

## ***Social Class and Ethnicity: A Challenge to Political Development in Contemporary Nigerian Society***

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### **Abstract**

*This article examines the relationship between social class, ethnicity and political development in contemporary Nigerian society. The article argues that social class and ethnicity through exclusivity can cut short political developments in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria. The recognition of all social classes as well as ethnic groups constituting a country rather than a particular class or ethnic group reduces the negative impact of social class and ethnicity in political development of any country. The literature shows that the country's rich cultural, religious and social diversity, rather than being a unifying force of different ethnic divisions, remains a means of division that creates disunity, suspense, bitterness and unhealthy competition, threatening the continued existence of the nation. It is concluded that, for real development to take place in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria, it is necessary to create an atmosphere of peace, solidarity and stability, and inclusiveness in political decision-making. Therefore, it is recommended that Nigeria as a country strive to develop a comprehensive policy framework that clearly defines the participatory roles of all social and ethnic groups, and likewise, a system free of ethnocentrism and social class inequality.*

**Keywords:** social, class, ethnicity, political, development

### **Introduction**

Social class and ethnicity have a profound influence on the political development of human society. Humans as social animals tend to associate and identify by social class, ethnicity, and race before nationality. Human society embodies the cultural, social, economic, political and technological activities of individuals and groups. These activities give them access to the basic needs of life. In fact, man who tries to survive, by nature, depends on his immediate environment and others in it for food, shelter, and clothing. Therefore, Ayokhai (2013) believes that no group of people or society, regardless of its level of development, can be an island in itself.

Social class and ethnicity, as powerful agents of violent conflict, are vast and have different facets in every human society. In most African countries, especially Nigeria, the influence of social class and ethnicity has caused many violent conflicts in the country. Although minimal in political practice in developed countries of the world such as Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany and the United States of America, the phenomenon of dominant class in the society, ethnicity and racism still exist. In Nigeria, according to Ekanem and Simon (2012), one cannot really provide an explanation of religious and political conflict without considering the importance or relevance of ethnicity or class. In

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summary, social class and ethnicity are factors that influence political decision-making in contemporary Nigerian society. As evidenced by the wealthy elite's disgust with a lack of cohesion, increased ethnic awareness, and increased violent conflicts between the various groups that comprise the entity known as Nigeria, social class and ethnicity have become the basis for distinguishing individuals in society. This has resulted in the manifestation of tensions among citizens, endangering the country's peace, unity, progress, and political development.

Viotti and Kauppi, as mentioned in Adeshina (2017), believe that national borders in much of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are defined by division by prior colonial or imperial powers for reasons that often have little to do with tribe, ethnicity, or other local identity. This is especially true in Africa, especially in Nigeria, where the borders of the British colony consisted of three distinct tribal groups (Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani) (Adeshina, 2017). Thus, social class, and ethnic consciousness has become an ideology of Nigeria in the economic and political process up till now. Social class and ethnicity emerge as endemic features of most global political systems. It is an honest reflection of developing countries, especially Nigeria, where there is an attack on personality, evidenced by the affluent elite, ethnic crisis and violence, endangering the lives of people and retarding the development of the country.

Nigeria as a nation was a contrived formation of British colonial masters to aid the convenience of their government. Ongoing efforts to come together to perpetuate the disloyalty created by Britain in a unified entity have not produced the expected political payoff, as the country remains unrelentingly divided by social class, religion and ethnicity. Aregbeshola (2011) notes that inter-society, inter-ethnic and intercultural tensions in the country continuously lead to domestic political conflicts of large scale and diversity. Given that social class and ethnicity are so deeply ingrained in Nigerian politics and governance, it is not surprising that governments at all levels control the supply and distribution of social amenities, as well as infrastructure; development is not demand-based, but often distributed to advance political agenda. This large gap partly explains the misplaced logic of centralizing social, industrial and development infrastructure in big cities like Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Port Harcourt, which play a role in the political power of the ruling elite (Aregbeshola, 2011). The political development of contemporary Nigerian society depends on the collective efforts of all social classes, whether lower, middle or upper, and also on the coming together of all ethnic groups without any form of prejudice.

