

Ethnicity and Marginalization within the Nigerian State: A Case Study of the Nigeria Police Force

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Abstract

Following some deliberate activities of our highly celebrated past leaders and nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Sir Ahmadu Bello to mention but a few who fought for Nigeria independence from the colonial masters but went ahead thereafter to domesticate their loyalty to their various regions of origin. Issues of ethnicity and marginalization of the minority groups within the country have since then grown uncontrollably. In fact, the practice of ethnicity is mostly seen today in Nigeria as being normal or as being what is naturally expected of every one in position of power without which such fellow or leader risk outright rejection and castigation from his/her folk after his/her tenure in such position of authority and influence. This study therefore seeks to examine the magnitude of possible practice of ethnicity within the Nigeria Police Force through a critical review of appointments and promotion of officers to lucrative positions within the Force and factors influencing such promotions and postings since Nigeria Police Force is a model of the entire society.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Marginalization, and Ethno-Political influence

1. Introduction

Nigeria has three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo who altogether represent 71 percent of the entire population (Otitte 1990). Other large ethnic groups include the Kanuri, who centered in Borno State; the Tiv, from the Benue Valley near Makurdi; the Ibibio and Efik in the Calabar area; the Edo from the Benin region; and the Nupe, who centered in the Bida area. Although these other ethnic groups are small by Nigerian standards, but each of these lesser groups has more members than almost any of Africa's other ethnicities. Where ethnicity is all about sticking to one's tribal group and possibly favoring such against the many existing others within a society, Some scholars have, on the other hand, seen marginalization as a process where a person is pushed to the edge of the society (Okpu 1977). That is, marginalization has potency of discrimination because a person is made to stand out and made to be different from everyone else where such person is marginalized and he/she may therefore feel different from the rest of the society. This is the condition some minority ethnics in Nigeria are pushed to today. Hence, the reality and sincerity regarding the nation lie in the fact that the country Nigeria only exists more now in name and as a geographical expression. This is because the sectional quest for relevance and out-smarting approaches to gain development, positions and self-favoritism advantages at the expense of others by many of these ethnic groups in Nigeria once they seize power-advantage have since given rise to mutual distrust and disharmony within the country. In fact, geo-political labels such as the 'North East, South South, South East, South West, North Central and so on have added tremendously to the plaque and negative impact of practicing ethnicity. The consequence of which is eroding the sense of unity and gradually tearing the nation apart on the ground of togetherness today. In fact many scholars have spoken against what the nation tag Federal Character which emphasizes geo-political advantage against human resource capacity, qualifications and merit in the distribution of positions. This practice has largely been criticized for being responsible for the most politically influenced positions that are allocated to undeserving leaders within the country. Of course, the effect of this is obvious on the nation's socio-economic and political awkwardness.

Police are however the most visible governmental agents through which the character of a government and political system may be assessed (Alemika 1993). This is so because the police are the guardian or vanguard of the status quo. To a large extent, the actions and behaviours of the police reflect the political and economic character of society as well as what those in power are willing or able to tolerate or condone. Hence the need for this paper presentation to review appointments, postings, recruitments and allocation of critical duties within the hierarchy of the Nigeria Police Force in a bid to confirm the practice of ethnicity/political influence rather than merit to that achievement. More so, the influence/admirability of the efficacies of such practices or otherwise on the state of policing in Nigeria and within the Police system itself as it is today.

2. Method and Material

The study adopts discursive approach towards unraveling the practice of ethnicity and likely marginalization within the Nigeria Police Force as a model to what is experienced within the larger Nigeria society. The material used is mainly secondary data through related studies in published works, journals and online information where ethnicity related incidences within the Police are captured aside the researcher's contributory experience through personal observation of such practices within the Nigeria Police Force overtime. The approach of which largely informs the study's qualitative pattern.

3. History and structure of the Nigeria Police Force

Nigeria's police began with a thirty-member consular guard formed in Lagos Colony in 1861. In 1879 a 1,200-member armed paramilitary Hausa Constabulary was formed. In 1896 the Lagos Police was established. A similar force, the Niger Coast Constabulary, was formed in Calabar in 1894 under the newly proclaimed Niger Coast Protectorate. In the north, the Royal Niger Company set up the Royal Niger Company Constabulary in 1888 with headquarters at Lokoja. When the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were proclaimed in the early 1900s, part of the Royal Niger Company Constabulary became the Northern Nigeria Police, and part of the Niger Coast Constabulary became the Southern Nigeria Police. Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914, but their police forces were not merged until 1930. In the 1960s, under the First Republic, these forces were first regionalized and then nationalized (Tamuno 1970).

