

Political Inclusion: A Panacea To The National Questions In Nigeria’S Fourth Republic

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Abstract

The article explores the past to justify the present in the history of co-existence among political groups in Nigeria. Political instability becomes an obstacle to the national unity in the country. While this is true, the article argues that trend in Nigeria shows there has been frequent political crises that resulted in the successive military coup d’etat and counter coups in an attempt to hold power for controlling the national resources after the political independence. The article contests that the national questions may alley the issue in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria. Rather, it addresses the practice of governance among the ethnic groups after the restoration of democratic system in 1999 under President Olusegun Obasanjo and aftermath. Governance maintains the values of democracy for sustaining and strengthening the national unity across the country. It is argued that national questions are not challenging issues but a pathway to dialogue in the federal system. The article submits that in the Fourth Republic, political inclusion becomes the viable option in the corporate existence of the political groups. Political inclusion reflects the practice of civic responsibilities for decision-making process in a democratic system. The active participation of the citizens would contribute to nation building and political institution that delivers the campaign promises to the people in the Fourth Republic. The article made use of descriptive research method.

Keywords: Political inclusion, governance, national questions, resource control, patriotism

Introduction

Nigeria is a diverse nation-state with multiplicity of tribes, languages and religion; it can also be described as heterogeneous society. One of the challenges facing Nigeria is continuous struggle for resources among the various ethnic groups in the country. The struggle for resource control, revenue sharing and allocation, fear of domination of the majority ethnic groups and others related issues has culminated in the national questions Titus and Ogundiya (2023). These national questions are fundamental issues that continue to threaten the unity of the country. The

need to answer these national questions, allay the fears of the minority ethnic groups and ensure national unity and integration necessitated the adoption of the approach in the country. However, the struggle for the control of resources continuous, the fear of the minority is not allayed and revenue sharing and allocation continued to cause socio-political and economic disharmony in the Fourth Republic Ojo (2010).

The initiation of the Fourth Republic in 1999 was a process of political development. This is because, democracy is more likely to develop and endure when all segments of a society are free to participate and influence political decisions without suffering bias or reprisal and the national questions will be better answered adequately. However, this is not the case in many new and emerging democracies, including Nigeria, where large portions of the population are excluded from decision-making process based on their ethnicity, religion, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation and culture Nwokocha and Nnatuanya (2025). Among these characteristics, the ethnicity and religion both are phenomena that threatened the national unity after the political independence. These phenomena are parallel political situations and it defines the action and character of the political groups. The action and character of the three major ethnic groups vis-à-vis Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo have resulted in acrobatic political crises. Afterward, the military seized power in an attempt to install the law and order in the country. The era of the military is even the worse political arrangement. There were successive military coups and counter coups which collapsed the socio-economic development from 1966 to 1998. The rollover of economic decay inherited by President Obasanjo in 1999 contributed to high tension in the country. The high tension of the minority ethnic groups in the federation unit resulted in national questions Saka (2023).

Under the bad governance, merits are often jettison as the expense of mediocrity, where some ministries and civil service ranks have become the exclusive reserve of some ethnic leaning and religious groups and gender persuasion. Therefore, political participation is a fundamental means of addressing the social and economic inequities associated with marginalization Onyenweaku (2023). Consequently, democracy is dependent on the active participation and representation of all citizens in democratic institutions for decision-making process. These institutions and processes include election management bodies and elections, constitutional bodies and constitution-building processes, political parties and parliaments. Political inclusion of all Nigerian defines action for selecting leadership according to the rule of the game as against the backdrop of the military regime.

This is the idea that every citizen, regardless of class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, group, culture and ethnic or religious background should have an equal right and opportunity to engage with and contribute to the functioning of these institutions. The aim of this paper is to examine the efficacy of political inclusion as a panacea to the national questions in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It addresses the political inclusion as instrument of unity in the new democratic dispensation. The perception of political inclusion maintains the quality of political competition as mainstream of leadership selection in the Fourth Republic.

