

THE FALLACY OF NIGERIAN FEDERALISM AND THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL UNITY: LEGITIMACY AND THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY***ABDULRAHMAN DANGANA LUKMAN AND **AHMED MUBARAK MASHI****Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria **Department of Political Science, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University, Katsina***ABSTRACT**

The area now known as Nigeria came into existence with effective British occupation after a series of efforts at pacification and conquest. Being characterized as a vast country with little tradition of unity; with people of different historical, racial, cultural and religious backgrounds; with special problems of communalism, regionalism, lingualism and casteism; and different social customs and differing concepts of law and society; a federal system was adopted to integrate the diverse groups of Nigeria. The arrangement is expected to be instrumental in forging national unity and preserving the separate social identities of the country. Paradoxically, while the political system continues to operate with minimum cohesion, ethnic mistrust and minority problems increasingly weakens the fabrics of Nigerian federalism. This paper however interrogates the trajectories of federalism and national unity in Nigeria. It adopts the Group Theory of politics which assumes that, society and the entire political process are nothing but a gigantic network of interacting groups where

Introduction:

Despite the fact that federalism is seen as a form of government in which there is a division of powers between at least two levels of government of equal status (Wheare, 1963:11), the hardcore of the philosophy is meant to accommodate diverse groups and their interests. In other words, federalism is seen as a process by which unity and diversity are politically organized and these processes include political phenomena, persons, ideas and institutions put differently (Frederick, 2008:27). Nigeria, like many other states characterized by ethno-linguistic, socioeconomic, cultural and political heterogeneities began to adopt federal system from the colonial time.

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each group remains engaged in perpetual struggle for power and domination. The study adopts the quantitative research method for proper analysis. Findings reveal that, even though various measures were set up for the purpose of reconciliation of aggrieved groups; corruption, nepotism and tribal loyalty hindered the adherence to the basic principles of federalism in Nigeria. There have been accusations and counter accusations from all sections of the polity as to how powers are being distributed or how they ought to be distributed. As the country is still searching for national identity, federalism is thus threatened by both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. The study recommends that, all stakeholders should reflect upon the appropriate federal system applicable to Nigeria and Nigerians; ensure the establishment of effective institutional frameworks; establish a system of sharing power and avert crisis associated with unequal distribution of power and resources.

Keywords: *Fallacy of Federalism, Nigerian Federalism, National Unity, Legitimacy and National Identity.*

The origin of the federal system in Nigeria can be traced to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914. The federal structure began to form in 1939 under Sir Bernard Bourdillon who divided the Southern Protectorates into two. The Richards and Macpherson constitutions of 1946 and 1951 respectively only created a decentralized unitary system. The practice of federalism in Nigeria was officially adopted through the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 as it was the first genuine federal constitution of the country.

Some scholars have given several opinions on the basic reason for its introduction. One of which is that federalism was introduced in Nigeria by the British for administrative convenience (Akinyemi, 2001; Ben Nwabueze, 2001:07). Some believe that the British colonialists adopted federalism in Nigeria to solve the problem of how to keep the large and ethnically diverse groups of people together, and others are of the view that Britain imposed federalism on Nigeria in order to maintain some control on the country after independence (Coleman, 1958:21).

Thus, Nigerian federalism became consolidated at independence even though, it has swung between the excessive regionalism that marked the First Republic (1960-1966) and the excessive centralization of the military, and relatively, the

post-military era. In other words, Nigerian federalism overtime has undergone structural changes by which the federation moved from its initial three-region structure at independence to a four-region structure by 1964, and to its current thirty-six states structure including seven hundred and seventy-four local governments.

However, Nigerian federalism has not been able to adequately promote national unity and integration across the country. Attachment and allegiance to ethnic, regional and religious groups characterised the Nigerian federalism. In other words, positive feeling for common identity, shared national sentiment and common sense of patriotism and nationalism is lost in contemporary Nigeria. There has been significant tension between the southern states and the northern states due to financial inequality, ethnic differences, religious conflicts etc.

While the political system continues to operate with minimum cohesion, this paper examines the dynamics of Nigerian federalism (with particular attention given to the fallacy of the country's federalism) and the tension surrounding national unity, ethnic mistrust and minority problems which increasingly weakens the fabrics of Nigerian federalism.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Group Theory of politics otherwise known as the Interest Group Theory which get influence in the realm of politics particularly from the late 19th Century (1920s, 1950s, 1970s/1980s to date). Leading advocates are James Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville, Arthur Bentley, David Truman and Robert Dahl etc.

