



Assessment of the practice of federalism in Nigeria: a focus on democratic governance from 1999-2021

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Abstract

The paper examines Nigeria as a state claiming to be practising federalism from its inception, but which specialists and scholars in federalism has classified to be a lopsided federal state. This study adopted a systematic qualitative technique which involved secondary source of data gathering where data for analysis were sourced from printed and online materials. This included newspapers, relevant books, journals, publications and the internet. Meaning, features/attributes, merits and demerits of a true federalism were discussed as well as considering issues and factors presenting Nigeria as one practicing lopsided federalism. Finally suggestions and recommendations were made to correct such anomalies to make Nigeria remain one indivisible entity.

Keywords: fulanisation, federalism, lopsided federalism, quota system, constitution

Introduction

From the inception of Nigerian state, Nigeria has been presented as a federal state, but one of the principles of federalism is that “in any federal state no single part shall or must be greater than all others put together” but in Nigeria reverse is the case because based on the 1951 Census figures, allocations of 312 parliamentary seats were as follows: Northern Region-174; Eastern Region- 74; Western Region-62; Lagos-2. With this allocation, the Northern region already had more than half of the total parliamentary seats to be contested for. Additionally, from 1959 cum 1960 election that were contested for among the major three major political parties, that is- Northern People Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens) (NCNC) the result declared by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) were: Nigerian People’s Congress (N.P.C) 134 seats; National Council of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C) - 89seats; Action Group (A.G)- 73 seats; Others - 16seats TOTAL 312 seats (Ojelabi & Adisa 2020) ^[4].

Statement of the problem

Considering these two indisputable and verifiable facts which include other census conducted, creation of states and Local governments, allocation of national resources, federal appointments not following the rule of federal character or the so called quota system, etc, as we are going to see even with the present administration (199-2021) with his divisive administrative policies, ethnically biased appointments, religious and bigotry allocations of Nigeria’s commonwealth etc. against the law and rule of true federalism is the reason why this catches the attention of the researchers to put pen to paper to investigate if the present administration observes the theory of federalism or has bastardized it?

Objective of the study

The goal of this research is to assess if Nigeria is running/practising a government skewed in favour of a section of the country or a true Federalism?

Specifically, the objectives of the study include the following:

1. To examine tenets of a true federalism
2. To assess obstacles to Nigeria’s inability of practising a true Federalism.
3. To proffer solutions for making Nigeria to remain an indivisible entity.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are Nigeria leaders observing and practising tenets of a true Federalism?
2. What are the obstacles responsible for the Nigeria’s inability to practice a true Federalism?
3. How practicable are the solutions for making Nigeria to remain an indivisible entity?

Methodology

The study adopted a systematic qualitative technique which involved secondary source of data gathering where data for analysis were sourced from printed materials and online such as newspapers, relevant books, journals, publications and the internet.

Conceptual Framework

As we know that in social sciences there is no singular universally acceptable definition for any term or concept, so also federalism have many definitions from the perceptions of different scholars, some of which we are to consider here.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2022) federalism is a mode of political organization that unites separate states or other polities within an overarching political system in a way

that allows each to maintain its own integrity.

Additionally, to Edeh (2021) federalism could be defined as a compound form of government where the government ruling over the people in a country exist in several levels or tiers i.e the federal government and then state governments. Some federal States also have another tier called the local or grassroots government. Examples of countries that practice federalism include: Nigeria, Russia, India, Canada, Malaysia, Germany, Belgium, Pakistan, etc.

Many reasons calls for the adoption of federalism, some of which are;

- i. Fear of domination
- ii. Large size of geographical territory and population
- iii. Historical/colonial experience
- iv. Pulling together of resources for social development
- v. Geographical nearness/contiguity
- vi. Desire for autonomy
- vii. Availability of human resources
- viii. Desire for union
- ix. Existence of marked inequalities and disparities in language, culture, religion, etc
- x. Availabilities of adequate natural resources
- xi. Fear of external aggression

Source: <https://bscholarly.com/reasons-for-federalism-in-nigeria/>

According to Amah (2017) ^[1] there many advantages that can be derived from practicing federalism, some of these are;

Advantages of Federalism

1. Federalism prevents the emergence of a despotic central government that may use power arbitrarily and violate the fundamental rights of the people.
2. It fosters political participation at the grassroots level as it recognizes government at the lowest level e.g. local government.
3. Federalism promotes unity in diversity, where different ethnic groups that make up the federation would retain their culture and identity within the same united federation.
4. It promotes political stability as sources of frictions are removed i.e. it provides for revenue allocation, outlawed secession, etc
5. It gives room for weak and small states to come together and form a strong state.
6. Promotes fast economic development of states as the states develops according to the resources at their pace and disposal.

