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## **Political Federalism and minorities In Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores how the federal model in Nigeria has promoted pluralism in accordance with the current constitution, acknowledging diversity and cultivating a sense of loyalty and belonging among all citizens of the Federation. The analysis commences by tracing the historical development of Nigeria's federal system. Subsequently, it examines the practical implementation of federalism in contemporary Nigeria. The study delves into the ethnic minorities in Nigeria and the politicisation of ethnicity. Furthermore, it elucidates the constitutional provisions pertaining to political rights, representation, and participation, including the incorporation of Sharia Law into Nigeria's federal system. Finally, the study concludes by examining the political participation of minorities at various administrative levels, encompassing the village, state, and national levels.

**Keywords:** Politics; Federalism; Minorities; Nigeria.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria, characterised by significant diversity and fragmentation, emerged in 1914 as a political entity resulting from the union of Northern and Southern Nigeria (Odeyemi, 2014). The minimal shared histories and cultural relations between these regions, established mainly for administrative purposes, have perpetuated inequalities intensified by colonial rule. Religious and ethnic differences, deepened during colonialism, have become enduring sources of instability. The division between the North and South is evident in severe economic and social disparities, often exacerbated by religious confrontations, particularly since the 1980s (Stewart, 2005). Ethnic tensions arise among dominant groups like the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa/Fulani, contributing to conflicts with minority ethnic groups. Nigeria's complex social fabric involves a notable divide between the "indigenous" and "outsiders," leading to conflicts over land, a crucial aspect of societal sustainability. Competing for control over state institutions, corruption, and the exploitation of natural resources, especially oil, further contribute to instability. Despite attempts to address differences through the concept of racial "federal character," implemented through federalism, major inequalities persist.

The federal character principles of 1979 and 1999 aimed to use the federal governmental system to resolve party distinctions, promote domestic harmony, and prevent the dominance of specific regions or cultures (Elazar, 1987). However, the implementation of federalism in a diverse country has incentivized winner-taking policies, fueled redistributive impulses based on community status, and failed to address significant inequalities. This injustice has, in part, contributed to the rise of groups like Boko Haram and conflicts such as the Niger Delta War. Nigeria, characterised by significant diversity and fragmentation, emerged in 1914 as a political entity resulting from the union of Northern and Southern Nigeria (Akanmidu, 2018; Ishamali, 2022). The minimal shared histories and cultural relations between these regions, established mainly for administrative purposes, have perpetuated inequalities intensified by colonial rule. Religious and ethnic differences, deepened during colonialism, have become enduring sources of instability. The division between the North and South is evident in severe economic and social disparities, often exacerbated by religious confrontations, particularly since the 1980s. Ethnic tensions arise among dominant groups like the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa/Fulani, contributing to conflicts with minority ethnic groups. Nigeria's complex social fabric involves a notable divide between the "indigenous" and "outsiders," leading to conflicts over land, a crucial aspect of societal sustainability. Competing for control over state institutions, corruption, and the exploitation of natural resources, especially oil, further contribute to instability. Despite attempts to address differences through the concept of racial "federal character," implemented through federalism, major inequalities persist.

The federal character principles of 1979 and 1999 aimed to use the federal governmental system to resolve party distinctions, promote domestic harmony, and prevent the dominance of specific regions or cultures (Oyovbaire, 1983). However, the implementation of federalism in a diverse country has incentivized winner-taking policies, fueled redistributive impulses based on community status, and failed to address significant inequalities. This injustice has, in part, contributed to the rise of groups like Boko Haram and conflicts such as the Niger Delta insurgency.

## **NIGERIAN FEDERALISM IN PRACTICE**

The intricacies of human nature often manifest in diverse variations concerning systems and institutions in the public sphere. Even with established standards in the processes of these systems and institutions, optimal outcomes are achieved when processes are effectively adapted to local realities. Federalism is not exempt from this principle, as there is no universally applicable pure federation model. Instead, the fundamental principle of combining mutual rule for certain purposes and regional self-rule for others within a single political structure, ensuring neither is subordinate to the other, has been flexibly employed to accommodate distinct circumstances (Watts, 1996).

The acknowledgement of these variations justifies the need for assessment. Drawing from Watts' (1996) three-pronged framework for the design and operation of federations, our evaluation is grounded in the following aspects:

1. The interrelationship of societal systems, hierarchical frameworks, and democratic mechanisms
2. The interaction of these elements influences one another.
3. Issues in the design of federations that impact their operation.

Within the first category, our focus will be on inter- and intra-governmental relations, encompassing vertical and horizontal relationships among the units in the federal compact. The second level of comparison addresses the nature of relationships, specifically examining the degree of asymmetry and its influence on resource allocation. Lastly, attention is given to the nature of diversity. The concluding segment will

concentrate on two distinctive challenges in Nigeria: the military heritage of constitution-making processes and the minority question.

### **Inter-Governmental Relations**

This section explores the intricate nature of intergovernmental relationships within the context of federal structures, particularly focusing on Nigeria. The warmth of the partnership is contingent upon whether federalism is dual or cooperative. Dual federalism strictly delineates duties and powers between the central government and entities, limiting interference, while cooperative federalism acknowledges the authority of both central and component units, allowing for intervention to ensure no absolute obedience to restrictions or autonomy. In Nigeria's political history, federalism has been characterised by a devolutionary structure where the states exhibit a relative degree of subordination to the central government.

