



Consociational Democracy: An Alternative Tool for Power-sharing and Conflict Resolution in Nigerian Plural Society

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Abstract

Recently, Nigeria has been under a serious fresh heat of ethnic and regional tension; some clamoring for division while some pleading for togetherness, yet, some for restructuring. The plural character of the Nigerian society has done more harm than good simply because of the promotion of ethnic, regional and religious consciousness. The Nigerian state has time and again failed to create a system of democratic institutions that accommodates the interests and demands of the diverse groups of its society which always result in conflict. The recalcitrant nature of conflict in most part of Nigeria like it is in Plateau State and the north-east, particularly Borno State, and now, herdsmen scattered all around the country and causing serious bloodshed, has made governability intractable and immensely difficult to cope with. The fundamental significance of consociational power-sharing to Nigeria is the hope embedded in it to resolve conflict and guarantees an equitable distribution of power in the system via its principle of proportionality and mutual veto among others. Also, the proposed consociational power-sharing to Nigeria by this paper is pertinent because of the justification that politics in divided societies such as Nigeria require the accommodation of interacting groups and the realization of compromises over contending interests. This argument is consolidated by the fact that, once all parties are guaranteed a stake or part in the system, violent competition and the tendency for losers to disrupt the entire framework will be less because every player has something to benefit from, if the system thrives. The relevance of consociationalism in Nigeria then will be a system in which the stakes are considerably reduced in shared power, reflecting the due representation of all the important groups, including minorities. Consociationalism is most likely to turn the unstable Nigerian political culture into a less volatile system.

Key words: Consociational Democracy, Power-sharing, Conflict Resolution, Nigerian Plural Society.

1.0 Introduction

A plural society connotes a society separated along many cleavages. Nigeria being a plural society simply means that the country is a melting pot of ethnic nationalities, class, regions, religions and other socio-cultural markers. Its pluralism has played and still playing a vital role in shaping its politics (Dele and Mike 2015). Nigeria is made up of over 250 different ethnic groups, three religions, six geo-political zones, etc. That is how plural the country is. Painfully enough, Nigerian plurality is not a blessing but can almost be termed as a curse. A country such as Ghana has maximized its plurality in the positive to consolidate its democracy but Nigeria, which is just an immediate neighbour to Ghana, has failed to learn from it. The political class, together with its religious counterparts has exploited ethnicity and religion in particular, as instruments of mobilization and negotiation for patronages and sharing of national resources. The division of Nigeria into the diverse ethnic groups has breed marginalization and exclusion in the national political sphere, culminating in diverse conflicts experiences across the country. Most conflicts which ordinarily could have been seen as distribution based, had taken ethnic and religious face or outlook and are normally virulent, causing the destruction of lives and property of innocent citizens (Dogara 2014).

Examples of Some Conflicts Experienced in Nigeria

There have been uncountable ethno-religious and communal unrest since the return to civil rule in 1999. For instance, there have been several clashes between Yoruba and Hausa groups (Okoha 2003). The first occurred in Sagamu near Lagos on 17 July 1999, where fighting broke out as a result of the death of a Hausa woman who had allegedly desecrated the Owo festival. More than 50 persons lost their lives in the incident. The crisis led to reprisal attack in Kano, as fleeing Hausa kola nut traders recounted their experiences in Sagamu. Hundreds of lives were lost in these reprisals. Again, on 26 November 1999, Yoruba and Hausa traders clashed over the control of the strategic Mile 12 Market in Ketu, Lagos. The intervention of the OPC, whose fundamental objectives include 'to monitor the various interests of all the descendants of Oduduwa, by whatever name called, anywhere on the face of the earth and struggle for the protection of these interests, culminated in the escalation of the clashes with 115 persons reported dead. (Akinyele 2001: 626-31; Ikelegbe 2001a: 15-7). Among the consequences were the formation of the Arewa People Congress (APC) to defend the interests of Hausa/Fulani, and also, a government order to

the police to shoot OPC members on sight (Akinyele 200; Ibrahim 2001). However, rather than contain clashes, these actions ignited more conflagrations. Since the Ketu crisis, there have been seven more violent clashes involving the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. The rising incidence of clashes between Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani since the return to civil rule is interesting because earlier studies of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria showed that there were more clashes between the Hausa-Fulani and Igbo due to the fact that there was more contact between both groups, as Igbos tended to settle in the North (Nnoli 1978, 1995).

