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CITIZENSHIP CRISIS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA (1999-2015)

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Abstract

The study delves into the complexities surrounding the concepts of 'Indigeneship' and 'Citizenship' in Nigeria, particularly focusing on Ekiti State. 'Indigeneship' is described as a discriminatory tool employed in Nigeria to differentiate between indigenous residents and non-indigenous settlers. On the other hand, 'Citizenship' represents the legal or customary recognition of an individual as a member of a country. Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal rights, the distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes has significant implications for political participation. The study, conducted in Ado, the capital of Ekiti State, employs mixed methods, combining questionnaires and in-depth interviews for data collection. The findings reveal a grey landscape, with non-indigenes expressing interest in political participation but facing barriers, particularly in contesting elections at higher levels. While the government has made efforts to include non-indigenes in decision-making, there is a prevailing sentiment among indigenes limiting political roles for non-indigenous residents. The research highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics between indigeneship, citizenship, and political participation, emphasizing the impact on non-indigenous individuals striving for equal representation and participation in the political sphere.

Keywords: Citizenship, Ethnicity, Indigeneship, Politics, Political Participation, Ekiti State

In Nigeria, democratic governance and civic engagement are profoundly influenced by the concept of citizenship, which permeates the fabric of political participation and identity. Central to the discourse is the 'Citizenship Question,' which revolves around the distinction between formal citizenship rights delineated in legal frameworks and the recognition of group identities in Nigeria's diverse, multi-ethnic society. This discourse specifically addresses the differentiation between "national citizenship"

and “local citizenship,” leading to patterns of exclusion based on regional, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations. Individuals identifying as “indigenes” or “natives” often marginalize those perceived as “non-indigenes” or “aliens,” denying them access to certain rights and privileges despite their Nigerian citizenship and fulfillment of civic duties like tax payment. While ethnic differences are prominent, sub-ethnic identities also serve as grounds for exclusion or limited political participation. Since Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999, the country has grappled with intricate challenges related to citizenship and political participation. These issues are particularly pronounced not only in Ekiti State but across the nation. Ekiti State, with its distinct political environment and historical background, provides a significant case study. This era of political transitions and reforms in Nigeria underscores how discussions on citizenship intertwine with broader questions of identity, belonging, and political agency. As Osaghae (2001) argues, the crisis of citizenship in Nigeria fundamentally stems from a crisis of political participation and representation, marginalizing certain groups and undermining the country's democratic principles. In Ekiti State, manifestations of this crisis manifest in forms such as discrimination, voter apathy, and the manipulation of ethnic and regional identities for political gain.

Theoretical Framework

Primordial Theory

Primordial theory, influential until the 1970s, posits that nations are ancient, inherent entities rooted in German Romanticism, notably Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Johann Gottfried Herder (Hayward, Barry & Brown 2003: 330). This theory introduces three core propositions:

First, ethnicity is viewed as an innate characteristic inherited from one's ancestors. This perspective asserts that individuals of Chinese or Yoruba descent inherently possess the physical and cultural traits of their lineage, forming a profound, intrinsic connection. Second, it argues that ethnic boundaries, defining inclusion and exclusion from an ethnic community, are immutable. This permanence suggests that one's ethnic identity—whether Chinese or Yoruba—is lifelong and unalterable. Third, ethnicity is asserted to stem from shared ancestry, encompassing both genetic and cultural heritage. The term “Primordialist” aptly describes this viewpoint, emphasizing the foundational role of ancestry and cultural bonds in shaping and perpetuating ethnic identities (Geertz, Isaacs, Van den Berghe, as cited in Yang 2000).

Within primordial theory, two perspectives emerge: socio-biological and cultural. The socio-biological perspective, championed by Pierre van den Berghe, highlights kinship as pivotal in shaping ethnicity. Van den Berghe posits that ethnic identities derive from familial affiliations, extending from immediate to extended family ties, thereby fostering enduring ethnic group memberships (Van den Berghe in Yang 2000).

