



## ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A CONSOCIATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study explored the relationship between ethnic diversity/plurality and democratic governance in Nigeria. Nigeria has over 300 different ethnic groups, with diverse beliefs, customs, traditions and norms. These diversities have threatened the unity of the country and the system of governance. Political rivalry among the different ethnic groups substantially hampers the institutionalization of democratic governance in the country. Efforts at accommodating the ethnic groups in governance processes by successive administrations have not yielded significant results, hence threat of secession by some ethnic groups. The result of these threats in the country is the lack of harmony and/or cohesion in the polity, particularly in the areas of national identity and unity of purpose. Therefore, the main objective of the paper is to demonstrate that ethnic plurality does not necessarily negate democratic governance in a society. The study adopted the Consociational Democratic Theory to analyze the imperative for national unity cohesion, peace and harmony among the different ethnic nationalities under a democratic system of governance. The study used mainly secondary data, related to ethnic diversity/plurality, democratic governance and the politics of accommodation for harmonious national development. The study revealed that tension in the polity is attributable to the different ethnic groups struggle to capture and/or maintain state power for the benefit of mainly people from the leader's ethnic group and/or region. This has increasingly made people of the different ethnic extractions clamour for "one of their own" to occupy the seat of power at federal, state and/or local government levels. The paper concluded that for Nigeria to make progress and achieve oneness of purpose under a democratic administration, there must be sincere accommodation of all ethnic groups in the governance process. The paper recommended, among other things, that leaders should live above ethnic biases in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities; there is a need to create sustainable national consciousness and identity among Nigerians in order to reduce ethnic rivalry in the country to the barest minimum.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnic rivalry, National Consciousness, Harmony, Ethnic Diversity, Accommodation, Governance.



## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a potential giant of Africa and the entire black race all over the world, has been reduced to a dwarf both in Africa and the world at large since her independence in 1960 because of ethnic politics. With over 300 different ethnic groups, political leaders in the country have continued to champion ethnic agenda in their utterances and conducts, thereby aggrieving the citizens of other ethnic extractions. Consequently, every ethnic group wants one of “their own” to be elected the President at the federal level or governor at the state level (or chairman at the Local government level), leading to fierce and violent political contestation, rivalry, misunderstanding, and distrust among the different groups. Ethnicity in Nigeria manifests in the formation of political parties, public policy, national discourse, appointment into public offices, etc. Thus, it is not uncommon to witness ethnic based political parties or members of an ethnic group giving justifications for the wrong conducts of erring members of their ethnic extraction, who have violated the code of conduct of their offices in the discharge of their duties. This creates a unique problem for the country and its democratic governance system. This problem, as Ojo (2009) has identified, is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of “the nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity, where justice reigns.” Indeed, these diversities have threatened the unity of the country and the system of governance.

The political rivalry that ensues from the ethnic diversities substantially hampers the institutionalization of democratic governance in the country. Efforts by successive administrations at dowsing the ethnic rivalry, distrust and acrimony through legislations, policies and programmes have yielded little or no success in uniting the people of the country. The failure to achieve subcultural harmony on national affairs threatens the nascent democracy in the nation. Contrary to the Nigerian experience, Lijphart (1975) opined that subcultural cleavages in the Netherlands rather than destroy strengthened national unity as well as democratic and political stability of the country. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate that ethnic diversity/plurality does not necessarily negate national unity and democratic governance in a society. The paper contends that, for Nigeria to achieve national consensus under a democratic dispensation, there must be sincere politics of accommodation of the different ethnic groups in the governance processes. This is only possible when leaders live above ethnic biases in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities and create national consciousness and identity among Nigerians. Therefore, the critical questions the study would address are: (1) What is the nature and character of ethnic diversity in Nigeria? (2) How has ethnic diversity/plurality affected democratic governance in Nigeria?, and (3) How would consociationalism successfully aid national consensus in a democratic system in Nigeria?

