

ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A SYNTHETIC REVIEW

Oyedokun Mojeed Oyetunji

&

Dawood Omolumen Egbefo Ph.D

Department of History and International Studies

Edo State University Iyamho

doubleoyeonline@gmail.com

dawoodamirah@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper provides a synthetic review of the interrelationship between ethnic consciousness and the historical evolution of constitutional governance in Nigeria. As a nation composed of over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria offers a compelling case for examining how identity politics have shaped constitutional frameworks and political institutions. The study analyzes the legacies of colonial rule, successive military regimes, and democratic transitions to assess how ethnic pluralism has influenced debates on federalism, resource allocation, political representation, and national integration. By situating these developments within a historical and political context, the review argues that ethnic consciousness has remained a central factor in the formation, contestation, and legitimacy of constitutional governance. It concludes that a historically grounded and inclusive constitutional arrangement is essential for managing diversity and promoting stable democratic governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnic pluralism, Constitutional development, Federalism in Nigeria, Identity politics, Democratic governance

Introduction

Nigeria's constitutional evolution has been deeply entwined with the country's complex ethnic configuration, featuring over 250 distinct ethnic groups.¹ This diversity has posed both challenges and opportunities in the pursuit of a functional and inclusive system of governance. Since its colonial inception, Nigeria's political history has been marked by continuous efforts to reconcile ethnic plurality with national unity, a tension that has left enduring imprints on its constitutional frameworks. The legacy of colonial rule, which codified ethnic divisions for administrative convenience, laid the groundwork for the politicization of identity in the post-independence era.² Successive constitutional experiments ranging from the colonial Clifford Constitution of 1922 to the current 1999 Constitution reflect an ongoing struggle to balance centripetal and centrifugal forces within the polity.³ Military interventions, civilian transitions, and constitutional conferences have all been shaped by the imperative to manage ethnic representation, federal

arrangements, and the equitable distribution of national resources.⁴ These leading Nigerian scholars continue to emphasize the critical relationship between ethnic consciousness and national development.⁵ This relationship, deeply embedded in Nigeria's political culture, cannot be overlooked. Indeed, ethnic identity has shaped both elite and popular engagement with the state and has had lasting consequences on national cohesion and development efforts.⁶ The salience of ethnicity both as a mobilizing force and as a structural constraint has significantly influenced the nation's post-colonial history. In today's fast-paced and highly competitive global order, where many nations are deepening integration to strengthen their influence, Nigerians remain embroiled in debates about the legitimacy and viability of their statehood.⁷ Discussions around whether Nigeria should remain a united entity frequently evoke claims that Nigeria is an artificial colonial creation, a mere geographical expression lacking authentic national cohesion.⁸ While the colonial experience undeniably shaped Nigeria's foundational challenges, attributing the country's contemporary problems solely to European imperialism neglects the agency and choices of post-independence leaders and citizens.⁹ Across the world, societies that have achieved national transformation have done so through deliberate efforts to reframe their historical narratives and forge collective purpose. From post-war Europe to the civil rights era United States, historical memory, inclusive governance, and civic imagination have played key roles in building national unity.¹⁰ These countries developed shared goals, constructed inclusive political identities, and built upon a foundation of collective struggle and mutual recognition. National transformation often begins with the recognition of shared historical burdens and the resolve to transcend them through cooperation. In a plural society like Nigeria, integration is not a spontaneous occurrence but a historically grounded process. It entails the cultivation of shared values and mutual awareness among culturally and linguistically diverse groups.¹¹ Such integration requires creative governance, inclusive policy making, and a supra-national vision that does not erase differences but manages them productively. Ethnic pluralism can serve as a source of strength if harnessed within a framework of justice, equity, and civic responsibility. As Obaro Ikime once noted, and as recent scholars have affirmed, "Unity is an attribute that has to be deliberately cultivated; once achieved, it has to be delicately nurtured."¹² His insight remains relevant in present debates about restructuring and nation-building.

Formation of Modern Nigeria and Colonial Integration.

