

Federalism in Nigeria and the Quest for Integration and Development: An Appraisal

Linus C. Nnamani

Department of Political Science, Enugu State University of Science and Technology
Email: drlcnnamani@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This work examined Federalism and the quest for integration and development of Nigeria. The autor used both primary and secondary sources of data in execution of the assignment. It went through the origin of federalism which was colonial initiative following the amalgamation during the period. The federalism altered the inter-group relationship that existed and persisted through the regional period to the present 36 states, 774 Local Government Areas and the Federal Capital Territory at Abuja. The work discovered that the challenges confronting Nigeria federalism include resource control and power sharing formula, leadership selection process, imposition of candidates, non-placement of high premium on merit in appointment of people into political positions/admission of candidates into public schools, godfatherism, money politics, corruption among other issues. The research recommends that merit should be given sixty percent in appointive positions in order to improve infrastructural facilities. Salaries and allowances of political office holders should be made less attractive. Furthermore, addressing the high unemployment rate among the youths should be given adequate attention, so as to reduce insecurity and militancy in the country.

Keywords: Federalism, Nigeria, quest, integration development appraisal.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizing Federalism

Federalism or federal system being a social science term has diverse definitions. Therefore, different scholars define the term based on their perceptions, environment and peculiar circumstances. Nevertheless, it is known that federalism was derived from Latin word "Foedus" which means covenant; and which further means binding, far-reaching agreement between individuals, groups or nations with legal and social implications. Early writers on the term like Bodin described federalism as voluntary political union of independent authorities. [1] viewed federalism as having the following five basic components. They are:

- i. There must be at least two levels of government and there must be constitutional division of powers among the levels of government;

- ii. Each level of government must be coordinate and fairly independent;
- iii. Each level of government should be financially independent. Here, Wheare argued that financial independence will afford each level of government the opportunity of performing their functions without depending or appealing to others for assistance;
- iv. There must be a Supreme Court of an independent judiciary; and
- v. In terms of the amendment of the constitution, no level of government should have undue power over the amendment process.

By global standard, a federal system of government is usually made up of two or more autonomous units that

have agreed to come together and form one united government despite their differences in culture, language, geographical, sectional, religious diversities, and economic resources. The standard metrics for a federal system of government require that:

- i. There is division of powers and functions among levels of government;
- ii. Powers and functions of the levels of government are defined by the constitutions;
- iii. The constitution is supreme: "A constitution is not the act of a government, but of a people constituting a government" (Thomas Paine).
- iv. There is bicameral legislature in the federal system, for example, the Upper chamber (Senate) and lower chamber (House of Representatives) in Nigeria;
- v. There is supreme court to settle conflicts arising from exercise of powers and functions among levels of government in the federal system;
- vi. There is the existence of the independent judiciary to interpret the constitution and laws;
- vii. There are duality of government polity at the federal and lower levels government; and
- viii. There is rigid constitution [2].

[3] defined federalism as a system for the promotion of unity among a diversity of nationalities to form a single stronger nation. [4] stated that federalism works best in a heterogeneous societies than in homogeneous ones. [5] described federalism as follows:

...a federal state is one which there is an explicit and

constitutional demarcation of powers and functions among national and sub-national units. Moreover, the powers and responsibilities are distributed in such a manner as to protect the existence of authority of both levels of polity, each of which is "independent" within its own sphere...federalism refers to the doctrine which advocates and promotes the form organization of a state in which power is dispersed or decentralised by contract as a means of safeguarding local identities and individual liberties.

Based on the above explanations, federalism could be said to be a system of government where administrative powers are constitutionally shared between the central/national governing authority which is higher and the constituent political units normally referred to as states, provinces or local. Therefore those governmental powers are decentralized between the centre and the sub-ordinates. Federalism has been in practice in many diverse nations like United States of America, Canada, India, Australia, Nigeria etcetra. Nevertheless, the practice and efficiency of the practices of federalism in those nations vary from nation to nation.

The Origin of Nigerian Federalism

The import of Nigerian federalism was laid by Sir Bernard Bourdillon (1935 - 1943) who initiated the idea of three regions (North, South and West in 1939. He added that each region should have its Regional Assembly. Sir Arthur Richard that succeeded him incorporated the regions in his 1946 constitution. The constitution that came into effect on 1st January 1947, tried to solve some problems confronting the country namely:

- To promote the unity of the nation, and
- To provide adequately within that unity, the diverse components which make up the country
- Secure greater participation by Africans in the discussion of their own affairs.

Further, the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 shared the powers between the central authority and the three regions then. The items that were exclusively reserved for only the central government include: Currency, foreign affairs, immigration, customs, railways, mining, communication and major roads

Items for both central and regional (component) units were called concurrent lists.

Others were reserved for only the regional government.

It should be noted that it was the British administration that initiated and made Nigeria a federal system. Therefore the political union of Nigeria (federalism) was not a voluntary one but put in place by the British administrations. That is why some scholars describe the Federalism in Nigeria as uncomfortable marriage imposed on us by foreign body.

