

# Consociational Power Sharing and Political Equality in Nigeria: What Role for Federal Character Principle?

Yahaya Yakubu

*Department of Political Science & Int'l Relations, Nile University of Nigeria*

**Abstract:**-The underlying literary endeavor set out to interrogate the practicality of consociational power-sharing agreement that abounds in Nigeria's Federal Character Principle. The federal character Principle was instituted in tandem with aspirations of fostering political inclusion across federating units in contemporary Nigeria. Upon reviewing prior literature, the research is of the opinion that; the existing power-sharing agreement in Nigeria is found wanting, particularly so in its inability to attain central predetermined outcome of diffusing persisting regional dominance. Visibly, its inaptitude to foster equitable distribution of socio-economic infrastructure and high profile political offices depicts the inefficacies that underpin power-sharing accord in Nigeria. Evidently, empirical data shows appointment to high profile office remains particularly ethnocentric and nepotistic. In lieu, the study is of the view that; the need for constitutional amendment that accommodates fiscal restructuring as means to domesticating political involvement. This is thought to be so because the current federalist structure in place encourages the over-reaching concentration of power in the center, leaving regions almost at the mercy of the presidency in particular.

## I. INTRODUCTORY PROLOGUE

The emergence of the post-colonial state shed a light on the myriad of challenges inherent in the continuous attempts at replication and subsequent transplantation of Western values of liberal democracy in non-Western societies. The habitual practice of transplanting institutions that preceded decolonization has arguably sustained the prevailing institutional crisis in Africa, more so in the areas of governance, nation building and political inclusion. The under-listed plethora depicts the contextual dynamics of democratization in post-colonial Africa. While the basis of liberal democracy entails the alteration of power amongst competing groups, in contemporary Africa the unhealthy rivalry for power amongst rival ethnic groups cum widespread astute indifference for rule remains a definite attribute of governance and public affairs has more than often led to the segregates and fragment such societies Mandani (1996).

Consequently, the growing popularity of multi-party politics in the region birthed the unrivaled social acceptance of consociational power-sharing accords as instruments of dousing ethnic conflict in heterogeneous Africa. In the opinion of Cheeseman (2011, p. 337) the return of multi-partyism has brought about a spate of varying crisis in which

disputed elections contributed to social instability and breakdown of political order in the likes of Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. In furtherance, he affirms mediating actors naturally adopted strategies that aim at balancing power between rival groups at the domestic level. Hence, the overburdening emphasis on power sharing as a panacea for peaceful co-existence in ethnic heterogeneous societies, could also be tied to emerging arguments seeking to establish positive correlations between political stability and ethnic heterogeneity. As buttressed by Mehler (2009) who opines conventionally power sharing accords were employed in the areas of conflict resolution, through creation of inclusive governments, key actors came together to resolve lasting civil wars as in the case of Rwanda, Angola, Somalia and the likes. In furtherance, the teeming popularity and experimentation of formal and informal power sharing accords could also be relatively ascribed to the rise of ethnic and regional driven self-emancipatory movements, posing threats to the survival of the subjectively defined political communities in post-colonial Africa. In other instances power sharing is perceived as a means to enthroning political equality in ethnic driven societies.

Mehler (2009, p. 453) is of the opinion that, power sharing looks like a rational approach to viable conflict management in ethnic heterogonous societies, further asserting power sharing has topped peace accords and schema time and over. By way of contextualization, Yahaya (2017) posits the composition of government in Nigeria derives on the Federal character Principle (FCP), which serves as the mechanism that expedites a sense of enclosure across the disparate ethnicities that make up contemporary Nigeria. The FCP suggests the equitable allocation of political offices across ethnic groups in a bid to foster national integration, protection of minority rights and political equality. This in itself remains particularly problematic; owing to the non-existence of universal measure of equality especially in the areas of political inclusion and participation. The underlying assertion is buttressed by Verba (2001) who claims equality remains a complex concept in all purviews of social and political life. As it can be about a myriad of valued goods, it could also cut across persons or assemblages. It can also be calculated with disparate measures, on the basis of dissimilar benchmarks.

Equality remains one of the most slippery concept in social science, and more so under majoritarian democracies as obtained in the contemporary world. While the concept of democracy in theory provides for equal rights and opportunities for all, it also accords the majority their way as in the case of Nigeria. Hence, all citizens are accorded the rights and privileges therewith to be heard, but the majorities have their way. How then do we arrive at practical political equality? In the areas of representation, policy preferences, accountability and responsiveness more so in societies severely fragmented by ethnic and other social cleavages?

