

ASYMMETRIC POWER RELATION AND NIGERIA FEDERAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

The development of Nigeria since her independence is bedevilled with unequal power relation which has affected the practice of true federalism in the country. Federalism is an essential tool for managing conflicts, promoting unity and peaceful co existence in an ethno religious diversity nation state like Nigeria. The adoption of federalism which is expected to bring together cooperation, unity and faith of the people in there fatherland is been lopsided due to asymmetric power relation. This paper therefore examines the asymmetric power relation as a problem confronting Nigeria Federal system. The objective of the study was to examine the reason for the adoption of federalism in Nigeria and the lopsided nature of Nigeria federal system. The study reveals that, unequal power relation affects the country democratic system. However, there is a need to ensure that the issues and challenges confronting Nigeria's federal system be resolved.

Keyword: Federalism, Federal System, Nigeria, Asymmetric Power Relation

Introduction.

Federalism is the bedrock of democratic edifice for a country of Nigeria's size and bewildering diversities (Ojo, 2010). Like India, also a federal state which has been rightly described as a land of "million mutinies" (Roy, 2002:2) Nigeria is a deeply divided and plural society. The polity is known to have many ethnic groups, which scholars have put at different figures (Kirk-Green, 1969:4; Attah, 1987:393-401; Otite, 1990:175-183; Suberu, 1993:39/1998:227). Nigeria is, one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with well over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa. As recalled by Onwujeogwu (1987, and 1995:60-76), at the beginning of the 1960s, there were over 3,000 ethnic groups (tribes) in the world, about 1,000 were represented in the geographical space called Africa and about 445 were represented in the geo-political space called Nigeria. Former USSR had about 127 ethnic nationalities in its geo-political space; China and India each more than 40 ethnic nationalities.

The units therefore have equal powers with the centre though such equality is not in terms of one to one, but in terms of originality, since the powers they exercise are not the creation of the centre. The relationship between the centre and the component units is not superior to the units in a federation (Ailoje, 1997). Federalism as a system of governance is pragmatic, dynamic, utilitarian and evolving. It can only thrive on consultation, negotiation, compromise, bargaining and agreement between the constituent governments. It grows under a system of mutuality and interdependence (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2009). Federalism represents a unique form of governmental arrangement. This is because, it involves organisation of the state in such manner as to promote unity while at the same time preserving existing diversities within an overarching national entity

The state as a political organism is erected on the bedrock of efficacious structural political organisation. Thus, structural political organization is one of the indispensable determinants of administrative efficiency of any given state. And, all over the world, there exists various types of this structural political arrangement though, with varying degrees of relevance and utility (Akindele and Olaopa, 2003).

Nigeria is a country of extraordinary diversity and as such, one of extraordinary complexities. This complexity is a reflection of the avalanche of ethno-cultural and religious groups cohabiting the territory and the intricacies of interaction among them. Federalism was adopted in Nigeria as a compromise device to help the country avoid the prospects of piecemeal independence from the British. Some contend that it was a clever imposition by the British to appease the reactionary North.

The issue of federal balancing in Nigeria since the country became a federation in 1954 till date continue to be a subject of discourse. Right from the time of amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces in 1914, there have been cries of marginalization and domination from one section of the country to the other. The colonial masters have been blamed by some school of thought for this unfortunate situation. For this school, if the South had been left alone and vice versa, the current problem would not have arisen. However, the British did what was best for them at that time and not for Nigeria.(Ozoigbo, 2008).

Federalism

The concept of federalism has numerous and multifaceted definitions. The concept has received broad scholarly attention. Each scholar defines it according to their perception. Thus, the meaning of federalism is surrounded by what Dare called ‘‘state of uncertainty and vagueness’’. Peter Ordeshook and Olga Slivetsova are of the opinion that ‘‘the meaning of federalism is yet to escape the state of uncertainty’’. This explains why each scholar approaches the study based on individual background and inclination.

Early writers on the concept of federalism such as Jean Bodin, Olto, Cosmanus among others, viewed federalism as a voluntary form of political union of independent authorities. The union either temporary or permanent, was based on the need for special common purposes like defense, trade, communications and other reasons that would benefit the parties involved. Contemporary writers on the concept of federalism such as Livingstone, Macmahon, and Riker among others viewed federalism as a mutual interactions between and direct contact with, at least two levels of government. These scholars take their root from the 1787 American constitution. The definition of federalism by these scholars rest on the fundamental principle that, federalism is a form of governmental and institutional structure, deliberately designed by political ‘‘architects’’, to cope with the twin but difficult task of maintaining unity while also preserving diversity.

