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Item Type	Book
Authors	Mustapha, Abdul Raufu
Publisher	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
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Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria

Abdul Raufu Mustapha

Democracy, Governance and Human Rights
Programme Paper Number 24
November 2006

United Nations
Research Institute
for Social Development

This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Programme Paper was produced with the support of the Ford Foundation. UNRISD also thanks the governments of Denmark, Finland, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom for their core funding.

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ISSN 1020-8186

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Acronyms

ACF	Arewa Consultative Forum
AG	Action Group
FCS	federal civil service
HRVIC	Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission
LGA	local government area
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria Citizens
NEPU	Northern Elements Progressive Union
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
PDP	People's Democratic Party
SMC	Supreme Military Council

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

Nigeria has about 374 ethnic groups that are broadly divided into ethnic "majorities" and ethnic "minorities". The major ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast. These three "hegemonic" ethnic groups constituted 57.8 per cent of the national population in the 1963 census. All the other ethnicities constitute different degrees of "minority" status. The dominance of the national population by the three majority groups was further accentuated by the tripodal regional administrative structure of the 1950s, which gave each majority ethnic group a region. From this demographic and historical starting point, Nigeria has evolved a tripolar ethnic structure, which forms the main context for ethnic mobilization and contestation. This paper investigates the consequences of the demographic and historical legacies for the management of inter-ethnic relations, particularly within the public sector. The paper is divided into three parts.

Part 1 explores the history and geography of the ethno-regional cleavages in Nigeria, and suggests reasons for their endurance. Early colonial rule in Nigeria was based on the implicit concept of one country, many peoples, and very little was done to create unifying institutions and processes for these peoples. The internal geography of colonialism expressed itself as a cultural geography, which emphasized the distinctiveness of peoples, and the indissoluble connection between the "tribesmen", their territories and their chiefs. Colonial administrative regionalism consolidated the link between ethnic distinctiveness and administrative boundaries: Hausa-Fulani in the north; Igbo in the east and the Yoruba in the west. The ethnic minorities in each region were forced to accommodate themselves the best they could in each region. Four factors that guided the evolution of the Nigerian state from 1900 are examined: the policies and practices of colonial administrations; the attitudes and prejudices of colonial administrators; and the colonial economy. From the 1940s, these three factors were joined by the politics of the emergent regional elites who had the incentive to mobilize along regional and ethnic lines, and in the process further entrenched the cleavages developed under colonial rule.

The long-drawn politico-historical process of regionalism, statism and localism has led to a concentric pattern of seven ethnic and political cleavages in Nigeria: (i) between the North and the South; (ii) between the three majority ethnic groups; (iii) between these *wazobia* groups on the one hand, and the minority groups on the other; (iv) rivalry between states, sometimes within and sometimes between ethnic groups; (v) interethnic rivalry in a mixed state composed of minority groups of different strengths, or a segment of a majority ethnicity surrounded by minority groups; (vi) intraethnic or subethnic rivalry within each majority ethnic group, sometimes also corresponding to state boundaries and sometimes within a single state; (vii) and finally, interclan and intraclan rivalries, particularly in the southeast and the north-central parts of the country. The most politically significant cleavages on which this report concentrates are the first three.

Part 2 examines the manifestations of the inequalities associated with the cleavages examined in part 1, particularly in the political, bureaucratic and educational apparatuses of the state. It argues that the cleavages coincide with systematic patterns of horizontal inequalities. It was particularly in the sphere of education that regional differences were first manifested under colonialism. And this then had a knock-on effect on the regional formation of human capital, and general economic development. Persisting educational and socioeconomic inequalities between different regions and ethnicities form the context for the observable inequalities in the staffing of governmental institutions in Nigeria. The long-run patterns of overlapping inequalities have come to shape people's life chances and their political perceptions. They have also had a tremendous impact on the electoral politics of the country and the composition of different cabinets and bureaucracies, giving rise to political conflicts centred on the nature of ethno-regional representation within the public sector. The patterns of ethno-regional representation in various cabinets, parliaments, military juntas, and different levels of the

public sector bureaucracy are examined, showing patterns of systematic correspondence between cleavages and horizontal inequalities in these institutions.

Part 3 looks at various efforts aimed at reforming the lopsided nature of representation within the institutions of the Nigerian federation. Particular attention is paid to an attempt to banish ethno-regional differences through the imposition of a unitary system of government, and the reasons for the failure of this policy. Other reform measures examined include the breaking up of the powerful regions into smaller states, the evolution of a quota system for elite recruitment into the educational system, the constitutional provision for affirmative action under the federal character principle, and the building of a federation with a strong centre and a powerful presidency as the antidote to ethno-regional separatism. There was also the reform of the party system and the introduction of majoritarian and consociational rules to moderate divisive tendencies within the political process.

These efforts at reforming ethno-regional representation and relations in Nigeria have had only limited success. While the reforms have fundamentally transformed the Nigerian state, they have yet to solve the problem of ethnic mobilization and conflict. As a consequence, there is still a plethora of grievances from various ethnic groups.

Abdul Raufu Mustapha is University Lecturer in African Politics and Kirk-Greene Fellow in African Studies, African Studies Centre, St. Antony's College, University of Oxford. He teaches on the Development Studies degree at Queen Elizabeth House.

Résumé

Le Nigéria compte quelque 374 groupes ethniques qui se divisent en gros en ethnies "majoritaires" et "minoritaires". Les principaux groupes ethniques sont les Haoussas-Fulanis au nord, les Yorubas au sud-ouest et les Ibos au sud-est. Lors du recensement de 1963, ces trois groupes ethniques "hégémoniques" représentaient 57,8 pour cent de la population nationale. Toutes les autres ethnies ont à des degrés divers un statut minoritaire. La domination de la population nationale par les trois groupes majoritaires a été encore accentuée par la structure administrative régionale des années 50, qui a donné une région à chaque ethnie majoritaire. A partir de ce point de départ démographique et historique, le Nigéria a développé une structure ethnique tripolaire, qui est essentiellement le cadre dans lequel les ethnies se mobilisent et rivalisent entre elles. L'auteur s'intéresse ici aux conséquences de cet héritage démographique et historique pour la gestion des relations interethniques, en particulier dans le secteur public. Le document se divise en trois parties.

Dans la première partie, consacrée à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie des clivages ethno-régionaux au Nigéria, l'auteur tente d'expliquer pourquoi ils perdurent. A l'origine, le régime colonial au Nigéria reposait sur la notion implicite d'un seul pays composé de nombreux peuples et s'est très peu soucié de créer des institutions et des processus qui soient un facteur d'unification pour ces peuples. La géographie interne du colonialisme était une géographie culturelle, qui soulignait le caractère distinct des peuples et le lien indissoluble entre chaque "population tribale", son territoire et ses chefs. Par sa politique de régionalisation, l'administration coloniale a renforcé le lien entre le caractère distinct de chaque ethnie et les divisions administratives: les Haoussas-Fulanis au nord, les Ibos à l'est et les Yorubas à l'ouest. Les minorités ethniques de chaque région n'ont pas eu d'autre choix que de se faire tant bien que mal une place dans la région. Quatre facteurs qui ont guidé l'évolution de l'Etat nigérian depuis 1900 sont étudiés ici: les politiques et pratiques des administrations coloniales, les attitudes et préjudices des administrateurs coloniaux et l'économie coloniale. A ces trois facteurs s'est ajoutée à partir des années 40 la politique des élites régionales montantes, qui étaient encouragées à recruter leurs sympathisants dans leur région et leur ethnie et qui, ce faisant, ont pérennisé les clivages institués pendant la colonisation.

Le long processus politico-historique de la régionalisation, de la formation de l'Etat et d'autorités locales a abouti à un modèle concentrique de sept clivages ou rivalités ethniques et politiques au Nigéria: (i) entre le nord et le sud; (ii) entre les trois ethnies majoritaires; (iii) entre ces groupes *wazobia*, d'une part, et les groupes minoritaires, de l'autre; (iv) entre les Etats, formés tantôt à l'intérieur d'une même ethnie, tantôt entre plusieurs; (v) entre les ethnies d'un Etat mixte, composé de groupes minoritaires de forces différentes, ou d'une ethnie majoritaire entourée de groupes minoritaires; (vi) à l'intérieur d'une même ethnie ou entre les sous-groupes de chaque ethnie majoritaire, dont les frontières correspondent à celles de l'Etat ou à l'intéreir d'un même Etat; (vii) et enfin à l'intérieur des clans et entre eux, en particulier dans le sud-est et le centre septentrional du pays. Le rapport se concentre sur les trois premiers, qui sont les clivages politiques les plus importants.

Dans la deuxième partie, l'auteur étudie les inégalités associées aux clivages examinés dans la première partie, telles qu'elles se manifestent en particulier dans l'appareil politique, l'administration et le système éducatif de l'Etat. Il fait valoir que les clivages coïncident avec des inégalités horizontales que l'on retrouve systématiquement. C'est d'abord dans le domaine de l'éducation que les différences régionales se sont manifestées à l'époque du colonialisme. Et ces différences se sont répercutées à leur tour sur le capital humain formé au niveau régional et sur le développement économique général. Les inégalités observables au niveau du personnel des institutions gouvernementales du Nigéria ne peuvent s'expliquer que lorsqu'elles sont replacées dans leur contexte, celui des inégalités qui persistent entre régions et ethnies différentes et qui sont d'ordre socio-économique ou tiennent à l'éducation. Ces différentes inégalités qui se superposent en partie et qui se sont répétées d'une génération à l'autre en sont venues à déterminer les chances des individus dans l'existence et leurs conceptions politiques. Elles ont eu aussi un impact profond sur les résultats politiques des élections et sur la composition des différents gouvernements et administrations, ce qui a donné lieu à des conflits politiques sur la nature de la représentation ethno-régionale dans le secteur public. L'auteur, qui examine ici les caractéristiques de la représentation ethno-régionale dans les différents gouvernements, parlements, juntes militaires et aux divers niveaux de l'administration publique, met en évidence une correspondance systématique entre les clivages et les inégalités horizontales dans ces institutions.

La troisième partie porte sur divers efforts entrepris pour corriger les déséquilibres de la représentation dans les institutions de la Fédération nigériane. L'auteur accorde une attention particulière à une tentative qui visait à faire disparaître les différences ethno-régionales en imposant un système de gouvernement unitaire, et aux raisons pour lesquelles elle a échoué. Il examine aussi d'autres mesures de réforme, notamment le démembrement de puissantes régions en Etats plus petits, l'évolution d'un système de quotas pour le recrutement des élites dans l'éducation, l'introduction d'une disposition favorable à l'action positive dans l'article constitutionnel qui pose le principe du fédéralisme, et la mise en place d'une fédération qui soit dotée d'un centre puissant et d'une présidence forte comme antidotes au séparatisme ethno-régional. Il y eut aussi la réforme du système des partis et l'introduction de règles majoritaires et consociatives pour modérer les tendances à la division dans le processus politique.

Ces efforts qui tendaient à réformer la représentation des ethnies et des régions et les relations entre elles n'ont eu qu'un succès limité au Nigéria. Si les réformes ont profondément transformé l'Etat nigérian, elles n'ont pas apporté de solution au problème de la mobilisation et du conflit ethniques. En conséquence, divers groupes ethniques nourrissent encore d'innombrables griefs.

Abdul Raufu Mustapha est chargé de cours en politique africaine et titulaire d'une bourse Kirk-Greene de recherche en études africaines au St. Antony's College, Université d'Oxford. Il enseigne au niveau du diplôme des études de développement à la Queen Elizabeth House.

Resumen

Nigeria tiene unos 374 grupos étnicos que se pueden dividir a grandes rasgos en etnias "mayoritarias" y etnias "minoritarias". Los principales grupos étnicos son los Hausa-Fulani del norte, los Yoruba del suroeste, y los Igbo del sureste. Estos tres grupos étnicos "hegemónicos" constituyen el 57.8 por ciento de la población nacional en el censo de 1963. Todos los demás grupos étnicos tienen el estatus, con diversos grados de diferencia, de "minorías". El dominio de la población nacional por los tres grupos mayoritarios se hizo sentir todavía más por la estructura tripartita de administración regional en los años 50, que dio a cada uno de esos tres grupos una región. Desde este punto de partida demográfico e histórico, Nigeria ha desarrollado una estructura étnica tripolar, que constituye el contexto principal para la movilización y el conflicto étnicos. Este estudio investiga las consecuencias que tuvieron los legados demográficos e históricos para la gestión de las relaciones interraciales, especialmente dentro del sector público. El estudio se divide en tres partes.

La primera parte explora la historia y la geografía de las divisiones etnoregionales en Nigeria, y sugiere razones para explicar porque han durado tanto. Al principio el poder colonial en Nigeria se basaba de manera implícita en el concepto de un país y varios pueblos, y se hizo poco para crear instituciones y procedimientos unificadores para estos pueblos. La geografía interna del colonialismo se expresaba como una geografía cultural, que hacía hincapié en las diferencias entre los pueblos, y la conexión indisoluble entre los miembros de la "tribu", sus territorios y sus jefes. La administración regional colonial consolidó la relación entre las divisiones étnicas y las fronteras administrativas: Hausa-Fulani en el norte; Igbo en el este y Yoruba en el oeste. Las minorías étnicas de cada región estaban obligadas a acomodarse lo mejor que podían en cada región. Se examinan los cuatro factores que guiaron la evolución del Estado nigeriano desde 1900: las políticas y prácticas de las administraciones coloniales; las actitudes y prejuicios de los administradores coloniales; y le economía colonial. Desde los años 40, a estos tres factores se sumó el de las políticas de las nuevas elites regionales que tenían el incentivo para movilizarse siguiendo las líneas regionales y étnicas, y en el proceso se profundizaron las divisiones que se habían desarrollado durante el régimen colonial.

El prolongado proceso político e histórico de regionalismo, estatismo y localismo ha conducido a un sistema concéntrico de siete divisiones étnicas y políticas en Nigeria: (i) entre el norte y el sur; (ii) entre los tres grupos étnicos mayoritarios; (iii) entre los grupos *wazobia* por una parte, y los grupos minoritarios por otra; (iv) la rivalidad entre Estados, algunas veces dentro y otras veces entre los grupos étnicos; (v) rivalidades interétnicas en un Estado mixto integrado por grupos minoritarios de dimensiones diferentes, o un segmento de una etnia mayoritaria rodeada de grupos minoritarios; (vi) rivalidades intraétnicas o subétnicas dentro de cada grupo étnico mayoritario, que a veces también corresponden a fronteras estatales y a veces dentro de un mismo Estado; (vii) y finalmente, rivalidades entre los clanes y dentro de los clanes, especialmente en el sudeste y en la parte central norte del país. Las divisiones políticas más importantes sobre las que se centra este informe son las primeras tres.

La segunda parte estudia las manifestaciones de las desigualdades relacionadas con las divisiones examinadas en al primera parte, especialmente en el aparato político, burocrático y educacional del Estado. Sostiene que las divisiones coinciden con tendencias sistemáticas de desigualdad horizontal. Fue especialmente en el ámbito de la educación en el que las diferencias regionales se manifestaron por vez primera en la era colonial. Esto luego afectó a la formación regional del capital humano y al desarrollo económico en general. Las desigualdades socioeconómicas y educacionales persistentes entre las distintas regiones y etnias forman el contexto en el que se observan las desigualdades en el nombramiento del personal gubernamental en las instituciones de Nigeria. Los efectos a largo plazo de desigualdades superpuestas han llegado a dar forma a las oportunidades de la gente y sus percepciones políticas. También han tenido un efecto tremendo en la política electoral del país y en la composición de los distintos consejos de ministros y burocracias, dando lugar a conflictos políticos centrados en la naturaleza de la representación etnoregional dentro del sector público. Se estudian las tendencias en la representación etnoregional de varios gabinetes ministeriales,

parlamentos y juntas militares, y a distintos niveles en las burocracias del sector público, sacando a la luz la correspondencia sistemática entre las divisiones y las desigualdades horizontales en estas instituciones.

La tercera parte examina distintos esfuerzos encaminados a reformar la naturaleza asimétrica de la representación dentro de las instituciones de la federación nigeriana. Se centra mucho la atención en un intento de eliminar las diferencias etnoregionales con la imposición de un sistema gubernamental unitario, y las razones por la que esta política fracasó. Otras medidas de reforma que se estudian incluyen la división de las regiones poderosas en Estados más pequeños, el desarrollo de un sistema de cuotas para elegir a los mejores en el sistema educativo, la disposición constitucional a favor de la discriminación positiva según los principios federales pertinentes, y la construcción de una federación con un centro con autoridad y una presidencia poderosa como antídoto contra el separatismo etnoregional. También se hizo la reforma del sistema de partidos y la introducción de reglas mayoritarias y de asociación para moderar las tendencias divisorias dentro del proceso político.

Estos esfuerzos para reformar la representación etnoregional y las relaciones en Nigeria sólo han obtenido un éxito limitado. Aunque las reformas han transformado radicalmente al Estado nigeriano, todavía tiene que resolver el problema de la movilización y el conflicto étnicos. Como consecuencia de ello, sigue habiendo abundantes quejas por parte de distintos grupos étnicos.

Abdul Raufu Mustapha es Profesor de Política Africana y Docente Kirk-Greene en Estudios Africanos del Centro de Estudios Africanos del Colegio St. Antony de la Universidad de Oxford. Es miembro del cuerpo docente para el Diploma en Estudios de Desarrollo de la Queen Elizabeth House.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country characterized by intense ethnic polarization and conflict. This is apparent from the submissions by various ethnic and regional groups to the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC), set up in June 1999 as the country returned to democratic politics after many years of military dictatorship. Complaints of genocide, political, economic and social strangulation and marginalization of the Igbo (also known as Ibo) were made by the leading Igbo elite organization, Oha-Na-Eze Ndi Igbo (Oha-Na-Eze Ndi Igbo 1999). This drew sharp rebuttals and counter-allegations of Igbo political and economic domination and political violence from the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), the leading ethno-regional organization of the elite of the former Northern Region (ACF 2001a, 2001b). Similar counter-allegations came from the ethno-regional organization of the ethnic minorities in the south of Nigeria, the South-South People's Conference (2001).[1] Other ethno-regional groupings were also drawn into the claims and counter-claims of ethnic domination and marginalization (Afenifere 2001; Joint Action Committee on the Middle-Belt 2001). Similar allegations were made at the National Political Reform Conference held in Abuja in 2005. These developments only confirm the historical fact that "inter-ethnic rivalry for domination" is a "fatal affliction" of the Nigerian political process (Afigbo 1989:4). But how has ethnic mobilization and confrontation manifested itself in the multiethnic setting of Nigeria?

