

# Politics of Ethnic Domination and The Challenge of National Integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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## **Abstract**

*This paper, examined the impact of ethnic domination politics on national integration in Nigeria. The study adopted desk review method, primarily utilised secondary sources of data and adopted ethnic domination theory as framework of analysis. The paper revealed that the foundation of ethnic domination politics was laid by the British colonialists with different ethnic groups enjoying varying degrees of power and privilege through their divide and rule policy. It also disclosed that the ethnic domination in Nigeria has led to increased insecurity, violence, and riots, displacement and exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions. The study concluded that national integration in Nigeria has not been made possible in spite of efforts of stakeholders. However, peaceful coexistence can be achieved in Nigeria through good governance, fight against corruption, generational re-orientation and re-birth. The paper recommended that Nigeria should adopt consociationalism, a system that promotes equal power-sharing and protection of diverse ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups. This approach encourages cooperation, consensus-based decision-making than on majority rule, and fair distribution of national resources and official positions, irrespective of numerical strength, ethnic and religious inclination.*

**Keywords:** Politics, ethnic domination, the challenge, national integration, Nigeria Fourth Republic

## Introduction

Diversity often leads to formation of new ideas and new concept, innovation, creativity among others but ethnic or cultural diversity of Nigeria has caused the country a lot of untold narratives in terms of conflicts, and ethnic tension, among others (Oluwadele, Adediran & Olaogun, 2023). The greatest strength of national integration worldwide is that it promotes social harmony, which means that it makes the people in a country live in peace as it strengthens their social bond through sense of brotherhood and tolerance in spite of the presence of several ethnic groups (Satpathy & Dutta, 2013). Contrary to the above perception, politicisation of ethnicity in Nigeria has been the main driver of disunity, ethnic tensions, insecurity and or violence in the country (Adediran, Okaiyeto, Olaogun & Oluwadele, 2021). However, peaceful coexistence and feeling of brotherhood is a precondition for progress and development of Nigeria which are all encapsulated in the dream of national integration but could only be achieved through good governance, fight against corruption, generational re-orientation and re-birth, among others.

This paper is divided into several segments, including conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, overview of politics of ethnic domination in Nigeria, factors promoting politics of ethnic domination, implications of politics of ethnic domination on national integration, stakeholders' efforts at resolving politics of ethnic domination, and conclusion and recommendations. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of ethnic tensions and their impact on national integration.

In addition, the segment that deals with overview of politics of ethnic domination in Nigeria, looks into the root or foundation of ethnic tension and ethnic politics in Nigeria tracing it to the divide and rule policies of the colonial masters. The section that deals with factors promoting politics of ethnic domination, examine the politics that deepens and encourage ethnicity in Nigeria. Likewise, the part that examines the implications of politics of ethnic domination on national integration in Nigeria, exposes the consequences of ethnicity and disintegration on the peace, progress and development of Nigeria. There is another segment that discusses the efforts taken by different stakeholders' efforts at resolving politics of ethnic domination.

Lastly, the section that concludes that, national integration in Nigeria has not been made possible because of the politics of ethnicity. Examples of the implications of such include increased insecurity, violence, poor governance, underdevelopment, and nepotism. Therefore, achieving national integration requires that all ethnic groups and other stakeholder to take the security, welfare, peace, progress and development of the country as priority. And finally, recommendations were made among others that the principle of consociationalism should be adopted in Nigeria. This is system that seeks to accommodate different ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups in a society by granting them equal power-sharing and protection of their interests.

## Conceptual Clarification

Concepts in social sciences usually attract plurality of definitions based on a variety of characteristics such as their level of experience, exposure, comprehension, and area of specialisation. As a result, various people will always define concepts differently, but explanations will eventually be needed for enhanced communication. That gives credence to the Yoruba philosophy which states that, "elanioro, ti a koba la kii ye ni". Hence, this literally implies that concepts should be defined or clarified to give readers a greater grasp of how they are used in the text.

