

Explaining the Institutionalisation of Power-sharing in Nigeria: A Hypothesis

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Introduction

One of the most contemporary concerns of the new institutionalist literature is the issue of institutional continuity and change. Institutionalists seek to provide answers to the question of why and how principles and practices become institutionalised. Institutionalisation denotes a stage in institutional development in which institutions become relatively accepted and considerably established to the extent that actors find it difficult to abolish them². Many scholars agree that the institutionalisation of principles and practices is enhanced when institutions possess continuity reproduction mechanism(s) which helps them to withstand pressures for change (Pierson 2004, Lindner 2003, Thelen 1999). However, as I will show in the later part of this paper, there is no agreement on the particular continuity reproductive mechanism(s) that is central to institutional persistence. Based on a case study of Nigeria, I will demonstrate in my Ph.D. thesis that the power relation of the opponents and proponents of institutional change is the core mechanism that promotes the institutionalisation of political principles and practices. The rest of this paper will present how I arrived at this hypothesis. I will proceed by making some brief remarks about institutional politics in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a deeply divided society with several lines of social divisions and bases of group identification. These lines of division reflect on the number of ethnic and regional groups that make up Nigeria. It was commonly assumed that Nigeria is segmented into about 250 ethnic groups until one notable Nigerian social anthropologist showed that there are 374 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Otite 1990:44-57,175-183). The population of these ethnic groups varies considerably; the three largest groups are more than half of the entire population while the eight largest groups constitute almost two-third (Nnoli 1995:27). This population disparity among the ethnic groups broadly divides the groups into the numerical (and political) ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-

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² I adapted this definition from Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson. *The New Institutional Politics: Performance and Outcome*. (London: Routledge, 2000:3)

Fulani (28% of the population), the Yoruba (18% of the population) and Igbo (16% of the population)³. All the other ethnic groups fit into the minority category, with varying degrees of political status, depending on their number and political influence. Notwithstanding the differences in numerical and political status of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, the entire groups share a common feature - each ethnic group live in an identifiable geographical location.

Ethnic cleavages in Nigeria coincide with other bases of group identification such as region and religion. For instance, the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are concentrated mainly in the South-eastern, South-western, and North-western zones respectively, while the other smaller groups can be found mainly in the South-south, North-central and North-western zones. Again, the Northern region of Nigeria is inhabited mainly by Muslim communities while the Christians are predominant in the South. Besides dealing with complex cleavages, Nigeria is faced with the challenge of political instability. In fact, many observers see the political history of Nigeria as a history of political instability (see amongst others, Ejiogu 2001, Salawu 2001, Reno 1999, Diamond, Kirk-Greene and Oyediran 1997, Olugbade 1992, and Anyanwu 1982). In four decades of independence, Nigeria has written six separate federal constitutions⁴, moved from Westminster-style parliamentarism to American-type presidentialism, witnessed the emergence and replacement of eleven regimes, and oscillated between democratic pluralism and military authoritarianism⁵ (Suberu and Diamond 2002).

Despite these visible signs of discontinuity, one can observe a deeper structure of political continuity in Nigeria. This manifests mainly in the area of the preservation of group identities and the accommodation of the diverse ethnic communities within the power structure of the state. One Nigerian scholar who alludes this observation notes that “even though successive military governments have tinkered at will with the Constitution, they have generally been more tolerant of the RAS (*Revenue Allocation System*) provisions of the Constitution, perhaps because of the extreme sensitivity of revenue allocation issues in Nigeria” (Phillips 1991:107 emphasis mine). Another student of Nigerian politics insists

³ These figures are based on rough estimates derived from various reports on Nigeria’s population. There is no official tabulation of the size of ethnic groups in Nigeria.

⁴ The Constitutions were written in 1960, 1963, 1979, 1989, 1995, and 1999. An attempt to rewrite the 1999 Constitution was rejected by the National Assembly in May 2006.

⁵ Nigeria was ruled by eight military dictators and three civilian leaders between October 1, 1960 and May 29, 1999.

that “if the last 50 years of Nigerian politics have been constant in anything, it is the very public and overwhelming conviction that Nigeria is and can be only federal” (Lincoln 1999:17). These comments point to the fact that in Nigeria, unlike in countries such as Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Cyprus, no political regime, including the military dictatorships, has challenged the existence of any ethnic group or contested the relevance of the institutions designed to accommodate ethnic diversity in Nigerian society and politics⁶. The only time when these practices were challenged was in 1966 when the regime of General Aguiyi Ironsi (January 1966-July 1966) attempted to abrogate ethnic associations and the Nigerian federal system. However, the regime was quickly toppled largely on the account this action (Ihonvbere and Shaw 1998:57).

In the contemporary Nigerian society, one can observe the existence of formal and informal principles and practices established to facilitate equitable distribute state power and encourage the recognition and respect for ethnic differences in the political process. Isumonah (2001:5) notes that “the search for stable inter-ethnic relations among Nigeria’s multiple ethnic nations has laid emphasis on sharing of political power”. Other notable students of Nigerian politics have also acknowledged the tendency towards ethnic power-sharing in Nigeria (Mustapha 2004, Suberu 2001, Akinyele 2000, Agbaje 1998, Jinadu 1985, and Horowitz 1985). In the context of this study, power-sharing represents “a set of principles that when carried out through institutions and practices, provide every significant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision-making abilities on common issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group” (Sisk 1996:5). In the course of history, Nigerian political leaders have creatively designed and initiated several power-sharing principles and practices with which they have used to deal with the country’s heritage of ethnic diversity. These power-sharing principles and practices include federalism and devolution, proportionality principles federal revenue sharing; zoning, rotation and federal character principles in office distribution; and distribution requirements in the party and electoral systems.