Statement of the Problems

In order to assert knowledge in the new article there is need to start from the national question as the subject-matter. The issue of national question coincides with socio-economic and political struggle among the ethnic groups in Nigeria. Historically, the year of 1914 amalgamation was a colonial policy purposely centered on the interest of the British to establish a direct government. The antecedent changed the political journey of the First Republic in Nigeria. There have been political struggle that culminated in coup d'état and counter coups from 1960 to 1998. The federal system or structure, marginalization and resource control are the issues that called for the national question in Nigeria. The three issues have deeply dominated the political system immediately President Obasanjo assumed office in 1999. Other issue followed, the elections have not been free and fair and there is massive corruption in both the civilian and the military government. Nigeria as a nation-state is bedeviled by leaders that have nothing to write home about. The transition to democratic rule or transfer of power from one political party to another is problematic in the Fourth Republic. The action and character portrays that Nigeria is at dilemma in the process of choosing credible leaders for the citizens. The national unity is threatened by indiscipline of the political leaders and electorates in the struggle to grape the central power for resource control.

The citizens grasp the fair for the future of the country as the dispensation witnesses unending socio-political crisis. The issue of national question could mitigate not a final solution to unending challenges in Nigeria. In this sense, national question is a traditional approach to create an avenue for national dialogue as well an attempt to restructure the political system at certain period. In this political situation, there could be clash of interest which might push more centrifugal power among the ethnic groups. I mean, each political group is not silent of making a point in the political setting. Therefore, the Fourth Republic has not witnessed democratic breakdown in the country as against the backdrop of other countries in Africa. For example, there was successful seizures of power in Mali (2020, 2021), Chad (2021), Guinea (2021), Sudan (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and Gabon (2023), alongside recent attempted coups in Guinea-Bissau and Benin (late 2025). However, the article wants to explain Nigeria from the perception of the national question. The article is interested in analyzing politics from the mainstream of action and character. The article is also interested in the future of the country and political inclusion is a new hope for the national unity in the Fourth Republic.

Theoretical framework

National question does not have universal definitions; it is a complex concept focusing on socio-political and economic issues challenging the state alongside with national unity, integration, and sovereignty where diverse political groups co-exist. National questions engage national debate on self-determination, identity, governance, and political participation among diverse groups arising from historical legacies. National question is an approach to resolve complex issues that are germane in the political system. It highlights the burning issues that are bothering the country at certain period of time Tenuche and Achegbulu 2020). Chuckwu (2017) notes that national question is a political platform addressing variety of issues relating to the national development. In addition, it focuses on the struggle and competition for power and sharing of resources among diverse ethnic groups in the same political environment. Olawale (2018) opines that the national question is an overall policy of the nation-state that guarantees enduring stability among the

political groups. In this sense, the Nigeria is surrounded by different nationalities integrated under the political domination of one structure (federal system).

In the recent democracies, African countries is neither democratising, rather regressing based on the character that frustrates the political structure. One of such in Nigeria is national question which transposed to debate among the ethnic groups that formed the nation-state Saka (2023). Momo and Adejumobi (2017) supported that the attributes of national question are liberty, equality, justice and self-determination between the majority and minority groups in the state. These attributes coincide with the overall interest of democratic state. It advances that national question identifies the challenges that must be discussed at the round table if a nation is to survive. It defines critical and burning issues that have not been settled over the years in the existence of the political groups in the state.

Under a federal system of government, the issue of national question reflects the political structure under a democratic setting. On this ground, Liberty and Ozohu-Suleiman (2020) asserted their views that the national questions are not challenges facing the state; rather the maintenance of governance for socio-economic development vis-à-vis employment, health care, roads, water, food, housing and security among the people is fundamental. The reflection of good governance in a democratic setting creates euphoria engagement with less challenge among the diverse groups. The article argues that good governance and national question are concepts that support the quality of democracy. Therefore, the recent democracies in Africa including Nigeria could adopt good governance by the national questions that centre on overall development of the people.

