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Full Length Paper

Ethnic Majority Rule and Its Threats to Democracy and National Security in Nigeria and Kenya

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Abstract

This paper examines ethnic majority rule and its implications for democracy and national security in Nigeria and Kenya. It explores the historical foundations of ethnic political competition, the influence of ethnic dominance on political representation and minority participation, and the relationship between political exclusion, electoral instability, and national security challenges. The study adopts a qualitative comparative documentary research design, drawing on peer-reviewed scholarly literature, constitutional provisions, electoral reports, and relevant institutional publications. Consociational Democracy Theory and Ethnic Competition Theory provide the theoretical framework for understanding how competition for political power can encourage ethnic mobilisation and how inclusive institutional arrangements may mitigate exclusionary practices. The analysis shows that ethnic political competition in both countries is shaped by historical grievances, electoral incentives, institutional weaknesses, and struggles over access to state power and resources. Although Nigeria's federal character principle and Kenya's devolved governance structure provide mechanisms for managing diversity, their effectiveness depends on equitable implementation, institutional accountability, and inclusive political practices. The paper concludes that ethnic identity itself does not threaten democracy or national security; rather, exclusionary political practices can undermine democratic legitimacy, deepen social divisions, and intensify existing security vulnerabilities. It recommends stronger democratic safeguards, equitable representation, credible elections, and impartial institutions.

Keywords: Ethnic majority rule, ethnic politics, democratic governance, political exclusion, national security, Nigeria, Kenya, consociational democracy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Ethnicity remains one of the influential forces shaping political competition, public authority, democratic representation, and national integration in many multi-ethnic societies. Although ethnic identity is not inherently incompatible with democratic governance, its politicisation can create conditions in which access to political power, public resources, government appointments, and institutional opportunities becomes increasingly associated with ethnic affiliation. In such circumstances, political competition may shift from the contest of ideas, policies, and development programmes to struggles over which ethnic constituency can secure control of the state and influence the distribution of national resources. This development raises important questions about the relationship between democratic majority rule, ethnic political dominance, minority rights, and the security of politically diverse states.

The distinction between democratic majority rule and ethnic majority domination is particularly important. Majority rule is a fundamental principle of representative democracy, allowing citizens to determine political leadership through competitive elections and

constitutionally established procedures. However, democratic legitimacy extends beyond the numerical strength of an electoral majority. It also requires the protection of individual rights, political equality, institutional accountability, minority participation, and the opportunity for competing groups to exercise political influence. Consequently, when electoral victories are interpreted as an entitlement for a dominant ethnic constituency to exercise disproportionate control over political institutions, majority rule may become a mechanism of exclusion rather than an instrument of democratic representation. Chandra (2024) draws attention to the dangers of ethnic majoritarianism, particularly where the construction of political majorities produces distinctions between those regarded as legitimate members of the political community and those treated as outsiders.

For the purpose of this study, ethnic majority rule refers to a political arrangement or practice in which a numerically dominant ethnic constituency, or a coalition claiming to represent dominant ethnic interests, uses electoral advantage, political institutions, or state authority to establish disproportionate influence over governance at the expense of equitable participation by other ethnic communities. This definition does not suggest that every electoral victory by a candidate belonging to a numerically large ethnic group constitutes ethnic domination. Rather, the concern is the institutionalisation of ethnic privilege, exclusionary political representation, and the unequal exercise of public authority. The distinction is essential because ethnic dominance may operate through electoral alliances, political appointments, party structures, informal elite agreements, and administrative practices without necessarily taking the form of an explicitly ethnic political party.

The relationship between ethnicity and democratic competition is especially significant in African countries whose political boundaries encompass numerous ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and regional communities. In these societies, the state is not merely an administrative institution; it is also an important arena through which competing groups negotiate recognition, representation, access to public resources, and political influence. The distribution of political authority therefore has implications for national cohesion and the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Where political actors mobilise ethnic identities to secure electoral support, elections may become closely associated with communal interests and perceptions of collective political survival. Gadjanova's analysis of ethnic wedge issues in African presidential elections demonstrates how political campaigns can employ narratives of discrimination, victimisation, and exclusion to mobilise support across ethnic constituencies while simultaneously intensifying existing grievances (484–507).

Kenya provides an important example of the relationship between ethnic identity and electoral competition. Since the introduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s, ethnic affiliations have remained influential in the formation of political coalitions, presidential campaigns, and electoral calculations. Political alliances have frequently reflected negotiations among influential ethnic constituencies, with presidential candidates seeking support beyond their immediate communities to construct viable electoral coalitions. However, the relationship between ethnicity and voting behaviour is neither automatic nor uniform. Harris's study of Kenyan parliamentary elections demonstrates that the influence of ethnic identity varies across constituencies and is shaped by local political relationships, candidate positioning, and the interaction between national and subnational political dynamics. His findings challenge the assumption that all Kenyan elections can be understood simply as ethnic censuses (149–73).

The historical experience of Kenya also illustrates the consequences of connecting political competition with ethnic exclusion and contested electoral legitimacy. The violence that followed the disputed 2007 presidential election exposed the extent to which electoral disagreements, historical grievances, political mobilisation, and perceptions of ethnic marginalisation could interact to undermine national stability. Although ethnic identity alone cannot explain the violence, the political mobilisation of communal identities contributed to the escalation of tensions and the breakdown of social trust. Subsequent political reforms and institutional interventions sought to address weaknesses in electoral administration, political representation, and constitutional governance. Nevertheless, ethnic considerations have continued to influence political alliances and electoral narratives. Cheeseman, Kanyinga, Lynch, and Willis observe that the 2022 general elections demonstrated both the persistence of ethnic considerations and the limitations of explaining electoral behaviour exclusively through ethnic affiliation.

Nigeria presents a similarly important but institutionally distinct case. As a federal republic characterized by considerable ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional diversity, Nigeria has historically struggled to reconcile political competition with the equitable representation of its constituent communities. Since independence in 1960, the organization of political power has been influenced by regional interests, ethnic affiliations, federal arrangements, and competing claims to national leadership. The historical significance of these relationships is reflected in the country's adoption of federalism, the creation of additional states, the federal character principle, and other institutional mechanisms intended to promote national inclusion and reduce the concentration of political authority.

Despite these arrangements, ethnic considerations continue to influence political mobilisation, public appointments, electoral alliances, and debates concerning the distribution of national resources. Kendhammer argues that Nigeria's federal character arrangements and citizenship practices reveal important contradictions in the country's attempt to institutionalise

political inclusion. In particular, the politics of indigeneity can reproduce distinctions between established ethnic identities and broader federal citizenship, thereby complicating the capacity of federal institutions to mediate competing claims of belonging and representation (396–417). Similarly, Ejobowah identifies the difficulties associated with indigeneity-based citizenship in Nigerian federalism, arguing that the distinction between belonging and residence creates questions of fairness and equal political membership (728–47).

The Nigerian experience further demonstrates that the existence of broad-based political parties does not necessarily guarantee effective interethnic cooperation. Although constitutional and electoral arrangements encourage parties to seek support across different parts of the country, the relationship between party integration and substantive political inclusion remains complex. Research on Nigeria's National Assembly by the authors of Managing Diversity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic National Assembly indicates that broad-based political parties do not automatically translate into strong mechanisms of intergroup cooperation. This observation is important because it demonstrates that institutional arrangements designed to discourage ethnic fragmentation may coexist with informal practices that reproduce political competition along communal lines.

The security implications of ethnic political dominance are equally significant. Where communities perceive themselves as systematically excluded from political authority, public appointments, economic opportunities, or access to state resources, grievances may accumulate and weaken confidence in government institutions. Such perceptions can create opportunities for political entrepreneurs and other non-state actors to mobilise communal dissatisfaction. In extreme circumstances, exclusionary political practices may contribute to communal violence, electoral disturbances, separatist agitations, displacement, and other forms of internal insecurity. Olaniyan and Omotola's examination of ethnic crises in Nigeria identifies the relationship between negative ethnic mobilisation, democratic contestation, resource competition, and national security as an important challenge confronting the Nigerian state (303–18).

It is important, however, not to interpret every instance of ethnic political mobilisation as a direct cause of insecurity. Ethnic identities frequently provide legitimate foundations for cultural recognition, political participation, and collective representation. The security problem emerges when political competition becomes exclusionary, when ethnic differences are deliberately intensified for electoral advantage, or when institutions fail to provide credible and peaceful mechanisms for addressing competing political claims. Ethnic grievances may also interact with poverty, unemployment, historical inequalities, weak institutions, elite competition, and disputes over land and resources. Therefore, understanding the security implications of ethnic majority rule requires an examination of the broader political and socioeconomic conditions through which ethnic divisions become sources of instability.

The comparative examination of Nigeria and Kenya is particularly relevant because both countries possess multi-ethnic political communities, competitive electoral systems, histories of ethnic political mobilisation, and institutional efforts to promote national integration. Nevertheless, their political structures and historical experiences differ. Nigeria operates a federal presidential system in which the federal character principle and state-level arrangements constitute important mechanisms for managing diversity. Kenya also operates a presidential system, but its constitutional and devolution arrangements provide a different institutional framework for managing political representation and regional interests. These differences make the two countries valuable cases for examining how distinct institutional arrangements respond to similar challenges associated with ethnic political competition.

Furthermore, the comparison provides an opportunity to move beyond the assumption that ethnic political dominance produces identical outcomes across African democracies. In Nigeria, questions of federal character, indigeneity, regional representation, and resource distribution are particularly important. In Kenya, electoral coalitions, local ethnic configurations, presidential competition, and the historical relationship between political leadership and communal representation provide significant dimensions of analysis. Examining these experiences together can reveal how ethnic majority politics interacts with constitutional structures, electoral institutions, political accountability, and national security.

Against this background, the study examines ethnic majority rule and its threats to democracy and national security in Nigeria and Kenya. It investigates how ethnic political dominance may influence electoral competition, political representation, institutional legitimacy, minority participation, and the management of national security. Rather than treating ethnicity as an inherently divisive phenomenon, the study focuses on the political and institutional processes through which ethnic identity may be transformed into a mechanism of exclusion and unequal access to state power. Ultimately, it seeks to contribute to the understanding of how inclusive democratic institutions and equitable political arrangements can strengthen national cohesion and security in multi-ethnic African societies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This situation creates a tension between the democratic principle of majority decision-making and the constitutional obligation to protect the political rights and interests of all citizens.

In Nigeria, this problem is reflected in persistent debates concerning ethnic and regional representation, federal character, indigeneity, political appointments,

resource allocation, and the distribution of national leadership positions. Although successive constitutional and institutional arrangements have sought to accommodate the country's diversity, questions remain about whether these mechanisms adequately guarantee equal citizenship and meaningful political participation. The existence of broad-based political parties has also not eliminated ethnic considerations from political competition. Demarest and Langer's (2023) examination of Nigeria's National Assembly demonstrates that intergroup cooperation cannot be explained simply by the presence of nationally integrated political parties. Rather, informal ethno-regional balancing practices play an important role in sustaining legislative cooperation. This raises a broader question about the extent to which political stability depends on equitable institutional arrangements rather than the numerical strength or electoral dominance of particular constituencies.

In Kenya, the problem is similarly reflected in the historical relationship between ethnic political mobilisation, presidential elections, coalition formation, and the distribution of political influence. The country's competitive electoral environment has often encouraged political elites to negotiate alliances around influential ethnic constituencies. Although such coalitions can facilitate political participation and broaden electoral support, they may also reproduce exclusion when political access and the distribution of state benefits become dependent on membership in politically influential communities. Harris's (2022) research demonstrates that ethnic voting patterns vary across constituencies, indicating that ethnic political behaviour is influenced by local relationships and the broader organisation of electoral competition. Consequently, the challenge is not merely whether ethnicity influences voting but whether the political system provides sufficient safeguards against the exclusion of communities that lack access to influential electoral coalitions.

The democratic implications of ethnic majority dominance extend beyond electoral competition. Where political institutions are perceived to favour particular ethnic constituencies, public confidence in democratic governance may deteriorate. Citizens may begin to question the impartiality of government institutions, the fairness of public appointments, the independence of administrative agencies, and the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Such developments can weaken the principle of equal citizenship and encourage political actors to prioritise communal loyalty over institutional accountability. Furthermore, the concentration of political influence within dominant ethnic networks may weaken opposition participation and create an environment in which political competition is increasingly understood as a struggle for ethnic survival rather than a constitutional process for selecting accountable leadership.

The national security dimension of this problem is particularly important. Persistent perceptions of political exclusion, unequal resource distribution, and institutional discrimination can intensify grievances among marginalised communities. When political institutions fail to provide credible channels for addressing these concerns, ethnic dissatisfaction may be exploited by political elites, communal organisations, and other mobilising actors. The resulting tensions may contribute to electoral violence, communal confrontations, separatist agitation, displacement, and declining public confidence in the capacity of the state to protect all citizens. Olaniyan and Omotola (2015) identify the negative mobilisation of ethnicity as an important dimension of Nigeria's insecurity, particularly in relation to political competition and struggles over state power and resources. Nevertheless, the relationship between ethnic politics and insecurity must be examined within its broader historical, institutional, and socioeconomic context rather than treated as an automatic or exclusive causal relationship.

Another important problem is the tendency to examine Nigeria and Kenya separately without sufficiently investigating the comparative institutional conditions that shape ethnic political dominance in both countries. Although existing scholarship has examined ethnic voting, political exclusion, electoral violence, federalism, and democratic representation, there remains a need for a focused comparative examination of how ethnic majority politics affects democratic inclusion and national security across different institutional settings. The two countries offer an opportunity to examine whether federal arrangements, devolution, electoral coalitions, and mechanisms of political accommodation effectively prevent the concentration of state power within dominant ethnic constituencies.

The problem, therefore, lies in the contradiction between the democratic promise of equal political citizenship and the practical realities of ethnic-based competition for state power. While majority rule is necessary for representative democracy, its application becomes problematic when electoral or demographic dominance is used to justify political exclusion, institutional inequality, or the marginalisation of minority communities. The study addresses this problem by investigating the relationship between ethnic majority rule, democratic governance, political representation, and national security in Nigeria and Kenya. It also examines the institutional and political conditions under which ethnic competition can be managed without undermining democratic legitimacy, national cohesion, and internal security.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine ethnic majority rule and its threats to democracy and national security in Nigeria and Kenya.

The specific objectives are:

1. Examine the historical and contemporary foundations of ethnic majority politics and electoral competition in Nigeria and Kenya.
2. Investigate how ethnic majority dominance influences political representation, minority participation, and

democratic governance in both countries.
3. Analyse the relationship between ethnic political exclusion, electoral competition, and threats to national security in Nigeria and Kenya.
4. Compare the effectiveness of institutional and constitutional mechanisms for managing ethnic diversity and promoting inclusive democratic governance in the two countries.
5. Identify policy measures for strengthening democratic inclusion, national integration, and security in multi-ethnic societies.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:
1. What are the historical and contemporary foundations of ethnic majority politics and electoral competition in Nigeria and Kenya?
2. How does ethnic majority dominance influence political representation, minority participation, and democratic governance in the two countries?
3. In what ways does ethnic political exclusion contribute to electoral instability and national security challenges in Nigeria and Kenya?
4. How effective are the institutional and constitutional mechanisms adopted by Nigeria and Kenya in managing ethnic diversity and promoting inclusive democratic governance?
5. What policy measures can strengthen democratic inclusion, national integration, and national security in both countries?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines the relationship between ethnic political dominance, democratic governance, and national security within the broader context of multi-ethnic African societies. Its contribution extends beyond the description of ethnic political competition to an examination of the institutional arrangements and political practices through which ethnic identity may influence access to public authority, democratic participation, and national stability.

Theoretical significance: The study contributes to scholarship on ethnic politics, democratic governance, political representation, and national security. By examining the distinction between legitimate democratic majority rule and exclusionary ethnic majority dominance, it provides a conceptual basis for understanding how numerical or coalition-based political advantages can become sources of institutional inequality. It also contributes to debates about the capacity of democratic institutions to accommodate competing ethnic interests without compromising equal citizenship and constitutional accountability.

Empirical significance: The comparative examination of Nigeria and Kenya provides an opportunity to understand how ethnic political competition operates under different constitutional and institutional arrangements. Nigeria's federal character principle and federal structure offer one framework for managing ethnic diversity, while Kenya's devolved constitutional system and electoral coalition politics provide a different institutional experience. The study will identify common patterns, important differences, and the conditions under which political inclusion can reduce the risks associated with ethnic competition.

