

### THE CONCEPT OF PLURALISTIC SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIAN TRIBES

Yakasai  
BASHIR ALIYU\*

Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, [Bashirayakasai@gmail.com](mailto:Bashirayakasai@gmail.com), ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6088-3963>

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**Abstract.** Many scholars and books talk about the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria as one country, not to mention the varieties of articles by assorted scholars and newspapers, who find the topic of Nigeria's plural society interesting. In this study, the author dived to examine the abundant tribes and ethnic groups in Nigeria. Scholars believe that countries like India, Congo, and Nigeria are wide in nature ethnically, and so, Nigeria which has hundreds of tribes and ethnic groups is more of a mixture of elements in chemistry that a lab scientist may be wondering what the outcome of mixing different chemicals would be. This paper is studied as conceptual research to theoretically lay the tribes found in Nigeria and the possibility of national unity and diversity, with secondary data mostly gathered through previous relevant literature and the author's observation as a Nigerian, understanding the basic and contemporary situation with the state and fairness or its vice. With the panoramic view of how these multiple tribes mutually relate with one another, either categorized as major or minor tribes could all be united as Nigerians. Although the study replicates some previous literature, data shows how most scholars that studied Nigeria's pluralistic society pegged its cohesion to either governance, a state of fairness or freedom as a way to unify its people. However, from observation, the author concludes Nigeria's three major tribes (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and the minor ethnic groups found across the country could attain unity through the introduction of more unity initiatives and programs that could poster national identity over ethnicity and religion or regional identity.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, tribes, ethnic groups, society, government, unity.

**Аңдатпа.** Көптеген ғалымдар мен әдебиеттер Нигериядағы плюралистік қоғам тақырыбын қызықты деп санайтын әртүрлі ғалымдар мен газеттердің әртүрлі мақалаларын айтпағанда, бір ел ретінде Нигерияның көп ұлтты табиғаты туралы айтады. Бұл зерттеуде автор Нигерияның көптеген тайпалары мен этникалық топтарын зерттеді. Көптеген ғалымдардың пайымдауынша, Үндістан, Конго, Нигерия сияқты елдердің табиғаты этникалық жағынан кең, сондықтан жүздеген тайпалар мен этникалық топтары бар Нигерия үшін бұл химиялық элементтердің қоспасы болып табылады және зертханашы ғалым бұл араласудың нәтижесі қандай болатынына таң қалуы мүмкін. Бұл мақала Нигерияда кездесетін тайпаларды және ұлттық бірлік пен әртүрлілік мүмкіндігін теориялық тұрғыдан тұжырымдауға арналған тұжырымдамалық зерттеу ретінде қарастырылады, деректердің көпшілігі алдыңғы тиісті әдебиеттер арқылы жиналған және автордың негізгі және қазіргі жағдайды түсінетін нигериялық ретіндегі мемлекет пен әділет немесе оның кемшілігі бойынша бақылауларынан тұрады. Осы бірнеше тайпалардың бір-бірімен өзара қарым-қатынасы туралы панорамалық көзқараспен негізгі немесе кіші тайпалар ретінде жіктелгендердің барлығы нигериялықтар ретінде біріктірілуі мүмкін. Зерттеу бұрынғы кейбір әдебиеттерді қайталағанымен, деректер Нигерияның плюралистік қоғамын зерттеген ғалымдардың көпшілігі оның халқын біріктіру тәсілі ретінде басқаруға, әділдік жағдайына немесе еркіндікке біріктірілгенін көрсетеді. Дегенмен, бақылауларға сүйене отырып, автор Нигерияның үш негізгі тайпасы (Хауса, Йоруба және Игбо) және бүкіл елде тұратын шағын этникалық топтар ұлттық бірегейлікті этникалық тұрғыдан алға жылжытатын көбірек бірлік бастамалары мен бағдарламаларын енгізу арқылы этникалық, дін немесе аймақтық сәйкестіктен гөрі ұлттық бірлікке қол жеткізе алады деген қорытындыға келеді.

\* Corresponding author: Y. Bashir Aliyu, [Bashirayakasai@gmail.com](mailto:Bashirayakasai@gmail.com)