⁶ In 1994, the Hutu dominated government killed over 800,000 Tutsis in one of the worst genocides in history. For more on the Rwandan genocide see Helen Hintjens. 1999. “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37(2):241-286. In Zimbabwe, a power-sharing arrangement embedded in the country’s 1980 Constitution saw the black majority conceding 20 percent of the parliamentary seats to white Zimbabweans, which constitute only 2 percent of the population. In 1987, a Zimbabwean black-majority government abolished these reserved seats. The same situation was the case in Cyprus, where minority guarantees were part of the broad power-sharing arrangement enshrined in the country’s 1960 Constitution. However, these power-sharing arrangements did not last long before they were abrogated. For more discussions on these cases, see Horowitz 1991^a:134-137, 144-145.

Based on Nigeria's political history, one can logically claim that there is a considerable degree of continuity in the practice of power-sharing contrary to the instability that have bedevilled other aspects of political governance in the country. However, some analysts may challenge this claim by contending that power-sharing arrangements in Nigeria have also undergone frequent changes. It is therefore, important to affirm that what many power-sharing arrangements in Nigeria have experienced is not a case of institutional abrogation but that of institutional reform and adaptation. Institutional change is construed here as a wholesale abolition of an entire set of institution, while institutional reform implies a modification of an institution without discarding its fundamental basis.

The aim of my PhD thesis is to present a theoretical reconstruction of Nigeria's experience with power-sharing in order to explain the conditions behind the continuous practice of various power-sharing principles. To this end, the crucial question my thesis addresses is, namely: Why and how have the principles and practices of power-sharing in Nigeria become institutionalised? Related to this central question are the following sub-questions: (1) what are the fundamental power-sharing practices in Nigeria, why and how did they develop, and what are their goals? (2) What kinds of political practices, particularly concerning ethnic politics, have emerged following the introduction of various power-sharing arrangements in Nigeria? The thesis will strive to locate the evolution and continuous practice of power-sharing within the wider social struggles in the Nigerian society.

The present paper introduces the theoretical framework for understanding the continuous practice of power-sharing in Nigeria. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections as follows: the first section analyzes the two dominant models of power-sharing and presents a third model which is modified to synthesize the two dominant theoretical models of power-sharing. The second section situates the practice of power-sharing within the new institutionalist perspective, while the third section accounts for institutional continuity based on the new institutionalist perspective. Finally, the fourth section offers some thoughts on the future direction of my research.

Theorizing power-sharing

In the past two decades, the idea of power-sharing received tremendous attention in academic and policy discourse. This development can be attributed to the fact that in the 1990s, ethnic divisions emerged as one of the most serious sources of violent conflicts in the world; and one which requires a constructive management (Lijphart 2002:37). Again, the prominence of the power-sharing discourse can be linked to the opportunities provided by the wave of democratic transition in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe for constitutional designs or reconstruction⁷. However, the contemporary popularity of the concept of power-sharing was preceded by the development of the theory of power-sharing. The theory of power-sharing emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, largely to challenge a common assumption that stability and democracy would be difficult to achieve in multi-ethnic societies. Behind this assumption is the claim that deep social divisions and political differences within plural societies are elements which would ensure perennial instability and breakdown of democracy in those states. For several years, this assumption held sway unabated. It only ebbed down when Arend Lijphart developed the consociational model to challenge the notion.

I. The consociational model

The groundwork for the development of the consociational model was laid by Arthur Lewis's (1965) *Politics in West Africa*. Lewis made one of the earliest calls for a rethink of the idea of impracticability of democracy in plural societies. He distinguished between two types of societies (class society and plural society)⁸. On one hand, plural societies are divided by tribal, religious, linguistic, cultural and regional differences, and they are more likely to be found in colonized territories of Africa, Asia and Latin America. On the other hand, class societies are homogenous societies in which social class is the key source of political identification and differentiation, and this type of societies is predominant in Western Europe. Lewis argues that it is not democracy that is inappropriate in plural societies but a specific kind of democracy, namely, majoritarian democracy. Lewis suggests that the kind of democracy that plural societies need is coalition governments where the

⁷ For part of the lively debates generated by South Africa's transition to democracy, see Arend Lijphart. 1985. *Power-Sharing in South Africa*. Policy Papers in International Affairs. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California; and Donald Horowitz. 1991. *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁸ This discussion is based on the excellent summary of Lewis' assumptions in Lijphart 1977:144-146.

regime is not polarized between the government and the opposition. Political polarization in multiethnic societies has the risk of arousing rivalry between the ethnic group(s) in government and those in opposition.

Arend Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy is grounded on ideas similar to those enunciated by Arthur Lewis. Lijphart's consociationalism was developed in his groundbreaking work: *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (1968) and elaborated in his later works (1969, 1977, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2002). The consociational model offers empirical and normative/prescriptive insights. At the empirical level, the model explains the political stability of a number of European plural democracies such as Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. While at the normative/prescription level, the consociational model offers the experiences of the plural societies in the West as vital prescriptions to the plural societies in the Third World that are plagued by the problems of political instability and democratic failure (Lijphart 1977:1-2).

The key element in Lijphart's consociational model is elite cooperation. According to Lijphart (1977:16) the political stability of consociational democracies is explained by the cooperation of leaders of different groups which transcend the segmental or sub-cultural cleavages at the mass level. Related to this element are four important defining features of the consociational model (Lijphart 1977:25). The first and the most important is government by grand coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the plural society. This can take the form of a grand council or committee with important advisory functions in parliamentary systems or a grand coalition of a President and other top officeholders in a presidential system. The other basic elements of the consociational model are (1) the proportionality principle in political and bureaucratic representation as well as in the allocation of public funds; (2) a high degree of autonomy for each segment to run its own internal affairs; (3) the mutual veto or concurrent majority rule, which serves as an additional protection to vital minority interests.

