
AN EVALUATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY INTERVENTION FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO NATION-BUILDING IN AFRICA, 1960-2025

Justice Chibuzor Okeleke

Department of History and International Studies,
Delta State University,
Abraka, Nigeria
okeleke.justice@delsu.edu.ng

Emmanuel Nwafor Mordi

Department of History and International Studies,
Delta State University,
Abraka, Nigeria
mordien@delsu.edu.ng

Nyerohwo Avi Eduvwie

Department of History and International Studies,
Delta State University,
Abraka, Nigeria
avi-eduvwie@delsu.edu.ng

Abstract: *This study evaluates government policy interventions for overcoming barriers to nation-building in Africa from 1960 to 2025, using historical methods of description and analysis. Post-independence optimism was eroded by separatism, ethnic conflict, electoral fraud, and resource disputes, rooted in colonial legacies of arbitrary borders, and exploitative political economies. The postcolonial state remained weak, lacking legitimacy and capacity, while conflict and climate change deepen insecurity. The paper examines policy responses: national service in Eritrea/Tanzania, ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, Arabization in the Maghreb, and civic identity in Rwanda. It finds that coercive, militarized, and one-party approaches largely failed. More effective interventions combined inclusive governance, constitutional adaptability, and education for national identity. Case studies of Nigeria, Sudan, and the Ethiopia-Eritrea war show how mismanaged ethnicity and military dominance obstruct integration, while youth engagement and African Union regionalism offer pathways forward. The study concludes that democratic governance, quality leadership, and historically grounded reforms are essential for transforming Africa's diverse states into cohesive nations.*

Keywords: *Nation-building, government policy, postcolonial Africa, ethnicity, governance, sustainable development*

Introduction

Following African countries independence in the 1950s-1960s, social scientists emphasized the imperative of “national integration” within newly sovereign states characterized by multi ethnic, religious, and racial divisions. On this note, Oyibobure and Okolie (2023, p.436) defines nation-building as the process of fostering harmony and a sense of inclusion among diverse groups within a state through efforts aimed at integrating those groups to construct a nation within the territorial boundaries of the state. Musarurwa (2016, pp.1-6) defines nation-building as the construction of a national identity through the instrumental use of state power. Okeke et al. (2022, p.24) conceptualize nation-building as the process of forging a strong, cohesive new nation from a plurality of pre-existing national allegiances.

Anshan (2026, p.1) identifies three main events that facilitated African independence: the unjust treatment of former colonies by European powers, the inspiration provided by the Bandung Conference, and Egypt’s firm stance during the Suez Canal Crisis. The awakening of Pan-African national consciousness became prominent in the post-Second World War period. Inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa reflect historical continuities, the legacies of colonial rule, the effects of realpolitik, and internal factors such as government policy. Nation-building requires the integration of multiple elements, including national consciousness, political authority, civil rights, electoral procedure, economic resources, administration and legal frameworks, ethnic policies, cultures and language, and social harmony.

National independence and nation-building are significant legacies of the Second World War. Africa participated in the war in several ways: its territories served as battlegrounds; belligerent powers requisitioned African raw materials and supplies; and African soldiers and laborers were recruited for combat and logistical duties; made substantial sacrifices which contributed to Allied victory over Nazism (Mordi, 2017, 58-88). Musarurwa (2016, p.18) observed that some countries experience relatively smooth nation-building due to linguistic, cultural and religious homogeneity. Examples include North African states with Arab majorities, island nations such as Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, and states with a single dominant ethnic group, such as Equatorial Guinea, Botswana, Lesotho, and Eswatini.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two inter-related theories that explain nation-building challenges and policy outcomes in postcolonial Africa, 1960-2025: Modernization Theory- Propounded by scholars like Deutsch (1953) and Rustow

(1970). This theory posits that nation-building progresses through economic development, education, communication, and social mobilization that weaken primordial loyalties and strengthen national identity. It explains why policies on education, national service, and language homogenization were deployed in Eritrea, Tanzania, and the Maghreb. However, Africa's experience shows modernization alone fails when institutions lack capacity and inclusivity.

Colonial Legacy/Structural Theory- Drawing from Fanon (1963) and Rodney (1972), this theory argues that arbitrary borders, divide-and-rule administration, and exploitative political economies imposed by colonialism created weak, "strange implantation" states. These structural distortions explain persistent ethnicity-based politics, separatism, and resource conflicts. It provides the historical baseline for evaluating why government interventions succeeded or failed. Together, these frameworks guide the study to assess how historical structures interact with institutional design and modernization policies to either constrain or advance nation-building in Africa.

Colonial Legacies and Structural Barriers to Nation-Building: Ethnicity, Language, and Territorial Fragmentation.

The researcher analyzes how arbitrary borders, divide-and-rule policies, and multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic structures inherited from colonialism shaped post-independence instability and constrained government policy effectiveness. Although independence in the 1960s generated optimism in Africa, nation-building was impeded in some states by separatist movements, genocide, electoral conflicts, and dispute over resource control (Anshan, 2026, p.19). These conflicts encompass political, socio-cultural, and inter-ethnic dimensions, and the role of external intervention cannot be disregarded. Political factors include inappropriate policies, inequitable distribution of power, electoral fraud and foreign interference. By affirming African identity, the African Union (AU) effectively mobilizes Africans globally, a strategic initiative that has attracted scholarly attention.

Scholars have since attributed postcolonial political instability and inter-ethnic violence in Africa to the structural legacies of colonial rule. Political leaders and statesmen posited that nation-building would facilitate state-building, thereby fostering peace, unity, development, and peaceful coexistence among African states. However, scholars argue that coercion alone is insufficient forging cohesive nations, particularly in contexts where fears of domination and competing identity claims persist. Additionally, the contradictions inherent in the colonial political economy- grounded in exploitation, racial discrimination, and systemic deprivation- continued to constrain processes of integration and state consolidation in post-colonial Africa.