**Түйін сөздер:** Нигерия, тайпалар, этникалық топтар, қоғам, үкімет, бірлік.

**Аннотация.** Многие ученые и книги говорят о многоэтническом характере Нигерии как одной страны, не говоря уже о разнообразии статей различных ученых и газет, которые находят тему плюралистического общества Нигерии интересной. В этом исследовании автор изучил многочисленные племена и этнические группы Нигерии. Многие учёные полагают, что такие страны, как Индия, Конго, Нигерия, этнически обширны по своей природе, и поэтому для Нигерии, где проживают сотни племен и этнических групп, это скорее смесь химических элементов, и учёный-лаборант может задаться вопросом, каков будет результат смешения. Эта статья рассматривается как концептуальное исследование, позволяющее теоретически заложить племена, обитающие в Нигерии, и возможность национального единства и разнообразия, причем большая часть данных собрана с помощью предыдущей соответствующей литературы и наблюдений автора как нигерийца, понимающего основную и современную ситуацию с государством и справедливостью или ее порок. С панорамным видом на то, как эти многочисленные племена взаимно связаны друг с другом, все племена, отнесенные к категории крупных или второстепенных, могут быть объединены как нигерийцы. Хотя исследование повторяет некоторые предыдущие публикации, данные показывают, что большинство ученых, изучавших плюралистическое общество Нигерии, связывали его сплоченность с управлением, состоянием справедливости или свободы как способ объединения народа. Однако на основе наблюдений автор приходит к выводу, что три основных племена Нигерии (хауса, йоруба и игбо) и второстепенные этнические группы, проживающие по всей стране, могли бы достичь единства за счет внедрения большего количества инициатив и программ единства, которые могли бы пропагандировать национальную идентичность над этнической принадлежностью, религией или региональной идентичности.

**Ключевые слова:** Нигерия, племена, этнические группы, общество, правительство, единство.

## Introduction

As one autonomous country Nigeria is blessed ethnically, with over 300 diverse ethnic groups, of which are the acclaimed majority i.e., the Yoruba, Hausa and the Igbo. These ethnic groups likewise comprise of multiple tribes enumerating up to 371 [1]. Furthermore, the multi-tribal nature of the nation may put someone in confusion, especially when it's claimed that each of these tribes has its own unique culture, dialect, and way of life. Despite these facts, Nigeria has one official language which is English, for it being a former British colony. However, English is not spoken as a first language in the whole country since other indigenous languages have been around for over thousand years making them the major languages in terms of number of native speakers. Nigeria has over 500 languages spoken among its about 280 million people. This shows the influence of the existing ethnic groups, some of the popular languages spoken in Nigeria are the ones quoted as the majority; Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, as well as the minority; Kanuri, Ijaw, Ibibio, Edo, Fulfulde, and Tiv. Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa, or in fact, the most populous black nation in the world, as its population shrinks to over 250 million. Both the minor tribes and the major ethnic groups are reported to have resided in Nigeria for thousands of years. But officially in history we could mark the amalgamation of the northern and the southern parts of the country by the British Empire in 1914 as a record that made the

present plural society of Nigeria. The nature of Nigeria's multi-ethnic environment is a question asked by many social scientists, political scientists, and sociologists, For the fact how the minorities live with the majorities and the matter that has to do with fairness and avoidance of tribal conflicts. As a student of knowledge who chooses the topic and draws up questions and hypotheses, in such a study, the question in this paper is how the government rules a country like Nigeria, as politically such environments are usually sensitive and hot. The recent 2023 election may show us the basic impact of a plural society by looking at the result and the post-result voter behavior. Social and economic initiatives could be some features of analysis in a multi-ethnic society, things like Census, political representation, and economic representation of national welfare to citizens. We will have a look at Nigeria's tribal relations between the majority and the minority in the next chapter of this study, hence the objective of this study is to analyze and give an overview of the abundant tribes found in Nigeria, and analyze the literature studied to understand how a nation of over 300 different tribes can achieve unity and diversity with peaceful cohesion between those tribes. In view of the literature relevant to this study, mostly, the scholars of this topic considered Nigeria's national unity at stake. Nigeria is not just divided through ethnic or tribal lines, but rather religion and regional differences. Atubi (2021) highlighted that Nigeria has

become a pluralistic society due to the expansion of its language, culture, and ethnic composition, resulting in diverse differences in religious, cultural, political, economic, and social aspects [2]. In fact, the ideal way for such pluralistic nations is national unity, but in Nigeria, people still identify themselves primarily with their tribe or ethnic background before national identity or choose religion, state or region of origin. In many instances, scholars attribute Nigeria's unity with governance or rule of law, in the context of Nigeria, ethnic groups that have historically been excluded from the political sphere i.e (Igbo, Ijaw, Ibibio) are less likely to incorporate a national identity, and thereby are less satisfied with the democratic process [3]. Likewise, Marcel et al. 2016 deduced that one of the major factors militating against an ideal national identity and integration is the heterogeneity of the ethnic groups that made up Nigeria and the interethnic jostling for the control and distribution of national wealth [4]. In the other hand, the hypothesis to test in this study is that "Nigeria can achieve national unity through the introduction of more national unity programs, that will promote existentialism more than ethnic identity". Reflecting the aftermath of the 1969 civil war and the creation of unity programs like the National Youth Service Corps, unity schools among others show promising progress in the mission of their foundation, as to uphold unity among the several tribes in the nation.

