

NIGERIAN FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

Abdulkadir ABDULMALIK

Department of Political Science
Faculty of Management and Social Sciences
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai
Niger State
abdulkadirabdumalik@gmail.com
08063061423

Shuabu Shittu ISYAKU

Department of Political Science
Faculty of Management and Social Sciences
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai
Niger State
sslapai@gmail.com
08065754652

ABSTRACT

Nigeria is the most populous black nation that got her political independence from colonial grip in 1960. The journey to her independence was tortuous and rancorous among the defunct North, West and East. It was not quite far from its nationhood that democratic journey was interrupted by the military junta. The 1979 and 1999 constitutions adopted the American presidential system of government where powers are shared between the central and other layers of government as evidently practiced in the second, aborted third and fourth republics. It is hoped that Federal constitutions is better for Nigeria giving its plurality and heterogeneity. On the contrary, peace and security continue to evade Nigeria. It is on this note, that this paper interrogates the implications of the adoption of the presidential system of democracy on national security in the Nigeria's fourth republic. The paper uses secondary sources of information and in-depth analysis. It adopts the Frustration-Aggression theory as a framework of analysis. The research concludes that fissiparous tendency, banditry and other forms of insecurity that ravage the country are evil manifestations of and radical reaction to political brigandage, unrestrained struggle to access and retain power by desperate political forces. It, thus, recommends financial autonomy/fiscal federalism, delisting of items from constitutional exclusive list and rotational presidency among others. These will stabilise the polity and make competition for presidential seat less attractive and fascinating.

Key words: democracy, presidentialism, security, separatism and banditry.

Introduction

The problem of Africa could be traced to its diversity. Incidence of state collapse in the continent is related to poor management of diversity and the plurality of the competing ethnic identities. That is, failure to evolve appropriate political frameworks and arrangements for these diversities graduated to political tension and contradictions, which undermined the nation-state project (Gana and Egwu, 2003). The evidence across the continent provides indications of the debilitating impact of the exploitation of these diversities by political elites and ethnic entrepreneurs as clearly seen in Liberia, Somalia and Sudan (Nosiri, 2018).

Historically, Nigeria's federal foundation is a nationalists and colonialists' consensus that marked the evolution of its statehood in the year 1954. In the euphoria of the moment, little attention was paid to the dynamics of inter-ethnic fierce competition for scarce resources (Gana, 2003). This decision was informed by the sociological complexity and realities of

Nigeria. Nigerian federalism, however, can be traced beyond 1954 to 1914 when northern and southern protectorates were unified to form one single entity called Nigeria. Egwu (1993) in (Gana, 2003) establishes that communal identity remains a potent instrument for material advancement in Nigeria as suggested by Ojukwu, the Biafran warlord, on the eve of the outbreak of the civil war “it is better we move slightly apart and survive (in a confederation, perhaps); it is much worse that we move closer and perish in the collision” (Krik-Greene, 1971 in Gana, 2003). The author comments that this might be an unfortunate course to take, but considering the dimension of the crisis, the options are increasingly becoming fewer. Enloe (1973: 12) affirms this in his statement – “there is nothing sacrosanct about the nation-state, only social scientists make it look so”.

Nigeria is the ready-made example in Africa where the idea of federal polity is adopted to manage its multiculturalism as reflected in the 1979 Constitution. In dealing with the management of diversity through federalist principle, Wole Soyinka contends that the matter is beyond the problem of ideology; it is a choice between centralization on one hand, and decentralization on the other hand. The former, as typified by the Nigerian federalism, allows for resources to flow only in the direction of the centre. The agitation for a resource control and the creation of economically unviable states are evidences of the “cracked model” represented by Nigeria’s federal arrangement (Gana & Egwu, 2003). Non-viable states have been created which underlines the contradictions inherent within a so-called federal system; they are kept alive only by sporadic blood infusions from the centre; the states were never meant to be self-sufficient entities, and do not exist beyond the establishment of another bottomless pit of a parasitic bureaucracy (Soyinka; 2003, 6).