The surge of inter-group conflicts that have plagued the state of Nigeria all the way can be viewed into four major, but overlapping, categories: ethno-religious clashes, inter-ethnic violence and intra-ethnic (which all have political undertone), and also clashes over citizenship by settlers and indigenes and inter-group socio-economic clashes. Virtually all inter-group clashes in Nigeria have involved the mobilization of identities in the contest for political power and socio-economic resources. Noah (2013) posits that many communal fracas in the oil-rich Niger Delta have been attributed to sectional contests for opportunities such as infrastructural and financial compensation provided by the multinational oil corporations or accruing from the oil industry in the region.

In respect to political crises, some of the outstanding political crises ever experienced are the Nigerian civil war, military coups and the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election (the aborted Third Republic). These entirely put together with others we have failed to mention here resulted in a constitutional breakdown and reinforced the mistrust and divisions among the people of Nigeria. Consequently, fear and suspicion intensified, hence, violence of sundry kinds. Examples of some of the protracted violence as a result of heightened tension by fear and suspicious of exclusion within a state alone is that of the Warri area of the Niger Delta among the Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri warring groups (Best 2009).

However, in recent time, the conflicts bedeviling Nigerians and her nascent democracy are without a doubt being traced to the return to civil rule in Nigeria. An influential news magazine in the country has captured forty cases of ethno-religious conflicts which have erupted within just the first two years of the civilian rule, besides the countless incidents of inter-communal and intra-communal conflict that have become the identity of national unity. To take account of all the conflicts from the inception of the democratic rule till date will be an unthinkable effort

because the conflicts have come to be seen as a very normal situation in the country. Explicitly or implicitly, the proliferation of ethno religious conflicts in the post-military period gives rise to propositions that link ethno-religious conflict to democracy (Jana 2010).

Furthermore, given this trend, and with the most recent inhuman onslaught going on by the Fulani herdsmen whose massacre has become an added injury, Nigeria has been placed under a serious fresh heat of ethnic, religious and regional tension; leading to some clamoring for division while some pleading for togetherness, yet, some advocating for restructuring. The plural character of the Nigerian society has done more harm than good simply because of the promotion of ethnic, regional and religious consciousness. The recalcitrant nature of the conflicts in the most part of Nigeria like it were in the north-east, particularly Borno State, the Middle-Belt, particularly Plateau State and now, herdsmen scattered all around the country and causing serious bloodshed, has made governability intractable and immensely difficult to cope with. Similarly, as rightly put by Raphael, the track record of political unrest, with a three-year civil strife inclusive, the collapse of three republics and six successful military coups coupled with recurrent ethnic and religious conflicts, all culminate in marring democracy in Nigeria (Raphael1999). Consociational democracy is likely hope to hold the key to the Nigerian plight.

According to consociational theory, politics in a plural society requires the cooperation of the elite which entails compromises and accommodation of all relevant groups in the decision-making process for stability to be attained. Every group should have a stake in order for general cooperation and system stability to be guaranteed. This for Raphael is the most fundamental tenet of consociational democracy. A clear look at the Nigerian political milieu reveals how some groups are being excluded from the share of power. Some have no even little autonomy whatsoever. More so, the nature of the electoral process which allows winners exclusive access to all the spoils of office makes competitors fight hard to either win or destroy the process, giving that there are no alternative means of protecting their interests. This consequently makes the process sterile and breeding disorder, causing even the military to take advantage of the process to take over power as it were in the pre-1999 era. But then, even the Military regimes have failed to bring about any positive or meaningful political improvement. The post-1999 democratic era was expected to make Nigeria better; Nigerians were plunged into this dispensation with high expectation; however, it is over nineteen years now with no hope in sight,

as all the hopes and expectations seem to be dashed. This persistent vicious circle of political decay, therefore, necessitated the urgent need for consociational democracy in the country.

Consociational democracy has been tested in solving conflicts and also as a portent power-sharing approach among different segments in fragmented or plural societies. Countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Canada are all undeniable evidence to this assertion (Sayran 2014). The Nigerian state has time and again failed to create a system of democratic institutions that accommodate the interests and demands of the diverse groups of its society which always result in conflict. It is in this light that this paper aims at exploring the possibility for consociational democracy to work as an instrument for conflict resolution and as a tool for power-sharing in Nigeria. The question that this paper seeks to answer therefore is – How relevant and possible is the consociational democracy a tool for power-sharing and conflict resolution in Nigerian plural society?