## Politics of Ethnic Domination

Ethnic domination refers to the unequal allocation of material and symbolic resources among ethnic groups in a society, which benefits one group at the expense of others (Wimmer, 2022). The politics of ethnic domination has been referred to as the ways in which political institutions, parties, and individuals use ethnicity to preserve or achieve power, frequently at the expense of other ethnic groups (Lake, 2019). Similarly, it has been defined as the use of ethnicity as a tool

of building power relations, and is concerned with how ethnicity impacts political mobilisation, state policy, and conflict resolution (Uberoi, 2020). Similarly, Politics of ethnic domination is described as the use of ethnicity as a tool of assigning and retaining political power, and it is founded in the cultural, historical, and institutional legacies of a society (Fox, 2020). It is also considered as the unequal allocation of political power, resources, and benefits in favor of one ethnic group at the detriment of others, and is marked by patronage, discrimination, and ethnic bias in government (Lankina, 2020).

From the foregoing, politics of ethnic domination can thus be defined as the situation or condition in which a group of people with a common, distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage exercise supremacy of control over another or other groups which often lead to unequal distribution of political power, resources among others in the particular society. It can also be defined as the marginalisation of one ethnic group in a country leading to their denial of opportunities in either political, economic, or social benefits of the country. What we are saying here is that the politics of ethnic domination can take the form by which discriminatory strategies or rules that favor one ethnic group over others are enacted. It can also take the form of excluding other group(s) or ethnic groups from political representation, while only the dominant one takes control and enjoy the power and resources.

### **National Integration**

National integration is the process of fostering a shared identity, culture, and political orientation among citizens across ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries (Davenport, 2020). National integration is the establishment and preservation of a shared feeling of identity and common purpose among disparate groups within a nation-state, based on a shared history, language, culture, or political ideology (Varshney, 2020). Furthermore, National Integration is referred to as the process of developing solidarity and loyalty among disparate groups within a nation-state, usually through the formation of similar institutions, values, and narratives (Tilly, 2019). Again, it is perceived as the process of developing a sense of unity and shared identity within a nation-state, based on a common commitment to liberal democratic values and the rule of law (Ignatieff, 2020). Similarly, National Integration is defined as the process of building and maintaining a sense of national unity among disparate groups within a country, usually via the employment of symbols, institutions, and narratives that reinforce a sense of shared identity and purpose (Liao, 2020).

Therefore, from the series of definitions above, national Integration can be defined as the practice of uniting various tribal, social, or religious groups within a nation-state. However, the aim of national integration is to create a feeling of unity and oneness, nationalism and patriotism that will promote common identity, standards, and unrestricted citizenship, and to minimise or eliminate ethnic tension among different ethnic groups. If this is done, it means that Nigerians will be able to live and work anywhere in the country. Therefore, national integration generates common identity and purpose among different groups, supporting solidarity and sense of belonging, conflict resolution, and national progress, by building common institutions, values, and histories. It puts into consideration the differences in group interests and their stakes in the country's destiny.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are several theories to underpin the politics of ethnic domination and challenge to national integration in Nigeria's fourth republic. However, this paper adopted the ethnic domination theory as the framework of analysis. The origin of ethnic domination theory can be traced to several academic works in the fields of sociology, political science, and anthropology. However, ethnic domination theory can be traced to the work of Donald Horowitz in the 1980s and John Comaroff in the 1990s (Makinda, 2022). However, some earlier scholars who have in one way or the other contributed to the development of this theory are, Max Weber, and Benedict Anderson, among others.

This theory explains how ethnic domination can occur when one ethnic group dominates another in the political, economic, or cultural sphere. It helps to understand the roots of ethnic

conflict and the challenges to national integration. The theory makes the following basic assumption: That ethnic groups struggle for control of resources such as land, political power, and economic opportunities. The theory also posits that ethnicity plays an important role in shaping social, economic, and political ties. Ethnic domination theory also assumes that ethnic dominance is a cyclical process with periods of stability and conflict (Yu, 2019). Again, it assumes that ethnic dominance can result in violence, such as hate crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Similarly, ethnic domination theory assumes that ethnic domination is a global phenomenon that manifests itself in many ways around the world, rather than a problem limited to specific regions or countries. Similarly, ethnic domination theory presumes that ethnic domination is not unavoidable or permanent, but can be addressed by a variety of tactics, including political mobilisation and grassroots activism. Finally, ethnic domination theory maintains that ethnic domination is not solely the result of individual prejudices or biases, but is also rooted in social structures, political institutions, and economic systems (Adeforiti, 2018).

