

## DEMOCRACY AND INTER-GROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA, 1999-2019

**Chukwu, Hamuel Oti**

Department of History and International Studies,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.  
ho.chukwu@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

*This study examined the impact of democracy and inter-group relations in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019, addressing the complex interplay between ethnic, regional, and political dynamics in a democratizing society. Despite Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, ethnic tensions and regional disparities persist, challenging national unity. The objectives of this research are to assess the influence of democratic governance on ethnic and regional politics, and analyze the role of government policies and institutions in promoting national cohesion. The research method employed was the qualitative analytical method which involved content analysis of relevant documentary data on the subject. The approach adopted was also thematic. The research findings reveal that while democracy has enabled greater political participation, it has also intensified ethnic tensions due to politicized resource allocation and socio-economic disparities. The study concludes that sustainable national integration requires comprehensive policy implementation, institutional strengthening, and inclusive socio-economic development.*

**Key words:** Inter-group Relations, Democracy, Ethnic Tensions, Federalism, Conflict Resolution

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," is a nation composed of over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, cultures, and historical experiences. This diversity, while a source



of cultural richness, has posed significant challenges to national unity and political stability. The transition from military rule to a democratic system in 1999 was expected to foster greater inclusion, representation, and equitable development across the different groups. However, the democratic era has been fraught with persistent ethnic tensions, conflicts, and a struggle for power among Nigeria's diverse communities. The inception of the Fourth Republic marked a period of optimism and high expectations for democratic governance to rectify past socio-political and economic injustices. Despite the establishment of democratic institutions, electoral processes, and a constitution emphasizing federalism and power-sharing, the reality on the ground has been complex and multifaceted, with democracy itself often marred by electoral fraud, political violence, and the manipulation of ethnic identities for political gain.

Despite two decades of uninterrupted democratic governance, Nigeria continues to grapple with significant inter-group conflicts and ethnic tensions. From 1999 to 2019, the country has witnessed numerous instances of ethnic violence, regional agitations, and communal clashes, underscoring the fragility of inter-group relations. These conflicts are driven by a myriad of factors, including competition for political power, control over resources, historical grievances, and socio-economic inequalities. The democratic framework, while providing a platform for political participation and representation, has also exposed and, in some cases, exacerbated underlying ethnic and regional divisions. Political elites frequently employ the politicization of ethnic identities as a strategy to mobilize support and secure electoral victories, entrenching ethnic politics and marginalizing minority groups. This situation has often led to the entrenchment of ethnic politics and the marginalization of minority groups, making the anticipated dividends of democracy, such as improved inter-group



relations, equitable development, and national unity, elusive for many Nigerians.

A critical challenge has been the ability of democratic institutions and processes to manage and mitigate these inter-group conflicts effectively. The electoral system, intended as a mechanism for fair representation and accountability, has frequently been undermined by practices such as vote-buying, electoral violence, and the manipulation of electoral outcomes, resulting in widespread disillusionment with the democratic process and a lack of trust in political institutions. Additionally, the federal structure, designed to accommodate Nigeria's diversity, has faced criticism for failing to address inequalities and imbalances in resource allocation and political representation. The concentration of power and resources at the center has fueled regional grievances and demands for greater autonomy and resource control, particularly from the oil-rich Niger Delta region. The persistence of these issues raises important questions about the effectiveness of Nigeria's democratic system in fostering national integration and promoting harmonious inter-group relations. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between democratic processes and ethnic dynamics, the challenges faced by democratic institutions in managing inter-group conflicts, and the socio-economic factors that influence these relations from 1999 to 2019.

### **Definition of terms**

The term “Democracy” refers to a system of government where power is vested in the people, who exercise that power directly or through elected representatives. It is characterized by free and fair elections, the protection of human rights, the rule of law, and the active participation of citizens in political and civic life. Democracy ensures that governmental authority is derived from the consent of the governed and operates within a framework of laws and principles that guarantee individual freedoms and equality. It is



built on the foundations of open debate, transparency, and accountability in governance, fostering an environment where diverse voices and opinions can be heard and respected.<sup>1</sup>

Another term that requires definition is “Inter-group relations”. It refers to the interactions, attitudes, and behaviors that occur between different groups of people, often defined by characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, or social class. These relations encompass the ways in which groups perceive and treat one another, which can range from cooperation and mutual support to conflict and discrimination.<sup>2</sup> Inter-group relations are influenced by historical contexts, social structures, economic conditions, and political dynamics.

