PROBLEMS OF FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA. A RAWLSIAN REMEDY

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Abstract

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, it has struggled to heal the severe divisions among its diverse populations. Nigeria embraced federalism to run her multiethnic state because it is one of the best structures for regulating a pluralistic community. However, instead of harmony, cooperation, and agreement, there appears to be discord, disagreement, and division. Other political strategies were adopted in the pursuit of national integration, including the quota system and federal character. The method used in this paper is critical analysis, which is used to analyze the problems of federalism in Nigeria. The Federal Character Principle, which aims to promote representation and participation to foster unity, loyalty, and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging irrespective of the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language, or religion, has not been able to achieve this objective, according to the findings Nigerian federalism is far from ideal. The conclusion of the study is that the nation's potential for greatness has been impeded by the application of the idea. It has exacerbated ethnic unrest and permitted mediocrity. The paper suggests that Nigerian federalism and the entire political system need to be redefined in order to ensure that true federalism and ideal democracy can be achieved through John Rawls' overlapping consensus, which entails an agreement backed by all opposing comprehensive doctrines and would ensure and produce the conditions necessary to produce a just and stable polity, effectively resolving the crises of ethnic relations, social injustice, and the problem of political instability and federalism.
Keywords: John Rawls, Federalism, Federal Character, Overlapping Consensus, Ethnic Relations

Introduction

Nigeria's federation-of-three-regions structure dates back to 1946, when the British colony underwent organizational reform. The Richards Constitution was the one who introduced this. Although Arthur Richard introduced the idea of introducing a federal structure into the Nigerian government in 1946, he was unable to do so despite Governor Bourdillion's earlier suggestion that the provinces be replaced

with regions. In order to ensure the improvement of the Richard constitution, Governor McPherson drafted a new constitution in 1951 and established a House of Representatives with the authority to enact national laws. In order to pass laws for the regions, he also established regional houses of assembly. Federalism has evolved in Nigeria as a result of these activities. Unfortunately, Nigeria's federalism is not being implemented in its entirety, which has an impact on the country's overall development. There are many different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Because of this, it has sparked the cry of minorities demanding their own state. Such a deed has contributed to one of federalism's main issues, which has hampered the country's progress. Inter-ethnic conflict has consistently hampered Nigeria's progress because of its multi-ethnic makeup. This led to an issue of secession by some ethnic groups, which disrupted Nigeria's federalism and had an impact on the growth and development of the nation.

Structure of Nigerian Federalism and Its Problems an Overview

The colonization of what would eventually become Nigeria by the colonialists involved coercion and the repression of human rights. During the colonial era, federalism was established in Nigeria. The Richard Constitution of 1946 was the first document to implement it. The Nigerian constitution established three areas: the Eastern, Western, and Northern regions, each of which had its own House of Chiefs and House of Assembly (with the exception of the Eastern Region). The House of Representatives occupied the center. The Nigerian federal system was established with the promulgation of this constitution in 1947. But because 1954 marked Nigeria's federation, that year saw the official adoption and implementation of real federalism under the leadership of Governor-General Olive Lyttleton.

Amuwo asserts that "Lugard's decision to unite Nigeria on January 1, 1914. This was not the product of the ethnic groups' coercion (permission). It was based on administrative convenience concerns as perceived by a colonial power (Amuwo, 2003:35). This shows that the interests and aspirations of the many ethnic groups were not taken into account during the creation, development, and unification of Nigeria's political and administrative structures. This misrepresentation of the many ethnic consents on what kind of system Nigeria will run- whether a federation, a confederation, or a unitary one- can be seen in the early pre-independence constitutional history.

After the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were combined in 1914, Okadigbo (1987:14) writes that "the country was more or less governed as a unitary colony with twenty-four provinces (12 in the North and 12 in the South) until the establishment of the federal order via the Richards Constitution of 1946. After it, regionalism and ethnic politics, sometimes known as tribalism, were unmistakable characteristics of Nigerian federalism. Okadigbo (1987:14) adds that "General Gowon created twelve states out of the pre-existing four regions (6 in the North and 6 in the South), and General Murtala Mohammed created seven more (4 in the North and 3 in the South) in 1976 to restrict regionalism as well as secession.