The genesis of the modern Nigerian state can be traced to the expansionist agenda of British imperialism in the nineteenth century. The formal incursion began with the British naval assault on Lagos in 1851 and its subsequent annexation in 1861. This marked the beginning of a broader colonial project through which Britain gradually imposed control over various pre-colonial political entities across the region. The culmination of this process occurred in 1914, when the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated by Sir Frederick Lugard to form the entity known as Nigeria.¹³ While Nigeria's formal colonial configuration dates to the early twentieth century, interactions between West African polities and European powers began as early as the fifteenth century through

Portuguese commercial exploration.¹⁴ These early engagements were heavily shaped by the transatlantic slave trade, which dominated for centuries until its abolition in the nineteenth century. Missionary activism, British anti-slavery policy, and changing economic priorities all contributed to a transition from slave trading to so-called "legitimate commerce" involving palm oil, ivory, textiles, and other raw materials.¹⁵ As European powers vied for commercial and territorial dominance, the imperative to secure economic interests catalyzed deeper political involvement in the hinterlands.¹⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, British trade had become concentrated in coastal hubs such as Lagos, Calabar, Bonny, and Brass. However, the commercial need to bypass coastal intermediaries and establish direct access to interior markets drove the British to engage with local political conflicts. A key example is the political instability within the Obaship of Lagos, which provided Britain the pretext for deeper intervention and eventual annexation.¹⁷ To facilitate inland expansion, Britain established a series of protectorates. The Oil Rivers Protectorate (1885) and the Niger Coast Protectorate (1893) were among the earliest administrative efforts to secure key trade routes.¹⁸ The Royal Niger Company, which exercised quasi-governmental authority in parts of the north and central Nigeria, governed vast territories under a royal charter until 1900 when direct British colonial administration took over.¹⁹ This transition led to the formal establishment of three colonial units:

1. The Colony of Lagos (1861–1906).
2. The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (1900–1914).
3. The Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (1900–1914).

In 1906, Lagos was merged with the Southern Protectorate, and in 1914, both were unified with the Northern Protectorate to create the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria under a single administrative authority.²⁰ Lugard, the architect of this amalgamation, became Nigeria's first Governor-General, serving until 1919. He was succeeded by a series of British administrators who continued to govern until independence in 1960.²¹ Though ostensibly unifying, the amalgamation of 1914 did not resolve the deep ethno-regional, administrative, and economic asymmetries among the diverse societies incorporated into colonial Nigeria. Rather, it laid the foundation for the tensions that continue to shape Nigeria's postcolonial trajectory.²² Nigeria's formation is frequently attributed to the 1914 amalgamation, yet this view obscures a more nuanced colonial history. In his comprehensive collection *The Historian and Society*, Yusuf Bala Usman emphasizes that between 1900 and 1914, there were three distinct administrative amalgamations that shaped Nigeria's evolution into a colonial territory.²³

The first merger occurred in 1900, when the Niger Coast Protectorate was unified with several British protectorates in the Lagos hinterland (established during the 1880s–1890s), forming the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria legally separate from the Colony of Lagos.²⁴ In 1906, a second amalgamation legally combined the Colony of Lagos with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, creating the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.²⁵ This regional consolidation brought Lagosians into Nigeria's administrative framework later than their southern counterparts, with the notable exception of Northern Cameroon, which would not join until after the 1961 plebiscite.²⁶ It was only in 1914 that the official and final merger took place,

uniting the Southern entity with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, thereby birthing the colonial entity known as “Nigeria.”²⁷ As Usman asserts, the British deliberately overemphasized this event to accentuate regional differences and dampen the potential for a unified nationalist movement by framing the North and South as inherently dissimilar.²⁸ Following colonial restructuring, Nigeria’s unity remained elusive. Scholars like Sam Egwemi have observed that post-amalgamation, “no conscious effort” was directed toward forging cohesion; on the contrary, colonial policy often reinforced divisions through administrative and legal distinctions.²⁹