According to World Atlas, Africa is still the poorest inhabited continent, but across its 54 countries, 1.4+ billion people, and 2,000+ languages, there are plenty of reasons for optimism. The region has made really economic and social progress in recent years, with South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco, and Egypt at the forefront. According to Omotosho (2016, p.175) Nigeria is one of Africa's most ethnically diverse states, with over 250 groups. Unlike most African states, Ethiopia avoided direct European colonization, but still faced the challenge of integrating diverse ethno-linguistic groups (Zahorik et al 2026, p.180). Ethiopia shows that both forced assimilation and institutionalized ethnic federalism carry risks. Elite manipulation of ethnicity remains a driver of instability (Mashimbye 2025, p.65). Rwanda is ethnically relatively homogeneous- Hutu, Tutsi, Twa distinctions are social rather than linguistic- yet it experienced one of Africa's worst genocides in 1994 (Zahorik et al 20126, p.187). Rwanda illustrates that even without deep ethnic cleavages, identity politics can be deadly when elites instrumentalize it.

There is an imperative to reconnect post-colonial with pre-colonial histories. Cultures, identities and institutions as a foundation for authentic post-colonial development. Education in Africa bears the responsibility for facilitating this reconnection, and thus carries a heavy burden in post-colonial and post-liberation nation-building process (Bereketeab, 2020, p.86). The ultimate objective is the liberation of the African mind and personhood. Despite these aspirations, the nation-building project in Africa remains in crisis. Oyibokure and Okolie (2023, p.434) argue that widespread loss of lives and property due to insecurity has significantly undermined the effective implementation of government policies and initiatives designed to strengthen the state.

According to Taoua (2003, p.489), Congolese post-colonial government pursued nation building through state control of cultural and political discourse, employing tactics including censorship and intimidation. Bayran el al. (2018, p.237) argues that state building in many post-colonial contexts is inherently artificial, as colonial power imposed territorial boundaries without regards for pre-existing cultural, tribal, or clan affiliations. This is in line with the Colonial Legacy/Structural Theory expounded by Fanon (1963) and Rodney (1972). These borders fragmented communal territories through a "mathematical" logic that disregarded indigenous social realities.

Alumona and Azom (2018, p.291) argue that among Africa's many challenges, identity crisis and its effects on nation-building stands out as the most long-standing and difficult. They define identity as how individuals and groups see themselves and are seen by others based on race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture. Identity

politics, they explain, comes from individuals or groups that stir up identity-based feelings while competing for control and distribution of the state's limited resources. It involves the political actions of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups demanding more economic, social and political rights within the system.

Filibus and Onyebuchi (2025, p.73) argue that inclusive policies, robust democratic institutions, active youth participation are essential for a sustainable and transformative nation-building process in Africa. This is in-line with the modernization theory which posits that nation-building progresses through economic development, education, communication, and social mobilization that weaken primordial loyalties and strengthen national identity. External factors, including foreign interventions, and the pressures of globalization, have also shaped the trajectory of nation-building across the continent. Francis (1968, p.338) further contends that Pan-Africanism can manifest as a form of ethnic nationalism, while restorative impulses often find expression in tribalism.

In Africa, religion and ethnicity often overlap during political decision-making and resource allocation because of the strong role of religious identity. Political actors use these social identities to raise awareness, advocate, and mobilize support. Ambitious and unscrupulous politicians intensify tribal and religious divisions by appealing to those sentiments to win votes or gain advantage over rivals. As a result, the struggle for political power often breeds lawlessness and violence, since succession is tied to dangerous manipulation of primordial loyalties. A clear example is Rwanda Genocide 1994- Hutu versus Tutsi. Here, there was ethno-racial and social caste divide between Hutu majority-85% and Tutsi minority- 14%. Colonial rule by Germany and Belgium hardened these identities by issuing ethnic ID Cards and favoring Tutsis, creating lasting resentments. The conflict started after President Habyarimana's plane was shot down in 1994, extremist Hutu factions launched a mass killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The outcome is that, RPF, led mainly by Tutsis, ended the genocide and took power. Rwanda now bans ethnic ID Classification to prevent repeat.

Second example is the Dafur conflict, Sudan 2003 – present- African farmer versus Arab pastoralists. This is a clear case of ethno-racial cleavage plus livelihood divide. The conflict is between African farming groups like Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit versus Arab nomadic pastoralist groups. Labels don't map perfectly to skin color, but groups mobilize around perceived Arab versus non-Arab identity plus access to land and water. The conflict started in 2003 when rebel groups from Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit attacked government targets citing marginalization. Government responded by arming Arab Janjaweed militias. UN/ICC called it genocide due to targeting of non-Arab groups. However, in 2020, Juba Peace Agreement tried to address grievances,

but violence continues. Ethno-racial cleavages fueled conflicts between the predominantly Muslim Arab north and the largely Christian African south. The tension escalated into armed violence that claimed lives (Akim & Akim 2019, p.53).

The pattern in Rwanda depicts colonial construction. Belgian rule hardened Hutu/ Tutsi categories through ID Cards and administrative preferences, turning flexible and social distinctions into rigid ethnic identities (Schaerrer 2013). Concerning the post-genocide nation-building effort in Rwanda, the Rwandan Patriotic Front or *Front Patriotique Rwandais* (RPF) government banned ethnic labels in public discourse, promoted “Rwandan” identity, and centralized power to prevent reoccurrence. Reconciliation and gacaca courts were used to rebuild social cohesion (Nantulya 2006, p.45). To critically view the Rwanda case, one can say that homogeneity did not prevent conflict. Stability now relies on strong state control and limited political pluralism.