The perennial demand by ethno-political groups for a re-negotiation of the basic agreements of the federal union is taken in a radical dimension. Ethno-nationalism has reached a crescendo of militancy and anarchism marked by destructive alacrity (Anam-Ndu, 2003). In recent time, these agitations have assumed horrible dimension that threatens the survival of Nigeria as a sovereign nation. Thus, this paper attempts to examine Nigerian federalism and national security in the Fourth Republic.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Frustration-Aggression theory. Theory is the guiding tool of analysis. Application of theory to a study enables us to understand a particular social phenomenon from broader perspective. Frustration-Aggression theory was proposed by Dollard Doob, Miller Mower and Sears (1939). It attempts to give an explanation for the cause of violence and crimes. That is, it explains the outbreak of crime, armed conflict, and act of aggression or terrorism as the function of neglect, deprivation and frustration. The theory cites aggression as the outcome of frustration, and that in a situation where the desires of an individual or group are denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person or group of persons to express anger through violence (Leonard, 1969). Frustration-Aggression theory assumes that individual believes the display of aggression will remove the barrier that is causing the frustration itself; and when individuals experience frustration they experience a drive to be aggressive towards the object of their frustrations. However, this is not always possible or appropriate resulting in the aggression being inhibited. Dullard et al proposed in such cases aggression is displaced from the source on to something else and he referred to this as “kicking the dog” effect.

This theory is criticized for gender bias as it fails to offer explanation on why men are more aggressive than women; and psychopathic killers whose aggression are not driven by frustration; and not every one that is frustrated is aggressive. Despite these weaknesses, the theory is ranked among most seminal theories in research on aggression as it establishes

empirical evidence between frustration and aggression. Hence, it is still adequate and relevant in the explanation of socio-political and economic realities of Nigerian state.

Conceptual clarification

Federalism

Federalism lacks universally acceptable conception. It is as fluid as other concepts in social sciences and humanity. It has attracted varieties of meanings and definitions without losing its essential characteristics (Obianyo, 2005). Federalism (from the latin *foedus*, meaning treaty) is the principle of sharing sovereignty between central and state (or provincial) governments (Hague & Harrop, 2010). Wheare (1963), a classical writer on this concept conceives federalism as the method of dividing powers so that general and component governments are coordinated and independent of each other (Anam-Ndu, 2003). According to Wheare, this principle comprises certain uncompromising features:

- i- The division of powers among levels of government;
- ii- Written constitution showing this division;
- iii- Co-ordinate supremacy of the two levels of government with regards to their respective functions;
- iv- The powers to amend the constitution to be exercised by both levels of government acting in cooperation;
- v- Existence of an independent judiciary or body to adjudicate dispute arising from clash of powers between the federal and state governments; and
- vi- Financial independence of both levels of government as ‘financial subordination makes an end of federalism.

Wheare’s definition is criticized for being pro-American model and excessively legalistic by ignoring the dynamism in federal practice by different nations of the world. However, his conception serves as a beacon to the understanding of federalism.

The major appeal of federalism is that it places emphasis on pluralism and seeks constitutional recognition for the rights of the component units. Federalism is generally accepted as the best form of government for large and culturally variegated societies. It is a moderation between two extreme forms of politico-administrative arrangement – confederalism and unitarism (Nnadozie, 2005). He explains further that federalism is a form of government in which constituent units have consented to stay together under a central authority but allowed to control and manage their own affairs and by so doing share the powers of the union. Power sharing and financial independence are common to Wheare and Nnadozie’s perspectives on federalism. Anam-Ndu (2003) affirms that the nature, extent and deep of diversity influence federal practice globally. It determines whether or not the centre should carry the bulk of legislative and development burden or, whether such burdens be dispersed to the federating units. These questions account divergent federal arrangements. This first constitution-making after Nigerian Civil War was in 1979. The Constitution deliberately made federating units very weak with more power concentrated at the centre. Equally, the 1999 Constitution is a blue print of ‘unitarism’; it has 68 items on the Exclusive list and 30 minor ones on the Concurrent list. Paradoxically, Nigeria is a country of federal union of states. Federalism is a process of constant search for equilibrium between the poles of unity and diversity (Maddex, 1941 in Ibrahim, 2003).