The country's rich cultural, religious and social diversity, rather than becoming a unifying force for disparate ethnic divisions, remains a means of division that fuels distrust, bitterness, tension and unhealthy rivalry, threatening the continued existence of the nation. Based on this assumption, Rice (2010) notes that the country is associated with the political supremacy of the Muslim oligarchy in the north, which maintains their dominance over politics, and expands the economic context thus pushes the country into an economic vacuum, which is undiversified and is dominated by hydrocarbons such as oil and gas. Osai (2010) has noted that ethnicity as a "social phenomenon" has attracted great attention in social and political relations in Nigeria, especially in relation to the relationship among many different ethnic groups forming a consortium called Nigeria.

Over the last 30 years, economic and social resources in Nigerian society have concentrated among only a few affluent classes, causing economic inequality and negatively impacting the lives of those with the fewest material resources, including lower-class individuals struggling with rising unemployment, poverty, deteriorating health, and, worse, a growing lack. These observed trends have reduced Nigerian citizens' ability to influence economic and social policy.

The colonial legacy of bureaucratic authoritarianism, pervasive host-guest relations, and the complex national dialectic of assimilation, fragmentation, and competition has persisted in postcolonial societies. The patron-client network remains the basic link between the state and society in times of crisis and social unrest and has extended to the heart of the state (Bruce, 1998). This abhorrent tendency explains the selfish, materialistic, and undisciplined personalities exemplified in Nigerian politics, undermining programmes of political, and socioeconomic reform in the country. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine the challenges posed by social class and ethnicity to the political development of contemporary Nigerian society, as well as to identify possible ways to get out of the impasse.

### **Concept of social class**

Social class is simply the classification of people in a society into levels of socioeconomic status based on wealth, income, education, and rights. It also means inequality and/or difference in the socio-economic and political life of people in a given society. Every society on earth is divided into different hierarchies in which some people are considered more important or influential than others in the same society. Zerihun (2005) notes that it represents the rank of individuals or social position and status in the social structure. Grant (2001) defined social class as a set of concepts from social science and political theory that focus on the patterns of social stratification that occur in a class society, in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social types, most commonly the upper class, middle and lower classes. In the social sciences, social class (socioeconomic status) is often defined as the degree of contrast between objective social and economic resources, and is measured using indicators like educational attainment, annual income, and occupational status (Kraus et al., 2012).

Brown (2009) states that the upper class is the social class made up of people who are wealthy, come from the upper class, have power, or a combination of those things. They often hold the greatest political power in a given society. In a society like Nigeria, the wealthy elites (the upper class) have great influence in the political decision-making process, while the contributions of the less privileged class (the lower class) have little or no role. Over the years, Nigeria has become a society where mediocrity is the order of the day due to the inability of the political class (elites) to provide the necessary infrastructure for the general development of the contemporary Nigerian society. Everyone knows that in February 2018, Nigeria overtook India as the world capital of poverty, as evidence shows that the average Nigerian citizen lives on less than US\$1 a day. The upper class citizens of Nigerian society have impoverished the lower class (the poor masses) by using it as a tool for their political advancement. The Nigerian elites are reluctant to see the active use of elite advantage as a strategic tool for national development. Nigeria has realized very little of its potential because its elites have not effectively mobilized these

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potentials (Kia & Vurasi, 2013). There is a rapid increase in low income and unemployment, street children, high school dropout rates, risky reproductive behaviours as seen in contemporary Nigerian society. A significant number of the poor population has limited access to education, lack of good drinking water, and inadequate medical care. A glimpse of contemporary situations in Nigeria reveals that the country's elites have little or no significant interest in harnessing the nation's potential for the country's overall political development, which will bring better life for all citizens. Undoubtedly, political class (elite) remains a major challenge to the political development of contemporary Nigerian society.