The assertion “Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression,” widely attributed to Obafemi Awolowo, encapsulates this ambivalence.³⁰ Bishop Matthew Kukah, however, contends that Awolowo intended this phrase as a call to nation-building rather than resignation.³¹ These tensions have manifested historically in recurrent separatist movements. Tekena Tamuno’s landmark study, *Separatist Agitations in Nigeria Since 1914*, documents these episodes but ultimately concludes that centrifugal pressures have been historically outweighed by centripetal tendencies.³² Yet scholars like Eghosa Osaghae caution that Nigeria’s federation remains fragile and its unity an ongoing project.³³ Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has adopted various institutional measures such as federal character policies, zoning, and quota systems to ameliorate regional and ethnic tensions.³⁴ While these mechanisms have had some effect, they have not remedied the underlying structural fissures.³⁵ Indeed, national crises such as debates over the zoning of the 2011 Peoples Democratic Party presidential candidacy reveal that the North–South divide remains politically salient.³⁶

The enduring legacy of colonial amalgamation and subsequent zoning practices were starkly reaffirmed in Nigeria’s 2023 presidential election. Since the abandonment of PDP’s internal zoning at the 2022 primaries, zonal tensions resurfaced with renewed intensity during the general campaign.³⁷ Although the two major parties the APC and PDP had historically relied on rotational zoning to foster regional inclusion, the PDP’s decision to field Atiku Abubakar (a northerner) in 2023 triggered significant north south friction.³⁸ The APC’s Muslim-Muslim ticket further ignited ethnic and religious anxieties, deepening sectarian mobilization.³⁹ The February 25, 2023 election marked Nigeria’s most polarized contest, with voter turnout at just 26.7 percent another signal of growing disenchantment and regional distrust.⁴⁰ Bola Tinubu of the APC emerged victorious with 36.6 percent of the vote, Atiku Abubakar secured 29.1 percent, and Peter Obi of the Labour Party garnered 25.4 percent, each dominating their respective home zones.⁴¹ The election intensified existing North–South divisions. Analysts described it as “the most divisive poll since 1999,” citing deepening interethnic distrust, weakened institutional legitimacy, and strained interpersonal relations.⁴² Youth-driven activism especially through digital platforms supporting Peter Obi underscored a generational shift divorced from traditional zonal allegiances, yet regional identities continued to define political choices.⁴³ Post-election disputes over results and assertions of irregularities by opposition leaders (Atiku and Obi) further eroded trust in both the electoral system and governance institutions, exacerbating national fragmentation.⁴⁴

Ethnic Consciousness and the Crisis of National Integration in Nigeria.

Ethnic consciousness in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the country's colonial history and social formation. The British colonial policy of amalgamating culturally, linguistically, and politically distinct ethnic nationalities into a single territorial entity without adequate regard for their socio-political differences laid the foundation for persistent interethnic tensions. The 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British was primarily an administrative and economic decision that failed to consider the potential long-term consequences for national unity and identity. The two regions, distinct in religion, legal systems, education, and governance structures, continued to operate largely separately despite their nominal unification. While the North employed Islamic (Sharia-based) laws, the South operated under the English Common Law system, reflecting a dual colonial administrative framework that sowed seeds of division from the onset.⁴⁵