### **Ethnic Diversity/Plurality**

Nigeria, like many other nation-states, is an agglomeration of many different nations into one entity for the purpose of administrative convenience and other benefits of larger collectivity. This act of bringing together under one jurisdiction different ethnic groups creates ethnic plurality or diversity. An ethnic group, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, is a social group or category of the population that, in a larger society, is set apart and bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality or culture. Such common language, nationality and culture naturally endears members of the group to themselves and consequently, there is the tendency to avoid members of other groups. It is for this reason McLean in Adegbami and



Uche (2015) opined that ethnic group is the strongest sense of group feeling among members of the in-group. According to Cohen (1974), one of the characteristics of a people so addressed as an ethnic group is the sharing of normative behaviour. This normative behaviour, as Adegbami and Uche (2015) have observed, “is a distinct behaviour which distinguished one group of people from others and it includes: kinship, marriage, friendship, festival, rivals and other similar ceremonial activities.’ A common observation in modern societies is the multiplicity of ethnic groups. Ethnic diversity refers to the presence of different ethnic groups, backgrounds or identities in a society. It is one of the forms of the social complexities found in most modern societies.

Historically, “it is the legacy of conquests that brought diverse peoples under the rule of a dominant group; of rulers who in their own interests imported peoples for their labour or their technical and business skills; of industrialization, which intensified the age-old patterns of migration for economic reasons; or of political and religious persecutions that drove people from their native lands” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020).

Prior to the 20th century, the presence of different ethnic nationalities posed little or no serious problems for empires. The agglomeration of diverse ethnic nationalities in one entity is a hallmark of the modern nation-state. However, different nation-states have adopted different approaches in an attempt to solve the problems associated with such ethnic diversity in their territories. Some of these approaches include elimination or expulsion of some ethnic groups as was witnessed during the Nazi policy against the Jews in Germany and other East European countries during World War II, the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from 15th century Spain, and the expulsion of the Arabs and East Indians in many African countries in the 1960s and 1970s (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). Even in the United States of America, the World’s most sophisticated democracy, the challenges of ethnic diversity are very visible in form of racial discrimination, religious intolerance, etc.

There were also efforts at assimilation and acculturation, which take the form of either being forced, induced or voluntary. A good example is the considerably less brutal methods through which the Chinese ethnic groups in Thailand and Indonesia were legally induced to adopt the dominant culture through a process called “directed acculturation.” This, perhaps, was encouraged to reduce tension in these countries tied to ethnic differences. Similarly, some nations have adopted a more promising approach known as pluralism, which usually rests on a combination of toleration, interdependence and separatism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). In Switzerland, for instance, pluralism in form of separatism has been adopted for a long-term solution, where the major ethnic groups are concentrated in separate Cantons, each enjoying a large measure of local control within a democratic federation.

Also, some western countries, such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, in their attempt to manage ethnic diversity, have put in place multiculturalism policies, which are intended to advance groups’ rights (Hasmath, 2011). However, it is not clear whether such policies have achieved unity or oneness of purpose in such nations. Hence, Lenard, in Hasmath (2011), questioned whether “an increase in ethno-cultural diversity contributes to a decline in the trust necessary to sustain redistributive policies, as well as active participation.” To Hasmath, Lenard’s argument is essentially to determine whether multicultural policies can serve to build or strengthen trust relations in ethno-culturally diverse societies. In all, to properly manage ethnic diversity in a society, there is a need to devise some informed



normative principles to guide the design of accommodations and the adjudication of the inter- and intra-communal conflicts that will inevitably arise (Hasmath, 2011).