Llobera (1999) further elaborates, describing sociobiology as an evolutionary science that elucidates human behavior through mechanisms such as kin selection, reciprocity, and coercion. Kin selection, favoring relatives, reinforces an individual's genetic legacy, sustaining ethnic groups through extended kinship bonds (Llobera 1999:3).

Conversely, the culturalist perspective underscores shared cultural elements—language, religion—as defining and maintaining ethnic identities, transcending genetic links. This viewpoint posits that common cultural practices foster a sense of belonging within an ethnic group, illustrating how diverse racial groups within a nation forge unified ethnic identities through shared cultural experiences, not solely through ancestry (Smith 1983).

Instrumentalist Theory

In contrast, instrumentalist theory views ethnicity as a strategic tool to acquire resources, labeling it as an instrumental or tactical asset. This perspective posits that ethnic identities are embraced and sustained for their tangible benefits. Ethnic groups mobilize politically and socially to advance

collective interests, leveraging ethnic networks and bloc voting to wield political influence (Yang 1999). Leading proponents Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1975) argue that ethnicity serves beyond emotional connections, functioning as a mechanism for political mobilization.

The instrumentalist view suggests that ethnic identity's relevance hinges on its capacity to fulfill economic and class interests (Patterson 1975:348). Ethnic affiliation is portrayed as flexible and contextual, varying with perceived benefits derived from group membership (Yang 2000). This nuanced perspective highlights how cultural cohesion reinforces group organization, bolstering ethnic solidarity and identity (Yang 2000).

Applying these theories to Ekiti's context, primordial theory implies an immutable status tied to local identity, influencing political representation to favor indigenous residents irrespective of policy alignment. Conversely, instrumentalist theory interprets this as a calculated manipulation of local identity by political elites to mitigate electoral competition, using ethnicity as a strategic tool. For the populace, local identity serves to reduce competition for resources like employment and political positions within the state.

Understanding 'Indigeneship' and 'Citizenship' in Nigeria

The term 'Indigene-ship' originates from 'indigenous'. The Encarta Encyclopedia Dictionary defines 'indigenous' as "belonging to a place: originating in and naturally living, growing, or occurring in a region or country" (Merlan, 2009). Francesca Merlan (2009) further interprets 'indigene-ship' as implying primary connections between a group and its locality, signifying belonging, originality, and strong processes of attachment and identification. In Nigeria, however, 'indigene-ship' has been co-opted to justify discriminatory practices, differentiating between 'indigenes' or natives of a state or locality and those deemed 'non-indigenes' or settlers (Omotosho, 2010). This concept is used to exclude non-indigenes from accessing certain benefits or resources.

On the other hand, 'Citizenship' denotes the legal or customary recognition of an individual as a member of a specific country. In Western political thought, citizenship is historically rooted in liberal ideals, emphasizing the equal legal status of individuals and accompanied by rights and duties granted by the state (Gaventa, 2002). It represents the formal link between an individual and a state or group of states, typically synonymous with nationality, although the latter occasionally carries ethnic connotations. The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 outlines criteria for acquiring citizenship, including birth within the country to Nigerian parents or grandparents, birth outside Nigeria to Nigerian parents or grandparents with subsequent registration, or naturalization (Sections 25–27 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended).

However, in many Nigerian states, citizenship equates to indigeneship at the state level. Consequently, individuals recognized as Nigerian citizens may not be considered citizens or indigenes in specific states or localities, potentially denying them certain rights and privileges accorded to acknowledged citizens or indigenes of those areas (Enaruna, 2014). One critical consequence of being labeled non-indigenous is the restriction on full political participation, especially in terms of eligibility for standing and contesting elections.

Lagos State presents a notable exception, where non-indigenes have successfully contested and won political offices, such as in the 2015 general elections where individuals of Igbo and South-south origins were elected to the House of Representatives (P.M. News, 2015). In contrast, Ado-Ekiti, the capital of Ekiti State, has seen no significant political representation from Hausa, Igbo, or Ebira communities despite their long-term residency, raising questions about the citizenship status of Nigerians residing outside their 'state of origin'.

