



THE VIABILITY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND ISSUES OF ETHNIC POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Numerous political, ethnic, and economic crises have plagued Nigeria as a whole. This is due to Nigerian ethnic politics and political institutions are having difficulties. This has led to ethnic divisions in the country, creating inequalities among its citizens. Due to unequal resource allocation across the country, these differences have led to rivalries. The dominance of one ethnic group over another in terms of leadership and governance is intimidating and difficult. And as a result, there is now mistrust and animosity among people. As a result, the



high number of ethnic groups holding important positions in Nigeria exacerbates the ethnic political issues. Injustice, imbalance, ethnic sentiments, and intolerance were all brought about by this ethnic politics. This study uses an analytical approach. It employs methods of critical analysis to analyze the challenges facing political institutions and concerns of ethnic politics in Nigeria. The issues of ethnic politics in Nigeria is more appealing when seen against the many occasions of injustice and unjust treatments suffered by the bulk of disadvantaged and vulnerable ethnic groups in the Nigerian society. Creating a social-political structure that can guarantee social justice in society and political stability among the political institutions is the biggest challenge Nigeria and Nigerians face. Therefore, in order to address the difficulties that Nigerian political institutions and ethnic politics face, this article utilizes John Rawls' overlapping consensus.

Keywords: Nigeria, Ethnic Politics, Rawls, Overlapping Consensus

Introduction

The ongoing debate in modern normative philosophy over what principles would be necessary to accept a nation's strong ethnic diversity lies at the heart of this argument. For there to be justice in the political community, each social benefit must be valued for what it means. Each ethnic group would have a unique conception of social goods, according to Michael Walzer's idea of internal autonomy for cultural groupings. According to a different idea linked to Charles Taylor, identity is shaped by acceptance of others, and the call for equal opportunity necessitates a liberal social model where people from different cultural backgrounds are viewed as equal partners. This necessitates some sort of federal arrangement and the official recognition of groupings as equal political participants. Will Kymlicka theory, which holds that cultural affiliation serves as the foundation for fulfilling life decisions that liberalism values. It sees minority cultures as threatened and the liberal state's political structures as reflecting the majority culture. If everyone must make decisions in life, then the liberal state must guarantee minorities' access to their culture. This is institutionalized through minority veto rights, special representation, and federal subunits. One of the main ideas in the theories is that if institutions in a multiethnic nation represent the different cultures of its citizens, then ethnic groups are treated equally in the political sphere. Numerous arguments are made in support of this central idea. The group is the unit of analysis in all of this.

In constitutional design, the latter is acknowledged and framed as a pertinent moral unit. However, Nigeria's history demonstrates that when political arrangements are designed around ethnic groups, the growth of those groups causes the arrangements to become unstable. This issue was brought to light in 1958 when the Nigerian Minorities Commission used it as an excuse for not granting certain minority ethnic groups' requests for recognition and inclusion in distinct political entities. However, in order to prevent the country's impending collapse, recognition had to be given in the 1960s. New ethnic groups with fresh political demands emerged as a result of the internal political boundaries surrounding ethnic groups being redrawn in the 1960s. A federal character plan that was created in the middle of the 1970s encouraged the growth of ethnic groups with new demands. After a savage civil war in the late 1960s, ethnicity was ultimately enshrined in law as a basis to guarantee fair access to resources and power. State formation, cabinet nominations, political party formation, and the selection of government parastatals, universities, and the civil service have all been done using this method for decades.



Additionally, during times of civil rule, it served as the foundation for legislative representation. It has since been updated to guarantee that the president's and governors' offices be alternated between national and state groups, respectively.

