

The Nigerian Federalism has always exhibited peculiar and irregular characteristics. The Nigerian federation was not created by the coming together of separate independent states that became Nigeria, but was the subdivision of a country which had been ruled as a single unit by the erstwhile colonialists. From the conventional perspective of comparative federalism, the primary anomaly in Nigerian federalism is the domination of the country's politics by centralizing military elites who have ruled for more than two thirds of the period since independence from Britain in 1960. This military factor, among other things explains the peculiarities and pathologies of Nigerian federalism.

More so, the unifying impact of the civil war, which produced a much stronger central authority, and the overwhelming domination of the Nigerian economy by federally collected allocated revenue and its attendant interventionist and centralizing tendencies, have reduced Nigeria into a "unitary state in federal disguise". Nigeria federalism is therefore not truly federal.

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

Nigeria is a country of extraordinary diversity and as such, one of extraordinary complexities. These complexities are a reflection of the avalanche of ethno-cultural and religious groups co-habiting the territory and the intricacies of interaction among them. Indeed, Nigeria's adventure into pluralism of religious and ethnic diversities owes its origin to colonial conquest which permitted the entire continent of Africa beginning from the early 19th century. In the case of Nigeria, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates made Nigeria a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country.

Perhaps cognizance of the existence of latest threats to the future political stability of the emergent nation-state, the founding fathers were desirous of a system of government that would neutralize the political threats and accommodate the divergent interests of the various ethno-cultural groups. This desire eventually found expression in the federal system of government as a diversity management technique. But it must be stated here that, with the advent of the 1979 and 1999 constitutions, there has been a profound change in the practice of federalism in the country in the sense that, the system has been practiced in an awkward manner and this has called into question whether Nigeria is truly operating a true federal system. This question has further been accentuated by recent damning reports of the National Intelligence Council of the United States Government which forecasted that by the year 2020, Nigeria might cease to exist as a nation-state.

Given this Background and against the fact that the operation of the system per se started far back in 1914, what is the continued relevance of the federal idea in

Nigeria? This is against the background of hiccups experience so far with the system and its attendant implications for political stability. Further to the above question, what are the sources of the present worry over adaptability of the system of Nigeria's situation and what are the future hopes for politically stable Nigeria through the practice of federalism?

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS**

In terms of the federalism debate in Nigeria, the picture mainly indicates that in spite of Nigeria's unsuitability for the practice of federalism, federalism is generally accepted by many as necessary for managing the country's ethnic diversity as reflected in the adage 'unity in diversity'. Indeed, there has been an upsurge in the literature on federalism in Nigeria in recent times. The views expressed mainly take a composite or specific approach to addressing the myriad of issues surrounding Nigeria's federalism, though most stress the 'integrative needs of the state'. An important aspect of the debate, however, revolves around the central 'mobilisational orientations' of a federalist ideology in respect of whether this should be 'centralist', 'decentralist' or 'balanced'. The major institutional design problem has been over the division of powers and functions at the various levels of government (federal, state, and local government). It has been a case of how to strike a balance between opposing demands for centralisation or de-centralisation of power [1]. There is the problem of how to design the federation in such a way as to prevent an ethnic group or a combination of ethnic groups, or one state or a combination of states, from perpetually dominating and imposing their will on other ethnic groups. In Nigeria, one cannot discuss federalism outside its implications for the country's ethnic diversity. For instance, federalism was introduced in Nigeria more as an instrument of divide and rule than as a mechanism for promoting unity-in-diversity which it eventually came to represent in the post-colonial era. Various discussed in the debate have been the impacts of prolonged military rule on federalism and the resultant operational defects.

This paper grapples with the question of Nigeria's federal practice. It argues that there is a need to re-examine federalism in the country with a view to restructuring the system so that it reflects the ethnological and political realities on the ground. It proposes the de-concentration or decentralisation of the powers of the central government, which increased astronomically during military rule to the disadvantage of the component units—the states. In addressing this subject matter, the paper critically examines the theoretical basis for the notion of federalism, seeking to determine Nigeria's suitability as a federal state in the first instance. A historical overview of the origin of Nigeria's federalism—alongside a discussion of present-day predicaments—is presented in the preliminary analysis. Subsequently, the persisting problems in Nigeria's federalism—like the monopoly of state power, revenue allocation, state creation

and federal character—are re-visited with a view to determining the situation in the post-transition democratic environment.

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