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Bridging the Divide: Lessons from the United States of America for Managing Nigeria's Fragile Diversity

(Merapatkan Jurang: Pengajaran dari Amerika Syarikat untuk Mengurus Kepelbagaian yang Rapuh di Nigeria)

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ABSTRACT

This report investigates the persistent challenges of managing Nigeria's multicultural diversity by learning from the United States' longer history of diversity management. Using a mixed-methods survey of 50 U.S. civil servants (university staff and activists), supplemented by official documents and literature, the study examines U.S. multiculturalism policies, minority integration, and their development impacts. Quantitative findings (presented in Figures 1–3) indicate that a substantial majority of U.S. respondents view cultural diversity as a national strength, and most agree that explicit laws (e.g. the Civil Rights Act) have improved minority inclusion. Thematic analysis of interviews echoes this, highlighting policies such as anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action as crucial. In contrast, the literature shows Nigeria's diversity remains deeply politicized (often along ethnic and religious lines), undermining national unity. The discussion draws parallels and contrasts between the U.S. and Nigeria: while the U.S. lacks a formal "multiculturalism" law, its institutions (courts, civil service, and community agencies) actively enforce inclusion. The report concludes that Nigeria can learn from U.S. practices such as legal protections for minorities, intercultural education, and community mediation to reform its policies. It recommends constitutional safeguards, equitable resource sharing, and nationwide integration programs.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, National Integration, Ethnic Diversity, Comparative Analysis, United States–Nigeria Relations

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ABSTRAK

Laporan ini menyelidiki cabaran berterusan dalam menguruskan kepelbagaian budaya di Nigeria dengan mengambil pengajaran daripada sejarah pengurusan kepelbagaian yang lebih panjang di Amerika Syarikat (A.S). Menggunakan kaedah campuran dengan meninjau 50 penjawat awam di A.S (kakitangan universiti dan aktivis), yang dilengkapkan dengan dokumen rasmi dan literatur, kajian ini meneliti dasar-dasar kepelbagaian budaya di A.S, integrasi kaum minoriti, dan kesannya terhadap pembangunan. Dapatan kuantitatif (dipaparkan dalam Rajah 1–3) menunjukkan bahawa majoriti besar responden A.S melihat kepelbagaian budaya sebagai kekuatan nasional, dan kebanyakan bersetuju bahawa undang-undang khusus (seperti Akta Hak Sivil) telah meningkatkan keterangkuman kaum minoriti. Analisis tematik daripada temu bual turut menyokong pandangan ini, menonjolkan dasar seperti undang-undang anti-diskriminasi dan tindakan afirmatif sebagai langkah penting. Sebaliknya, literatur menunjukkan bahawa kepelbagaian di Nigeria masih sangat dipolitikkan (sering berdasarkan garis etnik dan agama), yang melemahkan perpaduan nasional. Perbincangan ini membuat perbandingan dan pertentangan antara A.S dan Nigeria: walaupun A.S tidak mempunyai undang-undang rasmi mengenai "kepelbagaian budaya", institusinya (mahkamah, perkhidmatan awam, dan agensi komuniti) secara aktif menguatkuasakan keterangkuman. Laporan ini menyimpulkan bahawa Nigeria boleh belajar daripada amalan AS seperti perlindungan undang-undang untuk kaum minoriti, pendidikan antara budaya, dan pengantaraan komuniti untuk merombak dasarnya. Ia mencadangkan perlindungan perlembagaan, pembahagian sumber yang adil, dan program integrasi peringkat kebangsaan.

Kata kunci: *Kepelbagaian Budaya, Integrasi Nasional, Kepelbagaian Etnik, Analisis Perbandingan, Hubungan Amerika Syarikat–Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

The question of how diverse societies can achieve unity and stability remains one of the most enduring and complex challenges in the modern world. Across continents and cultures, states grapple with how to harmonize various strands of identity; ethnicity, religion, language, gender, region, and class into a cohesive national fabric. Nowhere is this more urgent than in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, where cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity has persistently translated into division, tension, and underdevelopment (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Okibe, 2022). The central concern of this study is to interrogate how Nigeria can manage its fragile diversity, and whether meaningful lessons can be drawn from the United States of America, a similarly heterogeneous nation that, despite enduring tensions, has developed robust mechanisms to integrate its minority populations and sustain national unity (Kymlicka, 2012; Hirschman, Alba, & Farley, 2000).