In the Nigerian situation where internal boundaries have been defined over and over to take account of ethnic difference, rights to natural resources have been vested under the sovereign body with the central government functioning as its agents. The system created for political domination by elites from a few ethnic regions of the country and also made for unequal distribution of public and social resources. Following the civil war, the federal government decided to declare state ownership of natural resources in order to eliminate the unequal distribution of goods and distribute the financial gains among the nation's ethnic groups. Long-term political stability and the public's perception of the state's impartiality and objectivity were thought to depend on the equitable distribution of income generated by national resources. In the 1970s, the federal character policy focused on distributing governmental offices and national resources in a proportionate manner. Though theoretical justifications for ethnic groups' rights to utilize the resources on their territory may seem plausible, the Nigerian example demonstrates how these rights undermine equity and lead to complaints from less affluent ethno regional groups. Furthermore, the claims to oil wealth made by ethnic groups such as the Ogoni, Ijaw, and others in the Niger Delta do demonstrate that granting rights to resources to ethno-cultural groups would set a precedent for all other ethnic communities in the country to exercise similar rights regarding their land. For instance, the suggestion that federalism is the best arrangement for accommodating ethnic groups could result in an endless number of demands for and fragmentation of internal political units, and the suggestion that one should have different citizenship rights could elevate ethnic membership above legal state membership as the criterion for citizenship identification.

This may result in restrictions on citizens' freedom and officially sanctioned discrimination against them. This essay's main argument is that the nation's multiethnic groups cause conflicts between the demand for ethnic diversity to be expressed and political stability. What Nigeria as a country and the various ethnic groups' needs is John Rawls Theory of Justice? The ethnic tensions would have to be bridged in order for the theory to acquire national validity. The practicality and positive outcomes of this theory, among other methods for comprehending the phenomenon of the ethnic political crises in Nigeria, make it essential to the study. Rawls' theory of justice has mostly been developed through an examination of his book "A theory of justice and political liberalism," but it has also been influenced by the assessments of other academics. His theory of justice is only meant for a "well-ordered society," according to John Rawls (1971). According to Rawls, "the significance of this special case is obvious and needs no explanation." He believed that the application of theory may enable exceptional cases of conceiving justice in society. It is reasonable to assume that once we have a solid theory for this case, the other justice-related issues will become easier to handle. Rawls (1971:7). John Rawls aims to create the prerequisites for what he refers to as a well-ordered society in his theory. Rawls develops a case for political justice as the norm that will provide society with long-term stability in order to achieve this aim. John Rawls argues that the institutions of governance are only just when those structures are agreed upon as reasonable for all, and not governed by what he calls a comprehensive philosophy.

When one doctrine rules a country, excessive force will be used to coerce other doctrines to adopt the preferred one. According to Rawls, this system is unfair and thus unsustainable in



the long run. In contrast, Rawls envisions a government that strives for a unified model in which no one all-encompassing theory can govern. This will be achieved by upholding a set of just values that have been agreed upon and established as the fundamental framework of government. A society where a variety of values may coexist may exist in this fashion. Even in situations where there are numerous conflicting comprehensive doctrines, John Rawls contends that a pluralist society is built on a political system founded on this notion of justice and political equality. Therefore, it is appropriate to use Rawls' theory of justice and his concept of "overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive to foster political stability, national unity, and harmonious relationship among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria" in order to address the problems political institutions and ethnic politics in Nigeria face.

Crises of Ethnicity and Nigeria Politics: An Overview

Since the inception of the nation, Nigeria's government has faced numerous difficulties, the majority of which are the result of ethnic politics and sentiments. A constant challenge to the democratic process, the maintenance of peaceful coexistence, unity, and political stability is the ethnic groups' unrelenting competition for political positions with the goal of dominating the nation's economic wealth and other resources. The question of preserving social cohesion and political stability is brought up by political institutions' inability to agree on a common understanding of social justice. How can political stability and unity be preserved in a society made up of numerous, sometimes contradictory, comprehensive viewpoints?

Regarding the concept of overlapping consensus, Rawls attempts to develop a practical formula for the equitable allocation of individual liberties and rights, as well as the process for allocating socioeconomic benefits that will encompass things like money, health, education, and other political rights. Four distinct constitutional frameworks have been adopted at various points in history. The first, which lasted from the 1940s until the Willink Commission in 1957–1958, was the outcome of several discussions in Britain and Nigeria. By dividing the nation into three political regions and establishing constitutional provisions for a federal system, it recognized the Hausa/Fulani of the North, the Igbo of the East, and the Yoruba of the West. However, it denied recognition to a number of other smaller ethnic groups, despite their stated concerns about dominance. From the early 1960s to 1969, a second framework focused more on ethnic differences. To accommodate smaller ethnic groups that had previously been excluded due to the circumstances of the Biafra civil war, it reorganized the nation into twelve states and instituted a quota system for appointments to national bodies. Another strategy was developed following the Civil War as a result of fresh constitutional discussions and government investigations. Adopting a "federal character" technique was the third method, which was used from the middle of the 1970s until the beginning of the 1980s. It had two components: the first was a further partition of the nation into more states in order to accommodate ethnic relations (without specifically recognizing ethnic recognition as the goal of the creation of additional states). The second was the requirement that national associations' compositions represent the federation's member states, which were thought to be equivalent to ethnicity, and that elections for the highest state positions are decided by a plurality of votes.