Indigeneship and Voting Rights

Understanding the status and identity of indigenous people and its impact on their voting rights is crucial for democratic inclusion and representation. This concept, known as 'indigeneship', has been extensively studied by Western scholars who explore how social histories shape civic rights and the relationship between citizenship and identity (Tilly, 1996; Baubock, 2002). In Nigeria, scholars focus on the practical and legal challenges arising from indigeneship, highlighting conflicts between indigenous populations and settlers in regions like Jos, where ethnic and regional identities are contentious (Adejumobi, 2001; Afolabi, 2016).

The legal framework governing elections in Nigeria adds complexity to this landscape. While the constitution and electoral laws define political participation rules, their implementation often reflects broader governance and equity issues. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) plays a critical role in ensuring free and fair elections, yet its effectiveness is hindered by issues such as executive influence and financial dependencies (African Affairs, 2017).

The practical challenges of conducting elections in Nigeria are well-documented, with allegations of fraud and irregularities undermining electoral processes in crucial transitional periods (African Affairs, 2017). These challenges exacerbate social and political divisions, disenfranchising non-indigenous communities and impeding national unity and integration efforts.

The ongoing debate and conflict over indigeneship in Nigeria are documented by organizations like Human Rights Watch (2020), which highlights how state and local regulations discriminate against non-indigenous groups, affecting their access to social services, education, and political engagement. Addressing these issues requires a multidimensional approach involving institutional strengthening, legal reforms, and initiatives to promote inclusivity and social cohesion.

Research Methodology

The Study Area:

The study area is Ado, the Ekiti State capital which hosts lots of migrants from various parts of the country and who are of different ethnic groups. Notable among this set of migrants are the Hausas, Igbos, and Ebira who are well represented in the town. For example, it is believed that the Ebira came into Ado-Ekiti in large numbers in the 1940s and 1950s and introduced new farming techniques to the town (ekitistate.gov.ng).

Methods of Data Collection:

According to the 2006 population census, and as reported by the official website of Ekiti state, the population of Ado-Ekiti is put at 308, 621 (ekitistate.gov.ng).

The data collection methods and techniques include questionnaires and In-depth Interviews (IDI). The necessary data for this study was gathered from both primary and secondary sources:

- (i) For primary data, the major source of materials is questionnaire design; meant to elicit information from the respondents selected from the population. A total number of 200 questionnaires were self-administered to respondents and 152 were duly recovered for analysis. The questionnaires contain variables that are related to political interest and participation in politics of both indigenes and non-indigenes. Also, interviews were conducted to elicit more detailed information to back up the data gathered from the distribution of questionnaires.
- (ii) Secondary sources include relevant books, journals, government and non-governmental publications, published periodicals, newspapers, news magazines, internet materials, and other published periodicals that are important to the theme and central focus of this study.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using interpretative and descriptive methods. Qualitative data were tape-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed based on the research objectives while secondary data were content analyzed.

Nature and Pattern of Indigene-ship and Political Participation in Ado Ekiti

Brief Overview of Ekiti State

Ekiti State, a distinct subset of the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria, traces its ancestry back to Ile-Ife, a spiritual center for all Yoruba people. Despite minor dialectal variations across communities, Ekiti natives understand each other well. They practice Christianity, Islam, and traditional indigenous religions (ekitistate.gov.ng). The Ekiti dialect of the Yoruba language shows regional variations; for instance, Otun's dialect resembles that of Igbominas in Kwara and Osun States, while Efon Alaaye's is akin to the Ijesas in Osun State (ibid).

Since colonial times, Ado-Ekiti has played a central role in education and socio-cultural affairs within Ekiti. This prominence led to significant infrastructure development, fostering economic, socio-cultural, and political growth (Ojo, 1966). Elevated to Ekiti State Capital, Ado-Ekiti has expanded rapidly since the 1940s, becoming a primate city. This growth attracted migrants from urban centers like Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, and others, drawn by employment opportunities and improved infrastructure (Oriye, 2013). The city's population growth and geographic expansion have been bolstered by migrants, including Hausa, Ebir, and Igbo communities contributing to the town's economic development and political life.