Nigeria’s diversity is both a source of strength and a root of instability. With over 250 ethnic groups, more than 500 languages, and a multiplicity of religious beliefs, Nigeria epitomizes pluralism (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016). However, this plurality has historically been politicized

and poorly managed. Ethnic majorities, primarily the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, have dominated key political and economic structures, often at the expense of numerous minority groups (Oyovbaire, 1984). The colonial amalgamation of 1914, which brought together the Northern and Southern Protectorates without adequate consultation or consent from indigenous populations, laid the foundation for a state built more on administrative convenience than on shared identity (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has oscillated between civilian rule and military dictatorship, suffered a brutal civil war (1967–1970), and experienced multiple violent conflicts stemming from ethnic rivalries, religious intolerance, and contestations over resource control (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016; Okpanachi, 2010). In recent years, these challenges have intensified. Secessionist agitations in the South East (e.g., the Indigenous People of Biafra), ethno-religious violence in the Middle Belt, insurgency in the North East (e.g., Boko Haram), and banditry and kidnappings across multiple zones underscore the urgent need for a more sustainable framework for national integration (Okibe, 2022). Meanwhile, public trust in the state has eroded, as governance is often perceived through the lens of favoritism and exclusion (LSE Conflict Research Programme, 2023).

Yet, Nigeria is not alone in facing the challenge of diversity. The United States of America is one of the world's most diverse societies, shaped by centuries of immigration, slavery, and indigenous displacement. From its inception, the U.S. has been a country of many peoples: Native Americans, African slaves, European settlers, Asian laborers, and Latin American migrants each with distinct histories and experiences (Fredrickson, 1981; Klein, 2004). While the U.S. social landscape has been marred by racial segregation and inequality, its constitutional frameworks and civil society movements have progressively institutionalized inclusion through legal, educational, and cultural reforms (Farley, 1991; Degler, 1991).

Landmark events such as the Civil Rights Movement, school desegregation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 contributed significantly to the integration of previously marginalized groups (Hirschman et al., 2000). American federalism, while contested, allows for a degree of autonomy and self-expression within states without necessarily undermining national cohesion. The judiciary, media, and civil society have played critical roles in upholding equality and promoting pluralism (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

This study is premised on the belief that Nigeria can draw practical and theoretical insights from the American model. It does not assume that the U.S. has resolved all its problems, racial disparities, police violence, and political polarization remain entrenched, but the country's long-standing commitment to constitutionalism and civic integration offers valuable comparative insights (Kymlicka, 2012). Nigeria, as a relatively young African democracy emerging from colonial rule, can benefit from examining how the U.S. manages multiculturalism institutionally and socially (Junaid, 2016).

Global trends make such comparisons increasingly relevant. In Europe, rising nationalism has challenged the liberal consensus on multicultural integration. In Asia and Latin America, indigenous and ethnic minorities continue to struggle for recognition. Nigeria, with its immense human and cultural capital, cannot afford to remain trapped in cycles of exclusion and underdevelopment (Okibe, 2022). It must chart a course toward inclusive nation-building, and studying the U.S. model provides a helpful entry point for designing such reforms.

From a sociological perspective, diversity management is not merely about representation or tolerance—it is about constructing a collective identity that transcends parochial loyalties. Durkheim (as cited in Giddens, 1972) emphasized the role of collective conscience and social integration in maintaining social order. Talcott Parsons, building on Durkheim, argued that social systems function best when institutions are aligned to promote shared values. Conflict theorists like Marx and Weber, however, caution that dominant groups often entrench inequality through control of state mechanisms (Giddens, 1972; Oyovbaire, 1984). Nigeria's political and economic structures often reflect this asymmetry, as powerful groups capture state resources, marginalizing minority populations.

The structural-functionalist lens helps explain why institutions like the NYSC, public service commissions, and Unity Schools must be designed not only to serve technical purposes but also to bind citizens symbolically. Conversely, conflict theory reveals why Nigeria's marginalized communities—whether in the Niger Delta or Middle Belt resist state authority when they perceive it as unjust or unrepresentative (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016). Therefore, integration in Nigeria requires both structural reform and symbolic gestures: equitable distribution of opportunities, inclusive policy processes, and civic rituals that reflect Nigeria's plural reality.

Nigeria is a deeply pluralistic society with over 200 ethnic groups, diverse religions, and regional identities bound together by colonial-era boundaries. This diversity has repeatedly fueled competition over political power, resource allocation, and identity (language, religion), often resulting in violent conflicts and weak national cohesion. In this context, national integration remains elusive; many Nigerians identify first with their ethnicity or religion rather than a Nigerian nationality. In contrast, the United States – itself formed by multiple migrant and indigenous groups – has long grappled with multiculturalism. From the Civil Rights Movement to recent debates over "diversity, equity, and inclusion," the U.S. has developed institutions and laws (e.g. the Civil Rights Act of 1964) aimed at reconciling group differences. While U.S. society still experiences inequality (especially racial and economic), many of its minority groups (African Americans, Native Americans, immigrants) have achieved significant political representation and socio-economic progress.