Conceptual Clarification

Political participation and competition involve electoral activities for the selection of credible leadership in the state. In explaining these concepts further, democratisation was the mainstream of analysis which recognises certain political situations that foster participation and competition of democracy. It indicates that the elite and the electorate interact in a way that conform electoral principles of the state. The elites that deliberately fall authoritarian regimes to democratic government do it explicitly for the model of institutional arrangement. The issues which surround political participation and competition in a new democracy depends on individual political behaviour. The process of competition begins from the elites that are interested in the leadership of the country and the electorate also participates in choosing credible candidates for the constituent offices Huntington (1991).

The regime transition was an institutional arrangement which takes place from the shape of political participation. The concept of participation starts from the transition process of African countries and depends on the electoral behaviour of the citizens. This electoral process starts from the registration of credible voters and campaign of each political party also contributes to participation and competition. In Africa, participation fluctuates based on individual political behaviour for each election. That is, presidential election could be different from parliamentary or gubernatorial election. In these views, political behaviour of the people determine the voting

pattern of each election in the country Bratton and Van de Walle (1996). In Nigeria, as a case study in Africa, political participation was very high since the inauguration of democracy of 1999. Therefore, between 1999 and 2015, the participation was high in the federation of the country. In this construction, election is the determinant of African democratic governments after the third wave of democratisation.

More so, the political competition, perhaps, relates with democratisation process, and it also has a bearing on political transitions. The process of party system contributes to participation of the elites and electorates for selection of leadership vis-à-vis political party, opposition party, incumbent party, electoral body, political campaigns, mass media, elections, etc. These elements recognise the institutional framework of a democratic state to function according to the consent of the electorate. The prime focus of political competition recognises the proportional representation of the party in the legislative, and the party that leads has majority members in the legislative house. The legislature was more distinguished because the representation of the people makes sense in democracy when community delegates members to participate in decision-making. The basic rule in the legislative house lies between the majority party and minority party. The significance of party membership in the Freedom House is to make a broad decision as well as to regulate the power of the executive power which comes under the system of checks and balances Bratton and Van de Walle (1996).

The concept of democracy implies that the ultimate authority of governance should rest with the citizens themselves via their participation. Political participation presides on the context of democracy as a set of rules which involves the citizens, seeking to achieve full political participation of the majority of the citizens, whether directly or indirectly. Political participation represents popular representation of the people in any political situations. This representation is determined by the population of each community in the plural society for making decision which are important in the state. This indicates that proportional representation most populous community would have more members in the legislative house than small community. Therefore, one of the dangers of representative democracy is political disconnection of voters who organise the government in power John, (1994).

Running of government for public policy defines political participation and competition. Participatory democracy from the modern view of Rousseau that individual participation implies that democracy is making a gain and involvement of the people and civil society groups in the governmental institutions as political process of the deepening of democracy. This context explains participatory democracy into twofold: first, participation in the making of decision; second, the representative government, a way of protecting private interest and ensuring good government. Thus, the function of participatory democracy enables collective decisions to be more easily accepted by the individuals. It also fosters an integrative function as everybody belongs to the same society Pateman (1970).

Furthermore, the relevance of participatory democracy is explained from two angles, that is, the classical and the modern methods of participation. The classical approach of participation was confined to a few people who have direct choice in decision-making process and the level of discussion is limited to small community. The modern participation enmeshes large scale political life of the nation-states. However, participation focuses on the interrelationship between the individuals and the constituent authority of institutions within which they interact to achieve national goals. In addition, participatory democracy recognises campaign promises and leadership performance of democratic government Pateman (1970).

Political participation implies that people are the arrow-heads of democracy and the theory of participatory democracy ordinarily deals with the citizens as a modern representative government. Political participation denotes the active involvement of individuals and groups in the establishment of government because it affects human livelihood. In other words, when citizens themselves play an active role in the process of formulation and implementation of public policies and decisions, their activity is called political participation. These include voting behaviour, competition for office, campaigning for a political party or contributing to the management of a community project, like public safety, etc. Interestingly, an act of opposition or public protest also involves political participation. For example, signing a petition, attending a peaceful demonstration, joining a protest march or forming a human chain are act of political opposition etc. Furthermore, political participation involves active interaction between citizens and government under the template of democratisation. Thus, the various forms of political participation are: citizens' initiative contact, recall, public hearing, adversary council, referendum, protest, civil disobedience, and political violence Gauba (2003).