### Literature of the study

A plural society is defined by Fredrik Barth as a society combining ethnic contrast: and the economic interdependence of those groups, and their ecological specialization i.e., the use of different environmental resources by each ethnic group [5]. The interdependence of both the majority and minority of tribes and ethnic groups in Nigeria could possibly show us how plural Nigerian society is as single nation. The idea that Nigeria has multiple tribes "termed" more beyond only the ethnic groups alone, digging down we may segregate the multi religious part and further look at the origin of regional sentiment. Mamdani contends that the colonial system established laws and

frameworks wherein cultural identity became the foundation of political identity in Nigeria, consequently transforming ethnicity into a political identifier [6]. Akinsola Akiwowo in his paper "The sociology of Nigerian Tribalism" elaborated that the same "tribe" group has often a common name, language, culture and an eponymous origin, its members live within a certain geographical territory, either in scattered homesteads or in village united by a field of marriage" [7]. Nigerian tribes have been indigenous, living in a particular region or area of the country for so long. Most of those tribes have their own way of life, culture, religion and the originating region they hail from. Now, we can notice the inter-tribal activities that may unite two tribes or ethnic groups, like marriage. Hausa and Fulani are the example of such concept. They live in the same region and share some traditional and cultural backgrounds, and so this gives them an opportunity to inter-marry and mix with one another, to the extent now that they are mostly called "The Hausa-Fulani". Some other regions who are more closely related known to inter marry are the Yoruba-Igbo, among other few minor tribes. Morris Hale pointed out that the evidence of Nigeria's ethnic diversity lies in the presence of two hundred and fifty distinct languages and dialects spoken within its borders, with the foremost being Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, along with numerous religious traditions [8]. Although, each of the Nigeria's tribe or ethnic group is autonomous, they as well have a religious background or different belief, while the contemporary political system of the state of origin may be other features that these tribes feel divided across. The ethnic and cultural tensions in Nigeria stem from the 1914 union of the Northern and Southern Protectorates orchestrated by Lord Frederick Lugard's colonial administration. This merger forcibly brought together culturally and historically disparate ethnic groups, some of which were erstwhile rivals and overlapped in imperialistic ambitions during the pre-colonial era [9]. The European colonial powers' merger of the Northern and Southern Protectorates lacked consultation with the diverse ethnic groups or their leaders, effectively consolidating them into a single entity. This autocratic and undemocratic British colonial policy became

the root cause of ethnic conflicts in the country. This action led Nigeria to the current state it is now and forced it to be a plural society that contains multiple ethnic groups and tribes that have no relation in history, background or similarity with one another. The idea of understanding how wide Nigeria is in terms of tribes and ethnicity, we could unarguably relate the aspects of social, economic, and political to it. As a federal state, Nigeria must be aligned with its assorted tribes and ethnic groups. For that reason “Consociationalism” is the best practice that may assist Nigeria to reach its destination in its democratic journey. Consociationalism as a form of democracy preaches power sharing, and for that, a true consociational state is one that has a great internal division along ethnic, religious, or linguistic stroke. Such states with consociational system are mostly designed to consolidate governmental stability, survival of the power sharing system and survival of democracy. If Nigeria carries such a system, it could pull along with its over 300 different tribes’ populations in harmony.

### **Method and material**

As a social study, this research is studied through a conceptual method to discuss the theory of Nigerian tribes, their background, and the relationship between them in contemporary Nigerian society. Previous literature and materials on the topic of Nigeria’s ethnicity and tribes were built as the main backbone of the paper data gathering, the author studied relevant literature and available secondary data to propose data of the study. As a Nigerian, the author imposed observation as a method in the study, noting the personal experience as a citizen from the northern region of Nigeria. The study of Nigeria, its people and culture are primarily ethnographic, of which the theme has been written in different perspectives by many previous scholars, and so studying the relevant literature and adding some practical observations from the author could fill the knowledge gap and justifies the chosen method. The study acknowledged the result from the relevant literature of different scholars who “classified” Nigeria as a plural society or Multi-ethnic nation. The

topic of plural society or multi-ethnic community has been studied by various scholars. Furnival highlighted a well-known fact that in certain countries the different sections of the population live side by side and mix, but do not combine. The phrase Plural society was quickly adopted without much discussion; it conveniently described a number of colonial and multi-racial situations that not many scholars were concerned with describing or analyzing [3]. Scholars from Nigeria and abroad have studied Nigeria as a pluralistic society, but most of them align the achievement of national unity with governance and the rule of law. Marcel et el. concluded that the rule of law, freedom, and fairness by the government could lead to the attainment of national unity [10]. This study suggests otherwise, as it portrays the introduction of unity programs and initiatives as the primary path to national unity in a pluralistic society like Nigeria.

