The major proponent of this theory is Vilfredo in 1935. The theory supposes that power rotates among the elites at the masses' expense. Thereby leaving some sectional section of the society to be at the receiving end. Pareto (1935) argued that the political elites always insulate and isolate themselves from their social order and, by so doing, can reproduce themselves from within the same order. They do not allow non-elites to join their membership. They, therefore, maintain a safe, functional distance from the rest of the people. They reproduce themselves on either an individual or selective basis in the same process, referred to as the "circulation of elites." Their yardstick for elite recruitment is often parochial, and the process is a manner that does not interfere with the traditional order of the dominant elite class. Gaetano Mosca's (1939) opinion contrasts with Pareto's that elite recruitment is only possible individually. Pareto believed in the possibility of one social class replacing another and posited that a non-elite member could join the elite class through 'collective social mobility; which refers to the status that people attain because of their social, economic, and professional efforts. Mosca (1939), opines that elite theory points to the concentration of power in the hands of a minority group that 'perform all political functions, monopolise power, and enjoy the advantages that power brings.' Thus, public policy is the value and preferences of governing elites. The Nigerian polity represents a situation where the welfare of the citizenry is wholly mortgaged for the interests of a few politicians with their mentors (godfathers).

Mosca (1939) also believes that there are already many societies that are sub-elite. These people facilitate communication between the elite and the non-elite and are potential tools for relatively large-scale elite recruitment. This argument makes it possible for both sub-elite and non-elite to become recruited into Nigeria's elite political class. The elite theory sees elites as players governing the state and national resources and occupying key positions related to political power and therefore used prebendal politics to favour ethnically the people from a particular section of Nigeria just like Buhari favoured Daura by removing Ekpenyong Director



General of DSS. Godfatherism serves as a medium for such selective elite recruitment in Nigeria. The resultant effects of the above in Nigeria's polity are under-development, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, poor health prospects, and misinterpretation of politics. The elite theory's relevance to this study is its ability to justify how godfatherism's politics facilitate people's transition into the elite political class. Liberalism in Nigeria promotes radical elitist democracy and a money-inspired electioneering system, leaving the masses as 'onlookers' and denying Nigerians the much-needed institutional, socio-economic, and political advancement.

Primordialist Theory

The primordialism theoretical framework was propounded and popularised by Clifford Geertz in his 1963 article "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States" and later in his 1963 book "Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa" The key features of primordialism are; To begin with, essentialism, which holds that certain characteristics are inherent and unchanging. In addition, determinism also suggests that ethnicity is determined by such as culture, biology, and history and conclusively, primordialism implies that ethnic identities are fixed and unchanging. The theory is flawed or criticized for its oversimplification of the complexity of ethnic identity and also, for its lack of neglecting the role of individual agency and choice in shaping ethnic identity and also for ignoring the power dynamics and social constructs that shape ethnic identity. Primordialism is a theoretical framework that explains the nature and origins of ethnic identity. Primordialism posits that ethnicity is an inherent, unchanging aspect of an individual's identity, ethnicity is viewed as a fundamental aspect of human identity, with deep-seated loyalties and attachments and primordialism emphasizes the importance of cultural and biological ties in shaping ethnic identity.

Prebendal Theory

The inability of the group and elitist theory to better explain the research topic under study, the researcher adopted the Prebendal Theory developed by Richard Joseph in 1987. Thus, the prebendal theory has been considered a more relevant theoretical review of analysis for the study. Prebendal theory is more encompassing because it captures both political and group consciousness, survival and real dynamics of the Nigerian real situations. The major proponent of prebendal theory was Richard Joseph. The prebendal theory was an adaptation developed to analyse the patron-client relationship as an inevitability of the defining features of Nigerian politics. Joseph's (1987:33) prebendal theory originated from feudal Europe where members of the clergy system felt that they were entitled by right to the revenue generated by the Cathedral. Joseph further traces its rise and application process in Nigeria's political system thereby conducting an overview process of how the state's fund was utilized by power elites of that time in his celebrated works, *democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*.

The word prebend refers to stipends assigned by a cathedral or a collegiate church as revenue or rewards system paid to clergymen and canon as wages. The prebendal theorist posits that state offices are regarded as prebends that are appropriated by political office holders elected or selected to use the political offices to generate material wealth and possessions for themselves and their constituent unit from their ethnic region, precinct or zones. A critical departure point in Joseph's prebendal theory is that political office holders can appropriate



conveniently wealth while in political positions and that that wealth is converted for their personal selfish purposes and that of their clients- ethnic affiliation, that which is called 'Authority Stealing' (Adebanwi, 2013).