### **Democracy and Democratic Governance**

The definition of democracy has continued to defy all attempted propositions of common understanding. According to Idike (2013), conceptual issues in democracy have also been highlighted as follows: democracy is a political system in which the people in a country rule through any form of government they choose to establish. In modern democracies, supreme authority is exercised for the most part, by representatives elected by popular suffrage (Osakwe, 2011). Hence, democratic governance is that governance system that involves the people in decision making process and where the government in place derives legitimacy. Democracy is not, for instance, rule by the elite, even when representatives elected by popular suffrage have formed part of the political elite. Democracy is not essentially rule by elected representatives. Democracy is rather essentially rule by the representatives of the people. Central to the concept and practice of democracy, therefore, are the wishes and the will of the people. Thus, democracy in the people's reckoning means improvement in their circumstances (Abati, 2006). Whenever, therefore, an attempt is made to re-conceptualize democracy, the effort ends up reaffirming that people are central to the democratic concept and practices. Awotokun (2004), for instance, has contended as follows: "By democracy I do not mean something as vague as 'the rule of the people' or 'the rule of the majority,' but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections, i.e., the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permits public control of rulers and their dismissal by the ruled and which makes it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers." However, besides the express mentioning of the right of the people' in this contention, 'the ruled,' upon which emphasis is placed in the reconceptualization, also refers to 'the people.' Democracy is therefore, essentially people centered (Idike, 2013).

Laski (2008), posits that the democratic form of government is doubtless a final form of political organization, in the sense that men who have once tasted power will not without conflict want to surrender it. According to Owolabi in Ogundiya (2010), the democratization project is therefore regarded as the age of civilization that every society should strive to attain, rather than a political option among many others. Ogundiya (2010) further posits that democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered (Idike, 2013). In the meantime, democracy in this study stands for a system of government by freely and fairly elected representatives of the people. Accordingly, the primary purpose of government by the representatives is the welfare of the citizens.

### **Ethnic Diversity and Democratic Governance: The Nigerian Experience**

Nigerian political structure is made up of ethnic nationalities; thus, ethnicity plays crucial roles in public discourse and democratic governance processes. In recognition of the complexities of the ethnic plurality in the country, the founding fathers adopted the federal system to maintain and create unity in diversity. Commenting on the ethnic diversity and its effect on democratic governance and politics in Nigeria, Adegami and Uche (2015) write: "Nigeria's ethnic groups could be broadly divided into ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities; the majority ethnic groups are the Hausa/Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the South West and the Igbo of the South East, of which their numerical and hegemonic strength within the nation gave Nigeria its tripodal ethnic structure."



This tripodal ethnic structure occasioned the formation of political parties in the country in the pre-independence and post-independence periods, thereby giving political parties in Nigeria ethnic colouration. For instance, out of the three dominant parties in the pre-independence period, namely National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (later renamed National Council of Nigeria Citizen – NCNC), the Action Group – AG and Northern People’s Congress – NPC, the NCNC was dominated by Igbos, AG by Yorubas and NPC by Hausa/Fulanis. This divide guided the voting patterns in the pre-independence Nigeria; consequently, the political leadership that emerged strongly demonstrated ethnic/regional bias in governance. This trend continued into the post-independence era, where the three majority ethnic groups continued to form political parties along ethnic lines and dominated the political processes to the near exclusion of the ethnic minorities. As Adegami and Uche (2015) have observed, “the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) have been engaged in the activities of controlling the political power of the nation, with the primary aim of controlling the resources of the state; the sole ambition of controlling the economic activities of the nation has led to keen hunt for political power, especially at the center, by the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.” This has become more critical since the first military coup in 1966, which centralized power and effectively put the nation on the path of unitary government while pretending to be a federal system. This centralization of state power has occasioned the inordinate contestation for political power by the different ethnic groups, which to a very large extent threatened the consolidation and institutionalization of democracy in the country.