Another round of discussions and talks began in the middle of the 1980s and has persisted to this day. The fourth strategy that resulted from it was essentially an update of the 1970s "federal character" plan. To better reflect ethnicity, the modification entailed further dividing



the nation into multiple states and local government entities. It also included an agreement on rotating the highest state positions across ethnic regions and on proportionate representation of parties (presumed to reflect ethno-regional interest) in the executive cabinet. However, it appeared that the continuation of military authority had jeopardized these advancements. A philosophical examination of Nigeria's political institutions and ethnic politics reveals a history of political instability and flexible constitutional approaches to dealing with ethnic diversity. In Nigeria today, there is fierce competition between numerous ethnic groups over matters like the formula for resource sharing and authority. The concerns listed above have been the subject of unsuccessful attempts by successive governments to find solutions.

Social Justice and the Problem of Ethnic Relations in Nigeria

Political connections and the local opinions of the many ethnic groups in Nigeria would inevitably lead to ethnic conflicts, thus the government and political leaders should take the lead in regulating the relationships between the various ethnic groups. To maintain the sovereignty of the Nigerian states and to guarantee that all ethnic groups coexist peacefully inside a single sovereign political entity, this function must be carried out. For Nigeria to achieve social justice and reduce ethnic relations conflicts, the government must diligently make sure that procedural governance concerns are developed and used in a fair and prudent manner. Equal treatment should be given to all ethnic groups when it comes to matters like income distribution, the establishment of new states, nominations to the federal government, and access to national institutions and other resources, all of which the federal government is required by the constitution to distribute. This call into question how programs that tend to encourage prejudice and nepotism, such as federal character, operate. Resource allocation is arguably the most contentious topic. Every ethnic community in Nigeria should receive an equal share of resources. This will guarantee that such resources are accessible for policies and programs that will enable all ethnic groups to realize their potential and be able to support economic growth. Ethnic groups are currently negotiating and requesting government services and favors by using their politicized ethnicity as a tactic. This is because, to the detriment of less well-connected ethnic groups, meritocracy has been undermined and ethnic groups can only obtain government services through discrimination and nepotism. Here, national resources refer to the standards by which revenue is distributed; the issue is how to maintain fiscal federalism policy in a federation such as Nigeria while guaranteeing justice and fairness. We will now look at a few strategies for resolving ethnic group inequalities and guaranteeing social fairness.

Provision for Equality of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity and a level playing field where all ethnic groups can achieve and realize their potential are crucial for eradicating further socioeconomic class stratification in Nigerian society. In terms of education, training, and other resources that could result in additional empowerment or the formation of a special class that will rule over ethnic groups and utilize public resources for their own personal advancement, no special treatment or concession should be given. The recruitment of public officials and the training provided to them must also be considered when considering the development of opportunities. This has to do with the current environment and rules for hiring public servants and looking for work in the private sector.

Regardless of social background or ethnicity, every person should be aware of the same standards and criteria for potential candidates. Public education standards should be able to



give ethnic groups that are unable to receive private education the skills they need to compete for both public and private jobs. According to Barry (1973), "equal" does not necessarily indicate "identical," but rather "equivalent ability" for achieving the intended purpose. Equal distribution is necessary for social fairness, unless inequality results from a scenario where ethnic groups have equal opportunities and then choose to become unequal. Eradicating historical or starting inequities is necessary to provide equality of opportunity. A prior privileged status or position that is passed down from one generation to the next may be the cause of inequality. Depending on the magnitude of the historical disparities, such inequality frequently results in cumulative benefits and drawbacks. Social justice in these situations must guarantee that equality of opportunity is attained by redressing historical injustice through distributive justice. A primary goal in achieving social justice is redressing historical injustice.