According to Eghosa Osaghae, colonial officials consciously sustained this duality by administering the regions separately and maintaining ethnic boundaries to ease governance.⁴⁶ The colonial policy of indirect rule further reinforced ethnic identity by empowering local ethnic authorities and structures, thus embedding ethnicity into the political psyche of the emerging Nigerian elite. The devolution of political power in the late colonial period did not result in national cohesion; rather, it intensified ethnic competition. As Nigerian elites began to dominate local politics in the 1950s, political mobilization was increasingly based on ethnic identity. Political parties such as the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) were all regionally and ethnically aligned. This competition for political dominance exacerbated divisions and entrenched ethnic consciousness.⁴⁷ The immediate post-independence period witnessed further ethnic polarization. The military coups of January and July 1966 and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) were fueled largely by ethnic rivalries and fears of domination. These events intensified ethnic nationalism and undermined any possibility of forging a unified national identity. In the post-war years, successive military and civilian regimes attempted to implement integrative policies such as the federal character principle, creation of new states, and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), but these efforts have largely been ineffective due to inconsistent implementation and deep-seated mistrust among ethnic groups. In the Fourth Republic, which began in 1999, ethnic nationalism has taken new and often more volatile forms. The emergence of ethnically based pressure groups such as the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Ohanaeze Ndigbo, and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) reflects widespread disillusionment with the state's ability to fairly distribute power and resources.⁴⁸ These organizations, while often framed as cultural or socio-political advocacy groups, frequently operate as pressure blocs demanding greater autonomy, recognition, or access to federal resources. Their proliferation signals a retreat from national identity to ethnic affiliation. The implications of this trend are far-reaching. Ethnic nationalism has led to violent conflicts, insurgencies, and inter-communal clashes, notably in the Niger Delta, Jos, and the Middle Belt. Between 2001 and 2004, over thirty major ethno-communal conflicts were recorded, often

involving disputes over indigeneity, access to land, and political representation.⁴⁹ The paradox of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria lies in the fact that individuals born and raised in a particular locality may still be regarded as non-indigenes, thereby denying them full political and economic rights in their place of residence.⁵⁰ These patterns of exclusion are further exacerbated by systemic inequalities in access to education, employment, infrastructure, and healthcare, often shaped by ethnic affiliations. Consequently, ethnicity has become both a tool for political mobilization and a source of alienation, undermining meritocracy and national integration.

Moreover, historical dominance of political power by certain ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa-Fulani elite in the North, has contributed to the perception of marginalization among other groups. This perception has fueled secessionist sentiments and deepened mistrust, as seen in the persistent calls for Biafra by groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB).⁵¹ The failure of the Nigerian state to evolve an inclusive governance framework has thus continued to intensify ethnic consciousness at the expense of national identity. Thus, ethnic consciousness in Nigeria has evolved from colonial administrative structures to become a persistent challenge to national unity. Despite several attempts at nation-building, successive regimes have failed to adequately address the structural and psychological foundations of ethnic nationalism. Until a truly inclusive political, economic, and social framework is developed, ethnic consciousness will remain a defining feature and a destabilizing force within the Nigerian polity.

Ethnic Politics and Democratic Governance in Nigeria.

Nigeria laid the groundwork for establishing a democratic government at the time of its independence. Democracy is envisioned as founded on widespread participation. It seeks to engage all politically marginalized groups, specifically all ethnic groups within the nation for this study. This contrasts with colonial rule, which was imposed upon the populace, or authoritarian military regimes (Mbachu, 1994). Democracy is defined as a political system in which the eligible populace (electorate) actively engages in selecting their leaders and contributes to shaping governmental policy outputs.⁵² It is a governance system that emphasizes the pluralistic nature of the political community.⁵³ Democracy underscores the following principles.

1. a government with elected officers.
2. no privileged class, as individuals rise by ability to positions of power and influence; and
3. equally, liberty, individual rights, tolerance, and also freedom of discussion and association.

This posits that ethnic politics have significantly influenced the aspirations of the Nigerian populace, especially concerning autonomy and the safeguarding of minority rights within a democratic framework. The dynamics of federalism in Nigeria as a manifestation of ethnic consciousness and the necessity for inclusivity. Nationalism ceased to exist after the 1954 Macpherson Constitution, as regional politics emerged as the primary focus. The political parties that emerged were established along

