

Attitudes towards citizenship in Nigeria

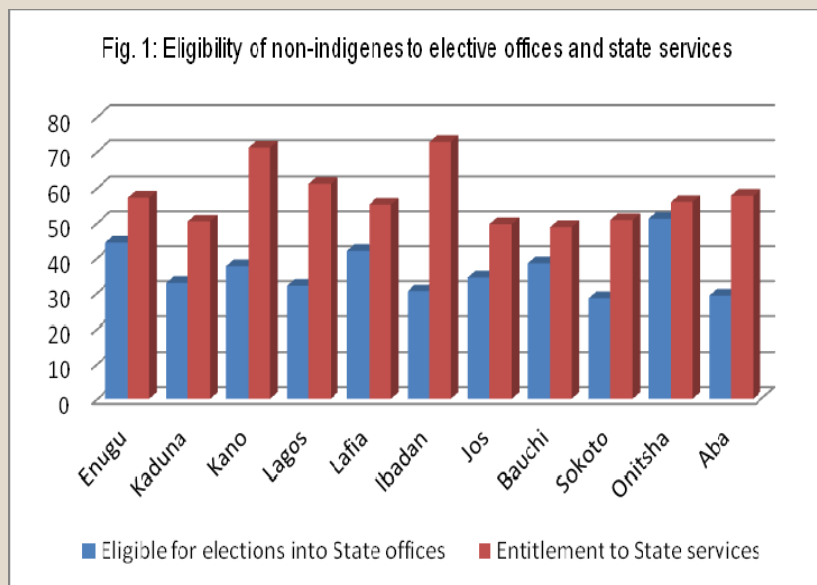
Summary

Nigerians who live in states other than their states of ancestral origin are referred to as *non-indigenes*, no matter how long they and their parents have lived in the state. This is important, because non-indigenes are often prevented from exercising the full citizenship rights enjoyed by indigenes. One of the most significant implications of this 'two-tier' system of citizenship is the exclusion of non-indigenes from access to services provided by state and local governments, in spite of a constitutional provision prohibiting discrimination on grounds of belonging to 'a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion'.

A recent study investigates the attitudes of Nigerians resident in eleven cities towards non-indigenes being granted equal access to government services and elective public offices.

Key findings

- Nigerians, indigenes and non-indigenes alike, agree that everyone resident in a state should have equal access to government services within the states
- A majority of indigenes and non-indigenes agree that only indigenes of states should be eligible for election into public offices within a state
- Indigenes are in favour of the exclusion of non-indigenes from elective offices within the states.



Policy conclusions

Nigerians have a complex understanding of citizenship that varies according to the location and issues or rights. While indigenes feel indigenes and non-indigenes should have equal access to public services, they do not believe that non-indigenes be elected into public offices in the states in which they reside. This is deeply problematic – it means that a significant part of the population is excluded from the political process, and it also serves to stymie the development of a coherent national identity. To rectify this situation the Government must enforce the constitutional provision that the state has a duty to 'secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation' and establish an effective framework for implementing the non-discriminatory clause in the Constitution. One way to do this would be to enact a law on 'residence rights' for non-indigenes, in order to establish their claims to full citizenship.

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Policy context

In a bid to prevent the domination of some groups by others, the Nigerian Constitution inadvertently made provisions that undermine effective national citizenship and loyalty to the nation. Section 318 (1) of the Nigerian Constitution has created a dichotomy between indigenes and non-indigenes by defining 'belonging to a state' (an indigene) as 'a person either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents was a member of a community indigenous to that state'. Section 15 (3) (b) of the Constitution provided that it shall be the duty of the State to 'secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation'. However, the Constitution did not specify these residence rights of the Nigerian citizens who are born or reside in states other than their states of ancestral origin. This gap has been a source of antagonism between indigenes and non-indigenes, which often explodes into violent conflict. Two of the critical problems associated with the status of indigenes and non-indigenes are (a) eligibility of non-indigenes for election into public offices within the state; and (b) equal access by indigenes and non-indigenes to services and opportunities provided by the state and local governments. In state ministries and organizations, non-indigenes are either excluded from employment or employed under discriminatory terms. In some states, non-indigenes are charged discriminatory tuition fees and are often denied access to government services and opportunities to contest for public offices.

Project findings in more detail

Researchers from the University of Jos, Nigeria and the iiG at the CSAE, University of Oxford, UK, investigated public opinion on economic, political and social issues in eleven cities across five of the six geo-political zones in the country. The cities were Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, Lafia, Ibadan, Jos, Bauchi, Sokoto, Onitsha and Aba. All with the exception of Onitsha are state capitals. A total of 2,750 respondents over 18 years of age were selected through multi-stage sampling and interviewed in their households in a language of their choice.

The respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that only 'indigenes of the state should be eligible for election into public offices in the state'. More than two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that only indigenes should be eligible for election into public offices within the state. About

one-third of the respondents disagreed that non-indigenes should be excluded from elective positions within the state. However, there was variation regarding this opinion across the cities. Respondents in Aba, Ibadan and Lagos were more favourable to the eligibility of non-indigenes for elected positions within the states. Xenophobia was higher among indigenes in the sub-samples in Enugu, Kano, Jos, Lafia, Kaduna and Sokoto (Fig. 1).

The respondents were asked whether or not they agreed with the statement that 'every Nigerian resident of this state should enjoy equal access to all government services (education, health care, housing, etc.) and employment'. The respondents were generally more receptive to the idea of equal access by indigenes and non-indigenes to government services and employment within the states (Fig. 1).

On a comparative basis, there is consensus among indigenes and non-indigenes that all Nigerian residents in a state should have equal access to government services (Fig. 1).

This finding offers evidence in support of granting indigenes and non-indigenes equal access to services provided by the tiers of government in the country. The Nigerian government should therefore work towards enacting a law to spell out and protect the 'full residence rights' already guaranteed in the Constitution.

For more detailed information

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