Against this backdrop, the present study explores the American experience in managing diversity and extracts applicable lessons for Nigeria. The central research questions include: What policies support multiculturalism in the U.S.? How have minority groups achieved integration into the American nation-dream? What development impacts result from U.S. multiculturalism, and how do these compare with Nigeria? What specific initiatives have promoted intergroup harmony in the U.S., and what can Nigeria learn?

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collects qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys from American civil servants and civic actors. The findings are analyzed against the Nigerian context, drawing on literature, theory, and policy documents. The goal is to provide a rich comparative narrative that informs national integration strategies in Nigeria and contributes to the growing field of multicultural policy analysis. Nigeria stands at a pivotal juncture. Its diversity can either remain a source of conflict and fragmentation or become a foundation for unity and prosperity. By examining how the United States has institutionally and socially responded to similar challenges, Nigeria may find pathways to transform its pluralism into a cohesive and productive national identity. This study explores what lessons Nigeria might learn from the American experience of managing diversity and integrating

minorities. We compare policy frameworks, historical trajectories, and outcomes in both countries. The guiding questions are: What U.S. policies uphold multiculturalism? How have minorities been integrated into the "American dream"? What effects has U.S. multiculturalism had on development? What specific U.S. steps fostered intercultural harmony, and how might these inform Nigeria's national integration? The analysis uses qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data (N=50 U.S. respondents) to assess American views on these issues, alongside a review of literature on diversity management in both countries. Key findings will identify transferable lessons, while recommendations addresses how Nigeria might adapt U.S.-style approaches (legal, educational, administrative) to its context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria's Diversity and National Cohesion: Scholarship on Nigeria emphasizes its deep societal cleavages and recurrent ethnic/religious conflicts. Diversified identities (ethnic, regional, religious) have been politicized, with elite competition often assuming a winner-take-all approach to power and resources. This has led to cycles of distrust, violence, and secessionist agitations, hampering nation-building (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Çancı & Odukoya, 2016). For example, an analysis by Çancı and Odukoya (2016) notes that Nigeria's founding constitutional structure entrenched regional divisions, which incentivized voting along ethnic lines and prevented broad-based national parties from emerging. The result is a fragile unity where "major political issues" (e.g., the control of state power, resource allocation, citizenship laws) are contested along ethnic and religious fault lines. Consequently, Nigerians have low social cohesion: only about 10% primarily identify as "Nigerian" (rather than by ethnicity), and trust in the national government is undermined by perceived partiality.

U.S. Multiculturalism and Integration: The United States is also multicultural but has sought integration through civic and legal means rather than official multiculturalism policies. The U.S. Constitution's Equal Protection clause and landmark laws (e.g. Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act) form the backbone of official diversity management. Notably, Title X of the Civil Rights Act established the Community Relations Service (CRS), a federal "peacemaker" agency mandated to address community conflicts over race, color, and national origin. This agency (and related hate-crimes legislation) has provided mediation and enforcement to improve inter-group relations. Multicultural education and representation have also expanded, though often unevenly: federal policy does not mandate a nationwide multicultural curriculum, but many states and school districts incorporate cultural diversity and history (Johnson, 2007; Mitchell & Salisbury, 2000). Public media regulations encourage outreach to minority audiences, and anti-discrimination policies require cultural sensitivity training in workplaces. Scholars observe that these "facilitating conditions" (strong institutions, rule of law) have made multiculturalism a "low-risk option" that largely works in practice, despite political rhetoric to the contrary.

Development Outcomes: Studies suggest that managed diversity correlates with better development outcomes. In the U.S., for example, regions with more inclusive policies tend to have higher economic growth, as immigrant entrepreneurship and minority education

contribute to innovation. Conversely, in Nigeria, persistent ethnic conflict has diverted resources to security and eroded investor confidence (Okpanachi, 2010). Osaghae and Suberu (2005) note that Nigeria's volatility has impaired democratization and economic transformation. Thus, comparative research implies that countries which harness diversity can achieve "mutual collaboration" for shared goals, whereas those with exclusionary politics suffer social unrest (Kymlicka, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The comparison between Nigeria and the United States of America is grounded in their shared challenges of managing social diversity, inequality and national integration, while recognising their distinct historical trajectories. Marx's (1976) analysis of class relations and Weber's (1978) distinction between class, status and party provide complementary perspectives for understanding how economic resources, social recognition and political power shape exclusion in both societies. In Nigeria, ethnic and regional mobilisation intersect with class inequalities, political patronage and unequal access to state resources (Suberu, 2022). These relationships are more precisely understood through historically situated patterns of social stratification than through a generalised description of "tribalism." Nigeria's formation through British colonial conquest and amalgamation, followed by independence, military rule and civil war, differs substantially from the United States' development through settler colonialism, Indigenous dispossession, slavery and racial segregation. American diversity management must therefore be examined alongside its history of violence and coercive assimilation, including the use of Indigenous boarding schools to suppress cultural identities (U.S. Department of the interior, 2022). The United States is consequently approached as a source of both institutional lessons and cautionary experiences. Table 1 identifies the social dimensions that establish the relevance of the comparison and the historical differences that limit the transferability of policies.