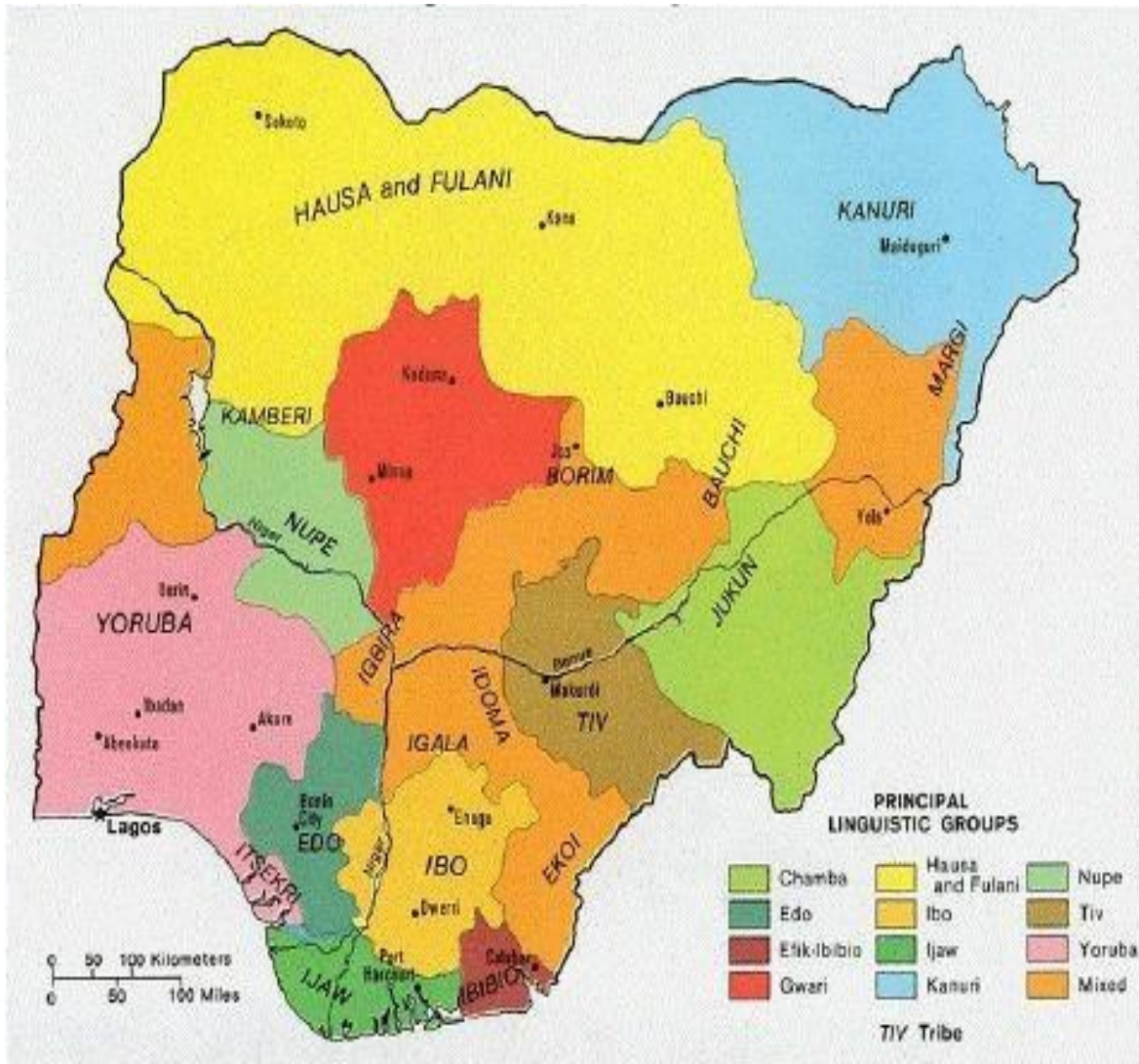
A review of the constitution reveals a clear alignment of the states with the central government, exemplified by the loss of their rights to establish independent constitutions. Despite the constitutional listing of functions for both tiers of government, the central government's breach of this process is apparent, affirming its preeminence in its relationship with state governments. Fiscal federalism emerges as a crucial aspect of intergovernmental relations, emphasising the need for each federal compact member to fund its activities. However, Nigeria's fiscal landscape is marked by a centralizing trend, with the central government assuming ultimate fiscal accountability (Ewetan, 2012).

Revenue sharing becomes a significant challenge in vertical fiscal ties, given the asymmetrical structure of federations. The distribution of income in Nigeria remains a politically sensitive issue, exacerbated by uneven resource distribution and varying state needs. Attempts to establish an agreeable revenue allocation formula through ad-hoc commissions have been futile, leading to persistent discontent, particularly from minority groups in resource-rich regions.

The disagreement over revenue allocation intensifies conflicts in intergovernmental relations, with demands for a fairer deal coming predominantly from southern states, particularly the Niger-Delta region. This situation reflects Nigeria's highly pluralistic society, characterised by ethnic, religious, and regional considerations. Despite numerous attempts to address revenue allocation through commissions, the issue remains unresolved, with the shift to an oil-based economy exacerbating tensions.

The critical starting point for the revenue allocation issue dates back to 1969, when the central government claimed ownership of petroleum resources. Subsequent revenue allocation systems, emphasising population and equality, have failed to assuage the perceived injustices, leading to volatile situations, such as the Niger-Delta region resorting to armed resistance. The income distribution problem poses a severe challenge to Nigeria's federal system, requiring genuine political agreement, dialogue, and unity for potential resolution.

## Ethnic Minorities in Nigeria



**Map: 1 Ethnic Minorities in Nigeria**

Democracy ensures the expression of the people’s will through majority rule, with a fundamental feature being the citizens’ freedom to change the majority through elections. However, it is imperative that the majority does not misuse its authority to violate the fundamental rights of minorities. This includes the minority’s right to seek majority status and freely participate in elections, exercising rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, and petition. The continuous and tyrannical imposition of the majority may lead to the victimisation of minority rights. While majority rule is crucial for conveying the national will, there is a concern that it may be misused to suppress both minorities and individuals.

Notable thinkers like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison have warned against the potential risk of dictatorship arising from the relationship between the legislature and the president. In a republic, safeguarding democracy against the tyranny of authorities and protecting one section of society from the injustice of another is of significant importance (de Tocqueville, 2004). Democracy strives to prevent the perpetuation of a single majority, emphasising the need for balance and the protection of minority rights. Regardless of how singular or alienated a minority is from mainstream culture, their interests must be upheld. The only justifiable exertion of power over any

member of a civilised society is to prevent harm to others, aligning with the principle of no harm (Mill, 1869). The rights of minorities are paramount in any form.

The tyranny of the majority extends beyond violations of individual rights or marginalisation of democratic minorities; it includes discrimination based on cultural minorities, such as ethnicity and skin color. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed genocides committed by totalitarian governments against ethnic communities, including the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and mass killings in various parts of the world. Recent examples, such as the Hutu genocide of Tutsi in 1994, Saddam Hussein’s mass slaughter of Kurds and Shiites, Slobodan Milosevic’s victims in Serbia in 1995, and the persecution of Rohingya Muslims by the government of Myanmar, highlight the enduring losses suffered by minorities globally. Nigeria, too, has experienced ethnic minority issues stemming from historical events like the Biafran civil war and subsequent religious and regional conflicts. This paper focuses on the challenges faced by ethnic minorities in Nigeria, their status determination, their demands, governmental responses, and areas requiring policy changes.

### **Historical Perspective**

The estimated number of distinct ethnic groups in Nigeria ranges from 250 to over 400. A prevalent indicator of ethnic diversity is language accent, which is discerned when individuals hear a different language with distinctive words. In the 1970s, language groups were counted at over 400 based on mutual intelligibility. In the ethnic classification of Nigeria, minorities are generally considered to be groups other than the majority ethnicities, namely the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. These three groups collectively constitute over 60% of the Nigerian population, while minority groups, such as the Ijaw, Kanuri, and Tiv, make up 29%, 22%, and 18%, respectively (refer to Table 1). It is also noteworthy to consider extending the concept of minorities to include ethnic groups in different geographical regions, such as the Christian community in the far north or Muslim minority groups in the Middle Belt and South East (Aboh, 2023).

The roots of minority issues in Nigeria trace back to the colonial period, particularly under the regionalization policy of the colonial government. In Northern Nigeria, minority grievances were centred on the dominance of indigenous ethnic minorities by Hausa-Fulani leaders, leading to the marginalisation of these communities from political and economic resources, including market power. The pursuit of independence in the 1950s further heightened minority concerns as the colonial government withdrew from the region. These concerns were not limited to the North but were echoed by minorities in other regions. Consequently, the demand for autonomy manifested in constructive responses, such as the establishment of a Calabar-Ogoja State in the East, a Midwest State in the West, and a Middle Belt State in the North, reflecting the aspirations of minority groups to address perceived injustices and corruption (Jibril, 1991).