As a way of outlining this paper, after the introduction is the Operationalization of concepts, followed by the literature review which starts with the review of plural society and consociational democracy with its necessary features and clarified them via the related aspects of the theory. This then is followed by the criticism of the consociational theory, we then immediately unveiled consociation democracy as a Power-Sharing Approach, after which we identified the favourable conditions, the unfavourable conditions and the prospect for consociational power-sharing and conflict resolution for/in Nigeria as we examine the Lijphart's consociational power-sharing thesis, aiming to marry the theory with the necessity of Nigerian political realities, and finally, the conclusion.

1.2 Operationalization of Concepts

We shall try to make available, the definitions of the most important concepts in order for us to understand and examine the case. This is crucial because just as Teorell & Svensson (2007:40) pinpointed, the concepts used by political scientists in describing certain phenomena must be elucidated clearly in line with the chosen theories and the question raised. But much more, it's to help us reduce misunderstanding tendencies or chances.

1.2.1 Consociationalism: refers to a peaceful way to politics in which the diverse groups in a state agree to avoid the obvious dangers or risk that may arise from inter-group competitions, by seeking peace through cooperation or collaboration among the political élite of the diverse

groups. Barry (1975) defines consociationalism as a descriptive term that means agreement or settlement. For him, political accommodation entails the capability of the political actors to amicably settle their differences.

1.2.2 Consociational democracy: Consociational democracy could be seen as a system of accommodation and cooperation among élites, where deeply divided countries are able to preserve political stability

Lijphart (2002) views consociational democracy also known as power-sharing, in terms of four key characteristics: participation of the representatives of all the groups in the government of the country; a high level of autonomy for each of these groups; proportionality (meaning a corresponding degree of representation for all the groups in the decision-making process or the executive); and lastly but not the least, mutual or minority veto. These characteristics shall be adequately explained in our literature review. However, it is worth noting here that Lijphart considers the first two characteristics as the bedrock of the power-sharing theory

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Theories of power-sharing are not actually new. The consociational thought is likely to be traced back to the sixteenth-century which now has become one of the most prominent theories of comparative politics. The influence of the theory has turned it into a means of conflict management internationally, which we can see ostensibly in countries that have supported, implemented and maintained power-sharing consensus in their plural societies. Examples of divided societies that have implemented consociational democracy with its power-sharing potency are Belgium, Canada, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Macedonia and Lebanon (though it later failed in Lebanon as a result of international intervention (O'Leary 2005:3). The success of the theory in the above mentioned divided societies is the driving force of this work in aiming to explore its relevance in solving the conflict problem of Nigerian plural society.

2.1 Plural or divided society and consociational democracy

Plural society simply means a society which is divided into “segmental cleavages”. These cleavages can range from religious, ethnic, regional, ideological, linguistic, racial, and cultural. The segments of a plural society are the groups of population bounded by the cleavages of

which political parties, interest groups, media of communication, schools and voluntary associations are seemingly organized along these lines (Lijphart, 1997:3-4).

According to Lijphart, consociational democracy, also known as power-sharing democracy is the best possible and only viable solution for deeply divided societies. There are four major features of consociational democracy outlined by Lijphart which Eliassi categorizes into primary and secondary. The primary features are Grand coalition and segmental autonomy while the secondary are mutual veto, and proportional representation that characterize consociational democracy (Eliassi 2014). For Lijphart, in such divided societies, the interests and demands of communal groups can be entertained or accommodated only through the establishment of power sharing. Lijphart uses Dahl's concept of "polyarchy" (Dahl 1998) as a synonym to democracy in his discussion of democracy in plural societies. He acknowledged that "It is not a system of government that fully encapsulate all the known democratic ideals, but one that approximates them to a reasonable degree" (Lijphart 1997).

2.2 Grand coalition

The most central characteristic of a grand coalition is in the institutional arrangement of participation by the elites of all important segments in the governance of a plural society. Grand coalition infringes on the rule of majority support which is normally obtainable by the cabinets in a parliamentary systems. The government- versus opposition- norms are predicated on a principle of exclusion where a great minority should be kept out of the government, and it is also at the same time based on the supposition that minorities will become majorities, and government and oppositions will rotate through different political mechanisms Lijphart (1977:27-28). Among such mechanism is the one that voters transfer their support from foremost parties to parties in opposition which by so doing, the opposition parties are given or gain the majority needed, culminating in the minorities become majorities. However, it is important to note that this mechanism does not operate effectively in a plural society where the segmental cleavages tend to be politically outstanding and coincides with party system cleavages. The floating vote will, therefore have very little significance and does not stand the chance to have any more impact. Besides, in a case where two or more smaller parties are being confronted by two stable alliances of parties, or a majority party, the only likelihood of avoiding the permanent

exclusion of the minority from the government is by incorporating a grand coalition (Lijphart 1977: 29-30).

