Political Leadership Struggle in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: An Ethno-Religious Analysis

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Abstract

Political leadership struggle is a fundamental characteristic feature of all human societies and political communities. The idea of political leadership struggle is indeed synonymous with political elite struggle geared towards the advancement of both elitist and group interests. Against this backdrop, the paper incisively x-rays the ethno-religious nature of political leadership struggle in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. With the aid of the elite/instrumentalist theory, the paper contends that ethnicity and religion are potent instruments deviously deployed by the political class for their personal aggrandizement. In addition, the paper argues that the clarion call by the political class for restructuring of the Nigerian state and the implementation of the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference are not intended to serve the interests of the generality of the citizens but that of the elite. In conclusion, the study posits that it is only democratically elected transformational political leadership that can engender socio-economic cum political development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Development, Elite, Ethno-religious, Leadership, Transformational

1. Introduction

Political leadership struggle has been a fundamental characterization of all human societies cum political communities. For example, Marx and Engels (1973, p.32) noted that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". While Nkrumah (1970, p.2) sees class struggle as a fundamental theme of recorded history. According to Jaja (2007):

But as Marx and Engels have noted every class struggle is a political struggle invariably ending in further radicalization of the class and increasing its level of consciousness. Here, we must note that mere economism i.e. mere emphasis on economic improvements in from of higher wages, etc, is not enough. Political consciousness requires that a class transcends mere economism to making political demands such as representation in political decision

making, canvassing for votes for political parties and organizing itself into a political party, contesting election, and subsequently winning to form a government and transforms itself into a ruling class. In this way political consciousness becomes synonymous with revolutionary consciousness (p.168-169).

The implication of this is that the totality of societal life is a function of political decisions. Politics is therefore the arrangement of governmental priorities and the allocation of public resources among competing users and uses (Idoniboye-Obu, 2004). This also underscores the central role that politics plays and the quest for political power by members of a political community. The idea of political leadership in Nigeria seems to be synonymous with the quest for political power struggle. However, the authoritative allocation of state resources is usually the whole essence of dialectical quarrel among members of the Nigerian political class, for the satisfaction of their personal aggrandizement through the instrumentalities of ethnicity and religion. It is also, therefore, in this context that, Majekodunmi and Awosika (2013, p. 70) see politics as the only means of reaching out at the state resources.

Since May 29, 1999, which of course heralded the official commencement of Nigeria's fourth republic, and consequent upon the inauguration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the second Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, political leadership struggle in the country has increasingly become a burning issue of public governance debate among political scientists, social commentators and public analysts. This is probably due to the fact that political leadership in itself has remained so overwhelmingly problematic given the manipulation of the instruments of ethnicity and religion by the political elite in Nigeria's fourth republic democratic experience.

Indeed, the current constitutional democratic experience has come a long way in Nigeria with the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998 by the General Abdulsalam Abubakar's administration. As Gilbert and Barigbon (2015) would say, the transition to the current democratic dispensation referred to as the Fourth Republic began in 1998. Corroborating this historical fact, Gilbert and Ubani (2015) also reported it thus:

> The current Nigerian democratic rule is a product of two futile attempts by different military heads of state, namely General Ibrahim Babangida and Late Sani Abacha to transit to civilian rule. Therefore, General Abdulsalam Abubakar planned the transition, which brought into power the current democratic rule. The Abubakar political transition programme

> between June 1998 and May 1999 is however regarded as the shortest in Nigeria's political history lasting barely one year (p.136).

Amadi (2014, p.137) while buttressing further obviously argued that:

> But in June 1998, General Abacha suddenly died, and a month later Abiola also died in prison. General Abdulsalam Abubakar who quickly organized a transition programme that saw the birth of the present Fourth Republic in May 1999, and its continuation with the 2003, 2007, and 2011 presidential elections.