The now Nigeria Police Force however is a Federal Government Institution with a centralized command structure headed by the Inspector General of Police (IGP) who reports directly to the president. According to Nigeria's constitution, the president must "consult" with the Nigeria Police Council prior to appointing or removing the inspector general.

However, the council, a civilian oversight body whose membership includes the 36 state governors, has rarely met in the past 10 years. The independent Police Service Commission (PSC) is responsible for appointing, promoting, and disciplining all members of the police force, with the exception of the IGP.

Each of Nigeria's 36 states, as well as the Federal Capital Territory, is served by an administrative unit known as a state command. The state commands are grouped into 12 zonal commands—with two to four states in each zone—each under the supervision of an assistant inspector general of police (AIG). Each state command is headed by a commissioner of police (CP) who is directly accountable to the AIG in the respective zone.

State commands are divided into smaller area commands, police divisions (headed by a divisional police officer, or DPO), police stations, police posts, and village police posts.

Source: Human Rights Watch (2010 Report on the Nigerian Police)

4. Training, Recruitments and Posting in the Nigeria Police Force and the Ethno-Corruptive and Political dimensions to it

The official pre-requirements to gaining employment into the Police Force, depending on the cadre though include as detailed:

- Lack of previous criminal Record by the applicant(s)
- Given the applicant is a Nigerian with prerequisite attestation letter(s)
- Have the prerequisite height level
- Have the prerequisite chest width
- Have the required academic qualification(s) depending on the cadre advertised
- Health Record/Certificate of Fitness
- Strong enough to withstand the rigors of the prerequisite drill(s)/training(s)

Above the whichever procedures that might be lay down as prerequisite/measures to absorbing people into the force however, it may be extremely difficult for an individual who may be adjudged to possess all physical and paper qualifications to gain such employment except he/she could produce or lobby for an introduction letter from a political figure in Nigeria on whose honor such a job-seeking Nigerian is given such slot to be recruited and not on the basis of his physical or academic qualifications to such achievement. Hence, Bitolu (1998) sees this practice as the door post to the recruitment of the miscreants and political thugs that have today taken over the job of policing where knowledgeable and competent Nigerians lack such recruitment opportunity for lacking political god-fathers.

By 1979, the NPF had grown above “80,000 ill-trained, ill-motivated and ill-equipped men.” (Odekunle 1979) Internal government and civil society reports during this time consistently identified problems of misconduct within the NPF. A commission set up by the military government in 1967, for example, found that the “despicable image of the police” was in part attributable to “bribery and corruption.” (Ahire 1991)

The report of the commission contains the following conclusions:

Unsuitable candidates had bribed their way into the force and “lucrative” stations are bought during posting of personnel. The term “lucrative” applies to border stations such as Idiroko and Calabar where smuggling is rampant.... Bribes are offered to affect assignment to duties with opportunities for extra income, otherwise styled “moving line” duties. They include traffic, vehicle inspection and criminal investigation duties. By the early 1990s, the Nigerian police had established a reputation for being “consistently repressive, corrupt, and ineffective,” for taking kickbacks, and also for accepting bribes from criminal suspects to avoid prosecution and other forms of case fixing.

Police’s training was however meant to be directed from headquarters by a Deputy Inspector General designated as commander. While recruits are meant to be trained at police colleges in Oji River, Maiduguri, Kaduna, and Ikeja, which also offered training to other security personnel, such as armed immigration officers. The Police College at Ikeja equally trains cadet assistant superintendents and cadet sub-inspectors. Some in-service training schools including the Police Mobile Force Training School at Guzuo, southwest of Abuja, the Police Detective College at Enugu, the Police Dogs Service Training Centre, and the Mounted Training Centre are also suppose to be functional.

In August 1989 for instance, Babangida laid the foundation stone for a Nigeria Police Academy (NPA) in Kano State. The NPA was to be affiliated with Bayero University until adequate infrastructure was available for independent operation (Ahire 1991). Although admission into this school was to be regulated by merit but other factors such as quota system and federal character soon overtook the principle of meritocracy in the Academy’s admission. The quota system and Federal Character factors soon silently confined the door way into the school to ethnicity criteria for admission since the Northerners/Hausas in whose territory the school is built now dominate the admission list against other ethnic groups in the country.