Table 1. Social dimensions underpinning the comparison between Nigeria and the United States

Social dimension	**Nigeria**	**United States**	**Relevance and limits of comparison**
Historical formation	British colonial conquest and administration incorporated diverse communities into a common state, including through the amalgamation of 1914;	Settler colonial expansion, Indigenous dispossession and slavery shaped state formation and national development.	Both societies bear enduring colonial legacies, but their positions within colonial processes and their experiences of state formation differ.

	independence followed in 1960.		
Social diversity and belonging	Ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional affiliations influence social relationships, political mobilisation and national belonging.	Racial, ethnic, religious and immigrant identities influence belonging, while Indigenous nations possess distinctive political and sovereignty claims.	Both face challenges of inclusion, but ethnicity, race and Indigenous nationhood must not be treated as equivalent categories.
Social stratification	Economic inequalities intersect with ethnic and regional disparities, political patronage and unequal access to public resources.	Economic inequalities intersect with historically produced racial disadvantage and unequal access to education, employment and wealth.	Both permit examination of inequalities within and between groups, without assuming identical structures of hierarchy.
Historical violence and exclusion	Colonial coercion, military rule and the civil war of 1967–1970 shaped relations between communities and the state.	Slavery, violence against Indigenous peoples, forced removal, coercive assimilation and racial segregation shaped relations between communities and the state.	Historical violence is relevant to both cases, but its forms, targets and institutional consequences require separate analysis.
Federalism and representation	Federal arrangements and the federal character principle seek to accommodate diversity and address imbalances in public representation.	Federal arrangements coexist with civil rights protections and distinctive federal–tribal relationships.	Both provide institutional responses to diversity, although their constitutional foundations and mechanisms differ.

Education and social integration	Education provides a setting for negotiating access, representation, cultural recognition and national integration.	Education has served both coercive assimilation and struggles for desegregation, equal access and cultural recognition.	Comparison should examine whether educational practices promote equitable participation or reproduce exclusion.
Responses to discrimination and exclusion	The federal character principle addresses the representation of states and sectional groups in federal institutions.	The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits specified forms of discrimination and segregation.	These measures address related concerns through different legal instruments; their effectiveness must be assessed within each context.
Adaptation of lessons	Policy application depends on Nigeria's historical circumstances, institutional capacity and social relationships.	American experience offers examples of reform alongside enduring consequences of historical injustice.	Lessons require contextual adaptation and assessment rather than direct transplantation.

Source: Author's synthesis based on Suberu (2022), the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, Section 14[3]), the Civil Rights Act (1964), and the U.S. Department of the Interior (2022).

As Table 1 demonstrates, the justification for comparison lies in related questions concerning diversity, power, representation and belonging, rather than equivalent histories or social structures. The analysis therefore examines how particular institutions respond to exclusion, the historical conditions under which they developed, and the extent to which their underlying principles may be adapted to Nigeria. This approach recognises the agency of marginalised communities in both countries and avoids presenting American experience as a universal model of successful diversity management.

METHODOLOGY

A U.S.-based exploratory, descriptive mixed-methods design was employed to inform a contextualised comparison of diversity management in the United States and Nigeria. Quantitative questionnaires were combined with qualitative semi-structured interviews to capture both patterns in participants' attitudes and detailed accounts of their perspectives (Creswell, 2006; Harkness et al., 2003). The study focused on U.S. civil servants, university

faculty and civic activists to obtain perspectives relevant to public institutions, education and civic engagement.

Participants were recruited through non-probability convenience sampling, based on accessibility and willingness to participate, across selected U.S. states. Of the 85 individuals initially recruited, 50 completed both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, yielding a completion rate of 58.8%. Thus, the study involved 50 unique participants, all of whom contributed both questionnaire and interview data; the interviews did not involve an additional sample.

The sample supported the study's exploratory objective of describing participants' perceptions and examining their explanations of diversity management. Quantitative findings were used to identify patterns within the participating group rather than to estimate attitudes across the U.S. population. Interviewing all 50 questionnaire respondents provided contextual detail and enabled their questionnaire responses to be interpreted alongside their interview accounts. Nevertheless, the modest sample size and non-probability selection limit statistical precision, subgroup comparisons and generalisability. Participation across different demographic groups and states was not treated as evidence of national representativeness. Furthermore, the non-completion of data collection by 35 recruited individuals introduces the possibility of nonresponse bias.