Ethiopia’s imperial/Socialist era saw successive regimes push Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and centralization to create a unitary nation-state. Policies aimed at removing tribal chiefs’ land control often increased resistance and conflict. The second point to note about Ethiopia is the divide-and-rule legacy. Post independence governments used ethnic divisions to maintain control, reinforcing fragmentation and undermining national identity. Another point to note is the ethnic federalism of post 1991 Ethiopia (Berriso & Sorsa 2025, p. 24). The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) system recognized ethnicity as the basis of federal units. It reduced some marginalization but also institutionalized ethnic identity in politics. The result has been ongoing tension, most visible in the Tigray conflict 2020-2022 (Bandyopadhyay & Green 2013, p.108). EPRDF was the ruling political coalition from 1991 until it was dissolved and reformed into the Prosperity Party in 2019.

Filibus and Onyebuchi (2025), in examining the role of youths and social movements in Africa, argue that the continent’s substantial youth population is central to nation-building efforts through activism and social movements. Young people increasingly act as catalysts for change by advocating for social justice, democracy, and human rights. The Arab Spring illustrates how youth-driven social movements can precipitate significant political transformation. Youth-led demonstrations in Tunisia culminated in the ousting of President Ben Ali 2011 and inspired similar movements regionally. Likewise, the EndSARS movement in Nigeria in 2020, which protested police brutality, contributed to systemic reforms of the Nigeria Police Force (Okeleke, 2025).

Okeke et al. (2022) assert that nation-building is unattainable without quality education. Through education, professionals such as accountants, lawyers, and

medical doctors are adequately prepared to contribute meaningfully to national development. Within the context of nation-building, the principal instrumental value of education lies in its capacity to establish a foundation for integrative behavior. Its core instrumental value, therefore, is human capital development and the production of skilled professionals. Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, Pp. 25-26) posit that the purpose of nation-building is to ensure that national resources are effectively harnessed, managed by citizens, and utilized for sustainable development, thereby enabling people to coexist harmoniously and maintain peaceful relations with neighboring states. They further argue (2018, p.26) that nation-building is a protracted and continuous process requiring constant reassessment in response to changes in domestic and global environments. Consequently, they identify two primary objectives of nation-building: the establishment of representative government and the creation of conditions conducive for economic growth and individual prosperity. Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, p.33) conclude that nation-building is more successful when the state has prior experience with self-government and is supported by a viable economy.

Christensen and Laitin (2019, p. 1) argue that Africa's growth potential initially exceeded that East Asia, with at least seven newly independent states possessing the capacity to achieve or surpass a 7 percent growth rate. This raises the question of why post-colonial African states have not fulfilled their promise to deliver prosperity, good governance, and security, and why they have not realized the aspirations articulated by independence movements and their charismatic leaders. In the first three decades after independence (1960-1990), sub-Saharan African countries lagged behind other regions on standard indicators of development, democracy, and order. Regarding the distribution of power and resources, economic resources failed to expand while political power rapidly became concentrated in the hands of semi-authoritarian rulers who struggled to maintain order. Regardless of the inventiveness or ambition of new African leaders, colonial legacies constrained the scope of feasible reform.

Sahel states like Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger have extended military rule, with elections postponed. There is tension in Tigray and Amhara regions of Ethiopia today. Libya remains divided with parliamentary elections planned for next year. Republic of Congo has its M23 rebels control parts of South Kivu as of late 2025. Asiegbu (2015) argues that for most African states, ethnic pluralism remains the most significant obstacle to nation building. Africa's nation building challenges stem primarily from a lack of political will and from the policy choices and strategies adopted to achieve national cohesion. Modern African states had no compelling reason to fail at nation-building when highly ethnically diverse European states such as Germany, France and Italy successfully integrated their various ethnic groups into modern nations. They

allocated substantial portions of state budgets to military armament and equipment. A characteristic feature of military rule was its laissez-faire attitude towards nation-building. Military regimes typically discarded the developmental political ideology pursued by civilian political elites. The military rarely committed state revenues to nation-building initiatives (Asiegbu, 2015). The military is not interested in genuine self-reliant economic development which often precipitates social transformation.

Adebayo (2014, p.1) observes that since 1960- regarded as Africa's "golden year" of independence- the challenges of leadership and good governance have continued to undermine nation-building. Drawing on Warren Bennis's *On Becoming a Leader* (1989), Adebayo notes that Africa requires charismatic leaders capable of motivating followers to achieve superior performance without reliance on formal authority. Such leaders inspire subordinates to internalize the leader's vision, values and conduct, thereby sustaining high levels of commitment. Charismatic leadership is especially critical in crisis and periods of transformation, with Nelson Mandela cited as a post-colonial exemplar (Adebayo 2014, p.2). Nevertheless, he (2014, p.15) emphasizes that identifying and nurturing leaders with vision, clarity of purpose, integrity and respect for citizen's rights remains a daunting task. Even in ostensibly democratic states, elected leaders often exhibit authoritarian tendencies, with misgovernance eroding nation-building efforts.

Many African leaders, past and present, have pursued transactional, self-serving politics, diverting state resources towards partisan and personal ends. Yet the scarcity of exemplary leadership should not imply that effective, people-oriented governance is unattainable in Africa. Ultimately, Africa's future rests on the decisions and leadership of Africans themselves. The overthrow of Togo's president Sylvanus Olympio in a military coup in 1963 inaugurated an era of military rule and corruption in Africa. This distinctive political development permeated the continent and held it hostage until the late 1990s. a substantial part of post-independence history was dominated by military rule; by 1990, the country had experienced the retrogressive effects of two decades of military governance.