Ever since, Nigeria has witnessed different successive civilian administrations for well over two decades. For example, Olusegun Obasanjo ruled from 1999 to 2007, late Umaru Yar'Adua from 2007 to 2010, Goodluck Jonathan from 2010 to 2011, and also from 2011 to 2015 and finally Mohammadu Buhari from 2015 to date. The 36 states of the Nigerian political configuration have equally not been left out, as it were, in this trajectory of successive constitutional and democratic regime change and political leadership struggle. Nigeria as a polyglot nation of over 250 ethnic nationalities is constitutionally a secular state. It also obviously has no particular official or state religion. As such, the Nigerian society is religiously, ethnically and politically polarized and, this has impacted negatively on developmental policies of the country (Emeaku, 2019, p. 92). However, the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba constitute the majority ethnic nationalities. While the minorities are Ijaw, Ogoni, Efik, Ibibio, Ishekiri, Urhobo, Tiv., Igala, etc. For instance, Adangor (2018, p. 363) also noted that the Ijaws are one of about 250 ethnic nationalities or groups comprised in the federation of Nigeria and the largest in the Niger Delta region and also reputed to be the 4th largest ethnic group in Nigeria with their traditional settlements situated throughout the Niger Delta. In Nigeria, notwithstanding, Christianity and Islam are the predominant religions. Thus, political leadership struggle in Nigeria's fourth republic has consistently been characterized by both ethnic and religious colourations

In fact, both ethnicity and religion have over bearing impact on Nigeria's politics. Admittedly, there has been an increasing political leadership agitation in recent times for obvious reasons, visibly from the six geo-political zones of the country such as the North-Central, North-East, North-West, South-East, South-South and South-West, and the majority and minority ethnic nationalities and perhaps religious organizations like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMIN), Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) etc. This study is phenomenological in nature hence it seeks to offer an ethno-religious analysis of political leadership struggle in Nigeria's fourth republic. With the aid of the elite-

instrumentalist theory, the paper contends that the Nigerian political class deviously deploys the potent instruments of ethnicity and religion for the satisfaction of their personal aggrandizement at the expense of the general public.

The next subdivision of this paper has to do with the clarifications of relevant concepts, while the third analyses the adopted theoretical framework for the study hence a demonstration of its applicability to the ethno-religious dimension of political leadership and political power struggle in Nigeria. The fourth section is the main focus of the study, that is, discussing political leadership struggle cognizant of the instruments of ethnicity and religion. Finally, the fifth section concludes by recommending a pragmatic step and panacea as the way forward.

2. Theoretical Explications

This paper adopted the elite-instrumentalist theory as the most appropriate theory in providing a better understanding of the dynamics of politics in Nigeria and its political leadership struggle, especially within the context of ethnicity and religion. The instrumental theory therefore assumes that ethnic identity is "created and constructed by the ethnic elite" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 2).

The word "elite" has been defined in several ways by elite theorists and academics. According to Pareto (1968), as referenced by Gilbert (2013, p. 3), elites are members of any group "who score the highest on scales assessing any social value or commodity (utility) such as power, wealth, and knowledge." They are also classified as members of a society who possess, to a noteworthy degree, attributes of intellect, character, skill, and any other ability (Mba, 2015). This is due to the fact that the socio-economic wellbeing of the elite begets their socio-political influence cum political power and vice-versa. Whereas, the elite class is usually in minority, but, very politically and economically powerful to dictate and influence political decisions in virtually all developed and developing countries of the world, more especially in Nigeria.

Therefore, since politics emphasizes the authoritative allocation of state resources and also the reason why the struggle for material resources by the Nigerian political elite class, for the advancement of their personal aggrandizement, the political elites infact deviously deploy ethnicity and religion as potent instruments for such purpose. In Nigeria, for instance, political elites are used to utilising ethnicity and religion as tools during electioneering campaigns in order to make a political point by using Machiavelli's maxim that the purpose justifies the means (Emeaku, 2019, p. 22).

In addition, it is essential to highlight that the political leadership competition in Nigeria has been heavily influenced by ethnic and religious issues, particularly the three major ethnic groups — Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba — and the two prominent faiths — Christianity and Islam. Ethnicity is thus a primary tool in inter-elite struggle for gaining and holding political power, as well as for gaining access to and exploiting other socioeconomic resources mostly, but not exclusively, in favour of the elites. Again, the struggle for political power between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) as the two dominant political parties in Nigeria today, which eventually brought about the Buhari presidency in 2015 and 2019 respectively, speaks volume of the potency of ethnic and religious dimensions of Nigerian party politics.