The estimated population of Nigeria in 2001 was 116.6 million (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2001:123), making the country the most populous in Africa. However, this is certainly an underestimation of the actual size of the population. The common myth is that Nigeria has 250 ethnic groups, while some estimates put the number at over 400 (see also Bangura no date). The sociologist Onigu Otite (1990) has provided an authoritative list of 374 ethnic groups. This confusion over numbers has as much to do with problems of classification and data gathering as with the tendency for ethnic segments to coalesce or differentiate in the face of economic or political developments. It is not unheard of for groups known under an accepted "umbrella" identity to fragment into their composite identities as a result of political and administrative developments (Mustapha 2000).

There is common agreement, however, that these ethnic groups are broadly divided into ethnic "majorities" and ethnic "minorities". The numerically—and politically—major ethnic groups are the composite Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest and the Igbo of the southeast. These three "hegemonic" ethnic groups are popularly referred to by the generic term *wazobia*.[2] Centres of large population concentrations coincide with the homelands of these three majority ethnic groups, which constituted 57.8 per cent of the national population in the 1963 census (Afolayan 1978:147, 155). That census has the Hausa at 11,653,000 (20.9 per cent), the Yoruba at 11,321,000 (20.3 per cent) and the Igbo at 9,246,000 (16.6 per cent) (Jibril 1991:111). If the Fulbe-speaking ethnic Fulani are added to the Hausa-speaking Hausa-Fulani, then both groups made up 29.6 per cent of the national population. All of the other ethnicities constitute different degrees of "minority" status. There are large minorities such as the Ijaw, Kanuri, Edo, Ibibio, Nupe and Tiv: 11 of such large minorities constituted 27.9 per cent of the population in the 1963 census (Afolayan 1978:155).[3] However, since minority status is both a numerical and a political category, often underlined by administrative and economic disadvantages, the bulk of the over 200-odd minority groups falls into different degrees of "minoritiness". The percentage of each ethnic group in the national population is the subject of intense political controversy, particularly among the majority groups and some of the large minorities.

The dominance of the national population by the three majority groups was further accentuated by the tripodal regional administrative structure of the 1950s. In the Northern Region, which

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[1] In Nigerian academic usage, until 1979, geographic designations—North, South, East and West—have an initial capital letter to indicate that they are considered to be political designations. This changed after 1979, so lowercase letters are used when referring to these regions from then on.

[2] From the Yoruba word *wa*, the Hausa word *zo* and the Igbo word *bia*, all of which mean "come".

[3] The 1963 census figures have been used because subsequent censuses have been based on territorial delineation and not ethnicity.

had 54 per cent of the national population in the 1952/1953 census, the Hausa constituted 32.6 per cent of the population. When the allied Fulani is included, the figure rises to 50.6 per cent. In the Western Region, the Yoruba constituted 70.8 per cent of the population, while in the Eastern Region, the Igbo constituted 61 per cent of the population (Government of Nigeria 1953:36, 1952a:26, 1952b:18). Buttressing this demographic distribution were colonial perceptions that "Nigeria falls naturally into three regions, the North, the West and the East" (Governor Arthur Richards cited in Oyovbaire 1983:8). There was, therefore, the numerical and political preponderance of the three majority ethnic groups in their respective regions and in the nation as a whole. Though the regions have since been abolished, the basic tripodal ethno-regional template persists as an enduring feature of Nigerian political life, though it is now cross-cut by other features such as the current division of the country into six geopolitical zones.[4] The tendency of many minority groups to cluster—politically, linguistically and culturally—around the big three, has given Nigeria a tripolar ethnic structure, which forms the main context for ethnic mobilization and contestation.

But Nigeria is also a country that has creatively, if not always successfully, sought to grapple with its heritage of ethnic diversity and conflict (Mustapha 2002). Policies ranging from federalism to consociation and even to the state promotion of interethnic marriages have been pursued at various times. That Nigeria remains a single country today is attributable to this commitment to holding the country together. However, a paradox of modern Nigerian politics is the resilience of tripolar ethnic mobilization in the face of repeated efforts at political engineering and nation building.

This research report investigates this contradictory process of ethno-regional fragmentation side-by-side with a centralizing nation-building agenda. Part 1 explores the history and geography of the ethno-regional cleavages in Nigeria, and suggests reasons for their endurance. Part 2 examines the manifestations of the inequalities associated with these cleavages, particularly in the political, bureaucratic and educational apparatuses of the state. It argues that the cleavages coincide with systematic patterns of horizontal inequalities. Part 3 looks at various efforts aimed at reforming the lopsided nature of the Nigerian federation, and examines ways through which the inequalities may be better managed.

Part 1: Historical Background

History of ethno-regional cleavages in Nigeria

As was the case in much of Africa, the pre-colonial template in what became Nigeria was characterized by linguistic and political fragmentation. The pre-colonial territory contained large polities such as the expansive Sokoto Caliphate in the north, the Oyo and Benin Empires in the south and the Kanem-Borno Empire in the northeast. It also contained small principalities and many stateless communities. Building on this template, as much by happenstance as by deliberate policy, British colonial rule wove cleavages into the very heart of the Nigerian state.

Nigeria was established in the late nineteenth century, starting with the Colony of Lagos in 1861. Subsequently, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was created in southeastern Nigeria and the Royal Niger Company was given a charter to control what later became Northern Nigeria. By 1900, there were the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. In 1904, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was divided into Central and Eastern Provinces, west and east of the River Niger; by 1939, the two groups of provinces became the Western Region and the Eastern Region, respectively. The Northern Protectorate

[4] Though these zones, three in the north and three in the south, are gaining increasing importance in the political process, many political processes, such as the rotation of the presidency, are still based on the north-south cleavage. Paden (1997:243) argues that despite the dominant perception of Nigeria in north-south terms, these six zones are "the more enduring reality…which can be traced to earliest British perceptions".

and the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914 to create modern Nigeria, largely to save the British treasury from direct financial responsibility for the administration of Northern Nigeria. However, despite this purported amalgamation, the British continued to run the two halves of the country—North and South—as separate political and administrative entities with little common linkage outside of common economic infrastructure such as roads, railways and a common currency. Amalgamation entailed neither a unification of colonial policies in the two halves of the country nor the development of an integrated administration (Oyovbaire 1983:10). Different systems of law and land tenure were developed in the two halves. The attempt to extend the Northern aristocratic system of Indirect Rule to eastern Nigeria for fiscal and ideological reasons failed woefully. Thereafter, different systems of local governance were also developed in different parts of the country. The governance of Lagos Colony, where a limited elective principle was introduced, was also different from the rest of Southern Nigeria.

The Nigerian Council, including six prominent traditional rulers from the northern and southwestern parts of the country, was constituted in 1916, ostensibly to create a national platform for this bifurcated colony. The council met rarely; in reality, the inward-looking colonial administrative ethos and practices in both the North and the South ensured that the two halves of the country continued to evolve as separate entities. And the political and administrative cleavages were further accentuated by colonial prejudice. British administrators serving in the North often regarded Southerners as unruly savages, while those in the South regarded Northerners as ignorant and backward. Such was the "partisan" gulf between the colonial administrations of both Northern and Southern Nigeria that a standard joke among educated Nigerians in the 1930s was that the two British administrations would have gone to war but for the presence of the Nigerian population separating them (Afigbo 1989:9)! The colonial administrative staff in the North were particularly prone to a separatist psychology (Bell 1989:110). This structural and psychological divide woven into the very structure of the colonial state permeated the society and remains engrained in Nigerian political life. Furthermore, the colonial policy of Indirect Rule, conducted through local chiefs, accentuated localism. Lord Lugard, the deliberate architect of this bifurcated colony based on regionalism and localism, left in 1918, bringing to an end a period in which Nigeria existed in name only.

Lugard's successor, Hugh Clifford, was governor between 1919 and 1925. Compared to Lugard, he was relatively progressive and was sceptical of the Lugardian Indirect Rule. Unlike his predecessor, he saw the nascent Western-educated local elites of Lagos as potential allies in propping up colonial paternalism. Clifford also recognized that Indirect Rule was encouraging localism and centripetal tendencies in the country. While Lugard had sought to extend conservative aristocratic principles from the North to the South, Clifford sought to extend his more progressive social ideas from the South to the North. The Colonial Office in London, still enamoured of Lugardian rule, blocked this. Still, it was the "progressive" Clifford who, in 1920, denounced the proto-nationalists of the National Congress of British West Africa for daring to suggest that they constituted the representatives of a "nation" independent of British paternalism. The nation, according to Clifford, was a theory "evolved by Europeans to fit a wholly different environment, for the government of peoples who have arrived at a wholly different stage of civilization" (Coleman 1963:193)!

Early colonial rule in Nigeria was, therefore, based on the implicit concept of one country, many peoples, and very little was done to create unifying institutions and processes for these peoples. The internal geography of colonialism expressed itself as a cultural geography, which emphasized the distinctiveness of peoples, and the indissoluble connection between the unholy trinity of "tribesmen", their territories and their chiefs (Nolutshungu 1990:89). In spite of this colonial perspective of "tribal" Africa, increased economic and social processes generated a process of national integration in colonial Nigeria. The railway that was started in Lagos in 1898 was extended to other parts of the country, particularly to Kano by 1912. By 1950–1951, the railway network was carrying five million people per year (Eleazu 1977:43), indicating a heightened level of interaction between the different regions and peoples. In the 1950s, of the 31

million indigenous inhabitants of Nigeria, between four and five million were living in areas other than the ones to which they were indigenous (Eleazu 1977:98). Social and economic realities were out of step with the colonial politico-administrative imagination. This was the context for the segregation of Southerners in Northern cities in *sabon gari* or strangers' quarters, and their designation by the colonial administration as "native foreigners". Indeed, Northern Nigeria was deliberately and systematically isolated from the rest of the country "with the implicit intention of leading the refined and improved emirates eventually back to sovereign status" (Ballard 1971:334).

One of the few efforts at unifying the peoples of the country was the Clifford Constitution of 1922, which sought to integrate the two Southern provinces and the Colony of Lagos, while at the same time creating more scope for the participation of the Western-educated elite. A legislative council was established to replace the Nigerian Council and the Lagos Legislative Council. For the first time, direct elections were extended outside the Colony of Lagos, with the inclusion of an elected member from Calabar in the southeast. Though only four of the 46 members of this council were elected, the new council stimulated nationalist sentiments and political party formation.

By 1938, the National Youth Movement, representing the new educated and commercial elite of Lagos, had superseded the Nigerian National Democratic Party, formed in response to the Clifford Constitution. Both parties had "national" in their names, but this was a claim sustained more by aspiration than reality. Both represented the nascent elite of Lagos and its immediate surroundings, but claimed to speak for the "nation". The impact of the Second World War was to increase the tempo of the social and political ferment, with ex-servicemen, organized labour and students joining the fray. Many more parts of Southern Nigeria were thereby drawn into the "nationalist" movement. An umbrella movement, which later became the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC),[5] was formed in 1944 to agitate for better educational provision. Though it had the Lagos elite at its core, it was able to incorporate a few individuals from the North into its ranks, if only for a while. The Richards Constitution of 1946 sought to respond to the postwar pressures. It formally introduced regionalism as a premise for governance, giving a *de jure* foundation to an extant reality. This regionalism also corresponded to ethnicity: with the Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria, Igbo in the Eastern Region and the Yoruba in the Western Region, the territoriality of ethnicity was enhanced. The ethnic minorities in each region were forced to accommodate as best they could to the rising tide of majoritarian hegemony in each region.

The MacPherson Constitution of 1951 sought to respond to nationalist—that is, NCNC—criticisms of the Richards Constitution. Its lasting legacy was to further entrench regionalism in the Nigerian state. Common economic infrastructure, particularly the marketing boards, was regionalized, creating even more powerful incentives for ethno-regional elites to organize along regional lines for the control of the marketing board surpluses. Regional Parliaments were also introduced, channelling political aspirations into regional institutions. A national House of Representatives was put in place in Lagos, composed of representatives of the regional assemblies. African ministers were put in charge of regional and central ministries. Not only were the entire administrative and fiscal structures of governance now formally regionalized, Nigeria also developed a bifurcated nationalist movement with a modernist nationalism in the South, based on a Westernized elite and enlightenment ideals, and a more traditional nationalism in the North, based on Islamic traditionalism and aristocratic symbolism. Independence was granted on 1 October 1960 on the basis of a federal Constitution with three regions, and the slogan "unity in diversity". In practical politics, the accent was on the diversity.

[5] The NCNC started life as the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon. Anglophone Cameroon was a British mandate territory attached administratively to Nigeria. The northern half subsequently voted to join Nigeria, while the southern half voted to remain in Cameroon.

Three factors had guided the evolution of the Nigerian state since 1900: the policies and practices of colonial administrations, the attitudes and prejudices of colonial administrators and the colonial economy. Since the 1940s, these three factors were joined by the politics of the emergent regional elites.

Politics of ethnic mobilization

Ekeh (1990) suggests that the power of ethnicity in Africa has deep roots in pre-colonial history and social psychology. He argues that weak pre-colonial states were incapable of protecting individuals and groups from the ravages of slavery, leading to the development of kinship systems such as "state surrogate". Under colonialism, the substantial and notional expansion of these kinship ideologies formed the bases for the development of ethnicities (Ekeh 1990:661). However, a pre-colonial history of linguistic diversity and kinship formation, and a colonial history of ethno-regional construction, are not sufficient explanations for the prevalence of ethnic nationalism in Nigerian public life. Ethnic diversity, on its own, need not lead to the politics of ethnic mobilization (see also Mustapha 2004). The conversion of cultural differences into political differences and the attendant development of ethnic mobilization occur under very specific circumstances (Brass 1991:13–14). First, the basic dynamic of politics is elite competition, based on broad political and economic parameters, and not on culture per se. Second, the relationship between the state and the elites, whether collaborative or conflictual, is crucial. With the emergence of the politics of decolonization from the late 1940s, these two conditions were met in Nigeria.

By 1951, nationalist politics was firmly split along ethno-regional lines: the Hausa-Fulani–dominated Northern People's Congress (NPC) in Northern Nigeria, the Yoruba-dominated Action Group (AG) in the Western Region and the increasingly Igbo-dominated NCNC in the Eastern Region. In federations, political parties have the important responsibility of building bridges, but these parties not only reflected the extant cleavages, they helped to shape and intensify them (Dare 1988). In each region, ethnic minorities were increasingly discriminated against. In a trenchant criticism of Nigerian democratic practice, Nolutshungu (1990) argues that Nigerian regional elites who developed within the contours of each region sought to maintain their privileged domain by "sanctifying" the regional artifice. They developed a common notion of democracy:

> as the context within which competition was to be undertaken rather than the issue contested. Democracy was not championed or challenged with respect to its content of rights, but was the mechanism through which political power would be gained or distributed, and with it economic power and status (Nolutshungu 1990:88).

What emerged from this notion of democracy was an intensely regional and conflictual political system, led by "juggernauts" representing the major ethnic group of each region: Sir Ahmadu Bello for the Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe for the Igbo in the Eastern Region and Obafemi Awolowo for the Yoruba in the Western Region. Each elite group wanted to succeed the departing colonial authorities, or to have a major say in the successor regime; political elites, local businessmen and administrators all had a stake in this competition. Parties "were contrived for political advantage rather than as the expression of primordial identities and sensibilities" (Nolutshungu 1990:88). Between 1951 and 1966, the parties clashed over a number of issues.

First, they clashed over the date for the granting of regional self-government. While the Southern regions wanted an early transfer of power, the North was fearful of such a development. The influential Northern newspaper, *Gaskiya*, warned against the precipitous granting of self-government because:

> Southerners will take the places of the Europeans in the North…it is the Southerner who has the power in the north. They have control of the railway

> stations; of the Post Offices; of Government Hospitals; of the canteens…in all the different departments of Government it is the Southerner who has the power (cited in Agbaje 1989:105).

Second, the regional parties clashed over the nature of the constitutional settlement for independence in 1960. A particular sticking point was the insistence of regional leaders from the Northern Nigeria at the 1958 constitutional conference that half of the seats in the proposed independence Parliament must be conceded to the Northern Region on the basis that it contained more than half of the national population. As a result of the adoption of this constitutional principle, parliamentary representation was determined by regional quota, and not actual votes won; the North got a built-in veto power within the federation.

Third, after independence, the regional parties engaged in intense confrontation with each other over the allocation of federal projects, particularly the proposed iron and steel project that each region coveted. In 1964, the NCNC government of the Eastern Region issued a statement bitterly attacking its alliance partner at the federal level, the Northern-based NPC, of using "the little power we surrendered to them to preserve a unity which does not exist" in order to direct money obtained from oil resources in the east—"our money"—to carry out development projects in the North (Okeke 1992:66).

Fourth, since the allocation of political seats and economic resources was based on the size of each constituency's population, the conduct of censuses became a highly charged affair as each region sought to inflate its figures. Fifth, there was an incessant struggle over the criteria for the allocation of state revenue. Which authority had the power to collect which taxes, and how federally collected revenues were to be distributed to the composite units of the federation became issues of constant political disputation.

Apart from these specific areas of disagreement, there was also the constant factor of the fear of being excluded from the post-colonial settlement. For example, in 1948, a prominent member of the Yoruba elite, Sir Adeyemo Alakija, asked:

> This big tomorrow (for) the future of our children…How they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria…How the Yorubas will not be relegated to the background in the future (cited in Agbaje 1989:104–105).

In the same vein, Bello, the leader of the NPC, asked:

> If the British Administration had failed to give us the even development that we deserved and for which we craved so much—and they were on the whole a very fair administration—what had we to hope from an African Administration, probably in the hands of a hostile party. The answer to our minds was, quite simply, just nothing, beyond a little window dressing (1962:111).

According to Kirk-Greene:

> Fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of retribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, of domination. It is the fear of not getting one's fair share, one's dessert (1975:19).

Fearful of being outwitted by its ethno-regional rivals, each regional elite contributed to the escalation of ethnic and political tension. In the process, a political system has been consolidated based on cultural plurality, elitism and communal cleavages (Oyovbaire 1983).

While each majority ethnic elite sought to ensure its stranglehold on its region, it also sought to create a winning coalition at the centre by exploiting minority grievances in the other regions. As a result, the Mid-West Region was created for ethnic minorities in 1963 out of a politically

weakened Western Region (Omoigui 2002). The continuing instability within the political system, coupled with the sustained resentment of many minority ethnicities, led to the collapse of the First Republic in January 1966 and the emergence of military rule.

Many military regimes have sought to restructure the country by dismantling the regional framework so central to ethnic political contestation. Explicit efforts were also made to address minority grievances. The result has been a sustained process of state creation, from the four regions of 1963, to the 12 states of 1967, to 19 states in 1976, to 21 in 1987, to 30 in 1991 and finally to 36 states in 1996. During the same period, the third tier of governance in the federation, the local government authority, expanded from about 330 to 775. However, far from curbing ethno-regionalism, the state creation process simply restructured it. Without their regional institutional backbone and now split into many states, hegemonic ethno-regional elites adopted other symbols and rituals as rallying points, leaving the tripolarity of the political system almost intact. Meanwhile, some minority ethnic groups secured states or local governments of their own, sometimes in an uneasy alliance with other minority groups, leading to the emergence of "majority" minority groups in some states and local governments.