In Benin Republic, the head of the military junta, Mathieu Kerekou, held power for an extended period as its military leader. A national conference in February 1990 stripped Kerekou of sovereign powers and established a transitional government. Another military-induced crisis engulfed Cote d'Ivoire in 2010. President Laurent Gbagbo, a former military officer who had transitioned to civilian presidency, was defeated in the polls but refused to relinquish power. For instance, Ani et al. (2023, p.93) examine secessionist tendencies in Nigeria, exemplified by the Biafra/IPOB-Igbo agitation. IPOB is an acronym for Indigenous People of Biafra. The objective of IPOB

is the establishment of an independent Biafran state in the southeast. Its historical antecedent was the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970, led by Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu. The contemporary iteration of the movement was founded by Nnamdi Kanu. IPOB employs civil disobedience, radio broadcasting, and legal advocacy as primary strategies. It was designated a terrorist organization by Nigerian government in 2017. The core grievances articulated by IPOB's founders include political marginalization, economic inequality, and persistent security challenges in the southeast.

A second example of secessionist group is the Niger Delta Militancy and Self-determination. The objective of the groups is the creation of a Niger Delta Republic. Prominent groups include the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which was active between 2005 and 2009, and the Niger Delta Avengers, operational from 2016 to the present. Their key demands center on control of oil revenue, remediation of environmental degradation from oil spills, and addressing underdevelopment in oil-producing communities, among other issues. As Ani et al. (2023) note, full secession is not always the goal; many groups instead advocate for "true federalism and resource control".

The third example within the Nigerian axis is the Oduduwa Republic/Yoruba Nation. This agitation seeks an independent Yoruba nation in the southwest Nigeria. Contemporary groups include Ilana Omo Oduduwa, led by Sunday Igboho. The movement gained prominence between 2020 and 2021 amid concerns over farmer-herder conflicts. Rallies were organized in Lagos, Ibadan and London. The central issue includes security concerns, the need for restructuring, and perceived marginalization of Yoruba interests within Nigeria. The fourth example is the Arewa/Islamic State- Northern Agitations. The objectives of Arewa-oriented groups vary. Some have historically pursued sharia-based autonomy or a separate northern state. The adoption of sharia law in 12 northern states in year 2000 represented a form of legal autonomy rather than secession. Boko Haram which emerged in 2009 and remains active, seeks the establishment of an Islamic state but is classified as a jihadist insurgency rather than an ethnic separatist movement.

The last on the list in Nigeria is Bakassi Peninsula Dispute. This dispute concerns self-determination for the Bakassi people following the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that ceded the territory to Cameroon. The principal group is the Bakassi Movement for Self-Determination (BAMOSD). The central grievance is the loss of territory and fishing grounds after Bakassi was transferred to Cameroon in 2008 pursuant to the ICJ ruling. The constitution of most African countries outlaw secession. For instance, Section 2(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, declares Nigeria "one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state".

Consequently, all secessionist agitation is illegal under Nigerian law. Most contemporary movements now emphasize restructuring and devolution of power rather than full independence. Nevertheless, many Nigerians continue to prefer a united Nigeria founded on principles of justice, equity, and equality, as opposed to national disintegration (Ani et al., 2023, p.106). Ani et al. (2023, p.93) contends that demands for self-determination and calls for restructuring are inevitable in a state such as Nigeria, where good governance remains elusive for the majority of the populace.

Igbokwe-Ibeto (2024, Pp. 1-17) argues that Nigerians, and Africans more broadly, do not appear to desire a change of leadership at this stage in their history; if their leaders are corrupt, it is because such leaders enjoy public support. Bureaucratic officials who embezzle billions from national treasuries often return to their communities and receive warm welcome and public celebration. For bureaucracies to function as agents of nation-building, the quantity and quality of public servants must be exemplary.

The two primary institutions inherited from colonial rule-the military and the civil bureaucracy-continue to pose serious security challenges to nation-building. Substantively, these institutions have not transformed into indigenous frameworks that support national integration. Berriso and Sorsa (2025, p.24) contend that the dynamics of nation-building in Ethiopia for instance, have consistently oscillated between centralization and the pursuit of ethnic autonomy, generating substantial challenges such as ethnic disenfranchisement, resistance movements, and communal conflicts. These issues have exacerbated ethnic tensions and political instability. The legal framework established by Ethiopia's federal constitution recognizes diverse identities and legitimizes the aspirations of various ethnic communities.

The constitution functions as a social contract, embodying values of inclusivity and equality while instituting mechanisms for participatory governance that empower diverse groups in decision-making processes (Berriso and Sorsa, 2025, p.28). Historically, the ruling elite sought to gradually assimilate all peoples within Ethiopian territory, with their distinct languages and traditions, into Amharic-speaking adherents of Orthodox Christianity, thereby constructing a singular Ethiopian identity that displaced local languages, traditions, and beliefs (Berriso and Sorsa, 2025, p.30).

Akuche (2016, p.1) maintains that cultivating a socio-political consciousness that enables citizens to identify first as a people demarcated by international boundaries will foster a shared commitment to protect and preserve a common

identity within a given territory. Specifically, identification with symbols such as the national flag, national anthem, national holidays, national stadia, national airlines, national languages, and national myths continually orients citizens toward advancing the foundational template for nation-building established by previous generations. Akuche (2016, p.22) posits that mistrust has led to citizens' unwillingness to commit to nation-building because they prioritize ethnic or regional affiliation over national identity. Trust and collective will, derived from a strong sense of togetherness, are essential for building the nation.

Comparative Evaluation of Policy Interventions: Assimilation, Federalism, and National Service Models.

The researcher assesses government strategies across Africa, including Arabization in the Maghreb, ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, civic identity programs in Rwanda, and national service in Eritrea and Tanzania, to determine their impact on cohesion and state legitimacy. Government policy choices in the post-independence period contributed to economic stagnation, weak but repressive states, and internal conflict. These policy choices included language policy, foreign policy orientation, and economic doctrines that shaped government expenditure and monetary policy. Beginning in the early 1990s, despite several notable setbacks, movements to replace military rule and one-party states with democratic governance achieved meaningful progress. New solidarity pacts, exemplified by the African Union, have helped mitigate civil conflicts and constrain autocratic tendencies among heads of state.