In 1976, there were nineteen states in Nigeria, making it a federal republic. Since 1976, regionalism has been replaced by statism, which has led to a larger sense of allegiance to one's own state than to the Nigerian nation as a whole. Therefore, statism at the state level took on the characteristics of sub-regionalism, sub-ethnic irredentism, or mini-redentism. The following is what Okadigbo (1987:14) adds: the notorious Decree N0.34 of May 30, 1966, which allegedly eliminated the regions and united the public services, was an effort to create a unitary state structure after the significant coup of January 1966, which ironically brought General Aguiyi Ironsi to power.

The final straw that caused the federal government to collapse was this deadly edict. Responses ranged from the horrifying massacre of Igbo and other southern Nigerians (as retaliation), mass exodus of people to their homes in southern Nigeria, the declaration of independence by eastern Nigeria under the name of the Republic of Biafra, to the return of federalism with a stronger central government. From that point on, it appeared that Nigerians in general agreed that the country should continue to be a federal republic. What kind of federal republic, has been the question?
General Ibrahim Babangida increased the country's state count to thirty in 1987 by founding nine more states. The country then had 36 states, 774 local government areas, and Abuja as the Federal Capital after General Sani Abacha's creation of six new states and 183 new local government areas in 1996. All of these had as their main objective the restructuring and strengthening of Nigerian federalism (Oyediran, 2008:175).

However, the Clifford and Richards constitutions, the first colonial constitutions in Nigeria from 1922 to 1951, did not freely or involuntarily agree to provide a

sizable amount of space for a federal state. They refused to let Nigeria's various ethnic groups participate fully in the process of drafting the constitution. Up until a concerted effort and pushback by Nigerian nationalists, regardless of regional and ethnic connections, from within and outside the country for a new constitution, their participation was constitutionally restricted in scope.

The Colonial Institutions in Nigeria

In order to acquire raw materials and market their finished commodities, all of the European countries met in Berlin in December 1884 to discuss how to divide the African continent among them. Four British West African territories existed in 1900. Ghana, The Gambia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone We will now talk about Nigeria and the government structure Lord Lugard chose. The British did not have definite notions about how colonies may be governed after the initial phase. However, they embraced a decentralized structure of governance.

Indirect Rule System

The British colonial authority utilized a form of administration known as "indirect rule" to rule the populace through the employment of local leaders and traditional political institutions. Lord Fredrick Lugard established the indirect rule system to Nigeria. Traditional leaders simply acted as go-betweens between the populace and the British government as the British officials in Nigeria developed and implemented policies and regulations through them

Indirect Rule System: Northern Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani)

The form of their pre-colonial governmental administration, which was highly centralized, and the existence of a taxing system before to the arrival of the British, contributed to the success of indirect rule in Northern Nigeria. Under a British authority identified only as "Resident," the northern protectorate of Nigeria was divided into six provinces. Districts, which were likewise led by a representative known as the district commissioner, were afterwards created from the provinces. The locals established courts and served as judges. However, it is important to highlight that the cultural courts of the Hausa and Fulani people were preserved. Generally speaking, only British government officials were allowed to pass laws. Since it was in place before the colonial master arrived, the indirect rule system was very successful (Abdullahi, 2007).

Indirect Rule in Western Nigeria (Yoruba Land)

In the south, especially Yorubaland, the indirect rule system was introduced to some degree of success. The truth is that before they arrived, Lord Lugard was unaware of the incompatibility between the northern and western administrations in Nigeria. Most importantly, the north had a more or less theoretical or autocratic regime, whilst the west had a monarchical one. Due to a mechanism that limits his power, the Oba does not have absolute control over his subjects. However, indirect governance has a tendency to expand the Oba's power to the complete exclusion of the senior chiefs. Aside from that, the Yoruba traditional system could not coexist with the advent of regularized taxation (Abdullahi, 2007).