Power sharing arrangement differs from one political organization to another. Constitutions of sovereign states determine whether to distribute it among the component parts of government relatively equal or to concentrate it at the centre (Nosiri, 2018). Hague and Harrop (2010) view federalism as a multi-level governance which shares sovereignty and power between governments within a single state. King (cited in Nosiri, 2018) defines federalism as “an institutional arrangement, taking form of a sovereign state and distinguished

from other such states solely on the fact that is the central government incorporates regional units in its decision procedures on some constitutionally entrenched basis”.

Federalism, therefore, offers practical arrangements for organizing large states. It provides checks and balances on a territorial basis, makes government functions closer to the people and allows for democratic inclusion.

Nigerian Federation

In the late 1950s, there were euphoric hopes for Grand African Federalism. However, the federal idea has since been systematically dismissed as a serious solution to African problems. This is based on the empirical evidences that federalism does not work in Africa. There are evidences that confirm failure of federalism in Africa (Ibrahim, 2003). The character of Nigerian federalism has been molded by some factors; the class character, configuration of class forces of the Nigerian state, dominant capitalist mode of production and multi-national, multi-religious and multi-ethnic nature of the society (Alli, 2003).

Sustenance of federal practice is dependent on evolving efficient ways of conflict accommodation. Scholars of federalism have identified three trends in any existing federation; centralization, decentralization and de-concentration. Centralization is about expanding policy responsibility of the central government as against the contracting policy responsibility of the component units of the federation. Decentralization is the tendency toward assigning increased responsibility to the constituent units of the federation. This occurs through a formal constitutional amendment or fiscal decentralization. De-concentration is seen as a process of interaction between the federal and state levels of government in a way that the centre brings the units to participate in the decision-making process without the prerogative of the former being eroded. Here, the central government maintains its authority intact. Decentralization, however, involves formal transfer of authority to subordinate administrative units (Rocher and Rouillard, 1997). The original federal system, from 1945-1966 consisted of a tricolor regional system with asymmetrical domination by the defunct northern region; provision of competitive politics based on parliamentary democratic model and revenue distribution based on derivation principle. Subsequently, successive federal military governments re-divided the polity into many states and local governments. These began precisely with the creation of 12 states by 1967, 19 by 1976, 21 by 1987, 30 by 1991 and 36 states plus FCT, Abuja by 1992. Correspondingly, there were 301 local government by 1976, 450 by 1988; 587 by 1991 and 774 by 1992 (Onimode, 2003).

A study revealed that among the federations currently exist in the world, Nigeria is one of the worst models of political accommodation of diversity as well as power and resources sharing (Jega, 2021). Nigeria battles to consolidate as a nation since its colonial era and height days of nationalism. Those who fought for her independence did not represent a united Nigeria but represented ethnic and regional interests. The Premier of defunct Western Region and Yoruba leader succinctly said Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are “English” “Welsh” or “French”. The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live in the territory of Nigeria and those who do not (Awolowo, 1947).

“Peace and unity”, the last two words in the Nigerian national anthem are chanted daily at different occasions. In reality, peace and unity elude us as a nation. There was never a time Nigeria is united. Immediately after the exit of British overlord, the political atmosphere became heated with ethnic nationalism that led to military coup and counter-coup as well as civil war and its vestiges that produced Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). On the other hand, Yoruba ethnic group clamors for the creation of Odu’a Republic while the Boko Haram is pushing for Islamic Caliphate in the North.