**Table 1: Population of Speakers of the 12 Largest Ethnic Groups.**

<b>Language</b>	<b>1963 Population</b>	<b>1986 Population</b>
Hausa	11,653,000	23,233,000
Yoruba	11,321,000	22,571,000
Igbo	9,246,000	18,434,000

Fulfulde	4,784,000	9,538,000
Kanuri	2,256,000	4,498,000
Ibibio	2,006,000	3,999,000
Tiv	1,394,000	2,779,000
Ijaw (Izon)	1,089,000	2,171,000
Edo	955,000	1,904,000
Nupe	656,000	1,314,000
Urhobo	639,000	1,274,000
Igala	582,000	1,160,000

**Source: Jibril, 1991. *Minority-Languages and Lingua Francas in Nigerian Education*. Central Books: Agbor, 111**

The British Colonial Master established the Willink Commission in 1957 in response to minority concerns that the colonial-imposed democratic system might lead to the dominance of minority communities by major ethnic groups in three key regions of the Federation. The Committee's purpose was to address and alleviate these concerns, which had been raised during the 1953 Constitutional Conference. The committee was tasked with:

- 1) Assessing the evidence and proposing ways to allay the fears of minorities in Nigeria, whether well-founded or not
- 2) recommending guarantees be included in the Constitution to address these concerns.
- 3) Proposing the establishment of states as a last resort if no solution is found.
- 4) Reporting its conclusions to the Colonial Secretary of State

According to Akinyele (1996), the outcome of the Commission, while acknowledging minority rights, was that the constitution of states would not address minority fears but could contribute to the country's continuous fragmentation.

In the post-independence context, issues related to minorities and the majority in Nigeria were influenced by proximity to capital or influence. Racial minorities faced outsourcing by the majority, leading to allegations of favouritism and countercharges. This situation also affected areas such as population censuses and the federal distribution of resources, which are essential for the nation's financial support. Ethnic minorities encountered challenges due to differences in their demands, with groups in the North, particularly the Middle Belt Region, seeking greater central government involvement, while Southern minorities aimed to control their capital explicitly.

Despite Nigeria being created as a result of British fusion in 1914, a lack of commitment to a British-imposed state has been observed in the post-independence era. The absence of a national debate on the cohesiveness of the Nigerian body and the tendency of citizens to align with their ethnic roots have persisted since colonial times. This observation aligns with Okwudiba Nnoli's (1980) argument that race is the underlying foundation of Nigerian identity and political separation.

The British colonial administration adopted a three-party North, South, and Eastern structure to create a Nigerian union overseeing three regional governments. This tripartite division reinforced ethnic identities, particularly among the North's Hausa and Fulani and the West's Yoruba and marginalised minority ethnic groups. The federal system concentrated authority in the three regions, neglecting the interests of minority ethnic groups that were not adequately represented.

“The presence of three politically influential ethnic groups demonstrates that colonialism’s approach to ethnogenesis has had a lasting impact on the ethnic identity of separate populations in Nigeria” (Cooper, 2002).

**Table 2: A Diary of Communal Clashes in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic (1999 – 2002)**

<b>Crisis Date</b>	<b>Crisis Place</b>
May 30 - June 9, 1999	Warri communal clash in Delta State.
July 18, 1999	Oodua People’s Congress and Hausa traders clashed at Sagamu, Ogun State.
November 25, 1999	Communal clash in Lagos between Oodua People’s Congress and Hausa traders.
January 25, 2000	Communal clash in Brass Local Government area of Bayelsa State.
January 29 - 30, 2000	Communal clash in Etsako Local Government area of Edo State.
February 2, 2000	Boundary dispute between communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers State.
February 21, 2000	Sharia riots in Kaduna.
February 28, 2000	Religious riots in Aba, Abia State, reprisal killing from the Kaduna mayhem.
March 5, 2000	Epoch of Ife – Modakeke war of attrition. Osun state.
<b>Crisis Date</b>	<b>Crisis Place</b>
March 16, 2000	Renewed hostilities between the people of Eleme and Okirika in Rivers State.
March 28, 2000	Religious riots in Damboa, Borno State.
April 8, 2000	Communal clash in Ovia South Local Government area of Edo State.
May 18, 2000	Local farmers and Fulani cattle rearer’s clash in Saki, Oyo State.
June 5, 2000	Epoch of the Owo mayhem in Ondo State.
June 12, 2000	Communal clash in Isoko North Local Government area of Edo State.

June 23, 2000	Communal clash between the people of IkotOffiong and Oku-Iboku of Cross River State.
July 1, 2000	The commencement of communal clash at IkareAkoko, Ondo State.
July 21, 2000	Renewed hostilities between the Ijaws and Urhobos in Delta State.
August 12, 2000	Renewed hostilities between the Ijaws and Urhobos in Delta State.
August 12, 2000	Communal clash in Bendel Local Government area of Abia State.
August 22, 2000	Violent clash at Agboma community in Epe Local Government area of Lagos State.
October 16, 2000	Igbos and Hausa traders clashed at AlabaRago market area of Lagos State.
December 11, 2000	Renewed clashes between Ife and Modakeke, Osun State.
March 13, 2001	Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.
April 13, 2001	Religious riot in Kano State.
May 12, 2001	Communal clash between the Ijaws and Itsekiri of Delta State.
July 2, 2001	Communal clash between Odimodu and Ogulagba communities of Delta State.
July 12, 2000	Ethnic violence in Nassarawa State.
September 7, 2001	Religious clash in Jos, Plateau State.
September 16, 2001	Religious riot in Kano.
September 18, 2001	Religious riot in Benue State.
January 12, 2002	OoduaPeople's Congress clash at Owo, Ondo State.
February 2, 2002	OoduaPeople's Congress and Hausa people clashed at Idi-Araba, Lagos State.
February 26, 2002	Communal clash between Apprapum and Osatura communities of Cross Rivers State.
March 10, 2002	Egbirayouth's revolt on Local Government creation.
March 30-April 2, 2002	All Peoples Party Intra party clash at Ilorin, Kwara State.
August 31, 2002	Communal clash at Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State.
September 3, 2002	Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.



November 2002	21,	Religious riots in Kaduna State and Abuja.
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**Source: 2000 Annual report on the Human Rights Situation in Nigeria, Tell Magazine, September 24, 2001; The Nigerian Tribune September 19, 2001; The Punch, November 22, 2002.**

### **Politicization of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

“The pursuit of imperial superiority played a significant role in the demarcation of ethnic boundaries” (Ukiwo, 2005). According to Nnoli (1980), ethnicity is a social phenomenon shaped by interactions among representatives of different ethnic groups. Jinadu (2004:115) describes ethnicity as a social construct involving political parties, public intellectuals, scholars, military and public administrations, unions, etc., mobilising for competitive purposes. He posits that the political origin of ethnicity lies within the social relationship system of development in the region. Ethnic groups, as a social construct, are social groups distinguished by communal boundaries.