For instance, Osaghae (1992) as cited in Idoniboye-Obu (1999, p. 61) noted that the "growing bourgeoisie is the champion of mobilized group ethnicity and of prebendal politics". Therefore, the clarion call for the implementation of the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference in Nigeria initiated by the Jonathan's administration is a prominent example of the foregoing analysis. Be that as it may, the political class in Nigeria, so to speak, stands to benefit more advantageously at the expense of the Nigerian masses, when eventually implemented. However, Ukiwo (2005), quoting Osaghae (1995), defines ethnicity as "the use or mobilisation of ethnic identity and difference to achieve advantage in competitive, conflict, or cooperative settings." While Young (1994), as referenced by Gilbert (2013, p.2), argues that instrumentalism draws our attention to the "contingent, situational, and contextual" use of ethnicity "in pursuit of material advantage", instrumentalism focuses on the use of ethnicity "in the pursuit of material advantage".

In the instance of Nigeria, Osaghae (1991) was most likely correct in his assertion that ethnicity is an ideology used by the privileged elements of a society in their battle for the nation's resources, particularly power. Moreover, he argued that the ethnicity thesis is epiphenomenal, since its existence is a result of manipulations of the people by the elite or privileged class (Gilbert, 2013). In other words, Karl Marx's assertion that "religion is the opiate of the masses" was probably also accurate (Obasi, 2009, p.313; Emeaku, 2019, p.94). Religion is then used by the bourgeoisie to influence the people for their own self-interest. Marx's belief that "the executive of the contemporary state is only a committee for handling the common concerns of the whole bourgeoisie" clearly demonstrates this (Jaja, 2007, p. 180). Hence, the relevance of the elite-instrumentalist theoretical perspective on ethnicity and religion cannot be over emphasized owing to its analytical explication of the ethno-religious nature of political leadership struggle in Nigeria's fourth republic.

3. Conceptual Clarifications

3.1 Politics

There is no one universally acceptable definition of politics among scholars. It means different things to different people, but its common denominator is the emphasis on power. It is in this context therefore that Onyekpe (1998) as cited in Afolabi (2015) defines politics as:

> The struggle for power which itself is the authority to determine or formulate and execute decisions and policies, which must be accepted by the society …. it is the struggle for power of governance, especially executive authority (p.44).

The implication of the above is that it is associated with the competition for the control of state power and authoritative allocation and distribution of state resources. This is in tandem with Okoko's view (1995) as cited in Jaja (2001, p.1) that politics is "the competitive struggle for political power to allocate resources for the entire state or society". Obasanjo (2002) concedes that "we strive and occasionally shed blood to acquire and keep political power because, for Nigerians, the political kingdom has been the doorway to the economic kingdom for a very long time" (Ijere, 2015, p. 110). Thus, for the Nigerian political elite, politics is fundamentally a game of "who gets what, when and how," in which values are assigned by the state's administrators (Gilbert and Barigbon, 2015, p.115). This may have also influenced Adebayo and Ogunleye's (2008) contention that, particularly in Africa, politics is seen as "a matter of life and death, a game of human survival or damnation" (Gilbert and Barigbon, 2015, p.115). Given the desperation of the Nigerian political elite in their pursuit of political power in order to acquire financial wealth at the expense of the state and the people, this is understandable. Hence, political power can be defined as that which empowers someone to make decisions that would be obeyed by the whole members of a given society (Obomanu, 2020).

3.2 Leadership

Leadership, according to Luthams (1976, p. 24), is the process of influencing others to work willingly towards achieving set objectives and to the best of their capabilities. Similarly, Krause (2005) as cited in Manilla (2006, p. 80) considers leadership as the process by which one person influences another to accomplish a mission, an objective, or a task. A leader is consequently a member of the group who is assigned the role of directing and organising tasks pertinent to group operations, or who, in the absence of a designated leader, assumes the major responsibility for carrying out these duties (Manilla, 2006, p. 80). In accentuating further, a leader is the focal point of any leadership due to the harnessing of both human

and material resources is being executed by him or her. Hence, leadership generally speaking is indispensable as far as human beings and organizations are concerned.

3.3 Political Leadership

Political leadership is another important aspect of the concept of leadership in itself. It is perhaps the centrality of other categories of societal leadership. Consequently, the concept of political leadership in effect expresses the fact of government which implies an activity of a few powers who takes decisions and actions on behalf of the people, but independently of their will, and whose decisions and actions, are backed by the laws of the state (Amadi, 2014, p. 37).

Amadi (2014) further contends that:

> Leadership refers to the idea of those at the helm of affairs in relation to those around them in any social organization; political leadership, therefore refers to those rulers at the helm of a nation's affairs and the manner of their exercise of either given or appropriated powers with respect to the dispensation of national resources, as well as their approach to the wellbeing of the people, (that is those governed) or what may be called the public interest (p.37).