The consociational model maintains that participating in a governing coalition is the sure means of addressing the problems of mutual distrust and fear of domination by groups, which are about the most difficult challenge to inter-group cooperation. According to Lijphart (1977:31) "the prospects of participating in government is a powerful stimulus to moderation and compromise because it minimizes the risk of being deceived by the other

parties or by one's own undue optimism concerning the willingness of other parties to be accommodating". In other words, participating in government is a guarantee of political security to groups that do not quite trust each other and a way of building inter-group trust. Although executive grand coalition is the 'prototypal' consociational instrument, Lijphart (1977:32) insists that this device must be complemented by coalition in other organs of government such as permanent or ad hoc councils and committees with decisive influence. He also insists that it is advisable to be in the coalition at the same time rather than to be in a diachronic coalition where segments alternate or rotate political offices. Lijphart suggests that another aspect of grand coalition entails the creation of an arrangement in which all the top offices are linked up and distributed among segments.

There are two major problems with the idea of grand coalition. The first is the question of when the coalition should be formed, that is, whether it should be a pre- or post-election coalition. Lijphart was not clear about this question but from his arguments, one can deduce that he anticipates a post-election coalition. The problems with post-election coalitions are many⁹. One of them is that the approach requires groups that won an election to partly relinquish their hold on power in order to accommodate other groups; when faced with this costly commitment, groups may prefer to hold onto their privileged positions. The other challenge relates to the difficulty of having all the ethnic nationalities in the government at the same time. Lijphart's prescription is practicable in countries like Netherlands and Belgium where there are small number of segments. Certainly Lijphart's prescription will be impracticable in societies with several ethnic segments. In such societies, it may not be feasible to accommodate all ethnic segments in the coalition government at the same time.

Besides the idea of a grand coalition, the other features of consociationalism also call for further examination. For instance, Lijphart mentioned that there are two variations in the practice of the proportionality principle. The first variation is the deliberate over-representation of small segments in political and bureaucratic positions while the other is proportional representation. There is a tendency that the application of this principle could face a major difficulty in societies with high fluidity of minority/ majority identity¹⁰. As many constructivist scholars have observed, majority/ minority identity are not static; they are constantly being reconstructed (see Sata 2006:23). Groups may define themselves (and

⁹ These problems are nicely summarized in Spears 2000: 108-111.

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion of the contestation of majority/ minority status in Nigeria, see Ikporukpo 2001.

other groups) as either majority or minority based on multiplicity of criteria such as political, economic, administrative and demographic. Consequently, working out an acceptable proportionality formula may be an arduous task for countries attempting to install consociational arrangement. Another serious challenge to the idea of proportionality principle, one which Lijphart (1977:44) also acknowledges, is the problem of how to contain the pressures and struggles that may follow the desire of some groups to switch from a system of proportional representation to that of over-representation.

The last key prescription of the consociational model is that segments of a plural society should be granted autonomy. This entails “the rule of the minority over itself in the area of the minority’s exclusive concern” (Lijphart 1977:41). The logic here is that on all matters of common interests, decisions should be made by all the segments together based on a rough proportional degree of influence. However, on other matters of specific interest to particular groups, decision-making and execution authority should be reserved to the separate segments. According to Lijphart (1977:41) the delegation of law-making and implementation powers to groups, together with the proportional allocation of state funds to each group are the basis for the establishment of “a robust segmental government”. Lijphart maintains that a plausible approach to the establishment of segmental governments is to ensure territorial concentration and separation of each segment in units that overlap with the segmental cleavages. This recommendation sounds interesting but it seems impracticable where there are several segmental groups. Meanwhile, there is a more serious problem. This is with regards to the question of how to control agitation for further sub-federal division by ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. Despite the problems with the prescriptions of the consociational model, it provides tremendous understanding of the structure of power-sharing. The following discussion will examine the attempts by Donald Horowitz to remedy the shortcomings of Lijphart’s consociation model in a second model of power-sharing known as the incentivist model.

II. *The incentivist model*

The key motivation for the development of the incentivist model is Horowitz’s contention that Arend Lijphart missed out an important lever to ethnic accommodation in his consociational model. He argues that the need to form a coalition is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for inter-group accommodation. This is especially so because not all coalitions are inclined to accommodation. Horowitz (1991^a:139-141) maintained that what

was lacking in Lijphart's consociationalism is the *incentive* for political actors to support the consociational system, to make a coalition agreement, and consequently, to foster inter-group accommodation. He observed that even if political elites commit themselves to a consociational arrangement at the outset in a competitive political environment, centrifugal forces emanating from their followers and political opponents may easily undermine the durability of the agreement. Horowitz therefore, argues that what is needed to augment Lijphart's consociationalism is to produce an *incentive* that will induce politicians to play conflict-limiting roles and sustain inter-group coalition. This incentive, according to Horowitz, can spring from the design of the political structure, and the most important of these structures are national territory and the electoral system. Federalism and regional autonomy constitutes the specific territorial device of the incentivist model while vote pooling arrangements are the most important electoral device.

Although many observers and practitioners agree that the creation of state(s) is an important means of achieving federalism and regional autonomy, there is a disagreement on the issue of the form and scope of the creation of states exercise. The last word is yet to be said about the ideal number of states for a plural society, and whether the states should be ethnically homogenous or heterogeneous. However, it is on these issues that Donald Horowitz offered his most important contributions to the theory of power-sharing. Horowitz (1985:613) suggested that if groups are territorially separate with prominent sub-ethnic divisions, ethnically homogenous states may be the best option¹¹. He argued that the creation of ethnically homogenous states has the advantage of fragmenting a formerly homogenous ethnic group and reducing the ability of such groups to make coherent divisive claims at the national level. Thus, issues which might otherwise have been contested at inter-group level may end up at the intra-group level; and in so doing, national level politics is relieved of several contentious issues.

