

An Overview of Consociational Policy and Nigeria's Federal Character Principles

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Abstract : Nigeria is a country of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with varied population size among them. There are about 370 ethnic groups scattered across the country with Islam and Christianity being the dominant religions. As a result of this diversity, the country adopted power sharing system using the Federal Character Principle (FCP) that mandated for the reflection of the country's diversity in the composition of government and its agencies. However, appointment of ministers does not reflect such diversity proportionally so also it does not take into consideration the varied population sizes of the states. Thus, there is a continued feeling and cries of marginalisation and domination across the country especially from the states with larger population who are left with higher number of unemployed as the system allocates the same number of slots to all the states regardless of population size. Therefore, it became imperative to find out if there is justice in the treatment of un-equals equally or favouring one religion against the other in the composition of cabinet ministers. The objective is to suggest on a more equitable formula for the allocation of slots to all the states and the FCT as well as an equitable and impartial cabinet of ministers. To achieve this objective an examination and analysis of both consociational policy and the FCP was carried out so as to analyse the practice of grand coalition and proportional representation in Nigeria. Both factors were found to be neglected and overlooked by the FCP which could have been utilized to improve on the federal character of the country.

Keywords: Consociational policy; proportional representation; grand coalition; federal character principle; marginalisation; domination

1.1 Introduction

Consociational Policy also referred to as Consociationalism was developed in an attempt to reconcile societal division be it along religious, ethnic, or linguistic divides so as to ensure there is no domination or exclusion of one group by another in the government of such heterogeneous society. It has been established by scholars and experts that societies with profound ethnic divisions are more susceptible to political violence than societies without serious identity cleavages (Selway & Templeman, 2012). The power sharing model was basically established as a substitute to Westminster style majoritarian regimes, characterized by both unitary nations and majoritarian plurality elections (Norris, 2008). It has been formulated to address the problem of majoritarian democracy that assumes the majority should govern while the minority opposes the government. According to the pure theoretical model, the majority have the monopoly of decision making and power (Hering, 1998). In a homogenous society this style is acceptable, but in a deeply divided society, this system has a negative implication because the minorities that are being denied access to power continuously will feel excluded and marginalized which could lead to revolt against the government. This majoritarian

democracy therefore, in a segmented society will eventually lead to violent crisis and disintegration. Accordingly, the main goals of consociationalism include governmental stability, durable power-sharing measures, enduring democracy and the prevention of violence. It guarantees stability by giving all relevant groups a stake in the government (Cammett & Malesky, 2012). It has been formulated and developed by most notably Arend Lijphart. It is generally accepted today that consociationalism is the dominant model in managing ethnically divided societies (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009).

Nigeria is a country with over 370 different ethnic groups practising mainly Islam and Christianity with a little of traditional religious practitioners. The country is broadly divided into 2 regions of North and South. These two regions are further divided into 6 geo-political zones for ease of administration and allocation of resources. The expression, Federal Character as defined in section 14(3) of 1979 constitution could be described as the individual wish of the Nigerian people to support national unity, nurture national allegiance and provide each citizen a sense of belonging to the country, distant from the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity that exists. The principle of federal character was articulated and used by

successive governments in the country in order to address and hopefully alleviate the problem of diversity so as to guarantee a non-violent, stable and integrated Nigeria. (Majokodunmi, 2013; FCC Handbook, 2006). The fear of exclusion or domination were salient features of Nigerian politics, and it was therefore essential to have a specific provision that will guarantee there was no majority of people from a limited states or even from a few sectional or other ethnic groups in the configuration of the government and its agencies. Accordingly, the country adopted power sharing in its operations under the Federal Character Principles which has been enclosed under section 14 (3) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended. Power sharing arrangement in the country as operated under the FCP however, does not reflect or consider religious or ethnic affiliations of candidates nominated to feel such vacancies. These two factors are the most critical cleavages in the country. Similarly, it does not consider the relative population size of states when it comes to allocation and distribution of bureaucratic or political posts among the federating units (Adetiba & Rahim, 2013; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012; Mustapha, 2007). Thus, the different segmental groups increasingly feel marginalized and neglected as a result of under representation in government.

Thus, this research work will attempt to explore and analyze grand coalition and proportional representation practiced under consociational policy and how it complies with the federal character principles.