This long-drawn politico-historical process of regionalism, statism and localism has led to a concentric pattern of seven ethnic and political cleavages in Nigeria: (i) between the North and the South; (ii) between the three majority ethnic groups; (iii) between the *wazobia* groups on the one hand, and the minority groups on the other; (iv) interstate rivalry, sometimes within and sometimes between ethnic groups; (v) interethnic rivalry in a mixed state composed of minority groups of different strengths or a segment of a majority ethnicity surrounded by minority groups; (vi) intraethnic or subethnic rivalry within each majority ethnic group, sometimes also corresponding to state boundaries and sometimes within a single state; and (vii) interclan and intraclan rivalries, particularly in the southeast and the north-central parts of the country (Mustapha 1986). The most politically significant cleavages are, however, the first three.

I have argued elsewhere that in the context of these multifarious divisions, the Nigerian state has always been able to construct a sufficient coalition to confront each challenge to its power without necessarily addressing the fundamental problems giving rise to these challenges (Mustapha 2002). Political engineering, based mainly on federalism, consociation and affirmative action, is central to nation-building in Nigeria. However, the frequent recourse to force to contain challenges to its authority is indicative of the tenuous nature of its nation-building agenda.

Though elite politics is the primary source of ethnic mobilization, there is, nevertheless, a large reservoir of ethnic consciousness in the wider society. A 2000 survey of public opinion found that ethnicity is the strongest type of identity among Nigerians: 48.2 per cent of the survey sample identified themselves in ethnic terms, compared to 28.4 per cent who chose class or occupational identities and 21 per cent who chose a religious identity. This ethnic consciousness notwithstanding, 97.2 per cent of the sample also expressed pride in being Nigerian (Lewis and Bratton 2000:iii). Significantly, the survey found that region and education were the two most important factors in the formation of individual attitudes (Lewis and Bratton 2000:20).

Historical foundations of inequalities

> It was precisely in the sphere of education that regional differences were increasingly manifested under colonialism. And this then had a knock-on effect on the regional formation of human capital and general economic development. Colonial educational policy in Northern Nigeria was driven by two intertwined policies: fear of the development of a class of educated Africans, as was the case in Southern Nigeria (Graham 1966); and the related attempt to create an alternative Anglo-Muslim aristocratic civilization in Northern Nigeria (Barnes 1997). It was Lugard's view that in Southern Nigeria 'education had produced men discontented, impatient of any control and obsessed with their own importance' (Graham 1966:136).

The "rowdy modernism" engineered through mission education had allegedly created young men lacking in "integrity, self control and discipline" (Barnes 1997:223). In colonial Northern Nigeria, therefore, the British did everything possible to prevent the emergence of an educational system that might threaten British control. Lugard's educational policy in Northern Nigeria had five goals, the first of which was the strengthening of government control (Graham 1966). It was not until 1931 that proper exams were introduced into the only secondary school in the North (Adamu 1973). Under the guise of protecting Islam, Lugard banned missionary activities, including the founding of schools; and while colonial subsidies were used to run three Muslim schools providing modern education in Lagos, no such schemes were put in place in the North (Mustapha 1986).

Instead, as Barnes (1997:198) shows, considerable effort was directed at a cultural engineering project that sought to inculcate the aristocratic values of the British public school system in the hope of creating "a modern and aristocratic Anglo-Muslim civilization". While the Colonial Office in London declared this educational system as the best in West Africa, a 1927 report noted that the educational system was not only backward, its officials were incompetent. The system was described as prodigiously inefficient and prohibitively expensive. Less than one-half of 1 per cent of the school-age children in the region were enrolled in the school system. Of the 2,000 boys who had been through the educational system by 1926, less than half had made it beyond Standard I; only 84, or about 4 per cent, had made it to Standard V; and only 26, or about 1.5 per cent, had reached Standard VI. Of the 26, not one was Hausa; all of them were Southerners. Worse still, while the government schools in the Gold Coast Colony cost the government 124 shillings[6] per pupil, the cost in Northern Nigeria was 726 shillings. Comparable costs were 70 shillings in Southern Nigeria and 250 shillings in England itself (Barnes 1997:205). Barnes concluded that the educational policy:

> was a reflection not of the recognized needs of the peoples of the colony, nor of a rational forecast of the colony's economic future, but of the social and cultural fantasies of administrators (1997:223).

Because of this educational policy, the head start that the South had in Western education due to its earlier contact with Europeans intensified, and a destabilizing inequality in educational attainment was built into the fabric of the Nigerian state. For example, in 1957, the South had 13,473 primary schools with a total population of 2,343,317 pupils, while the North had only 2,080 schools and 185,484 pupils (Okeke 1992:23). A similar gap existed at the secondary school level, as table 1 shows.

Table 1: Secondary school output in Northern and Southern Nigeria, 1912–1965

	Northern Nigeria		Southern Nigeria	
Year	**No. of schools**	**No. of pupils**	**No. of schools**	**No. of pupils**
1912	0	0	10	67
1926	0	0	18	518
1937	1	65	26	4,285
1947	3	251	43	9,657
1957	18	3,643	176	28,208
1965	77	15,276	1,305	180,907

Source: Adapted from Adamu (1973:51).

By 1958, only 9 per cent of the children of primary school age were enrolled in the North; the comparable figure for the South was 80 per cent. In the same year, while the North had 4,000

[6] In 1926, the conversion rate was 4 shillings = 1 British pound and $1 = 0.20627 British pounds.

children in secondary schools, the South had 40,000 (Yoloye 1989:57). By 1960, while the Western Region had 47.3 per cent of the students at the University College Ibadan, the Eastern Region had 39.8 per cent and Northern Nigeria only 8.4 per cent (Yoloye 1989:55). See table 2 for the relative position of each region in providing higher education by 1965. The East and West were far ahead of the North. While the geometric gap in educational attainment between the North and the South flowed directly from government policies, other inequalities also emerged, fuelled by differences in geography and natural economic endowments. The combined and cumulative effects of the educational and economic inequalities continue to bedevil Nigerian society to this day.

Table 2: Distribution of students by type of course and region of origin, 1965 *(per cent)*

Courses	North	East	West + Lagos	All regions
Academic and professional	338 (7.5)	2,353 (51.9)	1,843 (40.6)	4,534 (100)
Intermediate and sub-professional	338 (14.7)	935 (40.8)	1,021 (44.5)	2,294 (100)
Sixth form and university preliminary	542 (23.6)	685 (29.8)	1,070 (46.6)	2,297 (100)

Source: Adapted from Osemwota (1994:76).

Different regions had different climatic and soil conditions, leading to specialization in the agricultural systems. Differences in the value of export crops in the global market, and a regionalized revenue-sharing formula, meant that each region developed a different pattern of wealth accumulation and the related development of social infrastructure and social capital. Table 3 illustrates the differing fortunes of regional agricultural income. It suggests that per capita income was lowest in the North.

Table 3: Regional differences in agricultural export production and per capita income in Nigeria

Item	West	East	North
Agricultural export production			
Value in million pounds	11.4	7.3	9.75
Value per capita in pounds	2.8	1.4	0.72
Value per square mile in pounds	249.0	159.0	34.0
Per capita income			
Value in pounds	34.0	21.0	17.0

Note: In 1963, the conversion rate was $1 = 0.35714 British pounds. **Source**: Coleman 1963:66.

On the other hand, table 4 shows the regional distribution of manufacturing activities in the 1960s; the North's share was consistently below its share of the population by a wide margin.

Table 4: Regional distribution of manufacturing activities, 1962–1967 net output indicator *(per cent)*

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
West and Lagos	55.6	55.3	47.3	47.1	63.3	58.8
Mid-west	—	6.6	6.4	5.1	—	3.6
East	17.1	16.5	15.9	17.3	—	—
North	22.3	19.6	30.9	30.3	38.6	37.4

Source: Adapted from Osemwota (1994:60).

The differences in regional economic activities were reflected in the per capita expenditure of each region, as shown in table 5. For the decade 1957–1967, the North consistently had the least per capita expenditure of the three regions, and its expenditure also stagnated for seven of the years. These patterns of educational and socioeconomic inequality have persisted to the present day.

Table 5: Per capita expenditure by region, 1957–1967 *(thousand naira)*

Year	North	East	West
1957	0.9	1.5	1.7
1958	0.8	1.7	1.9
1959	0.7	1.5	2.1
1960	0.8	1.6	3.5
1961	1.0	1.9	3.7
1962	1.4	2.1	3.4
1963	1.4	2.2	3.9
1964	1.4	2.4	3.1
1965	1.7	3.0	4.0
1966	2.1	3.0	3.2
1967	2.0	3.7	3.5

Note: In 1972, the conversion rate was $1 = 0.658 naira. **Source**: Osemwota 1994:52.

Contemporary educational and economic inequalities

Persisting educational and socioeconomic inequalities between different regions and ethnicities form the context for the observable inequalities in the staffing of governmental institutions in Nigeria. The inequalities between the north and the south and between the various ethnic groups are now expressed, not in the old regional terms, but in terms of the 36 states and the six geopolitical zones[7] that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Table 6 shows the zones and states, and the distribution of ethnic groups within them. Each zone can be given a broad ethnic identification, based on the majority of the population in that zone. In this regard, the northwest zone is the core Hausa-Fulani area, while the northeast zone contains a mixture of Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri and many northern ethnic minorities. Both zones are regarded as the "far north", with overlapping cultural and Islamic attributes. However, Kanuri ethno-nationalism is an important factor in the northeast, and some prominent politicians are now seeking to advance the interests of the northeast in opposition to those of the northwest.[8] The north-central zone is traditionally regarded as the zone of the non-Islamic northern ethnic minorities, many of whom

[7] The three northern zones are the northwest, northeast and north-central, while the three southern zones are the southeast, south-south and the southwest.

[8] See Lagos *Guardian*, 2 December 2003, p. 9.

are Christian. Though this zone was equally involved in the political construction of a monolithic Northern regional identity against the South in the 1950s, it is also a zone of resistance against alleged Hausa-Fulani "domination" and cultural oppression in the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. The culture of this "lower north" is different from that of the far north. The southwest zone is made up of the old Western Region, the heartland of the Yoruba, while the southeast is made up of the Igbo heartlands of the old Eastern Region. The last zone, the south-south, is the zone of southern ethnic minorities, from the peripheries of the Igbo core of the old Eastern Region, and the whole of the old Mid-West Region.

The persisting educational inequality between the various zones in 1989 is indicated in table 7, which shows the number of post-primary institutions in each zone. The shares of the northwest and northeast zones continue to be far less than their share of the population. Since post-primary institutions are responsible for preparing candidates for bureaucratic recruitment, the discrepancy between population size and density of institutions is likely to have a bearing on the ethnic composition of applicants seeking to enter the bureaucracy based on their qualifications.

Table 6: Nigeria: Location of ethnic groups

States by zones	Dominant ethnic groups	No. of minority ethnic groups
Northwest		*54*
Sokoto, Kebbi + Zamfara	Hausa	12
Katsina	Hausa	1
Kano + Jigawa	Hausa	9
Kaduna	Hausa	32
Northeast		*205*
Borno + Yobe	Kanuri	29
Adamawa + Taraba	Fulani, Hausa	112
Bauchi + Gombe	Hausa	64
North-central		*123*
Old Kwara (+ some parts of Kogi)	Yoruba, Ebira, Igala	20
Old Niger	Hausa, Gwari	19
Old Benue (+ some parts of Kogi)	Tiv, Idoma, Igala	12
Plateau + Nassarawa	Birom, Angas, Yergam, Hausa	72
Southwest		*4*
Oyo + Osun	Yoruba	–
Ekiti + Ondo	Yoruba	2
Ogun	Yoruba	–
Lagos	Yoruba	2
Southeast		*1*
Anambra, Enugu + Ebonyi	Igbo	1
Imo + Abia	Igbo	–
South-south		*59*
Edo + Delta	Bini, Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Igbo	13
Rivers + Bayelsa	Ijaw, Ogoni, Andoni, Igbo	10
Akwa Ibom	Ibibio	7
Cross River	Efik	29

Source: Adapted from Otite (1990:44–57).

Table 7: Post-primary institutions in Nigeria by zone, 1989

Zone	Population in 1991 *(national percentage)*	Number of institutions *(per cent)*
Northwest	22,910,412 (25.8)	567 (9.7)
Northeast	11,900,913 (13.4)	343 (5.9)
North-central	12,133,696 (13.6)	1,022 (17.5)
Southwest	17,455,138 (19.6)	1,575 (27.0)
Southeast	10,774,977 (12.1)	1,208 (20.7)
South-south	13,392,963 (15.1)	1,114 (19.1)

Sources: Adapted from Federal Republic of Nigeria (2001); also see *Tell* magazine, 14 November 1994. p. 15.

The influence of the educational system on the process of elite formation is more clearly demonstrated when we look at the number of candidates from each state/zone seeking admission to university. In 2000–2001, in the 36 states of the federation, the six states with the largest number of candidates for admission were all from the south—two from each southern zone—with a total of 218,475 candidates. On the other hand, the six states with the fewest candidates were all from the north—three each from the northwest and the northeast—with a total of 6,729 candidates, a mere 3.1 per cent of candidates from the six southern states, which also happen to have a lower share of the national population.[9]

Figures for actual admissions into the universities, by zone of origin, are shown in table 8, which makes clear that the original educational gap between the northern and southern parts of the country persisted, with serious implications for the process of elite formation and recruitment: 80.1 per cent of young people going to university in 2000–2001 were from the south, which had 46.8 per cent of the population based on the 1991 census.

Table 8: Admissions to Nigerian universities by zone of origin, 2000–2001

Zone	Number of admitted candidates	Percentage of total admissions
Northwest	2,341	4.7
Northeast	1,979	3.9
North-central	5,597	11.1
Southwest	8,763	17.4
Southeast	19,820	39.4
South-south	11,734	23.3

Source: Adapted from www.jambng.com, accessed in August 2005.

This pattern of elite formation has obvious implications for interethnic relations. According to a leading northern educationist, Jubril Aminu:

> Certain sections of this country will be highly disturbed about their future in a united Nigeria if they study the pattern of higher educational opportunities in the country. It is this kind of disturbance which promotes among the people some actions and counteractions, mutual suspicion, nepotism and loss of confidence in the concept of fair play.[10]

In a similar vein, Vice-President Abubakar Atiku in 2002 lamented to northern leaders:

[9] www.jambng.com, accessed in August 2005.

[10] Cited in *Tell* magazine, 14 November 1994, p. 15.

> It is painful, I must say, how we continue to pay lip service to education while our teeming youth who represent our future rot away, without education, skills or moral guidance of any kind. It is tormenting to see how young children, especially girls, are left hawking or leading beggars on our streets at a crucial point in their lives when their peers in sensible societies are busy learning and building their future. It is disturbing to see how illiteracy is gaining the better of our society while others are competing in computer literacy and surfing the Internet. With this depressing profile, what role do we expect to play in the future of our country? Hewers of wood and carriers of water? Unfortunately, these frightening possibilities are not far-fetched.[11]

The discrepancies in the levels of educational attainment are further reflected in the levels of professional development in different parts of the country. The situation in the mid-1960s is reflected in table 9, which shows the Southern regions dominating most professions, with the exception of veterinary medicine, which the more pastoral North dominated. Little had changed by the 1990s, despite many efforts at "bridging" the educational gap between the north and south. In 1990, of the 6,407 engineers registered with the Council of Registered Engineers, only 129 or 2 per cent were from the northern states. Similarly, of the 1,344 lawyers called to the Nigerian bar in that year, only 196 or 14.6 per cent were from the northern states. Of the 669 registered estate surveyors, only five or 0.7 per cent were from the northern states. Only 160 of the 1,125 (14.2 per cent) registered architects were from the northern states. And out of the 522 registered firms of accountants, only 14 firms or 2.7 per cent are thought to have been established by people of northern origins.[12]

The educational and professional inequalities also coincide with similar economic and social inequalities. Of the total number of registered businesses between 1986 and 1990, 57 per cent were in Lagos, located in the southwest, 16 per cent in the north, 14 per cent in the east and 13 per cent in the core west (Hamalai 1994). By 1997, things had improved slightly, with the northern states now responsible for 34 per cent of all registered establishments; but this was still well short of the 64 per cent share of the southern states (Federal Office of Statistics 1997:188).

[11] See Lagos *Guardian*, 19 May 2002.

[12] See *Tell* magazine, 14 November 1994, pp. 16–20.

Table 9: High-level profession, distribution by region, mid-1960s *(per cent)*

Profession	Total	Northern	Eastern	Western + Lagos	Mid-western	Unspecified
Architect/town planner	93 (100.1)	9 (9.7)	37 (39.8)	41 (44.1)	6 (6.5)	—
Engineer	684 (100)	52 (7.6)	253 (37)	297 (43.4)	82 (12)	—
Doctor	429 (99.8)	20 (4.7)	158 (36.8)	210 (49)	40 (9.3)	1
Chemist	28 (99.9)	—	16 (57.1)	10 (35.7)	2 (7.1)	—
Veterinarian	35 (100)	16 (45.7)	11 (31.4)	5 (14.3)	3 (8.6)	—
Mathematician	83 (100)	6 (7.3)	42 (50.6)	29 (34.9)	6 (7.2)	—
Statistician	38 (100)	1 (2.6)	8 (21.1)	23 (60.5)	6 (15.8)	—
Economist	478 (100)	21 (4.4)	225 (47.1)	163 (34.1)	69 (14.4)	—
Accountant/ auditor	300 (99.9)	10 (3.3)	82 (27.3)	181 (60.3)	27 (9)	—
Surveyor	61 (100)	2 (3.3)	27 (44.3)	29 (47.5)	3 (4.9)	—
Estate manager	17 (100)	1 (5.9)	2 (11.8)	9 (52.9)	5 (29.4)	—
Pharmacist	218 (99.6)	5 (2.3)	119 (54.6)	71 (32.6)	22 (10.1)	1
Agriculturalist	226 (100)	22 (9.7)	125 (55.3)	70 (31)	9 (4)	—
Geologist	20 (100)	5 (25)	13 (65)	1 (5)	1 (5)	—
Scientist	186 (100)	14 (7.5)	108 (58.1)	52 (28)	12 (6.4)	—
All	2,896 (99.9)	184 (6.4)	1,226 (42.3)	1191 (41.1)	293 (10.1)	—

Note: Due to rounding, not all percentage columns add up to 100. **Source**: Adapted from Osemwota (1994:86).