### **Background of Nigeria’s Multi-Ethnic Society**

Nigeria is located in West Africa. It is a nation known for its rich cultural diversity. Likewise, a notable home to a large number of ethnic groups, with the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo being the three largest, constituting approximately 70 percent of the population. Ideally, there are several other noticeable groups, each with over a million members, like the Kanuri, Tiv, and Ibibio. The 20 percent of the population consists of over 300 smaller ethnic groups. Acknowledging the differences, these groups share commonalities that create a sense of unity among Nigerians [11]. Nigeria’s ethnic groups are usually divergent and defined primarily by language. As a single nation, it hosts more ethnic groups than any other African nation, ranking among the most “ethnically complex” states in the world. Most of these ethnic groups are small and localized, with only a few playing a central or major role in Nigerian society. Although it is literal that there were people living in today’s Nigeria as far back as 13,000 BC, we can as well trace the origin of each tribe or ethnic group to its individual history hence the case may differ. The rise in colonization during the 17th and 18th centuries may have brought



modern Nigeria as one state, unnoticing the difference in ethnic features i.e. tradition, culture, origin, or religion. Each of the tribes found in Nigeria has its separate history and place or its origin, meaning “it’s an original place or location it dwells”. The raiding of the whole territory of Nigeria by the British army during the early 18th century, terminated the claim of each of the

individual ethnic groups, to acclaim a new national name of “Nigerian”, forgetting one’s original tribal background. Some of these tribes have a huge number of members, while some are a few, with some even reported to be instinctive in the near future. For this fact, several authors of Nigerian ethnic studies categorized the tribes as “Major and Minor” [12].



Source: Extracted from [www.historians.org](http://www.historians.org)

Figure 1 – Location of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria

### Major Nigerian Tribes

The implication of colonial rule in Nigeria brought the various ethnic groups increasingly into contact with one another. This integrative process was implemented by the construction of connective infrastructure. Such development set in motion a socio-political process that led to greater relationships and competition among the various ethnic groups for dominance and economic advantage. The Nigerian government has worked out several tentative power-sharing arrangements to help ensure that its multi-ethnic groups are generally carried along and that each has some say in the society. The major tribes in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. These aforementioned tribes together comprise 70 percent of the

total national population, while the other 30 percent are considered to be the minority [1].

#### *Hausa*

This ethnic group dominates the northern part of Nigeria and is often considered unified with the Fulani tribe through intermarriage of acculturation, which gives them the common name of Hausa-Fulani as a single ethnic entity. The Hausas are themselves a fusion, believed to be a collection of Sudanese people that were assimilated, decades back, into the population inhabiting what is now known as Hausaland. This ethnic group mostly believes in the religion of Islam. The origin of Hausa is a matter of dispute, but most ethnologists hold them to originally be from the Southern Sahara or the Chad Basin.

Their arrival in Hausaland gave them an opportunity to set up seven small states centered around termed as "Birni," or walled cities. In these cities the Hausa developed techniques of efficient administration, consisting of a carefully organized fiscal system and a highly arranged judiciary, that earned them a reputation of integrity and ability in administering Islamic law [13].

While their counterparty, the Fulanis are also Muslims, consecutively, like the Hausas, their origin is perhaps an open question. Once nomadic people, or Tuaregs, inhabited the southern edge of the Sahara in central Africa. Most scholars claim that the Fulanis are related to the Phoenicians, or place related origin in shepherds of Mauritania that were looking for new pastures. Irrespective of their origin, the Fulanis are known to have arrived in the Hausa society in the early 13th century. Simultaneously, they intermarried with the Hausas, and have mostly adopted the latter's customs, traditions, and language, although some Fulanis preserve their ancestral background of culture, customs, and language by retaining a nomadic life and traditional beliefs [14].

#### *Yoruba*

The Yorubas are a mixture of both Christians/Muslims, living in southwestern Nigeria united by their common belief that Ife is their place of origin, and the Oni of Ife is their spiritual leader. Their ancient mythology holds that Oduduwa created the earth and that the royal houses of the Yoruba kingdoms could trace their ancestry back to the same Oduduwa. Yoruba society is organized into different kingdoms, the greatest of which was called the Oyo. The Oyo Empire collapsed in the 1830s, when Afonja, broke away from the other Yoruba culture and lost his empire to the Fulanis. This incident occurred in close temporal proximity to the Fulani Jihad, although it was not associated with it. Through the rise of religion, both Islam and Christianity spread to Yorubaland over the past few centuries, the group embraced both faiths alongside its wide traditional and animist beliefs. This blend and acceptance of religion survive in modern society and has avoided some religious conflict in places where Yoruba form the majority [14].