Indirect Rule in Eastern Nigeria (Ibo-Land)
The indirect rule was not fair in Iboland, contrary to what was documented for Yorubaland. Everything about it failed. The lack of a centralized governmental power is the reason behind this. The indirect rule system was significantly hampered by this lack. Warrant chiefs and district heads were chosen because it was the British government's goal to implement indirect rule successfully in Ibo land. This had the serious disadvantage of resulting in the appointment of warrant chiefs and district heads without any historical ties to the regions they were to govern. The Aba riot of 1929 was the end outcome, which led to unrest in several areas (Abdullahi, 2007).

The Nigerian Civil War
Ethnic conflicts between Nigeria's two main ethnic groupings were the cause of the civil war there. Nigeria was an artificial framework created by the British that ignored ethnic diversity, like many other African nations. At the time of its 1960 declaration of independence from Britain, Nigeria had a population of roughly 60 million people who belonged to about 250 distinct ethnic groups. The attempted independence of Nigeria's eastern area, led by Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, resulted in the political struggle that became known as the Nigerian civil war, which began in 1967.

Akpan (1972: 8) states that:

> Nearly 3,000,000 civilians and military personnel perished from famine. Three zones were established along ethnic lines when the country gained independence in 1960. These are the Hausa-Fulani-dominated northern region, Igbo-dominated eastern region, and Yoruba-dominated western

region. After Nigeria became a republic in 1963, the western area was combined with the fourth region to form the Midwestern region.

Following a military takeover in January 1966 under the leadership of Major Kaduna Chukwuma Nzeogwu, ethnic tensions grew. The Northerners perceived the coup as an attempt by the Igbo to rule the nation. A few months later, the Northerners organized a countercoup as a result of this. When the then-head of state, Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo major general, was slain during the countercoup, severe retaliation was launched on the Igbo in the country's north. The Igbo-dominated eastern area, which feared marginalization inside the state, proclaimed its independence as the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967.

The Nigerian government called Ojukwu's action a rebellion and vowed to put an end to it while launching a "police action" to reclaim the breakaway territory. According to Osaghae (2002:14), "fighting between federal and Biafran forces broke out on July 6, 1967, with Gowon ordering "police action" in a war he and other senior federal military officers believed would not last long." In terms of lives lost, financial loss, and damage to Nigeria's reputation abroad, the war was very costly. An estimated three million people perished as a result of the war, the most through disease and famine.

The declaration of Biafra's surrender by Lt. Col. Philip Effiong, Ojukwu's second in command, on January 12th, 1970, marked the end of the war. Following the conflict, "the federal government launched an aggressive program of reintegration and rehabilitation centered on reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation." Quick reconstruction was possible thanks to oil revenue. The politics of Nigeria did, however, continue to be marked by persistent ethnic tensions. In Nigeria, the military administration remained in charge for a long time.

The Causes of the Civil War
The military takeover, which was led by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu and other Igbo junior army officers, chiefly majors and captains, on January 15, 1966, was ostensibly motivated by allegations of electoral fraud and poor administration by the civilian government. General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo and the commander of the Nigerian army, was the first military head of state in Nigeria after the coup.

Ironsi mobilized the troops to thwart the coup attempt. After establishing military power, Ironsi claimed that democratic institutions had failed and that, despite his defense of them, they clearly needed renovation and improvement before returning to democratic rule. Ironsi, an Igbo himself, was believed to have promoted many Igbos in the army at the expense of the Yoruba and Hausa commanders. The coup, despite its failure, was regarded to have benefited the Igbo most.

The Northerners staged a counter-coup on July 29, 1966. Lt. Col. Murtala Mohammed oversaw this. Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the ruler as a result (Momoh, 2000). Due to rising racial tensions brought on by the coup and countercoup, Igbos living in the North were massacred in September 1966. According to Osaghae (2002), Ojukwu's secessionist plans, which led to the civil war, were largely motivated by the genocide committed against the Igbo in the Northern region and the retaliatory killings of Eastern officers during the July Countercoup, including the Head of State General Aguiyi Ironsi.