Inequalities in social well-being also mirror those in the educational and economic spheres. As table 10 illustrates, the northern states are behind the southern states in most of these indicators. The northern states have more households without electricity, a lower proportion of children in schools, a higher percentage of illiterate adults and a lower proportion of women and children with access to health care.

A final index of the inequalities between different states and zones of Nigeria is the level of poverty in each zone. Amid generally high levels of poverty, there seems to be a higher concentration of the poor in the northern states, as table 11 suggests. It has also been suggested that one-third of Nigeria's poor are concentrated in the three northwest states of Kaduna, Kano and Sokoto (The World Bank and Federal Office of Statistics no date:9).

Table 10: Social indicators by zone, 1995–1996 *(per cent)*

Zone	House-holds using stream or pond for water	House-holds without electricity	Children 6–11 in school	Children 12+ in school	Literate adults 15+	Women using family plan-ning	Pregnant women using clinics	Newborn children not immunized
Northwest	13.6	79.8	34.2	35.2	20.7	2.6	25.3	65.9
Northeast	26.4	78.3	42.3	47.6	25.0	1.4	39.4	60.7
North-central	44.4	61.2	69.8	73.7	44.7	4.5	66.8	54.0
Southwest	22.6	30.4	94.6	88.9	68.9	12.1	74.7	29.1
Southeast	61.4	47.7	88.3	89.6	75.8	14.9	84.8	29.0
South-south	50.4	55.7	90.9	87.6	77.2	9.1	60.7	56.9

Source: Adapted from Federal Office of Statistics (1995/1996).

Table 11: Poverty headcount by zone, 1996 *(per cent)*

Zone	Non-poor	Moderately poor	Core poor	All poor
Northwest	22.8	39.9	37.3	77.2
Northeast	29.9	35.7	34.4	70.1
North-central	35.4	36.7	28.0	64.7
Southwest	39.1	33.4	27.5	60.4
Southeast	46.5	35.3	18.2	53.5
South-south	41.8	34.8	23.4	58.2
All Nigeria	29.3	36.3	34.4	70.7

Source: Federal Office of Statistics 1999a:29.

I now turn my attention to how these systematic and overlapping inequalities, particularly between the northern and southern states of Nigeria, affect the composition of the institutions of the state. I have emphasized the enduring pattern of inequalities between northern and southern Nigeria because that is the most dangerous faultline in Nigerian national life. But other important patterns of inequality, such as the relatively poorer position of ethnic minorities, are also discernible from the indicators listed above.

Part 2: Composition of Government and the Public Sector

Electoral politics and government composition

As can be expected, the long-run patterns of overlapping inequalities have come to shape people's life-chances and their political perceptions. They have also had a tremendous impact on the electoral politics of the country and the composition of different governments. Under conditions of scarcity, inequalities and uneven access to economic and political resources, ethnicity has provided a convenient platform for political mobilization (Melson and Wolpe 1971). However, the analysis here is limited to an examination of political tendencies at the federal level, because of the enormous complexity of examining the multifarious tendencies at the level of the 36 state and the 775 local governments.

The first issue to note at the federal level is a correlation between ethnicity and the pattern of party formation. As noted earlier, from about 1951, regionalism gave rise to parties strongly associated with each of the major ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani–dominated NPC in the North; the Igbo-dominated NCNC in the East and the Yoruba-dominated AG in the West. Until the 1990s, this remained the basic template of party formation in Nigeria, despite repeated efforts by military regimes to "nationalize" the political party process. This resilience notwithstanding, it must be said that the repeated efforts at reform have had a salutary impact. This is discussed in a subsequent section.

Second, there is a correlation between ethnicity and the voting behaviour of large sections of the electorate. On aggregate, the electorate has tended to concentrate its vote along clearly discernible ethnic lines.

Table 12 brings out a number of salient features of the ethno-regional conflicts of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Each of the major ethno-regional parties was dominant in its region. Furthermore, the adoption of the principle of regional per capita representation in Parliament in 1958 meant that between 1959 and 1966 parliamentary seats were decided, not necessarily by the total numbers of the actual votes cast, but by an initial allocation of seats on a regional basis. This ensured that all governments up to 1966 had a built-in Northern majority. In 1959, the Northern NPC got *fewer* votes than the Eastern NCNC, but still went on to form the

government. A political-cum-electoral inequality favouring the North, therefore, manifested itself as the reverse of the other indices of inequality already discussed.

Table 12: Results of the 1959 general elections *(per cent)*

Party	Northern seats	Western seats	Eastern seats	Total seats	Total votes
NPC	134 (77)	—	—	134 (42.9)	1,922,179
NCNC	—	23 (35)	58 (80)	81 (26)	2,594,577
NEPU	8 (5)	—	—	8 (2.5)	509,050
AG	25 (14)	34 (52)	14 (19)	73 (23.4)	1,992,364
Others	7 (4)	8 (12)	1 (1)	16 (5.1)	610,677
Total	174 (100)	65 (100)	73 (100)	312 (99.9)	7,189,797

Source: Kurfi 1983:173.

Based on this system of northern political dominance since 1959, a broad pattern of governmental composition has emerged in which civilian governments are often composed of northern Hausa-Fulani interests as senior partners with eastern Igbo interests as junior partners, while military regimes are, more often than not, an alliance of Northern, often Hausa-Fulani, officers as senior partners with Yoruba Western officers as junior partners. This, however, did not mean that other ethnic groups were excluded from such governments, only that they played an essentially supportive role to the main players.

This pattern of ethnic composition of governments centred on Northern political dominance led a prominent Northern politician to suggest that there is a "platonic" division of roles within the *wazobia* in the governance of Nigeria. Based on the pre-colonial experience of the Sokoto Caliphate, the Hausa-Fulani are said to be schooled in the art of managing power, so they have the responsibility of political leadership. The Yoruba are said to be good in diplomacy, so they are assigned the responsibility of administering the bureaucracy. The Igbo are said to be good in commerce, so they assume responsibility for commercial activity.[13] Needless to say, this convenient "partitioning" of governmental institutions between the majority groups has been assailed from all sides; most governments have been unstable because of the continued struggle for power between these three ethno-regional blocs. The ethnic minorities are severely disadvantaged by this tripolarity, and often find it necessary to form alliances with one majority group or the other in order to secure their minimal interests.

Parties or candidates that are purported to "represent" particular ethnic interests and constellations have continued to get a huge slice of the votes from such constituencies. However, I cannot emphasize enough that the ethnic orientation in the political process does not reduce the electoral system to an ethnic census. Many other factors, particularly class, historical consciousness, localized communal solidarity, political clientelism and calculations of personal advantage have been just as important in many constituencies. There is also the increasing salience of religious mobilization, and the operations of political machines built around notable individuals. Ethnicity is not the sole explanatory variable within the political process.

It was the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 that created the opportunity for Nigerian participation in government at the ministerial level. The proposal to introduce ministerial responsibility created serious disagreements between northern and southern delegates to the 1950 constitutional conference called to consider the provisions of the new constitution. While the Southern delegations were anxious to assume greater responsibilities in government, the

[13] See "Maitama Sule's declaration", *Democracy*, September 1994, p. 21.

Northern delegation was fearful of the implications of increased Africanization of its regional interests. According to Tafawa Balewa, who later became the prime minister of the federation under the NPC, the North opposed ministerial responsibility:

> not because we do not like to take responsibilities and to share in the management of our own affairs, but [because] we only think, knowing conditions [in the north], that the time is not ripe for the north (cited in Osaghae 1989:137).

Nevertheless, the decision was reached to establish a council of ministers at the centre, headed by the governor. Each region contributed four ministers. But this body was not effective because of the regional basis for the selection of ministers and their sympathies for their respective regions (Coleman 1958:377). In 1957, the Office of the Prime Minister was established and filled by Balewa of the NPC. Ten ministers were appointed, reflecting regional and political differences. Between 1951 and 1957, the overriding principle in the composition of the Nigerian cabinet was the equality of regions, each of which contributed three ministers (Osaghae 1989:138).

Table 13: Composition of the Federal Cabinet, number of ministers by region and ethnic origin, 1951–1966

Regional/ ethnic unit	1951–1954	1954–1957	1957–1958	1959	1960–1961	1962	1963	1964	1965–1966
Northern Nigeria									
All ministers	3	3	3	4	9	9	9	9	10
Hausa/Fulani	2	3	3	4	9	9	8	8	9
Minorities	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	1
Eastern Nigeria									
All ministers	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
Igbo ministers	2	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	3
Minorities	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Western Nigeria									
Yoruba	2	2	4	3	3	5	5	5	8
Mid-western									
Minorities	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	9	9	11	10	15	18	18	18	22

Source: Adapted from Osaghae (1989:158).

However, since independence in 1960, based on the 1959 elections, the North began to have a majority in the cabinet. Based on the per capita representation in Parliament that gave the North half of the seats, half of the cabinet now came from the region, as indicated in table 13, which shows the regional and ethnic composition of the Federal Cabinet between 1951 and 1966. Apart from Hausa-Fulani predominance, there was also a large percentage of Yoruba ministers during this period, despite the fact that the party of the Western Region, the AG, was in opposition to the ruling alliance of the NPC and NCNC at the centre. There were two reasons for this.

First, between 1959 and 1964, the ministers of justice and health were both non-party members appointed for their professional expertise; both were Yoruba from the Western Region. And, second, the regional party in the Eastern Region, the NCNC, wanted to broaden its national base by gaining control of the Western Region. It, therefore, sponsored many Yoruba ministers from the Western Region. Another feature of the composition of the cabinet in this period was

the paucity of Igbo and minority ministers, the Igbo factor being explained by the position of the NCNC toward the Yoruba of the Western Region.

The instability of civilian rule led to a military coup by largely Igbo officers in January 1966 and the assumption of power by Aguyi Ironsi. The attempt by Ironsi, an Igbo, to revoke the federal arrangement and replace it with a unitary system raised hostile reactions in the North. This was a contributory factor to his overthrow in a counter-coup led by Northern officers in July 1966. Yakubu Gowon, a northern minority Christian, assumed power. As crisis mounted in 1967, the first attempt was made to break the regional mould of Nigeria politics; the erstwhile four regions were split into 12 states, with many minority groups now having a state of their own. It was hoped that this would not only meet minority demands for autonomy, but would also break the tripodal ethno-regional dynamic of the past. In the period from 1967 to 1979, the composition of the cabinet changed dramatically, largely because of the creation of states and the tendency to promote the equality of states. The resulting changes are shown in table 14.

Table 14: Composition of the Federal Cabinet, number of ministers by region and ethnic origin, 1967–1979

Regional/ethnic unit	1967–1970	1971–1973	1974–1975	1975–1976	1977	1978–1979
Northern Nigeria						
All ministers	9	7	10	11	10	8
Hausa-Fulani	5	4	7	9	8	6
Minorities	4	3	3	2	2	2
Eastern Nigeria						
All ministers	2	4	4	6	5	7
Igbo ministers	–	1	1	2	2	2
Minorities	2	3	3	4	3	5
Western Nigeria						
Yoruba	4	5	8	9	8	4
Mid-western						
Minorities	1	2	2	1	2	1
Total	16	18	24	27	25	20

Source: Adapted from Osaghae (1989:158).

In the period from 1967 to 1979, minority representation in the cabinet increased. This was particularly the case with northern minorities during the time of President Yakubu Dan-Yumma Gowon, (1967–1975). Second, from 1971 to 1979, the South had a majority of cabinet ministers. Third, the Yoruba continued to have a large number of ministers, while the poor representation of the Igbo worsened. There was no Igbo minister between 1967 and 1970, when the country was fighting the Igbo-led Biafran secession. After the war in 1970, Igbo representation remained low, because ministerial appointments were partly based on state representation, and the Igbo had only two states, while the Yoruba had four. The Southern majority in the cabinet from 1975 to 1979 is partly because the ruling Supreme Military Council (SMC), which gave instructions to the cabinet, had a Northern majority of 15 out of 23 officers (Osaghae 1989:146).

In 1979, the military handed over power to an elected civilian government headed by Shehu Shagari. Some of the reforms of the political system after 1966 were beginning to take effect. For instance, ethnic and regional parties were banned. This notwithstanding, the parties that were formed in 1978–1979 continued to have ethno-regional colourations (Omoruyi 1989; Dare 1988:138). The ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) had at its core northern political forces and elements from Southern minorities, but it also sought to bring all political "heavyweights"

across the country under its umbrella to constitute a "natural party" of government. The party introduced a "zoning" system aimed at cementing the alliance of these regional elites from across the country. Article 21 of the party's constitution stated:

> Zoning shall be understood…as a Convention in recognition of the need for adequate geographical spread. … At the national level, the following offices shall be zoned: namely the office of the National Chairman, the President, the Vice-President, President and Deputy President of the Senate, National Secretary, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Senate Leader, and the Majority Leader of the House of Representatives (Okpu 1984:115).

The country was divided into four zones, and the listed posts were shared out in an inclusive manner incorporating different sections of the country. Thus, the 1979–1983 period witnessed a diffusion of power away from the narrow confines of the cabinet. Nevertheless, this period witnessed the reassertion of a northern majority in the body as shown by table 15. Northern minorities continued to have significant representation, while the constitutional provision for a representative cabinet meant that each state was represented.

Table 15: Composition of the Federal Cabinet, number of ministers by region and ethnic origin, 1979–1983

Regional/ethnic unit	1979–1980	1981–1982	1982–1983	1983
Northern Nigeria				
All ministers	14	17	18	20
Hausa-Fulani	7	10	11	13
Minorities	7	7	7	7
Eastern Nigeria				
All ministers	6	4	4	7
Igbo ministers	4	2	2	3
Minorities	2	2	2	4
Western Nigeria				
Yoruba	4	4	4	5
Mid-western				
Minorities	1	1	1	2
Total	25	26	27	34

Source: Adapted from Osaghae (1989:158).

The government of Shagari was overthrown in December 1983 by a group of northern military officers led by Muhammadu Buhari, who was subsequently overthrown in a palace coup in August 1985 by Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida was then forced out of office in August 1993 by popular protests against his cancellation of the 12 June 1993 presidential election. Sani Abacha assumed office as head of state in November 1993 and died in 1998. The current democratic experiment took off in May 1999.

Under the northern-led military regimes, collective institutional rule was gradually supplanted but increasingly by personal rule. Military dictatorship, arbitrariness, personal ambition, corruption and the use of divide-and-rule tactics all contributed to swelling the ranks of the disaffected. The period from 1983 to 1998, therefore, witnessed an increasing level of ethno-regional and religious crises in Nigeria.

Table 16 shows the composition of the various military councils from 1983 to 1998. Though there were efforts to reflect the ethno-regional balance in the country, the ruling military councils often reflected more accurately the balance of factional intrigues within the military institution. The Igbo, in particular, were often underrepresented or not represented at all. These

military councils were the major determinants of policy in the context of the increasing personalization of power. The role of the cabinet was increasingly reduced to the implementation of decisions made elsewhere.

Table 16: Composition of ruling military councils by zone, 1983–1993 *(per cent)*

Zone	Buhari: SMC 1983–1985	Babangida: 1st AFRC[a] 1985	Babangida: 2nd AFRC[a] 1986	Babangida: 3rd AFRC[a] 1990	Abacha: Provisional Ruling Council 1993
Northwest	7 (35)	7 (25)	9 (29)	4 (21.1)	3 (27.3)
Northeast	1 (5)	3 (10.7)	3 (9.7)	1 (5.3)	1 (9.1)
North-central	5 (25)	6 (21.4)	7 (22.6)	8 (42)	3 (27.3)
Southwest	1 (5)	6 (21.4)	6 (19.4)	3 (15.8)	2 (18.2)
Southeast	2 (10)	1 (3.6)	1 (3.2)	2 (10.5)	1 (9.1)
South-south	4 (20)	5 (17.9)	5 (16.1)	1 (5.3)	1 (9.1)
Total	20 (100)	28 (100)	31 (100)	19 (100)	11 (100.1)

Note: Due to rounding, not all percentage columns add up to 100. [a] Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. **Source**: Adapted from Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (1994:330–349).

The increasing arbitrariness that characterized this period accentuated the feeling of alienation by southerners who increasingly characterized the various military regimes as northern. The Buhari regime was particularly resented, among other things, because the head of the regime and his deputy both came from northern states, and there were signs of discriminatory treatment against southern and radical northern politicians by the regime. This was particularly apparent in the cases of those brought before military tribunals. Similarly, Babangida's annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election that was won by a southerner fuelled already high ethno-regional tensions. All southern zones harboured deepening resentment of these military regimes. While the Igbo from the southeast felt excluded from government, the Yoruba felt discriminated against. The ethnic minorities of the south-south, the source of Nigeria's oil wealth, increasingly felt that their resources were being siphoned off by the federal centre for the satisfaction of the *wazobia*, particularly the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba. These tensions contributed to a climate of ethno-regional hostilities that has yet to abate. Ethnic militias sprang up in many parts of the country, especially in southern states.

The distribution of cabinet positions under the military regimes is shown in table 17. The distribution of cabinet posts was not as skewed as that of the military councils, but the cabinets must be understood as subordinated not only to the ruling council, but also to the whims of the individual heads of state.

With the return to civil politics in May 1999, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) won the presidency under Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo was specifically adopted as a candidate in order to soothe Yoruba nerves, frayed by the 12 June 1993 annulment. Like the NPN, the PDP also zoned different party and state offices to different parts of the country. However, instead of the four zones of the NPN, the now entrenched, but still informal, six-zonal structure was used. For example, Obasanjo is a Yoruba from the southwest, while his deputy is a Hausa-Fulani from the northeast. The president of the Senate is an Igbo from the southeast, while his deputy is a northern minority from the north-central zone. The speaker of the House of Representatives is a Hausa-Fulani from the northwest, while his deputy is a minority person from the south-south zone. The zonal distribution of cabinet positions in Obasanjo's second civilian administration (2003–2007) is shown in table 17.

Table 17: Composition of cabinets by zone, 1983–2004 *(per cent)*

Zone	Buhari 1983–1985	Babangida 1985	Babangida 1986	Babangida 1990	Abacha 1993	Obasanjo 2004
Northwest	6 (30)	6 (27.3)	5 (22.7)	6 (33.3)	5 (22.7)	7 (21.2)
Northeast	2 (10)	2 (9.1)	2 (9.1)	3 (16.7)	3 (13.6)	5 (15.1)
North-central	4 (20)	4 (18.2)	5 (22.7)	2 (11.1)	4 (18.2)	6 (18.2)
Southwest	4 (20)	5 (22.7)	5 (22.7)	3 (16.7)	4 (18.2)	5 (15.1)
Southeast	2 (10)	2 (9.1)	2 (9.1)	3 (16.7)	2 (9.1)	4 (12.1)
South-south	2 (10)	3 (13.6)	3 (13.6)	1 (5.5)	4 (18.2)	6 (18.2)
Total	20 (100)	22 (100)	22 (99.9)	18 (100)	22 (100)	33 (99.9)

Note: Due to rounding, not all percentage columns add up to 100. **Sources**: Adapted from Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (1994:330–349); list of Obasanjo's ministers in 2004.

