

CONSOLIDATING FEDERALISM IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Federalism is aimed at enhancing good governance, through equitable sharing of powers, resources, duties and responsibilities between the central government and the component units/regions. It is best suited for diverse nation-states where there are multiplicity of tribes, languages and religions; hence it fits perfectly into the need of Nigeria, which can best be described as heterogeneous society. However, the benefits of federalism has not been well harnessed and put to optimum utilization as a resultant effect of successive bad governance, corruption, favoritisms and nepotism, which has eaten deep into the socio-political and economic fabrics of Nigeria, hence, the political life has remained immature, parochial and a zero-sum in nature, while the economy has remained stagnant and basically monolithic, depending on crude oil, whose price is unstable for any meaningful economic sustainability. The aim of this paper is to examine the challenges of federalism in Nigeria, with a view of providing some recommendations toward finding solutions to these problems. Theoretically, the study adopts the co-operative federalism theory. Methodologically, the study is pivoted on the qualitative approach. The paper identified successive bad governance, corruption, favoritism and nepotism, minority issues and creation of states/local government, revenue allocation, and secession, as some of the major factors militating against the success of federalism in Nigeria. The paper recommends the weakening of the center to further accommodate the component units/regions, recognizing their peculiarities, also adequate measures must be put in place by the three tiers of government in other to halt the spate of the endemic corruption in Nigeria.

Keywords: Federalism, corruption, revenue allocation, heterogeneous, monolithic economy.

Introduction

Nigeria is a great state that is full of potentials in both human and material resources. However, she has not been able to translate these potentials to actual gains for her development. This makes the country to lag behind her peers. The political entity known as Nigeria today was a creation of the British colonial masters. In 1914, the British Governor-General, Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard, amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form what is today known as Nigeria. This amalgamation was the third of its kind in the history of the country. The first took place in 1900 when the Niger Coast Protectorate was merged with the Yoruba land to form the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The second took place in 1906 following the unification of the Lagos Colony and the Southern Protectorate to form the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.

It is important to state that the amalgamation was not done in collaboration with the Nigerian citizens but entirely the creation of the British colonial masters for their convenience. The forceful amalgamation as noted by scholars such as Usman (2013) and Egwu (2001) sowed the seed of suspicion and discord among Nigerians. Moreover, with the adoption of divide and rule strategies in the form of the indirect rule system and the style of the colonial constitutional development, Nigerians were robbed of the needed opportunity for common front towards nation-building. This system of government and the colonial constitutional designs, accordingly, paved the way for the emergence of regional leaders. The formation of the early indigenous political parties and their manifesto were designed along ethnically determined interests. For instance, the Clifford Constitution of 1922 that first introduced elective principle in Nigeria shielded the Northern part of Nigeria from benefiting from such electoral principle. When political awareness improved in Nigeria, most of the political parties worked for the interest of their regions rather than the Nigerian state. In the West, the Action Group (AG) was headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) was thriving in the East and it was headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was prosperous in the North and was headed by Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto. The constant violence that is being witnessed in the Nigeria state today can be attributed to the history and processes inherent in state formation during the colonial and the post-colonial era (Egwu 2001). Consequently, the colonial state, which was in every respect the foundation upon which the post-colonial state was built, played a significant role in the process of ethnic identity formation and the political use to which such identity can be described.

Therefore, the present Nigerian state is inherently in crises, corrupt and a violence generating mechanism, which is against the rule of fairness in fiscal federalism. Egwu (2000) lamented that the development of democratic order was not actually the concern of the colonial masters. Following the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Lugard, a constitution was adopted for the newly created political entity. Provisions were made for the establishment of the executive and consultative organ called the Nigeria Council. Unfortunately, this Council never had the opportunity to exercise their legislative or executive powers. Therefore, following the lapses in the constitution, it was abolished and seemingly more reliable and a more authentic one was constituted.

In 1922, the Clifford constitution was put in place; it was this constitution that introduced for the very first time, the principle of elections in Nigeria. But the Nigerian nationalists later attacked it because Nigerians who serve on the Council were mere spectators. Similarly, as stated earlier, the principle was only limited to the Southern Nigeria, the Northern Nigeria were not a party to it. The anomalies led to the abolition of the constitution. The Richard constitution came into effect in 1946. This constitution divided the country into regions, with each region built around different major ethnic groups. It was this constitution which built a pattern of political and ethnic rivalry among the regions. Ironically, each of these dominant groups had their own history, tradition, customs, values and languages distinct from one another.