Political Interest

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Political Interest

S/N	Political Interest	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neutral (%)
1	Do you have interest in Nigeria Politics?	93 (61.2%)	37 (24.3%)	22 (14.5%)
2	Do you follow Ekiti politics with interest?	78 (51.3%)	38 (25%)	36 (23.7%)
3	Are political stories reported in the media of interest to you?	114 (75%)	24 (15.8%)	14 (9.2%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

While trying to ascertain the level of political interest of people in Ekiti State as shown in the table above, majority of the respondents are interested in political events in Ekiti state and Nigeria as a whole; with 61.2% showing interest in politics, 24.3% not having interest while only 14% stays neutral on political events around Nigeria. Also, 75% of respondents said they follow with interest political stories reported in the media; hence, there is a high feeling of concern and curiosity about what happens in the political sphere of the country. However, 15.8% of the respondents seem not to care about what is happening politically in the country while 9.2% were indifferent.

Political Participation and Effects of Indigene-ship in Ekiti State

Table 2: Political Participation of Respondents

S/N	Political Participation	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neutral (%)
1	Did you vote in the last election or the ones before?	92 (60.5%)	59 (38.8%)	1 (0.7%)
2	Participation in other forms of political activity	35 (23.0%)	110 (72.4%)	7 (4.6%)
3	Are political happenings in your state of more importance to you than that of Ekiti state	81 (53.3%)	35 (23.0%)	36 (23.7%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

The success of any political system largely depends on the level and depth of citizens' participation in politics. However, citizens' participation is often determined by their level of awareness and the environment in which they find themselves. Citizens are more likely to participate in politics if their environment is encouraging and favorable. In this context, the environment refers to the attitude of both the government and fellow citizens towards encouraging or discouraging individual political participation.

While various modes of political participation, such as campaigning and petition writing, exist, the political engagement of Ado Ekiti citizens predominantly revolves around voting. The initial inquiry focused on whether respondents engaged in voting during elections. The findings indicate that 60.5% of participants actively voted in both the last election and its predecessor, whereas 38.8% abstained from this form of participation. In contrast, when considering alternative avenues of political involvement such as campaigning, protests, or petition writing, only 23.0% of respondents reported engagement, while 72.4% refrained from participating. Notably, 4.6% remained neutral. These outcomes underscore a distinct preference for voting among citizens, signaling a limited inclination towards alternative political participation avenues like protests or petition writing in Ado Ekiti.

The indigene-settler dichotomy in different states and the geo-political entity of the country also affects citizens' political participation. Non-indigenes often do not wholeheartedly commit to participating in the politics of their host communities, feeling it is a waste of time and energy. This was revealed in the data gathered, as non-indigenous respondents were asked about their political preference concerning their state of origin and Ekiti State. The results showed that 66.3% of respondents agree that political activities in their state of origin are more important to them than those in Ekiti State, while 9.6% have no preference for state affiliation, and 24.1% stayed neutral. In other words, most non-indigenes residing in Ado Ekiti are still more concerned with their state of origin, indicating a stronger sense of belonging and attachment to their state of origin than to their state of residence.

The reason for this deep sense of attachment to their states of origin is not farfetched, as revealed by the interviews conducted. For instance, when asked if he thinks Ekiti people usually support non-indigenes to contest elections and if any Hausa man has ever come out to contest, Alhaji Adamu, the leader of the Hausa community in Ekiti State and a key informant in this study, responded with an affirmative "No!" When asked why, he simply said, "We have not been given the opportunity." In other words, from Adamu's words, one may conclude that while the Hausa settlers are willing to contest elections in the state, they cannot do so because of the suspected hostility they would face from the indigenes of the state.

Perception of Indigenes on Non-indigenes Right to Contest Elections

Out of the 152 questionnaires retrieved, 68 of those questionnaires were filled by indigenes.