What is prominent in the Nigerian federal system is the effort of the central government to clip the wings of the states from flying at all form for them to be consumed by the flaming powers of the centre. The confusion surroundings the character of federation in Nigeria has posed a question mark on ‘true nature’ of Nigerian’s federal practice (Ayode, 1996). Nnadozie (2005) asserts that social groups and nationalities in the country want to be part of the Nigeria project, it is only when any of them feels persistently marginalized or threatened that they demand to opt out of the union or take up arm against the state, as evidence in the case of Igbo, the Tiv and Rivers revolts under Joseph Tarka and Isaac Boro respectively. Therefore, the crux of the matter is mechanism and acceptable tool to be used in order to achieve and sustain unity in diversity.

Security

Freedom from poverty, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation, and arbitrary governance constitute individual insecurity (Kufour, 2010) in (Bello-Imam, 2004). “The meaning of security is beyond Westphalia conceptualization in terms of external attack to encompass security of individuals and their property; respect for basic human needs – access to education, potable water, decent housing, healthy environment among others” (Dunmoye, 2021: 9). Nwolise (2006) averred that for a nation to be really secured, it must have a strong military force; strong and buoyant economy; a contented and happy people; and a good government is ran by a patriotic and democratic leadership. Security has to do with freedom from danger or with threats to a nation’s ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interests and enhance the wellbeing of its people. Thus, internal security could be seen as the freedom from or the absence of those tendencies which could undermine internal cohesion and the cooperate existence of the nation and its ability to maintain its vital institutions for the promotion of its core values and socio-political and economic objectives, as well as meet the legitimate aspirations of the people. Internal security also implies freedom from danger to life and prosperity” (Imobighe cited in Oche 2001:76-77).

National Security

Initially, the concept emphasized the freedom from military threat and political coercion to later increase in sophistication and include other forms of non-military security as suited the circumstances of the time (Yusuf, 2014). National Defence College, India defines National Security as “an appropriate and aggressive blend of political resilience and maturity, human resources, economic structure and capacity, technological competence, industrial base and availability of natural resources and finally the military might” (Yusuf; 2014; 52). Ali (2013) views national security as a state where the unity, value, well-being, democratic process, mechanism of governance, welfare of the nations is perpetually improved and secured. Yusuf (2014) and Dunmoye (2021) identified the following elements of national security:

Political Security: This entails defense against all forms of political oppression and guarantee of basic human rights and citizens’ freedoms.

Economic Security: It is a positive situation of stable income and job security that enable good standard of living now and in the foreseeable future

Military Security: Ability of a nation to defend its territory and citizens from internal and external aggressions. This is the traditional conception of national security.

Environmental Security: This consists of environmental issues that pose threat to the national health and survival. indiscriminate refuse disposal, desert encroachment, hazardous industrial activities and loss of biodiversity among others are threat to national survival hence, they are aspects of national security.

Food Security: It is the ability of a nation to feed itself without or with minimal importation of food items from other countries. It has to do with availability of food, access to food and food use. Food availability is about its abundant supply; food access is having sufficient

resources to obtain appropriate food for a nutritional diet while food use entails appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care.

Health Security: This guarantees citizens protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyle. Health security improves the life expectancy of citizens and guard them from epidemic and endemic diseases as well as nutritional diseases. Suleiman(2014) agrees with this perspective of national security by saying, national security encompasses protection of national interest which includes; political, economic, social and environmental objectives. National security implies the absences of threat to life, property, socio-political and economic well-being of the entire citizens.

National security covers the sum of what a nation does in order to safeguard itself as a sovereign entity. To achieve this, nations established armed forces, police and other Para-military forces (Jatau, 2014). According to Schuman in Nwolise (2006), since survival is the first law of life, the first duty of diplomats is the promotion of national security. Simeon (2018) explains that the concept of national security presupposes that a government should protect the state and its citizen against all kinds of crises through a variety of power projections such as political power, diplomacy, economic power and military might.