According to Tamuno (2003:13) ‘‘Federalism is that form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a co-operative manner through the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity, among others’’.

In the words of A.V. Dicey ‘‘Federalism is a political invention which is intended to reconcile national unity and power, with the maintenance of the rights of the separate member states’’ Jega in his own view said federalism is ‘‘essentially about the distribution of political and economic decision making power among constituent units or levels of governments’’ (Cited in Elaigwu and Akindele, 1996: 38).

According to Elaigwu (1996:166) ‘‘Federalism is essentially a mechanism for managing conflicts in a multicultural state between two types of self-determination and natural self-determination which guarantee

security for all in the nation state, on the one hand, and the self determination of component groups to retain their identities on the other”.

According to Appadorai: A federal state is the one in which there is a central authority that represents the whole and acts on behalf of the whole in external affairs and on such internal affairs as are held to be of common interest and in which there are also provincial or state authorities with powers of legislation and administration within the sphere allotted to them by the constitution (1982:495). Afigbo divided the evolution of Nigerian federalism into three epochs “the period of “informal federation” (1900-1946); the first phase of formal federation” (1946-1966); and the second phase of “formal federation” (1967-date)” (Cited in Amuwo, 2003:50).

Graham Smith (1995:4) also argues in the line of Burgess that federalism can be considered as an ideology which holds that the ideal organization of human affairs is best reflected in the collaboration of diversity through unity.

Forsyth, however, has a contrary argument that "restricting use of the term federalism to refer to an ideology is illogical and impractical. Just as terms such as 'feudalism' and 'capitalism' are describing not just political ideals, but concrete political and economic structures, so federalism may be used in a broader sense" (Forsyth 1994:14).

Ojo (2010) subscribes to the views of Forsyth when he asserted that "federalism is an explicitly ideological, and or philosophical positions in the same vein as other great 'isms' of political theory such as socialism. Liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, legalism e.t.c. federalism is ideological in the sense that it can take the form of one overtly prescriptive guide to action and it's philosophical to the extent that it's a normative judgment regarding the ideal organization of human relations and conduct."

The most cogent, clearly expressed and the most acceptable definition is that of K.C Wheare. All other formulation from other scholars like Livingstone, Macmahon, and Riker are variations of his work. In his book he talked about “federal principle” i.e. the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent of one another. Thus, Wheare’s proposition posits that the federal principle essentially entails a legal division of powers and functions among levels of government with a written constitution guaranteeing and reflecting the division. Wheare’s formulation of federalism is been drawn correctly from the United States of America which is regarded by him as the archetype of federal government.

Factors that necessitated the Adoption of Federalism in Nigeria.

According to Oyediran (2008) and Oneyeye (2001) they summarized the factors that necessitated the adoption of federalism in Nigeria as follows:

- **Heterogeneity/cultural differences:** Nigeria is made up of diverse ethnic groups, religions, customs, traditions and languages. These diversities are a problem to the operation of a unitary system. The peoples therefore opted for federalism to retain as much as possible.
- **Size and Population:** The country is too large both territorially (size) and in population for a unitary system of government, and federalism became inevitable for administrative convenience.
- **Historical /Colonial factor:** The different ethnic groups in Nigeria had developed different administrative structures. The colonial principle of indirect rule allowed each region to preserve its cultural and traditional practices different from those of other regions.
- **Economic factor:** In Nigeria, natural resources are scattered, therefore component units must unite as a federation to harness the resources for their overall benefit in addition to even and rapid economic development.
- **Fear of Domination:** There has been suspicion among the various ethnic groups, particularly the major ones like the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Hausa-Fulani. There was also fear by the minority groups that they would be dominated by the majority ones. Federalism therefore offers opportunity for self-preservation by different groups.

- **Divide and Rule Policy of the British Colonial Administration:** The British policy of divide and rule was a deliberate attempt to keep Nigeria weak and decentralized. The British considered unity among the various ethnic groups as a threat to their imperialistic interest

Problem of Federalism in Nigeria

From 1954 when Nigeria embrace federalism, the polity has been wallowing from one problem to the other, thereby making national cohesion a mirage after all (Ojo, 2010). To start with, unlike Switzerland, despite being a very small country, one of the most decentralized countries in the world as noted by Arnold Koller (2002:27), Nigeria's federal system is highly centralized in all its ramifications. On this problem, Coleman (Peil, 1976:115), observed that "excessive centralization and statism of most developing countries... not only means greater vulnerability as a result of unfulfilment of populist expectation, it also means heightened inefficiency".

