



**JOURNAL OF GOVERNANCE
AND DEVELOPMENT**

<https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/jgd>

How to cite this article:

Ogunwa, S. A., & Abasilim, U. D. (2024). Democracy, federalism and governance in Nigeria. *Journal of Governance and Development*, 20(1), 105-127. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jgd2024.20.1.4>

**DEMOCRACY, FEDERALISM
AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA**

¹Samuel Adetola Ogunwa & ²Ugochukwu David Abasilim

¹Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Crawford University, Nigeria

²Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Covenant University, Nigeria

²*Corresponding author: ugochukwu.abasilim@covenantuniversity.edu.ng*

Received: 9/4/2024 Revised: 24/4/2024 Accepted: 25/4/2024 Published: 8/7/2024

ABSTRACT

Nigeria became one of the federal societies under the supervision of the British colonial government in 1954. Federalism and democracy ceased when the military government usurped and suspended the Republican Constitution in 1966. The periods of military rule witnessed over-centralization of power at the centre, while the federating states became Lilliputians. The usurpation of jurisdictional competencies and centralization of power made the federating states and local governments default on their socio-economic responsibilities. The paper aims to elucidate the intricate relationship between federalism and democracy in Nigeria, shedding light on the repercussions of their erosion during military rule. Through a comprehensive review of historical events and constitutional changes, this study examined the consequences of over-centralization and jurisdictional encroachments during military governance. The paper

revealed that the institutionalization of federalism once embraced without due consideration, led to detrimental adjustments and crises during military rule, significantly impeding socio-economic and political development. The paper concluded that democracy and federalism are twins ‘brothers’ and will remain relevant and last long when Nigerian leaders, particularly elected representatives, undertake constitutional reforms that prioritized power devolution to states and local governments. This adjustment, rooted in justice and fairness, will rejuvenate the symbiotic relationship between democracy and federalism, ensuring lasting relevance.

Keywords: Constitutional reform, democracy, federalism, governance, military rule, Nigeria, power devolution, socio-economic development.

INTRODUCTION

The incessant demand for socio-economic and political justice in heterogeneous states has shifted attention to the utility of federalism as a political formula. The federal arrangement was touted and suitable for the challenges of centrifugal and centripetal forces confronting the various nationalities within the geographical zones. Yet, federalism insisted on unity within diversities, while at the same time was a system of government that recognizes the division of powers among the levels of government in a polity (Jinadu, 1979; Watts, 1999; Yusoff & Rajanthiran, 2017). The division of powers itself ensured the competencies and jurisdictional capacities for the delivery of minimum goods and services to the people within and beyond.

In developed federal societies, a review of constitutional provisions constantly offered new hope for both tiers of government in the areas conflicting with the citizen’s interest. Addressing multinationals’ interests, the national governments have sorted ways and means for the lower governments with sufficient resources and collaborative efforts towards responsible governance to their people. This initiative, according to Watts (1999, p. 3), in many political systems, political leaders including political scholars, journalists increasingly referred to federalism as a form of political organization that liberates and encourages positive economic growth and development in modern times as a form of government that articulates sensibility, division and diversity of the plural people.

Interestingly, the hope it offers, the federal citizens still believed in the system, and stand to preserve their socio-economic, cultural and political interests with great expectations (Pickel & Pickel, 2023; Watts, 1999). In Nigeria, the idea of federalism was muted to preserve the nitty-gritty and cultural diversities of the geopolitical zones made up of the Hausas, the Igbos, and the Yorubas as well as the minorities within these major ethnic groupings. The arrangement was then designed and distributed powers to the two levels of government (Oyediran, 2007). In the beginning, it started smoothly, until the Nigeria military usurped the power of elected representatives in 1966 and introduced what scholars described as a federal military government (Babawale & Olasupo, 2000; Sule & Sambo, 2024).

The usurpation of power by the military turned what used to be ‘true’ practice of the federal system upside down with the centralization of powers on the Federal Military government. Needless to say, the civilian governments beginning from Alhaji Shehu Shagari in the Second Republic (1979-1983) and now (1999-2023) have made conscious efforts at incremental adjustments to the national constitution in favour of the federating states. Despite several adjustments to the national laws, good governance has eluded the people of Nigeria. This study is designed to interrogate democracy, federalism and the place of governance in the country to assess the over-centralization of power and implications on the socioeconomic development among or within the federating states.