The introduction of the concept of ethnicity in Nigeria through colonialism contributed to reciprocal mistrust and acrimony due to its separation strategy. For instance, Attoh (2009) notes that in northern Nigeria, an official UK policy separated the Hausa-Fulani from their southern counterparts. While settlers and indigenous people initially coexisted peacefully in indigenous cities, this contradicted the official belief that interaction between African tribes was marked only by war. The strategy mandated migrants to settle in the Sabon-Gari region, while indigenous people remained in Tudun-Wada. However, resistance to this segregation strategy was evident in cities like Katsina and Gwandu, where Emirs resisted the establishment of Sabon-Gari.

The socialisation of Nigerians in this colonialist worldview resulted in the internalisation of such oppressive practices. Language or culture often served as crucial group elements, with language being a significant variable in Nigeria, as people sharing a language tended to be more connected. Ethnicity, in this context, assumes a conflictual nature concerning content. In a pluralistic democratic state like Nigeria, there are over 350 language groups. Race becomes the link between various ethnic groups within the political state, giving rise to contradictions stemming from competition for limited resources and marked by segregation in various aspects such as employment, accommodation, tertiary school admissions, scholarships, weddings, and welfare distribution. This situation is often accompanied by nepotism and corruption, leading to the frequent sacrifice of merit on the racial altar, intensifying rivalry over limited resources.

### **The Colonial/Post-Colonial State as a Trigger for Ethnicity**

The colonial urban environment in Nigeria served as the racial context within which ethnic groups developed a shared awareness. As a result, ethnicity emerged as both a colonial and post-colonial artifact. The proliferation of local organisations in the urban setting, particularly unions, led to intra-class and interpersonal socio-economic rivalry. Nnoli (1980) suggests that these unions, by accumulating wealth and highlighting the contradictions of peripheral capitalist society, became significant players. With the state’s inability to provide employment and resources, citizens increasingly valued these organisations as the only entities through which they could give meaning to their lives. Consequently, allegiance shifted from the state to these unions, deepening individual reliance on them.

This transition of allegiance was materially and emotionally compensated, further alienating individuals from the administration. Consequently, citizens and unions

aligned to compete for resources, escalating inter-ethnic rivalry and often leading to violence. The clashes widened the social gap between different ethnic groups, with each group attempting to secure the state's resources for its members, increasing social distance. Nnoli (1980) contends that the unions, through actions beyond their ethnic enclaves, demonstrated integrative efforts. However, this success also posed a threat to nationalistic awareness as ethnic groups became stronger and more united, hindering the creation of a collective identity.

Eyo Ita's warning in 1945 emphasised the need for coordination among ethnic unions to build a strong national consciousness and avert the dangers of parochial associations (Abbott, 2006). Economic clashes of interest eventually set the stage for the country's descent into ethnic politics. The inability of certain leaders to pursue their economic goals resulted in the emergence of ethnic politics. The actions of nationalist parties reflected their class and desires as they utilised government machinery to advance limited political objectives, often to the detriment of the majority. The power struggle was dominated by the pursuit of small-scale and comprador-bourgeois fortunes, leading to political regionalization and racial polarisation.

The colonialists, by promoting the politicisation of race, significantly influenced the political landscape. The Richards Constitution of 1946 contributed to the regionalization of the nation in politics and budgets, maintaining indirect control in the north, east, and west. The "Sabon-Gari" policy in the North further reinforced regional policies, preventing conflict between the North and the South. Crude oil played a pivotal role, influencing the perceptions of numerous citizens and facilitating the rise of organisations that sought to address the minority's complaints, particularly in the Niger Delta area.

### **Post-Civil War and Ethnicity**

In the post-liberation era, the prevailing theme has been ethnic competition, and despite attempts by various elites to downplay their divisions during colonial rule, contradictions have deepened. Salamone (1997) notes that ethnic elites, following liberation, began to promote exclusive interests to the detriment of other groups, resulting in unfair competition. This internal strife contributed to the demise of the first republic and, subsequently, the military coup of 1966, referred to by some as an Igbo coup. The aftermath was the July 1966 counter-coup, characterized by reprisal attacks against Igbo military officers and the tragic death of the then Head of State, General Aguiyi Ironsi (Ojo, & Fagbohun, 2014).

The events during this period triggered significant migrations, with Igbos relocating from the North to the East, leading to the declaration of the independent state of Biafra by the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, Lt. Col. Chukwu Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. In response, General Yakubu Gowon reorganized the country into a 12-state system to undermine Easterners' unity and uphold Nigeria's indivisibility. This strategic move proved effective, as minorities in the former East Region aligned with the Nigerian Army against Biafra (Ojo, & Fagbohun, 2014).

Following the conclusion of the 1970 civil war, General Gowon's government aimed at national reconciliation, asserting that "no victor was victorious, not defeated" (Soyombo & Attoh, 2009). Despite this official stance, sentiments of marginalization persist among the Igbos, evident in the fact that no Igbo individual had assumed the Presidency even 40 years after the civil war. Rather than fostering cooperation, the creation of states further fueled suspicions among ethnic groups, with demands for additional state development in 19 states and later in all 36 states. The prevailing assumption is that the war weakened the common bonds among different ethnic groups rather than strengthening them (Soyombo & Attoh, 2009).

## **Ethnicity and Power Struggle in Nigeria**

Ethnic and racial competition led to the emergence of politically aligned groups in Nigeria. By 1953, the three major political parties—Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba—were associated with the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon and the Action Party, aligning themselves with the primary race groups. This alignment reflected the regional elites' endeavours to establish distinct economic zones. These local elites propagated the misleading notion that political parties championed the interests of various ethnic groups, openly employing emotional ethnic markers and exploiting perceived ethnic tensions during elections. The power struggles among these elites exacerbated ethnic divisions and antagonisms.

Nnoli (1980) posited that one party sought to defend and promote the interests of ethnic nationalities by emphasising perceived conflicts of interest among different communities. The covert reason behind the use of racial propaganda in elections often stems from the transfer of national wealth to the leaders of each region, expanding their spheres of influence and diminishing opposition. An illustrative example is the 1962 state of emergency declaration in the AG-led Western region, a coalition of the National Council (NCNC/NPC). In contrast, the violent crisis in the same region in 1965 did not result in a state of emergency declaration because the ruling party was a coalition controlled by the NPC at the federal level (Mbah, 2014; Umotong, 2020a; Umotong, 2020b).