predominant ethnic lines. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was affiliated with the Eastern region; the Action Group (AG) was connected to the West, and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was associated with the North. Each party governed its territory while advocating for the interests of diverse ethnic groups. They employed emotional ethnic symbols and exploited purported ethnic consciousness to galvanize widespread support for governance. Upon achieving independence, the nation exhibited a pronounced state of ethnic consciousness and awareness.⁵⁴ The ethnic groups in each region were made aware of the minority group's desire for constitutional reform in the country. The politicization and governance through ethnic lenses can be most effectively illustrated by examining the voting trends in the 1959 federal election. This fiercely contested election evolved into a confrontation among the three principal ethnic groups vying for dominance following independence. Each of the three political parties secured the majority of votes in their established constituencies.⁵⁵ The pattern was discernible even during the Second Republic. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) were the evolved forms of the NPC, AG, and NCNC, then PDP, APC and Labour Party LP respectively. Nigeria has experienced a complex and dynamic political evolution marked by alternating periods of military dictatorship and civilian democratic governance. The country's leadership trajectory reflects the broader struggles of postcolonial Nigeria state to establish stable, inclusive, and accountable political systems amid ethnic diversity, regional tensions, and socio-economic pressures. Below is a chronological account of Nigeria's military and civilian heads of state from independence to the present day, illustrating the nation's enduring quest for political legitimacy, national integration, and democratic consolidation.

S/N	Name	Period in Office	Status	Geo-Political Zone
1	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa	Oct. 1960 – Jan. 15, 1966	Civilian (PM)	North-East
2	Johnson Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi	Jan. 1966 – July 1966	Military	South East
3	Yakubu Gowon	July 1966 – July 1975	Military	North-Central
4	Murtala Ramat Mohammed	July 1975 – Feb. 1976	Military	North West
5	Olusegun Obasanjo	Feb. 1976 – Oct. 1979	Military	South-West
6	Shehu Shagari	Oct. 1979 – Dec. 1983	Civilian	North-West
7	Muhammadu Buhari	Dec. 1983 – Aug. 1985	Military	North-West
8	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida	Aug. 1985 – Aug. 1993	Military	North-Central
9	Ernest Shonekan	Aug. 1993 – Nov. 1993	Interim (Civilian)	South-West
10	Sani Abacha	Nov. 1993 – June 1998	Military	North-West
11	Abdulsalami Abubakar	June 1998 – May 1999	Military	North-Central
12	Olusegun Obasanjo	May 1999 – May 2007	Civilian	South-West
13	Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	May 2007 – May 2010	Civilian	North-West
14	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	May 2010 – May 2015	Civilian	South-South

15	Muhammadu Buhari	May 2015 – May 2023	Civilian	North-West
16	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	May 2023 – Present (2025)	Civilian	South-West

Historical Issues and Nigeria Constitutional Development.

The Nigerian constitution developed through a sequence of historical occurrences significantly shaped by colonialism, independence movements, and the aspiration to establish a governance system that embodies Nigeria's diverse ethnic, cultural, and regional attributes. Prior to British colonialism, present-day Nigeria comprised numerous independent kingdoms, empires, and ethnic groups, each possessing distinct political systems. The groups included the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east.⁵⁶ The British colonized during the late 19th and 20th centuries, unifying various ethnic and cultural groups under a singular governance. During the colonial era, Britain employed an indirect rule system, depending on local traditional leaders to manage territories while consolidating power among British officials. The lack of a cohesive legal and political framework, coupled with ethnic and regional disparities, posed significant governance challenges.⁵⁷ The initial endeavor to establish a constitutional framework for Nigeria occurred in 1922 with the Clifford Constitution. It established some self-governance and formed a legislative council, while it remained under significant British supervision.⁵⁸ This constitution served primarily as a political instrument for governing Nigeria rather than facilitating self-governance. The Richard Constitution of 1946 represented a significant advancement as it established regionalism by partitioning Nigeria into three regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern.⁵⁹ It established the initial central significant control, and the constitution failed to consider the interests of ethnic minorities.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the two protectorates were merged in 1914 purportedly to facilitate the establishment of the current Nigerian state; yet, they remained under disparate and conflicting politico-administrative systems, hence fostering ethno-regional disparities and political dissent.⁶¹ Lugard's publication in 1922 unequivocally asserts that no European power operated in Africa solely for altruistic reasons. Practically, this reflects one aspect of the 'Dual Mandate' that Britain and other colonial powers pursued in Africa, where the European ambition to exploit African trade and resources often overshadowed any sense of obligation to assist the political advancement of the indigenous populations.⁶² The 1946 Richard Constitution sought to foster national unity in Nigeria, addressing prior challenges of political and administrative cohesion amidst diverse perspectives. The division of the country into three regions aimed to promote development along distinct regional lines, marking the inception of regionalism and ethno-regionalism in Nigerian politics.⁶³ It provided a rationale for regional separatism and the formulation of self-aware, determined administrative policies along regional lines. The Macpherson Constitution was enacted at Window Castle when the Nigerian Order-in-Council established a new constitution for Nigeria on 29 June 1951.⁶⁴ This constitution expanded the participation of Nigerians in government. It developed a more representative system in a central legislative body and provided for the construction of regional assemblies. However, it still lacked actual self-determination and did not satisfy all ethnic groups,