In the 1963 census, the combined Hausa and Fulani ethnicities made up 29.6 per cent of the Nigerian population, the Yoruba 20.3 per cent and the Igbo 16.6 per cent (Jibril 1991:111). From table 18 we can see that in quantitative terms, the high periods of Hausa-Fulani domination of the cabinet have been the Balewa years of the early 1960s and the Shagari years of the early 1980s. Only under the Gowon and Murtala regimes have the Hausa-Fulani been under-represented in the cabinet. The Northern minorities, on the other hand, have done well since 1967. However, they were overrepresented in the Murtala cabinet, adequately represented in the Buhari cabinet, but underrepresented in all the other cabinets. Except for the Balewa and Murtala cabinets, the southern minorities have been well represented. With the exception of the Shagari cabinet in 1983 and the Obasanjo cabinet in 2004, the Yoruba have also had a fairly proportionate representation in the cabinets, despite the fact that the dominant political group in the southwest has often been in opposition to the government at the centre. Indeed, the Yoruba were overrepresented in the Gowon and Murtala cabinets. The Igbo has been consistently underrepresented. Their low representation in the early 1960s further deteriorated with the Biafran war starting in 1967. And since Murtala's cabinet in 1975 was made entirely of military officers and the Igbo no longer had senior military officers after the defeat of Biafra, no Igbo was included in the Murtala cabinet. The Igbo have come closest to adequate representation only in the 2004 Obasanjo cabinet.

Table 18: Ethnic composition of Nigerian cabinets, 1960–2004 *(per cent)*

Regime	Hausa-Fulani	Igbo	Northern minorities	Yoruba	Southern minorities
Balewa 1960	60	13.0	0.0	20.0	6.7
Gowon 1967	21	0.0	21.0	36.0	21.0
Murtala 1975	25	0.0	35.0	35.0	5.0
Shagari 1983	38	8.8	20.5	14.7	17.6
Buhari 1984	35	10.0	25.0	20.0	10.0
Obasanjo 2004	30	15.0	18.0	18.0	18.0

Sources: Adapted from Osaghae (1989:158); Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (1994:330–349); list of Obasanjo's ministers in 2004.

In summary, therefore, while there have been periods of Hausa-Fulani domination of the cabinet, the Igbo have been, by and large, underrepresented. The minorities, discriminated against in the 1950s and early 1960s, have found some representation since 1967. In fact, there have been times that both the southern and northern minorities have been overrepresented. The Yoruba have been adequately represented for most of the period under study.

Qualitatively, however, the distribution of actual governmental powers might be different from the quantitative distribution of cabinet portfolios. Some have pointed out that of the 12 Nigerian heads of government between 1960 and 2004, eight have been of northern origin, three of Yoruba extraction and only one Igbo. Of the 12 leaders, only Gowon can seriously be said to be of minority origin. This suggests that the North has been at the helm of affairs for a disproportionately long period. As a pressure group calling itself the Federalist Vanguard argued in December 2003, people of northern origin have ruled Nigeria for 35 years or 80.5 per cent of its existence since independence, while people of western origin have been in charge for about eight years or 18 per cent of the time. People of eastern origin have been in power for only six months, or 1.5 per cent of the time.[14] This time chart is often used to support the argument of northern domination.

Table 19: Ethnic distribution of very important and less important portfolios, 1960–2004

Very important portfolios	Hausa-Fulani	Northern minorities	Igbo	Yoruba	Southern minorities	Total
Finance	2	1	3	4	3	13
Agriculture	6	2	1	1	2	12
Internal affairs	5	7	0	1	1	14
External affairs	2	5	2	2	2	13
Education	2	2	4	3	3	14
Federal capital territory	5	4	0	1	0	10
Defence	5	4	0	1	0	10
Works	6	2	1	4	3	16
Transport	3	3	1	4	1	12
Communications	5	4	3	3	0	15
Petroleum	2	0	2	0	3	7
Mines and power	6	3	0	0	2	11
Total	49 (33.3%)	37 (25.2%)	17 (11.6%)	24 (16.3%)	20 (13.6%)	147 (100%)
Less important portfolios						
Labour-employment and productivity	0	4	2	7	2	15
Information	2	1	4	2	5	14
Science and technology	1	0	2	2	2	7
Sports and social development	3	0	1	2	1	7
Women's affairs	0	0	0	0	1	1
Culture and tourism	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	6 (13.3%)	5 (11.1%)	10 (22.2%)	13 (28.9%)	11 (24.4%)	45 (99.9%)

Note: Due to incomplete data, the second Abacha cabinet, the Abubakar Abdusalami cabinet and the first (1999) Obasanjo cabinet have not been included; their inclusion is unlikely to change the picture fundamentally. Due to rounding, not all percentage columns add up to 100. **Sources**: Adapted from Osaghae (1989:158); Nigerian Army Educational Corps and School, (1994:330–349); list of Obasanjo's cabinet in 2004.

Another qualitative adjustment to our quantitative analysis is to take into account the power of patronage and the political sensitivity attached to different cabinet portfolios. Based on these two criteria, we can identify three broad sets of cabinet portfolios: the very important, the in-between and the less important. I am interested in looking at the ethnic distribution of the 12

[14] See *Thisday*, 8 December 2003, p. 35.

very important and six less important portfolios as shown in table 19, which suggests that there is an overrepresentation of northern ethnic groups in general, and the Hausa-Fulani, in particular, in the very important portfolios and, conversely, their underrepresentation in the less important portfolios. On the other hand, the southern ethnic groups, particularly the Igbo and to a lesser extent, the Yoruba, seem to be underrepresented in the very important portfolios and overrepresented in the less important portfolios. Southern minorities are overrepresented in both categories, particularly in the less important cabinet portfolios. The numerical balance of ethnicities and regions in the various cabinets has, therefore, to be interpreted in the context of this distribution of real power therein.

Composition of parliament

In colonial Nigeria, the principle of elective representation started in 1922 with the direct election of four members to represent three constituencies in Lagos and one in Calabar on the legislative council. By 1963, Nigeria had a bicameral parliament with 56 members of the Senate and 312 members of the House of Representatives. As mentioned earlier, the adoption of the principle of regional per capita representation in 1958 meant that half of the seats in the House of Representatives went to the Northern Region. In the Senate, however, the southern regions had a majority since each of the three Southern regions had 12 senators, while the Northern Region had 12 in total. Furthermore, the Federal Territory of Lagos, also in the South, had another four representatives. Therefore, the Senate in this period had 40 senators from Southern constituencies and only 12 from the North. However, in this Westminster parliamentary system, real power lay with the prime minister and the House of Representatives.

There was no parliamentary representation after the military takeover of government in 1966. Of the three arms of government—executive, legislative and judiciary—it is the legislative arm that has suffered the most from prolonged years of military dictatorship. By the time the military handed over power to civilians in 1979, two fundamental changes had taken place in the pattern of parliamentary representation. First, the four regions had been broken into smaller states; there were 19 states in 1979. Second, the new constitution was based on a presidential democratic model, closer to American presidentialism than to the Westminster model inherited from the British. As a result, after 1979 the power of the senate increased. In 1979, there were 95 senators, five from each of the 19 states. The principle of equality of regions was maintained. The House of Representatives had 450 members, with the population of each state determining its number of representatives.

There was another military takeover in 1983, which eventually handed over power to a civilian government in 1999. The ethnic composition of the Senate and House of Representatives from 1999 to 2003 is shown in table 20. Again, using the ethnicity figures from the 1963 census as our guide, it would seem that the combined Hausa-Fulani were slightly underrepresented in the Senate, but not in the House of Representatives. Northern minorities were underrepresented in both houses; the Yoruba were fairly represented in the Senate but slightly overrepresented in the House of Representatives; the southern minorities were overrepresented in both houses; and the Igbos were underrepresented in both houses.

Table 20: Ethnic composition of the National Assembly, 1999–2003 *(per cent)*

Ethnic group	Population (1963 census)	Senate	House of Representatives
Hausa/Fulani	29.6	28.4	30.3
Igbo	16.6	14.7	13.8
Yoruba	20.3	20.1	21.3
Southern minorities	9.5	15.6	13.8
Northern minorities	24.0	21.2	20.8

Source: Information on National Assembly members computed from data on 109 senators and 356 members of the House of Representatives (Anyanwu 1999).

Composition of the federal public sector

The rising tide of nationalism in the 1940s confronted the colonial administration with two demands: the right to political participation, and access to senior public service positions (Gboyega 1989:165). The demand for access was met through the government's policy of the "Nigerianization" of the bureaucracy. But in the context of regional educational and professional disparities, this policy was converted "from a moderately straight-forward organizational problem into a complex political issue" (Nicolson 1966:169). Which Nigerians were to be offered employment? What criteria should be used in the recruitment process? In 1948, Governor Macpherson set up the Foot Commission to make recommendations regarding these questions. The commission recommended that no non-Nigerian should be employed, unless no suitable and qualified Nigerian was available. At least 325 scholarships were to be made available to train Nigerians for the senior posts, and "special consideration should be given to candidates from the Northern Provinces and other areas where educational facilities were…more backward than elsewhere" (Gboyega 1989:166). Gboyega argues that although a special effort was to be made to encourage Northern participation, the underlying logic of the recommendations was that of bureaucratic impartiality, protection of the disadvantaged and equality of opportunity. The bureaucracy was seen as a meritocracy. Between 1948 and 1952, the number of Nigerians in the senior civil service rose from 245 to 685, but this was still only 19 per cent of the senior posts (Gboyega 1989:167).

The educational and professional imbalance between the Northern and Southern states was bound to have an effect on the composition of the various bureaucracies in the country. The Northern Region, fearing a Southern takeover of both the Northern and federal civil services, opposed the policy of Nigerianization, preferring to recruit foreigners. Partly as a result of this, the number of expatriates in the bureaucracy actually increased by 30 per cent between 1948 and 1952, despite the policy of Nigerianization. Apart from this problem, political and constitutional changes by 1951, when the Macpherson Constitution was framed to promote Nigerian participation in government, seemed to have gone beyond the parameters of the Foot Commission and its recommendations. With each region seeking to promote Nigerianization in its own peculiar way, the Phillipson-Adebo Commission was set up in 1952 to take another look at implementation of the policy.

The Phillipson-Adebo Commission upheld the principles of equal opportunity, merit and the protection of the disadvantaged. It specifically argued that there should be "no lowering of the qualifications and other standards prescribed for appointment to the Senior Service" (Gboyega 1989:169). However, in response to Northern fears, the commission recommended that:

> Preference should be given to qualified and suitable candidates of Northern Nigerian origin over all other candidates whatsoever in the filling of (a) all posts (other than promotion posts) in the Junior Service, (b) all posts (other than promotion posts) in the Senior Service which (were) to be filled by recruitment from outside the Service (Gboyega 1989:169).

But such was the slow pace of Nigerianization that in 1954, of the 582 members of the elite administrative (directorate) cadre of the senior service, only nine were Nigerians, and none of these was a northerner (Osaghae 1988:25). By 1954, rapid progress toward federalism necessitated the establishment of yet another commission to examine the public services of the federation. The Gorsuch Commission was very keen on tackling the problems of comparability posed by the presence of three regional services and one central service in the same country. This was a serious problem since some civil servants moved to the federal service from their regional positions. For the first time, the notion of "a healthy regional quota" was advanced as a desirable objective for the federal civil service (FCS). It was categorically stated that "the service should be representative of the whole of Nigeria" (Gboyega 1989:170). Between 1954 and 1960, therefore, there was a general agreement about the need for a representative bureaucracy, but there was no similar consensus about how to achieve this objective. In 1957, only 1 per cent of the staff of the FCS was of Northern origin, and the proportion of Northerners in the senior service was even smaller (Osaghae 1988:25).

Following the decision to allocate parliamentary seats on regional quotas, Northern politicians also demanded that the FCS be filled along similar quotas. This was rejected by the Parliamentary Committee on Nigerianization, which sought other means of increasing Northern recruitment into the federal bureaucracy (Gboyega 1989:173). For their part, Southern politicians emphasized the need to transfer bureaucratic offices to Nigerians, merit as a determinant of selection, and equality for all in the process of selection. The FCS became yet another theatre for the perennial struggle between different ethno-regional forces in the country.

Between 1954 and 1965, the accepted principle of representative bureaucracy could not be seriously implemented because of the overpoliticization of the issue. Quite often, party affiliation dictated employment prospects. From 1954 to 1979, two methods were used to improve Northern numbers in the FCS: (i) the ad hoc transfer of senior Northern civil servants from the regional or state services to the federal service; and (ii) the policy requiring that junior civil servants working in any federal agency outside the federal capital be recruited from the locality served by the agency (Adamolekun et al. 1991:44). Between 1960 and 1965, more Northern officers transferred to the federal service, compared to officers from the East and the West (Shagari cited in Gboyega 1989:173). By 1961, of the 1,203 Nigerian officers in the elite administrative and professional cadre of the FCS, only 34 (2.8 per cent) were from the North. Of the 1,150 Nigerians in the executive cadre, only 30 (2.6 per cent) were from the North (Osaghae 1988:25). Merit continued to be the yardstick for recruitment, but Northern officers were given special privileges such as priority in the allocation of official accommodation. By 1967, 14 (37.8 per cent) of the 37 Nigerian diplomats abroad were Northern, along with three out of eight members of the board of the Nigerian Coal Corporation, four out of 11 members of the board of the Nigerian Railway Corporation and, significantly, six (37.5 per cent) of the 16 federal permanent secretaries (Osaghae 1988:26). As one alarmed Southern newspaper put it in the early 1960s, "the Mallams [northerners] are coming!".[15]

As discussed in part 3, as the 1960s progressed, ethno-regional conflict over the staffing of the federal bureaucracies intensified. Political crises fuelled by aggressive ethno-regional competition resulted in two military coups in 1966. Part 3 examines the series of reforms that were carried out from 1966, and their impact. Meanwhile, the composition of the FCS in 2000 is shown in table 21. We can see that Southern, particularly Yoruba and Igbo, domination of the FCS continued. All of the southern zones and the north-central zone were overrepresented in the FCS, while the northwest and northeast zones continued to be underrepresented. However, unlike the situation in Zambia, where certain ethnic groups were reported to have dominated certain ministries (Dresang 1974:1611), no single ethnic group in Nigeria could be said to dominate a particular ministry. In a sense, the persisting situation of southern domination can be seen as a comment on the efficacy of the reforms discussed in part 3.

[15] Akin Fadahunsi, personal conversation, Zaria, 1990.

Table 21: State and zonal composition of the FCS, consolidated statistics, 2000

Zone/state	Total	Per cent	Zone/state	Total	Per cent
Northwest		*10.4*	*Southwest*		*24.9*
Jigawa	1,333	0.7	Lagos	6,423	3.4
Kaduna	6,949	3.7	Ekiti	4,005	2.1
Kano	3,651	1.9	Ogun	14,302	7.5
Katsina	3,503	1.8	Ondo	8,208	4.3
Kebbi	2,059	1.1	Osun	6,415	3.4
Sokoto	1,565	0.8	Oyo	7,996	4.2
Zamfara	803	0.4			
Northeast		*8.6*	*Southeast*		*16.0*
Adamawa	3,619	1.9	Abia	6,127	3.2
Bauchi	3,049	1.6	Anambra	6,100	3.2
Borno	3,748	2.0	Ebonyi	1,013	0.5
Gombe	2,001	1.1	Enugu	4,776	2.5
Taraba	2,072	1.1	Imo	12,474	6.6
Yobe	1,625	0.9			
North-central		*18.4*	*South-south*		*20.7*
Benue	7,099	3.7	Akwa Ibom	9,625	5.1
Kogi	9,106	4.8	Bayelsa	1,223	0.6
Kwara	5,258	2.8	Cross River	4,938	2.6
Niger	4,963	2.6	Delta	9,789	5.2
Nasarawa	3,164	1.7	Edo	9,583	5.1
Plateau	5,399	2.8	Rivers	3,995	2.1

Source: Adapted from the Federal Character Commission (2000:2).

However, if we disaggregate the FCS and look specifically at the senior administrative directorate cadre in 1998, what becomes clear is that while the southwest and southeast zones continued to be overrepresented, the northwest and northeast zones remained under-represented despite having been politically pushed up through various reform measures since 1966. The situation at this level of the FCS is shown in table 22.

Table 22: Composition of the senior directorate of the FCS, by state and zone, 1998

Zone/state	Total	Per cent	Zone/state	Total	Per cent
Northwest		*16.8*	*Southwest*		*24.4*
Jigawa	2		Lagos	13	
Kaduna	14		Ekiti	10	
Kano	15		Ogun	11	
Katsina	9		Ondo	13	
Kebbi	5		Osun	14	
Sokoto	3		Oyo	10	
Zamfara	1				
Northeast		*12.7*	*Southeast*		*13.4*
Adamawa	4		Abia	5	
Bauchi	10		Anambra	21	
Borno	12		Ebonyi	0	
Gombe	3		Enugu	1	
Taraba	4		Imo	12	
Yobe	4				
North-central		*16.4*	*South-south*		*15.8*
Benue	7		Akwa Ibom	7	
Kogi	14		Bayelsa	0	
Kwara	7		Cross River	4	
Niger	10		Delta	19	
Nasarawa	3		Edo	14	
Plateau	7		Rivers	2	

Source: Official list of all directors in the FCS as of 1998 produced in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation. Of the 305 directors on the list, only 290 whose state of origin could be determined were used for this table.

A significant point about the directorate cadre in 1998 is its manner of recruitment. While 82.7 per cent of directors of northwest origin transferred their services to the FCS, usually from a state level bureaucracy, only 17.3 per cent were recruited directly in open competition by the Federal Public Service Commission. Comparable figures for the other zones are: northeast, 78 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively; north-central, 62.5 per cent and 37.5 per cent; southwest, 14.1 per cent and 85.9 per cent; southeast, 12.8 per cent and 87.2 per cent; and south-south, 13 per cent and 87 per cent. Thus, while the majority of southern directors joined the service in open competitions, their northern colleagues often came in through their state services. This, of course, poses the problem of comparability. Though the northern zones continue to be underrepresented, there is, nevertheless,

> the widespread belief (no data are available) that a significant proportion of transfers involved officers who were given key positions for which they would normally be unqualified on the basis of experience, seniority, and educational achievement (Adamolekun et al. 1991:80).

A second significant point about the directorate of 1998 is the different speeds of career progression. Directors from the north-central zone took the longest time before arriving at their exalted status, 22.3 years on average. Those from the southwest took 22.2 years on average, while those from the south-south zone and the southeast took 20.7 and 20.5 years, respectively. The northeast has the shortest average of 17.1 years, followed by the northwest with 18.7 years. This relative speed, added to the high percentage of transferees, might suggest that officers from the northwest and northeast are special beneficiaries of policies aimed at balancing the ethnic composition of the federal bureaucracy at this senior level.