Policy significance: The findings will be relevant to policymakers, electoral management bodies, constitutional reform advocates, legislators, political parties, and institutions responsible for national security. By identifying the democratic and security implications of exclusionary ethnic politics, the study may inform policies aimed at strengthening equal citizenship, improving political representation, promoting fair public appointments, and ensuring that government institutions operate without ethnic discrimination. It will also clarify the importance of credible electoral processes and effective conflict-management mechanisms.

Academic significance: The study will be useful to researchers and students in political science, international relations, public administration, peace and conflict studies, African studies, and security studies. It will provide a comparative analytical foundation for further research into the relationship between ethnic identity, political competition, democratic consolidation, and national security. It may also encourage further investigation into the institutional conditions that enable multi-ethnic societies to manage political differences through democratic rather than coercive processes.

1.6 **Scope of the Study**

The study is geographically limited to Nigeria and Kenya. These countries are selected because of their considerable ethnic diversity, histories of ethnic political mobilisation, competitive presidential politics, and institutional efforts to manage political and regional differences. Their different constitutional arrangements also provide a useful basis for comparative analysis.

Thematically, the study focuses on five interconnected areas: ethnic majority politics, electoral competition, political representation, democratic governance, and national security. It examines how ethnic identity influences political mobilisation, party and coalition formation, access to public institutions, minority participation, and perceptions of political exclusion. It also considers the implications of these developments for electoral stability, communal relations, national cohesion, and internal security.

Historically, the analysis considers the colonial and post-independence foundations of ethnic political

competition, while giving particular attention to the contemporary democratic periods of both countries. In Nigeria, the discussion emphasises the Fourth Republic, which began in 1999, and relevant developments in federalism, political representation, and electoral competition. In Kenya, it considers the transition to multiparty politics, the post-2007 electoral and constitutional reform experience, and subsequent developments under the 2010 Constitution, including the 2022 general elections.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on secondary documentary sources, including peer-reviewed academic publications, constitutional documents, electoral reports, government publications, and relevant materials from credible national and international institutions. It does not attempt to establish that ethnic majority rule is the sole cause of democratic or security challenges. Rather, it examines the political and institutional conditions under which ethnic dominance and exclusion may undermine democratic governance and national security.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE, CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptual Clarification of Ethnic Majority Rule

The relationship between ethnicity and political power remains a significant subject in the study of democracy, political representation, and national security, particularly in societies characterised by substantial cultural and ethnic diversity. In such societies, democratic competition frequently involves the negotiation of competing group interests, demands for political recognition, and struggles over access to state institutions. Although democratic systems are founded on the principle that political authority derives from the consent of the governed, the practical exercise of majority rule may become problematic when political competition is organised around ethnic identity and electoral victories are interpreted as exclusive mandates for particular communities. Consequently, understanding ethnic majority rule requires distinguishing between the legitimate democratic authority of an elected majority and the institutional or political domination of one ethnic constituency over others.

Ethnicity generally refers to a socially constructed sense of collective identity based on perceived common ancestry, historical experience, language, culture, traditions, and other markers of group belonging. It provides individuals with a framework for understanding their relationship with particular communities and the wider political environment. However, ethnic identities are neither completely fixed nor politically uniform. Their significance may increase or decrease depending on institutional arrangements, historical circumstances, political mobilisation, and competition for economic and political resources. Chandra's conceptual examination of ethnicity emphasises the importance of socially recognised attributes in determining group membership and the political relevance of ethnic categories. Similarly, Eifert, Miguel, and Posner demonstrate empirically that ethnic identification in African countries becomes more pronounced as competitive presidential elections approach, suggesting that political circumstances influence the salience of ethnic identity (494–510).

This understanding challenges the assumption that ethnicity necessarily produces political division or violent conflict. Ethnic affiliation can provide legitimate foundations for cultural expression, political participation, social solidarity, and demands for equitable representation. It becomes politically contentious when political elites transform ethnic identity into an instrument for securing electoral advantages, controlling public institutions, or determining access to state resources. Therefore, the political consequences of ethnicity depend significantly on how institutions accommodate group differences and how political actors employ ethnic identification in the struggle for authority.

Majority rule, in its conventional democratic meaning, refers to the principle through which decisions are made according to the preferences of the greater number of participants, particularly through competitive elections and representative institutions. It is an important component of democratic governance because it provides a legitimate procedure for determining political leadership and resolving disagreements. Nevertheless, majority rule does not mean that an electoral majority possesses unlimited authority over the political rights and interests of other citizens. Democratic legitimacy also requires constitutional limitations, the protection of minority rights, equal citizenship, judicial independence, and accountability in the exercise of public power.

Lijphart challenges the tendency to equate democracy exclusively with majoritarian government. His analysis of divided societies establishes that democratic systems can operate through different institutional arrangements, including consensus-orientated and power-sharing mechanisms. In societies characterised by deep cultural, religious, linguistic, or ethnic divisions, unrestricted majoritarian competition may create incentives for political exclusion and intensify divisions between competing communities. Consequently, democratic stability may require institutions that distribute political influence more broadly than electoral numerical strength alone would permit (Lijphart, “Majority Rule” 113–26).

Against this background, ethnic majority rule in this study refers to a political condition in which a numerically dominant ethnic community, or a politically influential coalition organised around ethnic interests, exercises disproportionate control over state institutions, political leadership, public appointments, or the distribution of national resources in ways that undermine equitable participation by other communities. It is important to distinguish this phenomenon from the ordinary election of political leaders who belong to a numerically large ethnic

group. The identity of an elected official, considered independently, does not establish ethnic domination. Rather, the relevant issue is whether political authority is exercised through exclusionary practices that systematically privilege one ethnic constituency while restricting the political opportunities and rights of others.

Kaufmann and Haklai's examination of dominant ethnicity provides a useful foundation for understanding this distinction. They explain how democratic modernisation and popular sovereignty can facilitate the emergence of dominant ethnic majorities, while also demonstrating that the political consequences of majority dominance depend on how the dominant group relates to minorities and the wider national community (743–67). Brown similarly identifies the possibility of both inclusive and exclusionary forms of ethnic majority politics. Whereas an ethnic majority may support national integration through shared civic institutions, its political consciousness can also develop into exclusionary nationalism when minorities are portrayed as threats to the status or privileges of the dominant community (768–88).

The distinction between democratic majority rule and ethnic majority domination can therefore be understood through five interconnected characteristics.

First, political representation concerns whether citizens and communities have meaningful opportunities to participate in government institutions. Under democratic majority rule, electoral outcomes determine leadership while constitutional arrangements preserve the political rights of those who do not support the winning party. Under exclusionary ethnic dominance, political appointments, leadership positions, and institutional influence may become concentrated within a dominant ethnic network.

Second, equal citizenship requires that individuals enjoy the same constitutional rights regardless of their ethnic affiliations. Ethnic majority domination becomes problematic when access to political participation, public opportunities, or administrative recognition depends on ethnic belonging, perceived indigeneity, or connections to politically dominant communities.

Third, resource distribution concerns the extent to which public resources are allocated according to transparent legal and developmental considerations rather than ethnic preference. When government contracts, infrastructure, employment opportunities, and public investment are perceived to favour particular communities, other groups may interpret such practices as evidence of institutional marginalization.

Fourth, institutional accountability requires public institutions to operate according to constitutional procedures and impartial administrative standards. Ethnic domination may weaken accountability when political loyalty and communal affiliation become more influential than professional competence, legal responsibility, and public interest.

Fifth, minority protection involves the recognition that democratic authority must remain subject to constitutional limitations. Electoral victories cannot legitimately eliminate the rights of political minorities or deny them access to institutions through which their interests can be represented.

These characteristics establish that ethnic majority rule is not simply a question of demographic superiority. It is a question of how numerical strength, electoral alliances, and political influence are translated into the exercise of public authority. The distinction is particularly relevant to Nigeria and Kenya, where ethnic diversity intersects with presidential elections, party coalitions, constitutional arrangements, and debates about equitable political representation.

In Nigeria, the federal character principle represents an institutional attempt to prevent the concentration of public appointments and governmental opportunities within a limited number of communities or regions. Nevertheless, the politics of indigeneity and competing claims to citizenship reveal continuing difficulties in translating formal inclusion into substantive equality. Kendhammer's analysis of Nigerian federalism demonstrates how institutional arrangements intended to accommodate ethnic diversity may reproduce competing distinctions between citizenship, belonging, and political entitlement (396–417).

In Kenya, ethnic majority politics is closely associated with electoral coalition formation and competition for presidential authority. Political parties and presidential candidates frequently seek alliances across ethnic constituencies to increase their electoral support. However, the formation of broad coalitions does not automatically guarantee equitable representation or eliminate exclusionary political practices. Horowitz's research on campaign strategies in Kenya demonstrates that electoral competition can encourage both ethnic mobilisation and the strategic pursuit of support beyond established ethnic strongholds. This indicates that ethnic political competition is influenced by electoral incentives rather than determined exclusively by fixed communal loyalties (Horowitz 324–56).

Accordingly, this study approaches ethnic majority rule as an institutional and political phenomenon rather than an inevitable consequence of ethnic diversity. Its central concern is the conversion of electoral or demographic advantage into disproportionate political authority, particularly where such authority weakens equal citizenship, minority representation, democratic **accountability, and national cohesion.**

2.2 Ethnic Politics, Democracy, and National Security

The relationship between ethnic politics, democracy, and national security is complex because ethnic identity can simultaneously provide a foundation for political participation and become a source of competition over state power. In multi-ethnic societies, democratic institutions must accommodate diverse political interests while maintaining the constitutional principle that public

authority belongs to the entire citizenry. Where political actors mobilise ethnic identities to secure electoral support, the resulting competition may strengthen democratic participation if it encourages broader representation. Conversely, it may undermine democratic stability when political power becomes associated with ethnic entitlement, exclusion, and unequal access to public institutions.

Ethnic Politics and Democratic Governance

Ethnic politics refers to the organisation, mobilisation, and expression of political interests through ethnic identities and group affiliations. It includes the use of ethnic identification in electoral campaigns, party formation, political alliances, legislative bargaining, public appointments, and demands for government recognition. Ethnic politics does not necessarily involve hostility between communities. In many circumstances, it provides a mechanism through which historically marginalised groups articulate legitimate concerns and seek representation within national institutions.

However, ethnic politics becomes problematic when political competition encourages citizens to view state authority as the property of particular communities rather than as a constitutional responsibility exercised on behalf of the entire population. In such circumstances, elections may become struggles over which ethnic constituency will control the presidency, legislature, executive appointments, and the distribution of public resources.

Eifert, Miguel, and Posner provide important empirical evidence concerning this relationship. Their study, based on more than 35,000 respondents from twenty-two public opinion surveys across ten African countries, finds that ethnic identification becomes stronger as competitive presidential elections approach. Their findings suggest that political competition can increase the salience of ethnic identity because political actors and citizens recognise its potential importance in securing political influence (494–510). This finding is particularly relevant to Nigeria and Kenya, where electoral competition frequently involves negotiations among ethnic constituencies.

Nevertheless, ethnic voting should not be understood as an automatic or universal pattern. Political behaviour is also influenced by economic interests, ideological preferences, party performance, leadership credibility, local political relationships, and perceptions of government accountability. Horowitz's research on Kenya demonstrates that political campaigns in ethnically diverse societies may involve strategic efforts to attract voters beyond a candidate's traditional ethnic constituency. This complicates explanations that treat elections merely as competitions between fixed ethnic voting blocs (324–56).

Gadjanova's examination of ethnic wedge issues further explains how political actors employ narratives of discrimination, victimisation, and exclusion to mobilise support across ethnic constituencies. Such strategies can weaken intergroup confidence when political competitors frame electoral disagreements as evidence of collective ethnic persecution. Her analysis of presidential campaigns in Kenya and Zambia illustrates how ethnic appeals may intensify political grievances and reduce opportunities for compromise (484–507).

The democratic consequences of ethnic politics therefore depend on the relationship between political mobilisation and institutional safeguards. Where electoral institutions are credible, political parties are inclusive, and constitutional protections are respected, ethnic interests can be accommodated through peaceful democratic competition. However, where political authority is concentrated within dominant ethnic networks, democratic competition may become increasingly exclusionary.

Ethnic Politics and Political Representation

Political representation is central to democratic governance because it provides citizens with opportunities to influence public decisions through elected officials and constitutional institutions. In multi-ethnic societies, the question of representation extends beyond the numerical distribution of legislative seats. It also concerns whether different communities can participate meaningfully in executive decision-making, public administration, policy formulation, and the allocation of national resources.

The concentration of political influence within dominant ethnic constituencies may create perceptions of political inequality, especially when communities believe that their participation has little influence on national decisions. Such perceptions can weaken confidence in democratic institutions and encourage political actors to pursue communal rather than national political strategies.

Nigeria's federal character principle illustrates the importance of institutional mechanisms designed to promote equitable representation. However, Kendhammer's analysis shows that formal institutional arrangements do not automatically resolve the tensions associated with ethnic identity, citizenship, and political belonging. The distinction between indigene and non-indigene status can complicate equal participation, particularly where access to certain opportunities is associated with claims of ancestral belonging (396–417).

Kenya's constitutional devolution arrangements provide another institutional approach to political inclusion. The distribution of governmental responsibilities between national and county institutions creates additional opportunities for regional participation and local representation. Nevertheless, decentralization does not automatically eliminate ethnic competition, particularly where political influence at the national level remains closely connected to presidential elections and coalition bargaining.

The important analytical issue is therefore not whether ethnic communities should have political representation, but whether representation is structured in ways that promote equal citizenship, institutional accountability, and meaningful participation. Political

inclusion should not be reduced to the distribution of government positions among ethnic elites; it should also involve the protection of individual rights, fair access to public institutions, and opportunities for citizens to participate independently of ethnic affiliation.

Ethnic Politics and Resource Distribution

The distribution of public resources is another important dimension of the relationship between ethnicity and democratic governance. Government decisions concerning infrastructure, education, employment, public investment, public contracts, and development programmes influence how citizens assess the fairness and legitimacy of political institutions.

When public resources are distributed according to transparent developmental criteria, they can strengthen national integration by demonstrating that government institutions serve the broader public interest. Conversely, when political elites employ state resources to reward ethnic constituencies, electoral supporters, or politically influential communities, perceptions of discrimination and unequal citizenship may increase.

The problem is particularly relevant in resource-dependent and economically unequal societies, where control of the state provides access to significant economic opportunities. Political competition may consequently become a struggle not only over leadership but also over the distribution of public benefits.

The relationship between ethnic diversity and public goods provision has been examined by Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly. Their research identifies a relationship between ethnic fragmentation and the provision of certain local public goods in American cities, demonstrating how social divisions can interact with collective decision-making and public expenditure (1243–84). Although their empirical context is not Nigeria or Kenya, their findings offer a useful theoretical basis for considering how group divisions may influence public-resource allocation.

However, ethnic differences alone do not establish discriminatory resource distribution. Such a conclusion requires evidence of unequal treatment, institutional bias, or systematic departures from established allocation procedures. This study therefore treats perceived and actual resource exclusion as related but analytically distinct issues.

Ethnic Politics and National Security

National security encompasses the protection of the state, its institutions, territorial integrity, population, and constitutional order against threats that undermine stability and public safety. In contemporary democratic societies, security cannot be understood exclusively through military capabilities or the suppression of violence. It also involves institutional legitimacy, social cohesion, political accountability, and citizens' confidence that the state protects their rights without discrimination.

Ethnic majority domination may threaten national security when exclusionary political practices intensify grievances, weaken trust in government, and encourage political actors to mobilise communities around perceptions of collective victimisation. The relationship may become particularly dangerous when electoral competition is accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric, political intimidation, communal mobilisation, or the manipulation of historical grievances.

In Nigeria, the interaction between ethnic, regional, and religious identities has contributed to several forms of political and communal tension. Nevertheless, the country's security challenges cannot be explained through ethnicity alone. Insurgency, communal violence, separatist agitation, resource conflicts, economic deprivation, and institutional weaknesses have different historical and political foundations. Ethnic identity may intersect with these factors, but it should not be treated as a universal explanation for every security problem.

Kenya's experience similarly demonstrates the connection between contested political competition and national stability. The violence following the disputed 2007 presidential election illustrated how electoral disagreements, historical grievances, political mobilisation, and ethnic tensions could interact to produce serious security consequences. However, the episode should be understood within its broader political and institutional context rather than attributed exclusively to ethnic identity.