Effects of Military Regimes in Nigeria Federalism

Military regimes in Nigeria started with the January 15th 1966 coup d'état led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. The coup d'état brought Major General J.T.U Aguyi-Ironsi to power. Major-General Ironsi introduced decree 34 of 1966 (Unification decree) that

abolished federalism in Nigeria. The decree 34 intended to bring cohesion in the government structure but the regions would remain but addressed as group of Provinces. General Yakubu Gowon who succeeded Ironsi divided Nigeria into twelve (12) states.

General Murtala Muhammed that succed General Gowon increased the number of states to nineteen (19). Further creation of states made it 21 in 1987, 30 in 1991 and 36 in 1996.

Local Government Areas were also created during those years and in 1996, the number of local government areas in Nigeria came up to 774, which is the number till date.

The then military government promulgated the revenue allocation formular of the federation in such a way that favoured the federal government.

Nigeria is a heterogeneous nation with pluralism of languages, religion, socio-political and diverse economic formulations. Even though Nigeria obtained its independence in 1960 and has practiced the current unbroken democracy for over twenty (20) years, it is one of the developing nations characterized by high external debt, high inflation figure, poverty, institutional decay especially in health as exposed by the Corona Virus (Covid-19) that exposed the inadequacies of our health system, causing avoidable deaths due to closure of over-seas medical trips; education and general infrastructure, as well as high rate of unemployment. These issues are in place despite the nation's enormous and abundant natural resources and endowments as well as high human population. These issues were exposed and made Nigerians to realize more, the unpalatable state of affairs of the nation.

Consequently, there has been:

Politics of Federal Character Principles in Nigeria

We observe in Nigeria that, those from the so called educationally advanced states do not hold advantageous position when it comes to politics;

economics and other spheres of state power. People, who are discriminated against either in admissions into public schools or employment into government establishments, are the same group of people who do not have access to political or economic powers of the country. They are, therefore, discriminated against in more than just one way. What is more, the application of the principle of federal character *has not been total*. For instance, while it is supposed to be used in the recruitment into the armed forces, it is always followed when appointments are being made, irrespective of whether such appointments are political or military. Examples were the appointments made in 1987/88 under the regime of Ibrahim Babaginda [4] and the recent appointment by President Buhari. It favoured a part of the country. These imply that they did not consider the principle of quota system. [5] stated that "the impression this creates is that "the principle of federal character was applied only when it brought some group at par with others and not necessarily to objectively create a balance" [2].

The result has been that more qualified personnel are denied school admission, employment or promotion, mainly on the ground that the available position is not for their state or place of origin. In this situation, rather than foster or promote national unity, needed for development, the politics behind the practice of federal character has only heightened mutual suspicion and acrimonies among Nigerians to think more of their primordial groups. This has been the yardstick for agitation of state creation and even in the struggle for power to rule [2].

[4] states that the federal character principle has been manipulated by

and channeled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeois ruling class. It is the members of this class who formulated and operates the principle. Under the guise of the federal character principle, the members of the bourgeois class get themselves entrenched in power and exercise control over the machinery of state. Through the application of this principle, too, they strive to reconcile their class differences through the operation of acceptable formula for the allocation, distribution and sharing of national resources and benefits among themselves. While they do this, they capitalize on and fan the embers of the ethnic differences among the various Nigerian peoples to win the support of the masses in their areas [1].

Therefore, the national character principle breeds inefficiency and encourage other vices like favourism, nepotism and corruption since those appointed based on the basis of their ethnic background most times subvert existing rules in order to promote their local and sectional interests. Also the federal character principle encourages particularism, sectionalism and ethnic loyalty in the conduct of public affairs. Ethnic loyalty is re-enforced under the guise of national character, and ethnic groupings, form the basis of recruitments and promotions in the nation's public service. An individual is appointed to certain posts mainly on the basis of belonging to a particular ethnic group. This process distorts national development.

Therefore, there is the general feeling that the principle of federal character application perpetuates the primordial geography that it seeks to erase which had impacted negatively on national development efforts.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Structural Functionalism was the Theoretical Framework that supported the work.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 25	20	5.55
26 - 30	40	11.11
31 - 40	100	27.78
40 - 45	150	41.67
Above 46	50	13.89
Total	360	100

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	250	69.44
Female	110	30.56
Total	360	100

Resultant Effects

Due to all these issues there have been many agitations for restructuring which individuals and groups see and define from different perspectives. There have also been many militant groups in the country, which many ascribe to the fact that the cause is partly due to unfairness in sharing and utilization of the natural resources and political positions.

Restructuring

Many Nigerians clamour for restructuring due to perceived

imbalance in sharing and utilization of resources. This yearning and agitation for restructuring appear to be increasing and it is not unconnected with dissatisfaction within the country for failure of successive governments to satisfy the aspiration of majority of the governed. The unsatisfied groups appear to create tension that give rise to militia activities. The proponents to restructuring believe that it is the only way to save Nigeria and maintain peace and development.