The end of September saw Ojukwu come to the conclusion that the safety of Easterners living outside the region could no longer be guaranteed and he urged them to return home. Ojukwu had argued that the Northerners' actions against the Igbo had seriously raised doubts about whether Nigerians could ever sincerely live together as members of the same country. The Nigerian civil war was brought on by these and other factors.

Government Policies and Measures taken to End Ethnic Crises in Nigeria
Before and after independence, Nigeria's successive administrations have implemented a variety of policies and initiatives to address ethnic tensions, most of which have been ineffective. As a result, the issue still exists in the nation, especially during times of political and regime change.

The 'Sabongari' policy was implemented in northern Nigeria by the colonialists because they were concerned about the inherent potential of ethnically diverse societies to spark crises. This policy required migrants from the south and other parts of the north to live separately from the local population. This was carried out under the false assumption that the 'Sabongari' program would reduce ethnic

crises. Another colonial program, the native authority system, sought to establish an ethnic citizenship distinct from the civic citizenship of urban areas.

The plan of action gave each ethnic group the ability to preserve its unique heritage while yet serving imperial goals. Unfortunately, the only thing these policies accomplished was to exacerbate ethnic tensions, giving ethnicity in Nigeria a new symbolic significance (Otite, 2001).

The frequency of ethnic conflicts and crises in Nigeria, which is on the rise, casts doubt on their effectiveness. Politicians in Nigeria have been gravely concerned with the need for a reasonable policy to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the many ethnic nations both before and after independence. The 'federal character' theory, which was established in the constitution of 1979, is the result of the quest. Because Nigeria is made up of so many different ethnic nations, the distribution of appointees to top offices must do the same (Okpako, 1998). The actions taken thus far include:

> 1. The creation of administrative commissions to investigate the conflicts. 2. The establishment of autonomous ethnic regions (states and local governments) for ethnic regions in which such formation will lessen others' (perceived opponents') ethnic advantage and/or boost the ethnic objectives of the autonomous ethnic region's creators. 3. The establishment of the "federal character principle" in accordance with the nation's core goals and guiding precepts of state policy 4. Sending military expeditions to the ethnic zones where there are conflicts to provide military solutions. 5. Assigning specific ethnic nations or geographic regions of the nation with certain major political positions.

Almost all of the governments in the nation have started using administrative panels of inquiry to look into and attempt to settle ethnic conflicts, although the majority of these actions have not been successful.

Federal Character Principle and its Challenges
Official state policy initiatives to lessen or address prevailing grievances have frequently been prompted by the need to address perceived injustices and imbalances in society. Federal character action seeks to increase chances for

particular groups within a society by providing them with access that is equivalent to that of the predominate majority.

Under the rule of Murtala/Obasanjo (1975–1979), the idea of federal character initially gained widespread acceptance. It was raised as a constitutional issue in the constituent assembly and constitution-drafting committee, the entities that created the 1979 Constitution. It eventually made it into the constitution as a guiding principle of governmental action (Osaghae, 1988:4-5). The purpose of the federal structure is to ensure social harmony among all Nigerians and to advance national integration and stability.

In Nigeria, ethnicity has played a significant role in the quest for power and access. The issue of tense coexistence between the various ethnic groups and in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which causes mistrust and ethnic crises, has persisted and become endemic in the body politics of the country and has undermined its political stability since independence (Agbodike, 2004:2). The federal character principle has had some trouble being implemented in Nigeria. Political leaders have put too much focus on inter-state interactions while ignoring ethnic conflicts inside the states as a result of the federal character principle.