Politics

This section explains politics from the theory of Lasswell cited by Gauba (2003) as who gets what, when and how in the political system. In this sense, Easton further observed that politics is authoritative allocation of values. Therefore, politics is regarded as an instrument of power manifests by democratic process alongside with political groups selecting leadership in the state. Politics is an age-long concept which scholars and intellectuals have made many attempts to define. As a matter of fact, there are many definitions of politics as there are as many scholars of politics Liddel and Scott (2011).

This invites Oraldi (2023), perceives man as a political animal, because the essence of social existence and social relations is politics. This is because when two or more people interacting with one another, they are invariably involved in a political relationship, be in business transaction, public policies and opinions, civic duties and responsibilities. When human beings define their positions in the society and they attempt to obtain personal security from available resources and influence others to accept their points of view, they find themselves engaging in politics.

Heywood aggressively (2002) defined politics as the activities through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Politics is the theory and practice of government, especially the activities associated with governing institutions including legislative, and executive power running the affairs of the country. Easton (1961) viewed politics as the authoritative allocation of values in the society. This is in line with the definition of the German political philosopher. Weber (1947) defines politics as the striving to share power and striving to influence distribution of power in the state. In the final analysis, politics comes into place when there is need for human to interact and to share power which is limited among people that are numerous or at least more than one.

Political Inclusion

Almond and Verba (1963) in their famous book, *The Civic Culture: A Study of Five Countries* has rightly enunciated what the concept of political inclusion is all about, these include holding public political offices, being a candidate for an election, taking part in political campaigns, attending a political rally, contributing effort towards political activities, taking part in political discussions, wearing party badges, displaying the stickers, voting during elections, membership of pressure groups, protests, criticisms and petitions. In essence, political inclusion refers to the involvement of the citizens of a country in the formulation and implementation of policies for their governance and their participation in the choice of their leaders.

The concept of political inclusion coincides with political participation depending on the practice of representative democracy. The failure of democratic practice in Africa was due to unethical action and character that marred good governance. African leaders are desperate for power and the process receives high volume of competition among the political groups including Nigeria. The coup de; tat and counter coups massively paraded the weak institutions of Africa due to struggle among the political groups for resource control. According to Fukuyama (1992) theory of democratic process as the end of history and the last man after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1990. The wave of democratisation process was a movement trending against the backdrop of authoritarian regimes in different political situations. For example, Republic of Benin (1989), Nigeria (1999), Ghana (1993), and South Africa (1994) joined democratic government including other African countries. There is a belief that the socio-economic development is settled through the policy frame work of the country. The three arm of government vis-à-vis legislative, executive and judiciary are edifice through which democracy works Saka (2023).

The efficacy of intergovernmental relation promotes the deepening of democracy. It means the political inclusion is inevitable in the newest democracies. Nigeria is heterogeneous nation-state with diverse political groups facing unending political crises in different forms. The frustrating challenge in the Fourth Republic could be addressed through political inclusion. Political inclusion enhances the spirit of nation-building among the political groups. The principle could be achieved through the free and fair election IDEA (2022). German Marshall Fund (2019) observed that political inclusion is termed as political process in an ideal society. Thus, achieving political inclusion in Africa is imperative particularly in a diverse nation-state to engage civic education, voting, running for office, and offering input in government and creating a sense of belonging without any bias.

PANACEA TO THE NATIONAL QUESTIONS IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

The observation in the article raises the view that the national questions in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic was due to unethical character which has long paraded the political system. The initiation of democratic government in 1999 changed the political atmosphere among the political groups. President Obasanjo administration witnessed ethnic militia agitating for the resource control, marginalization and sovereignty. Tenuche and Achegbulu (2020) noted that the initiation of 2005 National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) aimed at discussing the issues confronting the country. Therefore, political inclusion is essential in sustaining and strengthening democratic government.