When we look at the senior staff of federally owned statutory agencies and companies, that is, at a professional/technocratic group distinct from the administrative elite of the FCS, we get a picture of the inequalities in professional development in the different parts of the country and the impact of this on the recruitment of technocrats. This is shown in table 23.

Table 23: State and zonal composition of senior staff in grade level 8 and above[a] in 122 federal statutory bodies and state-owned companies, consolidated statistics, 1996

Zone/state	Total	Per cent	Zone/state	Total	Per cent
Northwest		*7.9*	*Southwest*		*30.5*
Jigawa	354	0.6	Lagos	1,355	2.2
Kaduna	1,954	3.2	Ondo and Ekiti	4,602	7.6
Kano	999	1.6	Ogun	5,729	9.4
Katsina	643	1.1	Osun	3,902	6.4
Kebbi	421	0.7	Oyo	3,001	4.9
Sokoto and Zamfara	442	0.7			
Northeast		*5.3*	*Southeast*		*21.5*
Adamawa	1,000	1.6	Abia/Ebonyi	2,840	4.7
Bauchi and Gombe	921	1.5	Anambra	3,375	5.5
Borno	803	1.3	Enugu/Ebonyi	2,183	3.6
Taraba	329	0.5	Imo	4,678	7.7
Yobe	248	0.4			
North-central		*12.8*	*South-south*		*21.6*
Benue	1,299	2.1	Akwa Ibom	2,026	3.3
Kogi	1,929	3.2	Rivers and Bayelsa	1,485	2.4
Kwara	2,163	3.6	Cross River	752	1.2
Niger	1,100	1.8	Delta	5,180	8.5
Plateau and Nasarawa	1,263	2.1	Edo	3,799	6.2

[a] Civil servants in Nigeria are graded from 1 to 17. Level 8 is the beginning of the senior category. **Source**: Adapted from the Federal Character Commission advertorial in *Weekly Trust*, 1–7 October 1999, p. 23.

Compared to the situation in the FCS, overall southern overrepresentation increases within the technocracy at the same time as the overall northern underrepresentation intensifies. And the difference in the representation of the professional cadre also manifests itself in the private and business sectors of the economy. For this reason, southerners, particularly the Yoruba, are overrepresented in the management of banks, media houses and such modern private sector enterprises and civil society organizations.

Conversely, if we look at the lower-skilled spectrum of federal officialdom, specifically at the Nigerian Police Service, where a secondary school leaving certificate is all that is required for employment, we see a different configuration of zonal representation as shown in table 24. Though the northwest and northeast continue to be underrepresented even here, their positions are better, relative to their performance in the FCS. And the southwest is underrepresented here as well. It is noteworthy that the majority ethnic groups contributed only about 39 per cent of the police force in 1999. This is a radical departure from 1960, when the Nigerian police was made of 40.6 per cent Igbo, 16.9 per cent Yoruba and 2.4 per cent Hausa.[16]

[16] See *Tempo*, 10 October 1996, p. 16.

Table 24: The Nigerian police force, staffing statistics, 1999

Zone/state	Total	Per cent	Zone/state	Total	Per cent
Northwest		*12.0*	*Southwest*		*14.6*
Jigawa	800	0.7	Lagos	2,823	2.6
Kaduna	5,503	5.0	Ekiti	1,138	1.1
Kano	970	0.9	Ogun	2,993	2.7
Katsina	3,200	2.9	Ondo	3,708	3.4
Kebbi	1,067	1.0	Osun	3,147	2.9
Sokoto	869	0.8	Oyo	2,099	1.9
Zamfara	738	0.7			
Northeast		*12.7*	*Southeast*		*12.4*
Adamawa	3,534	3.2	Abia	1,589	1.4
Bauchi	2,191	2.0	Anambra	1,272	1.2
Borno	2,935	2.7	Ebonyi	1,457	1.3
Gombe	2,570	2.3	Enugu	5,236	4.7
Taraba	1,963	1.8	Imo	4,193	3.8
Yobe	722	0.7			
North-central		*22.0*	*South-south*		*26.1*
Benue	8,646	7.8	Akwa Ibom	3,974	3.6
Kogi	7,654	6.9	Bayelsa	1,742	1.6
Kwara	1,582	1.4	Cross River	5,505	5.0
Niger	1,166	1.1	Delta	5,487	5.0
Nasarawa	2,026	1.8	Edo	8,077	7.3
Plateau	3,352	3.0	Rivers	3,966	3.6

Source: Adapted from the Federal Character Commission (1999:25).

When we combine the information contained in tables 21 to 24, we have a rough idea of the ethno-regional segmentation of the Nigerian public sector. This is shown in table 25. The discrepancy between population share and bureaucratic and technocratic representation is consistent. In an "ethno-distributive" federation (Suberu 2001:xix) such as Nigeria, this skewed pattern of distribution within both the public and private sectors is bound to lead to conflict, especially when population is a major determinant of political representation and clout. In part 3, I look at the various efforts at reforming this skewed pattern of distribution in the public sector, and the politics resulting from the success or failure of the reform efforts.

Table 25: Ethno-regional tendencies in the staffing of federal bureaucracies by zone

Zone	Per cent in the bureaucracy	Zone	Per cent in the bureaucracy
Northwest	10.4	Southwest	24.9
Northeast	8.6	Southeast	16.0
North-central	18.4	South-south	20.7
	Per cent in the directorate		**Per cent in the directorate**
Northwest	16.8	Southwest	24.4
Northeast	12.7	Southeast	13.4
North-central	16.4	South-south	15.8
	Per cent in the technocracy		**Per cent in the technocracy**
Northwest	7.9	Southwest	30.5
Northeast	5.3	Southeast	21.5
North-central	12.8	South-south	21.6
	Per cent in the police		**Per cent in the police**
Northwest	12.0	Southwest	14.0
Northeast	12.7	Southeast	12.4
North-central	22.0	South-south	26.1

Sources: Adapted from the Federal Character Commission (2000, 1999:2); official list of all directors in the FCS as of 1998; Federal Character Commission advertorial in *Weekly Trust*, 1–7 October 1999, p. 23.

Pervasive inequalities

Inequalities pervade not just the federal government: there is a similar pattern of inequalities between ethnic groups at the state and local government levels. The resultant struggle for political and economic resources is particularly felt in states with tripodal ethnic structure such as Kogi state (Ebira, Igala and Yoruba), and those with two ethnic groups, where one is clearly dominant over the other, such as Benue state (Idoma and Tiv). Kogi state in central northern Nigeria is composed of three dominant ethnic groups, plus some ethnic minorities. In the 1963 census, the Igala Eastern Senatorial District made up 53 per cent of the 1,280,143 people living in the area that subsequently became Kogi state. The Ebira Central Senatorial District had 25.4 per cent, while the Okun Yoruba of the Western Senatorial District made up 21 per cent. In the 1991 census, the Eastern District is said to have 44.2 per cent of the population with the Central and Western Districts having 35.1 per cent and 20.7 per cent, respectively (Ebira Group for Advancement, no date:13). Since the creation of Kogi state, the three dominant ethnic groups have been engaged in a struggle for supremacy; in 2005, there was a shoot-out at a political rally attended by the Igala-born Governor Ibrahim Idris.

The issues in contention include: (i) the number of local government units created in each ethnic zone; (ii) accusations of skewed resource allocation; and (iii) an unrepresentative civil service. It was claimed that the election of ethnic Igala as governors since 1991 has led to the favouring of the Igala at the expense of the other ethnic groups as shown in table 26.

Because of these alleged inequalities and the dominance of Kogi politics by Igala politicians, there has been a sustained agitation for a "power shift" away from Kogi east to the other two areas of the state. Although the Okun are not disadvantaged in terms of access to resources, they nevertheless have a common cause with the Ebira because of Igala domination of the state governorship. The same politics of power shift dominates Benue state politics, with the more numerous Tiv controlling the political process at the expense of the Idoma. In Benue state, however, the dynamics of inequalities between the Tiv and Idoma are complicated by the intraethnic inequalities within the five subgroupings that make up the Tiv: the Jechira, Jembagh, Minda, Sankera and Kwande. The Jechira, Jembagh and Kwande have already produced

governors for Benue state. The Sankera and Minda, however, have not, and politicians from these two groups are insisting that all of the Tiv subgroups must occupy the office before the Idoma.[17] Meanwhile, there is increasing disquiet among Idoma politicians of the ruling PDP.

Table 26: Alleged discriminatory tendency in Kogi state under Igala governors *(per cent)*

Discriminatory tendency	Kogi East (Igala)	Kogi Central (Ebira)	Kogi West (Okun Yoruba)
Population (1991 census)	44.2	35.1	20.7
Revenue contribution to the state	7.0	71.0	22.0
Share in state expenditure	52.7	17.5	29.8
Local governments in 1991	37.5	25.0	37.5
Local governments in 1996	42.9	23.8	33.3
Share in civil service	60.0	6.0	34.0
Share in top appointments	67.9	10.0	22.1

Source: Ebira Group for Advancement no date.

The same patterns of inequalities and the politics of sectional mobilization prevail in multiethnic local government areas (LGAs). Even in ethnically homogeneous LGAs, other communal factors are often introduced as the basis for sectional political strategies. Representation remains a contested issue at all levels of Nigerian governance.

Ethnic inequalities are pervasive in Nigeria, affecting not just the public sector, but also the private sector. Invariably, the senior management and professional cadre of industries and businesses also reflect the patterns of inequalities in educational and professional achievements, with the southwest and southeast having the largest numbers of private sector professionals. The character of private sector businesses and civil society organizations are also shaped by these inequalities.

Part 3: Reform Agendas and Policy Instruments

After independence in 1960, the twin struggle to control one's own region while fighting for a dominant role at the centre intensified. This soon led to a collapse of the government of the Western Region. The unpopular minority Nigerian National Democratic Party government, which subsequently took control of the region, found it expedient in 1964 to publish a White Paper detailing alleged Igbo domination of many federal establishments, ostensibly at the expense of its own Yoruba constituency. The composition of the public sector, thus, became a major aspect of the war of attrition between the regional political forces. The White Paper alleged that under "the pretext of pursuing the bogus theory of tribal balancing"—the Yoruba had a historic headstart in Western education and a lead in the bureaucracy—the Igbo were constituting themselves into the "sole shareholders" of many statutory corporations (cited in Osaghae 1988:26). Alleging nepotism and "tribalism" in the Nigerian Railway Corporation under an Igbo chairman, the White Paper claimed that:

> Out of a grand total of 431 names on the current staff list of our Railway Corporation, 270 are Ibos and 161 belong to other tribes. Of fifty-seven direct senior appointments made by the Nigerian Railway Corporation during the tenure of office of the present chairman, Dr Ikejiani (an Igbo), twenty-seven were Ibos, eight other tribes and twenty-two expatriates (cited in Agbaje 1989:111–112).

[17] See Lagos *Guardian*, 8 October 2004.

At the Nigerian Ports Authority under an Igbo transport minister, Raymond Njoku, it was alleged that 21 of the top positions were Igbo, and that of the top 104 positions, 73 were Igbo, 23 Yoruba and all of the other ethnicities had a paltry representation of eight. At the Yaba Technical Institute, the Nigerian Airways and the Foreign Ministry, all institutions with Igbo heads, a similar allegation of nepotism was made (Osaghae 1988:26). The press was soon inundated with statistical claims and counter-claims, as champions of Igbo and Yoruba chauvinism sought to show which ethnic group was cornering which federal establishment. For its part, the Northern elite's position was expressed by Iya Abubakar, who called for a probe of the federal statutory corporations in the hope that Northerners would get "their fair share of office in the federation" (cited in Agbaje 1989:113). The Northern Region newpaper, the *Nigerian Citizen*, referred to the corporations as "rotten, scandalous and treacherous" (Agbaje 1989:113). When Louis Edet, from an Eastern ethnic minority group, was appointed the first indigenous Inspector General of Police in April 1964, the *Nigerian Citizen* wasted no time in reminding the government that:

> It was only (recently)…that another Nigerian, Commodore Wey (a Yoruba), was appointed to head the expanding Nigerian Navy…when the time comes for the appointment of the Army Chief, a Northerner should be considered for the post. Now we have an Easterner to man the Police Force and a Westerner for the Navy (cited in Agbaje 1989:113–114).

But the Northerner would have had to be promoted over the heads of two senior Southerners! By 1966, Nigeria was far from creating a representative bureaucracy; if anything, the imbalances within the public sector were a major contributor to the escalating ethno-regional competition and conflict. The conflict-ridden civilian regime was overthrown in a military coup in January 1966. The military regime of Ironsi, an Igbo who was hitherto head of the army, identified ethno-regional conflict as the major obstacle for the Nigerian state. He decided on a reform agenda with the objective to abolish the regions, which were seen as the institutional backbone of the contending ethno-regional forces. In Unification Decree 34 of 1966, the federation was abolished and replaced by a unitary system. This was the first effort at reforming the crisis-ridden governance of the country.

The regional civil services were to be unified to become a single national service. The nation would take precedence over the divisive regions. These plans raised immediate apprehension on the part of northern leaders, who felt that a unitary system would open the possibility of a Southern-dominated public service, not just at the centre, but also in the North. The Northern Region Military Governor, Hassan Usman Katsina, wrote a lengthy memo virtually disowning the decision of the SMC of which he was a member (ACF 2001b). In the Yoruba West, there was little support for the policy of unification, given the strength of Yoruba nationalist sentiments and the grudge felt toward the federal government on account of the travails of the Yoruba nationalist leader, Awolowo. Ironsi's reform efforts had little public support. When Ironsi was subsequently overthrown and killed in July 1966 in an uprising of Northern army officers, his attempt at introducing unitarism and civil service unification was presented as a thinly disguised move by the Igbo to seize control of the country (ACF 2001b).

With the successor regime of Gowon, a Northern minority Christian, we begin to see the elaboration of a different reform agenda for the same national problems. The Nigerian commitment to federalism was reaffirmed, but the nature of this federalism and the constitution of its public sector were about to undergo a radical change. Under this regime, three important policy instruments were developed: (i) the dismantling of the old regions and their replacement with 12 new states in 1967; (ii) the nationalization of the political space by the dismantling of the relics of feudal power in the North, the incorporation of the Yoruba into the mainstream through the co-optation of Awolowo and the defeat of the Igbo-led Biafran secession; and (iii) the informal introduction of state (territorial), but not ethnic, quotas, as a basis for representation in the cabinet and some other government institutions. Through these reforms, Nigeria moved in the direction of consociational federalism.

The creation of states was aimed at serving two objectives: fragmenting the majority ethnic groups into numerous states to diffuse their loyalties and deny them common political infrastructure, while simultaneously giving ethnic minorities states of their own in which they could exercise a measure of control and limited autonomy. Similarly, local government administration was reformed in the 1970s with the express purpose of giving smaller ethnic groups and local communities some say in their immediate governance. Representation on the cabinet was based on informal state quotas, and many previously excluded minorities were now incorporated into government. As discussed in an earlier section, the ethnic minority component of the cabinet increased. More states were subsequently created, leading to a total of 36 in 1996. In the process, however, the proportion of minority-controlled states decreased from 50 per cent in 1967 to 41.7 per cent in 1996.

After Gowon's removal in a palace coup in 1975, the nationalization of the political space gained added momentum. This was fuelled by rising receipts from crude oil sales, an activist foreign policy concerned with issues of apartheid and African liberation, and a nationalistic Murtala/Obasanjo regime fired by visions of national rebirth. This period saw the nationalization of erstwhile regional universities and television stations, and an elaborate programme of building national infrastructure such as roads and dams, and the institution of subsidies aimed at creating a uniform market regime across the country. The increase in governmental powers after 1967 was matched by a higher profile for bureaucrats who had a role in the allocation of resources, in a military-led context in which political competition and representation were absent. The decade between 1966 and 1976 has rightly been described as the "decade of ascendancy" of the FCS. Given this power of the FCS, state governments began to agitate for representation in the directorate cadre of the FCS in the hope of getting their concerns onto the federal agenda. This concern for representation at the very top was soon extended to the rest of the service (Adamolekun et al. 1991:78–79). The early Gowon reforms failed to settle the perennial contest for representation; they only changed the context in which the struggle took place.

The evolution of a quota system

The agitation by states for representation in federal institutions soon resulted in an attempt to re-engineer the elite formation process through the introduction of state quotas in the educational system. There was a prior experience with a quota system in the military. Because of colonial classification of some ethnic groups as martial, and because of the different structures of economic opportunity that confronted different ethnic groups in the colonial period, the lower ranks of the Nigerian army were largely composed of ethnic minority groups from the North. In 1958, a regional quota was introduced at this level, giving the North 50 per cent of new intakes, and the east and west 25 per cent each (Adekanye 1989:232). However, the Balewa-led federal government continued to insist on merit for the recruitment of the indigenous officer corps that was taking over from British officers (Miners 1971:97–116). But this changed in 1961, because of Northern fears of an Igbo or Southern-dominated officer corps. For example, of the 57 officers commissioned in 1961, 49 were Southerners (Okeke 1992:62), and the Northern regional leader, Bello, had for long been worried by this trend:

> When the first Iraqi coup occurred and the Prime Minister was killed and tied to a vehicle and driven on the streets of Baghdad, Sardauna [Bello] for days became restless… . He then reasoned that it was important that we contained this type of development, right now by fixing our boys in the military.[18]

A regional quota system for the officer corps was introduced in 1961, along the lines of the earlier quota for the other ranks. The Southern newspaper *West African Pilot* complained that the quota system would compel the nation to "send subgrade people for training merely to satisfy Regional as opposed to national interests" (cited in Okeke 1992:64). At the beginning of

[18] Former Minister Maitama Sule, cited in *The News*, 8 April 1996, p. 15.

the Biafran war in 1967, these military quotas were abandoned, but they were later reintroduced as part of a wider nation-building effort under the 1979 Constitution, when state-based quotas were introduced.

The new quota system in the educational system aimed specifically to change the structure of elite recruitment (Oyovbaire 1983:24), by altering the composition of the input into the educational system. An earlier effort to bolster Northern participation in the educational system through the introduction of regional quotas had been rejected in 1952 and again in 1961, when the federal government reiterated its commitment to building a university system with a national outlook, but based on the merit principle (Yoloye 1989:49–54). However, from 1970, interventionist nation-building military regimes increasingly focused on the educational system with a view to adjusting ethno-regional participation levels. They did this through two policy packages: (i) the nationalization of existing regional universities, and the extension of educational institutions to all parts of the country; and (ii) the establishment of state quotas for the intake into these federal institutions. Other institutions needed for this centralization of the educational system, such as the National Universities Commission and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, were also built (Yoloye 1989:65; Suberu 2001).