Gadjanova's findings are particularly relevant because they explain how electoral rhetoric based on discrimination and victimisation can intensify existing grievances and restrict opportunities for political compromise (484–507). Horowitz also demonstrates that the strategic organisation of ethnic campaign mobilisation can shape the intensity and direction of electoral competition in Kenya (324–56).

The relationship between democratic governance and national security is therefore reciprocal. Exclusionary political practices may undermine security by weakening institutional legitimacy and increasing communal tensions. At the same time, persistent insecurity can weaken democratic institutions by restricting political participation, displacing communities, undermining electoral administration, and increasing reliance on coercive state responses.

For Nigeria and Kenya, the central challenge is to establish political institutions capable of accommodating ethnic diversity without allowing ethnic affiliation to determine the distribution of constitutional rights, political opportunities, or security protection. Democratic stability requires more than the peaceful conduct of elections; it requires public institutions that are perceived as legitimate, inclusive, and accountable to all citizens.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Ethnic Majority Rule

The examination of ethnic majority rule requires

theoretical perspectives capable of explaining why ethnic identities become politically significant, how electoral competition influences relationships among ethnic communities, and why certain institutional arrangements produce democratic inclusion while others encourage political exclusion. Several theoretical approaches provide useful explanations for these processes. The most relevant include majoritarian democracy, ethnic competition theory, consociational democracy theory, and institutional approaches to ethnic politics.

2.3.1 Majoritarian Democracy Theory

Majoritarian democracy is founded on the principle that political authority should reflect the preferences of the majority of citizens, particularly as expressed through competitive elections. Under this arrangement, the political party or candidate that secures the required electoral support assumes governmental responsibility, while opposition parties retain constitutional rights to criticise the government, organise politically, and compete in subsequent elections.

The central assumption is that electoral competition provides a legitimate mechanism for resolving political disagreements and determining who governs. In principle, the possibility of electoral replacement encourages political accountability and prevents the permanent concentration of governmental authority in particular individuals or groups.

However, majoritarian democracy becomes problematic in deeply divided societies when political competition consistently follows ethnic divisions. Where ethnic affiliation strongly influences voting patterns, the same constituency may repeatedly determine electoral outcomes, while other communities experience limited opportunities to influence national leadership. In such circumstances, the formal equality of votes may coexist with substantive inequalities in political representation and access to state authority.

Lijphart's critique of unrestricted majoritarianism is relevant to this concern. He argues that the identification of democracy exclusively with majority rule overlooks alternative democratic arrangements that may be more appropriate for deeply divided societies. In particular, proportional representation, executive power-sharing, minority protections, and segmental autonomy can provide institutional safeguards against permanent political exclusion (Lijphart, “Majority Rule” 113–26).

This theoretical perspective is useful for examining Nigeria and Kenya because both countries operate competitive presidential systems in which electoral victories confer substantial political authority. The analytical concern is whether electoral competition produces governments that represent the broader citizenry or whether political authority becomes disproportionately concentrated within dominant ethnic constituencies.

2.3.2 Ethnic Competition Theory

Ethnic competition theory explains how competition for political power and economic resources can increase the political significance of ethnic identity. Its central proposition is that individuals and political groups may emphasise ethnic affiliation when it becomes an effective means of securing representation, mobilising electoral support, accessing state resources, or protecting collective interests.

This perspective is particularly associated with the political economy of ethnic mobilisation and the work of scholars such as Robert Bates, Donald Horowitz, Alvin Rabushka, and Kenneth Shepsle. Their approaches differ in emphasis, but they collectively demonstrate how ethnic divisions can become politically consequential when competing communities perceive state power as an important source of material and political advantage.

Bates's analysis of ethnic competition in contemporary African politics provides an important foundation for understanding the instrumental dimensions of ethnicity. Political actors may mobilise communal identities because political affiliation can influence access to government opportunities and the distribution of public resources. Under these conditions, ethnic solidarity becomes politically valuable, particularly where institutions are perceived as distributing benefits through communal or regional connections (Bates 152–71).

Eifert, Miguel, and Posner provide empirical support for this argument through their investigation of political competition and ethnic identification in Africa. Their findings indicate that competitive presidential elections strengthen the salience of ethnic identity, demonstrating that ethnic identification is responsive to political circumstances rather than being exclusively determined by inherited cultural attachments (494–510).

Horowitz's work further explains the relationship between ethnic competition and political instability. In societies where ethnic identities are politically salient, competition among groups may generate fears that electoral defeat will result in exclusion from state power. Such perceptions can encourage political mobilisation around communal interests and intensify disagreements over political representation, resource distribution, and institutional control.

Nevertheless, ethnic competition does not necessarily produce hostility or conflict. Political competition can also encourage interethnic alliances, coalition formation, and negotiation when electoral success depends on securing support beyond a candidate's immediate ethnic constituency. Horowitz's empirical examination of Kenya demonstrates this important qualification by showing that electoral campaigns in highly diverse societies may involve strategic efforts to attract swing voters outside established ethnic strongholds (324–56).

The theory is therefore useful because it explains both the mobilising and potentially divisive consequences

of ethnic political competition. In Nigeria, competition over federal appointments, national leadership, and public-resource allocation provides relevant institutional contexts. In Kenya, presidential coalitions and negotiations among influential ethnic constituencies provide important examples of how electoral incentives shape ethnic political mobilisation.

For this study, ethnic competition theory provides an explanation of how the struggle for state power can transform ethnic identity into a political instrument. It also helps identify the circumstances under which competition becomes exclusionary, particularly when political actors convince their supporters that electoral defeat represents the loss of collective political influence or access to national resources.

2.3.3 Consociational Democracy Theory

Consociational democracy theory offers an alternative to unrestricted majoritarian government in societies characterised by deep social, cultural, religious, or ethnic divisions. Developed principally through the work of Arend Lijphart, the theory argues that democratic stability in plural societies may require institutional arrangements that encourage cooperation among the major segments of society.

The central argument is that conventional majoritarian competition may be insufficient to sustain democratic stability where social divisions are deeply entrenched. If political parties and voting patterns consistently reflect communal divisions, an electoral majority may repeatedly control government while minority communities remain excluded from important decisions. Consociational democracy seeks to address this problem through negotiated power-sharing and institutional guarantees.

Lijphart identifies four principal characteristics of consociational democracy:

1. Grand coalition: Political leaders representing the principal segments of society participate in broad-based governing arrangements rather than allowing one segment to monopolise executive authority.

2. Segmental autonomy: Different communities enjoy a degree of autonomy over matters considered particularly important to their cultural, social, or institutional interests.

3. Proportionality: Political representation, public appointments, and the distribution of certain public resources reflect principles of proportional inclusion rather than unrestricted majority preference.

4. Mutual veto: Each major segment possesses safeguards against decisions that threaten its fundamental interests, thereby reducing the possibility of permanent domination by another group.

These principles are intended to encourage elite cooperation, institutional accommodation, and the peaceful management of competing communal interests. Lijphart argues that such arrangements can contribute to democratic stability by reducing the destabilising consequences of social fragmentation (Lijphart, “Definitions” 679–84).

Andeweg's review of consociational democracy further explains that the theory developed from an attempt to understand how divided societies could maintain democratic stability through cooperation among political elites representing different social segments. He identifies elite accommodation as an important mechanism for managing the destabilising effects of social segmentation (509–36).

However, consociational democracy has also attracted important criticism. Horowitz argues that power-sharing arrangements may create practical difficulties, including the possibility that political institutions become organised around fixed ethnic categories. Such arrangements may encourage political elites to present themselves as permanent representatives of particular communities, thereby reinforcing the ethnic divisions they are intended to manage. He also identifies the possibility of institutional immobilism, where minority veto arrangements make important decisions difficult to achieve (Horowitz, “Ethnic Power Sharing” 5–20).

Juon and Bochsler similarly demonstrate that power-sharing arrangements have two potentially conflicting effects. While they may provide guarantees of inclusion and encourage political cooperation, rigid institutional arrangements can also limit political competition and individual rights (their study distinguishes between more flexible and more restrictive forms of power-sharing).

For Nigeria, consociational principles provide a useful analytical perspective for examining federal character, inclusive appointments, regional representation, and the accommodation of different communities within national institutions. For Kenya, the theory helps explain the significance of coalition politics, constitutional devolution, and institutional arrangements intended to distribute political authority across different levels of government.

Nevertheless, the study does not assume that Nigeria and Kenya are fully consociational democracies. Rather, it uses the theory as an analytical framework for assessing the extent to which their institutional arrangements promote inclusive participation and protect communities against exclusionary political dominance.

2.3.4 Institutional Theory and the Management of Ethnic Diversity

Institutional theory provides an additional perspective by emphasising the influence of political rules, constitutional arrangements, electoral systems, and administrative structures on political behaviour. Institutions establish the procedures through which citizens compete for political authority, negotiate interests, resolve disagreements, and participate in public decision-making.

In multi-ethnic societies, institutional arrangements can either moderate or intensify ethnic competition. Electoral systems that encourage intergroup cooperation

may create incentives for political parties to build broad-based alliances. Conversely, institutional arrangements that reward narrow communal mobilisation may strengthen ethnic divisions and encourage political actors to prioritise group interests over wider national considerations.

Posner's examination of regime change and ethnic cleavages in Africa demonstrates that institutional changes can influence the scale and character of ethnic identities mobilised in political competition. His analysis of Zambia and Kenya illustrates how the transition from one-party to multiparty politics altered the incentives through which political actors mobilised local and broader ethnic identities (1497–1510).

This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria's federal character principle and Kenya's devolved governance system. Both arrangements seek to address the political challenges associated with diversity, although they operate through different institutional mechanisms.

In Nigeria, federalism is intended to accommodate regional and ethnic diversity through the distribution of constitutional responsibilities between federal and state governments. The federal character principle also seeks to promote equitable representation in public institutions. However, the distinction between formal institutional inclusion and actual political equality remains important.

In Kenya, devolution provides constitutional opportunities for regional participation and the distribution of governmental responsibilities between national and county institutions. Nevertheless, the existence of devolved structures does not automatically eliminate ethnic competition, particularly where national presidential elections remain highly consequential.

Institutional theory therefore reinforces the argument that ethnic political outcomes cannot be explained exclusively through demographic differences or cultural identities. They must also be examined in relation to the political rules and organisational arrangements that structure competition for public authority.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that ethnic majority rule is shaped by the interaction of electoral incentives, ethnic mobilisation, institutional design, and the distribution of political authority. While majoritarian democracy explains the legitimacy of electoral decision-making, ethnic competition theory explains why communal identities may become increasingly important in political contests. Consociational democracy and institutional theory, in turn, provide explanations of how political systems can accommodate diversity and reduce the risks associated with exclusionary majority dominance.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Consociational Democracy Theory and Ethnic Competition Theory

This study adopts consociational democracy theory and ethnic competition theory as its principal theoretical frameworks. The combination is appropriate because the two theories explain different but interconnected dimensions of ethnic majority rule. Consociational democracy theory provides an institutional explanation of how political systems can accommodate competing ethnic interests through inclusive representation, negotiated power-sharing, and minority protections. Ethnic competition theory explains how competition for political authority, economic opportunities, and access to state resources can encourage political actors to mobilise ethnic identities and intensify communal divisions.

The integration of these theories provides a framework for examining both the causes and institutional consequences of ethnic majority dominance. While ethnic competition theory explains why ethnic mobilisation becomes politically advantageous, consociational democracy theory identifies institutional arrangements through which the exclusionary consequences of such mobilisation may be moderated.

2.4.1 Consociational Democracy Theory

Consociational democracy theory is principally associated with the work of Arend Lijphart, whose scholarship examines the conditions under which democratic governance can remain stable in societies characterised by deep social divisions. The theory emerged from the observation that conventional majoritarian institutions may be inadequate in societies where political identities are strongly associated with religious, linguistic, cultural, or ethnic communities.

Lijphart argues that democratic stability in divided societies requires political arrangements that encourage cooperation among the principal segments of society. Rather than allowing electoral majorities to exercise unrestricted political authority, consociational democracy emphasises institutional mechanisms that provide different communities with opportunities to participate in governance and protect their fundamental interests.

The theory rests on four central institutional principles: grand coalition, proportionality, segmental autonomy, and mutual veto. These mechanisms are intended to reduce the possibility of permanent political exclusion and encourage cooperation among competing communities. Lijphart's subsequent clarification of the theory emphasises that these four elements constitute the defining characteristics of consociational democracy and distinguish it from broader forms of consensus democracy (Lijphart, “Definitions” 425–31).

Andeweg's review further establishes that consociational democracy developed as an explanation of how elite cooperation could neutralise the destabilising consequences of social segmentation. The theory recognises that political stability in deeply divided societies may depend on the willingness of influential leaders to negotiate, compromise, and accommodate competing communal interests (509–36).

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its explanation of why democratic legitimacy cannot be

measured exclusively through electoral victory. Where an ethnic constituency consistently secures electoral control and uses that advantage to restrict the participation of other communities, the formal existence of elections may coexist with substantive democratic exclusion. Consociational principles provide an alternative institutional approach by emphasising proportional inclusion, political negotiation, and safeguards against the permanent marginalisation of minority communities.

In Nigeria, the theory provides a useful framework for examining the federal character principle, inclusive political appointments, regional representation, and constitutional arrangements intended to accommodate the country's ethnic diversity. The federal character principle reflects an institutional recognition that public institutions should not become the exclusive preserve of particular sections of the federation. However, the effectiveness of such arrangements depends on their implementation, transparency, and ability to promote substantive equality rather than merely distribute positions among political elites.

In Kenya, the theory is relevant to the examination of coalition formation, inclusive executive arrangements, political negotiations, and constitutional devolution. The formation of broad electoral coalitions demonstrates the importance of interethnic bargaining in presidential competition. However, coalition arrangements must be evaluated according to whether they promote meaningful participation and equitable governance or merely redistribute political advantages among influential ethnic elites.

The theory also has limitations that are important to this study. Horowitz identifies difficulties associated with adopting and maintaining power-sharing institutions, particularly where dominant groups are reluctant to surrender political advantages or where minority veto arrangements generate institutional deadlock (5–20). Juon and Bochsler further demonstrate that power-sharing may promote political inclusion while simultaneously restricting democratic competition and individual political rights when institutional arrangements become excessively rigid (526–42).

Consequently, this study does not assume that consociational democracy automatically eliminates ethnic tensions. Rather, it uses the theory to assess whether institutional arrangements in Nigeria and Kenya provide meaningful safeguards against exclusionary political dominance and whether power-sharing mechanisms strengthen democratic accountability and national cohesion.

2.4.2 Ethnic Competition Theory

Ethnic Competition Theory provides the second major theoretical foundation of this study. Its intellectual foundations can be traced to the scholarship of Robert Bates, Donald Horowitz, Alvin Rabushka, and Kenneth Shepsle, among others, who examined how ethnic identities interact with political competition, economic interests, and struggles over state authority.

The theory explains that ethnic identities may become politically prominent when individuals and communities perceive them as useful instruments for securing political representation, accessing economic opportunities, influencing government decisions, and protecting collective interests. Political actors may therefore mobilise ethnic affiliations to construct electoral constituencies, negotiate alliances, and strengthen their claims to governmental authority.

Bates's work on ethnic competition and modernisation in contemporary Africa provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between political competition and communal interests. His analysis demonstrates that ethnic mobilisation can be understood in relation to competition over political influence and access to economic opportunities rather than simply as an expression of cultural differences (457–84).

Eifert, Miguel, and Posner provide further empirical support for this argument. Their study of political competition and ethnic identification across ten African countries finds that competitive presidential elections increase the salience of ethnic identity. Their findings indicate that political competition can encourage individuals to emphasise ethnic affiliation because it becomes relevant to the struggle for political power and representation (494–510).

The theory is particularly important because it explains the strategic behaviour of political elites. In competitive electoral environments, politicians may emphasise shared ethnic identities to strengthen political loyalty, mobilise voters, and establish the impression that their electoral success is necessary for the protection of communal interests. Such strategies can create a political environment in which elections are interpreted as contests between ethnic constituencies rather than competitions between alternative political programmes.

Horowitz's research on ethnic campaign strategies in Kenya provides an important qualification to this argument. He demonstrates that electoral competition does not always encourage parties to concentrate exclusively on their established ethnic constituencies. In highly diverse societies, political candidates may also seek support from voters outside their traditional ethnic strongholds. Consequently, ethnic competition can generate incentives for either communal mobilisation or cross-ethnic political cooperation, depending on electoral structures and the strategies adopted by political actors (324–56).