These national questions are volatile issues that continue to threaten the corporate existence of the country. The need to answer these national questions, allay the fears of the minority ethnic groups and ensure national unity and integration necessitated the adoption of the approach in the country. However, the struggle for the control of resources continuous, the fear of the minority is not allayed and revenue sharing and allocation continued to cause socio-political and economic instability in the country. Therefore, political inclusion and education can serve as answers and solutions to the national questions in Nigeria.

Sense of Belonging: through political inclusion and education, all Nigerians will have a sense of belonging in the federating states. This is because they will not only be heard but will also be seen and recognized in the democratic representation. This situation will further motivate them as active participants and not just an observer but practitioner. This is because they have been well included in decision making process in the country hence will see themselves as an insider. This situation will further reduce the tension and also answer some of the nagging national questions. For instance, if a personality from a section of the country is appointed as a federal minister in a particular administration, there is every tendency that such a section of the country will feel a sense of belonging and will ultimately support the country for better governance Olayinka and Adeyemo (2018).

Medium for participation: political inclusion and education will also serve as a medium for the citizens to participate in politics. Participation in politics provides numerous opportunities to the citizens to learn better how to govern the people. When there is a level playing ground for citizens to play active roles in politics it further allows them to explore other area that can add more values to their lives, when this is done national questions such as minority fears will be allayed because political inclusion has already provided them with a platform for participation Manuwa (2023).

Adherence to rules and regulations: this is a veritable tool in educating and enlightening the citizens to make them all-round in the political activities. A well-educated and enlightened citizens are easier to govern and less likely to be cheated. Hence, a sound education cum inclusiveness in governance will in inadvertently answer some of the national questions. Such citizens will most likely pay his tax, obey traffic rules and regulations and take part in voting. Such a person will realize that there are constitutional provisions for resource allocation and control, hence will always follow the constitution to the letter instead of violent protests and

destruction of public properties. This may not be the case of if such a citizen was not well educated and excluded politically Obi and Ojaide (2017).

National unity and integration: when majority of the citizens are included politically and a well-educated through the same syllabus or curriculum, through adequate citizenship and civic education, there is tendency and possibility that such a situation will endear national unity and integration, when this takes place volatile issues of national questions can be easily tackled and resolved on a round table. Thus, the citizens are united under the same education curriculum will see themselves as one indivisible people (Uriah, Amachi and Moneme 2020).

Spirit of patriotism and Tolerance: when majority of the citizens are aware of themselves as a very important stakeholder in Nigeria, such a people become more interested in the survival, socio-economic growth and development of the country and not the survival of their various ethnic group alone. The sense of patriotism and tolerance both act as catalyst for the people to co-operate in building a strong country not just asking for what they can gain from the country but what they can give back to the nation as a whole. Hence, the sense of belonging is very important in political inclusion and addressing the problems of national question Muhammad (2022).

Decision making process: this constitutes an important tool in solving some of the challenges of national questions, this is because when decisions are taken by some sections of the country at the detriment or the exclusion of many other sections, it doesn't allow for popular engagement and involvement of the people in governance, when this happens the people are automatically alienated from the decision-making process. This has a very negative effect on the participation of the people in governance and always brings about the issue of secession from the country Oluwatusin and Daisi (2018).

Conclusion

The article concludes by explaining political inclusion, politics and national question from the perception of good governance in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. What Nigeria needs in the present democratic dispensation is socio-economic development that maintains the national unity. Therefore, political inclusion with education is an instrument of democratic process that allays political crisis among the political groups in the emerging democracies in Africa including Nigeria. These national questions are fundamental issues that continue to threaten the corporate existence of the country. The paper identified the following as some of the salient national questions in Nigeria, these are; resource control, minority issues, creation of local government and states ensuring national unity and integration. This paper identified political inclusion, a strong adherence to national sense of belonging, medium of political participation, adherence to rules and regulations, national unity and integration, spirit of patriotism, decision making process as a way out of the problems of national questions.

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