Despite the establishment of states, considerations of national unity took a back seat as various ethnic elites prioritised personal interests, allowing their economic and political domains to expand. This approach was driven by the perception among the majority of Nigerians that socio-economic benefits could only be secured if individuals from their own ethnic groups held positions in government. Government decisions on matters such as industry location, road construction, and public service awards were often viewed through an ethnic lens. The Federal Character Provision, enshrined in the Constitution and implemented by the Federal Character Commission, aimed to ensure proper representation of all ethnicities in civil service appointments. The constant evaluation of the effects of different ethnic communities by the “national guards” highlighted the ongoing ethno-religious tensions, largely fueled by mistrust and misunderstandings. An example is the recent ethno-religious conflict in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, triggered by the perception that the indigenous population felt threatened by the House of Fulani's desire for dominance. Similarly, the disagreement between the Tiv and Jukun communities was rooted in allegations of marginalisation on one side (Attoh & Soyombo, 2011).

## **ELITE MANIPULATION OF ETHNICITY**

Sumner (1959) posits that the competition for finite capital has the potential to incite interhuman tension. This conflict is further intensified by ethnic philosophers and ideologues who endorse ethnic theories and values, fueling interethnic prejudice and animosity. This socio-economic struggle also results in nepotism and its adverse societal implications. Sumner's thesis aligns with Antonio Gramsci's study on hegemony. Gramsci (2001) argued that the foundation for regulation lies in economic determinism. While economic infrastructure serves as the backdrop, Gramsci emphasised the significance of concepts and values. He conceptualised civilization as a superstructure, comprising political society and civil society.

Democratic society, which includes the state, churches, labour unions, mainstream media, and political parties, regulates the means of repression. Gramsci viewed the state in terms of the actions of the capitalist elite, emphasising that once the dominant class gains hegemony, it persuades people to adopt its political and moral

ideals. Hegemony is achieved by controlling the views of the people in democratic society, akin to Marx's concept of false awareness. Gramsci highlighted that successful governance involves maintaining control over the ideas and convictions of citizens. He argued that authority is derived not only from economic influence but also from control over citizens' ideas. The failure to create a monolith using a single philosophy allowed ethnic jingoists to propagate ethnic stereotypes and animosity. The quest for greater sovereignty in ethnic revolutions in Nigeria prompted elites to spread ethno-ideas and values to dominate the target class in their pursuit of the state's capital. In Nigeria, political parties contribute to racial divisions, manipulated by elites to win votes, contrary to Gramsci's view. The trend is to exacerbate racial tensions in crisis settings, accusing others of exclusion.

The 1993 presidential election, endorsed by Chief M. K. O. Abiola, galvanized the Yoruba people, leading to the formation of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC). The OPC became a forum for people to express their frustrations. The military establishment perceived the June 12th election as racial oppression, and their inability to negotiate was viewed as indicative of ethno-nationalism. The decision to hand over control to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, was seen as a concession and an act of democratic unity amid ethnic manipulation attempts. The political crisis culminating in Dr. Goodluck Jonathan's presidency is noteworthy. Initially, minorities among the governing class were hesitant to support Jonathan's presidency due to their belief in the North's entitlement to two terms. However, when Niger Delta activists threatened unrest, the need doctrine was invoked to ensure Jonathan's acting chairmanship, consolidating the police force. The concept of federal character, the zoning formula embraced by the PDP, and other measures aim to achieve ethnic balance and prevent a sense of marginalisation in any part of the country.

### **Minority Rights in Nigeria**

The demographic composition of Nigeria is intricate, encompassing factors of race, religion, and language. The collection of data holds a crucial role in defining and guiding actions to address social inequality within communities. The Special Rapporteur notes a deficiency in Nigeria's capture and evaluation of racially, religiously, or linguistically disaggregated data. Civil society groups and the National Commission on Human Rights express disappointment over the lack of surveys since 2006, attributing it to a shortage of statistical evidence and inaccurate census records (Umotong, 2021). However, concerns have been raised about potential political misuse of sensitive data, leading to a reluctance to gather disaggregated information.

The highest legislative document in Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution, under Article 42(1), upholds the principles of fair treatment and non-discrimination, prohibiting discrimination based on community membership, race, place of birth, sex, faith, or political opinion (Bell, 2003). Article 14(3) introduces the 'federal concept of characters,' aiming to ensure fair representation in public appointments at the federal level, while Article 14(4) guarantees additional participation at the state and local levels for various groups (Izsák, 2014). Despite these constitutional provisions, concerns persist that the federal character principle is not effectively applied, as it primarily emphasises federal political participation without considering other factors such as racial communities (Izsák, 2014).

The Committee on Federalism, an autonomous entity with 37 commissioners, is constitutionally mandated to enforce the federal character concept, overseeing proportional involvement in governmental positions (Mustapha, 2009). Additionally, the National Human Rights Commission, established in 1995 and updated in 2010, functions as an independent human rights surveillance agency, investigating complaints

and making recommendations to the Federal Government (Godwin et al., 2015). Nigeria, as a state party to major international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, emphasises the protection of minority groups (Mechlem, K. 2009). However, the imposition of liberal democracy and philosophy, derived from Western ideals, has proven impractical in many African cultures, leading to challenges in recognising and addressing minority rights (Appiagyei-Atua, K. 2008). The democratic model's emphasis on 'consumer democracy' to maintain political system efficiency rather than foster constructive growth partnerships has further strained its applicability in Africa (Appiagyei-Atua, K. 2008). Ethnic conflicts, exacerbated by attempts to implement Western-style democracy, highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of local realities (Sullivan et al., 2012; Umotong, 2014).

The link between respect for minority rights, peace, and progress is emphasised, with the assertion that curtailing minority rights compromises unity and hinders development (Sullivan et al., 2012). Instances, such as the situation in the Niger Delta, underscore the challenges in achieving development goals when minority rights are neglected (Obenade & Amangabara, 2014). A polycentric governance structure, recognising and empowering minorities, is proposed as an optimal alternative to address underdevelopment and injustice. The emphasis is not merely on aiding minorities but on providing them the space to contribute positively to both their communities and the broader global context.

## **SHARIA LAW AND MINORITIES IN NIGERIA**

The Sharia (teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Ulama (holy scholars), or Qijas are a religious philosophy centered on the Qur'an, or Islamic law (case law). These values are true in daily life to public and private behavior. Sharia may be seen as guidelines for the behavior and conflicts of a person or community of people within society. The Constitution of Nigeria allows for a state and federal Sharia Court of Appeal, but these courts have exclusively Islamic personal and family law problems in their jurisdictions.

### **Offenses and Penalties under Sharia Law**

Sharia statutory law encompasses a range of offenses and corresponding punishments that have been extensively criticized by the international human rights movement. The ensuing descriptions delineate the crimes that have sparked significant contention within the context of the Zamfara State's interpretation of Sharia law, along with their associated penalties.

Article 150 of the Sharia penal code addresses the offence of alcohol consumption, prescribing corporal punishment and imprisonment for those found guilty of consuming alcohol in public or private settings. This provision exclusively applies to adherents of Islam, as the religion strictly prohibits alcohol consumption. The crime of adultery, if committed by an unmarried individual, attracts corporal punishment, while married offenders may face imprisonment or suicide, sanctioned by a hundred lashes. Article 129 addresses rape offences, punishing unmarried perpetrators with caning or suicide and married offenders with stoning or a hundred lashes, accompanied by imprisonment. Sections 130 and 133 stipulate analogous penalties for sodomy and incest offenses. Despite purportedly safeguarding Islamic faith values, these punishments have drawn severe criticism for their harshness, raising concerns about violations of the right to life and the potential for torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (Zarifis, 2002; Umotong, 2013).