### **Historical context of inter-group relations in Nigeria**

**Pre-colonial inter-group dynamics:** In pre-colonial Nigeria, inter-group relations were shaped by a complex web of interactions among various ethnic groups, each with its own distinct political, social, and economic structures. The Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east represented some of the major ethnic groups, but there were also numerous smaller groups with their own unique identities. These groups engaged in a variety of relationships, including trade, alliances, warfare, and intermarriage. Trade was a significant factor in fostering peaceful relations, with established trade routes facilitating the exchange of goods such as kola nuts, salt, textiles, and slaves. According to Robert Sargent:

*The Niger commercial alliance linked Songhay, Borgu, Nupe, Idah, Onitsha, Aboh and Warri in a complimentary and cooperative pattern of transportation and trade along the north-south axis.<sup>3</sup>*

Despite these positive interactions, conflicts were also a common feature of pre-colonial inter-group relations. Territorial disputes,



competition for resources, and attempts to expand political influence often led to warfare. For example, the Yoruba city-states frequently engaged in conflicts over dominance, as seen in the protracted Oyo-Ife wars. Similarly, the Fulani Jihad of the early 19th century, led by Usman dan Fodio, significantly altered the political landscape of northern Nigeria by establishing the Sokoto Caliphate, which subdued numerous Hausa states. These conflicts, however, were not solely destructive; they also led to the formation of new political entities and alliances, demonstrating the dynamic and adaptive nature of inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria.

Cultural and religious exchanges further complicated inter-group dynamics. Islam spread extensively through the northern regions, influencing the political and social structures of the Hausa-Fulani and parts of the Yoruba states. Conversely, traditional religious practices and institutions remained strong in other regions, such as among the Igbo. These religious differences sometimes served as sources of conflict but also as grounds for collaboration. The diversity of religious practices often required negotiation and accommodation, fostering a degree of coexistence. In some cases, religious leaders played significant roles in mediating disputes and maintaining peace among different groups.

Inter-group marriages were another important aspect of pre-colonial interactions. Marriages between different ethnic groups served to strengthen alliances and foster peaceful relations. A typical example is the marriage of princess Ennobi of Idah, the daughter of Attah (king) Ayagba (c. 1687-1717), to the Onitsha Monarch, Chima Ogbnefi.<sup>4</sup> These inter-group marriages also facilitated cultural exchange and the blending of traditions, contributing to the rich cultures of the region. For instance, as a result of wide-scale intermarriage, some Fulani have lost most of the distinguishing physical characteristics of their race, and the majority of them speak only Hausa as their mother tongue. However, such practices were



not universal and often depended on the specific political and social contexts of the time.

**Colonial legacy and ethnic fragmentation:** The advent of British colonial rule in Nigeria profoundly altered the existing inter-group dynamics and introduced new forms of ethnic fragmentation. The British employed a strategy of indirect rule, which involved governing through existing traditional authorities while introducing Western administrative structures. This approach had varying degrees of success and disruption across different regions. In the north, the British found it relatively easy to implement indirect rule through the established emirs of the Sokoto Caliphate. However, in the more decentralized societies of the south, such as among the Igbo, the British often had to create new administrative units and appoint "warrant chiefs," leading to significant disruptions in traditional governance structures.