Ethnic domination theory's relevance in the context of this study lies in its ability to explain the root causes of ethnic tensions and challenges to national integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Ethnic domination theory helps us to understand how colonial and post-colonial policies, such as the British colonial policy of divide and rule, led to the politicisation of ethnic identities in Nigeria. Similarly, ethnic domination theory is relevant to the study in that it will help us to explain how economic inequality and competition for resources can exacerbate ethnic tensions and lead to conflict (Edewor, Aluko & Folarin, 2014). Likewise, ethnic domination theory is important for the underpinning of the study because it help to explain how the politics of ethnic domination, such as the marginalisation of certain ethnic groups in political institutions or the use of ethnic identity to mobilise political support, can undermine national integration. Equally, ethnic domination theory is appropriate for this study because it will help to explain how the suppression of certain ethnic cultures or languages, as well as the promotion of a dominant ethnic culture, can lead to resentment and conflict (Adeforiti, 2018).

Despite its usefulness, some criticisms have been levied against the ethnic domination theory, on the ground that it overemphasises the role of ethnicity in social and political conflicts while ignoring other factors such as class, religion, and ideology. Another critique levied at the ethnic domination theory is that it overemphasises ethnic identity, considering it as a stable and unchangeable quality that influences people's behavior and views. Similarly, the critics further contend that ethnic domination theory lacks specificity since it does not identify the actual mechanisms by which ethnic dominance emerges and is maintained. Again, ethnic domination theory has been critiqued for overemphasising structural reasons while ignoring the agency of people and communities to resist or oppose ethnic dominance. The Theory was also critiqued for being too pessimistic since it makes the assumption that ethnic dominance is a constant or universal aspect of social existence (Mamdani, 2019).

### **Overview of Politics of Ethnic Domination in Nigeria**

The issue of ethnic supremacy in Nigeria may be traced back to colonial times. When Britain colonised the country after the Berlin Conference in 1884/1885. The colonialists in Nigeria promoted ethnic diversity in the country, with different ethnic groups enjoying varying degrees of power and privilege (Mukoro, 2022). Even after Nigeria's independence, its legacy continues to influence the country's politics. Throughout the colonial period, British colonialists in Nigeria followed a "divide and rule" approach (Usman & Isegbe, 2021). The programme favored specific ethnic groupings while dividing the population along ethnic lines. The British established administrative bodies or structures for distinct ethnic groups, such as the Northern and Southern Protectorates, which exacerbated ethnic tensions and competitiveness (Usman & Isegbe, 2021).

The Northern Protectorate was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, who got preferential treatment from the British, while the Southern Protectorate had smaller territory (Onuoha, 2020). In terms of education, the British created Islamic schools for Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Protectorate, with a focus on religious and Arabic literacy. These schools had less funding and standards than those in the Southern Protectorate, resulting in inferior educational achievement and less possibilities for the Hausa-Fulani (Falola, 2004). Similarly, the curriculum in schools

for different ethnic groups has been tailored to match their cultural and religious needs. For example, schools in the Northern Protectorate prioritised Islamic and Arabic education, whereas schools in the Southern Protectorate prioritised Western education and English language skills. Still on education, schools in the Northern Protectorate had lower academic levels than those in the Southern Protectorate because teachers were typically underprepared and lacked resources (Ogunyemi, 2020).

Another reason for ethnic domination in Nigeria is that the British prioritised certain ethnic groups over others in terms of economic development, resulting in unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. In the Southern protectorate, for example, the Yoruba dominated the cocoa industry. The Hausa-Fulani were barred from participating in the region's growing cocoa sector, despite the fact that the British gave finance, technical support, and marketing assistance to Yoruba farmers. In the North, however, the Hausa-Fulani dominated the textile industry. The Hausa-Fulani had privileged access to markets and transportation networks, but the British also gave the Igbo an edge in the coal mining business (Oduntan, 2022).

The actions of Nigeria's colonial masters contributed to the country's current ethnic dominance. They excluded other ethnic groups while providing some political representation. The practice of indirect control, which allowed local leaders from chosen ethnic groups such as the Fulani in the North to administer their own territory, bolstered ethnic identities and solidified political supremacy. Another intriguing part of this is the establishment of the legislative councils in the Southern Protectorate by the British in the 1940s and 1950s to provide political representation to distinct ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba and Igbo (Agbedi, 2021). This system continues to have a significant impact on Nigeria's political environment.