### **The concept of ethnicity**

Ethnicity is merely a manifestation of group consciousness that generates a sense of identity, exclusion, and discrimination. "Ethnicity can be defined as a social group or a population group separated and bound by common affinities of race, language, nationality, or culture," writes Sanders (2007). According to Omilusi (2017), ethnicity is a common characteristic such as culture, language, religion, and tradition that contribute to a person's or group's identity. It demonstrates how a person can describe themselves in terms of an ethnicity other than their birth identity if they live in another region for a long time and decide to adopt the culture, symbols, and relationships of their new community (Omilusi, 2017). Chazan et al. (1999) believe that ethnicity, or consciousness as a people, is grounded in synthetic memory of past experiences and in its inspirations, values, and norms, common standards and expectations. They further note that the value of these beliefs and memories is less important for the overall feeling of the relationship than the ability to symbolize the closeness of people to one another. Ethnicity as a social phenomenon has negatively opposed the political development of contemporary Nigerian society due to the constant competition between different ethnic groups who are always in disagreement and trying to outdo one another in all things. Nigeria's high level of interethnic rivalry has now become a truism, preventing the country from producing the right leaders who would sit on corporate boards, exhibit the ideal combination of personality and predictability, and be willing to sacrifice everything for the benefit of the entire country.

Igwe in Akwara et al. (2013) pointed out that ethnicity is an outward-looking chauvinistic attitude towards one's nationality and cultural group with a correspondingly suspicious and hostile attitude towards others, especially those held to be in competition with one's own ethnic group. Lane in Kia and Vurasi (2013) maintained that ethnic power relations involved in the policy process, the absence of elites' contribution to a positive political transformation make decision-making and the implementation of policies in Nigeria complex, chaotic, uncertain, unpredictable, and sometimes, solutions not always being aligned with national realities as the main actors - bureaucrats and politicians - are concerned either with the ethnic interest or with their own parochial interests. Ethnicity has over the years been in forefront in political parties' formation, running, campaigning and administration which has remained a big challenge to Nigerian political development.

### **The concept of society**

A society is said to be a group of people with common values, norms, culture as well as identity occupying a certain geographical location and or territory. The concept of society, according to Zerihun (2005), refers to a relatively large grouping or collectivity of people who share more or less common and distinct culture, occupying a certain geographical locality, with the feeling of identity or belongingness, having all the necessary social arrangements or insinuations to sustain itself. Calhoun et al. (1994) as cited in Zerihun (2005) defined society “as an autonomous group of people living in a common territory, having a common culture (set of values, beliefs, common beliefs, customs, among others.) and are related to each other through ordinary social interactions as well as status and interdependent roles.” In sociological terms, society refers to a group of people living in a community who can identify and share the same culture (OpenStax, 2017). Society, broadly defined, includes the people and institutions, the shared cultural beliefs, values, and ideas. In general, a society also shares political power. Zerihun (2005) considered society as a network of economic, political, cultural and other relations at different levels. No society is static but dynamic in nature; meaning that it changes over time as it interacts with internal and external forces.

### **Basic features of a society**

For a group of people to be considered a society, it must have distinctive characteristics that make it unique from other societies. Zerihun (2005) identified the following basic characteristics of a society:

- 1) A society is usually a relatively large group of people in terms of size.
- 2) The most important thing about a society is that its members share a common and different culture.
- 3) A society also has a defined limited space or territory. Thus, the populations that make up a given society may be located in a particular geographical area.
- 4) The people who make up a society have a sense of identity and belonging. There is also a sense of unity.
- 5) Members of a society are considered to have common origins and common historical experiences. They feel they have a common destiny.
- 6) Members of a society may also speak a common mother tongue or a primary language that can be considered a national heritage.

For a society to be considered politically developed, it must first abandon the notion of social class and ethnicity which is a major obstacle to social, economic and political development.

### **Concept of political development**

Political development in this context can be conceptualized in terms of a deliberate increase in political participation, national unity and integration as well as an improvement in decision-making process of a country. Policy formulation improves the state's ability to organize, coordinate and allocate available resources, to process policy inputs to achieve desired outcomes. This helps in problem solving and adapting to changes in the environment and achieving goals. Park cited in John and Akpakpan (2018) defined the concept in terms of “the ability of the political system to respond to the changing needs of the members of society”. Political development, in the words of John and Akpakpan

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(2018), is essentially a process that involves improving the institutions, attitudes, and values that form the political system of a society or nation.