Table 3: Indigenes' Perception on Non-Indigenes Right to Contest

S/N	Indigenes' perception of non-indigenes' participation in contesting elections	Yes	No	Neutral
1	Should non-indigenes be allowed to vote in elections	48 (70.6%)	17 (25%)	3 (4.4%)
2	Should Non-indigenes in Ekiti State be given a political appointment	36 (53.0%)	26 (38.2%)	6 (8.8%)
3	Do you feel a non-indigene of Ekiti state should be allowed to stand and contest for different political offices	26 (38.2%)	36 (53.0%)	6 (8.8%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

As earlier noted in the first chapter of this study, Individuals identified as indigenes of a location are those with the ability to trace their ancestry back to the original community settlers. Regardless of the length of time they or their families have resided in the place they consider home, anyone else remains classified as non-indigenous, with this distinction remaining constant. For example, Mr. Akadri an indigene of Kogi State, and Alhaji Umar, an indigene of Kebbi State both said Ado-Ekiti is home to them and their people just as they see themselves as part and parcel of the place; however, when probed further, they confess that they feel more attached to their states of origin than Ado-Ekiti which they have earlier described as home just more political rights and freedom is guaranteed in their state of origin and their potentials politically can be maximized.

The indigenes of Ekiti state believe that non-indigenes should not be allowed to enjoy equal rights with them as they are not from Ekiti state and therefore do not belong to the place. Therefore, the indigenes seem to have drawn a limit to the extent to which non-indigenes can participate in politics. When asked if non-indigenes be allowed to vote in elections; 70.6% of the indigenous respondents agreed that non-indigenes should be allowed to vote during elections, 25% disagreed with non-indigenes voting during elections while 4.4% stayed neutral. Also, most of the indigenous respondents agreed that non-indigenes be given political appointments in the state while a lower percentage of them are of the opinion that non-indigenes should not be given political appointments in the state. When further asked if access should be given to non-indigenes to stand and contest for different political offices in the state. The result revealed that most of the respondents (53.0%) disagreed with non-indigenes standing elections or contesting different political offices in the state, 38.2% feel non-indigenes should be allowed to stand or contest elections in the state, while 8.8% of the respondents stand neutral. In a corroborative manner, Mr. Oluwaseyifunmi Ayodele a key informant and the P.R.O of the Fayose market in Ado-Ekiti agreed that non-indigenes should be allowed to vote in elections but when asked if they can stand elections; his exact words were "that's not right; I don't support that because they can never allow that in their own states especially in the north". He added that he can still tolerate a non-indigene who is a Yoruba man to contest elections if he has stayed for the required years that the constitution approves of. He further said that he knows that non-indigenes are being denied certain rights in the state but since it happens all over the country, Ekiti shouldn't be an exemption. When asked if he knows that non-indigenes have the constitutional right to contest, he nodded and said he knows it's their right but still does not support the idea of a non-indigene standing elections. He backed up his opinion by claiming that Ekiti and Yoruba people are not treated well in other states of the federation domiciled by other ethnic groups, therefore, people who belong to other ethnic groups cannot contest elections in Ekiti state.

The interview with Mr. Ayodele reveals a flagrant and deliberate rejection of the constitutional provisions that guarantee all-inclusive political participation to non-indigenes. Despite being an educated fellow and a unionist in his university days, his attachment to his ethnic group is still very strong, and would not give it up or sacrifice it on the altar of merit.

Political Participation of Non-Indigenes

Out of the 152 questionnaires distributed, 84 questionnaires were filled by non-indigenes.