But in communities where groups are intermixed, Horowitz (1985:617) suggests that ethnically heterogeneous states be created. He claims that an ethnically heterogeneous state allows ethnically and sub-ethnically differentiated political actors to intermingle. Also, he maintains that the process of governing heterogeneous states may create opportunities for the development of inter-ethnic elite relations that can soften ethnic hostility among

¹¹ It should be noted that the term ethnically homogenous territories does not preclude the existence of sub-ethnic cleavages.

politicians and motivate inter-group fission. Finally, Horowitz posits that heterogeneous states afford groups that are minority at the federal level the opportunity to become majority in one or more states, thereby mitigating their reduced influence at the federal level. Horowitz's observations about the creation of state are interesting, particularly the point he made regarding the need to proliferate the states. He claims that the most states there are, the less will be the tendency of ethnic and sub-ethnic groups to be concerned with parochial alignments and issues, and the greater will be their difficulty of colluding across state lines to make coherent and divisive claims at the national level (Horowitz 1985:617). In other words, creation of states introduces more complex issue agenda on which states, rather than ethnic groups, may disagree because the interest of states (even the ones predominantly populated by a particular ethnic group) may differ from each other. Related to the last point is the view that proliferation of states makes the emergence of ethnic hegemony more difficult. Although these claims by Horowitz appear intuitively convincing, yet, they require some empirical endorsement.

Although the above points are enlightening and well-received, there are still a number of contentions I need to point out. First is the tendency of successful creation of state in one locality to inspire further demands for more states, leading to ceaseless demands for new states. Perhaps, Horowitz did not contemplate this possibility, and that is why he did not offer any concrete suggestion on how to deal with this negative development. The second relates to how to deal with multiple minority demands that usually arise in deeply divided societies. Proliferation of states tends to produce or activate dormant minorities who did not have the capacity to articulate their demands in the former state. The activation of these new minority groups may compound the woes of weak states which may not be able to deal with the demands of the existing minorities, not to mention the new ones that have just been activated. In other words, multiethnic states are torn between coping with the claims of the 'bigger minorities' and the fresh claims that will be activated once new states are created.

In addition to his submissions on the issue of territorial restructuring, Horowitz also made important contributions in the area of political engineering of party and electoral systems. Horowitz (1985:628) argues that electoral systems offer incentives for elite coalition and the platform for sustained inter-group power-sharing. He claims that aspects of the electoral system such as the delimitation of constituencies, electoral principles (such as proportional representation or first-past-the-post), the number of members per constituency, and the

structure of the ballot, all have a potential impact on ethnic alignments, electoral appeals, and elite coalitions in multi-ethnic societies. The key ingredient of the electoral system which serves as a powerful lever of ethnic accommodation is what Horowitz called *vote pooling*. Vote pooling refers to an exchange of the votes of their respective supporters by politicians who have been conditioned by the electoral system to be marginally dependent for victory on the votes of groups other than their own (Horowitz 2002:23, 1991^a:167).

To secure pooled votes, politicians must behave moderately on issues that generate inter-group disagreement. According to Horowitz (1991^a:184) three elements are needed to induce inter-ethnic vote pooling. The first is party proliferation, while the creation of ethnically heterogeneous constituency is the second element. The third element is the provision of electoral incentives that would make vote pooling politically profitable to politicians. There are three ways through which countries have tried to create electoral incentives. The first is through the enactment of distribution requirements for electoral victory, beyond the plurality or majority requirement. Distribution requirements are also imposed on politicians through the rules guiding party formation. The second is the adoption of preferential voting, which requires that where there are three candidates in an election, each voter must specify his second preference; where there are more than three candidates, his second and third preferences¹². The third approach is through the adoption of a system where all political offices are reserved for specific ethnic group.

On the surface, the distinction between the consociational and the incentivist models of power-sharing may be opaque as such one needs to look deeper into the prescriptions of the two models, particularly on Horowitz's strategies of incentive building, in order to distinguish the two models. In specific terms, the consociational model is different from the incentivist models because it suggests post-election ethnic coalition contrary to the pre-election coalition that the incentivist model seeks to achieve through vote pooling. Again, the consociational model can be distinguished from the incentivist model because while the former lays emphasis only on the elite level politics, the latter is concerned with both elite level and mass level politics.

¹² The implication of this arrangement is that in the absence of an initial majority, all but the top two candidates are eliminated. The alternative preference voter whose first (or second) choices are not among the top two contenders but whose second (or third) choices are among the top are reallocated to them to compute a majority, see Horowitz, 1985:639-640 for details.

Another important distinction between the incentivist and the consociational models lies on the type of executive they prefer. The consociational model is more inclined to parliamentary system than presidential system because parliamentarism offers a collegial cabinet in which various segments can be represented (Lijphart 1977:33-34). On the contrary, the incentivist model favours presidential system for two reasons. First, presidential system makes it impossible for a single ethnic group to capture the state permanently by mere capturing a majority in the parliament. This is essentially because presidential systems make access to government more complex. A group that is excluded from power in the parliament can still gain access to the government through the president. Second, presidentialism provides an important arena for inter-group conciliation deriving from an electoral formula based on vote pooling. States geographic distribution plus plurality rule as the basis for victory in presidential elections can create a system where the elected president can become a conspicuously pan-national figure, because the vote that earned him victory were pooled from different parts of the country. The vote pooling system makes the president more than a representative of his own group, and this element can serve as an incentive that will motivate politicians wishing to be president to make efforts toward cultivating good relationship with politicians from other ethnic groups and parties (Horowitz 1991^a:205-206).