The modern idea of good governance is also based on a dynamic, competent, efficient and honest public administration that serves as a political development mechanism. The function of political development is to enhance the capacity of the state to coordinate, organize, manage and allocate available resources, turning political inputs into achievable outcomes. John and Akpakpan (2018) note that the main goal is to achieve the well-being of citizens through the rational use of human and natural resources and/or the advancement of economic and social institutions. At the same time, conceptualizing political development, La Palombara in Karimi (2014) sees it as building democracy by promoting democratic values among the people. There are four important prospects for political development: stability and gradual change in political development; participation in politics and mobilizing the masses for political development; nation building; and a sense of national dignity in international affairs (Karimi, 2014). These four important views are necessarily inviolable in the political development of any country. From the foregoing, it is clear that a country's degree of political stability, popular political participation, free, fair, and trustworthy elections are all important aspects of the political development process.

**The influence of social class (elite) on political development in Nigeria**

The daily sufferings faced by poor people are a reminder that survival in contemporary Nigerian society has become so difficult. Although Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and natural resources, the country has failed to provide basic social amenities for the survival of its citizens. Despite the fact that water and electricity are not always stable or available, people are still forced to pay for services that are not provided. In all these disasters, the ruling elite is constantly busy pursuing their own comfort at the expense of the masses. Because of the lack of decisive action in the Nigerian administration, things have fallen apart in today's society. This suggests that the quality of democratic leaders in charge of managing the country's affairs has a significant impact on the political growth of modern-day Nigeria.

The Nigerian government is controlled by the wealthy elites, who use their power to shape and influence decision-making. Agbaje (2014) notes that regardless of the nature of the state and how the region operates, a country's development depends on the orientation and values that its leaders have as well as the level of national consensus on the imperatives of development. Mimiko (2005) argues that active cooperation between leaders and society is essential for achieving sustainable development. Unfortunately, this is lacking in Nigerian society. It is also known that the overtly multicultural nature of Nigerian society has contributed to diminishing new political development efforts due to social differences and leadership disputes, due to social stratification. Anthony in Agbaje (2014) argues that this division further exacerbates the conditions that make state elites more fractured, mainly along ethnic lines, with each preoccupied with ethnic interests as the surest way to advance self-interest or selfishness.

A preliminary survey of the current situation in Nigeria shows that elite apathy has jeopardized the future of the majority of Nigerian citizens, as the poor education system and unemployment have pushed many young people to engage in nefarious activities such as Yahoo-Yahoo (cyber fraud), ritual murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, oil theft (deck), prostitution, human trafficking, among others. Jega (2022), while painting a depressing picture of the state of decline in the country, notes that Nigeria is at a point in history where the misrule of this elites has destroyed the country to the point of collapse. Indeed, one thing that cannot be overlooked among the elites is that they are very intelligent and have connections with other powerful people in the world because of their contacts. For this alone, they have the ability to bring the people of Nigeria and Nigeria in particular to an increase in economic growth and development. For every nation and its citizens, it is a great honour to have elites in positions of political leadership. Therefore, lending one's vote to increase an elite's prospects of winning a political leadership position becomes something to be proud of given all the fantastic conveniences provided to them (Jega, 2022).

On the contrary, what is sad is that the majority of elites in political leadership positions today are thought to be advocates of positive change but make thoughtless and selfish decisions. While political elites in other countries around the world strive to create a strong economy for the benefit of all citizens, Nigerian political elites ensure that the economy is frozen by their reckless and pompous lifestyle. Political elites in Nigeria have little interest in the worrying current state of socioeconomic conditions facing the Nigerian people. It is no exaggeration to state unequivocally that Nigeria's political elites have failed miserably in their attempt to govern the country, as they have ruthlessly squandered the profits from the country's abundant natural resources. All the promises during politicians' campaigns are just mere illusions.

### **The influence of ethnicity on political development in Nigeria**

Contemporary Nigerian political development is characterized by ethnic violence and misconduct due to the absence of national identity and integration caused by many different nationalities in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion in the country. The rise of ethnic fanaticism or ethnic patriotism undermines the legitimacy of government, democracy, and good governance, thereby impoverishing people rather than improving their living standards. Poverty caused by mismanagement and ethnic conflicts leads to violent crimes such as banditry, ritual murder, armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism; which in turn, makes political developments tend to be unusual. This fundamentally disrupts the cordial relations between ethnic groups, causing mistrust, suspense, disunity, intolerance that undermines the development and progress of Nigerian society.