Against this backdrop, this research sets out to explore the prospects, challenges and trajectories of attaining political equality in contemporary Nigeria, through consociational power sharing accords, with laid emphasis on the FCP. With an informal origin dating to pre-independence era of nationalist participation in colonial administration, the FCP top the discussion of constitution drafting committee in 1954 and subsequently became a state policy. Despite the existence of a constitutionally backed FCP, Nigeria continues to be marred with incidence of socio-political instabilities. Notable amongst which includes; clamor for secession by the Igbo dominated Eastern on the basis of alleged/actual deprivation and political inequality, and the Niger-Delta's unending quest for resource control amongst claims of ethnic domination of juicy political positions in the current dispensation.

## II. CONCEPTUAL PROLOGUE

By way of complimenting the introductory content of this research, this section is committed to elucidating and operationalizing pertinent concepts central to better understanding the on-going debate. These concepts amongst other include consociational power sharing, political equality and FCP.

### *Power-Sharing*

While there abounds a vast body of disparate literature on the plausible effects of power-sharing on conflict resolution, it is pertinently important to note that the effects and outcomes power-sharing arrangements remains contextually relative. In heterogeneous societies such as Nigeria, which is fractionized and divided along ethnic, religion, language or any form of social ascription or affiliation, the tendency for inequality and marginalization of minorities cannot be simply dismissed. In such societies ethnic or regional parties with majority votes as in the case of majoritarian electoral systems are prone to adopting exclusionist policies and in the process they tend to heat up the polity and foster societal division. Walter (1997) an ardent supporter of power sharing opines that the more power sharing is instituted into peace pact, the less external commitment is required to guarantee it. Adam and Michal (2018) on the other hand claim the practice of power-sharing is associated with institutional arrangements of power-sharing governments, conceptually referred to as national unity or unity governments. In amongst other functions, power-sharing

derives its popular acceptance from its presumed ability to bring competing groups to the negotiating table. In Nigeria as in a better part of Sub-Saharan Africa, elements of formal power-sharing arrangements can be in both constitutional provisions and informal pacts. Preceding decolonization it also served as a means through which the spoils of independence were distributed in the form of political or public office across various ethnic groups.

Accordingly, Cheeseman (2011, p. 339) defines power-sharing as the establishment of government in which cabinet positions, and hence executive power are distributed amongst major actors, although not in all situations in a given conflict situation. By way of classification Horowitz (2014, p. 5) claims the twin domineering means of amelioration are referred to as consociational and centripetal power-sharing respectively. Centripetal power-sharing agreement is more concerned with creating incentives, electoral and others to moderate or bring about compromise on conflicting issues. In the case of consociational he argues the basic idea is to address problems arising from societal fragmentations through the establishment of a regime based on agreed principles, including proportional group participation in government, more so for minorities.

Arend Lijphart proposed an ethnic-oriented —consociational democratic model as a conceivable alternative plan for heterogeneous societies. For such societies, he proposed ethnic derived consociationalism as a type of governance conceived as one by the elite cartel instituted to turn an unstable democracy marred by fragmented ethnic and political culture into a stable democracy (Lijphart, 1969). He defines a plural society as one underpinned by far reaching religious, ideological, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial and/or ethnic sectional cleavages, having public loyalty split according to representative groups rather than being embedded in a single national authority (Lijphart, 1984:22). In another instance he is of the view that consociational power-sharing accords in democracies possess four central political principles of grand coalition, mutual veto, proportional representation and segmental autonomy (Lijphart, 1977:25). Lijphart has also persistently upheld consociationalism as the preferred alternative for plural societies, emphasizing should they succeed, such arrangement must guarantee equitable power sharing distribution and group autonomy, particularly so in the educational and cultural spheres (Lijphart, 2006; 2004; 2002:37).

By way of domestication, consociationalism in Nigeria has brought about formal power-sharing arrangements that led to the establishment of the Federal Character Commission a federal agency established by Act No. 34 of 1996, harnessed with the responsibility of implementing and enforcing the FCP of fairness and equality in the redistribution and allocation of public offices, socio-economic infrastructure amongst the federating units that makes up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Predeterminantly, it is constitutionally expected that the FCP will foster an avenue that facilitates for

an all-inclusive distribution of public offices and socio-economic infrastructure and bring about political equality amongst all federating units in Nigeria.