In this section, I presented the main points as well as the shortcomings in the arguments of the two major perspectives in the theory of power-sharing. In the ensuing section, I will examine how the conventional models of power-sharing relate to the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria. I will argue that there are overlaps in the arguments of the consociational and incentivist models. Consequently, none of the two approaches can on its own adequately explain the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria. I will therefore attempt to synthesise the two models by devising a framework which will eliminates the overlaps.

III. *Transcending the consociational/incentivist dichotomy: the tri-polar model*

Many analysts of power-sharing such as Reilly (2003) have tried to situate themselves somewhere at the end of the spectrum between the consociational and incentivist models. Others like Sisk (1996) have attempted to fashion a synthesis of the two positions, albeit, without providing an articulate framework for the harmonisation; thus they end up sliding to one of the edges they want to avoid. Because the various elements of the consociational

and incentivist models of power-sharing can be found in the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria, this study will synthesize both models in the analysis of power-sharing in Nigeria.

As ideal types, the consociational and incentivist models represent two extreme positions. As Horowitz (2002:26) himself observed, only a few countries, if any, have adopted wholly either of the two models. The adoption of any of the two power-sharing models is usually at best partial. This is mainly because the process of devising power-sharing arrangements involves context specific rather than universal considerations envisaged by both the consociationalists and the incentivists. Beyond this, there are the biases of constitutional actors that may favour and disfavour a particular approach. There are also variations in the positions and interests of ethnic groups participating in and/or affected by the power-sharing. Perhaps, this is why Horowitz (2002:26) suggests that the result of the making of power-sharing arrangements is far more likely to be the adoption of a mix containing elements drawn from various approaches rather than “a document embodying a consistent perspective and method”. Thus, what emerges in many cases is a hybrid power-sharing arrangement, which draws from both the consociational and incentivist models.

The above assertion is true in the Nigerian case. Nigeria is among the best examples of *hybridisation* of the consociational and incentivist models of power-sharing. As I mentioned earlier, Nigeria is a severely divided society with about 374 ethnic groups of which the three largest ethnic groups constitute two-third of the population. The numerical size and political influence of the three majority ethnic groups led to a structural imbalance that produced fear of majority domination among the numerical minority groups. The British colonial government compounded this situation with the introduction in 1954 of a three-unit federal structure, which secured political autonomy and hegemony for the three principal ethnicities – Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region, Yoruba in the Western Region, and Igbo in the Eastern Region (Suberu and Diamond 2002).

During the mid-1950s and 1960s, multi-party politics in Nigeria laboured under the immense political strains created by the structural imbalance in Nigeria’s political system (Mackintosh 1966, Post and Vickers 1973). The faulty federal structure, along with the intense struggles by various ethnic groups for political rewards, led to the series of conflicts and crises that culminated in the military intervention of 1966 (Post and Vickers 1973). The first challenge to Nigeria’s military leaders was the attempted secession of Igbo-dominated

Eastern Region and the outbreak of a civil war. To a large extent, it was the civil war experience and the increase in oil revenues beginning from the 1970s that informed the hybridisation of Nigeria's power-sharing structure (see Horowitz 1991^b, Obi 1998). Architects of Nigeria's post-civil war Constitutions (1979, 1989, 1995 and 1999) tried to fashion a power-sharing arrangement which would simultaneously embrace both ethnically accommodative and nationally integrative concerns; thereby oscillating between the prescriptions of both the consociational and the incentivist models.

Several elements of the consociational and the incentivist models of power-sharing can be found in Nigerian polity. For instance, one can identify consociational measures that seek to protect the interests and autonomy of groups such as the zoning and rotation of political offices, the creation of ethnically homogeneous states, proportionality principle in the allocation of federal revenue as well as the federal character principle¹³. On the other hand, there are incentivist measures which seek to crosscut the ethnic identities. These include the distributive requirements in the party and electoral systems, the proliferation of states, and the creation of ethnically both homogeneous and heterogeneous states.

Indeed, there are observable overlaps between the elements of the consociational and incentivist models. For instance, both models emphasise the role of federalism, state creation, and the proportionality arrangements in enhancing power-sharing. But because the prescriptions of the two models are implemented concurrently, it becomes difficult to identify the specific intent and content of the particular power-sharing arrangements¹⁴. In other words, it is difficult to separate the arrangements as either incentivist or consociational. This situation makes it difficult to analyse specific power-sharing arrangements according to the dominant models. Therefore, I propose the tri-polar model as a framework for analysing power-sharing in Nigeria.

¹³ Section 14 of 1979 Constitution which defines the Federal Character Principle stipulates that: (T)he composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.

¹⁴ The intent of power-sharing refers to the goals and aspirations which political actors seek to achieve by devising power-sharing institutions, while the content of power-sharing connotes the specific elements and mechanisms that define the power-sharing institutions and with which political actors seek to realize the goals of power-sharing. I borrowed these terms from Agbaje 1998.