The federal character principle's application in Nigeria tends to increase the political power of the dominant ethnic groups, widening the gap between powerful and weaker ethnic groups and putting politically weaker ethnic groups in what Ayoade (1998) refers to as "double jeopardy"

In Nigeria, the federal character principle's application has increased the amount of authority granted to politically powerful organizations, widening the gap between the powerful and the weak. Double jeopardy is applied to those who are politically weak, which is obviously incompatible with national integration (Bello, 2012:5). Therefore, no unity can come from such an exercise as long as the federal character principle is applied in a way that favors one ethnic group over another and discriminates against the other.

The overarching interests of the ruling class have been served via the manipulation and channeling of the federal character concept. The idea and application of the principle were developed by the students in this lesson. Even the discussion of the idea, as reported in the Nigerian news, has primarily been an issue for the affluent.

The bourgeoisie secures its position in power and exerts control over the state apparatus under the cover of the federal character concept. They also try to make up for their class distinctions by operating reasonable formulas for the distribution, allocation, and sharing of resources and benefits among themselves, all in accordance with the application of this concept.

In order to get the support of the general public in their territories, they take advantage of and fan the ethnic divides among the various Nigerian peoples. And as part of this exclusive game, members of this class rise to positions of power, collect fortune, and unlawfully enrich themselves. As a result, the federal character idea is only a political gimmick that won't significantly better the situation of the underprivileged for whom it is advocated (Gboyega, 1989). The federal character provisions ensure that significant ethnic groups are represented in key political positions, in appointments to the public service, and in the distribution of federal funds and projects to state and local governments. To promote loyalty, national cohesion, and state unity in Nigeria, the federal character principle was established. But sadly, rather than promoting national unity, it has increased resentment and suspicion among Nigerians.

The application of true federalism is crucial for stability and unity if the Nigerian state is to survive, as well as for the integration of its many distinct ethnic groups.

National Conference and its Challenges of Implementation in Nigerian Politics
Nigerians have traditionally argued about whether or not to continue to exist as one country. Previous presidents of Nigeria have demonstrated a tremendous desire to maintain the sovereignty of the country in order to prevent it from disintegrating, even though there are obvious and valid reasons why it shouldn't. The Nigerian state still has a significant problem in establishing a cohesive and stable political structure.

The greatest problem for Nigeria since Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard's amalgamation in 1914 has been achieving political stability. Many significant occurrences occurred long before this 1914 merger event. The Berlin Conference of 1885, which Otto von Bismarck called in Germany, is the most significant. The European race for African colonies made this conference imperative. In order to facilitate a "peaceful" division of the African territories among the European powers, including Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Italy, the

Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, and Turkey, Bismarck, the first chancellor of Germany, called the conference.

As a result, the decisions made at the summit marked a turning point in the history of the world in general and of Africa in particular, where European powers divided up African territory amicably without the Africans' agreement. However, the physical region that would become Nigeria was one of the African possessions given to Britain. The colonial rulers partitioned the land in 1900, creating the colony of Lagos, the southern protectorate, and the northern protectorate. The rest is history. It makes sense to wonder if the inhabitants of this region were sufficiently united to justify the creation of division protectorates.

The reality is that throughout the time before colonization, these people never came together, lived separately, and had little to no knowledge of one another's existence. Because of this, history has documented the separate existence of the pre-colonial kingdoms and societies of the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba. Consequently, the creation of protectorates was done for administrative reasons.

The amalgamation of 1914 has drawn a lot of criticism because it forcibly forced people from different cultural backgrounds to coexist, something that has frequently proven challenging as a result of the country's ongoing ethnic issues. Despite this unpleasant but clear fact, the former colonial ruler had to maintain the nation's unity in order to successfully control its crucial economic interests. The only thing these individuals had in common, then, was the name of their nation. That wasn't a sufficient foundation for real unity on its own. Currently, Nigeria is home to more than 250 ethnic group that speak roughly 400 different languages, illustrating the country's status as a linguistic crossroads of the world. It should come as no surprise that the colonial rulers implemented the divide and rule system, which emphasized these divisions and shattered any chance of peaceful coexistence and collaboration between the ethnic groups in the nation.