The uneven distribution of power and resources between the federal and state governments has historically resulted in power struggles among ethnic groups. For example, in Nigeria, the divide of political power between the federal and state governments has long been a point of controversy. Some ethnic groups, such as the Hausa-Fulani, have traditionally dominated the federal government, while others, such as the Igbo, have dominated business. This has led to tensions and power struggles among diverse factions. The allotment of government appointments, such as cabinet positions and top civil service positions, has long been a subject of contention (Oluwadele *et al.*, 2023).

Similarly, the division of natural resources, such as oil and gas, between the federal and state administrations has resulted in power struggles among ethnic groupings. Some tribes, such as the Hausa-Fulani, have dominated the federal government and controlled access to these resources, but others, such as the Igbo in the East and the Ijaw in the Niger Delta, have sought more authority over their own resources. Political violence, such as ethnic riots and clashes between ethnic militias, has become commonplace in Nigerian politics. People frequently base their political decisions on their ethnic identification and affiliation rather than a candidate's personal traits or opinion on issues (Ogbalu, 2022). In Nigerian politics, ethnic blocs emerged as a result of voters from particular ethnic groups typically supporting candidates from their own group, and competition among different communities has frequently resulted in election violence and bloodshed. Minority ethnic groups have long been underrepresented in Nigeria's political institutions and decision-making processes. These groups now feel marginalised and resentful. Minority groups in resource-rich areas, such as the Niger Delta, have frequently felt that they did not receive their fair share of the benefits from the exploitation of natural resources, such as oil and gas (Francis, 2023).

### **Factors Promoting Politics of Ethnic Domination in Nigeria**

Nigeria's federal system, which consists of 36 states and one Federal Capital Territory, has resulted in ethnic struggle for political power and resources (Okeke, 2022). The Yoruba-dominated Oyo State in Southwest Nigeria has been a hotbed of ethnic conflict between the Yoruba and Fulani over land and resources, resulting in violent clashes in many communities, including the Ibarapa area in 2021, with accusations of kidnapping, cattle rustling, and other criminal activities resulting in deaths, property destruction, and displacement (Abdukareem, 2021).

In October 2022, hostilities between Atyap, Hausa, Fulani, and Adara ethnic groups in southern Kaduna State resulted in violence, displacement, and fatalities, displacing hundreds of people. However, the Atyap ethnic group accused the Fulani of invading many villages in the Zangon Kataf Local Government Area, which resulted in the displacement of hundreds of people (*Daily Post*, 2022). Similarly, the Tiv-Fulani conflict in Benue State, which included attacks, livestock rustling, and pasture encroachment, ended in violent battles (Olumba, 2024; Uja, 2021).

As a result, ethnic groups have been known to use their numerical strength to control the political process. For example, in the 2019 general elections, the Hausa-Fulani dominated the political process in the North, with the All Progressives Congress (APC) obtaining the majority of seats in the region. In reality, 15 of the 19 Northern states voted for the APC, indicating the party's regional supremacy (Chuks, 2019). The Yoruba ethnic group has dominated politics in the Western region, particularly in Lagos State, where they have won gubernatorial elections and held important posts in the state administration. In the Lagos State gubernatorial election of 2023, as in previous ones, Babajide Sanwo-Olu of the APC, who is Yoruba, won, defeating Rhodes-Vivoo Gbadebo who is not seen as a pure Yoruba man (Ezeamalu, 2023).

Nigeria's electoral system promotes the group with the most votes, ensuring political appointments along ethnic lines, with crucial positions reserved for specific ethnic groups. During Buhari's first term in 2015, he was accused of favoring Northerners in cabinet nominations, with several critical positions held by Hausa-Fulani ethnic group members. For example, the Ministers of Education, Defence, Agriculture, and the FCT were all Hausa-Fulani. This prompted claims that Buhari selected ministers based on ethnicity rather than on merit (Yahya, 2018; Ramon, 2020). This has resulted in allegations of nepotism and favoritism in the political system. The North-west region of Nigeria has the most senators and members in the House of Representatives, with 21 senators and 86 members, despite having the most local government areas, with 186 out of 774 (Madueke, 2017). The federal government's control over natural resources such as oil and gas has been criticised for favoritism and ethnic domination, with the Petroleum Industry Bill of 2021 purportedly favoring northern MPs over those from other areas (Soremekun & Oyediran, 2021).