Also, as the country is presently constituted, the development envisaged may continue to affect negatively on the country. With the present situation, can socio-economic justice and dividends of democratic governance reach the people who themselves are the purpose of governance? The rest of the paper including the concept of federalism and democracy, a brief history of Nigeria, theoretical framework, federalism and distributive governance and conclusions are the next line of interrogation.

THE CONCEPT OF FEDERALISM

Federalism was a political ideology that combines elements of shared rule and regional self-rule to preserve the unity and diversity of different groups within a single polity (Asobie, 1998; Babawale, 2000; Watts,

1999; Yusuf, 2000). It was an institutional system that resembled a sovereign state and differs from other states only because the central government legally includes regional entities in some decision-making processes. In a federation, there were two sovereignties: the central, federal or general-purpose government, and the regional components, federating state or specific purpose government. The federal government exists when the powers of government for a community were significantly divided by the notion that there was a single independent authority for the entire area concerning some matters and that there were independent regional authorities for other issues, each set of authorities being coordinated and not subordinate to others within its own prescribed sphere.

The federal government was accorded with the specific rule, the shared rule along common institutions, including incorporating different nationalities that comprised the federation in its cabinet. In Nigeria, for instance, the election of the president and members of the National Assembly (NASS) was usually conducted by the Electoral Body every four years. On the day of the election, the component states go to the polls through the platform of political parties to elect the president and the members of the national lawmakers. The president and the NASS's powers covered the whole federation and represent the general interests. The elected NASS members also represented the component states through election. Election played a significant role in federal policies, especially in securing the shared-rule government.

According to Wheare (1963), democracy was a kernel for a federal government, dictatorship, with its one-party government and its denial of free election, was incompatible with the working of the federal principle. He argued that federalism demands form of government which have the characteristics usually associated with democracy or free government. There was a wider variety in the forms, but the main essentials were free elections and a party system, guaranteeing a responsible opposition. The sustenance and durability of the federal system were placed on democratic principles along with the rule of law, equality, one man, one vote, freedom, liberty, accountability, transparency, and election devoid of manipulations and falsehoods. In essence, in 'true' democracy and federalism, there was the tendency to checkmate the phenomena of the forces of centrifugalism and centripetalism and do away with pathological disorders as well as to preserve the unity in diversity or diversity in unity on which federalism is built upon.

Philosophically, since it was the federating states that unanimously ab initio agreed to federate for the common good and elected the general government as the head of the union, they also decide the place (home) and location for the general government to carry out the allotted responsibilities. However, the federal government and component states were housed in the same political territory but live in different regions due to their various functions. The central government functions on behalf of the union government, including defence, currency, and foreign affairs. Each level of government must exercise power, autonomy, and independence according to constitutional provisions. Power-sharing between the two sovereignties was essential for the sustenance of the federal government. For each level of government to function without encumbrance, powers must be shared behaviourally or politically.

The need to federate was peculiar to all federations, such as the desire for union, ethnic independence, geographical continuity, absence of inequality, homogeneity, political antecedent, economic resources, historical and political antecedent, tradition, common language, and relations. The federal system's sweetness, utility, and political tolerance must be a reasonable balance that ensured all units maintain their independence within their allocated sphere and no one can dominate the others. It was the task of those who frame and work a federal government to ensure that every unit is manageable.

UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRACY

Historically, democratic government took its root in the ancient city of Greece where the people gathered together and made decisions on matters of general interest. Since then, democracy as a concept in the lexicon of political science has been accepted generally as a form of government through which citizens can freely choose those to lead them through election. The acceptance of democracy as one of the vocabularies of political science gave rise to several definitions that have accorded the term 'democracy' (Mahajan, 2013; Shively, 2008; Valsangiacomo, 2022). Defining democracy from where it originated, the Greek Philosopher Cleon in 422BC said "that shall be democratic which shall be of the people, by the people, for the people" (quoted in Mahajan, 2013, p. 719). Cleon resisted the definition of a 'democratic state' or country that has attained democratic status as well as the people therein.