In the Maghreb, assimilation approach was adopted. Post-independence states promoted Arabization and a unified Arab-Islamic identity, often marginalizing Berber/Amazigh languages and culture. With regards to contestation and accommodation, Algeria and Morocco faced Berber movements demanding recognition. Morocco's 2011 constitution recognized Tamazight as an official language; Algeria followed in 2016. This reflects a shift from suppression to managed pluralism. Concerning stability link in the Maghreb, one is not out of play to state that where the state allowed cultural recognition without conceding secession, stability improved. Where recognition was denied or used selectively, protests and insurgency followed. Good examples to site here are the Algeria's Black Spring of 2001, and Libya's post 2011 fragmentation (Debelo and Keno 2025, P.2). Ethnicity becomes destabilizing when the state is seen as exclusionary or when elites weaponize it. Where institutions provide inclusive participation and public goods, ethnic identity coexists with national identity.

Africa popularly known as Maghreb includes Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Algeria. Nation building in Maghreb involves creating cohesive state identities from

colonial legacies and diverse populations, often struggling with issues of political legitimacy, security, and national cohesion. The major setbacks here include how to manage the post-colonial transition, addressing the weakness of the secular state institutions and managing religious and ethnic dynamics which hitherto led to authoritarian rule in modern day Maghreb.

The statehood and colonial legacies of Maghreb: there has been long term efforts to build a nation out of states carved out by colonizing powers (especially French) in the Maghreb. All states in Maghreb shared complex history, the decline of Ottoman empire, European colonization and nationalist movements which rose to prominence all at the same time. In most parts of Africa for instance in Eritrea, Giorgis (2012, p.1) observed deficit in democratic governance, significant lapses that disconnected policy and practice in nation building, state construction and development. Governments' effort at nation building was thwarted by lack of democratic governance and subverted socio-economic development. Socio-economic development came with liberation brought by military victory of Eritrea in May 1990 against Ethiopia when UN-monitored referendum in May 1993 affirmed self-determination and legitimized independence. The key policy choice of Eritrea and many other African countries in postcolonial era are secularism, decentralization, national service, defense and security, constitutional order, democratic governance and economic development.

The Bantu philosophy of *Ubuntu* has contributed to sustainable nation-building in Africa by anchoring social order in humanism, solidarity, and community-driven social control mediated by peers, kinship groups, and the wider community. Several African leaders have recognized that the healing of fragile, post-conflict societies requires the restorative logic of *Ubuntu* and a collective orientation. In the aftermath of apartheid, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established by the Government of National Unity to facilitate reconciliation between victims and perpetrators through testimony, dialog, and truth-seeking. The TRC has, however, been criticized for prioritizing reconciliation over retributive justice and for its grounding in Christian notions of forgiveness.

Nation-building in most African states remains rooted in deep cultural values, language, and sociological identity. Traditional policies are characterized by high power distance, whereby chiefs bear responsibility for the welfare of their tribe, clan, or nation. *Ubuntu*, or African humanism, functions as the moral compass of Bantu societies. Evidence suggests that states adopting a cultural-fusion approach have achieved more substantial social and economic transformation.

Orji (2012, p.80) contends that the African Renaissance envisioned under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) can only be realized through rigorous engagement with historical research. The role of history in nation-building and socio-economic development cannot be overstated. NEPAD represents African leaders' commitment to eradicating poverty, placing states on a trajectory of sustainable growth, and enabling active participation in the global economy and polity.

Since history's primary focus is the systemic study of human activity over time, it provides critical insights for understanding and shaping the future (Ake, 1990, p.19). Historical inquiry proceeds through the interpretation of selected facts to reconstruct knowledge of the past (Carr, 1961, p.19). Collingwood (1945, p.9) conceptualizes history as a scientific investigation of past human action, grounded in evidence and aimed at human self-knowledge and development. Historical evidence is derived from three principal sources: oral tradition, written records, and archaeology. Oral traditions remain preserved among diverse African groups, including the Kikuyu of Kenya, Bantu of South Africa, Burundi of Rwanda, Egun of Togo, Enuani, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo of Nigeria, Issa of Djibouti, Amhara of Ethiopia, Balata of Guinea-Bissau, Mande of Mali, Kwa of Guinea among others.

Ethnic conflicts, such as those between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi, Zulu and Xhosa in Southern Africa, and between Black and minority White populations in South Africa, continue to undermine stability. Sustainable progress therefore requires concrete commitment to electoral reforms capable of producing credible leadership. Historical research further indicates that electoral violence remains a persistent threat to national security in Africa. Nation-building was also affected in Africa during the COVID-19 era.

During the COVID-19 era, as observed by Gwala and Mashau (2022, p.223), compliance with COVID-19 social distancing measures had significant implications for national integration and social cohesion in Africa, as reduced physical interaction altered patterns of collective engagement. Travel restrictions provoked varied responses that ultimately proved retrogressive for nation-building. COVID-19 safety protocols undermined nation-building by prohibiting social gatherings and restricting population movement. This contradicted the imperative for national integration and social mobilization around development projects essential for socio-economic advancement during the pandemic in Africa. Scholarly debate on COVID-19 has focused disproportionately on migration, largely because lockdown orders imposed by governments to save lives and reduce transmission restricted human mobility. The premise is that by limiting movement, COVID-19 adversely affected trade, business,

tourism, association, social interaction and cohesion. Nation-building fundamentally requires the promotion of integration and social cohesion among citizens.

The global context is being reshaped and international mobility is gradually reopening (or have opened), subject to national regulation. Under such conditions, strict adherence to COVI-19 safety protocols makes nation-building in Africa difficult to achieve. Moreover, Africa have generally performed poorly in protecting vulnerable migrants, particularly the poor and unemployed (Gwala and Mashau 2022, p.226). it must be recognized that border enclosures are not a viable long-term solution for containing pandemics. Restrictive migration policies should remain temporary. Migration was only defined as a vector for disease transmission, with imported cases constituting a significant driver of COVID-19 spread in Africa. The tourism sector was severely impacted, resulting in the loss of over five million jobs across the continent. Another government policy to be studied here is education policy because education is central to nation-building.