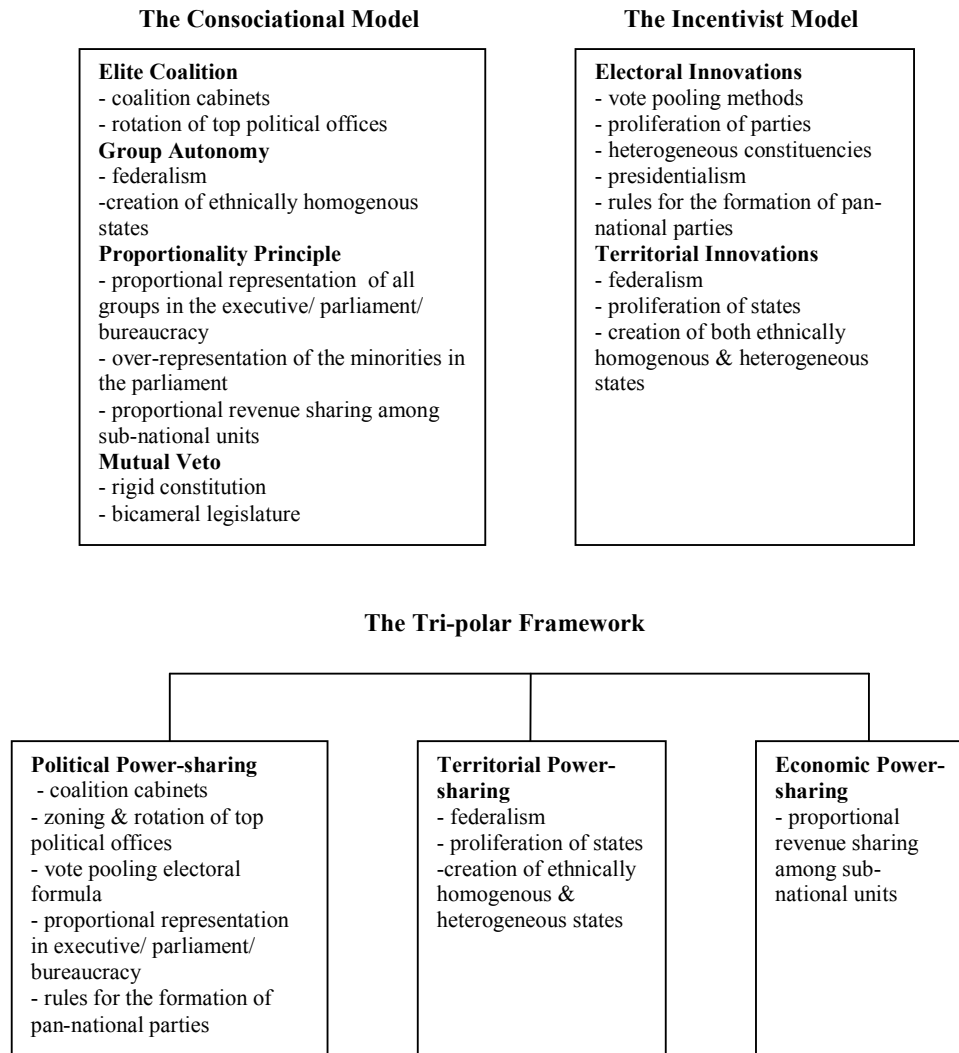
The tri-polar model categorizes power-sharing arrangements based on whether their intent is to share power along the political, territorial, or economic dimensions¹⁵. In this sense, the *political dimension* of power-sharing would include principles and practices of distributing political and bureaucratic offices among groups as well as the methods of organizing the party and electoral systems. The *territorial dimension* of power-sharing is made up of arrangements that define the territorial structure of the country and specifies the method of devolution of powers between the various territorial units. The *economic dimension* of power-sharing constitutes principles and practices national revenue sharing between the federal and sub-federal units on one hand and among the sub-federal units on the other hand.

In the Nigerian context, the political dimension of power-sharing can be operationalized in terms of two institutions. First is the institution of federal character, zoning and rotation of offices that regulate political and bureaucratic office distribution. The other one is the geographical distribution requirement that guides the party and electoral systems. Furthermore, the territorial dimensions of power-sharing can be operationalized as federalism and creation of states. And finally, the economic dimension of power-sharing can be operationalized in terms of the revenue sharing formula(s) (see figure 1.1 below for the specific features of the various models of power-sharing). I will discuss in details the above features of power-sharing in the various chapters of my Ph.D. thesis.

Thus far, much of this discussion has focused on the analysis of the consociational and incentive models of power-sharing and how to go beyond them. I have shown how much the theory of power-sharing oscillates between the consociational and the incentivist poles. At the same time, I have developed a framework that blends the two models and eliminates the overlaps in the analysis of the two models. In the next section, I will situate my analysis of the continuous practice of power-sharing in Nigeria within the institutionalist perspective. To do this, I will conceptualise the term institution and explain why I think that various power-sharing arrangements could be regarded as institutions.

¹⁵ I adapted this model from Hartzell and Hoddie 2003.

Figure 1.1: The models of power-sharing



Looking at power-sharing from an institutional perspective

The first step towards an institutional analysis of power-sharing would be to briefly define the concept of institution.

I. *The idea of institution*

The study of institutions has occupied a central place in the development of political science as a discipline. In an earlier era, institutions were studied as formal, static organizations such as courts and parliaments. However, interest in the use of the institutional approach waned during the long behaviouralist interlude, when emphasis shifted to the analysis of individual agents as rational actors. The study of institutions in

political science was resuscitated after March and Olsen (1984) published their groundbreaking work: “The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life”, in the mid-1980s. Among other things, March and Olsen (1984) deplored the tendency of scholars to reduce the explanation of the political process to individual interests. March and Olsen criticized political scientists for presenting an individualistic instrumental view of politics which gives individuals precedence over institutions by suggesting that individual rational actors tend to construct only the type of institutions that serve their pre-defined goals. In a later work, March and Olsen (1989) called for the rediscovery of institutions. Since the late 1980s, institutional analysis has been “rediscovered” in political science as well as in many other social science disciplines such as economics, sociology, and anthropology (North 1990, Powell and DiMaggio 1991, Koelble 1995). Today, many scholars have migrated from the ‘old institutionalism’ which sees political institutions as formal political organizations to the ‘new institutionalism’ which defines institutions as organized, established, procedures that have become “the rules of the game” (Jepperson 1991).