The notion of a democratic state was further expanded by former American President Abraham Lincoln when he said that “democracy is the government of people, by the people and for the people”. The emphasised of Lincoln’s concept of democracy is centred on the people who elect the government by themselves as the citizens of the state. When we combine the two positions with democracy, both are largely in agreement that democratic people in a democratic state will elect the representatives to govern them. This was not different from what the Greek city-state witnessed except that their kind of democracy was a direct democracy because of the smaller population of the city (Fowler, 2020: Johari, 2009). In this sense, Mills in his Representative Government quoted in Mahajan (2013, p. 719) observed that in a democracy “the whole people or some numerous portions of them, exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by themselves”.

Seeley quoted in Johari (2009, p. 330) summed up democracy as “a government in which everyone has a share”. Indeed, democracy was a government of everybody because it allows people to participate. However, it was at the level of participation that citizens usually expressed themselves through the electioneering process. After the election, the electorates (those who voted) withdraw to their tents, unless something triggers them to line up on the major roads to demand or protect against draconian policies being made against their socio-economic and political interests. Little wonder that Macpherson (1976) observed that democracy was just a mere mechanism for electing as well as authorizing government for laws and political decisions made for the society. Again, the beauty of democracy in democratic states were the basic principles such as universal adult suffrage, free, fair and periodic election, multiparty system, presence of civil society organizations, freedom of press and mass media, independence of the judiciary, freedom of association, free speech, political tolerance, persuasion, legitimacy, human rights, sovereignty of people, equal opportunity, constitution and constitutionalism, and so on.

These elements, Burns (1935) opined “democracy is a word, with many meanings and some emotional colour. It is not an algebraical symbol, but a flag or the call of a trumpet for some; and for others an obsolete mythology which has undesirable connections with capitalism and imperialism” (quoted in Mahajan, 2013, p. 718). In

the realm of party politics, the will of the people was not recognized because the political parties are infused into the Iron Law of Oligarchy that has pervaded all social organizations particularly the party system (Michels, 1962). Although, democracy gave birth to party institutions, yet it is indispensable to the working of democracy. According to Mahajan (2013), it lowers moral standards and carries national divisions into local elections. The operation of the party machinery denied the individual any opportunity or freedom to use his judgement.

He must select one or more candidates from a pool of potential knaves, none of whom he cares about, and one or more concerns, none of which are acceptable to him. However, there was a relationship between democracy and the party system. Political parties present their candidates, while democracy stands as a method of electing such candidates during elections. In the words of Mosca (1939), democracy results in the tyranny of the majority, while the minority only aired their view.

NIGERIA: A BRIEF HISTORY

The conquest and treaties of friendship with different mosaic tribes by the rampaging British imperialists beginning in 1861 ventured into the formal birth of Nigeria in 1900 and its naming and amalgamation in 1914. The formal amalgamation in the first instance was for economic and administration conveniences (Olaniyan, 2003). After the amalgamation, the British-led colonialists settled down to govern. From the amalgamation was the introduction of indirect rule. The indirect rule was a system adopted by Lord Lugard (the first Governor-General in Nigeria) to govern the nationalities. The people hitherto lived differently, while the policy of amalgamation brought them together as a country. Although, the policy of indirect rule partially succeeded in the Yoruba territory, successful in the North, but was miserable in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

What accounted for the failure was largely due to differentiations, peculiarities and diversities of culture, language, ancestry, history, tradition, religion, territory and the system of government. The socio-economic and political diversities of Nigerian peoples were well acknowledged and understood by the British officials. However, the permutations of how the entities should be divided as well as forms

of government were suggested by Lugard's lieutenants. For instance, Temple and Morel advised the division of the country into smaller units or four provinces (Olaniyan & Alao, 2003). These suggestions were vehemently rejected. The differences between the North and the South as well as political agitations by the nationalists led to the constitutional making under the imperial government, Britain.