The theory (which sees groups as political actors) get its roots from the late 19th Century within the context of the larger movement of behavioralism in sociology and psychology which brought to the social sciences the idea of empirical evidence being used to describe reality and/or develop predictive theories about non-scientific disciplines. This application of science moved political theory away from the study of the state and government in terms of pure form, into the study of influence and power (Knoke et al, 1996).

The major premise of the theory is that, the state is composed of actors both institutional and non-institutional, and these actors are a product of their historical, socio-economic, political, and various other contexts (Ball and Millard, 1986:25). Implicit in this concept is the idea that groups have competing sets of interests and the state acts as a control mechanism. It placed emphasis on the

interest of underlying groups in the society which includes civil society, political groups, governmental (policy) network, and mutual relations among interest groups (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986; Thomas, 1993). Questions such as how decisions are made, who decides, who benefits and what difference does it make all; revolves around group politics.

Interest group is a social group, particularly one with permanent organization, which attempts to realize its interests by exercising influence, in the broad sense, over politics and society. An interest group is an organization of people with similar policy goals who enter the political process to try to achieve those aims (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998:333). Their activities involve lobbying based on interests to influence actors involved in public policy making. The purpose is to protect and enhance values and desires on which the interests are based.

The theory acknowledged the contesting claims of the working class and those of corporate interests which led to the rise of "pressure politics" where groups use means to exert pressure on policy-makers (Bentley, 1967:34). The ability of extra-governmental groups with competing interests to affect the policy making decisions of institutional actors is one of the foundations of group theory. The major tenets of the theory as advanced by Key (1964:23) include:

- i. The task of the political system is to manage group conflict by establishing the rules of the game,
- ii. arranging compromises,
- iii. enacting deals into law,
- iv. enforcing and adjudicating the laws,
- v. government is like a referee calling the balls and strikes,
- vi. public policy is only a temporary equilibrium,
- vii. adherent believe that government is held together by latent group which supports the system, overlapping membership in different groups, checks and balances of group completion and agenda building.

Interest Group Theory believes that many different interests compete to control government policy, and that their conflicting interests can balance out each other to provide good government. The theory however holds that, situation will remain fluid permanently; no one will have a permanent victory (Knoke et al, 1996:21).

The theory also assert that, while politics and decision making are located primarily within the framework of government, there are many

nongovernmental groups who can and do use their resources to exert influence on those with the power to make policy. Inherent to this framework are the ideas that no one group has a claim on the general will, group interests are multiple and shifting, and any inequalities of power or access created by disparate resources are resolved by the democratic process (Olson, 1965).

While the Group theory can be seen as an organised body of individuals who share policy goal and try to influence policy, the theory fails to offer empirical evidence that interest groups are effective participants in the policy process. Nevertheless, it helps analyze the critical problem of national unity within the context of federalism in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employs the Quantitative Research Method obtained mainly from academic literature and other secondary sources. Data obtained examines the fallacy of the Nigerian federalism as well as the critical question of national unity and cohesion. The data also explains the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state, social disharmony and ethnic mistrusts among citizens which hindered the effective functioning of federalism in Nigeria.

The Fallacy of Nigerian Federalism and Some Cross-Cutting Issues

Since independence in 1960, the practice of federalism in Nigeria has been unable to contain the manifest diversities often mobilized by ethnic and religious identities. In other words, the demise of federalism in Nigeria began with the military incursion into politics which took over the government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and replaced it with the military government headed by Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi,

Contrary to the established belief that Federalism is the best governance model that can accommodate multi-lingual and multi-ethnic identities and the diversities emerging there from; the practice of federalism in Nigeria has been consistently challenged by certain factors at a huge cost to nation building and national unity. Some of the challenges to national unity include:

Legitimacy and the Problem of National Identity

It has been noted that Nigeria's population is over 180, 000,000. The country also has about 250 to 400 ethno-linguistic groupings. It is a fact that a significant number of all the tribes can be found in almost all the states especially the

commercial and political capitals of the country, hence crisis emerged over legitimacy and identity. In other words, there are always conflicts and tensions between the different ethnic groups in the country. Tension between south and north is strongly rooted in ethnic differences, with Hausa-Fulani peoples being the majority in the north, while the south is populated predominantly by Yoruba-speaking peoples in the southwest and Igbo peoples in the southeast.

Unfortunately, the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state and the mutual distrust that exists between ethnic nationalities has made the power sharing formula to be of great concern. Historical events such as the first and second military coups of 1966, the Gideon Okar attempted coup, the June 12 crises and the political complications that followed the ill-health of late President Umaru Musa Ya'radua are undoubtedly, outcomes of ethnic/regional power tussles (Adenike and David, 2013).