#### *Igbo*

The Igbo, considered to be the main ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria, their origins are completely unknown, as they claim to be from about nineteen assorted places. They do maintain an "indigenous home," thus the belt of forest in the country to the east of the Niger Valley. This home was established to avoid the inflow of Fulani's annual slave raids, which were conducted on cavalry that were unable to explore very deeply in the forest. The Ibo thus generally inhabited inaccessible areas, although during the 19th century, they began to assert ancestral claims to Nri town, "the heart of the Ibo nationality" [15]. The Ibo tribe formed a society that was fascinating in its decentralization, citing their largest societal unit as the village, where every extended family managed its individual affairs without being dictated to by any higher authority. As the chiefs existed, they also held very restricted political power and only local jurisdiction. The villages were democratic in nature, as the government of the local community was the concern of all who lived in it. The discovery of large oil reserves near Igboland in the early 1960s plus the restructuring of regions caused many in the group to fear the effect of being cut out of revenues from the country's natural resources. In 1967, an Igbo secessionist movement in Biafra state led to a 30-month war with the Nigerian government, in which hundreds of thousands of Igbos starved to death. In the post-war years, Igbos were reintegrated into Nigerian society, but in a more marginalized role [16].

### **Minor Nigerian Tribes**

The remaining 30 percent of Nigeria's population are categorized to be the minority, hence the major tribes out shadowed them in number. These minority ethnic groups consist of Kanuri, the Nupe, Ijaw, Tiv, Efik/Ibibio, Urhobo along with other hundreds of tribes.

#### *Ijaw*

The Ijaw people are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, they live mostly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, with significant number of populations in Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers (states in Nigeria). Many Ijaw are found as migrant fishermen inside assorted camps as far as

west of Sierra Leone and as far east as of Gabon. They account for about 1.8% of the Nigerian population according to CIA Factbook [14]. Historically, they are believed to have long lived in locations near many sea trade routes, and they were well connected to other areas through trade as early as the late 14th and early 15th centuries.

#### *Kanuri*

The Kanuri people are found mostly in northeastern Nigeria. Likewise, their population is believed to be approximately 4% of Nigeria or around 4,000,000. Kanuri people are predominately Muslims. Kanuri people include several subgroups and could easily be identified by different names in some regions. The Kanuri language was the major language of the Bornu Empire and still remains a major language in southeastern Niger, and in northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon, while in Chad it is limited to a handful of speakers in urban centers. The Kanuri, originally pastoral people, they were one of many Nilo-Saharan groups indigenous to the Central South Sahara, beginning propagating around Lake Chad in the late seventh (7th ) century and absorbing indigenous Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo, and Chadic (Afro-Asiatic) speakers. Based on the Kanuri tradition, Sef, son of Dhu Ifazan of Yemen, arrived in Kanem in the ninth century and united the population which led to the formation of the Sayfawa dynasty. This tradition, however, is likely a product of later Islamic influence, reflecting the association with their Arabian origins under the Islamic era. Evidence of indigenous state formation in the Lake Chad area dates back to circa 800 BCE at Zilum [17].

#### *Tiv*

The ethnic group known as Tiv is popular for its agricultural produce and the trading of its agricultural produce. This is one of the only sources of income for the tribe. The Tiv tribe all trace their ancestry back to an ancient individual named Tiv, who had two sons. Some Tiv people identify as Christians, proven even less as Muslim. The traditional religion of Tiv, based on manipulations of forces by humans who have been entrusted by a creator God, remains strong within the Tiv people. This tribe only makes up 3.5% of the Nigerian

population, as so, they fall under the minority ethnic groups within the country [14].

#### *Ibibio*

This ethnic group is mostly found in southeastern Nigeria, they possess an excellent verbal history which passed down from one generation to another. These people have lived in this part of Nigeria for several hundred years. The Ibibios are approximately 4.5 million in population which is equivalent to 3.5% of the population of Nigeria. Ibibio people in the region also requested (from the British Crown) to become their own sovereign state within Nigeria (pre-independence). As of Today, Ibibio predominantly identifies themselves as Christian. Ibibio has an outstanding artistic culture, and they are acclaimed to be makers of intricate wooden masks and carvings [14].

Although the smaller ethnic groups of Nigeria that are termed as the minority are hundreds in number, this study didn't present all, but some are among the top and most popular. Among those minor ethnic groups, some have predominantly been living in modern-day Nigeria, while others immigrated since the early age. Nigeria is blessed with huge ethnic groups that each has its individual ancestral history, culture, and tradition, but the consequence of colonization brought all of them together into answering a single name of "Nigerian".