1.2 Consociational Arrangements/Background of the Study

Advocates of consociationalism are of the opinion that ethnic diversities are exceedingly resilient and thus must be recognized and accepted in a society rather than ignoring it (McGarry & O'Leary, 1995). They further maintained that the major groups cannot be expected to merge, assimilate or dissolve to establish a common identity (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009). Accordingly, Consociationalists therefore regard themselves as realists who recognize and accept the existence of divisions within ethnically segmented societies and attempted to control such groups activities and quest for power through an often complex constitutional engineering (Kerr, 2009). As such, political systems of quite a number of countries function on consociational bases including that of Lebanon, India, Canada, Belgium, Netherlands from 1917 to 1967, New Zealand and Switzerland. Some scholars maintained that even the European Union resembles consociational democracy (Bogaards, 1998).

Belgium has successfully attained stability following her reform of 1970 which turned the country's central government into fully fledged power sharing system using the principle of parity

that guaranteed equal number of ministers to the French and Flemish speakers, upper ranks of the army etc. (Schneckner, 2002). In the federation of Bosnia, the three-member presidency requires one Muslim, one Croat and one Serb representative with each having veto power. Similarly, in an attempt to ensure segmental representation, the president in Lebanon must be a Christian, the prime minister on the other hand has to be a Sunni Muslim and the parliament speaker has to be a Shi'ite Muslim (Nagle & Clancy, 2012). India's democratic stability and success has been credited to the country's grand coalition government which comprised of the various linguistic and religious groups in the government cabinet and which has been formally institutionalised (Ganguly, Diamond & Plattner, 2007). Consociational theorists believe Canada is split along ethnic-linguistic cleavages. 24.3% of its population are French while the remaining 75.7% are English. It was presumed that the political unity of the country could not be sustained until ethnic conflicts are controlled. Canada's grand coalition different from that of consociational European states because in Canada, cabinet is not formed by various groups but rather British type of electoral system that produced a party government that accommodates various ethnic interests within the government and not from various parties. With a long history of tradition, it necessitated the cabinet to be truly representative of provinces, religion and language. Canada's cabinet composition follows proportional principle. Averagely, French ministers constitute 30% in the cabinet while the English constitute 70%. Other provision includes office rotation that entails rotating office of the governor general, speaker house of commons, and the chief justice of Supreme Court. The Royal commission of bilingualism and biculturalism recommended bureaucratic offices to be occupied proportionately (Hering, 1998).

In Switzerland, executive powers are shared among the various linguistic groups. This representation is in proportion to each group's population size in the country (Reut-Institute, 2014). Switzerland could be seen as a symmetrical federation characterised by component units whose political boundaries coincides with the social cleavages which determines the social diversity within the society with every component with a specific interest, demand and resources different from the other. This ordinarily would have been a major source of conflict with the units because they all tend to pursue selfish policies that could be detrimental to the other component units. But with the establishment of autonomous segment as envisaged by consociationalism, it has contributed to democratic conflict resolution in the state (Toit, 1987). Grand coalition may take different forms and 1 of the ways it can work is to establish a cabinet not just in partisan representation only but in terms of the representation of linguistic,

religious or any other factor in a predetermined ratio just like the case of Belgium. Grand coalition in India has gone further than that by ensuring that its cabinet is assembled from a broadly representative and inclusive nature of a single dominant party. At the top are national political elites who are committed to reconciling differences through bargaining amongst themselves. The combination of the congress party's inclusive nature and political dominance has produced grand coalition cabinet with ministers belonging to all the main religious, linguistic and regional groups. With the series of agitations from the Indian public, the state reorganization commission embraced the linguistic principle and recommended a drastic revision in state boundaries along linguistic line in 1955. This gave rise to linguistic federalism in India. The system also has reservations in public service positions, university admissions and even electoral positions specifically for the minority groups who in turn have a veto power over the Hindu majority with a population of about 83%. This policy has been regarded as a success by many scholars (Lijphart, 1996).

The sole aim of consociational democracy is that of ensuring peace and harmony by way of bringing together all the major sections, segments or groups of the society into forming the government in such a way that everybody will have a sense of responsibility and belonging. Under consociational democracy, power-sharing arrangements supposedly, are designed to incorporate principles of democracy and the necessity for management of conflict in deeply divided societies (Sisk, 2003).

1.3 Practice of Grand Coalition in Nigeria

Some constitutional provisions for the appointment of ministers in Nigeria, as enumerated under section 147 subsections 1-6 of the 1999 constitution as amended, are summarised as follows.

- The President may establish offices of Ministers of the Government of the Federation.
- The Senate must confirm the nominees before their appointment to the office of

Minister of the Government of the Federation by the President

- Who in the appointment of ministers must conform to section 14(3).
- In effect, he must appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of that State.
- To be appointed a minister, a person must attain the age of 30 years; obtain at least school certificate level or its equivalent, of sound mind and not a lunatic under any law.
- Must not belong to any secret society and not indicted for fraud by any commission.