In addition, Lijphart recommends that grand coalition is better instituted under the parliamentary system with a collegial cabinet, in which the various segments can be represented, than under a presidential regime that entails the dominance of a single leader. However, he also draws our attention to the fact that the presidential system and consociationalism are not absolutely incompatible.

Arguing further for incorporating a grand coalition is that a constitutional separation of powers results to cooperative and collective or joint strategies - “separation of powers and federalism reduces the uniqueness of the opposition and the opportunities for a stringently competitive contest between government and opposition” (Lijphart 1997).

2.3 Mutual veto

The mutual veto is another central feature of a consociational government and is another match and foil to the grand coalition. Albeit, participation in a grand coalition offers political security for minority segments, this cannot be absolute (Sayran 2014). The mutual veto connotes negative minority rule which gives each segment assurance or guarantee of political security. It prevents the danger of the minority being outvoted by the majority in a grand coalition in regards to decision making. In a situation where a decision failed to affect the fundamental interests of a minority segment, it will be termed unacceptable and will jeopardize inter-segmental elite cooperation according to Lijphart (2004). Thus, the mutual veto he says can either be a formal or informal rule which both can be seen in consociational democracies; means that it could either be a rule that is formally agreed upon and have it entrenched in the constitution or it could be an informal and unwritten consent or understanding.

2.4 Proportionality

Proportionality possesses two key roles which are important complements to the principle of grand coalition: it functions as a formula or method through which civil service appointments and scarce financial resources in the form of government subsidies are allocated among the diverse segments; and secondly, it plays another vital function with respect to decision-making

process such that all fragmented groups influence a decision in proportion to their numerical capabilities (Lijphart 1977:38-39). This goes to mean that all the political segments are not only represented in decision-making body but the representation should be in a proportional manner. In other words, it should have a proportional character.

Lijphart posits two varying but a related principle of proportionality. These are the conscious, intentional and calculated overrepresentation of small segments; and parity of representation which are highest extension of the former. The essence of these is that the minority or minorities are overrepresented to a level that they become equal to the majority or even largest group. When a plural society is separated into two segments of unequal size, parity becomes a useful option or substitute to proportionality. A typical instance can be seen in the case of the Belgian cabinet that must consist of equal numbers of Dutch-speaking and French-speaking ministers and in which the francophone minority is therefore overrepresented (Lijphart, 1977:41).

2.5 Segmental autonomy

Segmental autonomy is the last match to the grand coalition and is characterized by minority rule - "rule by the minority over itself in the area of the minority's exclusive concern". This implies that the formulation and implementation of decisions should be left to each distinctive segment except for matters of common interest which they are issues to be handled by the grand coalition in which all the segments are involved. A segmental autonomy increases the plural nature of an existing divided society giving that the representative organizations of a plural society follow segmental cleavages. Lijphart argues that

"It is in the character of consociational democracy, at first, to make plural societies more meticulously plural. Its approach is not to abrogate or undermine segmental cleavages but to recognize them unequivocally and to turn them into constructive elements of stable democracy (1977:42)".

Criticism

Consociationalism has been tested as a viable tool for conflict management yet, is not without criticism. In other words, there is no general agreement on the theory. Critics and skeptics have argued that the theory is not democratic. This they argue that it inevitably violates the rights of

some groups and the rights of some individuals and yet, another asserts that it excludes opposition since it is a loser-takes-all system (O'Leary 2005:6). Among other criticisms, Lijphart (2002:6-9) discusses what he claims to be the six most important criticisms and gives them his responses accordingly. These are : (I) Power-sharing is not sufficiently democratic; (II) it cannot work in practice; (III) a key explanation for its failure is that it does not contain incentives for moderate behaviour (IV) That regional autonomy especially, leads to secession and partition; (V) That autonomy increases conflict between the ethnic groups since it strengthens, rather than weakens their cohesion and distinctiveness. (VI) That the elements of the consociational model are anchored on European or western experiences and therefore does not suit the more divided multi-ethnic societies in other parts of the world (O'Leary 2005:6-8; McRae 1989:96-99).