Colonial policies exacerbated ethnic divisions by reinforcing and formalizing ethnic identities. The British administrative practice of dividing Nigeria into three major regions—the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions—based largely on the predominant ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, respectively) institutionalized ethnic fragmentation. This regionalization created political and economic imbalances, with the Northern Region receiving the largest share of resources and political representation. The creation of these regions also fostered a sense of ethnic competition, as each group vied for greater control and influence within the colonial framework. For example, the introduction of Western education primarily in the south contributed to disparities in educational attainment and economic opportunities between the northern and southern regions.<sup>5</sup>

Economic policies during the colonial period further deepened ethnic divisions. The British emphasis on cash crop production for export led to regional economic specialization, with cocoa



becoming the dominant crop in the Western Region, groundnuts in the Northern Region, and palm oil in the Eastern Region. This economic specialization reinforced regional identities and dependencies, making the regions economically distinct and competitive. The colonial economy also prioritized the development of infrastructure that supported the extraction and export of resources, often neglecting the needs of the local populations. The railway lines, for instance, were designed to connect the hinterlands to the ports rather than facilitating inter-regional trade or integration.<sup>6</sup>

The colonial legacy of divide and rule extended to the political arena, where the British encouraged ethnic-based political organizations. This approach laid the groundwork for the formation of ethnic-based political parties in the lead-up to independence. The Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) emerged as the dominant political parties, each representing the interests of the major ethnic groups in their respective regions.<sup>7</sup> This politicization of ethnicity entrenched ethnic loyalties and rivalry, complicating efforts to build a cohesive national identity.

Colonial education policies also played a role in shaping ethnic identities and fragmentations. Missionary schools, which were more prevalent in the south, provided Western education that became a tool for social mobility and political influence. The north, with fewer missionary schools and a preference for Islamic education, lagged behind in Western educational attainment. This educational disparity contributed to regional inequalities and fueled ethnic tensions, as the more educated southerners often occupied administrative and professional positions in the post-colonial state.<sup>8</sup>

### **Democratic Transition and Political Landscape (1999-2019)**

The return to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999 marked the end of a long period of military dictatorship and the beginning of the Fourth



Republic. This transition represented a collective desire among Nigerians for democratic governance and political stability. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the head of the final military regime, played a crucial role in facilitating this transition by initiating a series of political reforms and setting a timetable for elections. The establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was a critical step in ensuring the credibility of the electoral process. The presidential election held in February 1999 saw Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military head of state; emerge as the winner under the banner of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Obasanjo's presidency began with cautious optimism, focusing on consolidating democratic institutions, promoting national reconciliation, and addressing the economic challenges accumulated during years of military misrule. One of his notable achievements was the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to combat widespread corruption. Additionally, Obasanjo sought to reintegrate Nigeria into the international community, which had largely isolated the country due to its poor human rights record under military rule. His government also pursued debt relief initiatives, resulting in a significant reduction of Nigeria's foreign debt.<sup>9</sup> However, the political landscape was still marked by deep-seated ethnic and regional divisions, exacerbated by decades of authoritarian rule. The federal system, adopted to address these divisions, provided a framework for power-sharing among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.

The transition to civilian rule was not without its challenges. The early years of the Fourth Republic were characterized by political tensions and conflicts, such as the ongoing unrest in the Niger Delta region over resource control and environmental degradation. The Obasanjo administration faced significant pressure to address these issues, leading to the implementation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Additionally, the return to civilian rule saw the re-emergence of political godfatherism and





patronage networks, which undermined democratic processes. Political elites often manipulated electoral outcomes to maintain their influence and control, as evidenced in various gubernatorial elections marred by violence and electoral malpractices. Despite these challenges, the return to civilian rule in 1999 set the stage for Nigeria's democratic journey.

From 1999 to 2019, Nigeria experienced several key political developments and elections that shaped its democratic trajectory. After Obasanjo's two-term presidency, the 2007 presidential election marked a significant event in Nigeria's political history, with Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the PDP emerging as president amidst widespread irregularities and electoral malpractices. Yar'Adua's presidency focused on electoral reform and the rule of law, establishing the Electoral Reform Committee chaired by former Chief Justice Mohammed Uwais to address electoral system flaws.<sup>10</sup> Following Yar'Adua's death in 2010, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan assumed the presidency. Jonathan's tenure saw efforts to reform the electoral process and significant economic growth, but also criticism over handling corruption and insecurity. The 2015 presidential election was a watershed moment, with Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) defeating incumbent Jonathan, marking the first peaceful transfer of power between parties. Buhari's administration launched anti-corruption initiatives and tackled Boko Haram insurgency but faced challenges like economic recession and rising unemployment. The 2019 elections, despite logistical challenges and allegations of misconduct, underscored Nigeria's growing democratic resilience.