Similarly, in the Second Republic, the ethnic affiliation of political parties continued among the majority ethnic groups. For instance, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo was dominant in the South West and drew its strength from Yorubas, Nigerian Peoples’ Party (NPP) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe held sway in the South East and was dominated by Igbos, and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari had its support base among the Hausa/Fulani groups in the Northern region. It is important to note that these political parties also drew support from the minority ethnic groups, but that did not distort their majority ethnic outlook as they were dominated by Yoruba – UPN, Igbo – NPP and Hausa/Fulani – NPN. Ethnic cleavages in the democratic processes, created by ethnic diversity promoted bad governance, corruption, underdevelopment, threat to national unity/cohesion and ultimately political tension and instability. Furthermore, in spite of the efforts through legislations to abdicate from the past in the area of ethnic-based political parties of the first and second republics, even in the fourth republic, political parties still wear ethnic colouration and toga. For instance, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was largely seen as a Yoruba political party, All Peoples Party (later All Nigerian Peoples’ Party – ANPP) was tagged a Hausa/Fulani Party, while All Peoples’ Grand Alliance (APGA) was seen as an Igbo political party. It is only the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) that has some semblance of national party, by having both majority and minority ethnic groups in its ranks. The ethnic outlook of the major political parties makes political contestation fierce and violent as every ethnic group attempts to put “one of their own” in power.

According to Ojo (2004), “the consequence of ethnic and prebendal politics is pauperizing democratic dividends of the citizens in Nigeria.” In their comments on the negative effects of ethnic politics in Nigeria, Adegami and Uche (2015) wrote:

The political calculation and permutation of who gets what, when and how of the political cum economic potentialities of the nation are the main sources of hostility and conflicts. This has continued to threaten the political stability and advancement of Nigeria as a nation. The



incessant struggle for power is always heating up the nation's polity. Apart from the fact that this action has continued to polarize the nation along ethnic groups divides, the degree of human losses in every political violence associated with power struggle is unquantifiable.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work is anchored mainly on the Consociational Theory. The Consociational Democratic Theory was popularized by the political scientist Arend Lijphart in 1968, in his book: *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. Consociationalism, also known as the theory of elite cooperation, focuses on the role of political elites, their agreement and cooperation, as the key to a stable democratic system in deeply divided societies that is based on power sharing between elites from the different social (ethnic) groups. Lijphart emphasized the importance of elite accommodation or harmony in national and political stability, as well as to avert threats to national unity and cohesion.

For the models operationalisation, four elements must be in place: (1) executive power sharing among the representatives of all significant groups; (2) a high degree of internal autonomy for groups that wish to have it; (3) proportional representation and proportional allocation of civil service positions and public funds; and (4) a minority veto on the most vital issues (Daalder, 1996). To secure the collapse of pillarization, that is, ethnic cleavages, and achieve national unity and cohesion, Daalder (1996) suggests as follows: (1) elite reorientation; (2) mass secularization (especially in highly religiously divided societies); and (3) increasing social differentiation.

The theory is relevant for our study and the ethnically polarized political system in which there is constant agitation by different ethnic groups making one demand or the other on the system. Perhaps, if well applied, Nigeria will witness less agitations and stresses on the political system, the country and ultimately, achieve national unity and cohesion.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted mainly documentary research approach in the collection of data and content analysis method in data analysis. Thus, the study was basically qualitative in nature. It follows therefore that data for this study were drawn from secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, articles, newspapers, magazines, archival material, etc. These materials were selected on the basis of their relevance and suitability to the topic of study. In this work content analysis was used to examine the relationship between ethnic diversity and democratic governance in Nigeria, particularly from a consociational democracy perspective.

### **Nature and Character of Ethnic Diversity in Nigeria**

As earlier noted, Nigeria has different ethnic nationalities in the length and breadth of its territory. There are over 300 different independent ethnic groups brought together under an umbrella by the British for administrative convenience, which gave birth to the modern Nigerian nation-state. These groups are very different in their culture and civilization that on many fronts they are strongly opposed to one another. The ethnic configuration of the country revealed that there are three majority ethnic groups: Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, while others are classified as ethnic minorities (Kalagbor & Harry, 2020). This difference in ethnicity



has created rivalry, domination, distrust, hatred, ethnic chauvinism, etc leading to a long standing tension and threat to the existence of the country.