Disadvantages of Federalism

Life itself is double edged sword, therefore, there is nothing with benefits without its other side, the following were presented as disadvantages of federalism;

- **Leadership Problem:** There is always the challenge of whom the leader would be. This is because a big obstacle is how to select an acceptable leader within and among the different unit.
- **Unhealthy Rivalry and antagonism:** Are another problem among the component ethnic groups.

- **Lack of acceptable revenue allocation formula:** This is because each ethnic group feels cheated and not comfortable with whatever allocation formula presented by the government.
- **Secession Attempt:** there is always an attempt severally by the federating units to disintegrate and go separate ways
- Continuous complaints of domination and marginalization of majority by the minority group.
- It breeds slow decision making.
- **Uneven development:** federalism promotes disparities in the level of development of the component units of the federation.
- There is continuous agitation for creation of more states and Local governments by the federating units.
- Federalism breeds bribery and corruption, nepotism and favouritism.
- It lacks the existence of a true national political party, for majority if not all parties are ethnically based in their formation and outlook.
- Difficult constitutional amendment.
- There is problem of conducting a reliable and acceptable population census.
- It is very expensive to run {Michael Burgess (2006)}.

Characteristics/Features of Federalism

According to Ogunnaiki (2017) ^[3] the following are some of the identified tenets of federalism

- Supremacy of constitution
- Written and rigid constitution
- Allow existence of supreme court for judicial interpretation and review of constitutional matters
- Prevalence of Federal law over state law in case of conflicts
- Division of power among the component units-(which includes Exclusive, concurrent and residual)
- Duplication of organs of government
- Bicameral legislature
- Existence of three tiers of government
- Constitution provides for sharing of resources and revenue allocation formula
- Police force is under the jurisdictional control of the central government
- Constitution disallows/forbids the breakaway of any federating unit.
- Powers were derived from the constitution
- Unequal status of federating units

Apart from the above issues on federalism, there are other areas such as merits and demerits of federal system of government which this research will like to skip because of the area of focus which is to investigate if Nigeria as a state is operating a true federalism or a system favouring the Northern extraction with particular reference to the present administration.

With this observation the following table will present some facts as regards the appointment made by the present administration as against the rule of the game of federal character and or quota system which must not be tilted towards a particular ethnic group within and among the federating units.

Table 1

S/N	Parastatal	Name	Office	Tribe
1	NNPC	Malam Mele Kolo Kyari	Group Managing Director	Fulani
2	FIRS- Federal Inland Revenue	Mr. M.L Abubakar	Coordinating Director, Executive Chairman's Group (FIRS)	Fulani
3	NCS – Nigerian Customs Services	Col. Hameed Ibrahim Ali (Rtd).	The Comptroller-General	Fulani
4	NPA-Nigerian Ports Authority	Mohammed Bello Koko	Acting Managing Director	Fulani
5	Defence	Bashir Salihi Magashi	Minister	Fulani
6	Finance	Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed	Minister	Fulani
7	Education	Mallam Adamu Adamu	Minister	Fulani
8	Justice	Abubakar Malami SAN	Minister	Fulani
9	FCT	Mohammed Musa Bello	Minister	Fulani
10	Agriculture and Rural Development	Mohammed Sabo Nanono	Minister	Fulani
11	Police Affairs	Mohammed Maigari Dingyadi	Minister	Fulani
12	Aviation	Senator Hadi Sirika	Minister	Fulani
13	Communication and Digital Economy	Prof. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami)	Minister	Fulani
14	Power	Abubakar Aliyu	Minister	Fulani
15	Water resources	Engineer Suleiman Hussein Adamu	Minister	Fulani
16	Humanitarian affairs	Sadiya Umar Farouq	Minister	Fulani
17	FERMA	Nuruddeen A. Rafindadi	Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O)	Fulani
18	NYSC	Major Gen. Shuaibu Ibrahim	Director General	Fulani
19	PTDF	Dr. Bello Aliyu Gusau	Executive Secretary	Fulani
20	NTA	Yakubu Ibn Mohammed,	Director-General	Fulani
21	FAAN- Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria	Captain Rabiya Yadudu	Managing Director	Fulani
Anti- corruption Agencies				
22	EFCC -	Abdulrasheed Bawa	Chairman	Fulani`
23	ICPC	Musa Usman Abubakar	Chairman	Fulani`
24	NFIU	Modibbo Haman Tukur	Director and Chief Executive Officer	Fulani`