The quota system that emerged has four components, each weighted differently, depending on the level of the educational system. These components are: (i) academic merit; (ii) educationally less developed states; (iii) catchment area, or the immediate surrounding states of the educational institution; and (iv) the discretion of those running the institution in question. While academic merit was determined by the applicants' results in external examinations such as the West African Examinations Council or the Joint Matriculation Examination, the educationally less developed states and the catchment area of each institution were determined by the government and handed down to the institution. At the level of the federally owned unity secondary schools, the quota formula is 20 per cent on merit, 30 per cent on the state in which the school is based and 50 per cent on the equality of states. At the intermediate level of the technical colleges, teachers colleges, polytechnics and colleges of art and science, the quota formula is 20 per cent on merit and 80 per cent on the equality of states. In 1981, the quota system was extended to federal universities, based on a ratio of 40 per cent for merit, 30 per cent for catchment area, 20 per cent for the educationally less developed states and 10 per cent for administrative discretion.[19]

Like the military quotas used previously, the education sector quotas have not achieved their set objective. By 1966, after eight years of the application of quotas for the lower ranks of the military, Northern soldiers still constituted 75 per cent of the lower ranks (Okeke 1992:62). With respect to the officer corps, the application of quotas has worked in three ways, one of which defeats the objective of the policy. First, recruitment at the point of entry into the military training institutions is done on the basis of the equality of the states. Second, up to the rank of colonel, the merit principle is used, with due regard to performance, qualifications, conduct and training. Third, promotion to the rank of brigadier and above is based on discretionary—even arbitrary—representations within the military establishment (Adamolekun et al. 1991:85). It is this third element, for instance, that explains the continuing paucity of officers of Igbo origin in the higher reaches of the military establishment, over 30 years after the end of the Biafran war. Furthermore, although efforts have been made to include officers from all sections of the country in in-service training, staff courses and the command of troops,

> the fundamental problem appears to be the controversies that have surrounded the sharing of political posts among military officers during periods of military rule: the composition of the military substitute for a legislative body… membership of the federal Cabinet, appointment and deployment of governors, and other political appointments (Adamolekun et al. 1991:86).

[19] Suberu 2001; Yoloye 1989; Oyovbaire 1983.

Despite the quota system, many people in the South continued to see the military as Northern-dominated.

In the educational sector, the quota principle has failed even to make a dent in the yawning gap in educational and professional attainments between the different ethno-regional zones of the country. However, available statistics suggest that there has been some improvement in the spread of each state's candidates within the university system, and the spread of states represented in each university. Second, "the intake from the North [has] improved considerably" (Yoloye 1989:68–70). Since the Nigerian university system can only admit fewer than 10 per cent of willing applicants in any one year, there has been a backlash against the quota system, as many southern states have established universities of their own outside the reach of the federal quota system. In effect, southern states continue to put greater numbers through the university system.[20] Oyovbaire (1983) has argued that in practice, the effects of the quotas have been counter-productive; many southern candidates seeking particular placements have tended to manipulate their state of origin in order to gain a place. This has cast a shadow over the development of a common Nigerian citizenship based on equality of opportunity. In one university in 1979, the sentiments generated by such manipulations of identity led to violence (Oyovbaire 1983:25). Furthermore, Oyovbaire argues that the implementation of quotas has

> led to a tendency to lower, and even abandon, the minimum education standards which must be met by candidates from less developed localities, communities and states before entry into institutions (1983:26).

Meanwhile, northern states such as Katsina, Yobe and Zamfara do not seem able to produce enough candidates to fill their federal quotas; in 1997, there were only 465 and 841 applicants for university places from Yobe and Katsina states, respectively, and in 2001, only 523 from Zamfara.[21]

Predictably, the southern middle classes have expressed strong resentment of the quota system, claiming that their deserving children and wards are denied admission into federal institutions, while less-qualified candidates from northern states are admitted. A widely publicized court case on this issue was instituted by Yinka Badejo from Ogun state, who scored 73.25 per cent on the entrance examination for the unity secondary schools, but was not invited for an interview, because the Ogun state quota had been filled by candidates with higher scores. In her deposition before the court, Badejo argued that she was the victim of discrimination, as some northern candidates with as low as 37.75 per cent were invited to interview (Suberu 2001:130).[22] Similarly, the Igbo elite organization, Otu Aka Ikenga, condemned the quota system:

> We believe the quotas system is a good and suitable policy for a heterogeneous society such as Nigeria as it is intended to prevent the domination of our national life by one group. But the way it is being practised tends to encourage and reward mediocrity and hinders the effective participation of Easterners. Our children are sentenced to excruciating deprivation (cited in Igbokwe 1995:29–30).

The quota system has continued, despite this southern hostility, and it subsequently became the precursor of the Federal Character Principle discussed below.

The 1979 Constitution and the executive presidency

The centralizing, nation-building drive that started in 1966 and accelerated in 1975 found its apogee in the 1979 Constitution, which formed the framework for the return to civil democratic

[20] Since 2000, many northern states have also been establishing state universities of their own.

[21] www.jambng.com, accessed in August 2005.

[22] It is unclear what became of this case, but my suspicion is that she lost.

politics between 1979 and 1983. The 1979 Constitution is important for the number of innovations it sought to introduce into the management of interethnic relations. Principal among these were: (i) the introduction of a majoritarian executive presidency with a nationwide constituency as an antidote to regional and local sectarianism; (ii) the setting of new power-sharing rules for the appointment of public officers, dealing specifically with the ethnic composition of public bodies, that is, the Federal Character Principle; and (iii) the establishment of new pan-ethnic majoritarian rules to govern the formation and conduct of political parties, and the electoral process in general. Related to these constitutional innovations was the decision to move the federal capital to Abuja, right in the geographical centre of the country, and its vigorous promotion as the "centre of unity".

In a speech to the Constitution Drafting Committee in 1975, the then head of state, Murtala Mohammed, stated that the ruling SMC had come to the conclusion that the best form of government for Nigeria is an executive presidency in which:

> The President and Vice-President are elected, with clearly defined powers and are accountable to the people. We feel that there should be legal provisions to ensure that they are brought into office in such a manner so to reflect the Federal Character of the country; and the choice of members of the Cabinet should also be such as would reflect the Federal character of the country (cited in Gboyega 1989:176).

In effect, the Westminster parliamentary system, based on regional elite representation, which existed from 1960 to 1966, was seen as inadequate for ensuring the unity and stability of the country. An executive president, directly elected by the entire country, and with considerable powers, was seen as a better constitutional arrangement. The constituency basis of federal power was radically transformed. Unlike the multiregional power dynamic of the earlier period, the 1979 Constitution also centralized and concentrated power in the federal government (Oyovbaire 1983:21–22) and more specifically in the presidency;[23] the head of government was now to be elected by the people. The list of legislative powers was decidedly tilted in favour of the federal government, which had the power to "intervene in virtually every matter of public importance", while the power of the states was dependent on "what the federal government voluntarily chooses to leave to the states" (Suberu 2001:36). Though the commitment to federalism remained, the balance of power between the centre and the constituent units was radically adjusted.

The president who was at the centre of this centralizing tendency would "test his standing as a national figure" (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1977b:69) through building the requisite majoritarian alliances across the country. Furthermore, the presidential cabinet must "reflect the federal character of the country", and the tenor of leadership should be unquestionably national, as opposed to the regionalist leadership of 1960–1966.

> We want to be able to develop our economy to modernise and integrate our society—to secure and promote stability in the [Nigerian] community and safeguard civil liberties. [The Presidency] would be imbued with energy, unity, cohesion and despatch in grappling with the day to day affairs of government (Constitution Drafting Committee report cited in Oyovbaire 1983:17).

Important aspects of this all-powerful presidency are the rules governing the composition of the cabinet—Federal Character—and those governing the formation of political parties and the conduct of elections. Furthermore, to be elected president, a candidate must: (i) get a majority of the votes cast at the election; and (ii) meet a threshold of not less than 25 per cent of the votes

[23] From the Babangida military presidency in 1985 to the Obasanjo civilian presidency at the time of writing, the presidency has become too powerful, creating a focus for unbridled competition for power and generating its own logic of instability. Critics refer to it as the "Imperial Presidency".

cast in at least two-thirds of all of the states of the federation, according to Sections 125 and 126 of the 1979 Constitution.[24]

Political parties

In the period leading to 1966, political parties in Nigeria were invariably organs of ethnic or ethno-regional political forces. The NPC and the Yoruba-based AG were unashamedly regional and ethnic in their focus. And the NCNC had 60 ethnic organizations within it, the most influential of which was Ibo state union (Okpu 1984:108). The ethnic minorities were not left out of this pattern of aligning ethnic groups with political parties; 20 of the 81 parties banned by the military in 1966 were ethnic minority parties (Cohen 1971:9). The 1979 Constitution sought to break the connection between ethnicity and party formation by bringing the formation of parties under federal control, and stipulating the conditions that parties were to meet before they could be legally registered to contest for office. The thrust was to force erstwhile regional political forces into building wider national majoritarian alliances.

The relevant provisions of Sections 201 to 207 of the 1979 Constitution are summarized by Oyovbaire (1983:22–23):

- membership of political parties must be open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of place of origin, sex, religion or ethnic grouping;
- names, emblems and mottos of parties must not contain ethnic or religious connotation or give the appearance that the activities of the parties are limited to geographical areas of the country;
- the headquarters of parties must be located in the country's capital territory;
- the constitution of political parties must ensure that members of the executive committee or other governing body reflect the Federal Character of the country;
- members of the executive committee or other governing body shall be deemed to satisfy the requirement of Federal Character only if the members belong to different states not being less than two-thirds of all of the states comprising the federation;
- the programmes, aims and objects of parties must conform with the provisions of the Constitution on Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy;
- no parties must retain, organize, train or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use or display of physical force or coercion; and
- no association of any kind shall function as a political party unless registered by the Federal Electoral Commission.

The Federal Electoral Commission also insisted that each party have functioning offices in at least two-thirds of the states. A similar number of functioning offices is stipulated for the local governments in each state.[25]

Despite these stringent rules, however, the old ethno-regional parties recreated themselves in 1979, taking due care not to openly transgress the new rules. At the core of the new NPN was the rump of the old NPC, though it expanded its recruitment to other parts of the country; the new Nigerian People's Party was a "reformed" NCNC, incorporating northern Christian ethnic minorities; the Unity Party of Nigeria was a "reconditioned" AG; and the Peoples' Redemption

[24] In the 1989 Constitution, because of the imposed two-party system, the rules were slightly changed. The president was expected to get a majority—not just a plurality—of the votes cast, and one-third—no longer one-quarter—of the votes cast in two-thirds of the states. The 1979 formula was repeated in the 1999 Constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, 1989).

[25] In 1999, a threshold of 5 per cent of the votes in a given number of local governments in at least 25 states was initially used to decide which political associations would be given final registration. Following a Supreme Court ruling in 2003, all political associations wanting to become parties were registered.

Party was a "renovation" of the populist Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). Only the Great Nigerian People's Party did not have antecedents in the previous republic (Dare 1988:138). Though sectionalism and ethno-regional mobilization had not changed, important modifications had nevertheless been forced on the parties by the new rules. All eschewed open appeals to sectarianism, and they tended to

> behave in such a way as to make them appear like national organizations, and to select their officers so as to make the party representative of the various sections of Nigeria (Dare 1988:138).

The NPN went furthest by dividing the country into four zones and delineating a clutch of state and party offices to be shared out to these zones. As a result of these developments, Nigeria had its first ever nationally elected leader with a majority of the votes in nine states, second position in another nine states, and 33.76 per cent of the popular vote, out of a field of five candidates. Though Shagari was from the far north, five minority states—three in the south and two in the north—voted solidly for him (Oyovbaire 1983:18). This moderated, but did not obviate, the ethno-regional voting pattern: in its core northern constituency, the NPN won 46.4 per cent of the seats; the Unity Party of Nigeria won 87.9 per cent of the seats in the Yoruba southwest; while the Nigerian People's Party won 85.9 per cent of the seats in the Igbo southeast (Okpu 1989:360).

Federal character

The greater importance of the federal government in national politics and the oil-driven economy after 1966 was matched by the greater emphasis on state representation in federal institutions such as the cabinet, the bureaucracy, and the schools. This emphasis on representation and power sharing was given constitutional backing in 1979 under the Federal Character Principle. The drafters of the constitution were of the opinion that the fear of domination or exclusion were salient aspects of Nigerian politics, and that it was essential to have specific provisions to ensure that the predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups was avoided in the composition of the government and its agencies (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1977a:ix). Accordingly, Section 14, Subsection 3 of the 1979 Constitution stated:

> The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

Though this section was non-justiciable, other justiciable sections that reiterated the Federal Character Principle were Section 135, which stipulated that the president must appoint at least one minister from among the indigenes of each state, and Section 157, which compelled the president to take due regard of the Federal Character of Nigeria in appointing persons to such offices as the secretary to the federal government, ambassadors, permanent secretaries of federal ministries and the personal staff of the president. Similarly, Section 197, Subsection 2 stipulated that the officer corps and the other ranks of the armed forces must reflect the federal character of Nigeria, while Section 199 called for the establishment of a body to ensure that the composition of the armed forces complies with the Federal Character Principle.

It is possible that the constitutional adoption of the Federal Character Principle in 1979 helped to shift the focus of popular media debate on issues of representation and proportionality back to the question of jobs and appointments, as table 27 suggests. This table shows the regularity with which certain equity issues were raised in the popular media.

Table 27: Media publications and "federal character" subject focus by decade *(per cent)*

Federal character subject	Decade			
	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
Education	4.5	–	55.6	10
Appointments	18.2	92.1	11.1	90
State creation	52.2	2.3	11.1	–
Development	11.4	–	–	–
Right to land	11.4	5.6	22.2	–

Source: Adapted from Agbaje (1989:125).

It has been suggested that the actual implementation of the Federal Character Principle was marked by arbitrary appointments and removals (Gboyega 1989:178–179). Many Southern civil servants came to see the policy as a tool for depriving them of their jobs. Frustrated career expectations were also blamed on the policy, and southern applicants increasingly saw it as a discriminatory barrier. Serious damage was thereby done to the *esprit de corps* of the civil service (Gboyega 1989:183; Suberu 2001:123). While some from the North praised the policy as the "cornerstone of ethnic justice and fair government", others from the South condemned it as "geographical apartheid" (Suberu 2001:111).

Tensions concerning representation were further raised by the composition of the Buhari junta that came into power at the end of 1983 with 16 members, of which 13 were military men. Of these military men, 11—including Buhari's deputy—were from the northern states, raising southern fears. The point was made that the north supported the Federal Character Principle only when it suited its bureaucratic interests, but conveniently ignored it when it came to northern political dominance. When the Buhari government purged the civil service in 1984, the respected one-time secretary to the government of the federation, Alison Ayida, a member of a southern minority, argued that the sackings violated the Federal Character Principle (Okpu 1989:348). In the ensuing controversy, and a repeat of the press wars of the 1960s, the northern newspaper, *New Nigerian*, published figures showing southern domination of the federal ministries (Gboyega 1989:180).

Transfers to the FCS also accelerated from 1983: between 1974 and 1979 there were 331 transfers and this increased to 827 between 1983 and 1986. Four northern states had the highest number of transfers (Adamolekun et al. 1991:80–81). Because transfers are often on a lateral basis from one salary level to an equivalent one in the FCS, it is possible to transfer the accumulated promotions in the state service to the federal level. Promotions were faster in the northern civil services because of less competition for places relative to the southern services. In effect, northern officers from state services were frequently transferred above the heads of their southern contemporaries. Southern disenchantment of the practice is reflected in this editorial of a southern-based newspaper:

> The present practice is to encourage young graduates from the 'disadvantaged states,' which is a euphemism for the northern states, to refuse appointment into the federal civil service until they have first served four or five years in the civil service of their home states, by which time the most promising of them, already distinguished with double promotions, are sought by the 'Federal Character' scouts…and installed in topmost posts…[as] bosses to Southerners who are ten to twenty years their senior in the public service and who are themselves not lacking in excellence. Predictably, what follows is

> resentment, a sag in morale, sometimes stonewalling and sabotage. In the end, what is achieved is not national integration.[26]

From the point of view of the North, the complaints are aimed at excluding northerners from the FCS and maintaining southern domination. The "rigorous" application of Federal Character Principle is seen as an essential step toward building a truly national bureaucracy.[27]

For his part, as the military head of state responsible for the ratification of the 1979 Constitution, Obasanjo condemned what he saw as some negative trends in the implementation of the principle. He argued that:

> In the immediate pre- and post-independence period, most Nigerians have attained positions of eminence as a result of political patronage based almost exclusively on their places of origin with little consideration for merit and feelings of others competing with them. There is no doubt that for a multi-ethnical society like Nigeria, in the early stages of nation building, geographical representation of federal character must be ensured in our national representative appointments, but merit should not be completely sacrificed on the alter of federal character. It becomes counter-productive, divisive, and demoralising and more so, if the recipient of such seemingly undue favour is arrogant, disrespectful, overbearing, immodest and uncooperative (cited in Gboyega 1989:183).

The Federal Character Principle, which was aimed at securing national integration, thus faced the crisis of unintended consequences. Another problem with its application was its basis on the principle of the equality of states—which was only one cleavage in the Nigerian system. Important cleavages that were ignored included persisting ethnic, religious, regional and local differences. Indeed, the minority rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, called for a Federal Character Principle based on the ethnic group as the only criterion that would serve the needs of ethnic minority groups (Gboyega 1989:182).

Despite the tensions surrounding its application, the Federal Character Principle has been reaffirmed and even extended in all subsequent constitutions. In Section 150 of the 1989 Constitution, many new institutions, such as the governing bodies of state-owned companies and the governing councils of the universities, were brought under the purview of the Federal Character Principle. However, the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election unleashed a political crisis that eventually led to the abrogation of the 1989 Constitution and the emergence of Abacha as military head of state in 1993.

Such was the ethno-regional tension generated in the country by the political crisis that the National Constitutional Conference convened by Abacha in June 1994 came to a number of conclusions that intensified the power-sharing consociational aspects of the Nigerian Constitution. First, the presidency was now to be rotated between two zones of the country, the north and south. Second, all other major public offices in the executive and legislative arms of government were to be shared between six geopolitical zones. Third, there was to be proportional representation at all levels of government and in all institutions. Fourth, a Federal Character Commission was to be established, to "monitor and enforce federal character application and proportional representation". Fifth, it was recommended that any political party with up to 10 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly should be entitled to representation in the cabinet. Finally, the establishment of a multiple vice-presidency was suggested, to represent the interests of different geopolitical zones within the executive. Accordingly, Section 229 of the 1995 Constitution established a rotational presidency. Section 49 made federal character a justiciable clause in the Constitution, while Section 154 established the Federal Character Commission (Agbaje 2000:124–126).