It can therefore be said that this arrangement provided the ground for years of domination by one region over the others. It was this same suspicion and fear of domination, which led to the political uproar over the distribution of power between the North and the South at the general conference held in Ibadan in 1950. The general conference in Ibadan of 1950, gave birth to the Macpherson constitution of 1951, the constitution gave more powers to the regional houses of assembly to make laws and advise on issues concerning their people. Further agitations led to the collapse of the Macpherson constitution and the entrenchment of the Lyttleton constitution of 1954, which formally established federalism in Nigeria and introduced direct election into the federal and regional legislative houses in Nigeria (Adegbola 2012).

Nigeria was granted independence on October 1st, 1960, with the promulgation into law of the independence constitution of 1960. In 1963, Nigeria became a republic following the coming into force of the republican constitution. The 1960 and 1963 constitutions adopted the parliamentary system of government for the governance of the Nigerian state. However, the 1979 constitution and other constitutions that followed it such as the 1989 and 1999 constitutions adopted the presidential system of government (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) (2012:74). From the forgoing, it is crystal clear that the Nigerian state was built on imbalance foundation *ab initio*, hence the continuous challenges in her practice of federalism. Aside Nigeria, other countries that are practicing federalism such as the United States of America, Russia, Canada, Nepal, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Australia, and so on are relatively in conformity with the spirit of true federalism, hence the need to further interrogate the reasons why federalism is not thriving in comparison to some of these countries mentioned above. The aim of this paper is to examine the challenges of federalism in Nigeria, with a view of providing some recommendations toward finding solutions to these problems.

Theoretical framework

The theory of Cooperative federalism

Federalism is aimed at enhancing good governance, through equitable sharing of powers, resources, duties and responsibilities between the central government and the component units/regions. It is best suited for diverse nation-states where there are multiplicity of tribes, languages and religions; hence it fits perfectly into the need of the Nigerian state, which can best be described as heterogeneous society, struggling to attain stability between unity and various diversities. It is important to note that federalism is both a constitutional arrangement and practice that allows the diverse interests of a state to be accommodated in a single state allowing for the preservation of the individual peculiarities of the federating units.

According to Satyanarayana (2011), K.C. Where's classical definition of 'Federal Government' was based on the characteristics of American Federalism. He described most other federations as 'quasi federal', for example, Canada, Australia, and India. He further mentioned that like Canada, though a country may be constitutionally quasi-federal, yet it may remain federal in practice. But the constitutions of almost all federal countries today emphasize interdependence between the two levels of governments. Hence, 'co-operative federalism' is conceptually more suitable than classical federalism in the analysis of present-day federations.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that of utmost importance to federalism is the autonomy of both the central and the federating governments and their co-existence. Therefore, both the central and the component federating units cooperate in a symbiotic-mutually beneficial relationship to plan for their economic development, political stability, and social homogeneity. The relationship between the central and the federating units should never be parasitic or suspected to be so. Such symbiotic relationship is what Watts (1968), described as 'Co-operative Federalism', which is the strand of federal systems adopted in most of the newly independent Third World states such as Nigeria. Watts is of the opinion that, "both constitutionally and politically..., the situation has in fact been one of mutual dependence of central and regional governments on each other. This interdependence has found expression in the proliferation of institutions and arrangements for consultations and cooperation between governments in a wide variety of fields, and in the special weight given to regional balance within the institutions of the central government itself. Thus, by comparison with the older federations, a distinctive characteristic of the new federations has been the degree to which central and regional governments have been made more interdependent and their relations more flexible". It is easy to designate a state as federal or non-federal if we use the yardstick of classical federalism. In a nutshell, the cooperative strand of federalism theory fits perfectly into the Nigeria state situation.