### **Discussion**

#### *Nature of Nigeria's multiethnic society*

Despite the difference in ethnic background, culture, tradition and language of all the hundreds of ethnic groups found in Nigeria, the people still live in harmony. Although there are disagreements and conflict between one tribe and another or misunderstandings now and then. English is the official language of Nigeria in view of the country's colonial history by the British. With three major ethnic groups and languages in the country, choosing a local language as an official language would be an unending dispute. Not only the difference in language, but many scholars of social science also argue that the several lines of difference that Nigeria aligns are what make it hard for the country to achieve National unity and "Nationalism". Hence, a person may choose

to identify him/herself with his ethnic background, regional background, or even religion affiliation before answering the name “Nigerian”. One of the major factors militating against an ideal national identity and integration is the heterogeneity of the ethnic groups that made up Nigeria and the interethnic jostling for the control and distribution of national wealth. On ethnicity, many scholars write that Nigeria is such a multiethnic, linguistic, and religious community, where traditional social structure as well as the imposed western and oriental ones provides such a mosaic effect that to call it a pluralistic society sounds like an understatement [4].

#### *1914 Amalgamation of northern/southern British protectorate*

The colonial rule of the British in the Nigerian soil started not just as a single Nigeria or the Nigeria we know that has four geo-political zones and 36 states, but rather as four different regions of north, south, east, and west. Simultaneously, it became what was known as “Northern and Southern Protectorates”. In 1914, Southern Nigeria was joined with the Northern Nigeria Protectorate to form the single colony known as Nigeria. The unification was done for economic reasons and the colonial administration sought to use the budget surpluses in Southern Nigeria to offset this deficit [18]. M.I Onyobor stated in his work that the British colonial political strategy of “divide and rule” which was aimed at introducing the legacy of transforming the existing flexible and fluid identity relation between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria to one based on rigidity was a clear indication of their double barrel intention. He also added that until 1914 the colonial masters ruled Nigeria not as Nigeria, but as disparate nations at least four: the colony of Lagos and three protectorates; the West, the East, and the North [4]. This was so distinct to the extent that the national frontier was demarcated between these. Even an agreement was signed and rigorously implemented that hindered any southern penetration to Christianize the North. This shows that the country is not just homogenous looking at just ethnic differences but also religiously and regionally.