### **Major Political Parties and their Influence on Inter-group Relations**

The influence of major political parties on inter-group relations in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019 cannot be overstated. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), which dominated the political landscape



in the early years of the Fourth Republic, played a significant role in shaping inter-group dynamics. The PDP's approach to power-sharing and zoning, where key political positions were rotated among the major regions and ethnic groups, was aimed at ensuring inclusivity and balancing the interests of Nigeria's diverse population. According to Article 7(2) of the Peoples Democratic Party Constitution:

*In pursuance of the principle of equity, justice and fairness, the party shall adhere to the policy of rotation and zoning of party and public elective offices and it shall be enforced by the appropriate Executive Committee at all levels.<sup>11</sup>*

This principle aimed to alternate the presidency between the North and the South to promote equity. For instance, after President Olusegun Obasanjo (a Southerner) served two terms from 1999 to 2007, the PDP nominated Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (a Northerner), who won the 2007 election. This policy helped to manage ethnic tensions and fostered a sense of representation among various groups.

However, the PDP's dominance also had its downsides. The party's internal dynamics were often characterized by intense power struggles and factionalism, which sometimes spilled over into broader inter-group conflicts. The imposition of candidates by party elites, often without regard for local sentiments, led to dissatisfaction and violence in several states. The party's reliance on patronage networks also reinforced ethnic loyalties, as political leaders sought to secure support by distributing resources and favors to their ethnic constituencies. This practice undermined efforts to build a cohesive national identity and often exacerbated ethnic divisions.

The emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013 marked a significant shift in Nigeria's political landscape. The APC



was formed through the merger of four opposition parties: the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).<sup>12</sup>This coalition brought together politicians from different regions and ethnic groups, united by their opposition to the PDP. The APC's victory in the 2015 presidential election was a testament to its broad appeal and the electorate's desire for change. The party's success in fostering inter-group collaboration, at least temporarily, demonstrated the potential for cross-ethnic alliances in Nigerian politics.

Despite its initial promise, the APC also faced challenges in managing inter-group relations. The party's internal cohesion was tested by competing interests and ambitions, leading to factionalism and defections. The APC's handling of regional grievances, particularly in the Niger Delta and the southeast, was also criticized. The perception that the party favored certain regions over others, coupled with the Buhari administration's response to agitations for regional autonomy, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement, highlighted the ongoing struggle to achieve genuine national unity.

### **Impact of Democracy on Inter-group Relations**

One of the most significant impacts has been the increase in ethnic and regional politics. Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999 was marked by a resurgence of ethnic identities and regional loyalties, which have been instrumentalized by political elites to mobilize support and gain power. The use of ethnic identity as a tool for political mobilization has deepened existing divisions and often led to conflicts. For example, during the 2011 presidential elections, the contest between Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the South, and Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the North, exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions. Post-election violence in the northern



states resulted in significant loss of life and property, highlighting the persistent ethnic cleavages within the country.

The electoral process in Nigeria has also had a significant impact on inter-group relations. Elections, which should ideally be a mechanism for fair representation and peaceful transfer of power, have often been marred by violence, fraud, and the manipulation of ethnic identities. The 2007 elections, widely criticized for irregularities and lack of transparency, saw widespread violence, particularly in the Niger Delta and the northern regions. The violence was often fueled by ethnic sentiments and the perception that certain groups were being marginalized. The persistent electoral malpractice has undermined public trust in democratic institutions and exacerbated ethnic tensions, as different groups feel disenfranchised and excluded from the political process.

Despite the challenges, there have been instances where democratic processes have facilitated conflict resolution and improved inter-group relations. The amnesty program initiated by President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2009 for militants in the Niger Delta is a notable example. The program aimed to address the grievances of the militants, who were primarily from the Ijaw ethnic group, by offering them amnesty in exchange for laying down their arms. The initiative led to a significant reduction in violence in the region and opened up opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation. Similarly, democratic governance has allowed for greater civil society engagement and advocacy for peace building. Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations have played crucial roles in mediating conflicts and promoting inter-group harmony, particularly in volatile areas like Jos and Kaduna.