Gadjanova's study similarly demonstrates how political actors employ ethnic narratives of discrimination, victimisation, and exclusion to attract support and weaken opposing political coalitions. Such strategies can intensify communal grievances and undermine the possibility of political compromise, particularly when ethnic differences

become central to electoral campaigns (484–507).

The relevance of ethnic competition theory to Nigeria is reflected in political debates surrounding federal appointments, regional representation, resource distribution, and access to national leadership. Where communities perceive that political influence determines access to public opportunities, ethnic affiliation may become an important instrument for mobilising support and negotiating political advantages.

In Kenya, the theory provides an explanation of the relationship between ethnic coalition formation, presidential competition, and political bargaining. The search for electoral support across different ethnic constituencies can encourage coalition-building, but it can also produce exclusion when political negotiations concentrate power within a limited number of influential communities.

An important limitation of ethnic competition theory is that it may overemphasise material interests and strategic political calculations while underestimating the influence of historical experiences, cultural attachments, institutional arrangements, and individual political preferences. Ethnic mobilisation does not necessarily produce conflict, nor does competition among ethnic communities inevitably result in democratic instability. Its consequences depend on the nature of political institutions, the conduct of political elites, and the availability of legitimate mechanisms for managing competing interests.

For this study, ethnic competition theory explains how the pursuit of electoral advantage and access to state resources may encourage exclusionary political mobilisation. It also provides a basis for examining how such practices can weaken political trust, intensify communal grievances, and create conditions that undermine democratic governance and national security.

2.4.3 Integration and Application of the Theoretical Framework

The adoption of both theories provides a more comprehensive explanation of ethnic majority rule than reliance on either perspective independently. Ethnic competition theory explains the political incentives that encourage ethnic mobilisation, while consociational democracy theory explains the institutional mechanisms through which the exclusionary consequences of ethnic competition may be addressed.

The relationship between the theories can be understood through the following analytical sequence in figure 1.

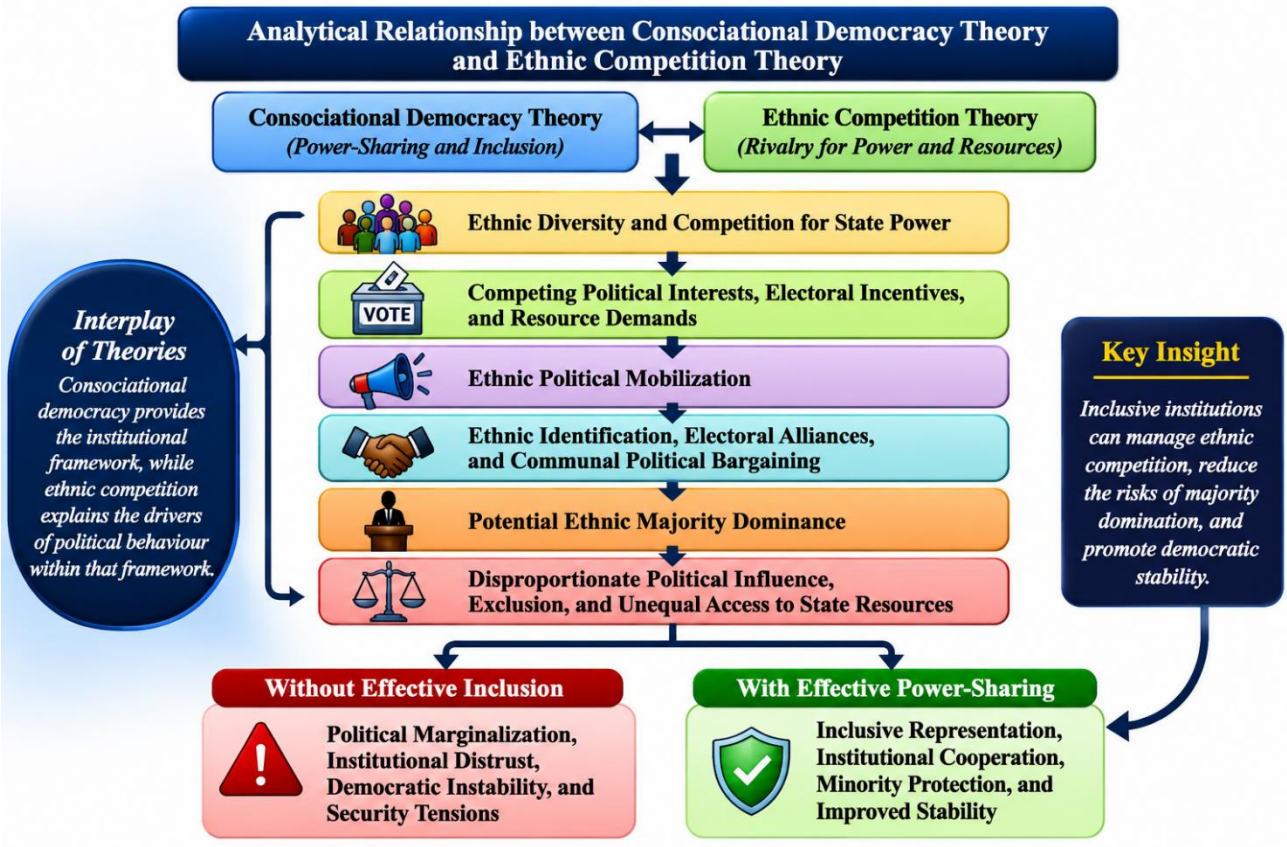


Figure 1: Analytical Relationship between Consociational Democracy Theory and Ethnic Competition Theory
Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis based on Ethnic Competition Theory and Consociational Democracy Theory.

The framework is applied to Nigeria and Kenya through four interconnected analytical dimensions.

First, ethnic mobilisation and electoral competition: Ethnic competition theory is used to examine how political elites employ ethnic identities in electoral campaigns, party organisation, coalition formation, and the pursuit of governmental authority. The analysis considers the extent to which ethnic affiliation influences political alliances and the strategies adopted by competing political actors.

Second, political representation and institutional inclusion: Consociational democracy theory provides the basis for evaluating whether constitutional and institutional arrangements promote equitable political participation. The analysis considers Nigeria's federal character principle and federal structure alongside Kenya's devolved governance system and mechanisms for political accommodation.

Third, resource distribution and minority protection: The combined framework examines whether access to public resources, government appointments, and institutional opportunities reflects transparent and inclusive procedures or becomes disproportionately influenced by ethnic and political affiliations. It also considers the extent to which minority communities enjoy meaningful constitutional protection.

Fourth, democratic stability and national security: The theories are applied to examine how exclusionary political practices may weaken institutional legitimacy, intensify communal grievances, undermine electoral confidence, and contribute to security challenges. The analysis also considers whether inclusive political arrangements can reduce tensions and strengthen national cohesion.

The application of these dimensions to Nigeria and Kenya recognises that the two countries have different political histories and institutional arrangements. Nigeria's federal character principle and federal structure provide one approach to managing ethnic diversity, whereas Kenya's constitutional devolution and coalition-based electoral politics provide another. The comparison therefore makes it possible to examine how different institutional arrangements respond to similar challenges associated with ethnic competition and political exclusion.

Ultimately, the study maintains that ethnic diversity does not inherently undermine democracy or national security. The central concern is the political manipulation of ethnic identity and the conversion of electoral or demographic advantage into exclusionary control over state institutions. Ethnic Competition Theory explains the incentives behind this process, while Consociational Democracy Theory provides the institutional perspective for assessing how inclusive governance can prevent permanent political marginalisation.

The combined theoretical framework is therefore appropriate for investigating the relationship between ethnic majority rule, democratic representation, institutional legitimacy, and national security in Nigeria and Kenya.

3 ETHNIC MAJORITY RULE AND THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA AND KENYA

This section examines how ethnic identity and ethnic political competition shape democratic governance in Nigeria and Kenya. It addresses the first, second, and fourth research objectives by tracing the historical foundations of ethnic political competition, examining its implications for electoral politics and political representation, and assessing the institutional arrangements designed to manage ethnic diversity. The comparison distinguishes legitimate majority decision-making from exclusionary ethnic majority dominance. It also recognises that ethnic identity does not automatically produce political conflict: its effects depend on how political elites mobilise identity, how institutions distribute power and resources, and whether citizens can participate on equal terms.

3.1 Historical Foundations of Ethnic Political Competition in Nigeria and Kenya

The historical development of ethnic political competition in Nigeria and Kenya is closely connected to colonial administrative structures, territorial organisation, the formation of political parties, and the distribution of political authority after independence. In both countries, ethnic identities became important political reference points partly because colonial governance institutionalised differences among communities and connected access to political influence with regional and local structures. Nevertheless, the two countries followed different institutional paths. Nigeria developed a federal system in which regional and later state governments became important arenas of political competition, whereas Kenya inherited a more centralised state in which control of the national executive became a particularly consequential political objective.

In Nigeria, the roots of contemporary ethnic political competition can be traced to the development of regional political organisations during the final decades of colonial rule. The emergence of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Northern People's Congress (NPC), and the Action Group (AG) reflected different political constituencies and regional interests. Although these organisations participated in the wider nationalist struggle, their political strength was substantially connected to regional structures and the constituencies from which their leaders drew support. The development of party competition therefore coincided with the consolidation of regional political identities. Katsina's historical analysis of Nigerian party-system formation indicates that the country's successive democratic experiments produced different party configurations, shaped by constitutional arrangements, electoral rules, and the changing organisation of political competition (Katsina).

The regional character of party politics became

especially consequential during the First Republic. The NPC was strongly associated with the Northern Region, the Action Group with the Western Region, and the NCNC with the Eastern Region, although none of these parties should be understood as representing internally uniform ethnic communities. Their constituencies included diverse groups, political interests, and ideological tendencies. The problem was not simply that political parties had regional support bases; rather, the concentration of political influence in regional organisations encouraged competition in which control of regional institutions could be interpreted as protection of group interests. The persistence of regional rivalries contributed to disputes over representation, federal power, and the allocation of public resources. Nigeria's subsequent experience of political instability and civil war reinforced the perceived need for institutions capable of limiting the concentration of power in any one region or political constituency.

Federalism consequently became a central mechanism for managing Nigeria's diversity. The creation of additional states, revenue-sharing arrangements, federal appointments, and the federal character principle were intended, among other purposes, to reduce the dominance of particular regions and widen access to public institutions. These arrangements, however, did not eliminate identity-based competition. Instead, they altered its institutional location. Political bargaining increasingly involved not only the major regional blocs but also state-level constituencies, minority communities, and competing claims about indigeneity and belonging. Kendhammer argues that Nigeria's federal character arrangements have been complicated by the relationship between federal citizenship and local or ethnic notions of belonging. In practice, the indigeneity system can privilege claims of ancestral origin over equal citizenship, thereby creating barriers for citizens who live outside the states or localities with which they are officially associated (Kendhammer 396–417).

The return to civilian rule in 1999 introduced a new phase of party competition under the Fourth Republic. Constitutional and electoral requirements encouraged the formation of parties with national reach rather than explicitly ethnic organisations. The national character requirement, for example, is intended to discourage political parties from being organised exclusively around narrow sectional interests. However, the formal national organisation of political parties has not always resulted in programmatic politics or the elimination of ethnic considerations. Political parties may operate nationally while relying on regional brokers, identity-based electoral networks, informal zoning arrangements, and negotiations among influential political constituencies. Bogaards identifies Nigeria's restrictions on ethnic parties as part of a wider programme of institutional engineering designed to encourage national political organisations, although the existence of such rules does not, in itself, remove the political incentives associated with ethnicity (Bogaards 730–49).

Nigeria's contemporary party system therefore reflects an important distinction between the formal organization of political parties and the informal practices through which political support is assembled. Parties may be nationally registered and constitutionally compliant, but their presidential nominations, running-mate selections, campaign strategies, leadership arrangements, and distribution of political offices can still be influenced by regional and ethnic balancing. Demarest and Langer's study of the Fourth Republic National Assembly further demonstrates that the management of diversity involves continuing negotiations between integrated party politics and ethno-regional balancing. Their analysis cautions against treating political identity as fixed or internally uniform, while showing that regional and ethnic considerations remain relevant to legislative representation and political bargaining (Demarest and Langer 593–617).

Kenya's historical experience also demonstrates the relationship between colonial structures, territorial politics, and the organisation of political competition. During the decolonisation period, political disagreements emerged over the structure of the postcolonial state and the appropriate relationship between national authority and regional autonomy. The Kenya African National Union (KANU) advanced a stronger national-government orientation, while the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) supported majimboism, a form of regionalism intended to protect communities concerned about domination by more populous political constituencies. Anderson's examination of the politics of decolonisation shows that the Majimbo debate was not merely an administrative disagreement; it also reflected concerns about regional inequality, political exclusion, and the protection of communities that feared domination within a centralised state (Anderson).

After independence, the consolidation of executive power and the gradual weakening of competitive political institutions increased the importance of access to the presidency. During the administrations of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi, political patronage and elite coalition-building helped sustain governing alliances. The distribution of influential appointments and access to state resources became important instruments for maintaining political support. Mueller's analysis of Kenya's political economy connects the weakening of institutions outside the executive, the personalisation of presidential authority, and the absence of strongly programmatic political parties to the high stakes associated with winning national elections (Mueller 185–210). These developments contributed to a political environment in which electoral competition could be understood as a contest over which coalition would control the central state and its associated opportunities.

The reintroduction of multiparty elections in the 1990s did not immediately transform this political structure. Political parties and movements frequently relied on broad ethnic and regional coalitions to assemble electoral

majorities. Khadiagala argues that Kenya's coalition-based political movements often lacked the organisational coherence and ideological consistency expected of programme parties. Although such alliances could provide short-term political accommodation, they also preserved the importance of ethnic bargaining and patronage in the struggle for national power (Khadiagala 65–84). The 2007 general election exposed the dangers of this arrangement when disputed electoral outcomes interacted with historical grievances, institutional weaknesses, and political mobilisation. Cheeseman identifies the crisis as a demonstration of the fragility of multiparty institutions when electoral competition takes place amid weak institutional credibility and insufficient elite agreement on the rules of political contestation (Cheeseman 166–84).

Kenya's 2010 Constitution represented a major attempt to address the institutional concentration of power through devolution, constitutional checks, and a more extensive framework for rights and accountability. The establishment of 47 county governments was intended to bring government closer to citizens, distribute public authority, and reduce the historical marginalisation of particular regions. Devolution has created additional arenas for representation and resource allocation, although it has not removed the national importance of presidential elections or the strategic value of ethnic coalitions. Sjögren and Angerbrandt's comparative study of Nigeria and Kenya finds that the institutionalisation of territorial politics differs substantially between the two countries: Nigeria's federal structure has provided more established subnational arenas for political contestation, whereas Kenya's historically centralised system has maintained stronger links between national electoral competition and ethno-regional mobilisation (Sjögren and Angerbrandt 343–62).

The historical comparison establishes that ethnic majority politics in both countries developed through the interaction of identity, political organisation, and state structures. In Nigeria, federalism and state creation helped disperse some forms of regional competition, but indigeneity, appointments, and resource allocation continue to generate questions of inclusion. In Kenya, the historical concentration of executive power has made national elections especially consequential, while devolution has sought to reduce the exclusionary effects of centralisation. These distinct historical trajectories provide the context for examining how ethnic considerations influence contemporary party formation, electoral mobilisation, leadership selection, and democratic representation.

3.2 Ethnic Majority Dominance and Electoral Politics

Ethnic considerations influence electoral politics when political actors use group identity to organise support, construct electoral alliances, select candidates, and frame competition for public authority. In multi-ethnic societies, political parties must often build coalitions across communities to secure electoral majorities. Such coalition-building is inherently democratic. It may encourage negotiation, compromise, and the inclusion of different constituencies in national politics. The democratic difficulty arises when electoral coalitions become mechanisms through which a dominant ethnic constituency claims privileged ownership of the state or treats political victory as authorisation to exclude rival communities from meaningful participation.

In Nigeria, political parties are formally expected to possess a national character, but electoral mobilisation continues to involve regional and identity-based calculations. The constitutional requirement that parties reflect a national outlook is designed to discourage sectional political organisation. Nevertheless, parties often seek to assemble geographically broad electoral coalitions through negotiations with regional leaders, political blocs, and influential local organisations. Presidential campaigns, in particular, require candidates to demonstrate support beyond their immediate regional constituencies. The choice of running mates, the distribution of campaign responsibilities, and the negotiation of party leadership positions may therefore be influenced by considerations of regional balance and political inclusion.