To assuage the demands of the educated elites that turned nationalists, the Richard Constitution of 1922 was promulgated with elective principles. The Constitution provided for the formation of political parties by politically inclined Nigerians. Under British rule, the constitution was expected to cover the whole country that is, the North and the South (as the country was known then), but the New Council put in place only legislated for the Southern Provinces, while the Governor made laws and orders for the Northern Provinces (Oyediran, 2007). In other words, for twenty-four years (1922-1946), the North and the South never sat together to deliberate on the matters that concerned them as one people and one country. They lived as different people and countries but in the same territory.

Oyedele (2020) opined that Lugard did not set out to build a Nigerian nation and never intended to prepare the people for any future leadership role. The British government only succeeded and used the resources of the South to better the lots of the North (Agbaje & Adebani, 2003; Olaniyan & Alao, 2003). The politics of division or separation perpetuated by the colonial government attracted criticism from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. According to him, in the aftermath of amalgamation in 1914, "Nigeria ... existed as one country only on paper" (Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, 1947 quoted in Oyediran, 2007, p. 8). The realization of the deep division between the South and the North, the Richard Constitution was promulgated in 1946. In the words of Richard, the Constitution became necessary to bring the people together and to unite them.

The provisions included: promoting the country's unity; providing for diversities of the country including all the elements that is, the North, the East and the West; and finally, ensuring greater participation by Nigerians in their own socio-economic and political affairs (cited in Oyediran, 2007, p. 12). Undoubtedly, unity was absent among the hitherto called Nigerian peoples despite the political amalgamation carried out 32 (1914-1946) years after. While the Richard constitution attempted to bring the people together, political pundits such as

Oyediran (2007) and Olaniyan (2003) observed that the constitution instituted and institutionalized regional politics in the three geopolitical zones made up of Nigeria. Two years later (1948) the Eastern region became an entity. Still, under the constitution, the two tribal associations were rechristened political parties.

For instance, Egbe Omo Oduduwa became the Action Group (AG) and the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa turned out to be the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). Before this time, the NCNC which dominated the political scene since 1944 after the collapse of NYM has become the Igbo party. The politics of regionalism coordinated by the colonial government continued at the General Ibadan Conference. The conference was meant to charter a new constitution against the Richard Constitution of 1946. Olaniyan (2003, p. 12) opined that the constitution that was, Macpherson "full of landmines that eventually over-dramatized and exacerbated ethnic awareness, suspicion and hostility". Under the supervision of the British government, the 1951 constitution politically reconfigured the Nigerian state. The North had threatened to pull out of Nigeria unless she got 50 percent of the legislative seats at the national legislative council. Kirk-Greene (1971, p. 9) posited that the concession to the half of Nigeria that is, to the north "was one to dominate the sharing of Nigeria's political culture until the First Republic exploded sixteen years later".

The constitution, indeed, instead of emancipating both the two halves of the country (North and South), emphasized the inability of Britain to eliminate unhealthy rivalry among the regions and sealed the hope of the "emergence of ethnic-based political parties" as well as "all patriotic agenda for the total emancipation of the Nigerian state" (Olaniyan & Alao, 2003, p. 14). The lacuna in the Macpherson constitution influenced the agitations for another constitution. Although the constitution bequeathed the federal system of government to the country, yet, it did resolve partially the challenges that accompanied the amalgamation. Also, accorded more autonomy, and sovereignty to the regional governments, while the centre remained politically imbalanced. With political independence in 1960 and the attendant challenges of the first Republic in 1963, Nigeria was still regarded as a "grotesque artificiality of the state".

Nigeria as a counterfeit and nonindigenous object, Awolowo (1947, p. 47-48) observed that "Nigeria is not a nation... is a mere geographical expression". Even, Lugard (1965, p. 100) himself buttresses the fact

that the amalgamation exercise was a scheme “designed to involve as little dislocation of existing conditions as possible”. Indeed, the amalgamation of the peoples even with central institutions “were merely formal and did not create a common forum for all the components of the amalgamated Nigeria” (Ifidon, 2003, p. 34). With political and administrative disparities forced on the Nigerian people by the imperialists, Tamuno (1991, p. 400) argued that the policy of bringing Nigerian people into the country ab initio “lacked the essential ingredients of stability in nations, developing or developed ...” and devoid of “trust, justice, and peace”.