This equally buttresses allegation of the fact that most Police stations in the North are administered in such a manner that it would be extremely difficult to have a southerner without Hausa language speaking orientation posted and work in such area since such stations of the Nigeria Police only interact and carry out its administrative functions in Hausa language. Hence, a southerner posted to such environment would naturally feel marginalized because he would never feel belong nor have understanding of what his/her own co-workers/colleagues are discussing even in critical security situation. Nigeria government has no checks and balances for such practices within the police system. Hence, the practice of ethnicity and marginalization flourish.

5. List of the past and present Inspector General of Police and their regions (1)

Name	Period of office	Region
Louis Edet	1964–1966	Southern Region
Kam Salem	1966–1975	Southern Region
Muhammadu Dikko Yusufu	1975–1979	Northern Region
Adamu Suleiman	1979–1981	Northern Region
Sunday Adewusi	1981–1983	Southern Region
Etim Inyang	1985–1986	Southern Region
Muhammadu Gambo-Jimeta	1986–1990	Northern Region

Name	Period of office	Region
Aliyu Atta	1990–1993	Northern Region
Ibrahim Coomassie	1993–1999	Northern Region
Musiliu Smith	1999–2002	Northern Region
Mustafa Adebayo Balogun	2002 – 2005	Southern Region
Sunday Ehindero	2005–2007	Southern Region
Mike Mbama Okiro	2007–2009	Southern Region
Ogbonna Okechukwu Onovo	2009 - 2010	Southern Region
Hafiz Ringim	2010 - Jan 2012	Northern Region
Mohammed Abubakar	2012 - current	Northern Region

Source: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/02/promotion-of-digs-aigs-tears-police-apart/>

6. How Promotion of DIGS & AIGS Tears Police Apart

The strands of unity and discipline left in the Nigeria Police Force following the exit of former Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Abubakar Ringim and the appointment of Mohammed Dikko Abubakar dragged towards near collapse following the promotion of 7 Deputy Inspectors General of Police and 13 Assistant Inspectors General of Police with senior officers whose juniors were promoted above them, threatening to dump the force for DIG Parry Osayande(rtd) led Police Service Commission and the Inspector General of Police, MD Abubakar. This holds largely to the fact that such promotions never followed the usual civil service or the Police Service Commission's (the body saddled with the responsibility to promote Police Personnel) lay down procedures. Of course, it was a highly ethno-politically influenced promotion going by the fact that the newly elevated Inspector General of the Police itself (Mohammed Abubakar) equally jumped normal promotional ranks to occupy the position. This ethno-political promotional arrangement rather than procedural arrangement brought about such heavy shakeup within the police hierarchy in early 2012.

Many of the senior officers particularly, Assistant Inspectors General of Police and very senior Commissioners of Police are irked that the same DIG Parry Osayande (rtd) who has all along insisted that he is on a mission to cleanse the promotion and appointment structure of the force, and follow due process in appointment, discipline and promotion, is the one presiding and approving a promotion that is specifically aimed at frustrating and insulting the sensibilities of officers who have devoted their lives to the Nigeria Police force.

At the center of complaint and misgivings by the senior officers, are the promotions of junior Commissioners of Police over and above senior Commissioners as well as AIG's some of whom have tested and impeccable track records that can stand the test of time within the Police Force.

Promotion of such officers like Marvel Akpoyibo, Late Haruna John, Abdurahmen Akano and Peter Yisa Gana as well as AIG Atiku Yesufu Kafur to DIG's, were called to Question while for the AIG's, the promotion of some other officers who names were never made public also called for questioning.

Also promoted by the Commission are a Deputy Commissioner of Police from ACP (Mr. Owosheni), a Superintendent of Police and five Assistant Superintendents of Police, among the recent others. The list of these Northern dominated officers equally attracted attention and criticism among the Nigerian Populace who feel Nigerian leaders should desist from using the privileged positions to promote ethnic agendas. The list as well as the regions of the officers promoted is as follow:

Promotion to the Rank of Assistant Inspectors General of Police (AIGs). They are:

- Christopher T. Dega (A Northerner)
- Aliyu Musa (A Northerner)
- Bala Hassan (A Northerner)

- Mohammed J. Abubakar (A Northerner)
- Tambari Y. Mohammed (A Northerner)
- f) Ibrahim Abdu (A Northerner)
- Julius A. Ishola (A Southerner)
- Alex Emeka Okeke (AIG Medical Services) (A Southerner)

“All the above mentioned promotions are with effect from the 1st of August, 2012.