Bereketeab (2020, p.17) contends that education plays a decisive role in nation-building in Africa. The post-colonial nation-building process is intended to involve two interrelated phases: deconstruction-dismantling colonial structures, institutions, and power-relations-and reconstruction-replacing them with functional national institutions. identities, cultures authorities, and mechanisms. In practice, many colonial structures remained intact after independence, despite nationalist leaders' intention not to reproduce the colonial legacy uncritically. Education serves as a key instrument for transmitting culture and collective heritage of societies. It is also critical for inculcating a sense of common national identity and nationhood. National identity itself is a political construct. The Eritreans case demonstrates how nationalist leaders can effectively deploy education for successful nation-building. Strategic use of education to construct national values and norms can therefore advance the nation-building project.

Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices centered on the sacred-things set apart and treated as forbidden. These shared beliefs and practices bring people together into a single moral community and often shape their role in political life. As Alumona and Azom (2018, p.296) note, the term "religious identity" was first used by Hans Mol in 1976 and again in 1979 to describe an individual's connection to a religious tradition. Religion creates one of the strongest forms of identity for both individuals and groups. In Africa, political contests are frequently framed around religious beliefs. Voters often base political choices on religious affinity, and religion is used to mobilize support for candidates or discourage voting for opponents. Even in Egypt, a Muslim-majority country, elections are usually dominated by debates over

secularism versus Sharia law. Across African societies, both politicians and citizens tend toward religious subjectivism in politics. Elites often exploit religion to serve personal socio-economic interests, while also using religious fanaticism and favoritism to divide people, deepen polarization, and maintain political tension.

In recent times, religion has emerged as a contentious issue that deepens societal divisions. Communities have become increasingly polarized along ethno-religious lines, which has impeded nation-building efforts. To address porous borders and related security challenges, there is an urgent need for collaboration with neighboring states, alongside transparent and accountable leadership. The government must also establish a social contract with its citizens as the basis for demanding their loyalty and support.

Democracy, Leadership, and Human Capital: Pathways to Sustainable Nation-Building

The Researcher examines the role of democratic governance, quality leadership, education, and youth participation in overcoming corruption, military dominance, and insecurity, and in aligning policy with practice for inclusive development. To Orji (2012, p.85) the institutionalization of participatory democracy in Africa is essential. In addressing Africa's persistent socio-economic challenges-including abject poverty, illiteracy, gender-inequality, infant and material mortality, poor health services, and environmental degradation-NEPAD had set 2015 as a target for remedial action.

Filibus and Onyebuchi (2025, p.73) argue that inclusive policies, robust democratic institutions, active youth participation are essential for a sustainable and transformative nation-building process in Africa. This is in-line with the modernization theory which posits that nation-building progresses through economic development, education, communication, and social mobilization that weaken primordial loyalties and strengthen national identity. External factors, including foreign interventions, and the pressures of globalization, have also shaped the trajectory of nation-building across the continent. Francis (1968, p.338) further contends that Pan-Africanism can manifest as a form of ethnic nationalism, while restorative impulses often find expression in tribalism.

Villa-Vicencio (1990, p.853) averred that since the Constantinian settlement of A.D. 313, the prevailing theology of the church has generally aligned with successive ruling authorities, and it has often been employed to legitimize corrupt and oppressive regimes. In light of this, the resistance of those who opposed the church's corruption under Adolf Hitler's regime represents a significant contribution to the history and

theology of nation-building, particularly in discussions of church-state relations in contemporary Africa.

Tunisia and Morocco: there is serious issue of national cohesion. However, the political leadership concerned itself with policies and programs geared towards the creation of centralized state identities. Algeria and Libya: is noted for having highly restive societies. The youths are restive to the extent that strong state management is required to curb youth restiveness.

Considering the Eritrea-Ethiopia war 1998-2000 and its aftermath-the “no war, no peace” period that lasted until 2018. What actually happened? The cause: border dispute around Badme and other areas after Eritrea gained independence in 1993 when fighting broke out. The war ended with the Algiers Agreement in Dec 2000 and the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission ruling in 2002. The humanitarian and economic impact includes displacement of over 1million people in border areas during the war; refugee/expulsions- 100,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin expelled from Ethiopia, plus 75,000 Ethiopians expelled from Eritrea. Total refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) ran into hundreds of thousands. The economic cost- both countries diverted up to 30%+ of national budgets to military spending. Infrastructure, trade routes, and cross-border markets were shut down. Ethiopia lost access to ports, raising trade costs. Development projects stalled and growth slowed, especially Tigray and Southern Eritrea. Long-term effect: the frozen conflict consumed resources that could have gone to health, education and infrastructure. It also shaped politics in both countries and the Horn of Africa for 18 years. The situation only shifted after Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2018, leading to the peace agreement and resumption of relations.

Eritrea’s nation-building strategy after independence centered on two major state initiatives: administrative reorganization and a comprehensive national service program. First, the government undertook a restructuring of the country’s territorial administration. The primary aim was to reinforce long-term national cohesion, broaden political participation at the grassroots level, and stimulate economic development. The new administrative regions were delineated largely along natural catchment basins rather than arbitrary colonial lines. This redrawing took into account demographic distribution, available natural resources, regional development potential, and the need to mitigate long-standing disputes over land and communal boundaries. Second, the state introduced a mandatory national service scheme for all Eritrean citizens between the ages of 18 and 40. The program required 18 months of service, structured as six months of military training, followed by twelve months of active military duty and involvement in national development projects under the

military's coordination. Beyond this initial period, citizens remained liable for compulsory service in the event of mobilization or a declared state of emergency until age 50.