Ethnic Diversity and Tolerance

The goal of the Nigerian state was to create a unified nation that valued the diversity of the various ethnic groups that comprised the nation while also promoting tolerance for the opinions of smaller ethnic groups. Provisions pertaining to citizenship and fundamental human rights help to accomplish this goal. Under the Directive Principle and State Policy, it is translated in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as modified). Promoting reciprocal responsibilities between the state and its residents as well as the national political goal of creating a free and united society for all Nigerians are the two goals to be accomplished. Creating new states from existing states, according to some scholars, will encourage ethnic diversity and tolerance by creating a territorial entity for ethnic groups of similar and identical ethnic origin (Suberu, 2000:276). We disagree with this interpretation since the ability of ethnic groups to live in harmony with one another is crucial. Additionally, historical data shows that other attempts to create states—such as those in 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991, and 1996—have not succeeded in settling rivalries and ethnic tensions. Moreover, neither political nor economic justifications exist for the creation of additional states in Nigeria. Nigeria's population cannot be ascertained through a legitimate census for the purposes of analyzing its fiscal and economic development; the regimes of General Gowon, Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo, Buhari, Babaginda, and Abacha all created states to appease the sectional and cabal interests of the political elites, rather than to promote grassroots development. Historically, states have been established for political reasons rather than to promote economic development or encourage citizen engagement in government. This will only lead to further bureaucracy; it will not facilitate local infrastructure development or economic expansions (Alapiki, 2005:49).

State formation was sometimes also meant to quell ethnic rivalries and hostility among several ethnic groups that were grouped together in one area for political reasons, but the federal government's creation of states for southern Nigeria was always a political tactic in response to demands from political actors, and such a call for the creation of additional states unintentionally exacerbates the representation and equity issues in the North-South divide. Northern Nigeria often receives additional states without a clear population census to support the claim that the population there is larger. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Nigerian state in terms of the need to ensure the welfare of the ethnic communities. Nigeria lacks a firmly established political ideology, so the government is in a unique position because it has access to national resources and can allocate them in line with a stated political ideology. This often leads to crises that are planned by clans and ethnic groups. In



the pursuit of a social justice agenda, this article adopts the position that applying John Rawls' overlapping consensus can increase the government's relevance to ethnic groups that have ceded their constituent power to the government in the exercise of their political power as the source of sovereignty.

John Rawls' Overlapping Consensus and Issues of Ethnic Politics in Nigeria:

Since unequal distributive shares are the primary cause of Nigeria's ethnic politics, ethnic relationship crises, political instability, and lack of unity and cooperation, the study and application of John Rawls' overlapping consensus has become highly relevant in the country. Rawls' overlapping agreement is frequently criticized for being pointless. However, Rawls' significant impact on political theory is undeniable, even among his critics. We will talk about how John Rawls' overlapping consensus might be applied to Nigerian society and beyond. Given the historical context, Nigerian society is ethnically divided and culturally diverse. John Rawls' overlapping consensus is the only thing that can prevent a small number of ethnic groups from controlling other ethnic groups. Emphasizing the need for John Rawls' overlapping consensus, it is crucial to remember that crises arise when certain ethnic groups suspect—or have proven—that the state has denied them social advantages, privileges, or entitlements. When this is seen in society, ethnic crises occur. We can't deny that until all ethnic groups consistently apply a political idea of justice, a multiethnic society like Nigeria will unavoidably be unjust.