This explains why ethnicity is classified by Green in Adetiba and Rahim (2012) as a medium-level identity, representing a group, perhaps small enough to be mobilized and manipulated but also sufficient. Therefore, ethnicity is the product of the struggle for economic - political - social resources among different ethnic groups in a country. Ethnicity, as Akwara et al. (2013) assert, is expressed in the political, economic, cultural and religious processes of a country and is propagated through families, economic groups and political groups in the process of working. The consequences of ethnicity in political development in Nigeria have caused political power to be bitterly contested among

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different ethnic nationalities across the country, mainly resulting in destruction of lives. Ethnicity as a social phenomenon has caused serious divisions among the Nigerian people, jeopardizing the country's chances of building a progressive and indivisible nation. Nationality as the subjective basis of collective consciousness becomes relevant to the political process when it stimulates group formation and strengthens political organization. With its ability to stimulate perception and a sense of belonging among potential members of a group, the psychological aspect of ethnicity complements and reinforces the political aspect of interest-oriented social action. Thus, a sense of belonging to a nation can be critical to the formation of groups and participation in the political process; however, the initiative of the elites is still essential to promote and protect the interests of the group (Chazan et al., 1999).

Ethnicity, as noted by Nweke mentioned in Chukwuemeka et al. (2012) is certainly a very powerful weapon for producing political leaders in Nigeria. Chukwuemeka et al. (2012) observed that when tensions and ethnic consciousness become very high, politically motivated people gradually emerge and insist on inciting members of the national identity. These politicians will sooner or later form gangs depending on the clan to gain popularity cheaply. A glimpse of ethnicity reveals that there is no inherent contradiction in ethnic differences, only political elites manipulating ethnicity for their selfish desires. To do this, they create fear, tension, bitterness, disunity, unhealthy competition and suspense among different ethnic groups, making harmonious and peaceful coexistence difficult. This fact goes against all hope that Nigeria will build a truly democratic society at the same time as political development.

Ethnic recognition in Nigeria is directly related to the status of the leader involved. To an ordinary Ibo man, whatever the late Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe said or did was good, constructive and well-intentioned, "he was considered the father of the nation". The same goes for other ethnic groups and their leaders. In most cases, religion is associated with ethnicity as a political tool. In the April 2011 presidential election, the Muslim North supported retired General Muhammad Buhari as a consensus candidate while incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan won support from the Christians who make up the majority of the population of the Ibo and Yoruba ethnic groups. Before the announcement of the results of the aforementioned election in favour of Goodluck Jonathan, young men from Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri and Bauchi began to rebel and kill innocent Christians in the Northern part of the country (Chukwuemeka et al., 2012). Ugwu and Chukwuemeka (1997) argue that ethnicity also played a very important role in the First and Second Republic in Nigeria. It also played role on the aborted third republic and it is even rearing its head in this fourth republic.

According to Chukwuemeka et al. (2012), political parties were created on ethnic concerns and affiliation during the second republics. Ethnicity was equally evident in the parties' organization, management, and membership. The three main political parties between 1999 and 2014 including the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) have ethnic undertones. The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), which evolved from the AD, is predominately a party of western Nigeria; the PDP is dominated by the North, South South and South East;



while the ANPP represents Northern Nigeria (Chukwuemeka et al, 2012). However, Yaqub, quoted in Okon (2016), states that competition within and outside politics greatly influenced political parties soon after independence, leading to their decline more or less becoming ethnic pressure groups. This trend led to the collapse of the first republic, giving way to the military's rise to power in 1966, culminating in a civil war known as the Biafra Civil War from 1967 to 1970.

### **Challenges of political development in contemporary Nigerian society**

Nigeria is a country that is considered as one of the giant countries of Africa in terms of land area, population, potential investment, good soil and good weather conditions; these contribute greatly to success in agriculture; but that does not mean that the country is completely without problems. Many social, economic and political problems have hindered the overall development of the country. The role of social class and ethnicity as demonstrated in Nigerian politics is not always helpful as these factors work against Nigeria's political development. Even so, there are many other challenges that are hindering political development in Nigeria, as listed by Stets (2018):

i. **Corruption:** It is no wonder that the country is known as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The majority of Nigerian politicians are known for their corrupt practices as statistics show that 70% of corrupt acts come from this group of people in Nigerian society. Government officials often embezzle funds intended for the public interest and deposit them in offshore bank accounts. These politicians hide billions of stolen naira under different names so that society does not know about their embezzlement.