This process can have both integrative and exclusionary consequences. Where coalition-building encourages parties to accommodate different communities, it may broaden participation and reduce the possibility of permanent political exclusion. However, where political bargains are restricted to powerful elites, the appearance of ethnic balance may conceal the continued marginalisation of smaller communities and ordinary citizens. Demarest and Langer's analysis of Nigeria's National Assembly illustrates the tension between integrated party politics and ethno-regional balancing. Their findings suggest that political institutions can facilitate cross-regional cooperation while simultaneously reproducing the need for identity-based negotiation in the allocation of political influence (Demarest and Langer 593–617).

Nigeria's electoral structure also encourages parties to develop support across the federation rather than depend exclusively on one ethnic or regional constituency. The presidential electoral provisions of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, require a successful candidate to obtain the prescribed nationwide plurality and geographical distribution of votes. This requirement creates incentives for candidates to build broader electoral alliances. It does not, however, guarantee that political parties will develop strong ideological programmes or that all communities will enjoy equal influence within their party structures. Ethnic calculations may continue to shape candidate selection, campaign messaging, and post-election political appointments even when electoral success requires nationwide support.

Kenya's electoral politics display a more direct historical relationship between ethnic coalition-building

and the struggle for the presidency. The presidency has traditionally been associated with substantial influence over national appointments, public resources, and political patronage. Consequently, communities and political elites have often viewed presidential elections as contests over access to the state. The result has been the formation of coalitions that bring together several ethnic constituencies under a common presidential candidate. These alliances may be strategically broad, but their durability often depends on negotiated elite interests rather than on a stable programme of policy commitments.

Bratton and Kimenyi's study of voting behaviour in Kenya demonstrates that ethnic origins influence electoral choices, while also cautioning against reducing voting behaviour to an uncomplicated ethnic census. Their findings indicate that voters may consider ethnicity alongside other political interests and circumstances (Bratton and Kimenyi 272–89). Harris similarly demonstrates that the relationship between ethnicity and electoral behaviour varies across local constituencies. His research, based on interviews and constituency-level election results, shows that local constructions of ethnic difference mediate the influence of national political dynamics. This suggests that ethnic identity does not operate uniformly across all electoral settings; its political significance is shaped by local histories, party alignments, and the configuration of competing interests (Harris 149–73).

Ethnic coalition-building in Kenya is also influenced by campaign narratives. Political actors may present particular communities as excluded, threatened, or inadequately represented, while promising to correct perceived injustices through electoral victory. Gadjanova's study of ethnic wedge issues explains how campaign narratives about discrimination and victimization can be used to divide an opponent's support base and mobilize particular constituencies. Such strategies can intensify ethnic grievances and make political compromise more difficult, particularly when competing parties portray electoral outcomes as decisions about which communities deserve access to state power (Gadjanova 484–507).

The 2007 election illustrates the consequences of intense electoral competition under conditions of institutional weakness. The disputed presidential result was followed by widespread violence, displacement, and a breakdown of trust among communities. The violence cannot be attributed to ethnicity alone. Electoral distrust, elite mobilization, historical land grievances, the activities of politically connected groups, and weaknesses in conflict-management institutions all contributed to the crisis. Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero's empirical study identifies the perception that the election had been rigged, pre-existing land disputes, and the activities of politically connected gangs as important factors associated with the violence and its consequences (Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 731–44). The episode demonstrates how ethnic identities can become politically dangerous when electoral competition intersects with grievances and institutions that cannot credibly resolve disputes.

The comparison reveals a significant distinction. Nigerian parties are constitutionally encouraged to maintain national reach, and federalism provides several subnational arenas in which political competition can occur. Kenya's presidential system has historically concentrated the stakes of electoral competition at the national level, making the formation of broad ethnic coalitions particularly important. Both countries nevertheless experience identity-based bargaining within parties and electoral alliances. In each case, the democratic significance of ethnic mobilization depends on whether political coalitions expand participation and accountability or become vehicles for the capture of public authority by a privileged group of political elites.

3.3 Political Exclusion, Minority Representation, and Unequal Access to State Power

Political exclusion is a central challenge of democratic governance when citizens or communities are unable to participate meaningfully in political institutions, influence public decisions, or obtain equal access to public opportunities. In ethnically diverse societies, exclusion may take the form of under-representation in elected institutions, limited access to senior appointments, unequal distribution of public resources, discriminatory administrative practices, or the political stigmatisation of communities associated with opposition parties. These practices should be distinguished from ordinary electoral competition. A community's failure to win an election does not, by itself, establish exclusion; the more serious problem arises when institutional arrangements or government practices systematically restrict its opportunities to participate as an equal political constituency.

Nigeria has developed several institutional mechanisms intended to promote inclusion. The federal character principle, reflected in the 1999 Constitution, requires the composition of federal institutions and the conduct of public affairs to reflect the diversity of the country and discourage the predominance of a few states or sectional groups. The principle is particularly relevant to appointments to public institutions and the distribution of opportunities within the federal administration. Its purpose is to ensure that national institutions are not perceived as the exclusive property of particular ethnic or regional constituencies.

Nevertheless, the implementation of federal character has generated substantial difficulties. One major problem is the interaction between the principle and the indigeneity system. In some contexts, access to public opportunities is influenced not only by citizenship or residence but also by officially recognised claims of origin. This distinction can disadvantage citizens who have lived for extended periods in states other than those associated with their ancestral backgrounds. Kendhammer's analysis argues

that the federal character system can reproduce discriminatory distinctions between federal citizenship and ethnic or local belonging, thereby limiting its ability to achieve equal inclusion (Kendhammer 396–417).

The implications are particularly significant for minority communities whose political influence may be limited at both national and subnational levels. In the Niger Delta, for example, political claims about marginalisation have been associated with the distribution of oil-derived resources, environmental concerns, local participation, and the relationship between producing communities and federal institutions. The existence of federal revenue-sharing arrangements does not automatically resolve disagreements over the distribution of resources or the extent to which producing communities influence decisions affecting their territories. Such disputes demonstrate that inclusion must be assessed through institutional access, public accountability, and the practical distribution of benefits, rather than through formal constitutional recognition alone.

At the national level, the distribution of political appointments may also influence perceptions of inclusion. The appointment of ministers, senior public officials, heads of government agencies, and other influential officeholders can be interpreted as evidence of whether the governing administration recognises the country's diversity. Demarest and Langer's research on the National Assembly shows that ethno-regional balancing remains relevant to political bargaining even within institutions whose members operate through nationally organised parties (Demarest and Langer 593–617). However, descriptive representation should not be confused with substantive inclusion. The presence of individuals from different ethnic communities does not necessarily guarantee that public institutions will respond equally to the needs of all citizens.

Kenya's experience of political exclusion has been strongly connected to the historical concentration of executive power and the distribution of public resources through national political networks. Where access to government appointments, development projects, and state opportunities is perceived to depend on proximity to the presidency, communities outside the governing coalition may regard electoral defeat as a loss of political and economic access. Mueller's discussion of high-stakes ethnic politics explains how perceptions that co-ethnics of presidential winners receive preferential access to senior appointments and public goods can reinforce clientelism and intensify competition over national office (Mueller 343–55).

The historical experience of marginalisation also contributed to demands for regional autonomy and the protection of minority interests. The Majimbo debate during the independence period reflected concerns that a centralised state could allow more populous communities to dominate political and economic decision-making. Anderson's study indicates that regionalism was partly motivated by fears of political exclusion and uneven development, particularly among communities that believed their interests would be inadequately protected under centralised national rule (Anderson). These concerns remained relevant in subsequent debates about devolution and equitable access to state resources.

The 2010 Constitution sought to address these problems through devolution, constitutional recognition of diversity, and principles governing the equitable distribution of national resources. Article 174 identifies the objectives of devolution, including promoting the democratic and accountable exercise of power, recognising diversity, and protecting minorities and marginalised communities. Article 203 provides criteria for determining the equitable share of revenue allocated to county governments, including the need to address disparities between counties. These provisions establish a constitutional basis for distributing political authority and public resources beyond the national executive.

Devolution has therefore created additional opportunities for political representation and local decision-making. County governments can respond to local development priorities and provide political spaces in which communities that have historically experienced marginalisation can exercise greater influence. However, decentralisation does not automatically guarantee inclusive governance. Local political elites may reproduce exclusionary practices within county institutions, and competition over county resources can become entangled with local ethnic alignments. Mbori's examination of the Kenyan devolution experiment recognises its potential to address historical economic exclusion while questioning whether institutional decentralisation alone is sufficient to produce national multi-ethnic unity (Mbori).

The comparison between Nigeria and Kenya demonstrates that institutional inclusion requires more than the formal recognition of ethnic diversity. Nigeria's federal character principle seeks to regulate representation within federal institutions, but its interaction with indigeneity can produce new forms of exclusion. Kenya's devolution framework distributes authority and resources among county governments, but the persistence of national patronage networks and local political competition can limit its transformative potential. Both countries therefore face the challenge of ensuring that political appointments, public employment, development spending, and access to public institutions are governed by transparent and accountable criteria rather than by ethnic entitlement or partisan loyalty.

An additional issue is the distinction between actual exclusion and perceptions of exclusion. Political actors may invoke marginalisation to mobilise electoral support, even when the underlying distribution of opportunities is more complex. Conversely, formal claims of national inclusion may conceal inequalities in practice. A credible assessment must therefore consider constitutional guarantees, administrative procedures, budgetary allocations, appointment patterns, and the experiences of affected communities. This distinction is essential to avoid

treating every political disagreement as ethnic discrimination while still recognising that persistent institutional inequalities can undermine equal citizenship and democratic legitimacy.

3.4 Ethnic Polarisation, Democratic Institutions, and the Rule of Law

Ethnic polarisation becomes a threat to democratic governance when political competition is framed as a struggle among mutually exclusive communities rather than as a contest among citizens and political organisations with competing policy preferences. Under such conditions, electoral outcomes may be interpreted as victories or defeats for entire ethnic groups. This weakens the democratic principle that political authority is temporary, constitutionally limited, and subject to peaceful transfer. It can also reduce public confidence in electoral institutions, courts, legislatures, and public administration when these institutions are perceived to operate in the interests of particular political or ethnic constituencies.

In Nigeria, constitutional arrangements have sought to limit ethnic polarisation through federalism, national political parties, federal character provisions, and the distribution of political authority among different levels of government. These institutions provide mechanisms for negotiating competing interests and reducing the possibility that one group will exercise exclusive control over the entire political system. However, their effectiveness depends on the quality of implementation and the willingness of political actors to accept constitutional limits. Where party competition is driven primarily by elite bargaining and the distribution of patronage, formal institutions may provide only partial protection against exclusionary political practices.

The regulation of political parties is particularly important. Nigeria's constitutional and electoral framework discourages parties organised around narrow ethnic or sectional interests and encourages national political organisation. Bogaards explains that the country's prohibition of ethnic parties forms part of a broader institutional strategy to shape the organisation of political competition and encourage parties with nationwide support (Bogaards 730–49). Nevertheless, a national party label does not necessarily establish that a party is internally democratic, ideologically coherent, or equally representative of all its constituencies. Political parties can satisfy formal requirements while maintaining informal networks that privilege particular regional or ethnic elites.

Legislative institutions also provide an important arena for managing diversity. The National Assembly is expected to represent citizens across the federation, scrutinize executive decisions, and provide a forum for negotiating competing interests. Its democratic contribution depends on the capacity of legislators to act as representatives of the wider public rather than merely as agents of sectional political networks. Demarest and Langer's findings indicate that legislative politics in Nigeria involves continuing interaction between party integration and ethno-regional balancing, suggesting that inclusive representation requires both cross-regional political cooperation and safeguards against the marginalization of particular constituencies (Demarest and Langer 593–617).

Kenya's institutional experience demonstrates the consequences of concentrated executive authority and the importance of credible electoral dispute resolution. The 2007 post-election crisis exposed the dangers of a political environment in which presidential victory was perceived as determining access to state power and resources. The disputed election and ensuing violence weakened confidence in electoral institutions and demonstrated the consequences of unresolved political grievances. Cheeseman's analysis emphasizes the interaction between institutional weakness, historical grievances, and the absence of elite consensus over electoral rules in explaining the fragility exposed by the crisis (Cheeseman 166–84).

The crisis also revealed the importance of the rule of law in preventing political competition from escalating into violence. Electoral disputes require institutions that can investigate complaints impartially, publish credible results, and provide remedies through established legal procedures. When political actors or citizens believe that electoral institutions cannot resolve disputes fairly, the incentive to seek political outcomes outside constitutional processes may increase. Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero's findings show that the perception of electoral fraud, politically connected violence, and pre-existing land disputes contributed to the 2007–08 crisis and its damaging effects on public trust and social relations (Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 731–44).

The 2010 Constitution introduced significant reforms intended to strengthen institutional accountability and reduce the concentration of power. Devolution created county governments, while constitutional provisions on the separation of powers, judicial authority, public participation, equality, and equitable resource distribution established additional safeguards. These reforms widened the institutional channels through which communities could participate in governance. Yet the continued importance of ethnic coalitions in presidential elections indicates that constitutional reform does not automatically eliminate the political incentives associated with ethnic mobilization.

The role of political parties is equally significant in Kenya. Parties and coalitions can strengthen democratic accountability when they provide coherent programmes, transparent candidate selection, internal competition, and stable legislative organization. Conversely, parties that function mainly as temporary electoral vehicles for elite coalitions may reinforce ethnic polarization. Jensen, Kuenzi, and Lee's analysis of voting in Kenya's National Assembly demonstrates that parties and coalitions influence legislative behaviour, even though ethnicity and

clientelism continue to shape the conduct of legislators (Jensen, Kuenzi, and Lee 523–41). This finding is important because it suggests that ethnic identity does not entirely displace institutional or partisan behaviour; rather, the relationship between them is mediated by political organization and legislative incentives.

The rule of law also requires that public institutions remain impartial in the administration of justice, law enforcement, and public resources. Where security agencies, administrative bodies, or oversight institutions are perceived as partisan, citizens may lose confidence in the state's capacity to protect their rights equally. Ethnic polarisation can intensify such perceptions, particularly when political actors associate law enforcement or public decisions with the interests of a rival community. The central democratic requirement is therefore not that institutions should ignore social diversity, but that they should apply constitutional rules consistently and protect citizens without discrimination.

Nigeria and Kenya consequently share a significant institutional challenge: both have adopted mechanisms intended to manage ethnic diversity, but the effectiveness of these mechanisms depends on the autonomy, credibility, and impartiality of public institutions. Nigeria relies substantially on federalism, national party requirements, and federal character arrangements. Kenya has pursued constitutional devolution, judicial and electoral reforms, and protections for marginalised communities. Neither framework should be regarded as automatically sufficient. Their democratic value depends on whether they constrain executive dominance, promote meaningful participation, protect minority rights, and provide credible mechanisms for resolving political disputes.

3.5 Comparative Analysis of Ethnic Majority Politics in Nigeria and Kenya

The experiences of Nigeria and Kenya reveal both common patterns and important institutional differences in the relationship between ethnic majority politics and democratic governance. In both countries, political elites have used ethnic and regional identities to mobilise electoral support, negotiate political alliances, and make claims about representation and access to state resources. However, the institutional settings within which these strategies operate are different. Nigeria's federal structure has distributed political authority among the federal government and constituent states, whereas Kenya's historical centralisation made control of the presidency especially important before the constitutional reforms that introduced devolution in 2010.

First, the historical foundations of party competition differ in their institutional expression. In Nigeria, regional party formation during the colonial and early post-independence periods contributed to the development of a federal political order in which regional and later state-level institutions became important arenas of political bargaining. The subsequent adoption of national party requirements was intended to discourage exclusive ethnic organisation. In Kenya, the early debate between KANU's national-government orientation and KADU's regionalist position reflected concerns about domination within a centralised state. The later development of multiparty politics retained strong incentives for coalition-building around ethnic and regional constituencies (Anderson; Katsina; Khadiagala 65–84).