A more significant query, however, is how this shift will be accomplished if it turns out that only a small number of ethnic groups require protection beyond the bounds of justice. Is the loss of life and property a sign of violence? How can we strike a balance between the measures we should use and the desire to achieve our goals? When the remedy is just as awful as the disease, or when the cause is just as evil as the outcome, how can we avoid the paradoxes that result? Etuk states in *God, Justice and Minority Groups in Nation Building* that "a nation that wishes to forge ahead and attain economic progress can ill-afford...the display of anger and hostility; because in the task of nation building, the goodwill of every citizen should be held at a high premium" (Etuk, 1992:103). Rawls' position on the marriage of politics and morality is a significant contribution to the main issue of socio-political philosophy, which is the possibility of justice in a political society. Though many thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, and others, have been deeply involved in trying to explain the reasoning behind the use of immoral and unjust methods to resolve social issues, Rawls is the one who has made it abundantly evident that any compelling political argument must be grounded in morality. Rawls has been able to distinguish himself as a fervent supporter of the liberal democrat. Omoregbe has stated that:

Rawls' social justice is one which, tries to take callousness, heartlessness and indifference to the plight of the poor, out of capitalism and thereby make it more morally acceptable. Its premise is that there is inequality in society and, in this circumstance, the most moral cause of action is not to do anything that will worsen the already bad condition of the poor. Indeed no action, no social arrangement or change should be allowed to take place unless it is going to improve the lot of the poor (Omoregbe, 1991:152).

Rawls has adequately demonstrated that it is morally acceptable for society to redistribute social goods for the benefit of everyone, without necessarily abusing the process or



permitting it to become a flagrant infringement on the rights of a select few. Furthermore, as the concept embodied in the redistribution will be transformed into firm moral obligations like generosity and liberality, Rawls has demonstrated that it has inherent worth for the entire society. The application of Rawls' overlapping consensus is more likely to succeed in modern Nigerian culture. There will be huge advantages. For example, it is reasonable to assume that his overlapping consensus may provide a long-term solution to Nigeria's ethnic relations problems. Therefore, Rawls' theory has given the world- and Nigeria in particular—the tools it needs to prevent the occurrence of boundary conflicts, power and resource struggles, government insincerity and unfairness, and ethnic intolerance.

Rawls' overlapping consensus can help salvage ethnic feelings that have been fueled by self-serving political objectives for a long time. Improving Nigeria's democratic organization has long been the country's biggest sociopolitical problem. Nigerian politics have always been in chaos due of the obduracy and pervasiveness of its politicians. And maintaining democracy in Nigeria is one of its issues, not its establishment. Political history in Nigeria after independence, for instance, has demonstrated that democracy cannot thrive there unless Nigerians are prepared and willing to adhere to specific approved standards and principles. Thus, the necessity of correctly applying Rawls' political theory is now more important than ever. Rawls suggests the overlapping consensus of plausible comprehensive doctrines as a solution to the issues facing contemporary liberal nations. This consensus is a term used to describe society's shared conception of the good and the processes by which the communal good is implemented, maintained, and safeguarded. According to Rawls, “in a consensus, the reasonable doctrines endorse the political conception, each from its own point of view. Social unity is based on a consensus about the political conception; and stability is possible” (Rawls. 1993:134).

As the principles of justice are dictated by political liberalism's demands for stability, Rawls' overlapping consensus implies agreement that the political conception of justice is realized in the twin principles of liberty and equality, and citizens have a deliberative vehicle through which they reasonably can resolve disagreements about what those principles mean within their respective conceptions of the good.

Rawl's Social Justice and the Need for a Welfare System of Government in Nigeria

The necessity of reconstructing Nigerian society's political institutions and resolving the country's ethnic political issues and political institutions' viability highlights the core of Rawls' theory of justice, which prioritizes liberty and stresses equality and the well-being of the underprivileged. This emphasis on Rawls' first principle can be interpreted as his close and unbreakable ties to the liberal school. In the context of Nigeria, the two principles would govern some of the most controversial topics, such as the allocation of rights, responsibilities, privileges, etc., and they would only apply to the fundamental framework of Nigerian society. Liberty emphasizes the importance of the inviolability of individual members of society without exception. The liberties necessary for the proper governance of society cut across moral, philosophical, and political (the right to vote and hold public office) and promote such fundamentals as freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience, and freedom of thought. The principles would also govern the distribution of social and economic advantages, but it is importantly important to state that these principles would have no meaning until Nigeria becomes a liberal society...In accordance with the idea of the rule of law, liberty also promotes individual freedom, including "freedom from psychological oppression and



physical assault and dismemberment (integrity of the person)," the inalienable right to possess personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure. The first principle states that all citizens should have the same rights (Rawls, 2001:53).