Political leadership, according to Ogbeidi (2012, p. 4), is the ruling class that is responsible for managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by establishing and influencing the policy priorities affecting the territory through various decision-making structures and institutions designed to facilitate the orderly development of the territory. This implies that political leadership confers on the leaders both moral and legal responsibilities for the good of political communities, including Nigeria.

3.4 Transformational Political Leadership

In the first case, leadership cannot be separated from politics; it is politics in its whole. Thus, transformational leadership is characterised by its basic principles of objectives, visions, and the ways to unify followers in achieving these goals (Amakiri, 2022). This is because such a leader is responsible for ensuring that his or her followers are well-organized throughout the transition process and generates a feeling of collective activity. It is also the style of leadership that seeks to differentiate leaders from their current followership. In this context, Lawal et al. (2012) suggested that the transformational leader moves people beyond concern with fundamental requirements and eking out an existence, as is the case in the majority of the nation today, and sets the pace for individual and national self-actualization. However, its emphasis is on morality and motivation

through the instrumentality of leadership and followership for the achievement of organizational goals. A leader's experiential background is sine-qua-non for transformational leadership (Manilla, 2006). Thus, transformational political leadership is that aspect of leadership where the political leader provides a conscientiously motivated and purposefully human-oriented leadership for the developmental good of his society. Lawal et al. (2012), for example, stated that such leaders work independently and courageously to make the best choices for their states in the global system of economic, political, and cultural interaction; lead citizens to maintain educational quality and excellence, revitalise infrastructural facilities, and modernise productive agricultural and industrial activity; and insert skilled indigenous professional and labour at the centre stage of building national development infrastructure. Thus, it is clear that transformational leadership is characterized by positive result attainment and its leaders are also result-oriented for both human and societal development.

3.5 Ethnicity

Ethnicity as a concept in the literature of both political science and sociology has been variously defined, and especially within the context of this paper, it is a political instrument of ethnic sensitization and identity mobilization. It is "a social phenomena connected with the identification of members of the greatest conceivable contending communal groupings (ethnic groups) attempting to safeguard and promote their interest in a political system," according to Nnoli (1978, p. 5). Akinwowo (1972) as cited in Nwaorgu (1999, p. 95) defines ethnicity as "an ideology of employed by politicians of a particular ethnic group in a tribally heterogeneous state to justify their exclusive claims of political or economic advantages and to debunk similar claims by other politicians belonging to different tribal origins or affiliations". It is probably for this reason that Nwaorgu (1999) further argues that the phenomenon has gained considerable ground in Nigerian politics and also gathered its different definitions and explanations.

Therefore, ethnicity especially in Nigeria is a highly priced competitive political weapon for sectional pride, manipulations and benefits. This is because Nigerians are more inclined than any other identity to describe themselves in terms of their ethnic affiliations (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

3.6 Religion

Religion has over the centuries become a political weapon of mass indoctrination. According to Emeaku (2019), Marx's conception of religion might be viewed as the sigh of oppressed animals. The heart of a heartless planet, similar to the spirit of a spiritless

circumstance. Religious anguish is both an expression of genuine suffering and a protest against genuine misery. The opiate of the masses is their religion.

The above gives credence to the fact that religion is an instrument used by the ruling class to intoxicate and mesmerize the general public for the realization of their selfish interest. Religion, on the other hand, implies, "to observe (or gather) the signs of divine communication" (Jaja, 2015, p. 4). He is of the opinion that this is one reason why religious people are usually gullible given the supremacy of a "Super Being" over their affairs. This, the political class capitalizes on, to take undue advantage of the masses. Beyond the obvious fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation, she is also a multi-religious nation where religion plays a central role in shaping its politics. Thus, no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious (Ijere, 2015). The implication of this is that religion is a potent instrument of advantageous political manipulations and scheming as it has been observed over the years in Nigerian political history.