Table 4: Participation of Non-Indigenes in Politics

S/N	Right to Contest Elections	Yes	No	Neutral
1	Would you like to contest in Ado Ekiti in the near future?	34 (40.5%)	37 (44.1%)	13 (15.4%)
2	Do you feel you have the right to contest?	66 (78.6%)	15 (17.9%)	3 (3.5%)
3	Do you feel you or your ethnic group have a say in the affairs and decision-making process in Ekiti state?	65 (77.4%)	11 (13.1%)	8 (9.5%)
4	Do you feel your ethnic background can limit you from contesting an election in Ekiti state?	44 (52.4%)	31 (36.9%)	9 (10.7%)
5	Do you feel you have more rights and freedom to contest elections in your state of origin than in Ekiti state?	77 (91.7%)	4 (4.8%)	3 (3.5%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

According to Frank Hendricks (2010), Participatory democracy entails citizens being active participants who possess equal standing and agency. In this model, engagement extends beyond mere involvement and consultation; it embraces open dialogue and active participation for all. This involves jointly addressing issues, devising solutions collectively, making decisions collaboratively, and collectively implementing those decisions. From Hendrick's perspective, this approach is not solely functional; it also carries symbolic significance as it represents an inherent value in and of itself.

However, the realities in Ekiti State seem to be contradictory to Hendrick's view of what an ideal participatory democracy should be. Despite the constitutional guarantee of equal rights granted to every citizen of Nigeria. The non-indigenes in Ekiti state seem not to be enjoying equal rights with the indigenes politically.

When asked if non-indigenes would like to stand in elections in the state? 40.5% of the respondents said they would like to stand elections in the state in the near future, 44.1% declined interest while 15.4% remained neutral. The result shows a set of non-indigenes who are disinterested in the electoral contest. When asked if they feel they have the right to contest; 78.6% believe they have the right to contest while 17.9% think they do not have the right to contest and 3.5% stayed neutral. The implication of this is that non-indigenes are aware of the constitutional provisions that guarantee their citizenship and full rights to participate in politics in their host states.

The government of Ekiti state however seems to be doing well in promoting and encouraging non-indigenes' participation in the politics of the state. Both present and past governments in the states have always encouraged non-indigenes by giving them political appointments into different offices which are geared towards making sure that their interest is well represented. For instance, it was discovered that Igbo (Prince Eze Nwaberioke) and Urhobo (Hon. Francis Omorioghoye) settlers are currently serving on the Christian Pilgrim Welfare Board. Also, in a similar move, Hausa (Musa Ahmed) and Epira (Abdulwahab Saliu) settlers are also currently serving in the Muslim Pilgrim Welfare Board under the current Ayo Fayose-led administration. In another instance, former Governor Segun Oni in July 2008 appointed an Edo indigene; Dr. John Omobogie as permanent secretary of the state Hospital Management Board (HMB) having performed better than his colleagues who vied for the same position.

For example, when asked if non-indigenes are being carried along in the governance and decision-making process in Ado-Ekiti; the response was positive as 77.4% said yes with only 13.1% of them saying they are not carried along in the decision-making process while 9.5% remained neutral. For example, a key informant Mr. Daniel Ogbonna from Ebonyi state who is a member of the executives

of the Igbo Traders Association in Ekiti state affirmed that the Governor of the state usually has a meeting with the Ohanaeze Ndigbo in Ekiti state to seek their opinion on issues whilst also listen to their plights and requests. This result means a pass mark for the state government which has been carrying the non-indigenes along in the decision-making process of the State i.e. allowing them to air their opinions on issues and policy moves just like other indigenes of the State. Therefore, one may conclude that the government recognizes the fact that those regarded as non-indigenes are also Nigerians who should have a say in the way and manner they are being governed as opposed to the indigenous populace who seek a limit to the participation of non-indigenes in politics.

Another question which seeks to know if being a non-indigene could be a barrier to standing elections in Ekiti State was asked. 52.4% said yes, 36.9% said No and 10.7% were neutral. In one of the interviews conducted, one of the respondents; Mr. Badamosi Mohad a Hausa man said he had no interest in contesting elections when I asked why? He said 'Here, they are claiming it's only indigene that can contest and I'm not an indigene'. He further described the indigenes as 'tribalistic people' i.e. people who vote based on ethnic sentiment and ethnic affiliation. The implication of these is that a larger percentage of the respondents feel or anticipate hostile reactions if they are to come up to stand elections in the state hence, their rights have become limited by the virtue of their migrating from their states of origin to Ekiti state. This is a major problem as the number two question reveals the fact that non-indigenes know they have the right to contest, yet they feel their ethnic background and non-indigenous status a barrier to their participation in politics.