The ideal of liberty would also guarantee that, regardless of the economic, social, and political circumstances of the delegates to the national dialogue, the two principles—liberty, equality, and welfare—represent a meaningful option when taking into consideration the type of social-political structure for the nation, particularly when they are uncertain about the future. Because of this, it makes sense that the nation's ethnic groups would support the second principle, which calls for equitable opportunities. While social inequality serves the interests of the most disadvantaged, the second principle is strongly favored since it guarantees that Nigerians with comparable abilities and resources experience comparable circumstances. The second principle, which discusses inequality, is where the difference principle originates. This principle is a crucial and fundamental component of Rawls' overall beliefs, which partially dictate the welfare of the most disadvantaged members of society, despite its lower position in the lexical hierarchy. According to Rawls (1999:64), this principle states that "existing inequalities must effectively contribute to the benefit of the least advantaged; otherwise the inequalities are not permissible." However, how significant is the liberty principle in society?

In terms of lexical order, liberty is more significant than equality as Rawls ranks the first principle higher than the second. Is this what he's doing? Citizens' freedom, liberty, and individual rights are unquestionably universal and unassailable. Similar to Rawls' first principle, which emphasized the importance of liberty, Mill (1987) argued that no member of society or central authority should have the authority to restrict an individual's freedom because everyone is entitled to enjoy their private property as long as it is theirs. Does this imply that people can conduct without consequence if society has no authority whatsoever to intervene on any issue that affects an individual? Individual freedom must not come at the expense of another individual's freedom. A system of unrestricted rights and liberties may backfire since freedom comes with obligations. Does the State have the right to step in now? It is now the responsibility of the state to apprehend offenders who violate the rights of members of the public.

Enforcing the obligations that improve the enjoyment of these liberties is another duty of the state. Beyond this, people in society are completely free to act in any way they see fit, comply with the law, and deal with the fallout. Since no member of society is given complete freedom without accountability, is it not appropriate for the State or other members to step in when someone does something that may not harm the interests of other members, as Mill would have us believe, but may cause harm to them personally? The liberty principle for Mill is that such intervention must be at the instigation of the individual and the individual must be the final judge:

Neither one person, nor any number of persons is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it. He is the person most interested in his own well-being; the interest which any other person except in cases of strong personal attachment can have in it is trifling, compared with that which he himself has; the interest which society has in him individually is (except as to his conduct to others) fractional and altogether indirect; while with respect to his own feelings and



circumstances, the most ordinary man or woman has means of knowledge immeasurably surpassing those that can be possessed by anyone else (Mill, 1987:133)

Based on Rawls, the fundamental institutions of society are tasked with regulating society, and part of that task will involve redistributing wealth to the less fortunate members of society. In response, Mill says that in order for societies to function smoothly, general rules that outline expectations should be established, but that an individual should be free to pursue personal interests. The principle applies to, for example, income and taxation, fiscal and economic policy; it does not apply to specific circumstances and conditions of transactions, but rather to the background against which these occur; crucially, the difference principle may be perceived as encouraging a lack of initiative as the rewards of labor may be redistributed. The goal of this principle is to provide guidance for the tinkering and adjustments of the system of entitlements and rewards along with the standards that this system uses in its operations.

Nigeria's situation is not how to arrive at the two principles, but rather how to develop a new system or social-political welfare structure based on these two principles. At the end of the agreements, these ethnic groups would fizzle out for the enthronement of individual liberties and rights established in accordance with the Rawlsian intentions. The idea is that in order for the least advantaged to be as well off as they can be, there must be some sort of redistribution of the rewards of the well off. Since the interests of all citizens are treated equally and ethnic group coverage is no longer required, this is probably acceptable. It's crucial to remember that the lack of a consensus on what justice is one of the things that hinder society's efforts to achieve it. Rawls (1971) promoted the idea of a well-ordered society because of this. This indicates that a society is governed by a public conception of justice that is known and accepted by the people at a certain point in their history. Therefore, it can be observed that the lack of this agreement in the polity is a contributing factor to the issues of political stability, unity, and ethnic relations crises among the various ethnic groups, including Nigeria. At the time of Amalgamation and the creation of Nigeria in 1914, there was a glaring lack of a public conception of justice. Additionally, it was evident that there was no theory, paradigm, or principle for the formation of the fundamental framework of Nigerian society at the time of its independence in 1960. I believe that these basic shortcomings are what led to the social justice issue in Nigerian society from the beginning. For these and other reasons, we believe that the liberal worldview is here to stay and that Nigeria cannot escape it. It places a strong emphasis on liberty, individual freedom, rights, and the necessity of constitutional democracy, free and fair elections, equality, welfare, and unrestricted access to societal institutions.