Analysts note that, in theory, such a policy could instill discipline and a strong work ethic, contribute to economic projects, and strengthen a shared sense of national identity. In my view, however, this extensive conscription system was primarily a wartime measure necessitated by the conflict with Ethiopia. In the absence of war, the leadership would have been better served by focusing on policies oriented towards sustainable national development and building the human capital and technical capacity of the population. One of the most notable African nation-building initiatives occurred in Tanzania in 1967, when President Julius Nyerere introduced ujamaa and the National Youth Service programs, which have since been replicated across the continent. However, several nation-building programs have faced criticism due to forced participation, corruption, militarization of citizens, the emergence of militias, and inefficient use of resources. Musarurwa (2016, p.7) identifies nine key nation-building processes and policies implemented across Southern, Eastern, and Western Africa since the 1960s:

1. Changing state names.
2. Changing capital cities' names and locations.
3. Changing national currencies.
4. Military conscription and national service.
5. Religious and linguistic homogenization.
6. Declaration of republican status and centralization of policies.
7. Declaration of one-party states.
8. Conducting non-ethnic censuses.
9. Land nationalization.

Beyond these, other states have introduced symbolic practices such as daily flag-raising ceremonies at public institutions, display of portraits of national leaders in public offices, national identity cards, national pledges, national dresses, national dances, and state symbols including flags, mascots and postage stamps. While youths value shared national symbols such as anthems and flags, they also recognize religion, language, ethnicity, and culture as critical markers of identity. Musarurwa (2016, p.25) argues that young people must be intentional about the issues they address as they assert their role in nation-building at local, national, and international levels. About 50 years after the end of the colonial era, the typical post-colonial African state remains weak and lacks legitimacy; and the capacity to deliver social goods, and broader relevance. Conflict, underdevelopment, insecurity, social unrest, class struggle, and

climate change continue to undermine people's well-being and worsen living conditions across much of the continent. For this reason, Giorgis (2010, p.1) says "the prototype state is dysfunctional, insecure, and fragile". Some states wage war against their own citizens. Lacking the consent of the governed and dismissive of the public will, they sustain indefinite, despotic rule through repression and intimidation, fostering widespread fear and insecurity.

This framing partly derives from colonial-era racial attitudes, influenced by interpretations of social Darwinism, which characterized African tribal systems as inherently barbaric and savage (Ejovi et al 2026, p.1). Omotosho (2016, p.190) argues that the situation remains redeemable if political leadership achieves unity, abandons historical grievances, overcomes intellectual poverty, eliminate corruption institutionalized through ethnic patronage, and constructs governance systems aligned with indigenous cultural configurations and diversity. Under such conditions, ethnicity can function as an effective instrument for promoting national consciousness and integration.

Conclusion

Government policy interventions for nation-building in Africa since 1960 have been constrained by colonial legacies, ethnic pluralism, and weak institutions. For Africa to achieve development and succeed in nation-building, peace, safety and security constitute necessary preconditions. Bayran et al, (2018 p.249) posit that successful nation building strategies have varied globally: some states relied on a dominant sect or religious institution, while others promoted a common language to facilitate internal assimilation and distinguish the nation from others.

Coercive measures and military dominance failed, while inclusive governance, democratic reforms, and education proved more effective. Sustainable nation-building requires democratic leadership, alignment of policy with practice, and institutions rooted in historical realities. Peace, security, and youth participation are preconditions for transforming Africa's diverse states into cohesive nations capable of development, unity, and regional integration. An internally led, dynamic process of democratic governance is essential for successful nation-building, state reconstruction, and development in Africa. There is an urgent need for inclusive governance that accommodates the country's heterogeneity. Proactive government involvement in peace and security, democratic governance, and economic development would help ensure the success of an independent African initiative. Principal lessons that emerge from the foregoing are:

1. State-building must be rooted in history and reality: any attempt to construct a state should be grounded in the historical trajectory and current social, economic and cultural realities of the society it serves, rather than imposed as an abstract blueprint.
2. Constitutions must be living, adaptable frameworks: a constitutional order cannot be static or merely ceremonial. It needs to evolve with society, remain relevant to present conditions, provide a flexible basis for governance and dispute resolution.
3. Political pluralism is essential: a healthy political system requires space for diverse voices, parties, and ideologies to compete and coexist, preventing the entrenchment of a single, unchallenged authority.
4. Democratic governance is non-negotiable: legitimacy and stability depend on governance that is accountable to the people, transparent in its processes, and responsive to public will through regular, free and fair participation.
5. Quality leadership makes the difference: effective, ethical and visionary leadership is critical to translate institutional structures into tangible progress and to inspire public trust.
6. Organizational effectiveness is tied to internal democracy: institutions and political organizations function best when they themselves practice democratic norms internally-open deliberation, merit-based selection, and accountability-because this shapes how they govern externally.
7. Policy and practice must align: for governance to be credible, what is declared in policy must be consistently reflected in implementation. Gaps between stated objectives and actual practice undermine both effectiveness and legitimacy.