Nigeria is a cliffhanger federation, anchored on precarious grudging multi-ethnic accommodation, thriving on unabated certainty and tense expectation. The dilemma of the Nigeria state lies in a pretentious and faulty federal system (Hassan and Issa, 2003). Suberu (2001) argues that at the heart of Nigeria predicament is the development of an intensely dysfunctional system of centralized ethno-distributive federalism. Federalism has not been a particularly workable option in Nigeria. This is not as a result of federalism as an integrative mechanism, but because of its acts that are antithetical to federal principles.

The problem of acrimonious existence among the diverse groups and interests in the federation of Nigeria leading to mutual distrust, suspicion and inter-communal conflicts has become perennial and endemic in the nation's body politic and has militated against the political stability of the country since independence. The fear of domination of one ethnic group or section of the country by another and the national question of who gets what and how the national cake should be shared constitute a major factor of this problem. As a result of mutual suspicion existing among the various social groups, whatever the issue at hand in Nigeria, the patterns of reaction to it will be determined by geo-political as well as religious considerations. This situation seriously hampers efforts at national unity as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the disparate ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements or groups in the country (Saliu, 1999; Agbodike, 1998; Gamberi, 1994; Kurfi 1998).

One of the greatest problems of Nigeria federalism is the problem of asymmetric power relationship between and among the different component unit of the federation. The federation is rife with mutual accusations and counter accusations of domination and marginalisation. The south is aggrieved by what is called political domination by the north. Osuntokun (1994) buttresses the position that Nigeria's federation is tilted in favour of the north. The appearance of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo from the south-west as Head of State in the 1970s was accidental. He was next to Gen. Murtala Muhammed who was assassinated on 13 February, 1976. Automatically, the mantle of leadership fell on Obasanjo who later handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 in a controversial election. Chief Ernest Shonekan also from the south-west, was manipulated into office by the military to head an Interim National Government to placate the Yoruba who were aggrieved because of the annulment of June 12, 1993 general election won by M. K. O. Abiola. Thus, the Shonekan administration lacked real power and legitimacy and was short lived. Obasanjo subsequent re-emergence as civilian president from the south-west two decades after vacating that office as military head of state is not unconnected with the abiding need to placate the south-west over the same fraudulent of Abiolas 1993 presidential election victory.

The third observation is that, the regime which emerged on July 1966 ought to have been headed by Brig. Babafemi Ogundipe who was the most senior officer in the army then. But reports have it that he was deliberately schemed out after his leadership was rejected by the northern military and political establishment (Oluleye, 1985), the fourth is that the south-east, including the Igbos and the south-eastern minorities, are greatly disadvantaged politically whereas the north, and some extent, the south-west, have had a disproportionate share of federal executive power not until 2010 when the then Vice President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan became the president after the death of Alhaji Musa Yaradua and he was also re-elected at the 2011 general election.

Empirical indication of power (Presidency) between 1960-2015.

No	Dates	Identities	States	Zones
1	Oct. 1, 1960-Jan. 14, 1966	T.F Balewa	Bauchi	North-East
2	Jan. 15, 1960-July 29, 1966	J.T.U. Ironsi	Abia	South-East
3	July 30, 1966-July 28, 1975	Y.T. Gowon	Plateau	North-Central
4	July 29, 1975-Feb. 13, 1976	M.R. Muhammed	Kano	North –West
5	Feb. 14, 1976-Sept. 30, 1979	O Obasanjo	Ogun	South –West
6	Oct. 1, 1979-Dec. 30, 1983	U.A.S. Shagari	Sokoto	North-West
7	Dec. 31,1983-Aug. 26, 1985	M. Buhari	Katsina	North – West
8	Aug. 27, 1985-Aug. 1993	I.B. Banbangida	Niger	Middle-Belt
9	Aug. 26, 1993-Nov. 17, 1993	E.A. Shonekan	Ogun	South-West
10	Nov.18, 1993-June 8, 1998	Sani Abacha	Kano	North –West
11	June 9, 1998-May 29, 1999	A. Abubakar	Niger	Middle-Belt
12	May 29, 1999-May 29, 2003	O. Obasanjo	Ogun	South-West
13	May 29, 2003-May 29, 2007	O. Obasanjo	Ogun	South-West
14.	May 29, 2007-May 5, 2010	M Yaradua	Katsina	North-West
15.	May 5, 2010-May, 29 2015	G. Jonathan	Bayelsa	South-South
16.	May, 29 2015- date	M. Buhari	Katsina	North-West

Source: Sunday Tribune, 7th August, 1994, Ibadan, pp. 7-9 and updated by the author.