The criticisms nonetheless are adequately attended to by Lijphart. In his response to this criticism, Lijphart first and foremost explains that when executive power-sharing is a coalition of all the major parties, it conflicts with the view that a strong opposition is the essential condition of contemporary democracy and that its goal is to become the government. As for the turnover criteria, when a democracy is viewed as consolidated if the winners in the initial elections at the time of the democratization process, lose the next following election and turn over power to the winner of that election who then peacefully turns over power to winners of a later election, he argues that both the turnover and the opposition criterion are based on one conception of democracy, namely the majoritarian conception and that it is not the only option to democratic possibilities.

Furthermore, Lijphart (2002:6-8) refutes the arguments that consociational democracy is not working correctly and doomed to fail, as the failed cases of Cyprus and Lebanon revealed. These two cases he argues worked properly as power-sharing democracies but failed because of international interferences especially in the case of Lebanon, thus the Lebanese war should not be regarded as an ordinary civil war rather an international conflict fought on Lebanese soil. Power-sharing should in these cases rather be repaired and improved instead of replaced. Donald L. Horowitz in (Lijphart 2002:8), another critic of Lijphart's consociational democracy lay emphasis on the reason for why executive power-sharing is likely to fail by pointing at its inability of providing incentives for compromise. In Lijphart's response to this, he says that one

of the fundamental assumptions in political science is that political parties want to gain power and for that reason parties will want to enter and also remain in the coalition cabinets. This goes to also explains that the only way for ethnic or other parties to enter and remain in the cabinets is to reach compromise with their coalitions.

More criticism is that the aspect of autonomy as a federal decentralized system is unsafe and will lead to utter secession since the groups that are given autonomy are unlikely to be satisfied with it. More so, that group autonomy may encourage ethnic conflict because it unequivocally recognizes the legitimacy of ethnic groups and making them stronger, articulate and distinctive. In his defense against the autonomy element, Lijphart counters by outrightly referring to Gurr's worldwide comparative analysis which recognizes that there is nothing inherent in autonomy agreements that results to civil war or dissolution of the state and that autonomy is a viable method of solving regional conflicts. He also argues that if the necessary ingredient for separatist sentiment would be strong, there is no guarantee that a unitary and centralized democratic system would stop or prevent secession. At the end, Lijphart concluded that power-sharing democracy is indeed more common in non-western countries where leaders and politicians, in fact, claim that majoritarian rule violates their native traditions which is reminiscent of the power-sharing idea (Lijphart 2002:9).

Consociation as a Power-Sharing Approach

The consociational power-sharing approach to the challenge of ethnic divisions characterized by conflict is based on the emphasis that 'it is almost always better to accommodate different ethnic groups in the same state with suitable guarantees of political influences and autonomy than to apportion separate territorial states' (Raphael 1999).

3.0 Favouring Conditions for Consociationalism

Lijphart itemized nine favouring conditions for consociational power-sharing:

1. Where there is the absence of a majority ethnic group, which makes negotiation easier because it is then, more or less, an agreement between equal parties. When it is between unequal parties, negotiation is more difficult because that the majority would basically ask for a larger share.
2. That a geographically concentrated ethnic groups among other things, allows for federalism to be used to promote group autonomy.
- 3 Those ethnic groups are of equal size to enable for a balance of power sharing among them.

- 4 That there are no too many groups so that negotiation among them will not be too difficult or problematical.
- 5 That the total population is comparatively small so that the decision-making process will be less complicated.
- 6 That there are external threats (or a common enemy to the nation-state) that will tend to promote a sense of nationalism (or cooperation) for internal security.
- 7 The presence of overarching loyalties that lessen the strength of particularistic ethnic loyalties.
- 8 The absence of large socio-economic differences among ethnic groups.
- 9 The existence of prior traditions of compromise and accommodation. A track record of past compromises will reinforce hope for subsequent cooperation.

In criticizing Lijphart's favouring conditions for consociational power-sharing, Pappalardo (2012) is of the view that there are only two apparent conditions that are favourable to consociationalism. These he says are (a) finding stability between the interacting groups (inter sub-cultural stability) and (b) élite exertion of control over the masses who are ready to accept and respect whatever judgments that are made by their leaders or representatives on their behalf. For Raphael, it is likely that Lijphart anticipated this and thus, states that 'the most vital aspect of these favourable factors is that they are not decisive or crucial. That is to say, they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the adoption or success of power sharing. That they are merely helpful factors (even when many conditions or most crucial ones are unfavourable, success is possible). Invariably, it then means that whether a divided country and Nigeria as our case meets these conditions or not, consociational power-sharing still holds hope for her.