The question now is even though the government wanted the composition of its cabinet to reflect the country's diversity, why then it failed to recognize and emphasis on ethno-religious affiliations of prospective ministers? Does this neglect make people to feel marginalised and dominated? It has been established that ministerial appointment in Nigeria goes in line with the constitution and the policy of federal character principle which mandated for the allocation of ministerial slots to the 36 states of the federation. From 1999 to 2015, all the states were allocated ministerial slot accordingly. Therefore, ministerial appointment in Nigeria, comply with the federal character principle.

However, it does not ensure adequate representation of the various ethnic and religious groups that exist in the country. In 2003 when president Obasanjo named his ministers, from the entire southern region, not a single Muslim was made a minister in that cabinet despite the fact that the South West zone with about six states has about 50% Muslim population (Tudu, 2005; NACOMYO, 2003). Table 1.1 below shows the composition of ministers in Nigeria from the return of democracy in 1999 to 2015 being the period when the Federal Character Principles fully comes into effect.

Table 1.1: Composition of ministers from 1999 to 2015

S/N	Affiliations	Obasanjo 1999	Obasanjo 2003	Yaradua 2007	Jonathan 2011	Buhari 2015	Total	% of Ministers	Overall population %
1	Muslim	20	16	21	17	18	92	45	60
2	Christian	26	26	16	25	18	111	55	40
3	Traditionalist	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
	Total	46	42	37	42	36	203	100%	100%

Source: Adapted from Nigerian News from Leadership News, (2015) CIA, (2014); SCSN, (2013); Ugoh & Ukpere, (2012); Afenifere, (2008); Muse, (2008); Mustapha, (2007);Tudu (2005); Nacomyo (2003); Mckaiser, (1999); BBC (1999)

The Kanuri ethnic group situated in the North West zone with presence in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and Gombe states, with a total population of about

5.6% of the country's population regarded as the fifth largest ethnic group (UNHCR, 2015) yet, were never regarded for any ministerial slot since the

return of democracy in 1999. During President Jonathan's regime, it was revealed that he preferred to appoint northern minority Christians on any slot that is meant for the northern Nigeria thereby overlooking the dominant ethnic and religious groups in that region which leads to cries and feelings of marginalization and domination. The process of appointing ministers in Nigeria therefore does not comply with grand coalition under consociational democracy.

Consequently, it is believed that if the government could ensure proportional representation in the appointment of minister on the basis of religion and ethnicity, the federal character of the country will certainly become more effective and strengthened. This has been proved in India with its cabinet of ministers where certain numbers of ministers are allocated to the various religious and linguistic groups in the country according to their overall population sizes (Lijphart, 2008).

1.4 Practice of Proportional Representation in Nigeria

Proportional representation is a system where by the allocation of slots and offices among the various states correspond closely with the proportion of the total population of those states. For example, if a state has 7% of the country's total population then, a flawlessly proportional structure would allow that particular state to gain 7% of the total slots or offices to be distributed among the states. Proportional representation could take so many forms like the form of religion, ethnicity or relative population sizes of the various states as obtainable in many countries because the main objective is to ensure, the various segments of the society feels adequately represented and not marginalised in any way so as to have a peaceful and harmonious country.

Section 217(3) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria has instructed for the reflection of federal character in the composition of the Nigerian military. Accordingly, the federal character principle equally advocated for equitable representation of the

various states in all public institutions including the Nigerian Defence Academy being the entry point of military officers in the country. However, it has been revealed that the NDA regardless of any consideration on state's population sizes, ethnic or religious divisions, allocates almost the same number of slots to all the 36 states of the federation. The neglect of these factors made it possible for the sad feeling of unhappiness, marginalisation and domination of Muslims across the country. This sad feeling, led to the Supreme Council of Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN) and the Council of Imams and Ulama (CIU), to jointly raise an alarm over what they described as incessant marginalization and lop-sidedness of the Muslims in the enrolment of personnel into the NDA. According to a communiqué they issued, the result clearly shows that Muslims in Nigeria were systematically marginalized seen as a plan intended to steadily get rid of Muslim youth particularly from the Armed Forces as well as other security agencies in the country. They cautioned that this incessant marginalization and lop-sidedness notwithstanding the greater number of Muslim in Nigeria will not be accepted henceforth.

Similarly, it has been observed that the range of population according to the states differs significantly from Kano being the highest populated with 9.3 Million representing about 6.7% of Nigeria's population and Bayelsa being the least populated with about 1.3 million representing about 1.2% of the country's total population. However, when allocating slots to the states, the NDA does not consider population size of states and therefore allocates the same number to all the states. Thus, people from states with high population are not happy with this system of sharing slots and feel not adequately represented in the NDA. Such states are also left with higher number of unemployed youth due to this system of allocation to the states. The process of military recruitment in Nigeria therefore does not comply with proportional representation as practiced under consociational democracy. Table 1.2 below shows Nigerian military recruitment through the NDA from 2012 to 2015.