[\(http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/02/promotion-of-digs-aigs-tears-police-apart/\)](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/02/promotion-of-digs-aigs-tears-police-apart/)

7. Nigeria Police Force and Other issues bedeviling it

Aside the NPF's endemic problems with recruiting, training, inefficiency, and indiscipline; it equally lacked expertise in specialized fields. Corruption and dishonesty remain mere passage issue while low level of public confidence and failure to deal with crime appropriately complement the agency's misdeeds. In fact, the NPF is seen and believed to be more adept at paramilitary operations and with its exercise of force against the civil populace than carrying out its constitutional responsibility of community service functions or crime prevention, detection, and investigation.

In September 2005, Nigeria withdrew 120 police officers serving in the UN Congo mission because of accusations that they had engaged in sexual abuses. The reason for this is simple; the deployment of personnel for such mission must have been conducted not based on track records or sanctity of the officers sent out but on ethno-political influence on the list of officers to be deployed for such assignment. Otherwise, the few best behaved officers within the system could have been sent for such mission without coming back to disgrace the nation.

Ethnicity issues have equally been raised against some other Police Officers deployed to some troubled Northern part of the country where there were religious riots eventually leading to ethnic discrimination. Specifically, where some Northern Muslims fanatics were killing Southerners who lived among them but some of these law enforcers called Police arrived the scene of the incident only to join forces with their fellow tribal men to open gun-fire on the vulnerable Christian southerners they were meant to protect among other practices of marginalization and ethnicity by Police personnel.

8.0 Conclusions

The following conclusions are derived from the emerging issues in the course of discussions on ethnicity and marginalization in the Nigeria Police Force:

One, that such ethnic driven practices within the Nigeria Police Force as discussed in the course of the study are just used as model or as reflections of what is obtainable within the Nigeria society at large on the basis of ethnicity and marginalization among the various multi-ethnic Nigerian populace.

Two, that the NPF like the larger society of Nigeria is yet to meaningfully address issues of ethnicity oriented practices and influences within its system. In fact, it may be scary to believe that such police system as well as Nigeria society may even be seeing such practices as being normal as it stands.

Three, that the Nigeria Police have exhibited signs of ethnicity, politicalism and marginalization of the voiceless group in the course of their recruitment, posting/deployment for major national/international assignments and promotions.

Finally, that the way and manner at which people now flout ethnicity driven practices may continuous bring about disgruntleness, dissatisfaction and reactionary actions from those who may be victims of such ethnic-discrepancy and marginalization. A good example of which is well cited in the Nigeria Police Force's DIGs and AIGs promotions of 2012. This may lead to riot, social disorder and possible motivation for secession if the intimidating growth in the practice of such remains unchecked. Consistent agitation by the Igbo people for possible secession due to their unending marginalization is another good example within the Nigerian state.

9. Recommendations

Based on the revealing findings in the course of the study, the following recommendations are relevant:

First, the call for a holistic overhaul of the entire system of policing in Nigeria is long overdue. These should include restructuring in the recruitment process (which should be handled by independent, non governmental and non Nigeria body devoid of all ethnic inclination), training and re-training patterns and the need for meritocracy-

approach in the choice of men for promotion and deployment rather than political/ethnicity consideration to these achievements.

Second, the actions of Police Service Commission especially as relating issues of personnel promotion should be subjected to periodic review by possible presidential committee to ensure things are done in line with lay down procedures so as to curb unnecessary disgruntleness of personnel at such level of volatile security positions as DIGs and AIGs for possible avoidance of government sabotage in security related issues.

Third, Police authority as well as Nigerian government should look critically into the issue of transforming official language at police barracks in the Northern part of the country to Hausa rather than English language so as to build sense of security in other southerners who may find themselves working in the North by normal routing transfer within the system. Otherwise, such practice on checked may make their job, interaction among their northern colleagues very difficult for them while reporting at such place of duty.

Finally, the Nigeria Government should never casualize issues of police personnel deployed to curb riot/ethnic fracas turning around to join hoodlums to foment mayhem on innocent Nigerians in such process in the name of supporting their ethnic group against others. Officers present or past who may have perpetrated such should be fished out and prosecuted accordingly to send warning cross board.

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