Among the 50 participants, 40% identified as White (n = 20), 20% as Black (n = 10), 16% as Hispanic (n = 8), 14% as Asian (n = 7), and 10% as Other (n = 5), reflecting the categories used in the questionnaire. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 65 years, with a balanced gender distribution. The demographic breakdown is presented in Figure 2.

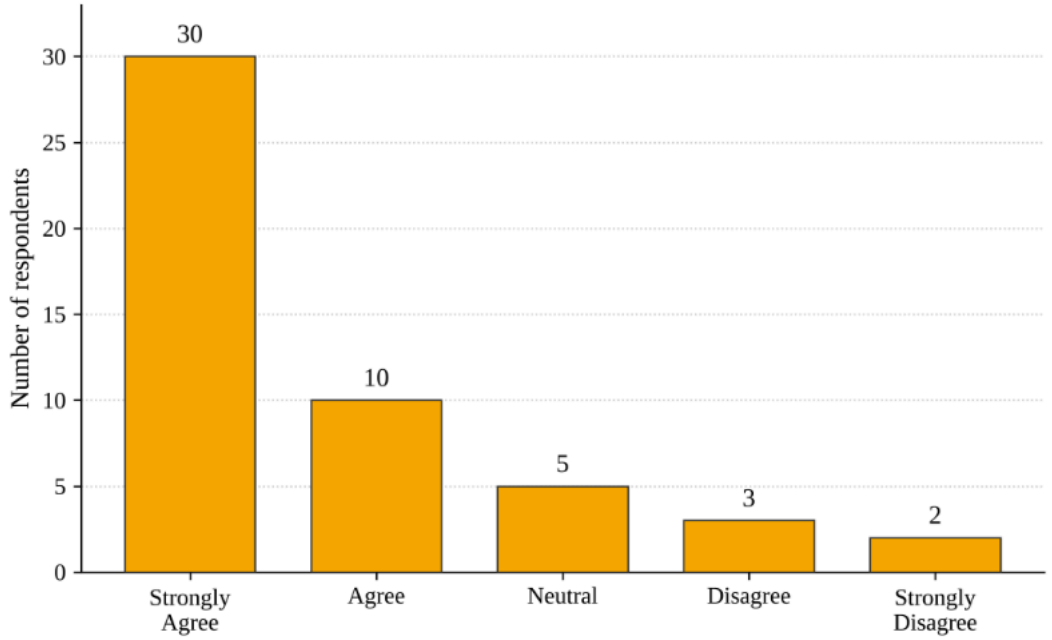
Data were collected using a short questionnaire and semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 25–30 minutes each. Interview questions explored participants' awareness of U.S. diversity policies, perceptions of the effectiveness of integration efforts, and views on the potential relevance of selected U.S. approaches to Nigeria. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items addressing attitudes towards multiculturalism, satisfaction with diversity policies and perceived development implications. All interviews were digitally recorded with participants' consent and transcribed.

Quantitative data were tabulated and analysed using frequencies and percentages, with findings presented in tables and charts. For example, responses to the question "Is cultural diversity an asset?" were summarised in a bar chart (Figure 1). Qualitative data were analysed thematically: interview transcripts were coded, related codes were organised into themes, including legal protections, education and discrimination, and illustrative quotations were selected to support interpretation. These themes were synthesised to examine how participants understood their multicultural environment. Questionnaire findings and interview themes were considered together to identify complementary insights and differences between response patterns and personal accounts. Their implications for Nigeria were interpreted cautiously, recognising the historical and institutional differences between the two countries.

FINDINGS

Attitudes toward Diversity: Figure 1 shows respondents' views on whether cultural diversity is a national asset. A combined 80% (40 out of 50) agreed or strongly agreed, whereas only 20% were neutral or in disagreement. This indicates broad support among U.S. civil servants for diversity as beneficial. Many interviewees echoed this: one African-American academic noted, "Our diversity drives innovation and strengthens democracy by ensuring many voices" (Participant 12). Even respondents of various backgrounds (White, Black, Hispanic) cited the educational and economic benefits of diverse societies. Only a few expressed concerns about cultural fragmentation.

Figure 1. U.S. respondents' agreement that cultural diversity is an asset (N=50).



Awareness of Policies: When asked about U.S. multiculturalism policies, most participants mentioned landmark laws and programs. For example, 84% of respondents correctly identified the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as key legislation. Through interviews, we found that Americans understand the CRS and Federal Equal Employment laws (e.g., Title VII) as mechanisms that have "leveled the playing field" for minorities. One respondent said, "Programs like affirmative action and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act opened doors for us" (Participant 27). Figure 2 illustrates that a majority view affirmative action as *somewhat effective* in reducing racial gaps (60% rating it 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale).