4. An Ethno–Religious Analysis of Political Leadership Struggle in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The politicization of ethnicity and religion is not in any way alien to the Nigerian socio-political system. It dates from the colonial and postcolonial periods. However, in Nigeria, for instance, it has been stated that the British colonial authority purposefully generated and encouraged ethnic animosity in order to achieve colonial and imperialist economic and political aims (Ayatse & Akuva, 2013, p. 178). They also contended that ethnicity has its origin traceable to the evolution of the Nigerian federalism under the colonial leadership of Sir Bourdillon in 1939. In fact, this colonial leader succeeded in dividing the country into provinces and regional councils along the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Ayatse and Akuva, 2013). This gives credence to the concept of triad in Nigerian politics based on ethnic divide as well as the struggle for the control of political power among the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic nationalities. The formation of political parties in the country has also taken this dimension since the colonial days to the first republic and also continued in a like manner till date.

Of course, religion has always worked hand in hand with ethnicity in Nigeria. According to Gilbert (2005):

The Nigerian state was born on 1st October 1960, into the contemporary world states-system. However, Nigeria was congenitally afflicted by interethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts, which reflects in competitions for state power and resources. Recently, ethno-

religious conflagrations have added to the crises of instability consistently and persistently threatening her foundations (p.120).

For instance, in the beginning of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, ethno- religious factor was so much at play. Infact, as Ndu (2011, p.172) puts it "current democratic journey in Nigeria, which started off with the 1999 elections after several years of military dictatorship, stands potentially threatened by negative forces of ethnicity". The Yorubas of the South-West geo-political zone therefore felt it was their turn to produce the number one position in the land (i.e. the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Due to the obvious reason that they had been denied of the position in the June 12, 1993 saga and, since M.K.O Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the presidential election in that year could not make it and eventually died in the struggle to actualize his mandate. And so, the Yorubas demanded for political compensation for the injustice meted out on them. When ultimately a notable Yoruba son, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, was selected as the standard flag bearer of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the religious aspect of togetherness was heightened. Consequently, in the 1999 elections, Pentecostal Christians publicly backed Obasanjo's candidacy via the PDP, seeing him as a symbol of the "end of Muslim political supremacy" and the "establishment of Christian rule over the government of Nigeria" (Afolabi, 2015, p, 47). The Christians by implication saw that as an opportunity of massively supporting one of their own having been marginalized in the sequence of the highest political leadership position in Nigeria. Consequent upon Obasanjo's victory in 1999, they kept on supporting him through prayers and this culminated in the courageous decision of Obasanjo as president to build a chapel in the presidential villa (Afolabi, 2015). According to Obadare (2006) as cited in Afolabi (2015), many Christians saw Obasanjo's "second coming" as a spiritual metaphor that went beyond the fact that he became president because of a political compromise between the country's geopolitical power blocs. For Christians, it was a fulfilment of God's promise to free his children (Southern Christians) from the rule of Northern Muslims. So, a *spiritual halo* was put around a political "second coming," and Obasanjo became a kind of "Messiah" almost overnight.

Similarly, in 2015, Christians in Lagos state of Nigeria took the bull by the horn to demand for a Christian governor due to the fact that since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, no Christian had governed the state as governor. For instance, available record also reveals that both Senator Bola Tinubu and Mr. Babatunde Fashola that governed the state for sixteen (16) consecutive years between 1999 and 2015 are Muslims. There was so much tension, from the political stakeholders and enlightened Lagos electorate, on the political leadership equation for Lagos state to have a Christian as its governor, which also formed part of the political expediency that eventually led to the emergence of Mr. Akinwunmi

Ambode as a Christian in the first instance in 2015. The choice of Ambode as the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Lagos state, as some political analysts would say, was to douse the religious dimension of the heightened political tension and also to enhance the electoral fortunes of the APC in the 2015 gubernatorial election in the state.

So, politicians, policymakers, and religious leaders often use religion to decide who gets what, when, and how in public and private offices. Religion also has a big impact on the direction of government policy (Emeaku, 2019, p. 100). Moreso, in 2015 political permutations in the APC, the Bola Tinubu vice presidential candidature to the then General Buhari was vehemently opposed on the basis of a Muslim- Muslim ticket which eventually culminated in the choice of Professor Yemi Osibanjo as a Christian, as well as a pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). This has sustained the trending political argument of a Muslim-Christian joint ticket and vice versa in understanding the dynamics of Nigerian political party nominations especially at the national level.