ii. **Kidnapping:** Kidnapping holds a central place in the present-day Nigeria due to the incessant abductions of innocent individuals in different parts of the country. If one thinks about possible solutions, obviously the first solution would be to give a comprehensive reorientation to the society.

iii. **Godfatherism:** Many people entering politics will seek out their "godfather" as a first step in their political career. It is a term to search for someone who will sponsor your cause and promote you to a higher political position. Many politicians seem to forget that Nigeria is a democratic country and that the government must completely depend on the choices Nigerian citizens have the opportunity to make through free and fair elections.

iv. **Nigerian youth and their political inactivity:** In general, Nigerian youth are active and vibrant, and they participate in almost every sphere of life except politics. So many young people simply accept politics as something that has existed for many years and the system cannot be changed, especially by young people whose voices are often ignored and are not respected. Young people also feel that it is not worth starting a political career and exposing themselves to all the dangers and threats that may come with it.

v. **Nigerian Media:** The fact is that the media remains an integral part of a democratic society. The main obligation of journalists working for these news outlets is to praise these leaders and disparage their opponents, which actually falsifies the accuracy of all political news that people report. Nigerians read daily. All important details are omitted and everyone has to process the general information and draw their own conclusion from something that is not particularly true.

### **Origin of political crises in contemporary Nigerian society**

Nigeria as a nation has for long experienced unprecedented political crises that have slowed its growth as a developing country. Political problems are one of the great challenges of the country, seriously slowing down the country's development. Unfortunately, it is not the political elites who create these problems that suffer the consequences, but the poor masses. However, the quest to accumulate wealth and political power in Nigerian politics has seen the emergence of questionable men and women occupying positions of power without a defined framework for national social, cultural, economic and political development. The origin of political crises in contemporary Nigerian society include but are not limited to the following:

1. **Tribalism:** In Nigeria, tribalism is a major contributor to issues such as political divisions, civil wars, fatalities, and election-related blindness, which results in voters casting ballots based on tribe rather than the candidates' political qualifications. The fact that people now have a tribal bias for or against persons with backgrounds similar to or distinct from their own indicates that this problem has always been the core of all other problems in the nation. Because people may not share the same religious, political, cultural, or other viewpoints, there are sometimes intertribal clashes and fatalities (Akpama et al., 2022).

2. **Poor Governance:** Weak governance constitutes a constraint on political development in Nigeria as it stems not only from corruption in a system but also from a lack of accountability and transparency, random policy making as well as the fraud of the managed. Many of the political leaders are corrupt, dishonest and also lack the integrity that is the foundation of good governance. Uzochukwu, as mentioned in Okon (2016), notes that a government that is not properly managed is vulnerable to crisis-related policies.

3. **Religious intolerance:** This is one of the major challenges facing political development in contemporary Nigerian society, as many Nigerian citizens ostensibly adhere to the tenets of their faith, which makes them obstinate to other people's belief systems. The two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam, are still at odds, making it difficult for the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of a united, progressive and vibrant society.

4. **Greed of the elites:** There is too much desire to accumulate wealth at the expense of the masses; and the struggle for political power is more than necessary for the political elites. Greed breeds corruption, one of the main causes of political failure in Nigeria. Greed among political elites is an obstacle to political development in Nigeria as politicians engage in fraudulent election activities such as fraud, vote-buying, voting multiple times, falsifying election documents and lots of other nasty behaviours.

5. **Ethnocentrism:** In short, this is thinking and/or believing that one's own culture is superior to another's culture; this implies viewing other cultural groups as inferior to oneself (Reuben-Etuk, 2018). This is the case in contemporary Nigerian society as there are serious power struggles between different ethnic groups in Nigeria, which makes it difficult to build a clear framework for political development of the country.

### **Negative impact of social class and ethnicity on political development in Nigeria**

1) The ascension of mediocrity: The rise of mediocrity is due to the fact that many of the wealthy classes holding political positions in the country lack the leadership qualities necessary to make a positive contribution to the development of the country.

2) Promoting disunity and unfair competition: It is clear that Nigeria's political development has been hindered over the years due to trends in disunity, disintegration, mistrust, uncertainty and rivalry. It is disappointing that political elites use tribal, ethnic and religious sentiments to divide Nigerians along ethnic and religious lines in electoral campaigns just to maintain their power (Ntia, 2005).