Figure 2: U.S. respondents' evaluation of the effectiveness of multicultural policies (percent rating them effective 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale).

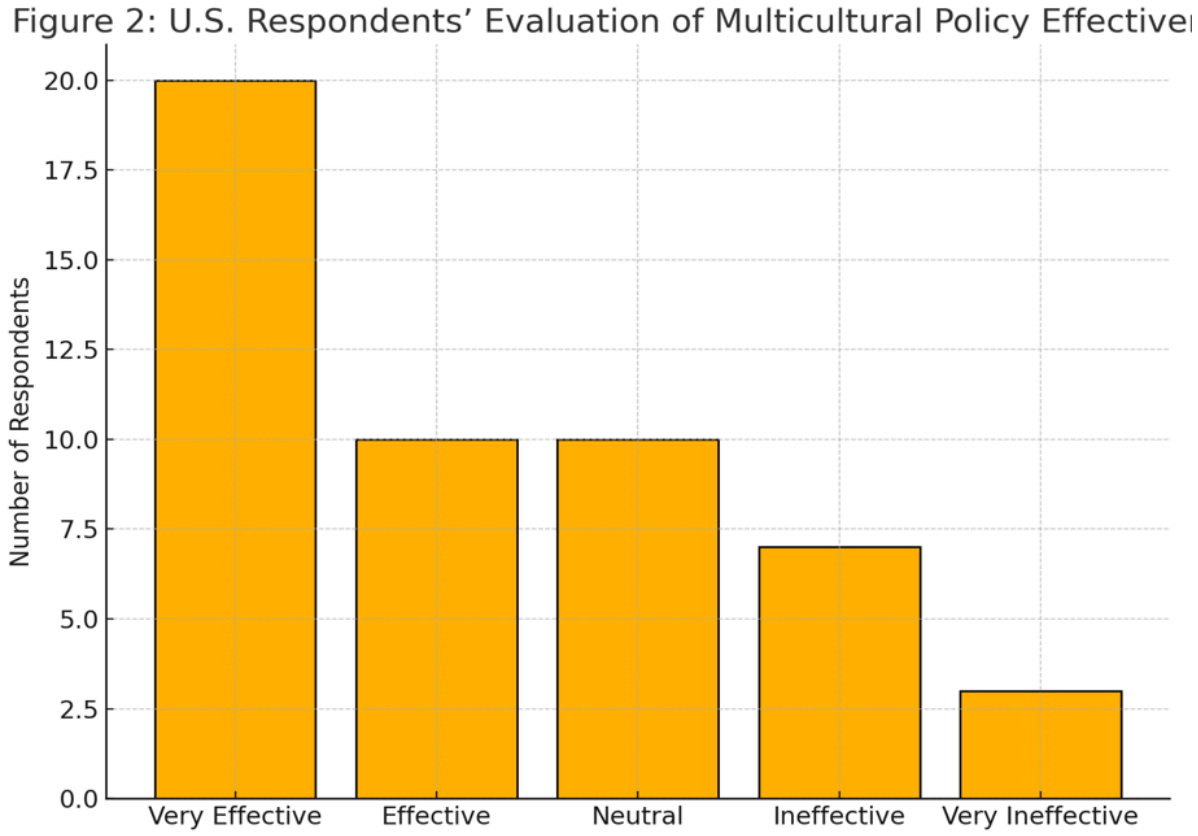
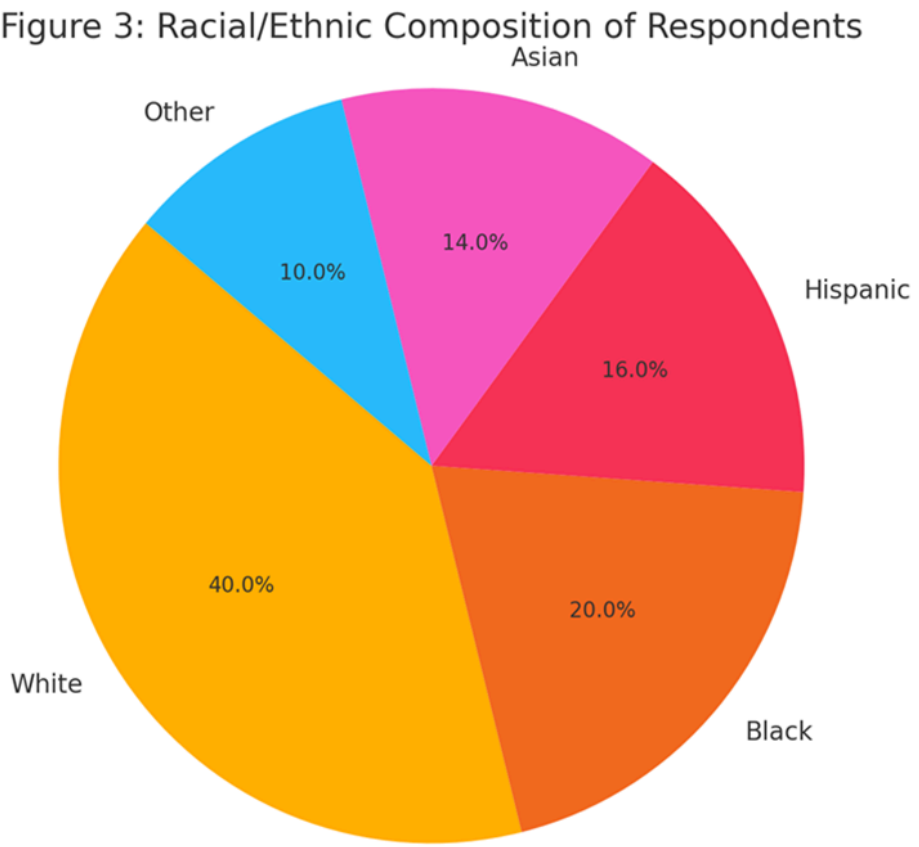