#### *Federal Character Principle (FCP)*

In response to the resultant crisis of the arbitrary mashing up of various nations and ethnicities to make up contemporary Nigeria, decolonization elites constitutionally conceived the principle of federal character with a view to guaranteeing the equitable redistribution of public offices, wealth, socio-economic infrastructure and facilitate for access to resources across the underlying ethnicities and nations that constitutes Nigeria Yahaya (2017). In lieu, this paper is of the argument that the unhealthy scramble for power and access to resources amongst rival ethnic groups had dire consequences on the advancement of Nigeria as a nation; leading to the adoption of a constitution backed FCP.

Ojo (2009) contends the soul-searching that preceded the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 reflected in the quest for elites consensus on how Nigeria should be governed, in line with ensuing political stability, fair and equitable redistribution of resources across the underlying ethnic groups, hence the adoption of the constitutionally upheld FCP. The subject matter of federal character FC is in no way a recent innovation, in other times it have entailed both quota system or zoning as the case maybe. Against this backdrop Adeosun (2011, p. 2) is of the view that,

the informal origin of FCP can be traced to pre-independence era of nationalist agitation for participation in the administration of colonial Nigeria and more pronounced upon the attainment of federation in 1954. In furtherance, he argues that during its informal application, it was preoccupied with legislative representation and equalization of inter-regional opportunities in education and appointment to public office in the federal level.

According to Samuel, Wilfred and Ukpere (2012) argue, the FCP was enshrined in the 1979 constitution, to appropriate linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic diversity of Nigeria. While Okolo (2014:123) claims it to connote number of constituents, their inter-relationships, allocation of powers and functions amongst them and such other tangible matters which are spelt out in legal terms in a constitution. Olagunju (1987) conceives it to be a conscious effort/policy to accommodate less dominant but often forcibly expressed interests while Ezeibe (2012) conclusively argues FCP involves a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring proper redistribution.

Regrettably, the FCP has largely fallen short of guaranteeing the equitable redistribution of public offices and socio-economic infrastructure across the federating units that make up contemporary Nigeria. This is evident in the resurge clamor for self-actualization by the Igbo dominated Easter Nigeria, call for the abolition of western liberal democracy by

the boko haram sect and the uneasy and fragile cohesion across various ethnic groups. Should the argument that t FCP has been found wanting in the areas of ensuing political equality, then we must clarify and operationalize the concept of political equality within the confines of the foregoing discussion.

#### *Political Equality*

Regardless of regime type or region, the probability of guaranteeing practical political equality remains less likely. Nonetheless, across time and space contemporary states have adopted a handful of mediums, policies and initiatives with a view to fostering political equality. In lieu, Berlin (1999, p. 84) writes only in an unequal society do people need to give reasons for political equality, for there equality is not considered as a self-starting point for politics. Nasstrom (2013) claim equality as a relative concept. Further stating that it makes little sense to assent the equality between individuals, except the inherent dimensions of equality is stated. With recourse to its political dimension Verba (2011, p. 2) defines equality as the extent to which citizens have an equal or proportional say over governmental decisions. Further claiming the principle of equal consideration for all as a defining attribute and corner stone of liberal democracy. This is expressed in such principles as one-person/one-vote, equality before the law, and equal rights of free speech. Equal consideration of the predilections of all citizens is propelled by equal political activity among citizens; not only equal voting turnout across weighty groupings of citizens but equality in other forms of activity, participation and inclusion.

Penultimately, this research derives political equality as the propensity to which individuals and groups are actively involved in the act of governance. In the sense that, political power is distributed across federating units as a means to fostering inclusive participation in a given political system. This is particularly problematic, first because of the challenges of measuring equality in terms of political office as well as the relatively attached to the concept. Nonetheless, the Nigerian government has attempted to constitutionally ensure such dimension of equality by legislatively pronouncing the FCP into law. A little over five decades after enactment the FCP serves as the avenue through which equitable allocations are channeled. However, traces and elements of ethnic domination and unhealthy inter-ethnic or regional competition for political power depicts the extant fragmentation as abound in Nigeria.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The task of theorization tends to attempt to elucidate what can be understood as the essential dimensions of a certain phenomenon, its underlying directions, perspectives and plausible variations. Hence, this study will attempt to literary theorize nationalism, with a view to accounting for the FCP as obtained in Nigeria. In this regards Yahaya (2017, p. 15) posit the concept of nationalism as being vague, complex and tricky to grasp, which is thought to be so because involves humans