However, the amalgamation event's clear indication of Nigeria's diverse nature explains the ethnic groups' competition and agitations that have throughout the years led to innumerable violent crises that have been endangering the country's unity. In Nigeria, past and present political leaders have consistently called for periodic national conferences to proclaim their desire for equality and justice in

the pursuit of economic independence, social cohesion, national unity, and political stability.

Rawlsian Solution to the Problem of Political Stability

The main "problem of political liberalism," in the words of John Rawls, is how to explain how "there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible philosophical and moral doctrines" (Rawls, 1993:xviii). Given that there is "deep doctrinal conflict with no prospect of resolution" (Rawls, 1993: xxviii), how is it possible to create an equitable society that is also stable?

It is obvious that political liberalism aims to establish a foundation for intergenerational stability. According to Rawls, the issue of stability is central to political philosophy, and as such, political philosophy ought to focus on finding solutions to it. In order to understand how members of such a liberal democratic society-whose citizens hold reasonable, irreconcilable, and incompatible conceptions of the good that govern all aspects of morality—can come to an agreement on a moral issue, such as the principles of justice that govern the core aspects of their lives in the society, Rawls examines the nature of modern democratic societies. How is it possible for several reasonable comprehensive theories to coexist with one another? Why the concept of a political vision of justice when doctrines are supposed to be thorough and reasonable? In a nutshell, Rawls is concerned about and seeks to elaborate on these problems, which are essentially those of stability in a free democracy.

To coexist, for Rawls, the various comprehensive theories need to have the same political idea. It suggests that a thorough philosophy ought to include political concepts. Given the diversity of comprehensive theories, it is obvious that there can only be one political theory of justice for society to be properly organized. This implies that imposing a single comprehensive ideology on the populace will not be appropriate because doing so would be oppressive and result in nothing more than an unjust and unstable situation. In the meanwhile, stability is related to two questions, claims Rawls (1993:141). The first is whether individuals who are raised in just institutions have a sense of justice that is generally strong enough for them to uphold these institutions. The second concern is whether the political notion can serve as the center of an overlapping agreement in light of the general

circumstances that define a democracy's public political culture, particularly the fact of tolerable plurality.

The first question's response relates to defining what he terms the moral psychology that enables members of a well-ordered society to have a strong enough sense of justice to motivate them to abide by its fair rules. The concept of overlapping consensus and how to deal with its challenges provide the solution to the second question.

Additionally, stability often refers to a society's ability or willingness to uphold the rules of the conception of justice that governs society's fundamental structure. In other words, the issue of stability pertains to how members of a society can cultivate and uphold a sense of justice that will cause them to abide by the notion of justice that governs the fundamental structure of the society. Thus, according to Martin (1999:743), "the solution to the problem of stability is found in the synthesis of the various moral and philosophical views, each of which accepts the political conception of justice from within their own comprehensive views." Therefore, overlapping consensus is viewed as a tool for dealing forcefully with the issue of stability in a democratic society.

Rawls' Theory of Overlapping Consensus

Our contemporary federal states are pluralist society, with a range of loyalties and views. It is not clear how to develop a shared foundation from which to interpret the ideals that support such federal states. The challenge of reaching consensus on interpretation highlights the issue of preserving harmony and stability within society: how should harmony and stability be preserved in a society made up of several, occasionally antagonistic, comprehensive views?