Adeoti and Olaniyan (2014:17) averred that "the issues that made up the Nigerian National question are the political structure of the country, the relationship between the different ethnic groups, the political system to be adopted in taxation, revenue generation, the relationship and responsibilities between different levels of government, fundamental human rights, social justice, prevention of the environment and the defense of the nation". Thus, the practice of federalism has remained unable to throw up an agreeable power sharing formula as part of efforts to manage diversities in Nigeria (Ekanade and Ekanade 2011).

Nigerians have been advised (Panter-Brick and Dawson, 1970; Okhaide, 1992; Tyoden, 2000; Yahaya, 1978) to play down ethnic and tribal differences; but to see one another as members of the same country. When the opposite was done, it led to ethnic and religious wars and genocide. Nigeria has seen so many lives lost to hostilities resulting from hate and ethnicity that such attitude should be abhorred.

Fiscal Federalism and Resource Control

Concerning fiscal federalism, access to political power at the centre is perhaps the most crucial factor in resource distribution and revenue allocation. In such situation, the group that controls political power at the centre is seen to be ultimately able to control revenue allocation and thus would have the opportunity to expropriate a larger share to its own advantage to the detriment of the wealth producers. This scenario is exemplified by the consistent and

systematic relegation of derivation as the principle of revenue allocation since 1951.

Achieving sound fiscal federalism has been in the forefront of contemporary federal discourse in Nigeria (Olu, 2017; Akinyemi, 2001; Alao, 1990; Adejumobi, 1992). Various attempts however have been initiated in this regard. Starting with the Phillipson Commission of 1946 that recommended the use of derivation and even development as distribution criteria for revenue generated in the country. Phillipson Commission recommended 50 percent to be retained by the region of origin, 35 percent to be shared among the regions including the region of origin while the central government was left with 15 per cent. This was followed by the Hicks-Phillipson (1951) which recommended Derivation in the following percentage: Area of Origin 50 per cent, Regions 35 per cent; and Central Government 15 per cent (Alapiki and Odondiri, 1992).

Thus, the Hicks Commission of 1953 recommended 100 percent for the region from which the revenue is generated with the payment of rents/royalties to the Federal Government. The Raisman Commission of 1958 supported the principle of Derivation of 50 percent to the state of origin, Regions 30 percent and Central Government 20 percent. The Binn Commission of 1964 was in support of - 50 per cent to the Region (area of Origin) (Babalola, 2008).

Dina Commission of 1969 was during the civil war and it recommended national minimum standard as balanced development. Aboyade Technical Committee recommended national minimum standard for national integration, equality of access to development opportunities, absorptive capacity, fiscal efficiency and independent revenue effort (Burgess, 1993). The Okigbo Committee of 1980 recommended principles of population, equality, social development and internal revenue effort. Danjuma Commission of 1988 recommended federal share of 50%, states 30% local government 15% and special fund 5%.

In 1999 at the return to civilian rule, the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), was created as permanent revenue body in accordance with section 153 (n) of the 1999 Constitution as amended.

However, since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed sustained debate with respect to fiscal federalism in the country. Efforts have been activated as far back as 2001 to support the call for fiscal federalism base on the principles of national interest, need and derivation where resource control was defined as the practice of true federalism and natural law in which the federating units express their rights to primarily control the natural resources within their

borders and make agreed contribution towards the maintenance of common services of the government at the center (Elaigwu, 2000:22). This sharply contrast the views in other parts of the country including many non-oil producing communities of the south that all revenues on all resources found within Nigeria belong to all people of Nigeria.

Fiscal federalism debate that dominated the politics of the country was two pronged: the centripetal forces and the centrifugal forces: Centripetal forces were of the opinion that the federal government should be in control of all mineral resources throughout the country; while the centrifugal forces are in support that states should control the resources that are found in their various. The centrifugal school of thought are of the opinion that states should contribute part of the resources accruing to them to centre and not the state giving to them revenue from resources harnessed for their states (Ikelegbe, 2004:21). The argument in basic terms suggest that that ownership of resources should be the major determinant of who gets what, when and how in the fiscal federalism (Jinadu, 2004:32).

However, the oil producing states have continued to make demands from the government which includes resource control and a restructuring of the nation's federal system of government, autonomy and self-determination of the region. The essence of this agitation is to have total control of the resources emanating from these states, especially revenues from oil and gas exploration and production (Jega, 2000). Be that as it may, the 1999 Constitution as amended through the derivation principle, states of the Federation are paid 13% of revenue that accrue to the Federal Government from the exploitation of natural resources to the state from which the revenue is generated (Obiyan, 2010).