The socio-economic dimensions of democracy have also influenced inter-group relations in Nigeria. The democratic era has been characterized by efforts to address economic disparities and



promote development, although progress has been uneven. Economic policies and programs aimed at poverty alleviation, job creation, and infrastructure development have had varying degrees of success. For example, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) were initiatives aimed at addressing socio-economic inequalities. However, the perceived inequitable distribution of these programs often led to inter-group tensions, as some ethnic and regional groups felt they were not receiving their fair share of the benefits. The interplay between socio-economic development and inter-group relations underscores the importance of inclusive and equitable governance in fostering national unity and stability.

### **Case Studies of Inter-group Conflicts and Resolutions**

#### **The Niger Delta conflict**

The Niger Delta conflict is one of Nigeria's most protracted and violent inter-group conflicts, driven primarily by issues of resource control, environmental degradation, and economic marginalization. The Niger Delta region, rich in oil reserves, has long been the economic backbone of Nigeria. However, the local communities have seen little benefit from the wealth generated from their land, leading to widespread poverty, unemployment, and environmental destruction due to oil spills and gas flaring. The resulting frustration and anger have manifested in militant activities, with groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) engaging in armed resistance, sabotage of oil installations, and kidnapping of oil workers to press for greater control over local resources and better environmental practices.

The federal government's response to the Niger Delta conflict has been multifaceted, involving both military and political strategies. Initially, the government deployed military forces to quell the insurgency, but this approach often exacerbated tensions and led to



human rights abuses. Recognizing the need for a more sustainable solution, the government established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, aimed at facilitating development projects in the region. Additionally, the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Program marked a significant turning point. The program offered unconditional pardon to militants who surrendered their arms, along with vocational training and reintegration support. This initiative led to a significant reduction in violence and restored relative peace to the region.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. The implementation of development projects has been plagued by corruption and inefficiency, limiting their impact on the ground. Moreover, the structural issues of poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation persist, fueling intermittent unrest. For instance, the resurgence of militant activities in the form of the Niger Delta Avengers in 2016 highlighted the fragile nature of the peace achieved.

### **The Herders-Farmers Conflict**

The conflict between herders and farmers, particularly in Nigeria's Middle Belt region, has become one of the country's most deadly and persistent inter-group conflicts. This conflict is primarily driven by competition over land and water resources, exacerbated by environmental changes, population growth, and the encroachment of farmland on traditional grazing routes. States like Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna have been hotspots for these clashes, resulting in significant loss of life, displacement of communities, and destruction of property. The violence often takes on ethnic and religious dimensions, with predominantly Muslim Fulani herders and predominantly Christian farmers clashing, thereby deepening Nigeria's ethno-religious divides.



Efforts to resolve the herders-farmers conflict have included both short-term security measures and long-term policy initiatives. The federal government has frequently deployed military and police forces to affected areas to restore order, but these interventions have often been criticized for being reactive and insufficient in addressing the root causes of the conflict. In terms of policy, the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) was introduced to modernize livestock farming, reduce the movement of herders, and promote peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers. This plan includes establishing ranches and grazing reserves, as well as providing support for both herders and farmers to improve their livelihoods. Despite these initiatives, the conflict persists, highlighting the complexity of the issues at hand. Implementation of the NLTP has been slow and fraught with resistance from various quarters, including some state governments and local communities.

### **The Boko Haram Insurgency**

The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria represents a major inter-group conflict with profound implications for national security and social cohesion. Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group, emerged in the early 2000s, initially advocating for a strict interpretation of Islamic law and opposing Western education and secular governance. The group gained notoriety for its violent tactics, including bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings, most infamously the 2014 abduction of over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok.<sup>13</sup> The insurgency has led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people and the displacement of millions, creating a humanitarian crisis in the region.

The Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram has involved military operations, regional cooperation, and various counterterrorism strategies. The Joint Task Force (JTF) and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising troops from Nigeria and neighboring countries, have been central to efforts to



combat the insurgents. These military campaigns have succeeded in reclaiming territory and degrading Boko Haram's operational capabilities. However, the group has proven resilient, adapting its tactics and continuing to carry out attacks, particularly targeting vulnerable communities and security personnel.