It is very germane and quintessentially imperative; to situate this analysis within the context of the theme of this study to explicitly understand the relevance of prebendal theory to the research work under study. The application of prebendal theory to the study portends that the capitalist nature of the Nigerian state makes state power be used for both primitive and advanced accumulation of wealth meant for the masses. Political competition guarantees access to state resources, and the heightened competition for political offices which gives room for lack of regard to statutory purposes for which political offices were created abinitio. The political office holders who were elected or selected to occupy vantage political positions now use the opportunity to amass state resources firstly, for themselves and secondly, for that of their ethnic grouping kith and kin, with total exclusion of those from other ethnic nationalities.

While in political office their kith and kin extremely utilise the opportunity for the benefit of their people in total exclusion of other ethnic groupings. The ethnic factor made for example president Muhammadu Buhari in his first term in political office when elected by Nigerians across all ethnic nationalities to appoint about 17 security heads with just one Yoruba General Abayomi Olonisakin as the chief of defence staff and other members as people appointed from his ethnic group which id the North and also the removal of the head of DSS who hails from South-South was been replaced by another person from the North Daura from the North (The Vanguard, Thursday, 02 July 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study relied on Focused Group Discussion and semi-structured interview research methods, which allows for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding ethnicity and prebendal politics.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling technique was adopted to elicit responses from persons who are knowledgeable in the phenomena under study.

Method of Data Collection

The primary and secondary sources of data gathering were employed for the study. The primary method entails Focused Group Discussion and semi-structured interviews for analytical purposes while the secondary method was drawn from books, journals, conference papers, credible and reliable internet sources, reports and other available documents on ethnicity and prebendal politics.



Procedure for Data Collection

The data collection procedure for the study was meticulously planned to ensure the acquisition of comprehensive and reliable qualitative data. Initially, semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion (FGD) protocols were designed with open-ended questions to thoroughly explore the influence of ethnicity and prebendal politics. Following this, ethical approval was secured from the relevant review board to ensure compliance with ethical standards and to obtain informed consent from participants.

Instrumentation

The primary instruments used for the study included Focused Group Discussion and semi-structured interviews which involved small, diverse groups of participants from various sectors academics, traditional rulers, bureaucrats, civil society organizations, and policymakers. In-depth interviews complemented the FGDs by providing detailed individual perspectives. This approach allowed for flexible exploration of significant topics while ensuring that essential questions were addressed, thus offering a deep understanding of personal viewpoints and experiences related to the study's focus.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The instrument Focused Group Discussion and semi-structured interview allowed for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding ethnicity and prebendal politics which aided the final draft in determining its content validity.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively using Focused Group Discussion and semi-structured interviews. Small groups of participants from various sectors, such as academics, traditional rulers, bureaucrats, civil society organizations, and policymakers were gathered to explore their perspectives on ethnicity and prebendal politics in Nigeria. These discussions provided rich, in-depth insights into how these factors influence political dynamics and governance. This method allowed for the collection of qualitative data, capturing a broad range of opinions and experiences.

Ethical Issues

In researching "Ethnicity and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria," several ethical considerations were meticulously addressed to ensure the integrity and respectfulness of the study. Informed consent was a cornerstone of the research process. Participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives, the use of their data, and any potential risks involved, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the study. Personal information and responses were anonymized, and data was securely stored with access limited to authorized research personnel only. Given the sensitive nature of ethnicity and prebendal politics, the research was conducted with a high level of respect and cultural sensitivity. The researchers were mindful of cultural norms and values during focus group discussions and interviews to avoid offending or marginalizing participants.



To prevent bias and harm, the research was conducted with impartiality. Discussions and interviews were facilitated neutrally, with careful attention to avoiding leading questions or influencing participants' responses. Measures were also implemented to safeguard participants from any negative repercussions, particularly in a politically sensitive context. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant review board before the research commenced, ensuring compliance with established ethical standards and guidelines.

FINDINGS

Ethnicity and prebendal politics are deeply intertwined in Nigeria, with ethnic affiliations often influencing political behaviour and decision-making. The study findings revealed that ethnicity and prebendal politics made politicians and political actors use state resources to maintain power and reward loyalty. In Nigeria, ethnicity has been a persistent feature since independence, with the country's major ethnic groups - Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo - often competing for power and resources. This competition has led to the emergence of prebendal politics, where politicians use state resources to maintain their power base and reward loyal supporters. The intersection of ethnicity and prebendal politics plays a significant role in shaping prebendal politics in Nigeria. Ethnicity has been used as a basis for political mobilization, and politicians often exploit ethnic sentiments to gain support. In addendum, patronage and clientelism which are vital features of prebendal politics in Nigeria made politicians use state resources to maintain their power base and reward loyal supporters, often along ethnic lines.

Discussion of Findings

The study of the study findings espoused that ethnicity and prebendal politics profoundly influence nepotism in governance appointments in Nigeria, creating a significant barrier to the country's democratic development. Ethnic favouritism is pervasive, as political elites often prioritize appointments based on ethnic and personal connections over merit or qualifications. This practice erodes the integrity of governance structures, resulting in the appointment of individuals who may lack the requisite skills for their roles (Osaghae, 2020). As a result, governance becomes inefficient, public institutions lose credibility, and societal divisions are exacerbated. For instance, Nwagboso (2021) emphasizes that ethnic-based appointments can lead to a skewed representation in key government sectors, fostering disenfranchisement among marginalized groups. This undermines national cohesion and perpetuates a cycle of ethnic dominance in leadership positions.