Robbery and burglary offences are considered among the most severe crimes under Sharia law. Theft is penalised with right-hand amputation for the first offence, left-foot amputation for the second, right-hand amputation for the third, and right-foot amputation for the fourth. A fifth offence of robbery results in imprisonment. An original form of robotic punishment involves life imprisonment and the amputation of the right hand and left foot, along with property confiscation, if the crime is committed without causing death. The death penalty is introduced in cases where death results from robbery. These sanctions, due to their stark infringements on the right to life and the prohibition against cruel, unusual, or degrading punishment, face vehement opposition from international human rights advocates, such as Human Rights Watch. As noted by Zarifis (2002), these offenses are not inherently tied to an Islamic value framework and could be adequately addressed by the traditional law enforcement system.

### **Nigeria's International Human Rights Obligations**

Nigeria is party to a diverse array of international conventions on human rights, imposing an obligation on the country to safeguard and ensure the human rights of all its citizens within its jurisdiction. One such convention is the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), a component of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ICCPR). Additionally, Nigeria is a signatory to an Election Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, aimed at eliminating various forms of ethnic discrimination, and an accord focused on the eradication of discrimination against women.

According to Dörr and Schmalenbach (2011), Nigeria is bound by numerous foreign treaties, including the General Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities (Declaration of Minorities), all of which carry legal weight. The authors emphasise the legally binding nature of these treaties, underscoring Nigeria's commitment to upholding international human rights standards. Furthermore, in accordance with Article 14 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (Dörr & Schmalenbach, 2011; Umutong, 2011), a state party is obligated to adhere to its international commitments and is precluded from using domestic law as a justification for non-compliance once specific international treaties have been ratified. Therefore, it is the paramount duty of the Nigerian Federal State to ensure justice for human rights in Nigeria. Consequently, Nigeria's foreign human rights commitments cannot be invoked as a justification for failing to enforce domestically declared Sharia law.

### **Human Rights Implications of Sharia Law on Religious Minorities and Other Sectors**

The imposition of restrictions on the freedom of faith contradicts Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which specifically prohibits the infringement upon the rights of individuals belonging to religious minorities to engage with other members of their community in the exercise of their religious practices. Legislation based on Sharia law not only violates the freedom of religious communities to practice their faith but also subjects them to penalties for activities that are not permissible under Sharia law, thus constituting an offense. The declaration on minorities further reinforces the protection against religious persecution. It is essential to note that the current legal framework is not universally supported among Nigerian Muslims. In states where Sharia law is implemented, Muslims who prefer to be judged by a court operating under civil terms in accordance with the Nigerian penal code are precluded from this alternative (Dörr & Schmalenbach, 2011).

Sharia law extends its influence beyond matters of faith, regulating alcohol use, implementing gender-based discrimination in educational institutions, prescribing dress codes for women, and restricting the freedom of movement for women (Ignatius & Umotong, 2022). A significant concern arises from the actions of religious authorities who arbitrarily arrest both Muslims and non-Muslims for perceived violations of dress codes, particularly when travelling alone in taxis. Despite assertions that Sharia law applies only to Muslims, instances have been documented where it is enforced against non-Muslims, illustrating a discrepancy between theory and practice. Human Rights Watch highlights differences in the standards of proof, rights of challenge, and legal representation afforded to Muslims compared to non-Muslims within the Sharia legal system, revealing inherent bias against non-Muslims.

In summary, the expansion of Sharia criminal law to encompass both Muslims and non-Muslims constitutes a violation of the fundamental right to the free exercise of religion.

### **Implication of Sharia on the Fundamental Rights of Muslims and Non-Muslims Protection of the Right to Life**

The Sharia penal code permits the death penalty in cases of rape or adultery, especially when the individual involved is married (Peiffer, 2004). However, this form of punishment directly contradicts Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which upholds the right to life. Notably, Safiya Huseini faced a death sentence, including stoning, in a high-profile case involving alleged adultery. Ultimately, she was acquitted, citing legal considerations. Similarly, in March 2002, a woman from Katsina faced a death sentence by stoning after giving birth outside of marriage. In instances involving rape or adultery within a marital context, the Sharia penal code permits the imposition of the death penalty (Peiffer, 2004). This form of punishment, however, contradicts Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which upholds the right to life. A notable case involves Safiya Huseini, who faced a death sentence, including stoning, for alleged adultery. Ultimately, she was acquitted, citing legal considerations. Another instance involved the condemnation to death by stoning of a woman from Katsina in March 2002 for giving birth outside of marriage.

The UN Committee on Human Rights interprets the ICCPR as allowing the death penalty solely for intentional crimes with lethal or extremely severe consequences. It emphasises that if a state party employs the death penalty, it should be reserved for the most serious offences and administered to cause the least possible physical and emotional harm. The Committee asserts that in exceptional circumstances, states should not revert to the death penalty, and for offences not meeting specific criteria, they are obligated to abolish the death penalty (Peiffer, 2004). International human rights law generally guarantees the right to life. Consequently, the imposition of the death penalty for rape and adultery presents two challenges: it constitutes an unjust penalty for offences that do not qualify as the 'worst crimes' according to the ICCPR, and it does not align with the principle of inflicting the least possible physical and mental suffering in the implementation of the death penalty.

### **The Right to be Free from Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment**

Corporal judicial punishments sanctioned by the Sharia Penal Code are considered forms of ornate, cruel, or humiliating treatment, raising concerns under Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These penalties include flagging and amputation for offences such as stealing, substance injection, assault,

adultery, and abuse. The specific application of stoning as a method of execution under Sharia law is viewed as constituting barbaric and unusual punishment, leading to prolonged physical and emotional suffering for the individuals involved.

Despite the defences outlined in Nigeria's international human rights treaties, instances reported by Amnesty International reveal Sharia Court orders for amputations in cases of stealing and robbery, as well as public floggings for offences like drug use, gambling, or holding women behind motorcycle taxis. For example, in Katsina, the Sharia Court sentenced Ahmed Tijjani, accused of partially blinding a companion in a dispute, to lose his left eye. Such severe sanctions have prompted some individuals following Sharia law to renounce Islam due to internal opposition among Muslims arising from the implementation of penal laws associated with Sharia.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture has indicated that the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, as outlined in the Convention Against Torture (CAT), to which Nigeria has been a party since June 2001, may not be applicable to corporal punishment. The UN Committee on Human Rights has also noted that severe corporal punishment falls under the scope of Article 7, which prohibits barbaric, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Consequently, the language in international human rights treaties, to which Nigeria is bound, does not adequately ensure the protection of Nigerians' right to be free from barbaric, cruel, or degrading treatment through corporal punishment as established by the criminal code of Sharia law (Weissbrodt & Heilman, 2011).