Historical events, such as the Biafran War in the 1960s and 1980s, increased ethnic tensions and mistrust in Nigeria, especially among the Igbo people, who were committed supporters of Biafra (Gumede, 2020). During the war, Igbo citizens were slaughtered and displaced; even after the war, many Igbo politicians and military officials were marginalised or removed from positions of authority, resulting in political marginalisation and exclusion, as well as mistrust and conflict (Shettima, 2018). Military authority during the 1980s militarised politics, favoring specific ethnic groups. Resource control and regionalism, both important factors in the Biafran War, became more intense as ethnic groups competed for power (Nwaneri and Onah, 2017). During the 1980s military governments, numerous major political appointments, including governors and ministers, were given to members of the dominant Hausa-Fulani ethnic group (Suberu, 2013).

Corruption in Nigeria leads to ethnic domination, with politicians distributing resources and positions to ethnic groups in exchange for political support, putting loyalty ahead of merit and national interest. This system has been questioned for its religious dimension. For example, the appointment of Kanuri Muslim Kashim Shettima as presidential candidate was intended to secure support from Northern Muslims (Akhaine, Godwin, Nwaoku, Omolaoye & Osahon, 2022). Corruption has allowed particular ethnic groups to attain prominent positions in the civil service, judiciary, and other institutions, strengthening their grip on the political process. A noteworthy illustration in this instance is the nomination of judges to the Nigerian Supreme Court in 2019. The Nation reported that 11 of the Supreme Court's 16 judges were from the Northern region of the country, while only 5 were from the Southern section (*The Nation*, 2019). Similarly, there were complaints that the composition of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NJC), which is in charge of recommending appointments to the Nigerian judiciary, was biased against specific ethnic groups. According to The Guardian (2022), 15 of the 36 NJC members were from the North-West, North-East, and North-Central regions, while 6 were from the South-

West, South-East, and South-South regions. Corruption frequently leads to ethnic dominance via resource-based conflicts, culminating in bloodshed and increased mistrust. The distribution of public resources, such as federal grants and contracts, often favors majority ethnic groups, marginalising minorities. For instance, in Nigeria, the revenue allocation formula favors states with large populations, such as the Northern region, while the Southern region, rich in oil and gas, receives less (Ewuzie, 2021).

The religious divide in Nigeria has influenced ethnic dominance. The northern part is predominantly made of Muslims while the southern part is predominantly occupied by Christians. This brings to fore the consideration of religion as a criterion in the selection and appointment of political positions like the president and the vice-president, senate president and house of Assembly speakers. For instance, during 2023 presidential parties of all major political parties in the country, religious issue such as Muslim-Muslim generated a lot of political debate, heat and confrontations, majorly between the Muslims and Christians communities and leaders in the country (Fasan, 2022). This thus further wreaked havoc on national integration efforts in the country as some political parties frequently field candidates from specific religious backgrounds, prompting accusations of discrimination and manipulation (Umeanolue, 2020). In October 2022, religious divisions produced unrest, particularly in the Middle Belt region, when Muslim Fulani herdsmen and Christian farming communities struggled over land and resources in Kaduna State (*BBC News*, 2022).

Nigeria's political elites prioritise loyalty over national unity, resulting in ethnic dominance, while patronage concentrates power in certain ethnic groupings. This system of bias and electoral fraud was obvious in both the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections (Effiong, 2021). Southern Nigerians protested in 2020 against the concentration of power in the hands of northern elites, calling for restructuring (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Okunade, 2020). In 2022, the debate over "Power Shift" turned to the rotation of power between North and South areas, with arguments of marginalisation (Yusuf, 2022).

### **Implication of Politics of Ethnic Domination on National Integration in Nigeria**

Ethnic domination in Nigeria has resulted in heightened insecurity, bloodshed, and rioting, notably in the Middle Belt region, where herdsmen-farmer clashes for resources have caused displacement and intensified ethnic and religious tensions, jeopardising national unity. In April 2023, Fulani herders raided a farming village in Benue State, killing several people and displacing hundreds. The attack was motivated by land and grazing resource issues, which exacerbated tensions between Fulani and farming communities and prompted calls for government intervention (Abah, 2023). Economic marginalisation and ethnic elite dominance encourage Boko Haram's insurgency in the North-East area. In March 2023, they stormed a military base in Borno State, killing 15 troops and capturing weapons, displaying their resilience in the face of years of counter-insurgency measures (Gambo, 2023).