The Viability of Political Institutions and Issues of Ethnic Politics in Nigeria

Political institutions, which are organizations that create, enforce, and apply laws; mediate conflict; make government policy in the economy and social system; and otherwise provide representation for the citizens, have become a platform for personal enrichment and the promotion of ethnic interests. Ethnic crises over resource allocation have also been common in the political arena of most African countries, and Nigeria in particular, where ethnicity has been politicized to the extent that it can be used as a springboard for capturing political power (Alistair, 2012). Examples of political institutions include political parties, trade unions, and the courts. The term also refers to the established framework of rules and principles that



govern the aforementioned bodies, including concepts like the right to vote and be voted for, responsible, responsive, and accountable government. Political institutions are basically the rules of the game in political life and were created to solve certain socio-political and economic problems. Some of the general problems that political institutions might resolve are those related to collective action, delegation of power, etc. Given the dynamic nature of ethnicity in Nigeria, these conditions can be social, economic, and political, with political conditions supporting social and economic factors. In other words, the political instrument that measures the character of ethnic identities in the polity remains crucial for the social, economic, and political sustainability of a state. A polity must have functional political institutions free from manipulation by its political leaders in order to be sustainable.

Therefore, it is undeniable that a weak political institution continues to be harmful to a state's sociopolitical growth. In a multiethnic state, the survival of the political institutions free from ethnic politics is critical to the success of national integration. Even though the nation's adopted power-sharing principle is thought to have lessened ethnic crises, the political system is still weak when it allows political groups within the various ethnic groups to manipulate one another, leaving democratic institutions vulnerable to the major ethnic groups. It has an impact on how long the nation's sociopolitical and economic development can continue. We might be able to understand why ethnic crises have continued in Nigeria despite the use of various ethnic management strategies if we examine the democratic institutions in the country. This does not imply that these tactics are ineffective. The claim is that ethnic crises still exist, despite the fact that they are functioning comparatively. One could argue that the success of the democratic system in the industrialized world and, arguably, the political leaders' incapacity to reject colonial legacies lend support to the idea of and adoption of democratic rule following flag independence. The main justification for advanced states' adoption of this form of government (democratic governance), according to Kaur (2007), must have been that it was associated with development and was also seen as a means of achieving both individual and collective socio-political values. The system was allegedly adopted without taking into account the political and socioeconomic climate of these developed nations. Nigeria's political institutions, which should have given the nation leverage for socio-political development and political stability, have been struggling for these reasons.

A democracy is a political system that allows people to participate in elections and does not allow for ethnic relations problems. Instead, it guarantees that all ethnic groups are fully involved in the process of governance and decision-making. To put it another way, it should be viewed as a form of governance that is founded on the acceptance and application of the rule of law, especially when it comes to ensuring the rights of every individual without regard to their ethnic background, which in turn improves the socioeconomic sustainability of the nation. In other words, it facilitates the development of positive ethnic relations. This explains why Nigeria has used a variety of ethnic management tools, including the federal character concept, the adoption of multi-party democracy, the establishment of states, etc., to handle ethnic issues. Unfortunately, the system has not been able to function because to the country's complex social fabric, which is made up of over 250 ethnic groups.

This is because the many ethnic leaders, especially the larger ethnic groups, use this to gain ascendancy and exercise their hegemonic authority. The nation's recent wave of ethnic conflicts is the outcome of this. Of course, this has demonstrated that Nigeria has failed to create a robust and sustainable political structure that can effectively manage ethnic conflicts,



despite 64 years of political independence. The viability of a state's social-political institutions determines its level of development. One thing to keep in mind is that, as a result of the divide and conquer strategy, the Southerners advanced more quickly than the Northerners, especially in the field of Western education. The South was able to gain an advantage in the early stages of Nigeria's nationhood through Western education, while the North lagged behind, possibly due to the influence of doctrine and colonial government.