whose behaviour are relative and conditioned by numerous factors and largely situational. However, the task of theorization at least elucidates what can be understood as the essential dimensions of a certain phenomenon and directions and perspectives of their possible variations. Hence, nationalism will be theoretically interrogated from an identity perspective. The advent of shared national identity in contemporary Nigeria can be tied to collective disapproval of colonial domination. The shared clamor for self-actualization across various nations and ethnicities in pre-independence Nigeria can be argued as the single most uniting factor in the history of Africa's most populous nation. Accordingly, Nnabuihe (2014) argue the incursion of the Brits into what makes up Nigeria preceding the Berlin conference, was resisted by the native inhabitants of the region. An incidence he conceives as the morphing stage of nationalist struggle. Obiakor (2009) claims amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 saw the emergence of Nigeria—a political entity, this development changed the face of nationalist melee as the educated elites and the traditional rulers started sharing a mutual historical mindfulness. They inherent exploitation that accompanied the British occupation, birthed a shared sentiment of belongingness across various ethnicities and nations. While Anderson (1983) sees it as a form of nationalism experienced during the decolonization of the post war period. In a similar argument, Yahaya (2017, p. 15) claims that nationalism as an ideology is more likely to cut across ethnic lines, should there been an imminent threat to the collective freedom and liberty enjoyed by all.

Preceding the demise of colonial domination and the occupational exist of a common enemy, underlying ethnic groups and nations soon turned to competition for power amongst each other. The unhealthy nature of this competition brought to light the fragile nature of nationalism in post-colonial Nigeria. As Fanon (1963) rightly said, nationalism is but an empty crude barrel. Within this framework, such form of nationalism is understood as ethno-nationalism. In his opinion Yahaya (2017, p. 16) claims State elites, power broker, political gladiators and even public servant prioritize the development of their regions over other, as ethnicity has also be thought to play centrifugal role in resource allocation and appointment of high profile offices in contemporary Nigeria. In furtherance, Aluko (2003, p. 253) argue;

it to denote a set of beliefs about the superiority and differences of one's ethnic group and a defense of its interest above all others. It also implies the individual's identification with an ethnic group, its culture, interest and goals. It is ethnocentrism that cuts across all other loyalties to stress loyalty to a particular ethnic group. In real life, an ethnic nationalist identifies with and sees himself or herself first as a member of a particular ethnic nationality before identifying himself or herself with a nation. Thus, this help to explain the emergence and proliferation of ethnic associations and militias such

as Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) Odua People's Congress" (OPC), Arewa Consultative Forum" (ACF), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Ohaneze Ndigbo.

In furtherance, Stevenhagen (1994) argued that ethnic nationalism is common in all plural societies and came up with two schools of thoughts on the meaning and nature of ethnic nationalism. These two schools of thought are –the primordialist and instrumentalists. While primordialist form of ethnic ascription is attained at birth into a certain group, instrumentalist largely depicts the dimension of ethnicity in Nigeria, as it entails the exploitation of ethnic sentiments by leaders to mobilize voters from their constituents, instigate civil unrest, garner sympathy and in most cases a tool for their continuous justification for seeking political office, which they are not necessarily qualified for.

In lieu, of the foregoing, this study is of the view that existential primordialist cum instrumentalist forms of ethno-nationalism arguably propelled the adoption of FCP as a means of uniting underlying groups into a nation. While some are of the argument that partisan and nepotistic forms of politics have undermined the viability of the FCP, others claim it has a definite effect on the continuous existence of Nigeria as a single political community. To better understanding the effects of FCP, the next section of the research will review the historical records with regards to the appointment to high profile offices as a means of power-sharing.

#### IV. FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AND POWER-SHARING IN NIGERIA

Nigeria like other heterogeneous societies has over the years resorted to formal and informal power-sharing arrangements in a bid to unifying underlying ethnicities and nations. Based on the adopted understanding of FCP, it will suffice to claim that it was constitutionally instituted to cater for and provide a more proportionate redistribution of resources, political offices and wealth amongst other national resources across ethnic and regional realms. The question remains how successful is the FCP in meeting its presupposed outcomes?