Nigeria's ethnic group competition for resources and power has led to militant groups in the Niger Delta region engaging in sabotage and attacks on oil facilities, causing instability and insecurity. In 2016, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) claimed responsibility for attacks on oil pipelines in Bayelsa State, causing significant damage and disrupting oil production, all in the name of demanding greater control over oil resources and a more equitable distribution of oil revenues (Asu, 2016). The North-West region's resource and power competition has resulted in increased banditry and kidnapping, with criminal bands terrorising communities and targeting law enforcement. In April 2023, a village attack in Zamfara State resulted in several killings and kidnappings (Makinde, 2023).

Ethnic dominance has marginalised minority groups, fostering divisions and resentment. Under-representation in political appointments and decision-making bodies further exacerbates their exclusion from resource distribution and power distribution. In January 2023, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari appointed 23 new Permanent Secretaries to the civil service, but the list was criticised for lack of diversity, highlighting the under-representation of minority groups in political appointments (Oye, 2023). In June 2023, minority ethnic groups in the North-Central region petitioned the National Assembly, claiming they were excluded from crucial

government appointments and projects, citing examples of projects benefiting other regions (Okoronkwo, 2023).

The government frequently neglects minority communities' needs, resulting in a lack of basic infrastructure and services like education, healthcare, and security. The Kalabari people in Rivers State, despite oil and gas facilities, suffer from inadequate infrastructure, causing poverty and disease (Ojo, 2023). Minority groups in Nigeria face economic disparity due to exclusion from opportunities like credit and government contracts. In September 2023, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company awarded oil blocks to private companies owned by people from dominant ethnic groups, leading to accusations of bias and exacerbating the gap between minority groups and dominant ethnic groups (Udoma, 2022). Minority groups in Nigeria face challenges in preserving their cultural heritage due to dominant ethnic groups promoting their own languages and customs, leading to the erosion of their identities and cultural heritage. The Idoma people in Benue State, Nigeria, are a minority group who speak the Idoma language and practice their own cultural traditions; however, The Tiv and Hausa-Fulani, dominant ethnic groups in the state, have often promoted their languages and cultural practices at the expense of the Idoma (Olayinka, 2021).

The politicisation of ethnicity has led to increased social division and mistrust, hindering national unity. Political leaders and elites use hate speech to mobilise supporters. In February 2023, Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu were accused of using hate speech and ethnic rhetoric to mobilise their supporters, citing Atiku's statement about the PDP being a "Northern party" (Ugoh, 2023a). The politicisation of ethnicity has led to violent clashes between different ethnic groups, especially during elections and political tensions. In March 2023, violence occurred in Lagos, Rivers, and Kaduna, with PDP and APC supporters mobilising to defend their interests (Ugoh, 2023b). For instance, Rivers State experienced violent clashes between PDP and APC supporters following the governorship election, fuelled by ethnic tensions and a desire to defend their interests and candidates (Naku, 2023).

The fall out of the politics of ethnic in Nigeria has led to increased calls for regional autonomy and secession in many part of the country. In April 2023 The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has renewed their call for regional autonomy and secession, citing marginalisation and neglect by the Nigerian government. This follows a long history of agitation for Biafran independence since the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War (Nwanna, 2023).

Ethnic domination in a country leads to poor governance, underdevelopment, and nepotism, as leaders favor their own ethnic group in appointments and resource distribution, exacerbated by ethnic loyalty rather than competence. In May 2023, President Buhari appointed Mallam Isa Funtua as the new Chairman of the National Sugar Development Council, a controversial appointment criticised as an example of nepotism, with many Nigerians accusing the president of favoring his own ethnic group (Okeke, 2023). Ethnic interests makes it difficult for citizens to hold leaders accountable for their actions, as they are often seen as representing their group's interests. For instance, the Nigerian Army's January 2023 offensive against Boko Haram faced criticism for human rights abuses and civilian protection (Osinbajo, 2023).