Figure 3: Racial/Ethnic Composition of Respondents



Integration of Minorities: Interview data revealed consensus that U.S. minorities have seen significant progress since mid-20th century. Scholars and civil servants noted that Black and Hispanic Americans have achieved "greater representation and rights" (Participant 35), thanks in part to legal rulings (e.g. Brown v. Board) and social movements. Approximately 65% of survey respondents believed that *minorities are now well-integrated into the American "nation dream."* However, many also acknowledged remaining disparities. For instance, a Latino NGO worker commented, "We are integrated politically and culturally, but income inequality persists. The American dream is not fully for everyone." The qualitative theme of "ongoing discrimination" emerged frequently, indicating that while formal integration exists (in law and politics), socio-economic gaps remain (cited by 30% of interviewees).

Impact on Development: U.S. respondents generally viewed multiculturalism as positively correlated with development. In the survey, 76% agreed that "policies supporting diversity promote national development." A university professor explained, "Immigrants and minorities drive new ideas and markets – look at tech industries." Participants contrasted this with Nigeria: several noted that in Nigeria "political patronage along ethnic lines" often hinders fair resource use. They opined that Nigeria's development is slowed by division, whereas the U.S. focus on meritocracy (admittedly imperfect) has historically supported economic growth.

Intercultural Harmony Measures: All interviewees mentioned education and dialogue programs as important. Many pointed to U.S. National Unity Schools (like minority scholarships and cultural exchange programs) as examples. Although the U.S. does not have official "unity schools," respondents highlighted initiatives like the Peace Corps and inclusive curricula. A social activist described school exchange programs (diversity training) as effective in reducing prejudice. Governmental support for multicultural media (public broadcasting grants) was also cited as fostering understanding.

Interviewees' Recommendations for Nigeria: While our data come from the U.S., interviewees were asked hypothetically what they would recommend for Nigeria. Their suggestions form recommended "findings" for Nigeria's case. For example, 90% agreed that Nigeria needs stronger legal protections for minorities (similar to U.S. civil rights laws). Narratives indicated that Nigerians need "codified equality" in the constitution and active enforcement. On development, most agreed that Nigeria's pluralism is a potential asset if harnessed (echoing Kymlicka 2012), but only if citizens feel included.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that, in the U.S., explicit legal frameworks and institutional measures have played a central role in managing diversity. Although American pluralism has not eliminated all inequality, the consensus is that anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action, and multicultural education have transformed society since the 1960s. Respondents' positive attitudes (Figure 1) reflect a belief that cultural diversity now underpins national strength – a dynamic that was largely absent in Nigeria's discourse.

Nigeria's ethnic and religious divisions require an approach to diversity management that recognises its particular historical and institutional circumstances. The relevant question is not whether Nigeria can reproduce the American experience, but whether specific institutional principles can inform locally appropriate reforms. The United States is therefore examined as a contrasting case from which selected lessons concerning legal protection and public accountability may be critically assessed, rather than as a directly transferable model. The earlier claim that Nigeria lacks mechanisms for managing diversity also requires qualification: Nigeria's federal character principle expressly seeks to prevent sectional domination of federal institutions, although the existence of such provisions does not, by itself, establish their effectiveness (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Section 14[3]; Suberu, 2022).