The perverse political consequences of Nigeria's over-centralized fiscal federalism have been most evident in the syndrome of youth militancy, state violence, and anarchy in the oil-Niger Delta, from which much has been taken but little has been returned, environmental disaster, economic destitution, and political repression (Diamond 2001). In other words, given the concentration of resources and real powers at the center, the competition for the control of the federal government has tended to be vicious, corrupt, and politically and ethnically explosive.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Nigeria, being a plethora of ethnic groups and religious affiliations presents a difficult to manage scenario resulting in the polarization of the country along

ethnic and religious lines. The persistent, ever volatile, resource sapping ethnic and religious crises that continually explores the fault lines of religion, region and tribe to foment discord and aggravate hostility and mistrust among Nigerian communities has remained a constant challenge to the practice of federalism (Ojo,1998).

Unfortunately, success has not been recorded in all attempts to design a workable arrangement that can contain the manipulation of ethnicity and religion (Coleman, 1958; Gofwen, 2004). Each group believing in the superiority of its norms and practices has led to a general uneasiness and distrust (Ailoje, 1997). This has in turn resulted in several conflicts. Some of the ethno-religious conflicts include; the Maitatsine sectarian crisis in 1981, the Kaduna and Bulunkutu (Maiduguri) in 1982, the Ilorin Muslim-Christian riot during Christian Easter procession of March 1986, Zaria and Funtua religious riots of March 1987. In October 1990, there was a clash between Christians and Muslim in Kano (Kamoru and Sanusi, 2016) etc. The most worrisome account so far is the Jos crises (from April 1994 to date), the recurring farmers–herdsmen conflicts as well as the bomb attacks by the Boko Haram movement.

These ethno-religious crisis not only undermine the effectiveness of federalism to foster national unity and security, but also threaten the stability of the federation. There is bound to be some form of tension among the religious groups. Religious sensitivities among Nigerians have weakened patriotism, insecurity, commitment to national deals and true nationhood.

Mechanisms Adopted in Fostering National Unity in Nigeria

Various measures have been advanced by different governments to promote national unity among different groups in Nigeria. Some of these measures are as follows:

The National Youth Service Corps Scheme established in 1973 under the administration of Major-General Yakubu Gowon. The scheme makes it mandatory for fresh Nigerian graduates of below thirty years of age, to undergo one year national service in states other than their own (Bach, 1997). The objective of the scheme includes among others:

1. To inculcate discipline in our youth by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves;

2. To develop common ties among our youth and promote national unity by ensuring that as far as possible, youth are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin; each group assigned to work together is as representative of the country as possible;
3. To removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups;
4. To encourage members of the corps to seek at the end of their service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting free movement of labour (Bach, 1997).

Even though, there are more obstacles confronting the scheme, it has succeeded in mobilizing manpower to areas of crucial need all over the country, especially in the educational sector. It resulted in the encouragement of inter ethnic marriages and domiciliation in ethno regional areas other than one's own.

Also, the Unity schools and Federal Government Colleges were established to bring youths from the diverse ethnic groups into close contact very early in life and create an enduring environment of love and trust for each other that will lead to a reduction in mutual suspicion and mistrust. The Unity school as strategy of integration has its own problem. It has led to discrimination of children from the so-called educationally advantaged states (Aderonke, 2013).

As such, the federal character principle is another measure adopted to promote national unity across the country. This principle means that, distribution of appointment to high offices must reflect the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria (Adeosun, 2011). This is applicable to both states and local governments. It is important to note that the pursuit of this policy has proved inadequate in forging national unity across the diverse groups of country (Bello, 2012:21). It led to nepotism, favouritism and tribal loyalty and which subverts the principle of justice and fair play to the individual citizens (Edigin, 2010:11).

Another measure adopted by Nigerian government to promote the unity of the country is state creation. State creation is seen by most Nigerians as the quickest means to accelerated development, reduce minority tension and foster national unity (Ekanade and Ekanade, 2011:09).

Unfortunately, state creation rather than promoting national unity has increased our disunity and sense of alienation. Non-indigenes are treated little better than aliens in states other than their own (Olu et al, 2017). Even if they so wished, non-indigenes cannot integrate into the state where they work, pay their taxes and

may even have been born (Carnell, 1961). Apart from restrictions on the right to own property, non-indigenes are also required to pay higher school fees in the educational system.