Nigeria's poor governance and ethnic domination lead to ineffective policies that are designed to meet the needs of the dominant groups, causing underdevelopment and inequality. The Petroleum Industry Bill, signed in 2022, includes provision for a host community development trust fund, but minority groups argue it fails to address environmental degradation and development issues (Nnena, 2022; Ataide & Enebong, 2020). The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), introduced by the Federal Government to address conflicts between herders and farmers, has been criticised for focusing on Fulani herdsman's interests at the expense of farmers and other rural communities, and for disproportionately benefiting one ethnic group, and not resolving land use, access to water, and environmental degradation problems (Nwosu, 2022).

The focus on ethnicity in politics has led to increased social divisions and mistrust among different ethnic groups, hindering consensus and national unity. Since the beginning of the fourth Republic in 1999, almost all of the elections were marked by fraud and irregularities, sparked protests, often characterised by ethnic violence and hate speech, further deepening these divisions (Adekoya, 2023; Oluwadele, 2022).



Ethnic interests in Nigeria hinder economic development, discouraging foreign investment. French oil company Total Energies withdrawn from Akpo and Egina oil fields in April 2023 due to security risks and political instability, affecting local communities (Nwanna, 2023). Twitter was suspended in Nigeria on June 4, 2021, after it deleted President Muhammadu Buhari's post threatening regional secessionists, warning of a potential 1967 Nigerian Civil War repeat due to insurgency (Al-Jazeera, 2022). The blocking of Twitter had significant implications for free speech and economic development in Nigeria, as many businesses and organisations used the platform to communicate and market their products (Anyim, 2021).

Ethnic domination in Nigeria leads to inefficient resource allocation, with politically influential regions receiving higher allocations than those with greater economic growth potential. This issue was exemplified in the 2024 budget and COVID-19 relief funds allocation, with some governors in the North receiving larger allocations (Arowolo, 2024; Aina, 2023).

### **Stakeholder's Effort at Resolving Politics of Ethnic Domination in Nigeria for National Integration**

The following are some of the significant stakeholders who have played important roles in resolving Nigeria's ethnic domination politics and promoting national integration. The National Peace Committee, led by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, mediates between Nigerian ethnic and political groupings to promote peace and national unity, including holding talks before to the Anambra state gubernatorial elections in 2021 (Okeke, 2022). In 2023, the National Peace Committee signed a peace agreement with 18 Nigerian presidential candidates to minimise conflict that could surround the February 25 general elections, with the goal of ensuring free, fair, credible, transparent, and verifiable elections (Egbejule, 2023). The agreement seeks to compel political parties, candidates, and supporters to use constitutional methods if they are dissatisfied with electoral results. During the 2023 presidential elections, the national peace committee also encouraged peaceful conduct and launched dialogues initiative to address any complaints of electoral fraud (Isuwa, Benjamin & Mbakwe, 2023).

Nigeria's National Orientation Agency (NOA) actively encourages national unity and cohesion through a variety of campaigns and activities aimed at reducing ethnic divisions and fostering national integration. For example, in 2022, the NOA established the Peace Ambassador initiative, which recruited young people from various ethnic groups to promote inter-ethnic discussion and peace building in their communities (Ogunde, 2022). Similarly, in 2023, the NOA organised the "Unity Cup," a national football event that brought together teams from many ethnic groups to promote peace and understanding through sport (Adeleye, 2023).

Nigerian civil society organisations, such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF), are actively encouraging inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation as a means of national unification. In 2022, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) held inter-ethnic dialogue sessions with community, religious, and civil society actors to alleviate ethnic tensions and foster peace (Ihejirika, 2023). In 2023, the Nigerian Bar Association initiated a campaign called "One Voice, One People," which promotes ethnic harmony and national unity through town hall gatherings (Ajibade, 2023). In 2023, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Nigeria sponsored inter-ethnic dialogues to promote peace, understanding, and social justice, with assistance from the European Union and the United Nations Development programme (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2023).

Religious leaders in Nigeria, including Christian and Muslim leaders have utilised their platforms to promote inter-faith dialogue, reconciliation, and discourage hate speech and sectarian violence. In 2023, Bishop Matthew Kukah of Sokoto Diocese held a conference in Kaduna State aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue and national reconciliation among religious leaders (Macmurdie, 2023). In 2022, the Sultan of Sokoto and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria co-hosted a national peace summit in Abuja to promote inter-faith dialogue and understanding (Omonobi, 2022). In 2021, the Ecumenism/Inter-Religious Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Oyo in Nigeria held an annual seminar on Inter-Religious

Dialogue, discussing issues affecting peaceful co-existence. The seminar, titled *Need for Peaceful Coexistence: Combatting Fake News, Hate Speech and Prejudices*, attracted religious leaders, civil society lawyers, and Nigeria Police Force members (Chipumbu, 2021).