The potency of religion also played out in Rivers state in 2019 during the electioneering period. For instance, the Muslim leadership accused the state governor, Barrister Ezenwo Nyesom Wike for demolishing their mosque around Trans-Amadi in Port Harcourt. However, the governor also publicly denied being responsible for demolishing any mosque in the state thereby describing the accusation as mere falsehood, orchestrated by mischief makers so as to cause disaffection among the good, peace-loving and hospitable people of the state. The governor also described the incident as part of the antics of the APC leadership in the state in order to score cheap political points. This is also a clear justification of the fact is that the political class often than not deviously deploy ethno-religious sentiment for their personal gains. Given that the governor had always categorically maintained that "Rivers state is a Christian state" without no apologies whatsoever. This however contradicts the constitutional provision of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) that there is no state religion is Nigeria. This is rather a mere public statement by the governor himself.

Besides, Rivers state, on the other hand, has had its fair share in the history of its political leadership struggle. This is because in the politics of Rivers state, ethnic factor heightened political agitations and tensions by political gladiators and other ethnic nationalities in the state, on ethnic group should have produced the governor in 2015 and 2019 governorship elections respectively. The trend has not changed even in the political agitations and scheming for the 2023 governorship election in the state. This is sustained in the fact that since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999, those referred to as the "uplanders" had occupied that position of governor till date. This is further justified due to the fact that

Rivers State is naturally characterized by what the political class in the old Rivers state called Riverine/Upland dichotomy in the second republic for the purpose of gaining political power. Also implying that there exists a political gentleman agreement to alternate the position of governor in the order of this composition of the state given that the Ikwerre ethnic nationality of the upland extraction has had enough of the benefits of the office of governor. For instance, the Rivers Ijaws, that is, the Kalabaris, Okrikas, Ibanis (Bonny and Opobo), Obolos (Andoni) etc, have argued tenaciously that it is their turn to become governor. On the contrary, the Ogonis of the upland extraction are also agitating for the same position and equally arguing that they are the most marginalized in the state in terms of political positions such as Governor, Deputy Governor, Speaker of the State House of Assembly as well as the Chief Judge of the state. For example, and above all, in 2015, Barrister Wike finally became governor in an intense political situation of electoral violence before, during and even after the governorship election. Hence, the Supreme Court of Nigeria's description of Rivers State as a "theatre of war". Till today, virtually all the ethnic nationalities in the state are clamouring likewise especially in view of the 2023 gubernatorial election.

Another good case in point of understanding the role that politics plays and its manipulation in Nigerian party politics is the introduction of Sharia law since 1999 by the former governor of Zamfara state Ahmed Sani Yerima. This led to serious constitutional and political controversy between the two major religions of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. According to Afolabi (2015), some Christian organisations have "translated" the present discussion that is taking place among Muslims into the arena of Christianity and have requested the implementation of (Christian) canon law in nations that are largely Christian. In other words, the application of sharia law resulted in religious instability, bloodshed, and the eradication of Christians, particularly in the governments that embraced sharia law as their legal system (Afolabi, 2015). And so, religious-political conflict has ever since redoubled due to Christians resistance to the applicability of sharia law in some northern states that thereafter adopted it.

There is also no doubt that both ethnicity and religion have engendered political conflicts and strife as it is obvious in the past and present Nigerian political history. Indeed, since May 29, 1999 ethno-political conflicts have characterized Nigeria's democracy, suggesting that there has been a carry-over of ethnic identity politics from the proceeding years (Allen, 2011, p. 165). This, of course, has ignited the tempo of ethno-nationalist agitations for the control of state power and state resources. Thus, Gilbert (2013) noted that the three ethnic militia groups in Nigeria like Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Movement for the

Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were formed for obvious political reasons and the struggle against marginalization in its entirety.

It is similarly interesting to mention that several other groups including Movement for the survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDICS) Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteers Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta strike Force (NDSF) proliferated in the Niger Delta (Gilbert, 2013). Interestingly, these ethno-nationalist groups have prominently featured in the 4th republic Nigerian political space for their struggle against political injustice and other forms of marginalization.

The emergence of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) ethno-political group though with clear "separatist agenda" has equally generated an unprecedented ethnic sentiment and political tension in the polity which culminated in the application of force by the Nigerian State through a theatre of military operation in the Southeast known as "Operation Python Dance or Exercise Egwueke" to deter the ethnic agitation by Igbos. Whereas, the Boko Haram terrorist group has continued to champion its campaign for the Islamization of the Nigerian State from an ethno-religious perspective by mounting revolutionary pressures on the system through its guerrilla warfare tactics. This group of course has also had its fair share of the reprisal response from the Nigerian armed forces through a similar operational theatre of the famous "Operation Lafiya Dole" in Northeastern Nigeria.