FINDINGS

Interview and questionnaire used in this study show that the style of leadership; manipulation of electoral process, non independence of the judiciary, corruption etc are the main bane of Nigeria lack of economic growth and development.

Table 2: Perception of Realities from Respondents

S/N	Issues	SA	A	D	SD
1	Nigeria as a country does not place high premium on merit	200 (55.56%)	100 (27.78%)	40 (11.11%)	20 (5.55%)
2	Political actors and godfathers impose candidates on electorates	210 (58.33%)	90 (25%)	35 (9.72%)	25 (6.94%)
3	Political actors do not make the rural people enjoy dividends of democracy	150 (41.67%)	140 (38.89%)	50 (13.89%)	20 (5.55%)
4	Local government chairmen and their executives live and operate from urban areas	180 (50%)	110 (30.56%)	55 (15.27%)	15 (4.17%)
5	Money politics and corruption are the bane of Nigerian politics and development	205 (56.94%)	105 (29.17%)	30 (8.33%)	20 (5.56%)

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree

D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

From table 2 above, the views of the respondents show that two hundred of them, representing 55.56 percent strongly agree that, Nigeria as a country does not place high premium on merit in consideration and placement of people on positions and even on admission of students into public schools. One Hundred of the respondents representing 27.78 percent agreed that placement of people on position or students admission into public schools are not based on merit. The total number of respondents that agree with very low utilization of merit in public offices and schools representing 83.33 percent of the respondents. It is only forty and twenty respondents represent 11.11 percent and 5.55 percent respectively that disagreed and strongly disagreed in respect of placement of people and students based on merit.

This finding is in line with President Robert Mugabe's hilarious quotes thus:

African education system has surprising outcomes. The smartest students pass with first (1st) class and get admission to read Medicine and Engineering. The second class students get admission to read for MBAs and LL.Bs to 'manage' the first class students. The third (3rd) class students enter politics and rule both 1st and 2nd class students. The failures join Army and control politicians who, if they are not happy with, they kick or kill them... Best of all those who did not attend any school,

become prophets and witch doctors and many people follow them.

It appears that President Mugabe's quotation is true to a reasonable extent especially during their decades of leadership. That may explain why many African nations had many coup d'etat in their political experiment.

The views of respondents in respect of how the political actors and godfathers impose candidates on electorate during primary elections show that 210, representing 58.33 percent strongly agree that candidates are imposed on the electorate. They added that those imposed candidates would come into political offices mainly to serve their godfathers. Another ninety respondents, representing 25 percent agreed that political godfathers impose candidates on the electorate. It is only sixty respondents representing 16.67 percent that stated that candidates are not imposed on the electorate. Regarding development of rural areas, majority of the respondents representing 80.56 percent stated that the local government chairman and their executives do not reside in their various towns and communities. Continuing, they added that those chairmen and their executives operate from the urban areas. They concluded that such action is the main reason for snail-speed development of the rural communities.

Another vital issue that the respondents indicated as one of the major challenge confronting Nigeria integration and development is money politics and corruption. Two hundred and five (205) representing 56.94 percent respondents and another one hundred and five (105) respondents representing 29.17 percent were of the view that money politics and corruption are the bane of the nation's integration and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, merit system of recruitment and appointment into the nations public

schools, political positions and other offices should be used.

1. Merit should take sixty percent (60%) while federal character or

- equality of states and local governments should take forty percent (40%).
2. Political and public officer's salary, allowances and benefits should be made to be less attractive. Also the security votes to all government officials should be reduced. This reduced incentive will attract only those who want to serve their nation and repel potential scavengers/looters.
 3. Adequately, addressing of social exclusion, unemployment and deprivation among Nigerians (especially youths) must be adopted as an effective means of tackling insecurity and militancy in the country. So, Nigerians should try to vote those with credible character into leadership positions.
 4. Further, we need to be professing broad nationalism in our multicultural entity and our people should begin to fight for each other, not fighting against each other, because our strengths is in the unity of our diversity.
 5. There should be re-orientation of Nigerians to make us believe and understand that it is only when merit is given its top position in all spheres of life in Nigeria, that we can attain the needed speedy growth and development.

REFERENCES

1. Agbodike, C.C. (2000). "Federal Character Principle and National Integration in Nigeria," In K. Amuwo, A. Agbaje, R. Suberu, G. Herault eds, *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan Spectrum Books Limited.
2. Gboyega, A. (2003). "Democracy and Development, the Imperative of Local Government," Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
3. William Livingstone (1952) "Federalism as a system for the promotion of unity among a diversity of nationalities to form a single stronger nation.
4. Burgess (2006) "federalism works best in heterogeneous societies than in homogeneous ones.
5. Maje Kodinmi (2015)...*a federal state is one which there is an explicit and constitutional demarcation of powers and functions among national and sub-national units.*