The National Assembly in Nigeria is actively involved in promoting national unity and addressing ethnic divisions through legislation like the Hate Speech Prohibition Bill and the National Commission for Human Rights and National Orientation Act. The Nigerian Senate passed the "National Unity Commission Bill" in 2023, while the House of Representatives established a committee on ethnic conflicts and national integration which held public hearings and consultations with different ethnic groups and stakeholders with the aim to address root causes and to promote national unity, peace, and harmony in Nigeria (Ataide & Enebong, 2020).

Traditional rulers in Nigeria have played crucial roles in resolving ethnic conflicts, promoting peace, and fostering national unity by acting as intermediaries between communities and the government. Nnaemeka Alfred Achebe endorses the Peace in South East Project (PISE-P), a non-kinetic approach to address security challenges in the region, following the proposal by the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Benjamin Okezie Kalu members of the National Assembly (*Leadership News*, 2023). At the grand finale of the Gbaramatu people's yearly Amasekumo celebration in Delta State's Warri South LGA, the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, has warned Nigerians against divisive tendencies that could undermine the country's unity of purpose, as established by its founding fathers (Oyeyemi, 2024). He advised that Nigerians should view cultural variety as strength in fostering national unity and peace. On several occasions and at different for a, the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, has been preached peace and love in the country, for instance, in 2023 urge all Nigerians to embrace peace and love one another, irrespective of your religion or ethnicity in Jos, the Plateau State capital, during an event organised by the Kwamkur Samuel Foundation for Justice Peace Development as part of activities to mark the 2023 International Peace Day celebration. He added that it will be difficult for the country to actualise its developmental goals, if it does not do away with the problems of religion and ethnicity and foster national peace and unity among the people (Abraham, 2023).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Many efforts have been taken by various governments' regimes in Nigeria to ensure national integration in the country but integrating the country in reality has not been made possible. A Yoruba philosophy states that "Amukun eru e wo; Amukunni Okeni e wo, e o woisale". Which literarily translates that people tends to focus on the consequence of an event but neglecting the cause. The foundation, formation and establishment of Nigeria as a country was faulty in the sense that the colonial masters only brings together different ethnic groups in the country for their own administrative convenience but selfish interests without the consent and consideration of the ethnic groups within. Also the divide and rule system adopted by the colonial masters in the country has sowed the seed of ethic disharmony which has culminated in ethnic domination and tensions. Similarly, since politics is a function of number which thrives on majority principle, the dominant ethnic groups will always use their numerical strength at the expense of the lesser ones. Put Politics aside, Nigeria is not one and can never be one because with over 250 ethnic groups, with hundreds one languages, different customs and traditions, different religious beliefs and practices, there will always be diving marks. These therefore, have been making national integration impossible in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, peaceful coexistence can be achieved in Nigeria through good governance, fight against corruption generational re-orientation and re-birth.

To salvage the situation therefore, it is recommended that:

- i. Decentralising or transferring more responsibilities to states and local governments could help diminish Nigeria's centralised power structure, providing minority ethnic groups more autonomy and the capacity to develop their own resources and promote their cultural heritage.
- ii. The principle of consociationalism should be adopted in Nigeria. This is system that

- seeks to accommodate different ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups in a society by granting them equal power-sharing and protection of their interests. It emphasises cooperation between different groups rather than competition. The political power is shared among different groups, and decision-making is based on consensus, rather than on majority rule. Therefore, allocating resources and positions in Nigeria should be assigned in a way that assures a fair distribution of benefits among all ethnic groups, regardless of their numerical strength.
- iii. Nigeria's justice system should be evaluated for corruption, with officials and groups committing financial corruption being executed in public to deter others.
  - iv. Ethnic groups in the country should promote peaceful coexistence, avoid violence and hatred, and respect human rights. They should rather work together to solve common problems like poverty, crime, and environmental degradation, recognising that these affect everyone.
  - v. Finally, It must pointed out that it might not be easy to achieve total national integration in Nigeria but achievable through willingness to work through difficult issues and find ways to move forward.

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