Challenges of the practice of Federalism in Nigeria

Nigeria adopted federalism as the best constitutional and practical approach to accommodate the internal differences and dynamisms inherent in the state occasioned by the existence of over 250 ethnic groups and three major competing religions. It is important to note that, just like Eremie (2014, 79) argues, the type of federalism operational in any state is a product of the unique political, religious, economic, historical, and ideological experiences of that state. Consequently, the practice of federalism in Nigeria is affected by some of the factors, as mentioned above, and has militated against the development of the country. Specifically, some of the challenges of federalism in Nigeria include.

Bad governance; governance across all strata, that's federal, states and local government in Nigeria are bereaved of good governance attributes such as transparency, accountability, equity, fairness, and adherence to the rule of law that would have enabled access to stable electricity, clean water, adequate security, good transportation system and so on. However, what obtains are lack of electricity and unstable electricity in some locations, inhabitants drinking from the river banks, insecurity even at the seat of power, and the failure of successive government to be responsible and responsive by being transparent and accountable in their disbursement and spending of public funds. This bad governance tends to portray the feelings that federalism cannot give the necessary impetus that are needed for development to take place in the country (Chukwuemeka & Aniche, 2016).

Corruption, favoritism and nepotism; Idoko et al. (2015) argue that "corruption has been seen as one of the social problems confronting the developmental efforts of Nigeria. This is because money and other resources meant for educational development of the country are often diverted to private pockets by privileged few individuals at the expense of the entire population. The acquisition of wealth due to selfish acts and greed has characterized most societies in Nigeria and that has negated the social and economic efforts of many societies." Corruption has manifested itself in the form of election rigging, abuse of power, embezzlement of public funds, buying of votes, sharing of money at the polling centers, manipulation of voters' register, diversion of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, unlawful possession of firearms and other electoral offences (United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2019).

This has engendered a lukewarm attitude towards political participation as many citizens become frustrated because of their constant political involvement, without adequate compensation with good governance. In such a political system, these are obvious obstacles to citizens' involvement in politics (Muse and Nasiah, 2015). For Chiamogu & Chiamogu (2019), corruption by successive governments in Nigeria has often given birth to unnecessary favoritism and nepotism because government in power, particularly the central government, have often made very sensitive appointments on critical sectors such as; energy, oil and gas, education, security and so on based on parochial sentiment of religion and ethnic bias. Such breeds mistrust among the central government and the federating units often, leading some sections of the federating units to be attempting secession to preserve their interest. Also, it should be added that these triangular problems of corruption, favoritism and Nepotism is not only limited to the government, but also to the governed at both the public and the private domains (Ilorah, 2009). The overall negative effect is a high sense of mistrust among the federating units as well as the citizens on the efficacy of federalism to deliver on its promises to the development of the country.

Minority issues; predominantly, the most populated ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and the Yoruba, according to Minority Rights Group International (2018), these major ethnic groups form more than 68% of the population. The other minority ethnic groups such as the Tiv, the Ijaw, the Itshekiri, Efik, Ilaje, Urhoho, Ibibio, and so on often feel threatened and perceived feeling of injustice. The Willinks

Minority Commission was set up in 1957 to investigate and assuage the fear of the minorities in the buildup towards independence. After independence to the present dispensation, there still exists palpable fear of the minority in the federation. Due to the fear of domination by the majority ethnic groups, there has been clamor from these minority ethnic group for greater participation in the Nigeria project. Calls have been made on several occasions by the minority groups in this regard. The failure of the Nigeria state to address the issues of these minority groups has further threatened the corporate existence of the Nigeria state with the formation of various youth militia groups (Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017) and (Okolo, 2014). Today, the fear of the minorities and even some major ethnic groups in Nigeria has been elevated to the clamour for 'sovereign' national conference and or restructuring of the Nigeria state. The basis for federalism is to accommodate and take care of the fears emanating from the federating units. Unfortunately, however, in Nigeria, the fears keep aggravating even when federalist structures exist.

Creation of states and local governments; these have always been one of the sore parts of Nigeria's federalism. This is due to the incessant call for more states and local governments creation, this creation of more states and local government instead of solving the problem of non-inclusiveness of the minority ethnic groups has further polarized the country into more ethnic bias state as more and more tribes seek to have local governments and states created solely for their own ethnic group. Successive governments in Nigeria have not also created these states and local government for equity and good governance, but that has further polarized the different ethnic groups, thus bringing about unhealthy rivalry among the various sections of the country, due to the subjective and parochial approach to this sensitive issue by the central government (Adeyemi, 2013).