Under the new institutionalist perspective, institutions can be both formal and informal. A formal institution is constituted by a set of formal rules that can be derived from codified legal orders such as a written constitution. On the other hand, an informal institution encompasses informal rules derived from particular established norms, conventions or codes of conduct, which shape the behaviour of people who implicitly or otherwise have a loyalty to that code and are subject to certain level of controls if they violate the norms (Rothstein 1996:145-146). Formal institutions are often secured by the means of the employment of physical violence against non-compliance, while informal institutions are usually guaranteed by the means of non-violent sanctions such as expulsion and shaming (Lane and Ersson 2000:34). Institutions can also be divided into micro-institutions and macro-institutions. A typical micro-institution operates at the individual level and it is characterised by rules set by agents who are few that they can meet in a face-to-face situation and regulate their own common interests. On the other hand, a macro-level institution operates at the governmental level and it is represented by a general law decided by a government to steer the behaviour of actors who may or may not have participated directly in deciding the rule (Lane and Ersson 2000:34).

In this section, I have identified the core features of an institution, namely: (1) that institutions are rules, norms or organised procedures; and (2) that institutions can be classified into formal and informal as well as micro- and macro-institutions. In the next section, I will argue for why power-sharing principles and practices should be construed as institutions.

II. *An institutionalist interpretation of power-sharing*

It may further clarify our understanding of power-sharing if I highlight why I consider power-sharing arrangements as institutions. Surely, power-sharing arrangements can be seen as institutions because they possess the characteristics that define institutions. Firstly, power-sharing arrangements are *organised procedures*. In specific terms, these procedures focus on distributing state powers among different social groups in such a way as to make it exceedingly difficult for any group to dominate the others. Secondly, power-sharing arrangements are both *formal and informal*. Formal power-sharing arrangements are those agreed upon and codified in legal orders such the constitution. Informal power-sharing procedures are based on established norms and conventions of inter-group relations which political actors have repeatedly accorded their commitment. Finally, power-sharing arrangements are *macro-level institutions*. Scholars agree that power-sharing provides the society with an overarching institutional framework that enables it to organise/mediate inter-group relations (Sisk 1996). In stabilised power-sharing states, individuals and groups carry out their struggles within the power-sharing structures and rarely resort to extra-legal channels in order to achieve their interests. Therefore, one can perceive power-sharing as a web of formal and informal procedures that provide the framework for inter-group relations in a plural society. Having argued for an interpretation of power-sharing arrangements as institutions, the next task is to explain why institutions (including power-sharing arrangements) persist.

Explaining institutional continuity

It is not easy to come up with a straight forward definition of institutional continuity. This is because unlike change which manifests in an observable way, continuity is more or less a latent phenomenon. I will clarify my understanding of institutional continuity, by acknowledging the dialectical relationship between continuity and change, and based on that, I will distinguish institutional continuity from institutional change. Institutional change can be simply defined as the introduction of new rules or rule interpretations to replace

existing rules or interpretations (Lindner 2003:912). It can also mean an outright abrogation of a particular institution without any replacement.

The theory of path dependence provides a useful starting point for an analysis of institutional continuity and change. The theory of path dependency is based on the assumption that once actors have adopted a set of institutions, these institutions appear to generate patterns of costs and benefits that significantly constrain the ability of the actors to initiate institutional change even if that might provide higher aggregate returns in the long run (Alexander 2001:252). In other words, path dependency characterizes institutions as paths that are hard to leave. Path dependency theory contends that actors support institutional continuity because change imposes significant short-term costs and the longer actors operate within such institutions, the more any possibility of change is unattractive (Thelen 1999, Pierson 2000).

Path dependency theorists provide three reasons why actors are constrained to stick to a particular institution. The first reason, which has been much emphasized in the rationalist literature, is the role of institutions in solving *coordination problems* for actors. Path dependency theorists argue that actors are better off if they have reliable expectations about the behaviour of their counterparts. Institutions are important because they provide actors with platforms upon which they can converge and exchange information, in this way; they help actors to resolve their coordination problems. Pierson (2004:200) argued that once actors have suitably coordinated on one institution, they may not have any incentive to unilaterally dissolve that institution. The prospects of institutional change are blocked by the difficulties involved in coordinating many actors around some new institutional alternative. A counter-argument that can readily come to mind against the coordination problem thesis is that institutional change is often championed by the same group of actors that created it, as such what they pose as the most formidable coordination problem (interest aggregation and articulation) may not be a serious problem in this case. Therefore, although coordination problem can be regarded as an impediment to institutional change it is only a very partial explanation for institutional continuity.

The second reason that path dependency theorists offer as explanation for institutional continuity is the issue of *asset specificity*. The idea here is that over time, actors get adapted to particular institutions. They make extensive commitments in the process of adapting to

the institutions based on the expectations that these institutions will serve their present and future interests. In the words of Peter Gourevitch:

Political actors develop investments, 'specific assets', in a particular arrangement – relationships, expectations, privileges, knowledge of procedures, all tied to the institution at work. Where investments in the specific assets of an institution are high, actors will find the cost of any institutional change that endangers these assets to be quite high; indeed, actors in this situation may be reluctant to run risks of any change at all...Investment of specific assets helps to explain institutional persistence. Actors in each society invest in a particular institutional arrangement; they have incentives to protect their investment by opposing change (Cited in Pierson 2004:207-208).

Thus, the main point of this argument is that institutional adaptation compels actors to seriously consider the costs and benefits of institutional change. The actors' calculation of the costs and benefits is influenced to a large extent by asset specificity or their 'sunk cost' (Pierson 2004:205).

The last reason for institutional continuity is what is commonly referred to as *veto points*. Path dependency theorists argue that institutions persist because their designers typically create rules that require multiple veto points (extensive level of consensus and broad super-majorities such as referendum and qualified majority requirement) to effect any institutional alteration. There are two major reasons why actors design institutions to be change-resistant (Pierson 2004:203). Firstly, where trust is scarce, actors may want to constrain themselves by ensuring that none of them will change a common agreed rule. And then secondly, where actors are uncertain about the future, they may wish to bind their successors by putting serious hurdles on the revision process of an institution.