Table 1.2: States population and slots allocated

S/N	States	2012 Admission	2013 Admission	2014 Admission	2015 Admission	Total Selected	2006 Population Figure	% of Admission	% of Population
1	Abia	9	10	10	11	40	2,833,999	2.7	2.0
2	Adamawa	9	10	11	11	41	3,168,101	2.8	2.3
3	Akwa Ibom	9	10	10	10	39	3,920,208	2.7	2.8
4	Anambra	9	11	10	10	40	4,182,032	2.7	3.0
5	Bauchi	9	11	11	10	41	4,676,465	2.8	3.3
6	Bayelsa	9	11	11	10	41	1,703,358	2.8	1.2
7	Benue	9	11	11	11	42	4,219,244	2.9	3.0
8	Borno	9	10	10	10	39	4,151,193	2.7	3.0
9	Cross Rivers	9	10	10	10	39	2,888,966	2.7	2.1
10	Delta	9	10	10	10	39	4,098,391	2.7	2.9

S/N	States	2012 Admission	2013 Admission	2014 Admission	2015 Admission	Total Selected	2006 Population Figure	% of Admission	% of Population
11	Ebonyi	9	10	10	10	39	2,173,501	2.7	1.6
12	Edo	9	10	11	11	41	3,218,332	2.8	2.3
13	Ekiti	9	11	10	10	40	2,384,212	2.7	1.7
14	Enugu	9	11	10	11	41	3,257,298	2.8	2.3
15	Gombe	9	11	10	10	40	2,353,879	2.7	1.7
16	Imo	9	10	11	11	41	3,934,899	2.8	2.8
17	Jigawa	9	10	10	10	39	4,348,649	2.7	3.1
18	Kaduna	9	11	11	10	41	6,066,562	2.8	4.3
19	Kano	9	10	10	10	39	9,383,682	2.7	6.7
20	Katsina	9	10	11	12	42	5,792,578	2.9	4.1
21	Kebbi	9	10	10	10	39	3,238,628	2.7	2.3
22	Kogi	9	10	10	10	39	3,278,487	2.7	2.3
23	Kwara	9	11	10	10	39	2,371,089	2.7	1.7
24	Lagos	9	10	10	11	40	9,013,534	2.7	6.4
25	Nassarawa	9	10	10	10	39	1,863,275	2.7	1.3
26	Niger	9	10	10	11	40	3,950,249	2.7	2.8
27	Ogun	9	10	10	10	39	3,728,098	2.7	2.7
28	Ondo	9	10	10	10	39	3,441,024	2.7	2.5
29	Osun	9	11	10	10	40	3,423,535	2.7	2.4
30	Oyo	9	10	11	11	41	5,591,589	2.8	4.0
31	Plateau	9	10	11	10	40	3,178,712	2.7	2.3
32	Rivers	9	11	10	11	41	5,185,400	2.8	3.7
33	Sokoto	9	11	11	10	41	3,696,999	2.8	2.6
34	Taraba	9	10	10	11	40	2,300,736	2.7	1.6
35	Yobe	9	10	10	10	39	2,321,591	2.7	1.7
36	Zamfara	9	10	10	10	39	3,259,846	2.7	2.3
37	FCT	6	8	8	8	30	1,405,201	2.0	1.0
38	Total	330	380	379	381	1,469	140,003,542	100%	100%

Source: Adapted from NDA Admission list 2012, NDA Admission list 2013, NDA Admission list 2014, NDA Admission list 2015 and National Populations Commission, (2006)

Consequently, it is believed that if the government could ensure proportional representation according to the state's overall population, ethnicity and religion, the federal character principle will indeed become more effective and strengthened. This has been proved in India's democratic stability and success has been attributed to its provision of proportional representation in in the country's political arrangement that has proportionally accommodated the various linguistic and religious groups in the country (Ganguly, Diamond & Plattner, 2007).

1.5 Conclusion

This study has attempted to examine and analyse Consociational Policy with the sole objective of providing an improvement idea to the federal character principles in Nigeria. Considering the cries and feelings of marginalisation and domination in the midst of the federal character principle and how it failed to leave up to expectation, this study attempted to proffer an enduring solution on how the federal character principle may be improved in an attempt to make it more effective through the Consociational model which if adopted could improve the effectiveness of federal character principle in Nigeria.

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