### **The Right to Freedom of Religion**

Sharia law mandates Muslims to observe religious freedom, a right protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and minority rights declarations. Religious freedom, as outlined in Article 18 of the ICCPR, entails the liberty of individuals to adhere to a religion of their choice and the right to practice that faith individually or collectively. The only permissible limitations are those prescribed by law and necessary for maintaining peace, justice, safety, and the values of all citizens.

In line with the United Nations Human Rights Committee's General Comment 22, which elucidates the scope of Article 18, this provision extensively encompasses individuals professing a religion and their right not to practice any religion. It also provides protection for religious minorities that may face hostility from the majority religious community. Additionally, any restrictions on this right must be proportionate to a specific need and should not be arbitrary or discriminatory. Importantly, the existence of a state religion should not impinge upon other rights under the ICCPR and should not discriminate against adherents of other faiths (Weissbrodt & Heilman, 2011; Umotong, I., & Udofia, 2021).

### **Conflict of Rights under International Law**

Addressing the intersection of Sharia law and international human rights standards necessitates the recognition of a dispute within the realm of protected human rights. The implementation of Sharia penal law by Nigerian states is acknowledged under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); however, it poses a challenge to the right of religious minorities to practice their faith, as guaranteed by Article 27 of the ICCPR (Pejic, 1997). This presents a tension between ensuring religious equality and safeguarding minority rights in Nigeria, where the application of Sharia law by non-Muslims infringes upon their freedom to follow their own faith and live within society. General Comment 22 underscores that freedom of religion is permissible as long as it does not violate any human rights protected by the ICCPR (Zarifis, 2002).



The implementation of criminal Sharia law in Nigeria raises questions about its conformity with the country's international human rights commitments. While a state is not precluded from adopting an official religion, it must not encroach upon the freedom of individuals to observe or profess any faith. This clause, particularly emphasised in the ICCPR, is crucial, given that non-Muslims and certain Muslims may be subject to trial by a criminal court rather than a Sharia court in Nigeria. Consequently, individuals have the freedom not to be subject to a criminal Sharia court and the imposition of religious conduct, highlighting the complexity of navigating between Sharia law and international human rights standards.

### **Sharia Law and International Human Rights Instruments**

An analysis of textual materials indicates that Nigeria's diplomatic commitments to uphold human rights exhibit inconsistencies with the Sharia Penal Code and its enforcement. The introduction of Sharia criminal legislation poses a threat to the freedom of religious expression for minorities and jeopardises the rights of ethnic minorities and women to equitable participation within the community. In response to these concerns, the Presidential Review Committee proposed the retention of a moratorium on official faith and advocated for the preservation of religious freedom, as articulated in the 1999 constitutional provision establishing the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a secular state.

The proposal addressed the contemporary challenge of religious fervour in the region, attributing it to the manipulation of faith for political rather than theological reasons. It recommended that in a secular, multi-religious nation, subject to certain limitations, a stringent demarcation should be maintained between public affairs and individual religious beliefs and practices. The Committee explicitly emphasised the need for careful consideration of the rights to worship and the potential infringement of fundamental freedoms under religious dictatorship to prevent adverse consequences.

### **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MINORITIES IN NIGERIA**

Civil society organisations, community members, civic movements, and religious leaders consistently highlight the critical importance of effective governance and equitable political engagement in achieving social and political cohesion and addressing Nigeria's current socioeconomic challenges. One commentator noted that addressing suffering and inequality could potentially reduce the emphasis on ethnicity and faith among Nigerians. Numerous NGOs have documented systematic corruption at the municipal, state, and federal levels, decrying the lack of fiscal transparency that hinders effective oversight and accountability for political actors. A prevailing argument suggests that substantial petroleum profits, constituting a significant portion of the national wealth, do not sufficiently benefit society. Côte d'Ivoire recommended the enhancement of anti-corruption laws in Nigeria in its December 2013 study submitted to the Universal Periodic Review Working Group, a recommendation endorsed by Nigeria.

The government affirms that the Constitution provides for equitable political representation opportunities. The Federal Character Commission plays a crucial role in implementing the concept of federal character and ensuring fair state participation in federal agencies and administrations. This principle can be traced back to the pre-independence quota system in the recruitment of the Nigerian military to prevent any single party from constituting a majority in the army. During a meeting in Abuja, the Special Rapporteur engaged with representatives of the Commission on Federal Character, who briefed her on the commission's efforts to promote regional balance in public representation. This includes the development of guidelines for the distribution of

public positions, with a provision specifying that indigenous people in any state should not be less than 2.5% nor more than 3% of the total available positions (Abbott, 1996).

It is also asserted that effective governance and inclusive democratic engagement are central to achieving social and political peace and addressing Nigeria's contemporary socio-economic challenges. This sentiment is echoed by representatives of civil society, community members, youth groups, and religious leaders. There is a common understanding that addressing hardship and inequality could potentially diminish the emphasis on ethnicity and faith among Nigerians.

Multiple NGOs have confirmed the prevalence of corruption at the provincial, state, and federal levels, condemning the lack of budgetary integrity that complicates the oversight of political actors. A general consensus exists that petroleum income, which forms the majority of national wealth, inadequately benefits broader society. Côte d'Ivoire's proposal to strengthen anti-corruption laws received support from Nigeria in its study submitted to the Universal Periodic Review Working Group in December 2013. In conclusion, the government emphasises the constitutional commitment to electoral inclusion and acknowledges the role of the Federal Character Commission in ensuring fair state participation in federal agencies and administrations. The Commission's efforts to promote regional equilibrium in public representation are outlined, including the development of guidelines to ensure proportional representation for indigenous people in any state.

### **Government Composition**

The enduring dynamics of conflicting differences significantly mould the lives and political perceptions of communities, profoundly influencing election policies and the composition of separate governments. Melson and Wolpe (1971) assert that ethnicity provides a suitable platform for democratic mobilisations amidst circumstances of scarcity, inequalities, and disparate access to economic and political services. This analysis is confined to the examination of federal political patterns, as complexities at the state and local levels are considerable.

At the federal level, the correlation between race and party formation trends is noteworthy. Regionalism in 1951 led to the emergence of parties closely tied to the major ethnic groups: the northern Congress (NPC), led by the Hausa-Fulani, the North American National Council (NCNC), dominated by the Igbo, and the western Action Party (AG), governed by the Yoruba. This configuration persisted until the 1990s, despite ongoing attempts by military regimes to 'nationalise' party processes. The resilience of this template is noteworthy. Furthermore, a connection exists between the broad ethnicity of the electorate and voting behaviour, with each major ethno-regional party prevailing in its territory. The introduction of geographical per capita representation in 1958 indicated that parliamentary seats were determined regionally, not solely based on overall votes cast between 1959 and 1966. This regional basis ensured a built-in Northern majority for both administrations up to 1966, establishing political-electoral inequality distinct from previously discussed discrimination indexes. The dominance of the North continued with a variety of government compositions, predominantly featuring northern Hausa-Fulani civil governments as senior partners and the preferences of East Igbos as junior partners.