Second, electoral coalition-building is important in both countries, but the stakes of national executive power have historically been more concentrated in Kenya. Nigerian presidential candidates must construct geographically broad electoral support, and parties frequently negotiate regional balance through candidate selection and informal power-sharing arrangements. Nevertheless, federalism provides alternative political arenas through which regional interests can be pursued. In Kenya, the historical concentration of executive authority made presidential elections particularly consequential for communities seeking access to national appointments and public resources. Electoral coalitions therefore became central to the process of assembling a winning majority. Bratton and Kimenyi's research shows that ethnicity matters in Kenyan voting behaviour but does not explain all electoral choices, while Harris demonstrates that local contexts mediate the influence of national ethnic alignments (Bratton and Kimenyi 272–89; Harris 149–73).

Third, the institutional management of political representation follows different models. Nigeria's federal character principle is designed to promote balanced representation in federal institutions and reduce the dominance of a limited number of states or groups. Its weakness lies partly in the practical interaction between federal citizenship and indigeneity, which may restrict the opportunities of citizens who reside outside their officially recognised states of origin. Kenya's constitutional framework emphasises devolution, equitable distribution of resources, public participation, and protection of marginalised communities. These mechanisms create opportunities for local representation but do not automatically prevent ethnic competition within county governments or eliminate the national significance of presidential coalitions (Kendhammer 396–417; Mbori).

Fourth, the distribution of public resources is politically significant in both countries. In Nigeria, federal revenue allocation, oil-derived income, state-level distribution, and public appointments are important areas of political bargaining. Disputes over the distribution of resources have been particularly significant in areas where communities perceive a gap between their contribution to national wealth and their access to development opportunities. In Kenya, historical centralization linked the distribution of public goods and senior appointments to the national executive, thereby strengthening the perception that presidential victory could determine which constituencies enjoyed privileged access to state resources. Devolution has attempted to reduce this concentration by assigning functions and resources to

county governments, although the implementation of equitable distribution remains a continuing institutional challenge (Demarest and Langer 593–617; Mueller 343–55; Sjögren and Angerbrandt 343–62).

Fifth, both countries face the problem of translating descriptive representation into substantive democratic inclusion. A government may include individuals from different ethnic groups without ensuring that all communities enjoy equal influence over policy, public appointments, and resource allocation. Similarly, a political party may possess a national organisational structure while relying on elite bargains that limit internal democracy. The relevant test is therefore whether citizens can participate in political institutions on equal terms, hold public officials accountable, and access state services without discrimination. This distinction also prevents the analysis from assuming that an elected leader's ethnic identity is sufficient evidence of ethnic majority domination.

Sixth, the consequences of ethnic polarization have been shaped by the credibility of democratic institutions. Nigeria's federal structure and party regulations provide mechanisms for managing regional competition, but political bargaining can still reproduce exclusion where accountability is weak or access to public institutions is mediated by identity-based claims. Kenya's 2007 post-election crisis demonstrated how electoral distrust, historical grievances, political mobilization, and institutional weakness can interact to produce severe violence. The subsequent constitutional reforms strengthened the institutional framework, but the persistence of ethnic coalition politics indicates that institutional change must be accompanied by credible electoral administration, impartial justice, and accountable political parties (Cheeseman 166–84; Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 731–44).

The comparative study by Sjögren and Angerbrandt is particularly relevant because it examines how decentralisation shapes the strategies of state-wide parties toward ethno-regional mobilisation in Nigeria and Kenya. Their analysis of the Niger Delta and Kenya's Coast region demonstrates that political parties respond differently to regional demands depending on the territorial structure of the state. In Nigeria, federalism has provided established subnational arenas that can redirect some forms of regional contestation away from the national level. In Kenya, the legacy of centralisation has historically connected regional grievances more directly to national electoral competition, although devolution has begun to alter this relationship (Sjögren and Angerbrandt 343–62).

The comparison can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Historical Ethnic Politics, Democratic Inclusion Mechanisms, and Institutional Challenges in Nigeria and Kenya

Dimension	Nigeria	Kenya
Historical pattern	Regional party competition followed by federal institutional development	Nationalist and regionalist competition followed by strong executive centralization
Electoral mobilization	National parties often rely on regional bargaining and identity-based coalition-building	Presidential coalitions have historically depended heavily on ethnic and regional alliances
Institutional structure	Federal system with federal and state-level political arenas	Unitary constitutional state with devolved county governments
Inclusion mechanism	Federal character principle, state representation, and national party requirements	Devolution, equitable revenue allocation, public participation, and minority protections
Major exclusion concern	Indigeneity, uneven access to federal appointments, and resource-allocation disputes	Historical regional marginalization, patronage, and unequal access to national political influence
Democratic challenge	Translating formal federal balance into equal citizenship and accountable representation	Reducing the high stakes of presidential competition and preventing local reproduction of exclusion
Institutional priority	Impartial implementation of federal character and protection of equal citizenship	Effective devolution, credible elections, and accountable national and county institutions

The comparison demonstrates that ethnic majority politics cannot be understood solely through demographic size or electoral victory. Its democratic consequences depend on the interaction between party organisation, the concentration or distribution of state power, the credibility of electoral institutions, and the extent to which minority communities enjoy enforceable political and economic rights. Nigeria's federal structure offers multiple arenas for political participation, but its inclusion mechanisms remain constrained by indigeneity and uneven implementation. Kenya's devolution framework has expanded subnational political authority, but the historical significance of presidential power continues to influence national coalition-building and perceptions of access to state resources.

These findings directly address the first, second, and fourth research objectives. Historically, ethnic political competition in both countries developed through colonial and postcolonial arrangements that linked political organization to territorial and group identities. In

contemporary governance, ethnic considerations continue to influence party formation, electoral mobilization, leadership selection, representation, and political appointments. The institutional comparison further shows that federalism and devolution can create opportunities for inclusion, but neither guarantees democratic equality without impartial implementation, accountable political parties, and effective protection of minority rights.

The central conclusion of this section is that the principal democratic challenge is not ethnic diversity or majority rule in itself, but the conversion of electoral and demographic advantage into disproportionate control over public institutions and resources. Democratic governance requires majority decision-making to remain constitutionally limited, open to political competition, and compatible with equal citizenship. Where ethnic coalitions become instruments of permanent entitlement or systematic exclusion, they weaken representation, undermine institutional trust, and create conditions that may intensify political instability. The next section builds on this analysis by examining how such exclusionary practices interact with national security, political stability, and the capacity of institutions to prevent or manage conflict.

4. ETHNIC MAJORITY RULE, NATIONAL SECURITY, AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

This section examines the relationship between exclusionary ethnic politics, national security, and political stability in Nigeria and Kenya. It addresses the third and fourth research objectives by investigating how political exclusion, electoral competition, and institutional weaknesses may contribute to insecurity and by assessing the capacity of constitutional institutions and security agencies to manage ethnic tensions. The analysis distinguishes between ethnic political grievances and the different forms of insecurity experienced in the two countries. In Nigeria, these include communal and farmer–herder violence, insurgency, separatist agitation, banditry, and other forms of internal insecurity. In Kenya, the relevant experiences include election-related violence, localised communal conflict, terrorism, and tensions associated with historical marginalisation and competition for land and political representation.

The central argument is that ethnic identity alone does not explain insecurity. Political exclusion can contribute to insecurity when it interacts with unresolved historical grievances, competition over land and resources, weak accountability, economic inequality, electoral manipulation, and ineffective conflict-resolution mechanisms. It is therefore necessary to examine the conditions under which political identity becomes connected to violence, rather than assume that ethnic diversity or majority rule inevitably produces instability.

4.1 Ethnic Domination and the Escalation of Communal Conflicts

Communal conflict becomes a national security concern when disputes among communities develop into sustained violence, displacement, destruction of property, or challenges to the authority of public institutions. In multi-ethnic societies, political exclusion may contribute to such conflicts when communities believe that their interests are systematically disregarded or that state institutions protect some groups more effectively than others. However, communal violence rarely has a single cause. Ethnic identity may provide a language through which grievances are expressed, while the underlying disputes may concern land ownership, access to natural resources, political representation, local authority, historical injustice, or competition over economic opportunities.

In Nigeria, communal violence has occurred in different geographical and political contexts, including the Middle Belt, parts of the North-West, the North-East, and the Niger Delta. These conflicts should not be treated as one uniform phenomenon. In some areas, disputes between farming and pastoralist communities have involved competition over land, grazing routes, water, and agricultural livelihoods. In other settings, communal violence has been connected to disputes over traditional authority, local government boundaries, indigeneity, religious identity, and control of economic resources. Ethnic identification can intensify these disputes when political actors present local conflicts as evidence of broader group exclusion or mobilise communities around perceived threats to their collective interests.

The farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria illustrate the need to distinguish ethnic narratives from the wider causes of insecurity. Although some confrontations have been framed in ethnic or religious terms, the conflicts also involve changing land-use patterns, environmental pressures, population growth, weak land administration, inadequate conflict-resolution mechanisms, and the proliferation of small arms. International Crisis Group's examination of farmer–herder violence identifies the interaction of environmental, economic, political, and institutional factors in the escalation of these disputes. It emphasises that the crisis cannot be adequately addressed through security operations alone without attention to land governance, local mediation, and the protection of livelihoods (International Crisis Group, Herders against Farmers).

Political exclusion can nevertheless affect how communities interpret and respond to these conflicts. When affected populations believe that security agencies are unwilling or unable to protect them, or that public officials respond selectively to violence, distrust of the state may increase. Such perceptions can encourage communities to rely on informal security arrangements, vigilante organisations, or self-defence groups. Although these arrangements may emerge from immediate

concerns about personal safety, they can also complicate public security when armed groups operate outside effective legal oversight. The result may be a cycle in which insecurity weakens confidence in state institutions and declining confidence further reduces cooperation with those institutions.

In the Niger Delta, communal tensions have also been connected to disputes over oil production, environmental degradation, resource distribution, and political participation. The region's security challenges cannot be reduced to ethnic majority politics, since they involve the political economy of petroleum, environmental damage, corporate conduct, federal revenue allocation, and the historical relationship between producing communities and the Nigerian state. Nevertheless, perceptions that local communities bear disproportionate environmental and social costs while exercising limited influence over resource governance have contributed to grievances and protest movements. Obi's analysis of oil-related conflict in the Niger Delta demonstrates the importance of understanding local resistance within the wider context of resource control, state power, and the political economy of oil (Obi).

Kenya's communal conflicts have also involved land, resource access, local political competition, and historical grievances. Violence in parts of the Rift Valley and other regions has sometimes been associated with disputes over land ownership, settlement patterns, political representation, and the relationship between local communities and the national government. These conflicts have occasionally acquired ethnic dimensions, particularly where political actors mobilise communities around claims of historical dispossession or fears of domination by rival groups. However, the presence of ethnic identities in these disputes does not mean that ethnicity alone explains their origins or persistence.

The historical importance of land in Kenya is particularly relevant. Colonial land policies, post-independence settlement programmes, and unresolved questions about land ownership have created grievances that continue to influence local political relations. Boone's study of land politics in Kenya demonstrates how the institutional distribution of land rights and the authority of local political structures shape patterns of conflict and political competition. Her analysis shows that land-related grievances are connected to the organisation of state authority and the political interests of local and national elites, rather than being simply expressions of ancient ethnic hostility (Boone).

The Kenyan experience therefore demonstrates that communal violence can emerge when historical grievances intersect with electoral competition and weak institutions for resolving land and resource disputes. Political actors may use existing grievances to mobilise support, while communities may interpret local disputes through broader narratives of political exclusion. Such mobilisation can increase the likelihood of violence, especially where the state lacks credible mechanisms for impartial mediation, compensation, prosecution, and the protection of affected populations.

The comparison between Nigeria and Kenya reveals a common pattern: communal violence becomes more difficult to manage when affected communities perceive public institutions as partisan, inaccessible, or ineffective. Nevertheless, the specific conflict environments differ. Nigeria's communal insecurity includes farmer–herder violence, resource-related conflict, and armed communal confrontations across several regions. Kenya's communal tensions have been particularly connected to land grievances, localised political competition, and historical patterns of regional marginalisation. The appropriate policy response must therefore address the specific causes of each conflict rather than apply a single ethnic-conflict explanation to both countries.

4.2 Electoral Violence, Political Grievances, and National Insecurity

Electoral violence is one of the most direct ways in which exclusionary political competition can threaten national security. It occurs when political actors, organised groups, or supporters use intimidation, assault, destruction of property, or other forms of coercion to influence electoral participation or determine political outcomes. In ethnically diverse societies, electoral violence may acquire an ethnic dimension when parties portray political competition as a struggle between communities or when voters are threatened because they are associated with a rival political constituency. However, electoral violence should not automatically be classified as ethnic conflict. Its causes may include disputes over electoral credibility, competition for political office, patronage networks, impunity, weak law enforcement, and the manipulation of historical grievances.

Kenya's 2007 general election provides a significant example of the interaction between electoral disputes and ethnic mobilisation. Following the announcement of the presidential result, allegations of electoral manipulation triggered widespread protests and violence. The ensuing crisis involved attacks, retaliatory violence, displacement, destruction of property, and serious violations of human rights. The Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence, commonly known as the Waki Commission, documented 1,133 deaths during the period of post-election violence and examined the conduct of state security agencies, including failures to anticipate and contain the violence and allegations of abuses by security personnel (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence).

The crisis cannot be adequately explained as a spontaneous confrontation between ethnic communities. Political mobilisation interacted with historical land grievances, local disputes over belonging, politically connected gangs, and the perception that the electoral

process had been manipulated. Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero's empirical study found that the perceived rigging of the election was a major trigger of violence and that exposure to violence reduced trust and social capital among communities. Their research also showed that the likelihood of victimisation was associated with geographical exposure to violence and pre-existing land disputes, rather than simply with an individual's ethnic identity or wealth (Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 731–44).

The significance of this evidence is that electoral violence can affect national security beyond the immediate period of an election. Displacement disrupts livelihoods and education, the destruction of homes and businesses weakens local economies, and unresolved crimes can deepen distrust between communities. When victims believe that perpetrators have been protected by political connections or that justice institutions are unwilling to investigate abuses, the legitimacy of the state may be weakened. Jenkins's analysis of the 2007–08 violence further demonstrates how narratives of territorial belonging and exclusion operated alongside elite mobilisation, creating conditions in which some communities were portrayed as outsiders or guests in areas where they had lived (Jenkins 576–96).

Nigeria has also experienced election-related violence, although its patterns have varied across electoral cycles and regions. The 2011 post-election violence in parts of northern Nigeria, for example, followed the presidential election and involved attacks on persons, homes, and public facilities. The violence was connected to political dissatisfaction, religious and regional polarisation, and the mobilisation of supporters in a highly contested electoral environment. It should not be reduced to a simple confrontation between ethnic groups, because political, religious, regional, and institutional factors intersected in its development. The comparison by Krause of post-election violence in Kenya in 2007–08 and Nigeria in 2008 also demonstrates that the relationship between elections and communal violence varies across cases and that the organisation and response of security forces can influence the forms of violence that occur (Krause 185–98).

A further security implication is the use of political intimidation to discourage participation by particular constituencies. When voters, candidates, community leaders, or electoral officials face threats because of their perceived political or ethnic affiliation, the principle of equal political participation is undermined. Such intimidation can also produce localised displacement, disrupt election administration, and encourage retaliatory mobilisation. In these circumstances, electoral violence becomes a broader national security concern because it weakens the peaceful transfer of power and creates incentives for political actors to rely on coercion rather than constitutional procedures.

The Nigerian and Kenyan experiences therefore reveal a common relationship between electoral credibility and public security. In both countries, disputed political outcomes can intensify existing grievances when institutions are unable to provide timely and trusted remedies. Kenya's 2007–08 crisis was particularly extensive in its national consequences, while Nigeria's election-related violence has occurred within a wider environment of regional and religious insecurity. In both cases, credible electoral administration, impartial policing, effective judicial remedies, and accountability for politically connected perpetrators are essential to reducing the security risks associated with electoral competition.

4.3 Ethnic Marginalisation, Separatist Agitations, and Internal Security Threats

Ethnic marginalisation may contribute to separatist agitation when communities believe that existing political institutions do not adequately protect their interests, recognise their identity, or provide meaningful opportunities for self-government. Separatist movements may frame their demands in terms of self-determination, historical injustice, political autonomy, resource control, or protection from discrimination. Such demands must be distinguished from insurgency and terrorism. A political demand for constitutional reform or self-determination is not, by itself, an act of violence. The security implications arise where separatist mobilisation becomes associated with armed activity, attacks on civilians or public institutions, coercive enforcement, or violent state responses.