leading to tensions between them. The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 marked the transition toward federalism, which recognized the four regions of Nigeria: the Northern, Western, Eastern, and Southern Cameroons. It provided for a federal government with greater powers to the regions. It also set the stage for Nigeria's eventual independence. Nigeria gained independence from Britain on October 1, 1960, with a parliamentary system modeled after the British system. The 1960 Independence Constitution established a federal system of government, with a House of Representatives and a Senate. It also encompassed a constitutional framework for individual rights and established a federal government with a balance of power between the central and regional authorities. However, the independent constitution was not perfect. Tensions over regional power, ethnic divisions, and economic disparities led to a series of military rule; the constitution was often suspended or amended, and governance was centrally used under military leaders. After years of military rule, Nigeria returned to civilian governance with the 1979 Constitution, which introduced a new president as the head of state and government.⁶⁵ The 1979 Constitution also emphasized federalism, separation of powers, and the protection of fundamental rights. Later, the 1999 Constitution came into effect following another period of military government. This is the current constitution of Nigeria and has undergone multiple modifications to address the difficulties of government, federalism, and human rights. The framers of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended must have intended the impression above when they placed Section 14(3) and Section 14(4) into the constitution. It is vital to replicate the provisions for convenience of reference: Section 14(3): The composition of the federal Government or its agencies and the management of its operations shall be executed in a way that reflects Nigeria's federal character and promotes national unity. Furthermore, to mandate national allegiance, thereby guaranteeing the absence of dominance by individuals from a limited number of states or specific ethnic or sectional groups inside the Government or its agencies.

Section 14(4): The composition of the Government of a state, a local government council, or any of the agencies of such Government or council shall be executed in a manner that reorganizes and manages the affairs of the Government or council, reflecting the diversity of the populace within its jurisdiction and fostering loyalty among all the peoples of the federation.⁶⁶

The progression of Nigeria's constitution illustrates the nation's historical transition from British colonial governance to a federal republic. The Nigerian Constitution, influenced by colonialism and ethnic issues, remains a fundamental framework for administration. The development underscores the ongoing effort to accommodate Nigeria's various populations and regions.

Conclusion

This synthetic review of Ethnic Consciousness and Historical Perspective on Constitutional Governance in Nigeria has highlighted the deep interconnection between ethnic pluralism and the structural evolution of governance in the Nigerian state. From the colonial amalgamation of culturally and politically distinct regions in 1914 to the successive constitutional frameworks that have attempted to mediate

interethnic relations, the Nigerian experience underscores how ethnic consciousness has remained both a central challenge and a persistent determinant of political development. The trend of Nigeria's constitutional governance has not been linear. Instead, it has been shaped by a complex interplay of colonial legacies, military interventions, negotiated settlements, and the strategic responses of ethnic elites to national politics. Ethnicity has often served as a basis for political mobilization, resource distribution, and identity-based claims for representation and autonomy. As shown, various constitutional moments from the Richards Constitution (1946) to the 1999 Constitution have grappled with the challenge of ethnic representation and national integration, often without adequately addressing the root causes of ethnic tensions.