Indeed, there is an increase in micro-nationalism of the different ethnic groups making various demands on the state. In this regard, there is a proliferation of ethnic-based socio-cultural movements with political biases such as the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Afenifere, Northern Elders Forum (NEF), Ohanaeze ndi Igbo, PANDEF, IPOB, etc, all of which have different views on national unity, form of government to be in operation, revenue allocation formula, etc.

According to Salawu and Hassan (2011) the nature of Nigerian federal system, because of its historical emergence, is one in which there is loyalty to ethnic groups rather than loyalty to the nation. They added that, in such circumstance, a mutual suspicion and fear of domination, as well as competition for power among ethnic groups become unavoidable.

Similarly, Adegbami and Uche (2015) assert that, in Nigeria, like in many other African countries, “the struggle for the control of political power from time to time, brought different ethnic groups into conflict such that each ethnic group advocates its interests in different ways in order to secure a place in the political economy.” Ethnicity in Nigeria, both in the pre-independence era and the post-independence era, has been a tool for political mobilization by elites in their attempt to take over power for plunder. As Ochulor (2011) has observed, ‘in Nigeria what matters to leaders is the politics of the national cake,’ and whoever has the national cake enjoys the support of the people, particularly those from the same ethnic groups, hence leading to the marginalization of many other ethnic groups.

Ethnic diversity in Nigeria and the use of ethnicity in politics has bred lack of nationalistic spirit in Nigerians. This is a major source of underdevelopment in the country. To Adegbami and Uche (2015), “ethnic politics has been a clog in the wheel of political advancement of the nation that there has never been a leader with national outlook that has emerged in Nigeria.” This assertion is consistent with the view of Umezina (2012), when he stated that, “the election of candidates so far has been based on where the candidates came from rather than on the right candidates for the election” or position. Indeed, there is the prevalence of “identity vs ability politics” in Nigeria, wherein leaders hardly focus on the capacity and capability of individuals to perform the assignment or task in question but where the individual comes from, that is, the ethnicity of the persons to be given appointments. In addition, ethnic diversity and the politics it enthrones have created an avenue for corrupt leaders being supported by members of their ethnic groups. In Nigeria, it is common to hear people say: “He is our own; let him eat; it is our turn”. In the words of Adegbami and Uche (2015):

Instead of the citizens to vehemently reject corrupt leaders and condemn their activities, they do support them due to ethnicity and ethnic politics, thereby making these leaders continue in the corruptive manner with impunity. Corruption without mincing words has been undermining Nigeria’s political development. It has permeated all levels of government in Nigeria while the ethnic groups of the corrupt politicians are always defending them.



## **Ethnic Diversity and its Effects on Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

Nigeria has experimented with democratic governance four times since independence in 1960. Hence, in the country's democratic experience she is in her fourth republic. Lijphart (1975) defines democracy simply as "a system of government in which the people have the opportunity to select their own leaders." His definition of democracy may have eclipsed the functionality of democracy in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of mass participation in policy making and implementation through consultations. For example, how open, transparent and responsive is the policy making and implementation process in the polity? All these are critical elements in democratic governance.

Lijphart, in his politics of accommodation, as a basis for democratic government noted that in a pluralist society there are different power blocs, but no single bloc should have a dominant position vis a vis the other blocs. This was observed in the Dutch system in the 1970s largely due to the strong nationalism throughout the blocs which remedied for their differences. On the contrary, in the Nigerian system, the power blocs are involved in micro-nationalism with a strong tendency to dominate other blocs and this is the reason for the fierce and violent political contestation in the country. Obviously, the advantage the Dutch political system has over Nigeria is the spirit of strong nationalism, which is lacking in Nigeria. Therefore, to achieve the accommodation Lijphart observed in Dutch politics in Nigeria, the governor of Rivers State, his Excellency Chief Barrister Nyesom Ezeunwo Wike, popularized and proposed the application of the "Nyee ndi eba, Nyee ndi eba, Nyee ndi eba, Nyee ndi eba" political philosophy in 2022 in the power sharing arrangement in Nigeria. The Nyee ndi eba, Nyee ndi eba political philosophy means, when you give a juice political office to one ethnic group, give another juice political office to the other ethnic group(s) too in the power sharing arrangement in the polity. This, no doubt, will give a sense of belonging to all ethnic groups in the country.