Nigeria's Biafra-related separatist agitation illustrates the complex relationship between historical memory, perceived marginalisation, political identity, and internal security. The Nigerian Civil War of 1967–70 remains an important historical reference point in discussions of political belonging and national integration. Since the return to civilian government in 1999, renewed Biafra-related mobilisation has drawn attention to perceptions of political exclusion, uneven development, historical grievances, and demands for self-determination in the South-East. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has become one of the prominent organisations associated with contemporary separatist agitation, although the broader spectrum of Biafra-related views and political demands is not uniform.

Nwangwu's study of neo-Biafra separatist agitation argues that its resurgence is connected to perceptions of ethno-national marginalisation and weaknesses in the Nigerian state-building process. The analysis places separatist mobilisation within a broader context of political grievances and contested national identity, rather than treating it as an isolated security phenomenon (Nwangwu 40–53).

More recent scholarship also cautions against explaining separatist activity exclusively through structural deprivation or state repression. Ejiofor's examination of Biafran separatist movements highlights the agency of separatist actors, their political strategies,

and the ways in which they employ narratives of ethnic fear and state insecurity to mobilise supporters. This perspective is important because it recognises that political grievances can be real and historically grounded while also requiring critical examination of the strategies and conduct of movements that claim to represent affected communities (Ejiofor 17–47).

The security implications arise when political agitation becomes connected to armed confrontation, threats against residents, attacks on public infrastructure, or coercive restrictions on civic and economic life. Equally, state responses that rely excessively on force without credible investigation, prosecution, and respect for constitutional rights may deepen distrust and strengthen narratives of collective victimisation. The resulting cycle can weaken the relationship between citizens and security institutions. A sustainable response therefore requires a distinction between peaceful political advocacy, criminal conduct, and organised violence. Treating all expressions of separatist opinion as equivalent security threats risks narrowing the space for lawful political participation.

Nigeria's other major internal security challenges must also be distinguished from separatist agitation. The Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, for example, is an armed Islamist insurgency rather than a conventional ethnic secessionist movement. Its development has been associated with local governance failures, socioeconomic inequalities, historical grievances, religious mobilisation, state repression, and the evolution of the group's ideological and military strategies. Dowd's comparative analysis of Islamist violence in Nigeria and Kenya emphasises that such movements can exploit local experiences of political marginalisation and violent governance while also developing distinct ideological and organisational characteristics (Dowd).

Dowd and Drury further demonstrate that civilian insecurity in the context of Boko Haram cannot be understood only through the actions of the insurgent organization. They examine how regional inequalities, historical conflict, state violence, and inadequate protection of civilians can interact to intensify insecurity. Their analysis notes that the insurgency evolved over time and that the motivations and experiences of those drawn into violence were not uniform. This is important for the present study because it prevents the mistaken assumption that all insecurity in northern Nigeria is an expression of ethnic majority politics or that all affected communities support insurgent organisations (Dowd and Drury 136–52).

The Niger Delta provides another distinct example. Here, armed militancy developed within a political economy shaped by petroleum extraction, environmental degradation, resource control, and disputes over the distribution of oil revenues. Obi explains that resistance in the region evolved from protests against the relationship between the Nigerian state and multinational oil interests into more violent forms of resistance, including attacks on state and oil-related targets. The conflict was connected to demands for local autonomy and control over natural resources, as well as the wider contradictions of oil production and distribution (Obi 219–36).

Aghedo and Osumah's comparative study of the Niger Delta and Boko Haram uprisings is especially useful in distinguishing these security challenges. Although both involve armed opposition to the Nigerian state, their ideological orientations, geographical settings, organisational histories, and immediate grievances differ. The authors connect both uprisings to weaknesses in governance and the state's reliance on coercive responses while recognising their distinct origins and trajectories (Aghedo and Osumah).

Kenya's internal security threats also require conceptual distinction. The country has experienced terrorism associated with Al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based militant organisation, as well as localised communal violence and election-related conflict. Al-Shabaab's activities should not be described as an ethnic separatist movement within Kenya. Nevertheless, its operations and the state's counterterrorism responses have had consequences for communities in northern and coastal Kenya, particularly where residents have experienced social exclusion, suspicion, or discriminatory security practices.

Dowd's analysis of Islamist violence across Nigeria and Kenya shows that local experiences of governance and political marginalisation can influence the environments in which militant organisations operate. This does not mean that marginalisation automatically produces terrorism or that affected communities support extremist groups. Rather, exclusion and abusive state practices may create grievances that violent organisations attempt to exploit (Dowd).

The relationship between counterterrorism and citizenship is particularly important in Kenya. Al-Bulushi's ethnographic research in Nairobi and Mombasa examines how surveillance and policing practices affect Muslim communities and how counterterrorism operations can transform ordinary spaces into environments of suspicion and heightened security intervention. The research emphasises the necessity of examining how security measures are experienced by the communities they affect, especially where enforcement practices are perceived as discriminatory or insufficiently accountable (Al-Bulushi 819–32).

The comparison therefore requires a clear distinction between the forms of insecurity experienced in the two countries. Nigeria faces a combination of separatist agitation, Islamist insurgency, resource-related militancy, farmer–herder violence, banditry, and communal conflict. Kenya's principal examples in this analysis include election-related violence, land-linked communal conflict, and terrorism associated with Al-Shabaab. Although political exclusion and weak governance may form part of the context in both countries, the organisations, objectives, and operational methods involved are not

interchangeable. Security policy must respond to the specific nature of each threat while preserving lawful political participation and equal citizenship.

4.4 The Role of Political Institutions and Security Agencies in Managing Ethnic Tensions

Political institutions and security agencies play a central role in preventing ethnic tensions from escalating into widespread insecurity. Their responsibilities include maintaining public order, protecting lives and property, ensuring equal treatment under the law, resolving political disputes through constitutional procedures, and providing effective mechanisms for addressing grievances. The legitimacy of these institutions depends not only on their capacity to enforce laws but also on their impartiality, accountability, and responsiveness to affected communities.

In Nigeria, the federal and state governments, legislatures, courts, electoral institutions, police, and armed forces all have roles in managing internal security. Federalism provides a constitutional structure through which political authority and public responsibilities are distributed, while the courts provide mechanisms for resolving disputes concerning rights, elections, and the exercise of governmental power. The federal character principle is also relevant because equitable representation in public institutions may help reduce perceptions that the state is controlled by particular sectional interests. However, these arrangements can only contribute to security when they are implemented transparently and consistently.

The management of communal conflict requires institutions capable of intervening before local disputes become violent. Traditional authorities, local governments, community organisations, religious leaders, and civil society groups may contribute to mediation and early warning. Their role is particularly important where conflicts involve land, grazing rights, local boundaries, or traditional leadership. Nevertheless, informal mechanisms must operate within constitutional safeguards and should not replace the responsibility of the state to protect citizens and prosecute serious crimes. Fatai's empirical study of persistent communal conflicts in Nigeria finds that biased enforcement and the misapplication of legal and administrative mechanisms can deepen conflict and reduce public confidence in institutions. The findings underline the importance of impartial law enforcement and credible conflict-resolution arrangements (Fatai 281–97).

Security agencies also need to distinguish between peaceful political activity, communal disputes, criminal violence, and organised insurgency. Where these categories are blurred, security operations may affect citizens who are not involved in criminal activity, undermine civil liberties, and increase distrust. In counterinsurgency operations, the protection of civilians, compliance with constitutional and international human rights obligations, and effective investigation of alleged abuses are essential to maintaining public cooperation. Bappah's analysis of Nigeria's military response to Boko Haram identifies problems relating to military professionalism, operational leadership, and the handling of the insurgency. His work illustrates why security effectiveness cannot be measured only by the deployment of military force; it must also consider institutional capacity, coordination, and strategic leadership (Bappah 146–58).

Kenya's constitutional reforms provide a different institutional framework for managing security and ethnic tensions. The 2010 Constitution established a devolved system of government, strengthened constitutional rights, and provided for independent institutions and oversight mechanisms. Devolution is relevant to security because it creates opportunities for local participation and assigns county governments responsibilities in areas that affect community welfare and development. Nevertheless, national security functions remain primarily a national responsibility, and coordination between national agencies and county institutions is necessary where security problems have local causes and consequences.

The 2007–08 post-election violence demonstrated the consequences of institutional failure in electoral and security management. The Waki Commission examined not only the violence itself but also the preparedness and conduct of security agencies, including failures to anticipate and contain the crisis and allegations of human rights violations. Its recommendations highlighted the importance of accountability, investigation, and institutional reform in preventing future violence (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence).

Kenya's counterterrorism experience further illustrates the tension between security effectiveness and the protection of civil liberties. Security operations may be necessary to prevent attacks and disrupt armed networks, but measures that rely on indiscriminate profiling, unlawful detention, enforced disappearance, or excessive force can alienate communities whose cooperation is important for intelligence and prevention. The study of Al-Shabaab-related security responses in Kenya by Botha and colleagues? No: the relevant article “Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer”: Al-Shabaab Violence and State Security Responses in Kenya documents how the construction of Somali and Muslim populations as security threats contributed to coercive practices and tensions between communities and the state. Its analysis emphasises that security measures perceived as discriminatory can deepen the very alienation that counterterrorism policies are intended to address.

Al-Bulushi's research similarly highlights how everyday policing and surveillance can affect Muslim residents and activists in Nairobi and Mombasa. The study is significant because it shows that public confidence in security institutions is shaped not only by responses to major attacks but also by routine encounters between citizens and law enforcement agencies (Al-Bulushi 819–32).

In both countries, the effectiveness of security institutions therefore depends on more than operational capacity. It also requires clear legal mandates, civilian oversight, transparent investigation of alleged abuses, coordination among agencies, and accessible complaint mechanisms. Political leaders must avoid using security institutions to settle partisan disputes or intimidate political opponents. Likewise, security agencies must avoid treating ethnic or religious identity as evidence of criminal responsibility. The principle of individual accountability is fundamental: security intervention should be based on credible evidence of unlawful conduct rather than assumptions about collective identity.

Institutional responses should also address the underlying grievances that can make communities vulnerable to political manipulation. In Nigeria, this includes improving the administration of land and natural resources, strengthening local conflict-resolution systems, ensuring fair access to public services, and addressing the concerns of communities affected by insurgency and displacement. In Kenya, it includes addressing unresolved land disputes, strengthening county-level accountability, ensuring impartial policing, and maintaining credible electoral dispute-resolution procedures. These measures do not eliminate all forms of insecurity, but they can reduce the institutional conditions through which political grievances are transformed into violence.

4.5 Comparative Implications for National Security in Nigeria and Kenya

The experiences of Nigeria and Kenya demonstrate that exclusionary ethnic politics can affect national security through several connected pathways: the politicisation of communal grievances, the escalation of electoral disputes, unequal access to state protection, the erosion of public confidence, and the exploitation of institutional weaknesses by violent actors. However, the forms and intensity of insecurity differ between the two countries. A comparative assessment must therefore distinguish shared institutional vulnerabilities from country-specific security challenges.

First, the relationship between ethnic exclusion and communal violence differs in its principal manifestations. In Nigeria, communal violence has occurred in connection with land and resource disputes, farmer–herder relations, local political competition, and struggles over resource control. In Kenya, communal violence has been particularly associated with land grievances, historical settlement patterns, and electoral mobilisation in certain regions. Both experiences show that political identity can intensify local disputes, but the underlying causes often include material interests and institutional failures. The evidence from Nigeria's Middle Belt and Kenya's land-related electoral conflicts demonstrates the importance of addressing resource governance and historical grievances alongside security operations (Olumba; Kanyinga 325–44; Boone 1311–42).

Second, electoral violence has different historical significance in the two countries. Kenya's 2007–08 post-election crisis was a major national episode in which disputed electoral results, elite mobilisation, land grievances, and institutional weaknesses interacted to produce widespread violence and displacement. Nigeria has experienced election-related violence in different regions and electoral cycles, including the 2011 post-election crisis. In both countries, the credibility of electoral institutions and the impartiality of security agencies are central to preventing political disputes from escalating into violence. The comparative analysis by Krause is useful because it shows that electoral mobilisation and the conduct of security forces can produce different patterns of violence even where elections interact with communal tensions (Krause 185–98).

Third, the principal armed security threats are not identical. Nigeria faces several distinct security challenges, including Boko Haram-related insurgency, Biafra-related separatist agitation, Niger Delta militancy, banditry, and communal violence. These challenges differ in their objectives, organisation, geographic concentration, and relationship to ethnic identity. Kenya's security environment includes terrorism associated with Al-Shabaab, election-related violence, and localised communal conflicts. Al-Shabaab's transnational Islamist orientation should not be conflated with ethnic separatism, even though counterterrorism policies and historical marginalisation can affect communities in areas exposed to its activities. Dowd's comparative research on Islamist violence in Nigeria and Kenya demonstrates the relevance of governance and local grievances while preserving the distinct contexts in which militant organisations operate (Dowd).

Fourth, displacement is an important human-security consequence of insecurity in both countries, but its scale and drivers vary. In Nigeria, displacement has been associated with insurgency, communal violence, banditry, and other conflict-related pressures. UNHCR's country information identifies conflict and insecurity, communal violence, climate-related shocks, and economic pressures as factors contributing to the country's displacement context. This reinforces the need to avoid attributing all displacement to ethnic conflict alone.

In Kenya, displacement associated with the 2007–08 post-election violence was closely connected to electoral conflict, attacks on communities, and land-related grievances. The Waki Commission documented the human consequences of the violence, while Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero demonstrated its effects on trust and social relations. These cases show that displacement is not merely a humanitarian outcome; it can also weaken social cohesion, interrupt economic activity, and deepen grievances when return, restitution, and accountability are inadequately addressed (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence; Dercon and Gutiérrez-Romero 731–44).

Fifth, public confidence in state institutions is a shared security concern. When communities believe that security agencies apply the law selectively, political institutions fail to resolve disputes, or public authorities protect politically connected actors, the legitimacy of the state may decline. In Nigeria, research on communal conflict identifies biased enforcement and institutional failures as factors associated with declining public confidence. In Kenya, research on post-election violence and counterterrorism practices highlights the damaging effects of institutional failure, impunity, and discriminatory policing on relations between citizens and the state (Fatai 281–97; Al-Bulushi 819–32).

Sixth, the institutional responses required by the two countries must reflect their different political structures. Nigeria's federal system provides constitutional and administrative channels for managing regional interests, but it requires more consistent implementation of federal character, effective coordination between federal and state institutions, and impartial protection of citizens. Kenya's devolved system provides county-level channels for political participation and resource allocation, but it requires stronger coordination between national security agencies and county institutions, effective local accountability, and continued attention to historical land and regional grievances. In both countries, decentralisation can create opportunities for inclusion, but it cannot substitute for the rule of law or guarantee that local political elites will govern impartially.

The comparative implications are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Comparative Overview of Major Security Challenges and Institutional Responses in Nigeria and Kenya

Dimension	Nigeria	Kenya
Major communal security concerns	Farmer–herder conflict, communal violence, resource disputes, and local armed confrontations	Land-related communal conflict, localized ethnic tensions, and electoral violence
Electoral security experience	Election-related violence in particular regions and electoral cycles, including 2011	Major post-election crisis in 2007–08, associated with disputed results and wider political grievances
Insurgency and armed movements	Boko Haram and related armed groups in the North-East; other armed actors in different regions	Al-Shabaab-related terrorism and associated security operations
Separatist or autonomy-related tensions	Biafra-related separatist agitation and historical Niger Delta resource-control movements	Historical regional autonomy debates and contemporary grievances, but Al-Shabaab is not a Kenyan ethnic separatist movement
Displacement concerns	Conflict, insurgency, communal violence, banditry, climate shocks, and other pressures	Electoral violence, localized conflict, and regional security pressures
Institutional framework	Federalism, federal and state security institutions, courts, and national human rights protections	Constitutional devolution, national security institutions, courts, and constitutional oversight mechanisms
Key institutional challenge	Ensuring impartial security provision, addressing regional grievances, and improving coordination and accountability	Ensuring accountable counterterrorism, credible electoral institutions, and effective national–county coordination

The comparison indicates that exclusionary ethnic politics becomes a national security concern when it undermines equal citizenship and weakens the ability of institutions to manage disagreement peacefully. The security consequences are not determined by ethnicity alone. They emerge through the interaction of political mobilisation, historical grievances, resource competition, institutional credibility, and the conduct of state and non-state actors. In Nigeria, this interaction occurs within a complex environment of multiple armed threats and regional security challenges. In Kenya, it is particularly visible in the historical relationship between presidential competition, electoral violence, land grievances, and counterterrorism practices.