The lack of these three fundamental principles for nationality integration was a sign that the British stooges were primarily driven by their peculiar interests and their love of the nation’s resources rather than by the socioeconomic and political advancement of the domestic government and its citizens. There was proof that merger was first and foremost advocated to make sure the imperial possession in Nigeria brought the crown and its government in Britain the most benefits possible. This may help to understand why British attitudes and actions did not take the peculiarities of Nigeria, its land, and its people into account. Nigeria’s nation-building was not approached holistically by Britain, and the country’s future political growth received little attention (Olaniyan & Alao, 2003). The political and socio-economic contradictions in Nigeria speak volumes of the crises that attended the creation of Nigeria.

The three major ethnic nationalities that were Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and other minority nationalities are at loggerheads with one another as enmity, rivalry and disharmony are the order of the day. The country was still battling with interethnic and intra-ethnic, religious, and political rivalries, and revenue allocation, among others (Fashagba, 2021). These contradictions were products of direct and deliberate failure by British colonial masters and Nigerian leaders to lay a solid foundation for the country. On the part of the Nigerian political elites, the submission of Nicolson (1989, p. 302) was that despite challenges before independence in 1960, “the main root system of Nigeria’s present ... is to be found in the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly in the early years of that period”. Sir Arthur Richard had explained to his London audience in answer to the Nigerian issue that Nigeria was just one country by mistake due to British suzerainty.

In terms of society or even the economy, it was still far from being one nation or country. Between the main tribal tribes, there were significant social and political distinctions. They represented various stages of cultural development, do not share a common language, and have wildly varied customs and lifestyles (Kasai, 2024). Little wonder that as old as Nigeria state was, born in 1900 became independent in 1960 and attained statehood in 1963, the country is still crawling.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Thomas Hobbes' (1588–1679) political philosophy was where the power theory originated. He contended that man naturally and continuously craves power and ever-increasing power in a single appetite, as opposed to the accumulation of many isolated cravings brought on by countless isolated perceptions. According to him, the primary driver of interpersonal rivalry was the pursuit of fame and power. The man's persistence for power, he notes, is that when the interests of individuals or groups meet in the pursuit of ever-increasing riches, honours, and commands, the competitors resort to killing, subduing, displacing, and repelling their rivals. According to Johari (2009, p. 11), "it is also true that men like to lie in peace to enjoy the iota of power they possess, it disposes them to live under a common power". The power battle between rival political groups was undoubtedly ongoing.

The nature of power was relational to civil society that everyone, whether moderate or immoderate engages in a perpetual struggle to possess power over others. Macpherson (1976, p. 37) observes that it "is necessarily pulled into a constant competitive struggle for power over others, or at least to resist his powers being commanded by others". The nature of politics in plural societies confirms that connections between the rulers and the governed, including subordination, dominance, and submission, were the core components of power. These interactions were the subject of political science. These connections have an impact on how political power is shaped and distributed while also having an influence (Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950, p. xiv). Power was a built-in mechanism of the state that is made evident through its machinery. The state was made up of these institutions: the legislative, executive branch, armed forces, police, bureaucracy, and judicial system.

Political authority demonstrated by the manner these state-run organisations operated and how they carried out government orders. Political parties, pressure groups, elite faction leaders, and other informal agencies or organisations wield control over a variety of decisions. Both the state and nonprofit apparatus can influence the political system in some way. Therefore, Gauba (2009, p. 283) asserted that the formal state organs do not possess exclusive authority over politics and that these organs were receptive to environmental inputs. Marxists believed that power is centred on and connected with a class (the dominant class) that detests its alternation. The power exercised by this class led to exploitation and expropriation of the non-dominant class because, in an aristocracy, a smaller group of activists made the policies published in the name of all the aristocrats, and in a democracy, the sovereign electorate was controlled by the politicians (Parry, 1971).