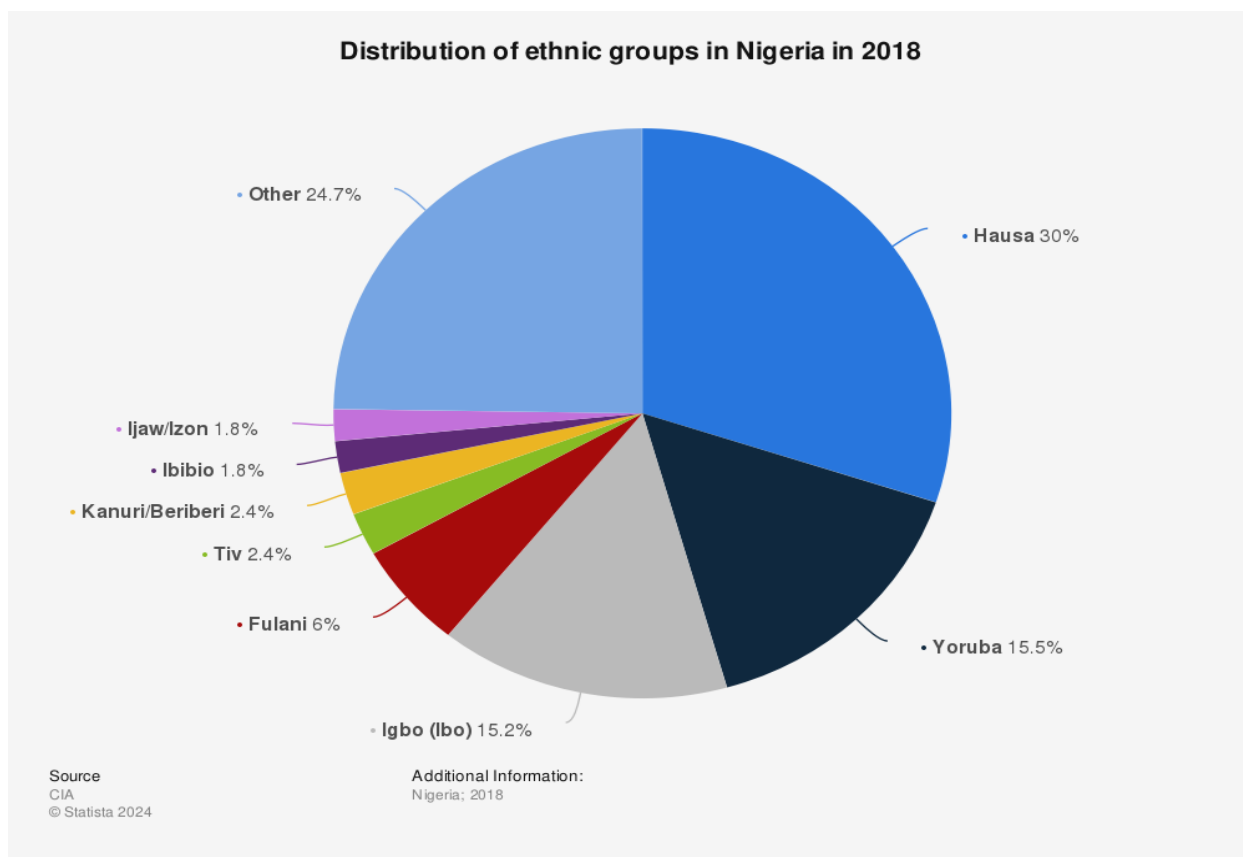
#### *1967 Civil War and The Biafra*

The 1967 Nigerian civil war was the first event that critically made Nigeria realize that it's ethnically plural and showed how important ethnic tolerance and diversity are to the nation. The Civil War took place between 1967 and 1970, pitting Nigeria's federal government against the secessionist state of Biafra. Factors such as ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and educational gaps played a significant role in igniting this conflict, resulting in an estimated death toll ranging from 500,000 to 3,000,000 individuals [19]. The origin of this civil conflict can be traced back to the colonial consolidation of the Northern Protectorate, Lagos Colony, and Southern Nigeria Protectorate in 1914. This amalgamation aimed to streamline administration, given the close proximity of these regions. However, it overlooked the cultural and religious disparities among the populace. Consequently, the quest for political and economic dominance intensified underlying tensions. The war portrayed challenges within pan-Africanism during the early stages of African independence from colonial rule, proving that the diverse nature of African people may present obstacles to achieving common unity [16]. Undeniably, each region in Nigeria has a long particular history of origin and its formation, not forgetting that each of the regions has its particular religion, culture, and way of life. The colonial masters might have been aware of this issue and expected something related to ethnic violence to rise after independence since there wasn't any reliable form of ruling or unity advocates that could support diversity. The post-independence era of Nigeria was set as institutionalization and consolidation of the country, but most of the manifestations laid are supporting the ethnic differences and not eliminating it. The President's endeavor to convene a conference aimed at resolving Nigeria's constitutional future was halted following a succession of ethnic massacres in October 1966. The federal military government issued a decree that divided the four regions into 12 states, with 6 in the north and 3 in the east, aiming to diminish the influence of the regions. On May 30, 1967, an army officer Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu announced the secession of the three states comprising the Eastern region, forming the



Republic of Biafra. This move was seen by Nigeria's federal government as an act of rebellion, sparking fighting that erupted in early July. Within a matter of weeks, the situation escalated into a full-blown civil war. The beginning of the final collapse of Biafra commenced on December 24, 1969, with the initiation of a significant offensive by federal troops. Biafra faced severe shortages of ammunition, its populace was in dire need of food, and its territorial control had dwindled to one-sixth of its original extent from 1967. On January 11, 1970, Ojukwu fled to Côte d'Ivoire, followed by a formal surrender of a Biafran delegation in Lagos four days later, marking the conclusion of the Republic of Biafra. The then head of state Gen. Yakubu Gowon bring together the opposing factions, resulting in the successful reintegration of the former Biafran states into Nigeria. The aftermath of the war is a dire sign for

Nigeria to understand how sensitive its nature of plurality is, which led to the creation of many national unity programs like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the formation of Unity Schools in every state, and the federal character commission among others. Several studies indicate that in areas characterized by a unique cultural or political background, ethno-regional and national identities are often viewed as mutually exclusive [12]. To foster national unity in Nigeria and support the development of sustainable democracy, Umaru et al. recommended Instilling the concept of unity in diversity into the minds of Nigerians, especially the youth and children, by integrating it into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools nationwide through practical means such as drama [20]. Such initiatives are the main objectives of NYSC and unity schools, and Nigeria needs more of such initiatives.



Source: Extracted from Statista.

**Figure 2 – A pie chart, showing Nigerian ethnic groups in percentage**

#### *1999 and the return of democracy*

The year 1999 recorded Nigeria's full successful return to democracy in the fourth republic in a historic election. Nigeria's

democratic history has been marked by a complex and often turbulent interaction with its military. Almost half of its time as an independent nation has been spent under