A key insight from this review is the persistence of historical grievances rooted in perceived marginalization and structural imbalances. These unresolved tensions continue to hinder the consolidation of democratic governance and national cohesion. Thus, while Nigeria has formally transitioned to a democratic order since 1999, the deep-seated ethnic consciousness shaped by its historical trajectory continues to influence the legitimacy, equity, and functionality of its constitutional arrangements. In moving forward, the Nigerian state must confront its historical contradictions by promoting inclusive constitutional reforms that are reflective of its plural nature. Institutional mechanisms such as true federalism, equitable power sharing, and constitutional restructuring remain critical to mitigating ethnic mistrust and fostering a governance framework that is both representative and responsive. Without such efforts, ethnic consciousness will remain a fault line in the nation's political architecture, constraining the promise of constitutional democracy in Nigeria.

End Notes

1. Adibe, J. *Ethnicity, Identity Politics and the National Question in Nigeria*. London: Adonis & Abbey, 2021.
2. Aderinto, S. *African Kingdoms and the Making of Colonial Africa, 1400–1900*. London: Routledge, 2023.
3. Adeyemo, A. "The Quest for National Integration in Nigeria: The Federal Character Principle Revisited." *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs* (December 2024).
4. Afigbo, A. *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929*. Ibadan: University Press PLC, 2001.
5. BusinessDay. "How 2023 Elections Destroyed Our Relationship Nigerians Tell Personal Stories." *BusinessDay*, March 2023.
6. Center for Strategic and International Studies. *Identity, Insecurity, and Institutions in the 2023 Nigerian Elections*. Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2023.

7. Coleman, J.S. *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958.
8. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Sec. 14(3)–(4).
9. Constitution of Nigeria.” *Wikipedia*. Extracted January, 2025.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Nigeria.
10. Dahl, R.A. *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
11. Dakas, D.C.J. “Federalism and Constitutional Reform in Nigeria.” *Journal of Constitutional Law in Africa* 2, no. 1 (1995): 45–67.
12. Ebenezer, L.B., and Oaikhena, I.M. “Federal Character Principles: Its Impact and Challenges in Nigeria.” *Cerdel Multidisciplinary Journal of African Development* 2 (May 2025): 112–28.
13. Egwemi, S. “Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Future of the Nigerian State.” *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 11, no. 4 (2009): 180–94.
14. Ekeh, P.P., and Eghosa E. Osaghae. *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987.
15. Ema-Etokudo, O.F., Kenneth N., and Evans, O.N. “Internal Party Democracy and Zoning System in Nigeria: The Case of Peoples Democratic Party 2022 Presidential Primary Election.” *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy* 9, no. 3 (2023): 75–89.
16. Ezera, K. *Constitutional Developments in Nigeria: An Analytical Study of Nigeria's Constitution-Making Developments and the Historical and Political Factors That Affected Constitutional Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.
17. Falola, T, and Matthew M. *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
18. Federal Republic of Nigeria. 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (as Amended).
19. Finnbowler. “On February 25, 2023... young Nigerians have leveraged social media to drive change... the Labour Party utilized social media campaigns... significantly enhancing their vote count.” [Online post].
20. Following the announcement... opposition parties have renewed calls to overturn the election result... citing irregularities.” News quote or post, 2023.

21. Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel, Carolyn Logan, and Peter P. *Democratic Backsliding in Africa?* Accra: Afrobarometer, 2021.
22. Hopkins, A. G. *An Economic History of West Africa*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2019.
23. Ibhade, N.F., and Akpomuvire, M. "The Federal Character Principle and Its Impact on the Nigerian Public Service." *Management Research and Behavior Journal* 3, no. 2 (December 2023).
24. Ibrahim, J. "Ethnic Politics and the Nigerian Transition." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 2 (2004): 121–35.
25. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Federal Government records, and recent national reports. 2025. Wikipedia contributors. "2023 Nigerian General Election." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved February, 2025. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Nigerian_general_election.
26. Institutional Publications and Legal Documents
27. Joseph, R. *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
28. Joseph, R. *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
29. Korieh, C.J. *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
30. Kukah, M. *Witness to Justice: An Insider's Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission*. Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2009.
31. Lugard, F. *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1922.
32. Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
33. Nwankwo, C. *The Politics of Zoning in Nigeria: The PDP and the 2011 Presidential Election*. Centre for Policy Advocacy and Leadership Development Report. Abuja: CPALD, 2011.
34. Ochonu, M.E. *Africa in Fragments: Essays on Nigeria, Africa, and Global Africanity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2020.

35. Oikhala, G.I., and Dauda, M.G. "Federal Character Policy Implementation and Governance in Nigeria." *Indonesian Journal of Politics* 11, no. 1 (June 2025).
36. Ojo, B. A. "Nigeria's Third Republic and the Challenges of a Democratic Transition." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 33, no. 1 (1998): 33–46.
37. Okibe, V.C. *Constitutional Development in Nigeria*. Enugu: Snaap Press, 2000.
38. Olukoshi, A.O. "State and Ethnic Relations in Nigeria." In *The Nigerian State: Political Economy, State Class and Political System in the Post-Colonial Era*, edited by William Adebaniwi, 201–223. London: Routledge, 2018.
39. Omotola, J.S. "Constitutional Reforms and the Quest for National Integration in Nigeria." *Journal of African Elections* 20, no. 1 (2023): 45–64.
40. Onimisi, T., and Shakira, H.O. "Strategies for Effective Policy Implementation in Nigeria: A Case of Federal Character Principle." *Journal of Governance and Development* 20, no. 1 (2024): 129–50.
41. Orji, N. "Nigeria: Transition Without Change." *Journal of African Elections* 7, no. 2 (2008a): 126–45.
42. Orji, N. "Power Sharing: The Element of Continuity in Nigerian Politics." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 8, no. 1 (2008b): 102–15.
43. Osaghae, E.E. *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.
44. Osaghae, E.E. "Colonialism and Ethnic Conflict in Africa: The Case of Nigeria." *Peace Research* 29, no. 2 (1997): 35–44.
45. Osaghae, E.E. *Nigeria: Ethnicity, Federalism and State Disintegration*. Ibadan: PEFS, 1995.
46. Osaro, A. E. *The Amalgamation of Nigeria: Colonial Realities and Contemporary Legacies*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1989.
47. Senate Committee on Federal Character and Intergovernmental Affairs. *Probe of MDA Compliance with Sections 14(3)–(4)*. Abuja, Nigeria, 2025.
48. Sklar, R. L. *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
49. Suberu, R. T. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2020.

50. Suberu, R.T. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001.
51. Suberu, R.T. "Managing Ethnic Conflict through Federalism: The Nigerian Experience." *Current History* 119, no. 817 (April 2020): 175–180.
52. Suberu, R. "The Nigerian Federal System: Performance, Problems, and Prospects." In *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*, edited by Dele Olowu and James S. Wunsch, 66–84. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2004.
53. Tamuno, T. N. *Nigeria and Elective Representation, 1923–1947*. London: Heinemann, 1966.
54. Tamuno, T.N. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria Since 1914." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 8, no. 4 (1970): 563–84.
55. Tamuno, T. *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898–1914*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2011.
56. Táíwò, O. *Africa Must Be Modern: A Manifesto*. Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2014.
57. Usman, Y.B. *The Historian and Society: Selected Historical Writings of Yusufu Bala Usman*. Edited by George Amale Kwanashie and Norma Perchonock. Zaria: Yusuf Bala Usman Institute, 2023.
58. Vanguard. "Senate Probes Abuse of Federal Character Principle." *Vanguard*, March 25, 2025.
59. Vaughan, O. *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
60. "2023 Nigerian General Election." *Wikipedia*. Extracted, January 2025. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Nigerian_general_election.