Presidential System

Presidential system of government, an American model of democracy, has gained global prominence and recognition. America remains the prototype of presidential government. In this arrangement, there is a “unicephalous” executive, where elected president is the head of state and head of government, hence executive power is concentrated in one person (Oruebor, 2018). In this system, the whole country is the constituency of the president who is the symbol of unity and chief administrator of the country. USA, Nigeria, Kenya, Malaw, among others, practice this system (Alonge, 2011). The essence of the presidential system is to bring various ethnic groups together to maintain political stability. The United States of America (USA) got political independence in 1776 in the aftermath of the revolutionary war. There are features that make adoption of this system appealing to some sovereign nations as mentioned above. Chief among these are; separation of power, executive president, tenure of head of government, veto power, individual ministerial responsibility and appointment of cabinet ministers at the prerogative of the president (Alonge, 2011). Separation of powers is the hallmark of presidential system and is typically reinforced by a separation of personnel. That is, members of the executive are different from members of the legislature and judiciary (Hague & Harrop, 2010). The following are strengths of presidential rule as identified by Hague & Harrop (2010):

- Fixed term of office provides continuity in the executive, avoiding the collapse of governing coalitions to which parliamentary governments are prone;
- Winning a presidential election requires candidates to develop broad support across the country;
- Election by the country at large, the president rises above the squabbles between local interests represented in the assembly;
- A president provides natural symbol of national unity.
- Limited government and protection of liberty.

National Security and Politics in Nigerian ‘Presidentialism’

Power is central to politics; the political elites do everything possible within their means to gain access to or consolidate power of the state. The challenges of balancing the interests of the state with the desires of the individual political elites often characterize the exercise of legislative power to control the executive branch of government in a developing democracy like Nigeria is often met with stiff opposition. As avers by Easton (1953) in Johari (1989), politics is authoritative allocation of values for a society. In Nigeria’s democratic experience,

personalization of public value is a prevalent culture. Political elites circumvent constitutional provisions for the promotion of their selfish objectives. Power is hotly contested for among the characters that dominate political space.

It is instructive to note that, Nigeria is a plural society bind together by the same geographical entity but different geopolitical zones. The north-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria comprises six states, with over 40 ethnic groups, the states and some ethnic groups are as follows: Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Borno, Adamawa and Bauchi. The south-south geopolitical zone comprises six states and over 40 ethnic groups in Nigeria. The states are as follow: Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Edo, Akwa Ibom, and Bayelsa (Asanebi, Theo-Iruo and Odoh, 2021). South-west comprises Oyo, Ekiti, Osun, Ogun, Lagos, and Ondo. South-east consists of Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, and Imo States. North-western states are: Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Kebbi, Sokoto Zamfara and Katsina while North-central comprises Niger, Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Kwara, Kogi and FCT, Abuja. There is a concentration of power at the centre. Office of the president wields enormous power; the centre controls national resources. Thus, these geopolitical zones engage in political rat-race to clinch power and grip on it at whatever cost. Johari (1989) succinctly puts it that it is the factor of power that makes state different from other forms of organization; it is the power that alternates from one party to another in the battle of the ballot box; it is power that enhances or reduces status of a state.

National security has been challenged and weakened by incessant conflicts, crimes and insecurity in north-east and south-south region of Nigeria. In both regions, the continuous threat to national security and harmonious living of the citizenry is real as these sad situations have triggered international community to declared Nigeria a failed state on several circles as well as in policy papers. For instance, the fund for Peace (FFP) 2012 report, ranked Nigeria as one of the top 10 failed states in Africa and 14th growing wave of insecurity and endemic violence. Evidence that gives credence to the fact that security situation is nose-diving in Nigeria can be found in the 2010 survey report published by the Business Environment in Nigeria. It is argued that the 2017 survey rated national security in Nigeria (02.69%) as against 49.49% in 2010 report. This represents a significant fall in national security. It is common knowledge that major causes of internal insecurity in Nigeria are: bad governance, corruption, poverty, inequality, mass unemployment, etc (Alhassan and Akindapo, 2019).

