

POLITICS OF DIVIDE AND RULE IN WEST AFRICA: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The title of this paper is the politics of divide and rule the case of Nigeria. The research methodology adopted was the documentary research design. The findings show that there is quite an extensive design of divide and rule perpetuated by the British colonialist and this has been further entrenched and instituted as a tradecraft by the political elite who see this strategy as their only means of hanging on to power at all cost. The study proffered some key recommendations such as diligently working against divisions among the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria a key to achieving this is the enthronement of good governance. Bad governance, maladministration and corruption helps fuel these divisive tendencies among others.

Key words: Politics, divide and rule, West Africa, Nigeria

Introduction

“A captain should endeavor with every art to divide the forces of the enemy, either by making him suspicious of his men in whom he trusted, or by giving him cause that he needs to separate his forces and because of this becomes weaker”. Machiavelli advising in Book iv of the *‘The Art of War’*.

We can see how this concept has been used overtime and proved to be efficient with every use, the Strategy is breaking into pieces large Power Concentration so they have lesser Power than the implementer in order to gain and maintain Power. This concept breaks up structures and also prevents them from linking up by creating conflict, enmity and rivalry amongst each other (Buell & Paul, 1979).

Several examples of this strategy exist in history like the British Empire in India, Gaius Julius Caesar parting the Jewish nation into five conventions and the list goes on. This strategy does not exist only in history as we see it happening very frequently in the 21st Century, and more so we see how it has been working from the first time to today, I could say it is one of the longest and most efficient political and social strategy in use.

Conceptual Clarification

Politics of Divide and rule: Divide and rule (Latin: *divide et impera*), or divide and conquer, in politics and sociology is gaining and maintaining power by breaking up larger concentrations of power into pieces that individually have less power than the one implementing the strategy. The use of this technique is meant to empower the sovereign to control subjects, populations, or factions of different interests, who collectively might be able to oppose his rule (Jordan & Preston, 2018).

In politics, the concept refers to a strategy that breaks up existing power structures, and especially prevents smaller power groups from linking up, causing rivalries and fomenting discord among the people to prevent a rebellion against the elites or the people implementing the strategy (Grob-Fitzgibbon & Benjamin, 2011).

The goal is either to pit the lower classes against themselves to prevent a revolution, or to provide a desired solution to the growing discord that strengthens the power of the elites. It was heavily used by British Empire in India and elsewhere (Wilson & Jon, 2016).

Methodology

The documentary research design was adopted; the study made use of secondary data alone, no statistical computations and analysis were done. The geographical location of the study was Nigeria while the population resident in Abuja constituted the population of study.

Discussion

The entity called Nigeria is made up many different ethnic nationalities which had before the advent of colonization lived separately under different systems of political administrations such as empires, kingdoms and chief less society.

In 1914 the north and south protectorates were amalgamated to become the present day Nigeria, this singular event orchestrated by the British was to ensure administrative and post colonial hegemonic metropole considerations. This act has pitched the north against the south and in extension the various sub units in either the south or north. In Nigeria it is a complicated situation created by the British and further sustained by primordial sentiments and the quest for political control (Ogar, 2017).

For example by 1963, three years after Independence Nigeria was a federal republic with the country divided into three regions based on ethnicity: the Northern region, the western region, and the Eastern region. In 1966, Six years after independence, Nigeria was plunged into a three year civil war, as a direct result of political and social cleavages exacerbated by the British tactics of divide and conquer.

The legacies of the British colonial administration left deep rooted political and social mistrust among the different ethnic nationalities in the young nation, that there were several centripetal and centrifugal forces at play at any given time even up till date.

The eastern region of Biafra sought its independence from the federal republic of Nigeria, which

unfortunately resulted in the tremendous loss of lives. Though the facts regarding this tragedy remain vague, it is certain that this was a result of the divide and rule tactics left in place and fueled by the colonizers. This war would set forth a series of violent power struggles within the nation, further fueled by religious or ethnic sentiments.

If we look carefully during the British rule in Nigeria from 1861-1960 we saw how different regions were frequently reclassified for administrative purposes, and how the tribal conflict between the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other minorities made it easier for the British to consolidate their power, this isn't so far from the concept as we have continuously allowed and let our unique differences to come between the fact that we are now a nation and we have also neglected the effect of these division on state building.

Selfishness, the pursuit of self-interest and self-aggrandizement are the driving forces of Nigerian politicians, bottom to top and back again, of those emotions, not one is free, not one is clean. A fundamental assumption of representative democracy is that each political party has ideals by which it lives and plans for the society it plans to govern and politics in Nigeria has also, once upon a time, lived this reality (Kalu, 2018).

The Nigerian state has over the years been headed by Nigerian politicians, with little or no inclination to provide genuine service to the people. So, from Abuja, down to all the state capitals, local government councils, towns and villages, Nigeria has become a huge community of local fiefdoms where those who own the people are prepared to do anything to hold on to the reins of control.

Unfortunately, the people are at sea! It's a largely impoverished society without any visible promise for change. That is one reason why true democracy will elude Nigeria for a while. Poverty and democracy are mutually exclusive with democracy and those who should work to lift society from the pangs of poverty are the same people who want to hold on to power by all means and leave others wallowing!

Challenges

The challenges towards making sure that the tactics of divide and rule does not succeed, is enormous, these challenges include but are not limited to the issues of primordial sentiments such as ethnicity, religion and regionalism. Others include the very high levels of illiteracy, massive corruption, weak public institutions, weak civic societies, poverty and very high levels of unemployment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The factor of divide and rule in Nigeria is a crucial variable that has retarded development in all ramifications in Nigeria, the quest for national development by Nigerians is a herculean task due to the promotion of divisive syndromes which are very pronounced due to many years of very bad leadership at all levels of government. Achebe captured it very well when he opined in his very celebrated works "the trouble with Nigeria" that the trouble with Nigeria was not the people or the land but the leadership. They without mincing words are the ones who are holding the country back with their continuation of the British tactic of divide and rule because of their inordinate quest for power.

The Paper also concludes that; Divide and rule cannot work without the effective functioning of following components:

- Creating or encouraging divisions among the subjects to prevent alliances that could challenge the sovereign
- Aiding and promoting those who are willing to cooperate with the sovereign
- Fostering distrust and enmity between local rulers
- Encouraging meaningless expenditures that reduce the capability for political and military spending.

Based on the following key strategies identified above therefore, the paper recommends that;

- i. Diligently working against divisions among the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria a key to achieving this is the enthronement of good governance. Bad governance, maladministration and corruption helps fuel these divisive tendencies.
- ii. In Nigeria the people who work for divisive tendencies are well known and they cut across various political divide, ethnic nationalities and diverse socio-cultural and economic strata. These people should be isolated.
- iii. The factor of distrust and enmity can be dealt with by creating an atmosphere of mutual corporation.
- iv. Budgetary frugality, accountability and transparency is a way to curbing meaningless expenditures.

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