From the above submissions, it is crystal clear that Nigeria from her inception has been operating what is called “*lopsided federalism*”. (Which means- Asymmetric federalism or asymmetrical federalism is found in a federation in which different constituent states possess different powers: one or more of the substates has considerably more autonomy than the other substates, although they have the same constitutional status <https://en.wikipedia.org> 2022). This is because, starting from 1959/60 general election results, allocation of seats between and among the federating units of the country were based on, various conducted population census that were controversial, some regarded as worst than allocation of figure, skewed local government and state creation in favour of a particular ethnic group against others, etc, different from the principle of federalism which states that “in any federal state or federalism no single part must be greater than all others put together” but in case of Nigeria federalism even from all the facts presented so far it is an indisputable fact that Northern Nigeria has been and is greater in everything including access to power, resources control, etc than all other regions.

To worsen the situation the present administration has been accused of ethnocentrism, tribalism, and religiously bigotry in terms of appointments as clearly presented in the table above which are verifiable.

Conclusion

To come to conclusion therefore, it can be deduced from the research that though previous governments in Nigeria based on their actions and inactions have not been following the federalism principles and tenets to letter or to say they’ve not been playing the game of federalism according to its rule, such as those mentioned in the above paragraph and others as

electoral rigging, imposition of candidates from one ethnic group on the others against the principles of federalism, resultant effects of which are corruption in high places, unending agitation for more creation of local governments and states, secessionist ideology, etc but which is more pronounced in this era, for example IPOB (Independent People of Biafra) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, Oodua Republic- Under the leadership of Chief Sunday Adeyemo (Popularly known as Sunday Igboho) these two are currently facing trial under the present administration, such as militarization of Eastern part of the country because of the protest and fight against injustice in allocation of resources and appointment or illegal bombardment of Sunday Igboho’s house leaving Fulani herdsmen that are killing, maiming, kidnaping, grazing on peoples farm, supplying with sophisticated weapon to defend themselves against the owners of the farm, without arresting them while brutalising common and innocent citizens on self-defence and alleging them for jungle justice after establishing of several reports of assault to the security agents and no action taken.

Recommendations

If true federalism recommends that administrative machinery of state should and must practice Symmetric federalism-(Coyle v. Smith - WikiMili, The Best Wikipedia Reader. https://wikimili.com/en/Coyle_v._Smith). This is in contrast to asymmetric federalism, where a distinction is made between constituent states. Therefore, for Nigeria to be a true federal state in line with international standard and practice, different from what is been presented from the table above the following recommendations are made;

- People in position of authority should implement even and

equal allocation of power and resources to show a good example of a patriotic leadership;

- Federal character or the so-called quota system in appointment must be strictly followed so as to allow equal representation in management and every echelon of sensitive positions in the country as against what is being practised presently so as to rebuild the destroyed and fragmented trust in the federal structure of the country.
- There is need to promote even development in all the federating units so as to remove disparities in the level of development of the component units of the federation;
- Federal government should implement the idea of resource control by each federating units if revenue allocation formula has been creating problem and disunity among the federating units;
- Issue of zoning or rotational selection of leadership should be included in the constitution through constitutional amendment to avoid challenges associated with leadership selection;
- Corruption as another indisputable identified problem as a clog in the wheel of Nigeria progress and development which has to be patriotically dealt with without considering ethnic bigotry, party sentiments, religious affiliation, etc so as to create a sense of belonging and develop spirit of patriotism in the masses with the attitude of protecting government properties as theirs, have a spirit of contentment. If corrupt officers and element are severely dealt with it will serve as deterrent to intending corrupt Nigerians. Some of these are current ongoing investigation of the allegation levied on NIMASA DG Dr. Bashir Jamo with fraud of 1.5 Trillion dollars, ₦ 9.5557,312.50 (Traceable to many account both in Nigeria and diaspora), Amechi's wife with different white elephant project (awarded but not executed) first, ₦48 billion, ₦ 70 billion all from NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission-for Empowerment Support Initiative, Rasheed Maina O pension Board with ₦ 2 billion,(Point blank news) last but not the least is that of Accountant General of the Federation Ahmed Idris with ₦ 80 billion (the Nation May 21, 2022), just mention but few.

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