Asanebi, Theo-Iruo and Odoh (2021) observe that the north-east and south-south regions of Nigeria have continued to witness Mephistophelean conflicts that have threatened and challenged the national security of the Nigerian State. Some of these conflicts and crimes are: politically motivated 'thuggery', armed banditry, political assassination, herdsmen and farmers' crisis, boko haram crisis, Niger Delta crisis and sea piracy, amongst others. It can be deduced from the above concepts that a secured state is the one where the aggregate of people organized under it have a consciousness of belonging to a common sovereign political community, enjoy equal political freedom, human rights, economic opportunities, and when the state itself is able to ensure independence in its development and foreign policy. Asanebi and Otoo (2018) noted that since the inception of democratic governance in 1999, the federal government of Nigeria has done little, if not nothing, to improve on human right and protection of its citizens' life and property as one of their cordial responsibilities

The increasing wave of crimes and insecurity in the north-east and south-south regions since the fourth republic of Nigeria has challenged the national security of the Nigerian State. These regions hold more than 75% of Nigeria wealth as a nation, therefore losing her will be too sad for the nation (Asanebi, Theo-Iruo and Odoh, 2021). Recently, violence against the state has escalated to the entire North-west and North-central. Banditry has shaken the foundation of the Nigerian State. People are killed, displaced and kidnapped on daily basis. Properties are destroyed; villages are sacked; farm crops are set ablaze and infrastructures are vandalized. In the South-east radical separatism gains momentum by the day; government

institutions and security agents are targeted by the group. Generally, there is fissiparous voices continue to rise.

At this point, it could be seen that there are sovereign nations that adopted the American model of democracy and federal constitution where power is shared among three components and each component has financial autonomy. Each moves and develops at its pace. In Nigeria's experience, power is concentrated at the centre, revenue is centrally pooled and share based on controversial formulae. The centre created state and local tiers; as such they look unto it for sustenance and survival. This type of arrangement is peculiar to Nigeria. This nature of Nigerian political economy – revenue pool - was created by the British colonialists and consolidated by the post-colonial comprador elites. Quest for fiscal federalism and financial autonomy is one the lingering national question in Nigeria. The oil-rich states felt short-changed thus, continuously agitate for financial autonomy. Again, Asymmetric distribution of population avails greater political strength to a particular region (the North) who has dominated the Nigerian politics since independence. This further manifested in the distribution of values and national resources among the component regions. The implication of this is mutual distrust and cry of marginalization by disaffected groups as well as unhealthy competition for the presidency. The hotly contested 2011 general election and post-election violence that greeted the announcement of Goodluck Jonathan are evidences how Nigerian federal structure ignites tense competition for power among the constituent nationalities. This is more evident in 2015 presidential election. The resultant effects are conflict, fissiparous tendency and instability. These divisive cleavages and centrifugal elements are weaponised by the elites and politicians to advance their selfish motives. As 2023 election draws closer, North-South binary is at play to lay claim for presidency. Each of the three sub-regions in the South spares no effort to be the Nigerian President in the 2023 election.

Banditry in the north and separatism in the south are expression of anger and discontent, as advanced by the militant Fulani groups and the separatist group (IPOB), over the exclusive and brigandage nature of the Nigerian politics. The Frustration-Aggression theory captures how systemic injustice and any form of deprivation could lead to violent unconventional reaction by the oppressed. Raging insecurity and the Southern and Northern Nigeria is more or less an expression of anger by the frustrated groups in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The paper concludes that Nigerian variant of federalism is a recipe for national insecurity and violent competition for the office of the President. The disaffected groups will always resort to violence in order to make their voices heard. To reverse this trend and make Nigeria positive model for other nations to follow, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be a constitutional amendment where items like defence should be removed from exclusive list to concurrent list for effective policing and security.
- Federal revenue pool should be undone by giving financial autonomy to each state in order to make office of the president less fascinating, and allay the tension associated with the contest for the office.
- States that are not economically viable should be merged with the relatively viable ones that have common ethno-religious identity.
- For the interest of national security and democratic stability, rotational presidency should be enshrined in the constitution in such in a way that it alternates among the six geo-political zones of the country. This will allay fear of political exclusion and economic marginalization.
- There should be effective policing and enforcement of laws in such a way that crimes are not committed with impunity. This will serve as deterrence to potential criminal activities.

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