After the first coup and under the short-lived military government of Aguiyi-Ironsi, the country was reorganized under a central government. Following the counter-coup which resulted in Aguiyi-Ironsi's deposition and assassination, Nigeria was reorganized as a federal country, with three of the regions being divided into newer entities and all first-level subdivisions being renamed as states:

- i. Eastern Region was divided into East-Central (Enugu), Rivers (Port Harcourt), and South-Eastern (Calabar) states;
- ii. Northern Region was divided into Benue-Plateau (Jos), Kano (Kano), Kwara (Ilorin), North-Central (Kaduna), North-Eastern (Maiduguri), and North-Western (Sokoto) states
- iii. Western Region was divided into Lagos (Lagos) and Western (Ibadan) states. Mid-Western and the states of former Eastern Region made a bid to secede from Nigeria as the states of Biafra and Republic of Benin, resulting in the Nigerian Civil War (Dudley, 1976).

In 1976, six years after the end of the civil war, the states were further reorganized:

- i. Benue-Plateau state divided into Benue (Makurdi) and Plateau states;
- ii. East-Central state divided into Anambra and Imo (Owerri) states;
- iii. Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) formed from parts of Niger and Plateau states;
- iv. North-Eastern state divided into Bauchi (Bauchi), Borno, and Gongola (Yola) states;
- v. Niger (Minna) state split from Sokoto;
- vi. Western state divided into Ogun (Abeokuta), Ondo (Akure), and Oyo states. Also, State boundaries and names were also reorganized (Diamond, 1988).

States of Nigeria from 1987/1989 comprised:

- i. Akwa Ibom state split from Cross River ;
- ii. Katsina state split from Kaduna (Adeyemi, 2014).

States of Nigeria from 1991-1996

- i. Abia State split from Imo;
- ii. Bendel State divided into Delta and Edo;
- iii. Enugu State split from Anambra;
- iv. Gongola State divided into Adamawa and Taraba;
- v. Jigawa State split from Kano;
- vi. Kebbi State split from Sokoto;
- vii. Kogi State formed from parts of Benue and Kwara;
- viii. Osun State split from Oyo;
- ix. Yobe State split from Borno (Adeyemi, 2014).

However, from 1996-to date

- i. Bayelsa State was split from Rivers;
- ii. Ebonyi State was formed from parts of Abia and Enugu;
- iii. Ekiti State was split from Ondo;
- iv. Gombe State was split from Bauchi;
- v. Nasarawa State was split from Plateau;
- vi. Zamfara State was split from Sokoto (Osaghae, 2004).

Thus, the demand for the creation of newer states in Nigeria tends to emanate from sub-state groups, often ethnic-or-tribal-interest groups, which accuse the current larger state governments of subverting or ignoring the interests and necessities of the more local regions. A much-criticized effect of the current type of federalism, of 36 states from previous pre civil war 3 regions is the creation of a political subclass of state bureaucracies, often headed by governors who are accused of and sometimes successfully prosecuted for, monetary corruption.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Federalism has been present in Nigeria since the former British colony was reorganized into a federation of three regions in 1946. Regionalism was introduced to the Nigeria system by the Richards Constitution. Bernard Bourdillon the Governor-general at that time initiated and laid the foundation of federalism in Nigeria in 1939 by creating three provinces. He later handed over the constitution to his successor Arthur Richards and it became the Richards Constitution of 1946.

At the beginning of formal British indirect rule in 1901, Nigeria was divided into two regions: Northern and Southern, both of which were divided into provinces. From 1901 to 1958, the number of regions was increased to three through both acquisition of territories and partition from existing provinces. The Mid-Western Region was formed from the Western Region in 1966 and various states were created in 1976 to 1996.

Despite the fact that Nigeria has been practicing federal system for over fifty years, only little has been achieved in the attempt to foster unity and cooperation among Nigerians. Intense regional/states and local rivalries have shaped, dominated and threatened the federal system in its entire ramification. Thus, the North-South religious-political dichotomy negatively affect the pursuit of national unity and development; the level of unity and cooperation among Nigerians is poor and Nigerians tend to emphasize forces of division than unity and are today more committed to their ethnic, sectional, religious and other primordial sentiments thereby endangering the prospects of peace, unity, cohesiveness, progress and stability of the country.

For the achievement of national unity, it is imperative for Nigerians to see themselves as belonging to one indivisible country, where they see themselves as brothers to each other. The philosophy of justice, equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law and the rights of all citizens must be inculcated in our values.

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