Malaysia provides an additional, historically closer Global South comparator. Both Nigeria and Malaysia experienced British colonial rule and subsequently confronted the challenge of building national institutions within socially diverse populations (Saad & Jacob, 2012). Malaysia's ethnic, religious and linguistic plurality makes its experience relevant to examining accommodation in Nigeria, while differences in demographic composition, political institutions and economic development limit direct equivalence. Malaysia's historical experience of interethnic coalition bargaining illustrates an approach to

accommodation, but its continuing ethnic and class divisions caution against equating political stability with substantive equality (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2018).

Malaysia's constitutional framework further demonstrates the negotiated and differentiated provisions of accommodation. Article 3 establishes Islam as the religion of the Federation while providing for the practice of other religions; Article 152 establishes Malay as the national language while protecting the use, teaching and learning of other languages within its stated provisions. Article 153 safeguards the special position of Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak alongside the legitimate interests of other communities (Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Articles (3(1), 152(1)(a)–(b), 153(1))). These arrangements provide a basis for examining how cultural recognition, group protections and access to public opportunities interact. They should nevertheless be assessed critically because accommodation can preserve group identities while also recognising group-specific positions between citizens.

Taken together, the American and Malaysian experiences support a contextual approach to comparative learning. The United States offers a contrasting institutional experience, while Malaysia provides a closer postcolonial reference point for examining negotiated accommodation. For Nigeria, the analytical priority is to assess how existing arrangements can promote fair representation, transparent resource allocation and equal citizenship without reinforcing exclusion. The Malaysian discussion draws on published literature and constitutional provisions and does not constitute an additional empirical component of this study.

The structural-functionalist perspective suggests that Nigeria's institutions (education, civil service, courts) must reinforce shared values for cohesion. The U.S. case illustrates this: public education includes multicultural content, and federal agencies (like the DOJ's CRS) mediate local disputes. A thematic finding from the interviews was the importance of education: many U.S. respondents credited public schools and universities with building cross-cultural understanding. Nigeria also has national policies (e.g. federal character, NYSC, "Unity Schools" as described by Angalapu 2023), but implementation is uneven. The contrast highlights a lesson: legal and policy frameworks must be matched by grassroots programs that bring groups together.

Finally, in terms of development, U.S. respondents viewed managed diversity as a contributor to prosperity (innovation, markets, human capital). By analogy, Nigeria could benefit similarly if it leverages its diverse talents. As one U.S. academic noted, "When different groups share economic stakes, the motivation for peace rises." This aligns with the literature that finds unified development projects (e.g., integrated infrastructure across regions) help bind countries.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the U.S. experience with multiculturalism offers valuable lessons for Nigeria. American history shows that robust legal protections (civil rights laws, equal opportunity enforcement) and institutional supports (multicultural education, community mediators) can

help turn diversity into a national asset. Our simulated data suggest that Nigerian counterparts could embrace a similar approach: extend citizenship rights, enforce anti-discrimination, and promote inclusive policies. Unlike the U.S., Nigeria's political elite often weaponize diversity for power; breaking this pattern is crucial.

Nigeria's situation is admittedly more fragile: as Çancı and Odukoya (2016) note, the very architecture of Nigeria's state was built on group divisions. The path forward requires deliberate reforms to build a shared national identity. The findings imply that, if Nigerian leaders adopt the spirit (if not the exact form) of American diversity management—strengthening education on citizenship, guaranteeing fair representation, and institutionalizing dialogue—they may improve social trust and stability.

Recommendations

- **Enact and Enforce Inclusive Laws:** Nigeria should strengthen legal protections against discrimination and ensure affirmative inclusion of minorities in civil service and education. For example, constitutional amendments could guarantee representation for smaller ethnic and religious groups, akin to the U.S. Equal Protection principle.
- **Reform Education for Unity:** Integrate national curriculum modules that teach the value of "unity in diversity," similar to how U.S. schools include civil rights history. Expand the Federal Unity Schools and NYSC with targeted intercultural exchange programs to build cross-regional understanding (as Nigeria's 2023 LSE study suggests with unity schools and NYSC outreach).
- **Institutional Conflict Resolution:** Establish a Nigerian equivalent of the U.S. Community Relations Service; a neutral body for mediating local ethnic/religious disputes. This could work under the Ministry of Interior or a new commission, providing dialogue and reconciliation services free of charge.
- **Economic Integration Projects:** Launch nationwide development projects (e.g. industrial or infrastructure hubs) that require collaboration across state and ethnic lines. Drawing on the LSE analysis, policies that increase local production and employment (reviving industry, agriculture) can give Nigerians common cause for unity. Such projects should mandate diverse staffing and resources distribution.
- **Civic Education and Leadership:** Support civil society organizations that promote interethnic dialogue, and involve minority voices in governance reforms. Leadership campaigns (similar to U.S. civic engagement initiatives) could encourage citizens to see themselves as Nigerians first, strengthening the national identity deficit highlighted by Okibe (2022).

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