

WEEK 3

Minority Issues in Nigeria and the Creation of States

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The Major and Minor Ethnic Groups in Nigeria

There are three major ethnic groups in Nigeria namely: the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. The minority ethnic groups are very many and they are scattered across the major ethnic groups. For example, some of the following minority ethnic groups exist in Nigeria: Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Urhobo, Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe, etc

Reasons for the Demand of More States

There have been recurring agitations for the creation of new states and local government in Nigeria. The following are some of the reasons for the demand for new states:

1. Ethnic Identity: Some ethnic groups want to be on their own and have their own government.
2. Cultural Differences: Due to cultural differences, some ethnic groups desired to have their own states so they can govern themselves based on their culture.
3. For Development Purposes: Some ethnic groups agitate for a state due to neglect from major ethnic group where they fall under. They demand for a new state so they too can develop.
4. Need to Bring Government Nearer: The creation of new state will bring government nearer to the people at the grassroots. It will encourage even development.
5. Minority Domination: Creation of states will remove the fear of domination of minority groups by the majority groups.
6. Revenue Allocation: Many areas demand for new states so they can partake in the sharing of the country's revenue.

The Complexity and Endless Nature of State Creation

Creation of states in Nigeria was carried out by military government. No civilian regime created states except the mid-western region that was created in 1963. The reasons are as follows:

1. Lack of accurate data: There is no correct data as to the number of people living in a particular area. To create states, population must be taken into consideration.
2. Lack of consensus: Within a given area, there can be great agitation for state creation among the various groups that make up the area. This will not bring unity of purpose.
3. Selfish desires: Creation of states could also be demanded based on selfish interest.
4. Viability: Some of the areas demanding for state creation may not be viable enough to generate internal revenue to manage its affairs.

The Willinks Commission of Inquiry (1957)

Reasons for Setting Up the Commission

The commission was set up to look into the grievances of minority groups and their agitations for separate states and make recommendations. However, the commission claimed that there were two genuine fears among the minorities.

1. The use of physical force by political parties which was becoming a feature of Nigeria politics was seen by the commission as a threat to democracy.
2. Regional governments did not demonstrate the readiness to meet the wishes of the minorities.

Major Recommendations of the Willinks Commission of Inquiry

The following are the major recommendation of the Willinks Commission of Inquiry

1. **No Creation of More States:** The commission recommended that the problems of the minorities could not be solved by creation of more states.
2. **The Police:** A strong united police force under federal authorities was recommended.
3. **Fundamental Human Rights:** The need to entrench the fundamental human rights in the constitution to safeguard the interests of the minorities.
4. **Muslim Laws:** Non-Muslims in the North not willing to be tried under Islamic laws should have the option of being tried in a non-Islamic court of justice.
5. **Existing Boundaries:** It recommended that no change should be made in the existing boundaries between the Northern and Western Regions, any change should come through plebiscite.
6. **Annual Reports:** Annual reports for both the special and minority areas were to be submitted to the House of Representatives and the appropriate Regional Houses.
7. **Special Councils:** Minority areas with special councils for both Calabar and Mid-West to monitor regional governments.
8. **Development Boards:** Establishment of special development boards for Niger Delta Areas.

9. **Special Areas with Special Problems:** Financial and other responsibilities to be shared equally by both the regional and federal governments. The Niger Delta should be declared a special area.

Solutions to the Minority Problems in Nigeria

The problems of minority groups in Nigeria can be solved through the following:

1. Even Development: All parts of the country should be evenly developed. This will make the minority group to put their confidence in the central government
2. Political Participation: Minority groups should be involved in decision making process so that they will have a sense of belonging and this will remove the feeling of being cheated or marginalized.
3. Revenue Allocation: when the revenue is shared, they should be given their own share so that they can use it to develop their own areas or communities.
4. Federal Character: This policy should be implemented so that the minorities can be fully represented in all the sectors in the state.
5. Dialogue: Opportunity should be given to the minority groups to say their minds to the government so that there can be solutions.
6. Justice, Fair-play and Transparency: The government should be open in their administration and there should be justice in the state.
7. Free and Fair Elections: The electoral commission should conduct free and fair elections so that the minority will not have a reason to revolt or cause trouble in any part of the state.

INTER-ETHNIC RIVALRY AND ISSUES OF SECESSION IN NIGERIA

CONTENT

1. Inter-Ethnic Rivalry
2. The Nature of Ethnic Conflicts or Rivalry in Nigeria
3. Problems of Secession in Nigeria
4. Measures to Avoid Secession in Nigeria

Inter-Ethnic Rivalry

Since the inception of Nigeria, there has been rivalry among the different ethnic groups especially the major ethnic groups of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. The major problem is the question of leadership in the country. None of them want to concede the leadership of the country to the other.

The Nature of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

The nature of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria is in various forms namely:

1. Political Disturbances: Some ethnic group may purposely cause problems in the country to destabilize the government.
2. Destruction of Lives and Properties: Some ethnic groups take laws into their hands by killing people and destroying their properties to show their displeasures to the happenings in the society.
3. Holding people as Hostages: Relatives of some important personalities or influential members of the society may be kidnapped and taken to an unknown destination until a ransom is paid. This is done in order to also show their displeasure over an issue or issues happening in the society.
4. Boundary Disputes: Many at times, there are communal clashes over a piece of land or boundaries. This sometimes leads to loss of many lives and properties.
5. Religious Disturbances: This is very rampant in Nigeria as religious groups especially the Muslim and Christian often embarked on religious killings over a minute religious doctrine.
6. Bomb Blast: This is another nature of ethnic conflict where a particular ethnic group uses bomb to destroy the lives and properties of another ethnic group. It is very common in Nigeria these days especially with the religious sect called Boko Haram.

Problems of Secession in Nigeria

Secession means a formal withdrawal by a certain ethnic group from a federation. Some ethnic group in Nigeria attempted secession. For instance, the Northern region threatened to secede over the issue of motion raised by Chief Anthony Enahoro, a member of Action Group (AG). This led to the release of eight point agenda that will make them to secede. The Yorubas also threatened to secede over the attempt of the Federal Government to separate Lagos from the Western region. The Eastern part of the country seceded from the Federation between 1967 and 1970. This led to the Nigerian Civil War which claimed a lot of lives and properties.

Measures to Avoid Secession in Nigeria

To avoid secession in Nigeria, the following measures must be taken:

1. **Good Government:** Good governance will enhance political stability in the country. This will hinder secession.
2. **Negotiation:** a peaceful way of resolving conflicts should be adopted. One of it is negotiation where the aggrieved parties will come together and discuss their grievances in order to proffer lasting solutions.
3. **Political Education:** People should be enlightened on the dangers of secession. This will help them to desist from such actions that can threaten the security of the country.
4. **Political Participation:** People from all ethnic groups should be carried along in the process of decision making in a state so that no group will feel neglected or cheated.
5. **Constitution:** The Constitution of a state should clearly state the abolition of secession and any defaulting ethnic group or groups of person embarking on that should face a serious disciplinary action.
6. **Equal Political Rights:** The government should ensure that every ethnic group is given equal right to get into any leadership position in the country.

EVALUATION

1. State three natures of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.
2. Outline five (5) problems of secession in Nigeria
3. Mention five (5) measures that can be adopted to avoid secession in Nigeria.

GENERAL EVALUATION

1. Outline five natures of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.
2. What are the causes of secession in Nigeria?
3. What are the measures or strategies to be adopted to prevent secession in Nigeria?
4. Explain reasons for the secession of the Eastern region in 1967.
5. Suggest two solutions to the problem of ethnic conflicts.