As a further confirmation of the above, respondents who are non-indigenes claim they have more rights and political freedom in their states of origin than in Ado-Ekiti. In the results gathered, 91.7% said yes, 4.8% said No and 3.5% were indifferent. This complements the indigenes' stand as shown above that non-indigenes should not be allowed to contest elections but supported that they should be allowed to vote. In other words, the rights to political participation of Nigerians who are regarded as non-indigenes in their states of residence are limited; not by the constitution but by those who have successfully defined themselves as indigenes and in most cases constitute the majority.

Another dimension to the political participation of non-indigenes in the state is that they are occasionally allowed to stand and contest elections at the local level but cannot proceed to contest and participate fully at the state level. The data gathered from the study area revealed that an Egbira man has been voted in as councilor of a ward in the Ado local government legislative council but being councilor of the ward at the local government level appears to be the peak of non-indigene political carriers as they cannot attempt to move further or higher. For example, When Mr. Akadri Ladeku a key informant who is the youth leader of the Egbira community was asked if, beyond the local government level, he sees his people contesting for top positions such as Federal House of Rep, House of Assembly, Senate, or Governorship seat? Akadri responded by saying "Actually nobody has done that since I started politics in Ekiti, there is no room for that, I don't think there is room". When asked why he said that people believe that they are strangers in Ado-Ekiti. He further said "What I think cannot happen in our area, I don't think it should happen here. We know we are dealing with local government level here; we cannot say we want to represent at the state level, they will say don't they have qualified indigenes here? Ekiti has not advanced to that level like Lagos state now but at the local level here, we can contest".

Going by the statements of Akadri, he believes that non-indigenes can also not be allowed to contest in their state of origin. It would then be awkward for him and his people to say they want to represent or stand elections at the state level; hence, he seems to have accepted his fate of not contesting any election that goes beyond the local government level.

Non-Indigenes and the Elite class

The political elite in Ekiti State appear to adhere to guidelines and expectations set forth by their fellow indigenous people of the state. Although these rules are not formally declared or legislated, they are conveyed through subtle cues, body language, and a shared sense of traditional consciousness

among the people. This behavior stems from the political elite's inclination to prioritize actions that align with their own political interests and personal benefits, adhering only to what they perceive as politically advantageous and socially acceptable within their circle.

Fielding non-indigenous candidates as flag bearers can significantly jeopardize a political party's chances of winning an election, as most voters in Ekiti State are indigenous people. Therefore, political parties often prioritize actions that are favorable to indigenous constituents. For instance, when questioned about the possibility of his party nominating non-indigenous candidates for prestigious political positions in the state, Hon. Wale Ayeni, a (former) member of the state House of Assembly and a prominent figure, adamantly opposed the idea. He emphasized that the political landscape of Ekiti State differs from that of other states like Lagos, and the state's politics has not evolved to a point where non-indigenous candidates are viable options. He further explained that in his constituency, the idea of a non-indigenous representative is unthinkable, as the community would vehemently reject the notion of being represented by an outsider.

Despite the above, the political class cannot neglect the non-indigenes because of the political benefits of associating with them. This is because the non-indigenes in the state have a considerable population and since politics is a game of numbers, especially during election periods. It might be politically suicidal to abandon them. For example, when asked if non-indigenes are allowed to fully participate in the politics of the state, Hon. Wale Ayeni's response was "We can't just ignore them because of their teeming population, they do things corporately together and that is one thing that gives them an added advantage whereby you look at Igbo people 2000 to 3000 of them coming together to vote for a particular candidate, so if you don't give them a priority, it will affect your party so we in PDP cannot underestimate them, we in PDP appreciate that fact. Although they may not be in the House of Assembly, I can assure you that they are part and parcel of the councilors we have at the various local government levels. Another key informant who is a scholar and an Associate Professor of political economy at Ekiti State University; Prof Akindele Adetoye attests to Hon. Wale Ayeni's response. When asked if political parties in Ekiti State especially the leading ones allow for equal participation of both indigenes and non-indigenes; he said "From what I know, I've not seen settlers as executive members of these political parties but there are settlers who are card-carrying members of these parties. Also, I am yet to see non-indigenes either Hausa, Igbos, or Egbiras contesting elections into offices such as local government chairmanship, house of assembly, etc. but I know of one Garba Alli from Kano state during the first tenure of Gov. Ayodele Fayose who was Senior Special Assistant on Economic Development and Strategy. After that, non-indigenes have not been prominent in getting appointments either as commissioners or being voted as the house of assembly members unlike what you get in Lagos."