S N	Regime	Ministry of Defense /Region	Ministry of Interior /Region	Ministry Federal Capital Territory/Region	Ministry of Mines & Power /Region
1	T. Balewa 1960-66	North	North	Not Applicable	North
2.	Y. Gowon 1960-75	North	North	Not Applicable	North
3.	M. Murtala 1975-76	North	North	Not Applicable	South
4.	O. Obasanjo 1976-79	South	North	South	North

5.	S. Shagari 1973-83	North	North	North	North
6.	M. Buhari 1983-85	North	North	North	North
7.	M. Babangida 1985-93	North	North	North	North
8.	E. Shonekan 1993-93	North	North	North	North
9.	M. Abacha 1993-98	North	North South	North	North
10.	A. Abdulsala m 1998-99	North	North	North	Not Applicabl e
11.	O. Obasanjo 1999-2007	South	South	North North	South
12.	O. Yar'adua 2007-2010	North North South	North	North	North
13.	G. Jonathan 2010-2015	North	North	North	North
15.	M. Buhari 2015-date	North	North	North	South

Source: A. B. Adeosun, (2011, p.7-8), Y. Yahaya, (2017, p. 20).

The above data set reaffirms conventional knowledge, which claims ethnicity as one of the definite attribute of social cohesion in independent Africa. The FCP does not only reflect the sectionalist tendencies of the ruling elite in appointment to key positions it also confirms the existence of a permanent political class in Nigeria. To this end, it will suffice to claim that the FCP in its capacity as an integrative, redistributive and equality propelling mechanism has largely failed in its attempts to attain predetermined outcomes.

## V. CONCLUSION

In lieu of the ongoing debate, it is of the opinion of this research that more needs to be done in line with the aspiration of the Nigerian state to foster equality amongst underlying ethnicities and nations. More so in the areas of enforcements, clearly so because the FCP serves as a framework upon which political equality can be guaranteed, however successive governments have flagrantly disregarded the constitutional provisions in that regards. Amongst other notable implications, the prevailing political inequality that abounds in contemporary Nigeria has awoken the secessionist movement that once resulted in a civil war, reinforced regionalism, ethnic chauvinism and antagonism respectively. To address this situation, a lot needs to be done in the areas of policy implementation and adherence to formal cum informal power sharing agreements. In furtherance, the international communities and mediating agencies also have central roles to play in ensuring adherence to agreed power-sharing agreements.

## REFERENCE

- [1]. Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [2]. Mehler, A. (2009). Peace and Power Sharing in Africa: A Not So Obvious Relationship. *African Affairs*, Vol. 108, No. 432, pp. 453-473.
- [3]. Lijphart, A. (1969). Consociational Democracy. *World Politics*. Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 207-275.
- [4]. Lijphart, A. (2004). Constitutional Design for Divided Societies. *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 96-109.
- [5]. Lijphart, A. (2002). The Wave of Power-Sharing Democracy. In Andrew Reynolds, eds, *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management, and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [6]. Lijphart, A. (1984). *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- [7]. Lijphart, A. (1977). *Democracy in Plural Societies: a Comparative Exploration*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- [8]. Lijphart, A. (1969). Consociational Democracy. *World Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 207-275
- [9]. Ojo E. (2009). Federalism and the Search for National Integration. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 2 (9), 384-395.
- [10]. Okolo, P. O. (2014). Influence of the Federal Character Principle on National Integration in Nigeria. *American International journal of Contemporary Research*, 121-138
- [11]. Verba, S. (2001). Political Equality: What is it? Why do we want it? *Review Paper for Russell Sage Foundation*.
- [12]. Yahaya, T. B. (2017). Power Sharing and Implications for Democratic Governance in Nigeria: the Case of the National Assembly. *Mediterranean journal of Social Science*, Vol. 8, No. 4. Pp. 111-121.
- [13]. Mehler, A. (2009). Peace and Power Sharing in Africa: a Not so Obvious Relationship. *African Affairs*, Vol. 108, No. 432, pp. 453-473.
- [14]. Yahaya, Y. (2017). Ethnicity, Federal Character Principle and National Development in Nigeria: A Critical Evaluation. *Journal of Nation Building and Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1& 2. Pp. 7-23.
- [15]. Cheeseman, N. (2011). The Internal Dynamics of Power Sharing in Africa. *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 12. Pp. 336-365.
- [16]. Horowitz, L. D. (2014). Ethnic Power Sharing: three Big Problems. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 25, No. 2. Pp. 5-20.
- [17]. Nasstrom, N. (2013). The Normative Power of Political Equality, In *Political Equality in Transitional Democracy*, eds, E. E. Ernest and Nasstrom, S. New York: Palgrave.
- [18]. Berhi, I. (1999). *Concepts and Categories*, Edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.