military governance rather than civilian leadership. Since gaining independence in 1960, three republics have been toppled by military coups. Interestingly, two out of the four democratically elected presidents during Nigeria's fourth republic previously held positions as military dictators. The winner of the 1999 Nigeria presidential election Gen. Olesegun Obasanjo also once ruled as a military head of state [21]. The coming back of democracy in the country was not just a celebration event, but an event full of uncertainties for a country full of ethnic divide issues. While democracy has yet to significantly improve living standards for the majority of Nigerians, it remains the sole governmental structure capable of fostering hope by accommodating Nigeria's diverse array of religions, ethnicities, and political traditions within its sizable population [22]. The advent of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 provided an avenue for the expression of long-suppressed ethnic grievances that had accumulated during years of authoritarian military rule. Consequently, various ethno-nationalist movements emerged, resulting in insurgencies such as those seen in the Niger Delta under the banner of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), the resurgence of calls for Biafra championed by the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), ongoing ethnic conflicts in the middle belt, recurrent religious unrest and Sharia-driven riots in the North, and the escalating activities of the Odudua People's Congress (OPC) in the west. These organizations operate largely outside the legal framework, and the state's response often exacerbates tensions. This situation is exacerbated by the weak institutional framework inherited from the military era, which hampers comprehensive efforts to address these challenges within the context of Nigeria's federal structure [23]. Realizing that the gap is there and filling the gap is the main action needed by Nigeria, as the nation is plural ethnically, and then supporting unity through programs and institutions that showcase nationalism is the answer to the multiethnic nature of Nigeria.

### Recommendation

The best catch for countries with such a huge gap in ethnic unity, scholars of

sociology outlined some remedies to imply in other to foster unity between the assorted tribes or ethnic groups living in a particular society. One of those ideas is the creation of national unity programs or initiatives. Although Nigeria has a few of such programs, (which are mostly introduced by the administration of general Yakubu Gowon in the early 1970s, after the country's civil war). Programs like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and Unity schools across the country in every state. The NYSC scheme was created in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile, and rebuild the country after the Nigerian Civil War. The unfortunate antecedents in our national history gave impetus to the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps by decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973 which stated that the NYSC was being established "with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity" [24]. Thus, those programs help in accomplishing the objectives of their foundation, but Nigeria still needs more of such initiatives. B.G Nseroka noted that multiculturalism and cross-cultural communication could be antioxidants to Nigeria's multiethnicity. He mentioned that "understanding the folklore of Nigeria cross-culturally, can help promote national integration. The culture of people is usually reflected in its folklore. Folklore is the traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioural patterns" [25]. Moreover M. I Onyibor stated existentialism could create and bring unity spirit among Nigerian tribes. He wrote: "...existentialism as a philosophy for achieving national identity and integration is based on the assumption that it has an inbuilt ontological and moral dimension that holds the key to the resolution of national identity and crisis of integration in a multiethnic society" [4]. For filling the gap Nigeria needs to create more programs that advocates for National unity to unite the ethnic groups.

### Conclusion

In a review form, let's finalize the subject matter studied in this article. No objection one would easily concur with the fact that Nigeria is a multiethnic state,

looking at how diverse it is with a high number of different ethnic groups which individually trace their separate origin and differ from one another in language, culture, and religion. Over 70% of the Nation's population is categorized as the ethnic majority (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo), and 30% are identified as the ethnic minority, which includes hundreds of smaller tribes and ethnic groups. Further, we see how modern politics drag more lines in making the country more ethnically diverse, as one may be identified as northerner, southerner, easterner, or westerner in addition to the state of origin. As a pluralistic society, Nigeria rolls a dice of ethnic politics with the citizens only tracing the dots of ethnic background before answering the name of Nigerians. Scholars relate the achievement of unity in Nigeria mostly with governance, democracy, freedom and fairness. This study proposed that Nigerian ethnic groups

and tribes could attain unity and address division by putting nationalism first before ethnicity through laying more national unity programs including initiatives that will support multiculturalism and cross-cultural communication. As this paper is studied by gathering secondary data with relevant literature and the author's observation, future studies should focus on conducting quantitative analysis to understand Nigeria's unity programs and unity institutions like the Federal Character Commission to study how people feel and perform, through surveys and questionnaires with alternate hypothesis. The null hypothesis in this study is that National unity could be attained in Nigeria by establishing unity programs as well as infiltrating existentialism spirit into the population to let Nigerians drop their ethnic background and pick up National identity.

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#### **ПЛЮРАЛИСТИК ҚОҒАМНЫҢ ТҰЖЫРЫМДАМАСЫ: НИГЕРИЯ ТАЙПАЛАРЫНА ШОЛУ**

**Якасай БАШИР АЛИЮ**, әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университетінің философия және саясаттану факультеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, [Bashirayakasai@gmail.com](mailto:Bashirayakasai@gmail.com), ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6088-3963>.

#### **КОНЦЕПЦИЯ ПЛЮРАЛИСТИЧЕСКОГО ОБЩЕСТВА: ОБЗОР НИГЕРИЙСКИХ ПЛЕМЕН**

**Якасай БАШИР АЛИЮ**, факультет философии и политологии КазНУ им. Аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан, [Bashirayakasai@gmail.com](mailto:Bashirayakasai@gmail.com), ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6088-3963>.