### **The Jos ethno-religious Conflict**

The city of Jos, located in Plateau State, has been a flashpoint for ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. Jos's strategic location as a crossroads between the predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south has made it a microcosm of Nigeria's broader ethnic and religious tensions. The conflict in Jos often pits indigenous Christian communities, such as the Berom, against settler Muslim communities, primarily the Hausa-Fulani. These clashes have resulted in significant casualties and displacement, with periodic eruptions of violence that destabilize the region.

Efforts to address the Jos conflict have included both local and national interventions. State and local governments have implemented peace building initiatives, such as dialogue forums, interfaith mediation, and community policing. The federal government has also played a role, deploying security forces to maintain order during periods of heightened tension. Additionally, civil society organizations have been active in promoting peace and reconciliation, organizing workshops and sensitization programs to foster mutual understanding and coexistence. Despite these efforts, the Jos conflict remains unresolved, with deep-seated grievances and mistrust persisting between the communities.

### **Socio-economic Factors Influencing Inter-group Relations**

Economic disparities and resource allocation are critical factors influencing inter-group relations in Nigeria. The uneven distribution of wealth and resources often exacerbates tensions between different ethnic and regional groups. For instance, the Niger Delta





region, rich in oil resources, has historically been underdeveloped and marginalized despite contributing significantly to the national economy. This has led to widespread grievances among local communities, who feel they are not receiving a fair share of the benefits from their land's resources. The resulting discontent has fueled militant activities and violent conflicts, exemplified by groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers, who resort to sabotage and armed struggle to demand greater resource control and development. In the northern part of Nigeria, economic disparities have also played a significant role in shaping inter-group relations. The region has the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the country, contributing to social instability and the rise of insurgent groups like Boko Haram.

Education, employment, and poverty are closely interlinked factors that significantly influence inter-group relations in Nigeria. Disparities in access to quality education across different regions and ethnic groups contribute to social inequality and tension. In the northern regions, educational attainment is considerably lower compared to the south, partly due to cultural practices, inadequate infrastructure, and security challenges. This educational disparity limits employment opportunities for northern youth, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion. High unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, create fertile ground for social unrest and conflict. In many parts of Nigeria, job opportunities are scarce, and employment is often secured through patronage networks that favor certain ethnic or regional groups. This breeds resentment and competition among different groups, as those excluded from these networks feel marginalized and disenfranchised. Poverty exacerbates these challenges, limiting access to education and employment opportunities and creating a cycle of deprivation and social instability.



The influence of media and communication on inter-group relations in Nigeria is profound and multifaceted. The media, encompassing traditional outlets like newspapers, radio, and television, as well as digital platforms and social media, plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and discourse. However, media can also exacerbate tensions and conflict by propagating biased narratives and misinformation. In Nigeria, where ethnic and religious identities are deeply ingrained, the media often reflects and reinforces these divisions. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a powerful tool for communication and mobilization, but it also poses significant challenges for inter-group relations, with instances of fake news and incendiary content quickly going viral and inflaming tensions. Despite these challenges, media and communication can also play a positive role in promoting understanding and reconciliation between different groups. Initiatives aimed at peace journalism and responsible reporting are crucial in this regard. Additionally, community radio stations and local media outlets have been effective in addressing local grievances and promoting peace building at the grassroots level.

### **Policy and Institutional Responses**

The Nigerian government has implemented various policies aimed at promoting national unity and integration to address the country's diverse and often fragmented society. One significant policy is the federal character principle, enshrined in the 1979 Constitution and reaffirmed in the 1999 constitution. This principle mandates equitable representation of all ethnic and regional groups in federal appointments and institutions, aiming to ensure that no single group dominates the federal government. While the principle is well-intentioned, its implementation has been met with mixed results, sometimes criticized for fostering mediocrity and reinforcing ethnic identities over national unity. Another key policy is the establishment of unity schools, or Federal Government Colleges, across the country. These schools were designed to bring together