A king's decisions were always made with the cooperation of his advisors. The school noted that the working class must seize political power from the dominant class, the bourgeoisie, for the non-dominant class, notably the working class, to be freed from the exploitation of the capitalists. Because "government in a democracy was certainly of the people, it might even be for the people, but it was never by the people but only by the ruling class" (Parry, 1971, p. 25), the masses must fight for their redemption. Politics entails the use of power but also the welfare of the public, according to the power theory. Accordingly, politics as a practice served the interests of the greatest number of people (Bentham, cited in Sabine and Thorson, 1973, p. 612). According to Laski (1967), people can use power to accomplish goals that lead to everyone's satisfaction.

As a result, the use of power in politics encompassed more than just the exercise of influence, the settling of conflict, and the pursuit of common objectives for the good of all. Sometimes, the use of power forcefully disrupts normality or peaceful co-existence in society "unless it is made subservient to the common will. Within society it is only the clumsy and the stupid people who seek to attain their ends using force" (Johari, 2009, p. 13). The concern of politics was about power and the state vis-à-vis government exercises power (Anifowose, 2008). And "... consequently, it includes not only the legal and formal but also the extra-legal and informal processes involved in government. ... power as the central concept is that political science

pays greater heed to man, especially the political man, as a basic unit of analysis” (Curtis quoted in Johari, 2009, p. 8).

Thus, the concept of power cannot be separated from discussions of politics or political parties. Although the topic of power theory was as old as politics itself, its significance in the modern era cannot be understated. Power has been the core premise of politics in modern governments, especially in pluralist societies. The antagonistic and competitive behaviour of individuals and their groups, such as political parties, labour unions, and religious organisations, was a manifestation of the reality of power. As a result, factions were vying for dominance over one another. The domination of a group over the other assumes the fact that such a group exercises power or dominion over other groups. The relevance of the power theory to the political system, the socioeconomic and political decisions of the Nigerian governments especially in the current fourth Republic has continued to widen the gap between the haves and have-nots.

The fruit of democratic government has turned into the non-availability of essential infrastructure like good roads, potable water, and employment. Thus, more often than not policy decisions of the federal government have quantumly affected all the levels of government and hindered their performance vis-a-vis to perform creditable well.

FEDERALISM AND DISTRIBUTIVE GOVERNANCE

Federalism as an ideological system of government was an instrument designed to protect and preserve unity in diversity among nationals in heterogeneous societies. Federalism served as a distributive justice, and fairness for governance matters as well as to make commonwealth available to the nationals irrespective of colour, race, language, customs, history and culture. It offered collaborations between all levels of government for socioeconomic growth and development. Federalism is perceived as an engine solution and positive development of political organizations. The Nigerian state after several permutations settled for a federal system of government in 1954. This did not come easily, but with negotiations among the regional leaders under the supervision of the colonial government, Great Britain (Akinyemi, 2003; Amuwo et al., 2004; Okeke & Omojuwa, 2022; Saidu & Rasheed, 2016).

The Igbo in the East, Hausa/Fulani in the North, and Yoruba in the West made up the three regions that made up the federation at the time. The areas initially harboured mistrust for one another. No state should be so strong in comparison to the others that it could match the combined strength of many of them, according to Mill (1960, p. 367-8). If there is such a one and only one, it will insist on dictating the conversations; if there are two, they will be impossible to resist when in agreement; and whenever they dispute, everything will be resolved by a struggle for domination between the rivals. Dudley (1968, p. 272) agreed with Mill's assertion that the regional leaders in Nigeria "started by uncritically accepting the Wheare's model of federalism". The manner in which the regional leaders adopted federalism implies that they might not have known the type of nation-state they wished to establish.

The leaders agreed to the unbalanced, unfair political framework on behalf of all Nigerians. As Ijalaye (1979, p. 141) rightly observed the North alone was as great, if not greater both in population and size than the rest of the three other regions including the Mid-west put together. With an imperfect political structure, the country attained political independence in 1960. At independence, party politics took the central stage with the regions generously guiding their spheres and attempting at usurpation of other regions into their spheres. This led to the creation of the Midwest from the Western region. The pre-independence and attendant political crises, although, did not delay the national independence in 1960, but suddenly reappeared after the partial departure of the colonial government. These and other crises such as the motion for self-government, census crisis, Kano riot in the north, NCNC crisis in the East, Action Group and the Western regional election, and the Federal election of 1964, among others culminated in the dismissal of the first Republic in 1966 by the Nigerian military.