While most of the violence in the southern part of Nigeria is not religious and is caused by protests related to the depletion of natural resources and the pollution of the environment, the northern part of the country has experienced a great deal more ethnic, tribal, and religious conflict, which is frequently manipulated by politicians for the purposes of political gain and profit, particularly in regions where neither Muslims nor Christians make up a clear majority (Nimenibo, 2015). This is also a clear pointer to the fact that since time immemorial, Nigeria has remained a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation made up of previously independent nationalities which formed a nation in 1914 and which became independent in 1960 (Okene, 2011).

In addition to this, it has been said that "under situations of intensive socio-economic competitiveness in the society, ethnicity is related with animosity, conflict, and violence" (Nnoli, 1993, as cited in Gilbert, 2013, p. 3). Because of this, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was elevated to the position of Vice President in 2007, Acting President in 2010, President in both 2010 and 2011, and eventually President in 2011. In the words of Alapiki (2011):

> The anti-Jonathan group formed the Northern political leaders forum (NPLF) led by Mallam Adamu Ciroma. The forum searched for a consensus aspirant of Northern extraction and subsequently screened former president Ibrahim Babangida, former Vice-president Atiku Abubakar, former National Security Adviser General Aliyu Gusau (rtd) and Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki. The forum eventually picked Atiku Abubakar as the Northern consensus candidate for the PDP. Even at that, former president Babangida wrote to the chairman of PDP Okwesili Nwodo on December 7, 2010 threatening to resign from the party if President Jonathan is allowed to contest the 2011 presidential election (p.199-200).

However, with the over politicization of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria between the North and the South political divide, Alapiki (2011) further argued that the perception in the Southern geo-political zones is that the Hausa-Fulani of the North will always sacrifice democratization so as to maintain themselves in power. For example, given an ethno-religious analysis of the outcome of the just concluded 2022 National Convention for the presidential primary election of the PDP in Abuja, where Governor Aminu Tambuwal of Sokoto state (the headquarters of the Caliphate of the Hausa-Fulani) officially stepped down as a presidential aspirant of the party and directed all his supporters (delegates) to vote for Atiku Abubakar, his fellow Fulani cum Muslim brother from Adamawa state also of the Northern extraction. This eventually gave due political advantage to Atiku and outright defeat of Governor Nyesom Wike of Rivers state, a Christian from a minority ethnic group (Ikwerre) of the Southern extraction.

Again, the increasing agitation for both state and local government creation has always been associated with the question of political leadership struggle in Nigeria's fourth republic. This is because state creation is particularly a balancing factor so to say as far as Nigerian federalism is considered. In Nigeria, it has consistently toed the line of ethnicity and ethno- political consideration. No wonder, the Igbo ethnic nationality of the South-East geo-political zone has been lamenting for being marginalized in state creation by having five (5) states as against the other geo-political zones having six (6) states each except the North-West geo-political zone that has seven (7) states. For example, whilst the South-East geo-political zone has five states and 95 LGAs, the North-West geo-political zone has seven states and 188 LGAs (Gilbert,2013, p. 36). Further corroborating the ethno-political factor, the Late Senator Francis Ellah, a second Republic Senator from old Rivers State opined that states in Nigeria should correspond with ethnic boundaries. According

to him, states provide ethnic groups in Nigeria opportunity for self-determination, self-realization and self-fulfillment (Allen, 2004, p. 28).

5. Concluding Remarks and the Way Forward

The critical and elaborate analysis of the ethno-religious nature of political leadership struggle in Nigeria's Fourth Republic cannot be overemphasized. It is also a clear revelation of the fact that the Nigerian political class has consistently and deviously deployed the potent instruments of ethnicity and religion for the advancement of the personal interests and gains of the elitist group. This, the political class has always done at the expense of the masses. Thus, Ake (1978, p. 70) observes that political competition is characterized by violence and such violence is used only to get access to the state and to use political power for their own class and private accumulation since state powers appear or assume significance as a means for creating an economically dominant class.

Above all, it is the position of this paper that despite the clarion call by more especially the Nigerian political class for the restructuring of the country and the implementation of the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference are not in any way intended to serve the interests of the generality of the ordinary Nigerian people but that of the elite. Hence, it is thought-provoking to conclude that it is only a democratically elected transformational political leadership that can engender socio-economic cum political development in Nigeria.

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