Furthermore, prebendal politics where political offices are treated as personal rewards for loyalists plays a critical role in Nigeria's political landscape. Prebendalism is often intertwined with ethnic favouritism, as political leaders distribute resources and appointments to their ethnic group or political loyalists, reinforcing the clientelistic nature of politics in Nigeria (Joseph, 2019). Mustapha (2022) explains that this system not only entrenches corruption but also promotes regional and ethnic inequalities, with leaders diverting state resources to benefit their base. Consequently, public officeholders see governance as a means of securing resources for themselves and their allies rather than serving the broader public interest. This perpetuates corruption and inefficiency, as public resources are misallocated based on favouritism rather than need (Ibrahim & Mustapha, 2020).



The effects of ethnicity and prebendal politics have far-reaching implications for Nigeria's socio-political and economic development. Socially, these practices fuel ethnic tensions and undermine national unity, as different ethnic groups vie for political power and resource control (Adebayo, 2021). Politically, ethnic favouritism and prebendalism erode the democratic process by weakening institutions meant to ensure fairness and accountability (Okeke, 2020). The dominance of particular ethnic groups in political appointments exacerbates feelings of exclusion and marginalization among other groups, contributing to civil unrest and instability. Economically, the impact is equally damaging, as nepotism leads to inefficient resource allocation and stifles economic growth. Studies by Arowolo and Aluko (2020) suggest that the mismanagement of resources due to nepotism results in inadequate infrastructure, poor public services, and underdevelopment in various sectors of the economy.

SUMMARY

The study reveals that ethnicity and prebendal politics significantly impact governance in Nigeria, particularly in the selection and appointment of public officials. Ethnic favouritism has led to the appointment of individuals based on connections rather than merit, undermining the integrity of governance and increasing inefficiency. Prebendalism further aggravates this issue by reinforcing clientelism, as political offices are treated as rewards for loyal supporters. These practices have severe consequences on Nigeria's socio-political and economic life, fueling ethnic tensions, weakening democratic institutions, and contributing to poor resource allocation. Additionally, the economy suffers as nepotism hinders infrastructural development and service delivery.

CONCLUSION

Ethnicity and prebendal politics remain deeply entrenched in Nigeria's governance, posing serious challenges to effective and equitable administration. The prioritization of ethnic connections and personal loyalty over merit has weakened the country's institutions, perpetuated corruption, and heightened regional tensions. The socio-political and economic consequences of these practices are evident in the lack of national cohesion, inefficient public service delivery, and underdevelopment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following four recommendations are made:

- i. **Promote Merit-Based Appointments:** To address the effects of ethnicity on nepotism in governance, a transparent, merit-based selection process for public appointments should be enforced. Recruitment policies should prioritize qualifications, experience, and competence over ethnic or personal connections, ensuring that appointments are free from bias and favouritism.
- ii. **Strengthen Anti-Corruption Mechanisms:** To curb the influence of prebendal politics and favouritism in Nigeria, strong anti-corruption laws and institutions must be



reinforced. Ensuring that public officials are held accountable for corrupt practices will reduce prebendal behaviour and promote fair resource allocation.

- iii. **Encourage Civic Education:** Raising awareness about the negative impact of ethnicity and prebendal politics on Nigeria's socio-political and economic life is essential. Civic education programs should be implemented to empower citizens to demand accountability and transparency from their leaders.
- iv. **Foster National Integration Initiatives:** Policies that promote national unity and reduce ethnic divisions should be encouraged. Initiatives such as regional development programs, inclusive leadership, and equitable resource distribution will help mitigate the negative effects of ethnicity and prebendal politics, fostering a more cohesive and just society.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study makes significant contributions to knowledge by offering a deeper understanding of how ethnicity, nepotism, and prebendal politics influence governance in Nigeria. It illustrates how ethnic favouritism and prebendalism undermine merit-based recruitment and promotion, affecting the efficiency and fairness of public institutions. The research also highlights the negative impact of prebendal politics on resource allocation, contributing to socio-economic inequalities and political instability. Furthermore, the study adds to discussions on governance reform by identifying the challenges posed by these practices and proposing actionable solutions to address them. By focusing on transparent and inclusive policies, it provides valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and civil society organizations interested in improving governance and fostering national unity in Nigeria.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The study suggested several areas for further research. One potential area is the influence of ethnicity on public sector recruitment and promotion practices. Future studies could delve deeper into how ethnic considerations shape the appointment processes, affecting merit-based recruitment systems and overall organizational effectiveness. Another critical area is the role of prebendal politics in shaping governance outcomes.

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