John Rawls presents the notion of an overlapping consensus between several legitimate philosophical and moral beliefs in response to this query. The goal of Rawls' (2005:133-134) discussion of the concept of an overlapping consensus is to "consider how the well-ordered democratic society of justice and fairness may establish and preserve unity and stability given the reasonable pluralism characteristic of it." To put it another way, Rawls uses the concept of an overlapping consensus to make the idea of a well-ordered political society more plausible and in line with the social and historical context of democratic federalism. It is stated in Justice as Fairness: A Restatement by Rawls (2001:32) that

"the idea of an overlapping consensus is introduced to make the idea of a well-ordered society more realistic and to adjust it to the historical and social conditions of democratic societies, which include the fact that reasonable pluralism"

Rawls expands on his justification in Political Liberalism. According to Rawls (2005:133), "how a well-ordered democratic society of justice and fairness may establish and preserve unity and stability given the reasonable pluralism characteristic of it" is a topic worth thinking about. A reasonable comprehensive doctrine, according to Rawls (2005:134), "neither ensures the base of social unity, nor can it furnish the content of public reason on basic political concerns.

Therefore, in addition to the notion of a political conception of justice, we propose another fundamental idea of political liberalism to show how a well-ordered society can be unified and stable. This idea is the notion of an overlapping consensus of acceptable comprehensive doctrines.

From what has come before, it is clear that the concept of an overlapping consensus is connected to the concepts of stability and cohesion in a political federal state. Conflicting loyalties must result in a single understanding- which is not necessarily a common interpretation- of the ideals that society should be based on if it is to remain stable throughout time. In other words, the discussion of stability introduces the notion of an overlapping consensus. Like contemporary cultures, Nigeria's federalism unquestionably faces a number of difficulties in establishing a democratic federal state.

Fostering a Unified and Stable Federalism in Nigeria through John Rawls Theory of Overlapping Consensus
 Nigeria's federalism, which has left millions of its citizens in a very poor and despicable state and dashed their hopes of ever living the good life that a unified and stable federalism through the medium and instrumentality of good governance is supposed to bring to them, can be revived with the aid of Rawls' theory of overlapping consensus. Perhaps this "good life" that Aristotle spoke of, which the state is meant to provide for its citizens, is what some Nigerian politicians refer to as the "dividends of democracy."

The federal structure of Nigeria can benefit from John Rawls' theory of justice. His ideology weakens and even rejects the notion of powerful men in any democratic

government, relying instead on the ideals of equality and liberty as his most potent weapons. His thesis places a strong emphasis on how fundamental social structures are superior to people as a whole.

This stability in plural societies will be made possible by Rawls' central thesis, which he refers to as the overlapping consensus of plausible comprehensive doctrines. The phrase "overlapping consensus" refers to a situation in which parties in a socio-political setting embrace various and frequently opposing accounts of ideas that "overlap" with one another on the issue of governance after reaching an understanding due to their reasonability. In actuality, the diversity of many rational, all-encompassing theories correlates to the various ethnic groupings that exist in Nigeria. Making moral and political decisions in the Nigerian political sphere can benefit from the use of John Rawls' political theory. In a pluralistic democratic society, Rawls contends, state institutions should be directed by a theory of justice that supports political stability.

Such a democracy is based on the idea of political liberalism. A politically liberal society is built on "a political conception of justice" that "gains the support of an overlapping consensus of citizens' with various comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls, 1996:11–15). John Rawls is interested in discussing how a just society should operate. According to Rawls, a modern democratic society is defined "not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrines but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines."

Since no comprehensive doctrine is as suitable as a political conception for a constitutional state, none of these beliefs, in Rawls' opinion, are affirmed or will ever be affirmed by all, or nearly all, citizens. In the words of Rawls, because people have different views on what constitutes a happy life, fairness, and fundamental human rights, modern society is not based on agreement on these fundamental principles. In light of these circumstances of rational incompatibility, Rawls looks for ways in which these communities can come to an understanding of what constitutes justice and stability. Or, to put it another way, what political idea can win the backing of such an overlapping consensus? (Rawls, 1996: xviii).

For Rawls, the only solution to the democratic pluralism dilemma is to construct a liberal state that does not give preference to one vision of the good over another. However, this solution is insufficient because some policy decisions result in fundamental differences and conflicts amongst groups of citizens. According to

Rawls, we also need to add a commitment that each and every citizen must have a commitment to righteous democratic practices (democratic ideals) that will take precedence over each and every citizen's political and moral beliefs. Therefore, citizens are first permitted to speak in favor of or against proposed legislation, and then morally obligated to accept and respect the democratically determined policy as a legitimate settlement of the issue, even if it is at odds with their own beliefs.

An overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines is defined by Rawls (1996:134) as follows: "In such a consensus, the reasonable doctrines affirm the political conception, each from its own point of view. Political thought must be agreed upon in order for society to be united. When the politically engaged members of society uphold the consensus's tenets and the demands of justice do not substantially conflict with the fundamental interests of citizens as shaped and promoted by their social structures, stability is feasible. According to Rawls, a liberal political system that is governed by overlapping principles is what defines a democratic society. Each person who lives in this society has his or her own conception of what is right and what is good, but they respect the fact that they are a part of a plural polity and understand that the democratic process cannot be legitimately overridden when it comes to making decisions about policies that involve opposing conceptions of what is good. Therefore, consensus is reached when someone, when necessary, prioritizes their loyalty to democratic processes over their personal convictions.

The primacy and undeniable significance of the idea or notion of social justice in society cohesiveness and human growth are highlighted by Rawls' theory of overlapping consensus. In Nigeria's democracy, social justice has received little attention over the years. It seems that Nigerian politicians are frequently unaware of the broad significance and ramifications of social justice. This abnormality has prevented prior and even current governments from delivering social justice, which is a necessity for Nigerian citizens. John Rawls' theory of overlapping and its applicability in the Nigerian federalism intended to fashion a new mode of operation in the nation's republic are highly relevant given the heterogeneous and pluralistic nature of the Nigerian state with its diversities and complexities, which have enthroned all manner of negative ethos in the state.

This invariably contributes to good governance in the federal system of Nigeria because it will lessen the negative effects of such well-known flaws in the country's

democratic structure as ethnic politics, ethnic crises, social injustice, and nepotism. This will pave the way for progress in the Nigerian state and return Nigeria to a unified and stable federal system, ethnic cooperation, and peaceful relationships between the various ethnic groups.

Conclusion
From the preceding, it is clear that Rawls' political theory of justice significantly adds to the wealth of existing ideas that aim to strengthen states' socio-political structures and ethical diversity in contemporary global communities. Looking at it particularly, the equality principle has significantly deepened human justice and liberty and directed it toward new democratic leadership and proactive governance for both rich and developing nations around the world.

The adoption of the overlapping consensus principles of Rawls' theory, which are incorporated into the nation's constitution and guarantee equal rights to all citizens, will be the first step toward the development of true federalism and an egalitarian society in Nigeria. As such, these principles should be taken very seriously in order to uphold the laws that give all Nigerians an equal playing field and to guide the nation's political and socioeconomic affairs.

Similar to this, Nigerian federalism needs to be urgently reviewed in accordance with John Rawls' overlapping consensus and other values of liberal democracy as practiced in the majority of today's world regions because it is so deficient in most of the principles of effective and admirable leadership and good governance available in other world democracies. In Nigeria, the leaders have established themselves as legitimate citizens, while the bulk of the people they govern end up as slaves in the country of their fathers and ancestors.

If Nigeria can honestly and appropriately apply its fundamental principles of justice and fairness into her socio-economic and political system without any bias and prejudices, Rawls' overlapping consensus has the potential to enhance and alleviate the country's current and political democratic leadership problems. As a result, for there to be genuine discussion, both the people and the leaders must collectively embrace Rawls' overlapping consensus and the principles of the theory of justice.

It will actually be a good starting point for a better future for everyone in Nigeria if we look for holistic principles that would guarantee ethnic relationships between the ethnic nationalities and true federalism that can harmoniously unite and cause the good and accelerated progress of the diverse ethnic nationalities in the country. We therefore contend that a better Nigerian society is imminent in the near future for the good and betterment of all and sundry, but only if the lessons obtained from our recommendations made above from Rawls' theory of justice are faithfully and honestly implemented to Nigerian federalism.

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