Efforts to challenge the ethnic political mould began in 1967 with the division of the former four regions into 12 states. The formation of states and the push for equitable status in cabinet structures varied significantly from 1967 to 1979. Although the ethnic minority presence increased, the northern majority in the cabinet persisted from 1979 to 1983. Successive military coups further influenced the political landscape, leading to periods of personal domination under northern-led military regimes. The quantitative

composition of cabinets during specific periods reflected the demographic distribution of ethnic groups. The early 1960s and early 1980s were characterised by elevated periods of Hausa-Fulani dominance, particularly during the Balewa and Shagari years. Northern minorities performed better after 1967, while southern minorities have excelled since the same period, except during the Murtala dictatorship in 1975. Yoruba maintained proportionate representation, with exceptions during periods of opposition to the central government.

The Igbo ethnic group, however, experienced consistent underrepresentation, particularly during periods of Hausa-Fulani dominance. Despite fair representation for communities discriminated against in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Yoruba have been consistently well represented. The qualitative distribution of individual political powers, influenced by sponsorship and political knowledge, indicates an over-representation of Northern ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa-Fulani, in very significant portfolios. Conversely, southern ethnic groups, especially the Igbo and, to a lesser extent, the Yoruba, appear underrepresented in more significant portfolios and exaggerated in less relevant ones (Jibril, 1991).

### **Parliament**

The genesis of elective democracy in colonial Nigeria dates back to 1922, when four legislators were directly elected to represent three districts in Lagos, one of whom was chosen by the Legislative Council in Calabar. Until 1963, the government operated under a bicameral system comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives. During periods of military rule, parliamentary functions were absent. When civilian rule was reinstated in 1979, significant changes occurred. Firstly, the original four areas were subdivided into smaller states, as noted by Dudley (1981). Secondly, the adoption of a presidential style akin to American presidentialism laid the groundwork for the current constitution, resulting in enhanced powers for the Senate post-1979. The concept of equity among regions persisted in the Senate, where the population of each state determined its representation in the House of Representatives. The military resumed control in 1983, and civilian authority was restored in 1999 (Osaghae, 2018).

An analysis of representation reveals a marginal underrepresentation of the combined Hausa/Fulani group in the Senate but not in the House of Representatives, based on 1963 estimates. Northern minorities were disproportionately overrepresented in both houses of the National Assembly. While the Yoruba were equally represented in the Senate, some disparity existed in the House of Representatives. Southern minorities found appropriate representation in the Senate but faced underrepresentation in the Assembly. In both houses, the Igbos were underrepresented.

### **FEDERAL PUBLIC STRUCTURE**

The surge of nationalism in the 1940s imposed dual demands on the colonial government, namely political participation and access to senior government positions (Gboyega, 1989; Ishamali & Ibiang, 2023). The Nigerianization initiative was introduced to address these requirements. However, this ostensibly straightforward operational measure evolved into a complex political issue within the context of geographical education and technical inequalities (Nicolson, 1966). In 1948, the foundational principle of the strategy emphasised impartiality, advocating for the defence of the rights of the poor, with a specific emphasis on fostering Northern involvement. Administrative authority was envisioned as a meritocracy. Over the period of 1948 to 1952, the number of Nigerians in senior positions increased from 245 to 685, constituting only 19% of senior citizens in Nigeria (Gboyega, 1989).

Educational and technical disparities between Nigeria's northern and southern states inevitably influenced the composition of various bureaucracies. The Northern region, apprehensive of the potential dominance of Northern and Federal Services by southern interests, resisted the preferential recruitment of foreigners under the 'Nigerianization' strategy. The shift towards federalism necessitated a reevaluation of the civil sector by 1954. The Gorsuch Commission recommended 'a sound geographical quota' for the Federal Civil Service (FCS), asserting that the service should represent the entirety of Nigeria (Gboyega, 1989). However, by 1957, only 1 percent of FCS employees were from the North, and the numbers from the Senior Department were even lower (Osaghae, 1988:100). Between 1960 and 1965, more officials from the North joined the FCS than those from the East and West (Gboyega, 1989; Ishamali, 2023). Merit remained the primary criterion for appointments, though northern officials received certain advantages, such as preferential assignment of official housing.

By 1967, a significant proportion of board members in various government corporations and federal secretaries were northern diplomats, reflecting the heightened ethno-regional tensions surrounding federal staffing in the 1960s (Osaghae, 1988). The debate over whether 'Nigerianization' was the appropriate solution for Nigeria's future intensified. Although the FCS currently comprises individuals from the South, particularly the Yoruba and Igbo, there remains a notable influence from the North. The FCS exhibits overrepresentation from both the southern and north-central zones, while the north-west and northeast regions are underrepresented. Unlike Zambia, where specific ministries are allegedly dominated by certain ethnic groups, no particular ministry in Nigeria can be definitively associated with a particular ethnic community (Dresang, 1974). In the realms of the Directorate and technocracy, however, consistent disparities persist between population demographics and bureaucratic and technocratic representation.

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, Nigeria's political landscape has undergone substantial expansion through various channels, yet it remains shrouded in mystery. While global democratic winds have purportedly influenced federalism worldwide, Nigeria experiences prevailing authoritarianism. This work contends that despite global challenges, federalism remains a vital aspect of Nigeria's political structure, albeit in a challenging and unresponsive environment.

The practice of federalism in Nigerian states has been marked by pervasive flaws, particularly in the undue marginalization of minority groups. This work explores the relevance of adopting a genuine federal system to address recurring minority unrest and party inequality in Nigeria. It acknowledges the potential utility of true federalism but recognises the need for a comprehensive and multifaceted solution to effectively implement and resolve turmoil. The transition from military rule to democracy in 1999 intensified conflicts within Nigeria's federal structure. Despite democratisation efforts and anti-corruption measures, territorial politics remain dominant, especially in favour of northern interests. The current state of Nigerian federalism is analysed, highlighting authoritarian tendencies at the federal level, horizontal and vertical disparities, and the absence of institutionalised power-sharing. To address these challenges, the work proposes amendments to federal allocation policies under the Nigerian Constitution, promoting resource ownership by all states. The lack of institutionalised intergovernmental power-sharing remains a significant obstacle to policy consensus, contributing to racial divisions. The ongoing northern dominance in the federal government exacerbates maximalist demands and undermines negotiations, while the aspirations of the South and minorities are sidelined.

The work concludes that genuine federalism, aligned with constitutional principles, demands persistent efforts to overcome the multi-ethnic and cultural complexities. Emphasising the need for reforms, it warns that the existing disjunction among national, social, financial, and policy interests, coupled with an unregulated constitutional structure, poses a threat to Nigeria's politics and democracy. The work also addresses the impact of Nigeria's monocultural economy centred on oil, attributing minority unrest to resource management politics. It highlights the importance of recognising the interests of smaller groups within the federal framework, emphasising the detrimental consequences of violence on Nigeria's image, security, and economic well-being.

In summary, the work calls for a genuine commitment to reform Nigeria's federal structure, advocating for a de jure transfer of authority, resource ownership, and institutionalised power-sharing to foster unity and progress within a democratic framework.

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