If the presidential position is largely a northern affair, the composition of the federal executives from independence to date is perhaps much more sectionally lopsided. As rightly observed by Olopoenia (1998) the greatest manifestation of this tendency is the implicit policy of reserving the political and top bureaucratic position in certain key ministries at the federal level for people from certain part of the country majorly the northerners. These are usually ministries with the greatest concentration of resources and the responsibility. Even if it is agreed that the north has the largest population size, which is quite controversial, federalism and democracy are about concessions and ethnic accommodation rather than exclusion and domination.

Northern regional hegemony has never being denied by the northerners but rather rationalised on various spurious grounds. Elaigwu, (1977) was of the view that there was a relatively delicate division of power between the north and the south. The north control of the political power was counterbalanced by the south monopoly of economic power in the country

Similarly, Sani Kotangora was of the view that the south is not content with monopolising economic power dominance of the federal civil service but has been thirsting for the choicest slice of the nation's policies, the presidency (Kotangora1990). To kotangora, Nigeria presidency is not for the south, because democracy is a game of numbers. If they i.e. the southerners want to take it, that is, the presidency, they can come to kill the people in the north so that their population can reduced. Also justifying northern hegemony, Alhaji Maitama Sule, a northern politician opined that everyone has a gift from God. The northerners are endowed by God with leadership qualities. The Yoruba man knows how to earn a living and has diplomatic qualities. The igbo is gifted in commerce, trade and technological innovations. God so created us individually for a purpose and with different gift (Sule, 1996).

This kind of conquest and monarchical spirit is an outright negation of federalism (Ayoade, 1982) this also inform the bases of southern agitation for the political restructuring and radical resolution of the national question.

Another impediment is structural in balance. According to Mills law of instability, a federation is morbid if one part of the federation is bigger than the sum of the other part (Ayoade, 1988). The Nigerian system is indeed far from being balanced it will be recalled that Macpherson constitution of 1951 created a central legislature which had 136 elected representative out of which the northern region alone has 68 members, making it possible for the north to swallow the other region combined with or hold them to ransom. This issue of structural in balance is still relevant till today because out of the 36 states in Nigeria, the northern part has 19 states, the region had more representatives in the house of representative and house of senate.

The lopsided structure of Nigeria has been in favour of the northy and this has been creating tension in the country.

Empirical indication of lopsidedness of Nigeria political structure

No	Factors	North	South (West & East
1	Number of LGAs	419 = 54%	35 = 46%
2	No of States	19 = 52%	17 = 48%
3	House of Representatives	190 = 53%	170 = 47%
4	No of Senates	57 = 52%	52 = 48%
5	Number of Ministers	19 = 52%	17 = 48%
6	Population	53%	47%

Exclude the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) source: (www.npc.ng)

The adoption of federalism in Nigeria is embedded with a lot of difficulties. “Nigeria has a unique problem not experienced by any state in the world past or present. The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of the nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns” (Ojo, 2002:4-5).

According to K.C Wheare the basic tenets according to him are:

- a) There must be at least two levels of governments and there must be constitutional division of powers among the levels of governments.
- b) Each levels of government must be co-ordinate and independent.
- c) Each levels of government must be financially independent. He argued that this will afford each levels of government the opportunity of performing their functions without depending or appealing to the others for financial assistance.
- d) There must be Supreme Court of the independent judiciary. He argued that in terms of power sharing, there is likely to be conflict hence, there must be independent judiciary to resolve the case.
- e) In terms of the amendment of the constitution, no levels of government should have undue power over the amendment process.

He maintained that, once a country is able to satisfy these conditions, such country is said to practice federalism.

Conclusion

With these acts of lopsidedness, the north will always have their way in the elections and major decisions in the legislature as well as appointment to executive political offices and sharing of revenue allocation from the federation account. In a true federation, all three regions should have equal opportunities and configurations. The Nigeria federalism has refused sincere restructuring of the country along nationalities and this has led to the consistent nationality question because the current arrangement lacks physical equity.

Recommendation

The study therefore recommends that:

- The report of the last confab should be adhered to by the federal government and put into use the suggestions and recommendation suggested by the committee.
- Also, there should be regular and periodic national dialogue where discussions about the federal character principle will be made so as to enhance unity rather than discord and disintegration

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