Revenue allocation and resource control; is another burning issue in the practice of Nigeria's federalism. It has witnessed many kinds of policy formation and implementation such as derivative policy, percentage and so on. However, it remains a negative aspect of Nigeria's federalism. This is because there is no adequate infrastructural development, no gainful employment in most areas where these resources such as crude oil, the main stay of the country's economy, is derived. This is in spite of humongous amount of funds deployed by the government in form of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB), created in 1958 and the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), created in 1992 which seem to have all failed. According to Senator Godswill Akpabio, OMPADEC, NDDB failed due to excessive corruption lamenting that, "their operations were marred by lack of focus, excessive corruption, political interference and high overhead cost, oil theft, which are still prominent in the present dispensation (Vanguard, 2020). Hence, as more funds are being allocated to these regions, the same funds are being siphoned by the same officials appointed by the government. Therefore, the clamour for more revenue allocation continued unabated (Ohiomu & Oluyemi, 2018). Similarly, the clamour for resource control is central to the challenges of federalism in Nigeria. Eremie (2014, 81) notes that it is one of the reasons why some sections of the Nigerian society had and still call for the practice of 'true federalism' in Nigeria.

Intra-ethnic rivalry; this is another bane in the practice of Nigeria's federalism. One of the major reasons for this can be traced to the perceived fear of domination of one ethnic group over the others. Particularly between the indigenous tribe and their settler neighbors. For instance, in the South-Western part of the country, the Ife people who are the indigenous group often perceived the Modakekes as mere neighbours, they are often not comfortable with Modakekes and perceive them as a group of people that are making attempt to take over their land. This has often developed from suspicion to actual breakdown of law and order in the

region. This same situation is what also obtains among the Urhobo and the Itshekiri, Aguleri and Umuleri, the Ijaw and the Ilajes and so on (Warren & Troy, 2015).

Inter-ethnic rivalry, another hydra-headed malaise in Nigeria federalism is the constant and, often time, deadly intra-ethnic clashes among the various multi-ethnic groups in the country. In the Northern part of the country, many Igbos and Yorubas have been murdered on various occasions, the same ugly incidents have been recorded on several occasions in the Eastern and Western parts of the country, where many Northerners have also been murdered on a number of occasions. These unhealthy constant clashes leading to loss of lives and property do not portend a good omen for the country's federalism, socio-economic and political stability (Solomon, 2016).

Secession, is another constant denominator in Nigeria's quest for true federalism. Whenever a section of the country feels neglected particularly by the central government, there is always the feeling of being marginalized, hence the need to break away from the country. The Yoruba at some point threaten to secede after the June 12th election, the people of the Niger-Delta also threatened to succeed at some point. The emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as the President of the Federation at a time, reduced the Niger-Delta further agitation for secession. This situation has always been with us as an entity culminating to the infamous and sad episode of Nigeria-Biafra War or Nigeria Civil War. The crisis is currently being reignited with the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) struggle, a group that the federal government had tagged as a terrorist organization. This possibility of secession has always threatened the basic existence of federalism in the country (Ogunmupe, 2021).

Solutions to the challenges of federalism in Nigeria.

Having laid bare the challenges confronting the practice of true federalism in Nigeria and thus frustrating the effort of Nigeria and Nigerians to benefit maximally from its practice, it is important to examine and proffer solutions to the mentioned challenges. This is important because the essence of academic research of this nature is to identify the challenges confronting the societies and prescribe solution to such challenges. Accordingly, this work identifies the following as the solutions to the federalism under threat in Nigeria.

Equity and fairness; for federalism to thrive in Nigeria, there should be equity and fairness among the various ethnic groups in the appointments at the various levels of government. Appointment into offices should not be lopsided in favour of a particular ethnic group at the expense of others. This will engender a strong sense of belonging among the various ethnic groups which is one of the spirits of federalism. A situation where sensitive positions of the state are occupied by one ethnic group, such do not represent a true federalist arrangement. Consequently, the government must imbibe equity and fairness in her appointments to reduce, to the barest minimum, the problems of favoritism and nepotism in the Nigeria state.