References

- Adebayo, P. (2014). The Impact of Leadership and Governance on Nation-Building in 21st Century Africa. *Carthage Center for Research and Information*, 1-17.
- Ake, C. (1990). History as the Future of Social Science. *Tarikh: History and the Social Sciences*. Vol.9, Pp.19-20.
- Akim, F.R. & Akim, W.D. (2019). Conflict Resolution in South Sudan. *Journal ICMES*, 3(1), 53-74.
- Akuche, A.B.M. (2016). Nation-Building and the Impediments of Building the Nigerian Nation. Pp.1-24. Researchgate.edu on 12/05/2026.
- Alumona, I.M. & Azom, S.N. (2018). Politics of Identity and the Crisis of Nation-Building in Africa. In S.O. Oloruntoba & T. Falola (Eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development*. Palgrave Macmillan, Pp.291-306.
- Ani, K.J., Ihuoma, C., Nwachukwu, V., & Ekpo, M.E. (2023). Insecurity and Secessionist Threats in Nigeria. *African Renaissance*, 20(1), 93-109.
- Anshan, L. (2026). Decolonization, National Consciousness, and Nation-Building in Africa Since World War II. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology*, 10(6), 1-29.
- Asiegbu, M.F. (2015). African States and Nation-Building in the Context of Modernity, Decolonization and Globalization. *West Africa Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 17, 1-12.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. & Green, E. (2018). Nation-Building and Conflict in Modern Africa. *World Development*, 45, 108-118.
- Bayram, M., Altun, M.T., & Ugurlu, M. (2018). Language and Nation-Building in Sub-Saharan Africa. Turkey: International Conference on Social Sciences, (ICOSS) eBook. *Culture Impact Journal*, 237-250.
- Bereketeab, R. (2020). Education as an Instrument of Nation-Building in Post-Colonial Africa. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 20(1), 71-90.
- Berriso, T. & Sorsa, L.D. (2025). Reassessing National Unity in Ethiopia: Strategies for Nation-Building Amidst Diversity and Challenges. *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, 29(2), 24-59.

- Bratton, M. (2004). State Building and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Forwards, Backwards, or Together? In M. Bratton, E. Gyimah-Boadi, & R. Mattes (Eds.) *Afrobarometer Working Papers*. University Press, Pp. 1-27.
- Building Amidst Diversity and Challenges. *Journal of Oromo Studies*, 29(2), 24-59.
- Carr, E.H. (1961). *What is History?* Penguin Books.
- Christensen, D. & Laitin, D.D. (2019). *African States Since Independence: Order, Democracy and Development*. Yale University Press. Pp.1-20.
- Collingwood, R.G. (1946). *The Idea of History*. Oxford University Press.
- Debelo, A.B., & Keno, G.I. (2025). A 'Python Model' of Nation-Building in Ethiopia until 1991: its Legacy and Ongoing Challenges to Ethnocultural Diversity, Peace, and Development. *African Identities*, 1-16.
- Deutsch, K.W. (1953). *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*. MIT Press.
- Ejovi, E.A., Ataine, E.S., & Akpokihe, O.R. (2016). Ethnicity and Nation Building in Africa. *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research*, 2(2), 1-9.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Atlantic Press.
- Filibus, Y. & Onyebuchi, J.S. (2025). Issues and Challenges of Nation-Building Process in Africa: An Overview. *Wukari Historical Review*, 4(1), 73-96.
- Giorgis, A.W. (2010). *Nation Building, State Construction: The Case of Eritrea*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Gwala, R.S. & Mashau, P. (2022). Covid-19 Migration and Nation-Building in Africa: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Nation-Building and Policy Studies*, 223-255.
- Igbokwe-Ibeto, C.J. (2024). Examining the Interface Between Bureaucratic Leadership and Nation-Building in Africa. *UNISA Commonwealth Youth and Development*, 21(1), 1-17.
- Larry, Steve (2024). The Ethnic Minority Question and Nation Building in Nigeria 1960-2020. *Labar Journal of Military History & Peace Studies*

- Mashimbye, R. (2024). Wither Ethiopia? Ethnicity and Nation (Un) Building: An Analysis Focusing on the Period 1991-2022. *Journal of Nation-Building & Policy Studies*, 8(2), 65-72.
- Mordi, E.N. (2017). In Defense of Empire: Government Press Collaboration in the British Win the War Efforts in Nigeria During the Second World War. *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics, Strategic Studies*, 44(1), 58-88.
- Musarurwa, H.J. (2016). *African Nation-Building: Lessons for Youths in Modern Day*. Mandela Institute for Development Studies. Pp.1-29.
- Oguh, S.V. (2015). Examine the Relevance of Nation-Building in Contemporary Africa? Retrieved from Academia.edu. on 12/05/2026.
- Okeke, R.C., Ikeh, C.P., & Oku, C.C. (2022). The Concept of Nation-Building: Theoretical Expositions. *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy*, 8(1), 17-26.
- Omotosho, O.F. (2016). Ethnicity as a Tool for Nation-Building in Nigeria. *International Knowledge Press*, 19(3), 175-193.
- Orji, K.E. (2012). Historical Research and Nation-Building in Africa. *LWATI A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 9(3), 80-89.
- Oyewole, T.G., & Adegoke, J.A. (2018). Human Capital Development in Nigeria: Implications for Nation-Building. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, 4(1), 23-34.
- Oyibokure, G.I., & Okolie, U.C. (2023). Security Challenges and Nation-Building in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, 29, 434-442.
- Nantulya, P.E. (2006). African Nation-Building and Reconciliation: Lessons from Rwanda. *Conflict Trends*, 1, 45-50.
<https://www.accord.org.za/publication/conflict-trends-2006-1/>
- Okeleke, J.C. (2025). Exploring and Evaluating the Intricacies in the Press Coverage During EndSARS Protest in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Arts and Social and Management Sciences*, 3(1), 67-81.
- Omotosho, F.O. (2016). Ethnicity as a Tool for Nation-Building in Nigeria. *Journal of Basic and Applied Research International*, 19(3), 175-193.

- Phyllis, T. (2023). Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa (Book Review). *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36(2), 489-491.
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
- Rustow, D.A. (1970). Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model. *Comparative Politics*, 2(3), 337-363.
- Schaerrer, A. (2013). Ethno-nationalist Identity Construction, Mobilization and Conflict in the Great Lakes Region of Africa (Masters Dissertation). <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/101412>
- Villa-Vicenci, C. (1990). Towards a theology of nation-Building: Church and State in Africa Today. *Journal of church and state*, 32(4), 851-867.
- Zahorik, J., Ade-Abijola, A.O., & Oshewolo, S. (2026). Historical Perspectives on the Accommodation of Diversity in Africa: A study of Nigeria and Ethiopia. *Sage Journals*, 18(2), 180-197.