Essentially, ethnic diversity has serious effects on democratic governance in Nigeria. For instance, irrespective of the developmental challenges of the country in the areas of resource mobilization and generation, the north (Hausa/Fulani) prefers the unitary or centralized system that stifles states/regions from exploring and exploiting minerals in their states/regions to increase resources for development, while others such as the Easterners (Igbo) and Westerners (Yoruba) are in support of true federalism or more autonomy to the states/regions to freely mobilise and generate resources. Similarly, in spite of the heightened insecurity in the country, there is still a discordant tune from the different ethnic groups on the policy of "state police" to enhance the overall security of the country. This is because of the mutual suspicion that exists among the different ethnic groups.

Also, election and politics in general is akin to war due to the desire of ethnic groups winning at all cost so as to dominate other groups in "the politics of winner takes it all." This has led to violence of immeasurable proportions claiming lives and properties and threatening the democratic system in the country. As Adegami and Uche (2015) have observed, ethnic diversity has always generated conflict in the democratic processes of the country as each of the three hegemonic/majority ethnic groups tries to strengthen its stronghold to ensure its dominance in governmental activities.

As earlier stated, many political leaders in Nigeria used ethno-religious propagation to their advantage thereby further dividing the country along ethno-religious lines. Consequently, the wrong policy choices of the leaders are considered to be good largely by members of his/her





ethnic group simply because he is “their own,” while making rubbish of even the best policy choice, if the proponent is not “their own.” Ethnic cleavages in the democratic processes created by the ethnic diversity promoted bad governance, corruption, under-development, distrust, threat to national security and unity and ultimately political tension and instability. Outlining the effects of ethnic diversity on the governance of Nigeria, Babangida posited that:

There is wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence encounters, clashes, and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestments of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy, and increasing gaps in social relations among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another. Ethnic nationalism is equally responsible for uprising of ethnic militias across the country: the Oodua People’s Congress of the South West, Arewa People’s Congress in the north and Egbesu in the East among others (Salawu & Hassan, 2011).

In sum, the effects of ethnic diversity on democratic governance in Nigeria have been negative threatening the very existence of the country. It negatively affects the consolidation of democracy and undermines the strengthening of state institutions for democratic governance in the country. It is important to note that the threat to national cohesion, security and survival posed by ethnic diversity is higher now than ever before in the history of Nigeria. Interestingly, despite the cultural/ethnic diversity, the nationalist in pre-independence Nigeria, accommodated themselves to secure independence. With the widespread divide in the polity, the present day political class or elites are expected to accommodate themselves to achieve national cohesion and survival of Nigeria.

### **Consociationalism and National Consensus in Nigeria**

Nigeria is on the verge of bursting the “critical range” of the political system boundary due to ethnic polarization of policy making and implementation, including those related to insecurity. Yet achieving consensus among political leaders and elites on a nationalistic basis seems too difficult, despite the threat to national survival. Three areas the Nigerian state had experienced stresses and strains in governance are: executive power sharing, resource control or true federalism and skewed representation in favour of a region, and failure in ensuring equitable opportunities in public services. On executive power sharing, efforts were made at different times to achieve harmony through the proposal of rotational presidency between the six geopolitical zones and the occupation of presidency by a northerner for eight years and then a southerner for eight years. These are all informal arrangements without constitutional backing. The issue of resource control or true federalism is the most contentious issue in the Nigerian state. Since after the military coup of January 15, 1966, Nigeria has been operating a unitary form of government, with centralized authority, while pretending it is a federal system. This has necessitated far-reaching agitations and clamour for restructuring to grant more autonomy to the states for effective governance. However, it has been resisted by some ethnic groups who seem to be enjoying the over-centralization of power at the centre in Abuja.