Hon. Ayeni's statement as corroborated by Prof. Adetoye's comments revealed that the political elite class relates with the non-indigenes because of its political correctness and while non-indigenes cannot be allowed to contest for various top political positions in the state, they are allowed to feature at local government levels. Also, as much as the result gathered from the study area revealed that non-indigenes are being given political appointments; those appointments seem to be limited to boards, parastatals, and positions that are not considered sensitive or key. For example, non-indigenes are not being made commissioners or special advisers which are key sensitive public offices.

Another dimension to non-indigenes participation in politics is that the issue of indigene-ship has become an instrument in the hands of the political class to reduce competition for available positions which is a scarce resource. According to Prof. Akindele Adetoye, "When people go to the market, they go as rational beings without discrimination", In other words, they do not care about who sells what and what, and rather, they only care about getting the highest quality at the available cheapest prize without minding who the seller is. Prof. Adetoye further noted that citizenship/indigene-ship is not the problem but the politicization of these concepts i.e., issues pop up when there are resources to be shared, then, these concepts become instruments to outweigh each other. This is because the elite class goes into offices with a mindset to amass wealth; they, therefore, use all available means to win people to their side. Therefore, the elites also contribute to the increase in primordial consciousness of

the people such that indigenes do not want non-indigenes to occupy key public offices, and this reduces the competition and jostling for the positions.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this study underscores the dynamics surrounding the concepts of 'Indigeneship' and 'Citizenship' in Nigeria, with a specific focus on their impact on political participation, particularly in Ado-Ekiti. Through a comprehensive examination of legal frameworks, socio-cultural practices, and their real-world consequences, several key findings have emerged.

Firstly, the misapplication of 'Indigeneship' as a criterion for political participation has created a discernible divide between native and non-indigenous residents. Despite constitutional provisions emphasizing equal citizenship rights, the prevalent practice of favoring indigenes over non-indigenes persists, particularly in the context of political engagement. Therefore, the political participation of non-indigenes in Ekiti is defined by limits and restrictions thereby denying non-indigenes equal political participatory rights with the indigenes.

Secondly, the disparities identified in political rights, especially in eligibility for elections, underscore a systemic challenge that contradicts the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. In other words, in as much as the non-indigenes are allowed to freely move and to establish themselves in Ekiti state, aspiring to contest for exalted political positions is a line that must not be crossed for the sake of continual peaceful co-existence. For the non-indigenes, migration from their states of origin to Ekiti has; unconsciously reduced their rights to fully participate in politics and maximize their potential politically.

These findings highlight the disparities identified in political rights, particularly eligibility for elections, highlighting a systemic challenge that hampers the inclusive and democratic ideals enshrined in the Constitution. Efforts to address this issue must extend beyond legal frameworks, delving into social and cultural dimensions that perpetuate discriminatory practices. It is important to note that achieving a more equitable and inclusive political landscape requires a concerted effort from policymakers, community leaders, and civil society to challenge and reshape prevailing narratives and norms surrounding the indigeneship status of Citizens.

Finally, as Nigeria continues its journey towards a more democratic and egalitarian society, acknowledging and rectifying the injustices linked to indigeneship becomes expedient and imperative. This can be done by fostering a political environment that genuinely upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and the resultant effect is that the nation will be able to harness the full potential of its diverse population whilst strengthening the foundations of a truly inclusive democracy.

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