The indigene and non-indigene status; in furtherance to consolidating federalism in Nigeria, the indigene and non-indigene status must be addressed. It must be outrightly removed from the constitution. Every Nigerian citizen should be able to claim the indigenship of his or her choice. The determinant factor should be based on Nigeria, not any ethnic or state indigenship. The indigenship factor should only come in when identifying the location of particular people and not for political appointment or political exegeses. This will booster federalism and encourage national unity and integration.

Fiscal federalism; the principle of fiscal federalism dictates that the different federating units should be autonomous and should also control what they produce in term of material and non-material resources, while an agreed percentage is paid or contributed to the central government. This will enhance socio-economic growth and development, improve the sense of belonging and stop the unnecessary and incessant clamour for secession from the different ethnic groups and regions in Nigeria. The current practice of running to Auja to

share the federal revenue between the federal government and the federating units is not healthy for the growth and development of Nigeria. Fiscal federalism is an important attribute of true federalism. The effort to undermine this principle in Nigeria leaves Nigeria with serious defects. Consequently, fiscal federalism should be inculcated into the Nigerian practice of federalism to enhance its contribution to the development of the country.

Decentralization/weakening of power at the centre; because of the military coups and counter coups in the past in Nigeria, her federalism seems to tilt more towards a unitary system of government than the so-called federalist structure. Unfortunately, successive civilian governments have also assisted in building upon the near-unitary federal system of the military era. Hence, the Central government wields more power than the other component parts of the federation. The enormous power wielded by the central government should be reduced to the barest minimum. This is important to restore true federalism in Nigeria. The situation where the central government is too powerful weakens the federating units and reduces them to mere appendages of the central government instead of federating units that are autonomous in the powers allocated to them constitutionally.

The situation where the central government wields too much power is antithetical to the spirit of true federalism, because power is supposed to be shared between the central government and the federating units and not concentrating all powers in the custody of the central government. This will also help to enhance good governance and expose the people inhabiting the federating units to better experience in the art of modern governance.

Federal character; the so-called principle of federal character needs an urgent review if our task of consolidating federalism in Nigeria is to be achieved. This is because this singular item has not only celebrated mediocrity at the expense of merit but has also denied Nigerians the opportunity of benefitting from the competency and proficiency of the more qualified work force to manage very critical spheres of the public life. Subsequently, the appointment of people into different positions ought to be based on the best available hands from any group or section in the country. This is not always the case, because recruitment to positions that are meant for people who have undergone specialized training such as those of teachers, engineers, medical doctors, lawyers, accountants and so on are not always based on merit, but on parochial ethnical sentiment.

Internally generated revenue; emphasis should be placed on the promotion of more internally generated revenue by the States. Each state should be encouraged to generate sufficient resources and funds to implement its policies, programmes and projects, without necessarily going cap in hands for fund from the central government. The present situation where the states and the local governments are given monthly hand out by the central government is doing more harm than good to our quest for true federalism in Nigeria. Hence, the states and the local governments are encouraged to generate more funds internally. This will make them to be financially independent and free from the financial apron strings of the central government.

Conclusion

Federalism is best suited for diverse nation-states where there is multiplicity of tribes, languages, and religions. The Nigeria state fits perfectly into this description, due to her heterogeneous and pluralist status. However, the gains and merits that go with federalism has not been well harnessed and put to optimum use by the Nigeria-state. Some of the problems militating against the gains of federalism in Nigeria have been identified and analysed by this paper as; bad governance from successive government, corruption, favouritism and nepotism, minority issues, creation of states and local government, revenue allocation, intra-ethnic rivalry, inter-ethnic rivalry, constant threat of secession by various ethnic groups. The solutions to these

problems as suggested by this paper are: equity and fairness among the ethnic groups, the indigene and non-indigene status, adherence to fiscal federalism, the decentralization and weakening of the central power, fair use of the federal character and more focus on the internally generated revenue by the states and local government. This paper concludes that the practice of federalism in Nigeria, on the basis of a symbiotic-mutually beneficial relationship between the central and the federating units on one side and between the federating units on the other hand, is important for her development. This engenders healthy competition and interaction in the federation that the ripple effects would trigger the much-needed development in Nigeria.

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