The existing and the non existing favouring conditions in Nigeria as a whole, and the prospect of consociational power-sharing:

A critical look at the realities of ethnic composition in many less developing countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Lebanon and Georgia-Abkhazia reveals how the above favourable conditions are almost absent (Raphael 1999).

In Nigeria as a country, none of these favouring conditions exists. Thus, Nigeria can be categorized as a special case in view of the hitherto mentioned favourable conditions for power-sharing as posited by Lijphart. The difference between the favourable and unfavourable

conditions is that where the favourable is feasible or in place, the greater the chances for reaching a power-sharing deal than where they are absent.

Drawing from Raphael, out of the nine favourable factors identified for power-sharing, the realities in Nigeria appear to be almost the complete opposite. First, where Lijphart sees the absence of a majority group as a positive element for power-sharing, the overriding size of the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria seems to be an impediment. Secondly, huge socio-economic differences exist among the ethnic groups. The northern region is more or less economically dependent on the mineral resources of the south, especially the south-east where most of the minority tribes reside. Educational wise, the Igbo and the Yoruba are ahead of the Hausa-Fulani and the smaller groups in the various regions. Adding to this, there is the resentment by other groups towards the exceptional job mobility and entrepreneurship of the Igbo tribe, which has made them acquire and own most private businesses in every nook and cranny of the country.

Thirdly, the theorist posits that ethnic groups of the same size allow for a suitable balance of power. In Nigeria unfortunately, group inequalities in size are very prominent. Outside of the fact that the Hausa-Fulani are the overall majority, there are regional and sub-states' majorities. This lack of parity in size makes it difficult to devise a suitable and consensual power-sharing formula Raphael 1999.pg. 19.

Conclusion

“Multi-national states do have an even far greater need than other polities, to explore a multiplicity of non-majoritarian, non-plebiscitarian formulas. For instance, if there are strong geographic concentrations of dissimilar groups within the state, federalism might be an alternative or option worth considering. The state and the society may also let a variety of openly supported communal institutions—like the media and schools in different languages, symbolic recognition of cultural diversity, a variety of legally accepted marriage codes, legal and political tolerance for parties representing different communities, and a whole array of political procedures and devices that Arend Lijphart has described as "consociational democracy". Obviously, proportional representation, instead of large single-member districts with first-past-the-post elections, can aid representation of geographically dispersed minorities. Some strict adherents to the tradition of political liberalism, with its focus on universalism and individual

rights, oppose any form of collective rights. Nonetheless, we believe that in a multinational, multicultural society and state, combining collective rights for nationalities or minorities with individual rights fully protected by the state is the least-conflictual solution”. Linz and Stepan (2009).

When Douglas (2015) said that restructuring the Nigerian federation along the six geopolitical zones will deepen the Nigerian democratic experience by allowing the component parts to organize themselves in the most appropriate manner consonant with their history, culture and resources for rapid social transformation, it’s simply not far from consociational democracy.

The consociational power-sharing approach to the challenge of ethnic divisions characterized by conflict is based on the emphasis that 'it is almost always better to accommodate different ethnic groups in the same state with suitable guarantees of political influences and autonomy than to apportion separate territorial states'.

Thus, the most fundamental significance of consociational power-sharing to Nigeria is the hope embedded in it to resolve conflict and guarantees an equitable distribution of power in the system via its four principles or characteristics, especially that of proportionality and mutual veto. Put it in a more elaborate way, the proposed consociational power-sharing to Nigeria is pertinent based on the justification that politics in plural societies such as Nigeria require the accommodation of interacting groups and the realization of compromises over contending interests. This argument is consolidated by the fact that, once all parties are guaranteed a stake or part in the system, violent competition and the tendency for losers to disrupt the entire framework will be less because every player has something to benefit from, if the system thrives. The relevance of consociationalism in Nigeria then will be a system in which the stakes are considerably reduced in shared power, reflecting the due representation of all the important groups, including minorities, hence, minimizing conflict and most likely to turn the unstable Nigerian political culture into a less volatile system. Therefore this paper makes bold to say that consociational democracy with its power-sharing formula holds a great hope for Nigeria.

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