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[26] Lagos *Guardian*, 22 July 1986, cited in Suberu 2001:124.

[27] *New Nigerian*, 17 December 1984, cited in Suberu 2001:124.

However, between the resolutions of the National Constitutional Conference and the final drafting of the 1995 Constitution, Abacha had seriously altered some of the power-sharing recommendations. First, instead of the north-south rotation of the presidency, he stipulated that the rotation would be between the six geopolitical zones. Second, he rejected the idea of a presidency with three vice-presidents and substituted it with a president, a vice-president, a prime minister and a deputy prime minister. Each of these was to go to a different zone. Third, he expanded the offices to be rotated between the six zones to include the four listed offices and those of the Senate president and the speaker of the House of Representatives. Finally, he stipulated that these power-sharing measures should last for 30 years (Agbaje 2000:127).

By the time the Federal Character Commission was established by Decree No. 34 of 1996, its powers, including the powers (Section 4, Subsection 1c) to prosecute heads of ministries and parastatals for failing to carry out its instructions, were enormous and its scope had been extended to address the inequalities in social services and infrastructural development, along with the inequalities in the private sector (Section 4, Subsections 1di and 1dii). It also had powers to work out a formula for the redistribution of jobs to establish, by administrative fiat, the principle of proportionality within the FCS (Federal Character Commission 1996). Though it argued that the commission "must not be used as a lever to elevate the incompetent" or associated "with the lowering of standards" (Federal Character Commission 1996:30–31), it nevertheless established that within the FCS:

> The indigenes of any State shall not constitute less than 2.5% or more than 3% of the total positions available including junior staff at Head office (Federal Character Commission 1996:33).

To give effect to this drastic formula, bureaucrats from five states from the southwest, three states each from the southeast and south-south, two states from the north-central and one state from the northwest would have been dismissed to make way for new intake, largely from the northwest and northeast. This would have been politically explosive. An attempt was also made to work out each state's share of facilities such as transportation, post offices, hotels, water resources, electricity and housing. The idea was that a similar proportionate formula for redistributing these facilities would be devised. Abacha died suddenly in mid-1998, putting an end to his extreme programme of power sharing. However, the Federal Character Commission was retained in the 1999 Constitution, though the political will to give effect to its increased powers and schemes seems to have dissipated.

The Federal Character Principle, or affirmative action, is defensible in the context of a society such as Nigeria where state institutions would be lopsided if only meritocratic considerations were used in recruitment into the public sector. Such a development would jeopardize public trust and peaceful coexistence. Without sacrificing efficiency, it is possible to take political action at various levels of society to try to achieve a more balanced and more representative public service. Yet, in practice, the implementation of federal character in Nigeria can be criticized on four fundamental grounds. First, it is all about sharing existing educational and bureaucratic facilities. This is a limited state-centred approach to the inequalities in the Nigerian system and runs counter to Nigeria's own immediate social history. When a similar gap as that between the North and South existed between the West and the East in the 1930s, every town association or improvement union, and every local community in the East, was involved in raising funds to build community schools and offer scholarships to their indigenes. This massive communal effort along with the effort of missionaries proved effective in eliminating the gap between the East and West by the 1950s. In a similar fashion, when Northern leaders under the regional premier, Bello, came to a full realization of the extent of the gap between the North and South in the 1950s, they embarked on a two-pronged policy of building local facilities on the one hand, and using political power to protect Northern interests at the centre on the other. Funds were solicited from private individuals in the North to send northern youths to England on scholarship, and considerable public funds were devoted to building educational institutions in the North itself.

In the current climate under the Federal Character Principle, many northern state governments and communities are content to get their "share" under the principle, and they have yet to accept responsibility to contribute their part in bridging the educational gap, which led to the adoption of the policy in the first place. The neglect of primary and secondary education in the north, the constitutional responsibility of local and state governments, does not bode well for efforts at bridging the gap between the north and the south. This is an area where northern politicians and communities need to play an active part. Yet, a politician and educationist in Bauchi state reportedly blamed northern leaders for the lackadaisical attitude to education in the region:

> Dr Yakubu Lame has blamed Northern leaders for the educational backwardness of the region. Lame said…that Northern leaders should be held responsible for the inability of the region to develop educationally. He said founding fathers of the North…laid a solid foundation for the region to grow, but lamented that subsequent leaders abandoned the original course. 'Northern leaders have lost their focus since they abandoned the original course charted by the founding fathers for the good of all,' Lame said. He also said it was unfortunate that the gap in education between the South and the North had continued to widen because the Northern leaders showed little or no interest in the development of the education sector.[28]

A similar complaint against the northern elite's attitude was voiced by the former minister, Iro Danmusa, who said:

> While they are competing among themselves to buy the latest cars from Asia, Europe and the US spending as much as N10 million on just one car, they have allowed the area to continue lagging behind in the educational sector ignoring the fact that their privileged position is acquired as a result of the goodwill of that same society they now choose to neglect.[29]

Another northern politician, Balarabe Musa, claims that the northern elites are not keen to promote mass education because such a move would constitute "a challenge to their status".[30] With this attitude from northern elites and communities, the educational gap will continue to exist and possibly widen. Federal character as public policy will amount to a mere band-aid in the face of the disequilibrium caused by the persisting gap.

Second, the connection between the implementation of federal character and the principle of efficiency needs to be more clearly spelled out. Federal character has been accused of encouraging "mediocrity in positions of power" (Oyovbaire 1983:19). This point was also stressed in 2002 by a retiring High Court judge:

> Declining output of the judiciary has been blamed on the principle of federal character which requires an ethnic spread in the judiciary. Speaking yesterday at his valedictory service in Enugu, retiring Court of Appeal Judge, Justice Eugene Ubaezonu said the principle, which has done more violence to the standard of justice, should be applied with caution if not abandoned all together. 'The Nigerian judiciary that I knew of in the early sixties is not the judiciary that I knew of today. The quality of the judiciary output is declining fast. It is nose diving. The principle of federal character as contained in our constitution is a contributory factor in this decline. Ethnic spread or geographical spread christened in the civilised language of federal character has done a great disservice to our judiciary.'[31]

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[28] *Daily Trust*, 5 August 2003.

[29] *Daily Trust*, 7 August 2003

[30] Lagos *Guardian*, 2 March 2004, p.7.

[31] *Thisday*, 30 November 2002.

Third, as table 27 shows, since the 1980s, the application of federal character has itself become a contentious aspect of interethnic relations, as those disadvantaged by it are likely to assert that "federal character is tribal character" (Oyovbaire 1983:19). In this regard, federal character helps to solve one problem—that of a heavily lopsided bureaucracy—but then creates another—interethnic discord and acrimony—particularly within the bureaucracy itself. This problem will persist until a way is found to practise federal character while simultaneously protecting technocratic principles of merit and due process, and giving due respect to the individual rights of all workers. Federal character, as group rights, therefore needs to be balanced by the recognition of the individual qualifications and rights of those involved in the process from all sides. If the trust of individual bureaucrats is to be maintained, their rights must not simply be swept aside in the effort to achieve even socially desirable group rights.

Finally, as Adamolekun and Kincaid (1991:178) have rightly argued, federal character legitimatizes group prerogatives throughout society and encourages group cohesion and elite manipulation. In a society in which ethnic barriers need to be made less rigid rather than consolidated, this is a counter-productive strategy. In a similar vein, Brass (1991:334) rejects the consociational model because it violates the rights of individuals and undermines incentives for individual achievement. To address these problems, it seems desirable to set targets for the transcendence of some aspects of federal character, so that all Nigerians can expect equal treatment and a common citizenship at some future date. These targets, like Abacha's proposed 30-year time limit for the zoning of the presidency, could be done sector by sector, and sequenced to create minimum disruption. Such a bounding of the applicability of federal character might have the added incentive of encouraging the educationally less-developed states to take the necessary steps to increase their training for open competition.

Conclusion: Nation Building as a Work in Progress

Since 1966, efforts to reform interethnic relations in Nigeria have had only limited success. For one, ensuring ethnic representation within the bureaucracy has not meant that the individual bureaucrat would be guided by ethnic or national considerations in the discharge of his or her duties. Bureaucratic and political power are frequently used for personal, and not collective, advancement. While reforms have fundamentally transformed the Nigerian state, they have yet to solve the problem of ethnic mobilization and conflict. As a consequence, there is still a plethora of grievances from various ethnic groups, particularly ethnic minority groups and the Igbo, but even the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani are not left out. Much of the politics of Nigeria after 1999 is informed by these inflamed passions (see also Mustapha 2003). However, it might be argued that the real problem lies not in the marginalization of this or that group per se, but in the inadequate formulation and/or implementation of previous reforms, their politicization, and the rising pressures of poverty.

To sum up Nigeria's experience in these various reforms, it would have to be said that attempts to create inclusive institutions have had limited success. It has been relatively easier to broaden ethnic representation in the executive and legislature than to create genuine structures of social inclusion. Even in the context of increased ethnic representativeness, hegemonic impulses of particular ethnic groups are not totally suppressed in the executive. This problem is even more obvious in the organization of political parties, where efforts at wider representation remain subject to manipulation by the more powerful ethnic groups, involving such tactics as the recruitment of lightweight politicians from particular areas to meet federal character injunctions. Despite the Federal Character Principle, the parties retained their ethnic colouration until the manipulative dictatorship of Babangida (1985–1993), and the tyrannical rule of Abacha (1993–1998) combined to destroy many of the old regional political networks. However, instead of becoming more representative, political parties are now increasingly replacing ethnic forms of organization with the personal networks of wealthy and powerful individuals. The old regional ethos supporting party formation has been largely replaced by an ethic of personal ambition. The increasing personalization of power under the military since 1985 has been

matched by the increasing personalization of the political party system, using ethnicity as an instrument, rather than a basis, of party political mobilization.

The reforms of other institutions of the Nigerian state have been even less successful, particularly in those institutions that privilege expertise as much as representativeness. The judiciary and the civil service fall into this category and here, many tensions are discernible. Professionalism has frequently been threatened by political interference, ethnic gate-keeping and internal factionalization. And the private sector bureaucracies in the media, banks, the formal sector economy and even civil society continue to manifest considerable ethnic bias with minimum effort at correcting the imbalances.

These limitations notwithstanding, we should be mindful of the fact that Nigeria is now a more integrated country than it was in the 1960s. The experience of the civil war has established a psycho-political line that ethno-regional mobilization is expected not to cross. However, this psycho-political line has sometimes been blurred by the intensity of ethnic mobilization. Though the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra seems to be raising the spectre of secession, the likelihood of a serious challenge to Nigerian nationhood is moderate to low. And many national institutions today are more national in composition, if not in spirit, than they have ever been. What continues to be lacking is a common spirit of civic citizenship, backed by the guarantee of basic citizenship rights by the state.

All ethnic groups in Nigeria continue to raise one complaint or the other, reflecting the incomplete nature of the nation-building reforms. From the Hausa-Fulani point of view, the historian Dahiru Yahaya has argued that:

> The Hausa Muslims of the Far North appear to be the target of the frustration of all other Nigerians. They are hated for the reasons of the political leadership imposed on them by the mutual suspicions of other Nigerians. They are subjected to humiliation by the South-Western Yoruba powerful media by which their culture, religion and leadership are daily treated to insults. They are also excluded from full economic participation by the Yoruba control of the financial institutions. In the private sector they are open to the exploitation of the Ibo control of the modern sector of private business activities. Ibos fix prices unilaterally by which Hausa money is siphoned daily. The Hausa are reduced to utter poverty and a large percentage of them rendered street beggars. The Hausa also feel that they are put at serious disadvantage in the public and social services in the country (1994:3).

When Obasanjo was elected president in 1999 and went on to initiate some reforms of the public sector, he faced stiff opposition from the north on the grounds that he was "marginalizing" the north and favouring his Yoruba ethnic group (Mustapha 2003). Vice-President Atiku explained that the reforms were necessary because, despite the Federal Character Principle, some northern states had six federal permanent secretaries in 1999, while others had none.[32] In the memo to the HRVIC mentioned at the start of this report, the ACF suggested that the Yoruba and the Igbo were the new colonialists:

> The Yoruba followed by the Igbos dominate in the Federal Civil Service, Central Bank of Nigeria…and the Presidency and they don't seem to be contented. They appear to be supplanting erstwhile British imperialism with ethnic domination (ACF 2001a:31).

From 2003, the Obasanjo administration started a process of wide-ranging marketization reforms, which included the reorientation of the civil service. Examinations have been introduced for civil servants before their employment or promotion. But this has been rejected by a spokesperson of the ACF on the grounds that "the increasing recourse to qualifying

[32] See Lagos *Guardian*, 9 June 2002.

examinations for jobs in the public service or private enterprises had the potential of wiping out any remaining northern influence".[33]

The Igbo have also continued to raise questions about the current operations of the Nigerian state. On 11 January 1995, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the collapse of Biafran secession, Igbo-speaking delegates to the National Constitutional Conference "raised an alarm that the persecution of the Igbo had reached epidemic proportions" (Igbokwe 1995:28). A long list of Igbo military and civilian officials allegedly unfairly dismissed from their posts formed the core of the complaint. They argued that the Igbo were being reduced to the status of second-class citizens through deliberate policies aimed at excluding them from effective positions in government and industry (Igbokwe 1995:28–29). In December 2003, a meeting of Catholic bishops from the Igbo-speaking ecclesiastical provinces of Onitsha and Owerri issued the following statement:

> We note with sadness the continued concern of Igbo people about their systematic exclusion, since the end of the Nigerian civil war, from certain substantive positions in the nation's administrative set-up such as the Head of State of Nigeria, heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force, Chief Judge of the Federation, Inspector General of the Police, heads of key Federal parastatals and Head of Service of the Federation. Whether planned or accidental, this exclusion does not reflect the equity that marks a true Federation.[34]

Igbo also complain that the Petroleum Trust Fund set up under Abacha to carry out infrastructural development across the country virtually ignored the Igbo southeast. As an illustration, 76 per cent of the rehabilitated roads were in the north, and the southeast got the least attention with only 5.3 per cent of the roads.[35] When Obasanjo formed his first democratic government in 1999, it was claimed that the Igbo were given the less important cabinet posts, and Igbo ambassadors were sent to insignificant and even war-torn countries (Mustapha 2003). The Igbo have remained lukewarm toward the government's policy of privatization, partly because they do not feel that their acquisitions will be secure in different parts of Nigeria. In the same vein, they claim that they were sidelined during the indigenization of foreign firms in the 1970s, with the Yoruba securing most of the assets. According to the internationally acclaimed writer, Chinua Achebe, the only thing the other Nigerian ethnic groups seem to agree upon is that they should bury the hatchet in the Igbo back!

The last of the *wazobia* triad, the Yoruba, have also been complaining. Afenifere, the elite Yoruba organization, sent a memo to the HRVIC, citing nine abuses suffered by the Yoruba, including the "organised and systematic marginalisation of the Yoruba in the Armed Forces, Police, Civil Service, the commanding heights of the economy and government appointments" (Afenifere 2001:10). They listed some important institutions allegedly "shielded" from Yoruba leadership: the Ministry of the Federal Capital Territory; Ministry of Defense, Mines and Power, Security Printing and Minting Corporation; the Passport Office; the head of immigration; head of customs and excise; and the Chief of Army Staff. The Yoruba, they believe, "have been subjected to excruciating repression (under Abacha), marginalisation and persecution" (Afenifere 2001:1).

Finally, the ethnic minority groups in the north and south have joined their voices to the torrent of complaints. For example, the Christian Association of Nigeria (1988:66–68), a mouthpiece of the mainly Christian northern ethnic minority groups, accused the regionally owned Bank of the North of a deliberate policy of employing only Hausa-Fulani Muslims, to the exclusion of others. Southern ethnic minorities, particularly in the Niger Delta, have complained of severe marginalization, and demanded the right to control their oil resources, as exemplified in the life

[33] Lagos *Guardian*, 22 September 2003, p. 7.

[34] Lagos *Guardian*, 4 January 2004. p. 58.

[35] See *Tell*, 6 September 1999, p. 24.

of the Ogoni leader Saro-Wiwa. When a Yoruba person was appointed the head of the Nigerian National Oil Corporation in November 2003, replacing a southern minority person, a minority columnist wrote of the rise of a "new Yoruba oligarchy" that has seized control of many strategic arms of the oil industry.[36] In mid-2005, southern minority delegates walked out of the National Political Reforms Conference because they felt marginalized by the majority of the delegates, particularly those from the north.

The problems listed above suggest that much remains to be done in terms of building interethnic accommodation in Nigeria. The main obstacles, in my view, are: (i) an excessively centralized state and presidency that is too much of a temptation for ethnic political mobilization in the zero-sum instinct of Nigerian politics; (ii) politically motivated distortions to the structures of governance caused during the long years of military tyranny after 1983 (Kano and Lagos states have nearly equal population sizes, yet Kano has 44 military-created LGAs, while Lagos has only 20); and (iii) mounting poverty. Since 1966, reforms of the Nigerian system have been predicated on the need to build a strong centre to counteract the regional divisiveness of the early 1960s. This process has gone full circle by turning the country into a virtual unitary system, which stifles local initiative. Many local communities and ethnic groups feel impotent and frustrated in the face of the central power. The concentration of political and economic resources at the centre has also created incentives for the control of this centre, intensifying the problem of ethnic mobilization. Reform of the federal system that returns substantial economic and political initiative to the states and zones, as advocated by those calling for true federalism, will help to channel political energies into less destructive ways.

The tyrannies of Babangida and Abacha were particularly responsible for the corrosive distortions of the Federal Character Principle between 1985 and 1999. Many of the complaints of southern and minority ethnic groups, and even some in the northeast, are traceable to the unaccountable actions taken under these two dictatorships. And correcting the distortions after 1999 has not been an easy task. The ease with which the Federal Character Principle can be subjected to political calculations suggests that there is a need to work out some rational guidelines for its implementation. Finally, the level of acute poverty has intensified across the country since 1980, when it stood at 28.1 per cent of the population. Poverty levels rose to 46.3 per cent in 1985, and 66 per cent in 1996 (Federal Office of Statistics 1999a:24, 27; 1999b:12). This rising tide of poverty is taking place in a context in which as much as "55.5 per cent accept that the government should bear the main responsibility for ensuring the well-being of people" (Lewis and Bratton 2000:9). Many, therefore, look to the state for salvation, creating a fertile ground for ethnic mobilization. Tackling poverty by creating avenues for ordinary citizens to earn a decent living must be part of the agenda for addressing ethnic political mobilization. A social contract of sorts between the state and the citizens should emphasize the reciprocity between the actions of the state and the responsibilities of the citizenry.

[36] See Lagos *Guardian*, 17 December 2003.

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Printed in Switzerland
GE.06-02869-November 2006-1,000

UNRISD/PPDGHR24/06/5