Lastly, on the issue of skewed representation and unequal opportunities in the public services by constitutional provision, the federal character principle was introduced to give every ethnic group a sense of belonging in the scheme of things. However, it is more in breach than ever before thus creating huge ethnic tension and threat to national unity and survival. Commenting



on the devastating nature of the federal character policy in Nigeria, Adegbami and Uche (2015) stated thus:

The plausibility of the principle notwithstanding brings about the reigning of mediocrity into governmental activities in the name of equity and fairness among the component states. Given the fact that merit has been overruled as a criterion for serving the nation, it is not surprising that all manners of people have been appointed to hold public office in which they neither had the training nor the experience.

All these efforts have not eliminated or reduced ethnic rivalry or threat to national cohesion. To achieve national cohesion, unity and stability, the consociational democratic model proffered some suggestions. First, Lijphart maintained that “the main factor in having a viable democracy in a strongly divided society is the spirit of accommodation among the elites of the different groups” (Kanol, 2010). The spirit of accommodation is a deliberate and honest effort at bringing every group on board at all times in the governance processes. Similarly, Daalder (1996) asserts that to actualize Lijphart’s politics of accommodation within the framework of consociational democracy, three things must be done: elites’ reorientation, mass secularization and increasing social differentiation. Daalder (1996) noted that to achieve the three factors needed for consociational democracy in a polity there is a need for increased social differentiation through coalition of cross-cultural organizations comprising different ethnic/subcultural groups based on professional inclination to create a nationalistic disposition of members, as against subcultural or ethnic champions. As he puts it,

... in the process, they tended to develop closer contacts with similar organizations in other subcultures (and with specialized sections of the government bureaucracy which regulated and subsidized organizations in particular sectors) that had with institutions and organizations within their own subculture. As more and more organizations went their own way, the institutional cohesion of the different subcultures was thus largely destroyed. A system consisting of rather rigid hierarchical subcultures was gradually replaced by a welter of independent organizational networks which connected specialized agencies and parts of the bureaucracy in the making and implementation of policies. There was, one might say, a self-destructing logic in *verzuiling*-process: its very success in fostering all manner of sectoral organizations within subcultures created so many sectoral interests across them, that this eventually spelled the demise of the subcultures as cohesion units.

No doubt, in the Nigerian context, diffusion or destruction subcultural or ethnic cleavages is an imperative for national consensus and cohesion. Such determined intermingling of ethnic groups have the potentials of enforcing nationalistic spirit in Nigerians, which is a *sine qua non* for stable and effective democracy as well as a united and prosperous country. When this happens, “the winner takes it all” politics in Nigeria could be replaced with consensus government to consolidate and institutionalize democratic governance in the country.



## CONCLUSION

The multi-ethnic configuration of Nigeria has created a conflictual situation, with every ethnic group fighting for its interests and none for Nigeria. This situation creates serious threats to national security, unity and cohesion, all of which are needed for the survival of the nation and practice of democracy. Efforts by successive governments to unite the country have failed to eliminate or even reduce inter-ethnic rivalry, distrust and misunderstanding; thus, the country is as divided as ever. There is so much dissatisfaction among different ethnic groups over the structure of the country, the nature of politics and the political fragmentation created by the system and the resultant insecurity, poverty and underdevelopment across the country. The Consociational Democratic Theory provides some guides toward achieving national cohesion, unity, peace and harmony among the different ethnic nationalities under a democratic system of governance. Politics of accommodation is the way to go if Nigeria must remain as one nation. Thus, the conclusion of the paper is that, for Nigeria to make progress and achieve oneness of purpose under a democratic regime, there must be sincere accommodation of all ethnic groups in the governance process. This would involve elites' consensus in line with the consociational democratic tenets.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the paper recommends as follows:

- (i) Leaders should live above ethnic biases in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities;
- (ii) There is a need to create sustainable national consciousness and identity among Nigerians in order to reduce ethnic rivalry in the country to the barest minimum.

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