This was the reason behind the Northern protectorate's initial implementation of indirect rule, the stark socio-economic and political divide between the North and the South, and the nation's failure to develop a national agenda for socio-economic integration; instead, the country created a level playing field for ethnic conflicts and the problem of how to have a robust political institution that can ensure political stability. The aforementioned indicates that Nigerian political institutions have been undermined from the beginning, making it difficult for democratic institutions that ought to serve as a means of improving the lot of the country's many ethnic groups to flourish. This may be the reason why one can still cite Awolowo, one of the regional political titans, when he states that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression" (quoted in Diamond, 1989:26). Ethnicity flourishes in Nigerian politics at a time when the country needed a viable democratic environment.

This has demonstrated that Nigerian societies' constituent parts could not be properly integrated by the First Republic's political institutions. Following its independence, Nigeria has been constructing on this frail political institution (Oyediran and Agbaje, 1991). This explains why the Second Republic's adoption of a multi-party system was unable to reverse the tendency of ethnic politics, even after Nigeria was reorganized into 19 states in 1976. Nigeria's political structure is likewise devoid of a peaceful way to resolve conflicts. To create a fairer and more equitable society, the rules of the game are broken. Furthermore, there is a practical lack of elements of a result-oriented democratic state, including accountability, responsibility, responsiveness, tolerance of opposition, respect for the constitution, human rights, and the rule of law. This has undoubtedly posed a significant threat to justice, peace, and the long-term viability of sociopolitical and economic development.

The nation's leadership has been unable to adequately address national integration due to the competition for political power, which is aimed at managing public money. Thus, there will inevitably be peaceful coexistence of the ethnic groups if each is adequately represented and the dynamic integrative approach of socio-economic and political institutions is used. This generally leads to political stability and growth.

Conclusion

Given that there are no political institutions that guarantee how political power is accessed and an equitable agreed principle for the distribution of resources is desperately needed, the country's social-political history demonstrates a bitter and tense struggle for political power at the center, primarily for the control of the national wealth. Additionally, there was a glaring lack of any theory, paradigm, or principle for the development of the basic structure of Nigerian society, which led to the deprivation of the social and political fabrics of Nigerian society from the beginning. Thus, what is at play today is a kind of authority driven by a unitary government posing as federal. This unilateral action resulted in the bringing together



of ethnic groups that had serious mistrust of one another, as well as constant and unrelenting rivalry, unhealthy competition, and envy. The legacy of Nigerian society today is that of ethnic groups with different traditional, cultural belief systems, as well as different beliefs in justice and morality. It was done without an adequate and appropriate structure to harness and accommodate these differences.

The lack of a workable alternative system of moral and social norms has had a detrimental impact on ethnic beliefs in justice and morality. This type of government has existed in many incarnations as a military dictatorship. The nation's leaders' unwillingness to confront these socio-political issues in an honest and sincere manner, as well as the cumulative impact of prior failures. Nigeria has been shown to be endowed with a wealth of natural and human resources, yet these resources are often overlooked and lost due to the loss of life and property caused by ethnic conflicts. Unfortunately, our leaders, who were meant to deconstruct the situation, are now diverting resources, wealth, and power to themselves and their ethnic group members at the expense of those who do not share their ethnicity. Many resentful Nigerians who do not gain from or support these dishonest leaders have decided to create ethnic conflicts by upsetting the social structures and political processes that unite the people of this wonderful nation in an effort to skew the situation. Having examined the problems affecting Nigeria's ethnic politics and political institutions based on the arguments presented thus far, it is argued that the application of John Rawls' overlapping consensus in Nigerian will be a panacea for the viability of political institutions and ethnic politics issues in Nigeria. This research posits that the best way out is to explore political conceptions of justice that can recognize and acknowledge the pluralities and diversities of the people, emphasize and promote liberty and equality of opportunities, and cater for legitimate and inevitable inequalities in society.

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