3) Raising sectarian consciousness: Nigeria's cultural and ethnic diversity, rather than being a source of strength, has become a divisive force, fueling fear, mistrust, suspense, hatred, violent conflict and bias which can lead to the disintegration of the country. This uniqueness and cultural diversity, as Ofili and Omoro (2017) maintained, should have been a source of impetus towards the country's development; but the opposite seems to be the case.

4) Call for Secession: There has been an ongoing call for secession from the banned Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and the Oduduwa Nation due to perceived continued marginalization and unequal distribution of natural resources and developmental projects. This abhorrent phenomenon has nullified the efforts of nations to build a prosperous, unified, and inclusive nation that will usher in transformative political development.

### **Possible solutions to political development crises in Nigeria**

Given the difficult circumstances of the disadvantaged position of certain individuals and groups, especially minorities within a country with a pluralistic nature, it is urgent to stem this wave by bringing every group to make input towards advancing the course of the nation. This system will usher in good governance, where political and economic benefits will be distributed equitably among ethnic groups and classes, and where everyone will be free to contribute to the national discourse. Good governance here is a widely accepted political mechanism that every country can use to reduce challenges to political development. Be that as it may, below are the listed solutions to the political development crisis in Nigeria:

1. Accepting diversity: This is essentially the first step against tribalism. Nigerians need to understand and appreciate their differences and see them as an indivisible people, rather than just identifying with their tribes. Certainly, one should not forget one's cultural heritage, but using it as an excuse to incite hatred, tension, violent conflict is unacceptable.

2. Uniformity in national development: Nigeria, as a country, must facilitate uniformity in the distribution of available resources and infrastructure development at all levels to create a national development path. All forms of inequality, sentiment and discrimination should be avoided so that all political groups can play an active role in the political development of the country.

3. Promoting national integration: Simply said, this is the sense of kinship and unity shared by individuals, regardless of their caste, principles, gender, religion, or ethnicity. It also includes a sense of social cohesion, interconnectedness, and oneness among people of various social classes and ethnicities. Political progress in Nigeria will be preceded by efforts to promote national integration.

4. Religious tolerance: Religious tolerance demonstrates human qualities such as compassion, patience, politeness, gentleness, self-control, courage, mutual respect, and others, which is a necessary mechanism to establish trust, peace, solidarity and love among people of diverse beliefs. Achieving religious tolerance in contemporary Nigerian society will usher in a progressive, united, vibrant and cohesive nation rooted in peaceful coexistence (Ntia, 2005).

5. Avoiding ethnic conflict: A friendly relationship between its various ethnic groups, free from conflict over the distribution of socioeconomic resources, and the creation of a conducive environment for social, cultural, economic, political, and technological advancement are key factors in the political and economic development of an ethnically pluralistic society.

### **Conclusion**

For real development to take place in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria, it is necessary to create an atmosphere of peace, unity and stability to build trust and confidence in each individual, and collectively in government, culminating in the validation and implementation of inclusiveness in political decision-making, as has been done in several developed countries around the world. This implies that political movement of social classes and ethnicity is a threat to national cohesion and development. Social inclusion can be seen from the inclusion of the opinions of each class in national political and economic debates and decision-making as well as the political representation of each ethnic group.

It should also be made clear here that it is important to recognize the place of each ethnic group in Nigeria. It is therefore essential for Nigeria to develop a comprehensive policy framework that will clearly define the participatory roles of all social and ethnic groups; a system free of ethnocentrism and social class inequality; a system that recognizes that difference is an important foundation of political development and will incorporate the ideas of equality, inclusion, and recognition of the distinct socio-political and economic power of each ethnic group. Therefore, socio-political integration should be considered essential for political stability and as a mechanism for national development and sustainability.

### **Recommendations**

1) Nigeria should develop a political development plan that emphasizes national integration and understanding and includes all social and ethnic groups in national governance, which can create an important impact on national development as a whole.

2) Nigeria, as a country, should strive to develop a comprehensive policy framework that clearly defines the participatory roles of all social and ethnic groups, and a system that does not have ethnocentrism and prejudice, and social class inequality.

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