Ake (1996, p. 4-5) correctly observed that the Nigerian political leaders, although united against the colonial regime, however, "their relationship was never free from tension and conflict" because "as they pulled apart, they placed more value on capturing political power, for themselves and grew increasingly fearful about... the grave consequences of losing to their rivals in the competition for the control of state power". As attention to power and control of state and its largesse increased, politics became a do-or-die activity "by politicizing national, ethnic and communal formations ..." and as

well as “appealing to ... and even religious loyalties”. The attitudes and dispositions of a few politicians to the country’s nascent freedom deliberately influenced the military to usurp the power of the people vested into the hands of the civilian leaders.

A spate of military coups that followed essentially formalised a situation that was already firmly established, according to Ake (1996, p. 6), despite the fact that the military was generally considered as an anomaly in politics when it comes to newfound independence, freedom, and statehood. By interfering in politics, the military did not bring about military rule in Africa in relation to Nigeria; rather, it was the nature of politics as well as politicians that spawned military rule by degenerating into conflict, ultimately elevating the experts in warfare to the forefront. The way and manner Nigerian politicians were buried in the quest for political offices accounted for the political instability and uncertainty that the Nigerian military was left with no other option than to save the state and send the elected public officials back to their respective homes. However, democracy, federalism and governance under the military regimes took a different dimension in Nigeria.

The military as an institution was not trained to govern but they were trained to protect a country from disintegration and where necessary to ensure law and order as in the cases of recent coups in the world particularly in Africa. As argued earlier the military were not trained for governance, but their usurpation of government was contrary to the ethos of democracy. Under the military, unitarism and centralization of power was the order of the day. The military, as well as military government, was centred on the *esprit de corps*. The presence of the military in Nigeria’s federalism represents the first crack and obstructs the working and operation. This was followed by promulgation of the Decree No. 34, 1966 which turned the country into a unitary state. The Decree says “Nigeria shall on the 24th May 1966 ... cease to be a federation and shall accordingly as from that day be a republic by the name of the Republic of Nigeria, consisting of the whole territory which immediately before that day was comprised in a federation” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1966, p. A153).

Perhaps, one should be said that the intension of the military regimes particularly that of General Aguiyi Ironsi is that the Decree was meant “to remove the last vestige of intense regionalism of the recent past

and to produce that cohesion in the government structure which is so necessary for achieving and maintaining the paramount objective of the National Military Government, ... national unity” (quoted in Elaigwu, 1979, p. 163). The two cited quotations above both in theory and practice abolished the intention of the federal government in Nigeria, with the National government replacing the Federal government. The military rule between 1966 to 1979 and 1983 to 1999 punctured and visited oppression on the country’s federalism especially on the federating states’ quest for deliverable governance. Nigeria’s federalism has constitutionally promulgated, “merely consolidated the centralization of power in the hands of the Federal Government” (Babawale, 1998, p. 18).

Asobie’s stance (1998, p. 18) clarifies that starting in 1963 but particularly since 1976, the federal government has demonstrated an increased ability to unilaterally alter the current distribution of power between it and the regional governments and, in fact, among the various levels of government. The scope and amount of the coercive, bureaucratic, ideological, and financial resources that the component entities (or states) directly had available to them for carrying out their constitutional obligations have continuously decreased while increasing in the hands of the federal government. Additionally, there has been an increasing accretion to the federal government of duties formerly assigned to the regional government. Since 1963, but particularly since 1976, the federal government has shown an increased capacity to unilaterally change the current distribution of power between it and the regional governments and, in fact, among the various levels of government.

There has also been an increasing accretion to the federal government of functions previously assigned to the regional (or state) government. In this instance, the state became “lilliputian today” and the federal government was transformed into a “titan” (Elaigwu, 2000, p. 28). As Babawale (1998, p. 78) infused “As the strength of the Federal Government increased, it assumed the status of a Frankenstein with its finger in every pie. This development invariably translates into a dilution of Nigerian federalism”. It was instructive to know that the military created the 36 states including the Federal Capital Territory, 774 local governments across the federation. Specifically, the 1999 Federal Constitution (as amended) ascribed sixty-eight (68) functions to the government at the centre and still legislates on the thirty (30) functions between it and the federating states.