These findings address the third research objective by demonstrating how ethnic political exclusion can contribute to electoral instability, communal violence, and other security vulnerabilities. They also address the fourth objective by showing that Nigeria's federal character and federal structure, and Kenya's constitutional devolution, provide important but incomplete mechanisms for managing ethnic diversity. The effectiveness of these arrangements depends on impartial law enforcement, accountable political leadership, credible dispute-resolution institutions, and the protection of minority and individual rights.

The central conclusion is that national security cannot be sustained through coercive measures alone. Security

institutions must protect citizens without discrimination, political institutions must provide meaningful channels for addressing grievances, and governments must ensure that public resources and opportunities are administered transparently. Where ethnic identity is used to justify political exclusion or collective punishment, the relationship between citizens and the state may deteriorate. Conversely, institutions that uphold equal citizenship, accountability, and peaceful political participation can reduce the conditions under which ethnic grievances are transformed into insecurity.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section synthesises the findings of the study on ethnic majority rule and its implications for democracy and national security in Nigeria and Kenya. It draws together the historical, institutional, electoral, and security dimensions examined in the preceding sections. Particular attention is given to the five research objectives and their corresponding questions, ensuring that the conclusion reflects the comparative evidence rather than introducing unrelated arguments. The central concern is how political institutions can accommodate ethnic diversity, prevent exclusionary domination, strengthen democratic accountability, and reduce the conditions that allow political grievances to develop into insecurity.

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

The study examined ethnic majority rule and its threats to democracy and national security in Nigeria and Kenya through a qualitative comparative documentary approach. It drew on scholarly literature, constitutional provisions, institutional reports, and historical analyses to investigate the relationship between ethnic political competition, democratic representation, institutional inclusion, and national security. The findings are summarised according to the five research objectives.

First, the study established that the historical foundations of ethnic political competition in Nigeria and Kenya are closely associated with colonial administration, post-independence political arrangements, and the organisation of state power. In Nigeria, regional political organisations during the colonial and early post-independence periods contributed to the development of identity-based political competition. The subsequent adoption of federalism, state creation, and the federal character principle sought to manage regional differences and prevent the excessive concentration of political authority. Nevertheless, regional bargaining, indigeneity, and competition over public appointments and resources have continued to influence political relations.

In Kenya, the historical development of ethnic political competition was shaped by the debate between centralised government and regional autonomy, the concentration of executive authority, and the formation of electoral coalitions around influential political constituencies. The reintroduction of multiparty politics increased electoral competition but did not eliminate the importance of ethnic and regional alliances. The 2010 Constitution introduced devolution as an institutional response to historical centralisation and marginalisation. The study therefore established that ethnic political competition in both countries has historical and institutional foundations, although the political structures through which it operates are different.

Second, the study found that ethnic considerations continue to influence political party formation, electoral mobilisation, leadership selection, and political representation in both countries. In Nigeria, constitutional requirements encourage political parties to maintain national character, while presidential elections create incentives for candidates to secure geographically broad support. However, regional balancing, informal zoning arrangements, party leadership negotiations, and the selection of political candidates may still reflect ethnic and regional considerations.

In Kenya, electoral coalitions have historically depended on alliances among influential ethnic and regional constituencies. Presidential elections have been particularly consequential because of the historical concentration of executive authority and the perceived relationship between electoral victory and access to public appointments and resources. The findings show that ethnic coalition-building can be consistent with democracy. It may promote negotiation and political accommodation when different communities are included in decision-making. However, it can weaken democratic accountability when coalitions become temporary elite arrangements that distribute political opportunities according to ethnic entitlement rather than transparent and constitutional principles.

Third, the study established that political exclusion and unequal access to state power remain significant challenges to democratic inclusion in both countries. Nigeria's federal character principle was designed to promote balanced representation in public institutions and discourage the predominance of particular sectional interests. However, the interaction between federal character and indigeneity can create difficulties for citizens whose residence and citizenship do not correspond with the officially recognised claims of state or local origin. Consequently, formal representation does not always guarantee equal access to public employment, political appointments, and other state opportunities.

In Kenya, historical centralisation and the distribution of political opportunities through national patronage networks have contributed to perceptions of regional marginalisation. The 2010 Constitution sought to address these concerns through devolution, equitable revenue allocation, and constitutional protections for marginalised communities. Although devolution has expanded opportunities for local participation, its effectiveness depends on the accountability of county institutions and

the equitable administration of public resources. The study therefore found that both countries require stronger mechanisms for translating formal recognition of diversity into substantive political and economic inclusion.

Fourth, the study found that exclusionary ethnic politics can contribute to national insecurity when it interacts with electoral grievances, historical disputes, competition over resources, and weak institutional accountability. In Nigeria, communal violence, farmer–herder conflicts, resource-related militancy, separatist agitation, and insurgency represent distinct security challenges. Although political marginalisation may contribute to some grievances, these forms of insecurity have different historical origins, organisational structures, and immediate causes. For example, Boko Haram's insurgency cannot be treated as an ethnic separatist movement, while Biafra-related agitation, Niger Delta militancy, and farmer–herder conflicts require separate explanations.

In Kenya, the 2007–08 post-election violence demonstrated how disputed electoral outcomes, historical land grievances, political mobilisation, and institutional weaknesses can interact to produce widespread insecurity. The country also faces terrorism associated with Al-Shabaab and localised communal conflicts. These threats should not be conflated with ethnic separatism, although perceptions of marginalisation and the conduct of security institutions may influence public responses to them.

The findings further established that insecurity has consequences beyond immediate violence. Displacement, destruction of property, interruption of economic activities, loss of livelihoods, and declining confidence in public institutions can weaken social cohesion and democratic legitimacy. The relationship between ethnic political exclusion and national insecurity is therefore conditional rather than automatic. Ethnic identity alone does not cause violence; its security implications depend on the political, socioeconomic, and institutional circumstances in which it is mobilised.

Fifth, the study found that constitutional and institutional mechanisms in Nigeria and Kenya provide important opportunities for managing ethnic diversity, but their effectiveness depends on implementation, accountability, and institutional impartiality. Nigeria's federal system, federal character principle, national party requirements, and constitutional protections provide mechanisms for managing regional interests and promoting representation. However, problems associated with indigeneity, uneven implementation, and perceptions of unequal resource distribution limit their effectiveness.

Kenya's devolution framework, constitutional rights, equitable revenue-sharing provisions, and independent institutions provide channels for local participation and political accountability. Nevertheless, the historical significance of presidential elections, the persistence of ethnic coalition-building, and local political competition continue to create challenges. The study consequently established that decentralisation and power-sharing arrangements cannot guarantee inclusion without effective oversight, impartial law enforcement, credible electoral administration, and the protection of minority rights.

The comparative findings demonstrate that Nigeria and Kenya share the challenge of preventing electoral and demographic advantage from becoming disproportionate political control. However, their institutional responses differ. Nigeria relies principally on federalism and federal character arrangements, while Kenya has pursued devolution and constitutional mechanisms for equitable representation and resource distribution. Both countries require institutions that protect citizens as equal members of the political community, irrespective of ethnic affiliation or political alignment.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that ethnic majority rule becomes a threat to democracy and national security when electoral or demographic advantage is converted into disproportionate control over political institutions, public appointments, economic opportunities, and state resources. Majority rule is a legitimate component of democratic government, but it must operate within constitutional limits that protect equal citizenship, minority rights, political competition, and institutional accountability. Where electoral victory is interpreted as permission for one ethnic constituency or political coalition to dominate public institutions, democratic participation becomes unequal and the legitimacy of the state may be weakened.

The comparative analysis of Nigeria and Kenya demonstrates that ethnic political competition is shaped by historical experiences and institutional arrangements. In Nigeria, federalism and the federal character principle were developed partly to manage regional diversity and prevent the concentration of political authority. However, the persistence of indigeneity-related exclusion, regional bargaining, and disputes over appointments and resource distribution indicates that formal constitutional provisions do not automatically produce substantive inclusion. In Kenya, the historical concentration of executive power contributed to the high political stakes of presidential elections and the importance of ethnic coalition-building. The 2010 Constitution introduced devolution and other safeguards to address historical marginalisation, but their effectiveness continues to depend on accountable implementation and the protection of equal political participation.

The study also concludes that exclusionary ethnic politics can contribute to national insecurity, but it is not a sufficient explanation for the different forms of violence experienced in either country. Nigeria's insecurity includes insurgency, separatist agitation, resource-related militancy, farmer–herder conflict, banditry, and communal violence. Kenya's security environment includes electoral violence, land-related communal

tensions, and terrorism associated with Al-Shabaab. Although political exclusion, institutional weakness, and historical grievances may interact with these threats, their different origins and characteristics require distinct explanations and responses. It would therefore be analytically inaccurate to attribute all insecurity in either country to ethnic majority rule.

An important finding is that democratic inclusion and national security are interconnected. Citizens are more likely to regard political institutions as legitimate when they have meaningful opportunities to participate, receive equal protection under the law, and access public services without discrimination. Conversely, perceptions of institutional bias, unequal resource distribution, and the selective application of justice can weaken public confidence and make political grievances more difficult to resolve peacefully. Security policies that disregard constitutional rights or treat entire communities as collectively responsible for the conduct of individuals may further undermine state legitimacy.

The study consequently concludes that sustainable democratic governance in multi-ethnic societies requires more than the periodic conduct of elections or the formal recognition of ethnic diversity. It requires constitutional safeguards that limit the concentration of political power, equitable representation in public institutions, accountable political parties, transparent resource allocation, credible electoral processes, and impartial security agencies. Nigeria and Kenya can strengthen democratic stability by ensuring that political institutions serve all citizens rather than particular ethnic or electoral constituencies.

Ultimately, the central challenge is not the existence of ethnic diversity or democratic majority rule, but the failure to translate political competition into inclusive governance. An effective democratic system must permit communities to organise, express their interests, and compete for political authority while ensuring that electoral victories do not become instruments of permanent exclusion. Inclusive institutions, equal citizenship, constitutional accountability, and peaceful conflict resolution are therefore essential to strengthening both democracy and national security in Nigeria and Kenya.

5.3 Recommendations for Democratic Inclusion and National Security

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for strengthening democratic inclusion, institutional accountability, national integration, and security in Nigeria and Kenya.

1. Strengthen constitutional safeguards against exclusionary ethnic domination.

Both countries should ensure that constitutional provisions protecting equal citizenship, minority rights, and political participation are implemented consistently. Nigeria should strengthen the practical application of the federal character principle while addressing administrative practices that disadvantage citizens because of their state or locality of origin. Kenya should continue to implement constitutional provisions on devolution, equality, and the protection of marginalised communities. In both countries, constitutional safeguards should prevent electoral majorities from exercising public authority in ways that systematically exclude other constituencies.

2. Promote equitable political representation and inclusive leadership selection.

Political parties should adopt transparent and participatory procedures for selecting candidates, appointing party leaders, and allocating internal political responsibilities. Leadership selection should reflect national diversity without reducing political representation to the distribution of positions among ethnic elites. Parties should provide opportunities for women, young people, minority communities, and historically under-represented groups to participate meaningfully in political decision-making. Such inclusion should be based on democratic participation, competence, and constitutional equality rather than ethnic patronage.

3. Strengthen internal democracy and accountability within political parties.

Political parties should institutionalise transparent candidate selection, competitive internal elections, financial accountability, and clear procedures for resolving internal disputes. Electoral coalitions should be supported by identifiable policy commitments and publicly accountable agreements rather than temporary arrangements based exclusively on elite bargaining. In Nigeria and Kenya, stronger party institutions can encourage issue-based political competition and reduce excessive dependence on identity-based mobilisation.

4. Improve electoral accountability and the credibility of electoral institutions.

Electoral management bodies should maintain operational independence, transparency, and public confidence. Election results should be announced through verifiable procedures, while complaints should be resolved promptly through accessible legal mechanisms. Political parties and candidates should commit themselves to constitutional dispute resolution and reject intimidation, incitement, and electoral violence. Security agencies should provide impartial protection to voters, candidates, electoral officials, and election materials. These measures are particularly important in preventing disputed elections from escalating into wider communal or political violence.

5. Ensure equitable distribution of public resources and development opportunities.

Governments should adopt transparent and measurable criteria for allocating public expenditure, development projects, public employment, and other state opportunities. Resource distribution should respond to population needs, developmental disparities, constitutional obligations, and legitimate regional considerations. In Nigeria, particular attention should be given to the equitable implementation of federal allocations, public appointments, and development interventions across states and communities. In Kenya, the equitable distribution of national revenue and effective county-level budgeting should remain central to the implementation of devolution. Public expenditure and appointments should be subject to independent scrutiny to discourage partisan or ethnic favouritism.

6. Strengthen conflict-resolution and early-warning mechanisms.

Both countries should improve institutional mechanisms for identifying and addressing communal tensions before they escalate into violence. Local governments, traditional authorities, religious leaders, community organisations, civil society groups, and relevant public agencies should participate in structured dialogue and mediation. In Nigeria, conflict-resolution mechanisms should address land-use disputes, farmer–herder relations, resource-control grievances, and local boundary disagreements. In Kenya, particular attention should be given to historical land grievances, intercommunity relations, and disputes associated with local political competition. Mediation should be supported by accessible legal remedies and should not replace the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes.

7. Promote impartial and accountable security institutions.

Police, military, intelligence, and other security agencies should operate according to constitutional mandates, professional standards, and human rights obligations. Security operations should be based on credible evidence of unlawful conduct rather than assumptions about ethnic, religious, or regional identity. Both countries should strengthen civilian oversight, independent investigation of alleged abuses, accessible complaint procedures, and accountability for unlawful conduct. Security personnel found responsible for violations should be subject to appropriate legal and disciplinary processes. These measures are essential for maintaining public confidence and encouraging cooperation between security agencies and local communities.

8. Address the distinct causes of insecurity rather than treating all threats as ethnic conflict.

Security policies should recognise the different historical and operational characteristics of insurgency, terrorism, separatist agitation, farmer–herder conflict, resource-related militancy, banditry, and electoral violence. In Nigeria, responses to Boko Haram, Biafra-related separatist agitation, Niger Delta militancy, and farmer–herder violence should be developed according to their distinct contexts and legal characteristics. Peaceful advocacy and constitutional demands should be distinguished from criminal violence and armed attacks. In Kenya, counterterrorism measures against Al-Shabaab should be evidence-based and accompanied by safeguards against discriminatory policing, while land-related communal tensions should be addressed through appropriate land governance and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

9. Strengthen national integration through civic education and inclusive public communication.

Governments, educational institutions, political parties, and civil society organisations should promote civic education emphasising equal citizenship, constitutional rights, democratic participation, and respect for cultural diversity. Public communication should discourage political narratives that portray ethnic communities as collective enemies or question the citizenship of individuals because of their ancestry. Educational programmes should encourage intercommunity understanding and emphasise the shared responsibilities of citizens in maintaining democratic institutions. Political leaders should be held accountable for public statements that incite violence or encourage discrimination.

10. Improve the protection and rehabilitation of conflict-affected populations.

Governments should strengthen the protection of internally displaced persons and other communities affected by violence. Measures should include access to shelter, healthcare, education, livelihood support, legal documentation, and appropriate compensation or restitution where applicable. Return and resettlement programmes should be voluntary, safe, and consistent with the rights of affected populations. Both countries should also strengthen mechanisms for documenting conflict-related abuses and supporting reconciliation among affected communities. Addressing displacement is important not only for humanitarian reasons but also for preventing unresolved grievances from becoming sources of future instability.

11. Strengthen cooperation between national and subnational institutions.

Nigeria should improve coordination among federal, state, and local institutions in addressing security

challenges that cross administrative boundaries. Kenya should strengthen cooperation between national security agencies and county governments, particularly in areas where local grievances have implications for national security. In both countries, clear institutional responsibilities, reliable information-sharing, and accountable funding arrangements are necessary to prevent gaps in public protection and conflict management.

12. Institutionalise monitoring and evaluation of democratic inclusion.

Both countries should develop measurable indicators for assessing political representation, access to public appointments, equitable resource distribution, electoral participation, institutional accountability, and public confidence in security agencies. Independent oversight institutions, research organisations, and civil society groups should be encouraged to publish periodic assessments of inclusion and institutional performance. Such assessments would help identify patterns of exclusion, evaluate the implementation of constitutional safeguards, and provide evidence for improving democratic and security policies.

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