A major problem that is commonly associated with the path dependency theory is that in as much as it provides useful insights into institutional continuity, it runs the risk of overemphasizing the permanence of institutions (Lindner 2003:916). Again, the path dependency theory treats all actors largely as a homogeneous bunch (Alexander 2001:253), assuming that all actors make roughly the same kind of cost-benefit analysis favouring institutional continuity. The theory believes that all actors would prefer to avoid an immediate cost than to have a long-term benefit. But in reality, this may be untrue since

there are some actors who may chose to make sacrifices by suffering a short-term in other to achieve a long-term goal.

Meanwhile, where path dependence treats actors as heterogeneous, it places them in a scheme in which costs and benefits are unequally distributed. In this scheme, the actors who prefer change are posed as relatively weak while the ones that support the status quo are portrayed as being powerful enough to determine the outcome. The problem with this scheme is that it underestimates the possibility that dominant actors may benefit from institutional change and as such may tend to support it. Also in a relationship characterized by mutual distrust as Alexander (2001:257) also acknowledged, there is the tendency that dominant actors may allow institutional change in order to avoid provoking extra-legal challenges and conflict. The last shortcoming of the path dependency theory is that it runs the risk of concept-stretching (Pierson 2000:252). Path dependency theorists present all-encompassing definitions of institutional paths that are used loosely to explain all instances in which a phenomenon persists without paying special attention to the specific mechanisms which might be at work in such cases.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of path dependency, the theory offers a useful insight that would enhance our understanding of institutional continuity. Lindner (2003:916) suggests that there are two forms of institutional change which can be discerned from the path dependency approach. These forms of change include: *on-path changes* and *off-path changes*. On-path changes occur when the adaptation or reform of an existing path (institution) does not alter the underlying principles that guide that institution. On the other hand, off-path changes abolish an existing path (institution) and in some cases, replace it with a new one. Whether an institution encounters on-path or off-path changes depends on the degree to which the institution possesses continuity reproduction mechanisms, which helps it to resist or accommodate pressures for change. Thus, when an institution is abolished or fundamentally altered then one can say that an off-path change has occurred. But when an institution is able to withstand pressures for change by allowing only a marginal reform then one can argue that there is an on-path change. Therefore, the key to understanding institutional continuity and change lies in the ability to discern the particular continuity reproduction mechanisms on which an institution rests and which are at work in any event of institutional continuity. To a large extent, the strength or weakness of the

continuity reproduction mechanisms is the primary motor force behind institutional continuity or change.

Drawing on the new institutionalist literature, particularly on the works of Offe (1996), Lindner (2003), and Pierson (2004), one can discern two major continuity reproduction mechanisms, namely, the bargaining power of the pro- and anti-change coalitions as well as the capacity of institutions to accommodate pressure for change through institutional reforms/on-path changes. I will address each of these mechanisms in the following paragraphs.

I. *The bargaining power of pro- and anti-change coalitions*

Institutions persist when there is a strong coalition of actors that benefit from the existence of the institution (Lindner 2003:917). Such anti-change coalition is usually formed when the institution is seen as being capable assisting actors to achieve specific interests/goals (Horowitz 1991^a:144). This requires that the institution must appeal to actors as something that is working well or has the prospects of working efficiently. This will convince the actors to invest interests around the institution. Institutional continuity is therefore, contingent upon the likelihood of the institution to provide its core supporters with tolerable levels of outcomes, which will motivate them to dispel any attempt to carryout institutional alteration (Offe 1996:208). As long as political institutions continue to muster a coalition with relatively strong bargaining power in politics, the continuity of the institution will be guaranteed. Thus, institutional continuity is anchored on the relative power of the anti-change coalition. However, if the bargaining power of the anti-change coalition wanes, various degrees of institutional change are likely to occur, depending of the extent of the decline in power.

II. *Institutional dynamism*

Because the bargaining power of the anti-change coalition is not likely to be perennially strong, institutional continuity may depend on whether the institutions are designed to create opportunities for reforms and marginal changes when pressures for change become overwhelming (Offe 1996:208). An institution can contain the demands for its abolition if it accommodates pressures for change in small-scale institutional modification (Lindner 2003:918). In other words, an institution can avoid change by providing actors discretion of behaviour and flexibility in the face of changing circumstances and preferences. Another

way an institution can exhibit this kind of dynamism is by channelling new preferences to other related institutions, thereby encouraging actors to switch to these institutions when their interests cannot be accommodated within that particular institution. In spite of the dynamic nature of an institution, institutional change may be inevitable under two conditions: when the pressure for change is so strong that it cannot be warded-off by a mere marginal reform, and when the scope and nature of the change(s) required cannot be realised through reforms/on-path changes (Lindner 2003:918).

Future directions

In summary, I have made three important points in the course of this discussion. First, I outlined the three main dimensions/contexts under which power-sharing operate – that is, the political, territorial and economic dimensions. Secondly, I argued for an interpretation of power-sharing principles and practices as institutions. Finally, I identified the two key mechanisms that can promote institutional continuity. Based on the foregoing, it is now possible for me to deduce a number of claims that the rest of my research will strive to demonstrate. The claims are as follows:

- That the continuity of power-sharing institutions depends on:
 - I. The bargaining power of the anti-change coalition vis-à-vis that of the pro-change coalition.
 - II. The tendency of institutions to create opportunities for marginal reforms/on-path changes.

I will demonstrate these propositions empirically based on secondary and primary data. The primary data will come mainly from a 6-months (May 2007 – October 2007) field research that I will conduct in Nigeria. The field research will take place at eight locations in Nigeria, and it will involve about 35 interviews, examination of media sources, and archival research focused on analysis of institutional politics in Nigeria.

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