students from various ethnic and regional backgrounds, promoting intercultural understanding and fostering a sense of national identity from a young age. The effectiveness of unity schools has been notable in some respects, with many alumni holding leadership positions in various sectors. However, challenges such as underfunding, infrastructural decay, and the persistence of ethnic cliques within the schools have undermined their potential to fully achieve their integration goals.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is another pivotal program aimed at promoting national integration. Established in 1973, the NYSC requires university graduates to serve for one year in a state different from their state of origin. The program seeks to foster national unity by exposing young Nigerians to different cultures and encouraging them to contribute to development in other regions. While the NYSC has had some success in building bridges between different ethnic groups, it has also faced challenges such as safety concerns, inadequate remuneration, and logistical issues that have affected its overall impact. Government policies have also included economic integration initiatives, such as the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, aimed at addressing the unique challenges of the oil-rich but underdeveloped Niger Delta region. These initiatives seek to address historical grievances by investing in infrastructure, education, and economic development in the region. Despite substantial funding, these efforts have often been criticized for corruption and inefficiency, which have hindered their ability to achieve meaningful development and integration.

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) plays a critical role in promoting national unity and integration in Nigeria. Established in 1993, the NOA is tasked with disseminating information about government policies and programs, promoting civic responsibility,



and fostering a sense of national identity among Nigerians. Through its various programs and campaigns, the NOA aims to bridge the gap between the government and the populace, enhancing public understanding and participation in governance. One of the NOA's primary initiatives is the promotion of national values and ethics. The agency conducts campaigns to instill values such as patriotism, integrity, and respect for diversity. These campaigns are crucial in a country where ethnic and regional identities often overshadow national identity. The NOA also engages in community outreach programs designed to promote intercultural understanding and conflict resolution at the grassroots level. These programs often involve dialogue sessions, workshops, and seminars that bring together community leaders, youth groups, and other stakeholders to discuss and address local issues.

Peace-building initiatives and conflict resolution mechanisms are essential for addressing inter-group conflicts and promoting long-term stability in Nigeria. Various government and non-governmental organizations have implemented programs aimed at resolving conflicts and building peace across the country. These initiatives often involve mediation, dialogue, and capacity-building activities designed to address the root causes of conflict and foster reconciliation among conflicting parties. One notable peace-building initiative is the establishment of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) by the Nigerian government. The IPCR conducts research, provides training, and facilitates dialogue on conflict resolution and peace-building. The institute's efforts are crucial in addressing the complex and multifaceted nature of conflicts in Nigeria. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a significant role in peace-building and conflict resolution, employing a range of tools to promote understanding and collaboration among different groups. Traditional and religious leaders are also pivotal in peace-building efforts, lending credibility to initiatives and ensuring community buy-in.



Despite these efforts, peace-building in Nigeria faces significant challenges. The persistence of structural inequalities, political corruption, and weak governance undermines the effectiveness of peace-building initiatives. Additionally, the prevalence of small arms and light weapons exacerbates violence and complicates conflict resolution efforts. To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates peace-building with broader development and governance reforms. Strengthening the capacity of local institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and addressing socio-economic disparities are key to ensuring sustainable peace and stability in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the impact of democracy on inter-group relations in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019, examining the historical context, democratic transitions, socio-economic factors, and policy responses. By analyzing the interplay between democracy and inter-group dynamics, the study aimed to understand how democratic governance has influenced ethnic and regional politics, federalism, electoral processes, and conflict resolution. The objectives of this study included assessing the effectiveness of government policies in promoting national unity, evaluating the role of key institutions and examining case studies of inter-group conflicts and resolutions to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities in fostering national cohesion.

The research findings indicate that while democracy has provided a platform for greater political participation and expression of diverse identities, it has also exacerbated ethnic tensions and regional disparities due to the politicization of ethnicity and resource allocation. The return to civilian rule in 1999 marked significant political developments, including the emergence of major political parties that have shaped inter-group relations. However, the



persistence of economic disparities, inadequate educational and employment opportunities, and the influence of media has often fueled conflicts. Despite numerous government policies and peace-building initiatives, the challenges of corruption, governance inefficiencies, and structural inequalities continue to hinder the achievement of sustainable national integration. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that combines effective policy implementation, strengthened institutions, and inclusive socio-economic development to build a cohesive and stable Nigerian society.

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