All these specified responsibilities not only increased or bloated the power of the federal government but at the same time reduced the powers and responsibilities of state governments including the power to initiate, legislate and implement policies for development in their respective states. According to Soyinka (2003), the truth was that after Nigeria's first four years of independence, the federal principle was merely abandoned, and a deliberate effort was made to subvert the state's rational relations to the centre, upsetting the balance between the federal government, the state, and even local government. This undesirable trend was caused by the way Nigeria's federal system of government was established. A federation was formed by the 13 colonies that had previously lived politically, independently, and separately in various federations, most notably the United States of America.

Those colonies having fought the British imperialists and won the battle for political independence were together between 1776 and 1787 at the Florida conference and agreed in favour of the federal system of government. Beer's (1993, p. 9) observation was that the creation of the American federation was made possible by "the people's constitution, the people's government, made for the people, made by the people and answerable to the people". Close to 300 years now, the American Constitution has been a living document, with spheres of influence for legal competencies for both the federal government and state governments. The uniqueness and separateness of the states from the general government was noticeable in the preference of each state distinguishing itself in what it produces on the comparative advantages.

From the American federal system scenario, the position of the general government was clear in the sense that the federal government is distinct and did not create the states, the states had existed before the federal government was created. The various states unanimously and vehemently subscribed to the idea of federalism. And concurrently unambiguous of the kind of nation-state they desired and wanted to build, while conscious efforts were made to define the power and the authority of the federal government with the constitutional backing and the power and authority of the states were delineated. In the case of Nigeria, Soremekun (2000, p. 16) observes that the central government created the constituent states. This view was reiterated by Dudley (1968). His observation was that the Nigeria else-while leaders

were too quick to accept the federalism without proper negotiation and without bearing in mind a nation-state being anticipated under a federal structure.

A federation must be conceived by the states and “indeed all political systems that are of the origin of union, the locus of its guarantee, and the use to which union should be put” (Agbaje, 2000, p. 11). The union or constituent units decide the place of the general government, while the organic law decides who performs what and how and specifies jurisdictional competencies. A democratic government was touted to be a government centred on the people and the common good for the democratic citizens. But the nature of the Nigerian state as well as that of the federalism have put the federal government to assume all responsibilities and the position of all-in-all in the country. By and large, politicians were attracted to covet power at the centre. The centralization of power reduced many responsibilities of the federating states including the local governments.

They all depend on the centre for national largesse in the form of money from the federation pool every month. This reliance on the federal government caused the state governments to default on their constitutionally mandated duties because a large country with widely disparate regions or federating states cannot be effectively governed from one town in this case, the Federal Territory far away in Abuja which monopolises decision-making. even if political factors are not included. Decentralising decision-making to those in the field was essential for effective administration. Therefore, a redistribution of responsibilities between central and subordinate authorities is greatly needed, regardless of any issue with federalism (Gberevbie, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted that the acceptance of federalism in Nigeria was influenced by a lack of critical thinking on the part of regional leaders, particularly in the Eastern and Western regions. The 1954 Lyttleton Constitution, aimed at preserving unity in diversity, eventually resulted in unfairness, alienation, suspicion, and division among the diverse Nigerian peoples. The military’s seizure of power further exacerbated the centralization of authority, contrary to the principles of federalism. This deviation from the idea of equal representation for justice and

fairness, as proposed by Mills in 1960, led to governance crises. Furthermore, the study acknowledges that democratic governance is an ideal but emphasizes the need for a genuine devolution of power. It contends that elected representatives, since 1999, bear the responsibility to rectify issues of over-centralization, especially by empowering state and local governments.

This shift would empower local governments to play a more significant role and make the people active participants in governance. The study also underscores the importance of equitable representation in the creation of states and local governments, emphasizing the need for their autonomy to be upheld. This approach, the study argued, will address tribalism, and marginalization, and promote fairness when distributing federal resources among federating states. The study suggests that for democracy and federalism to improve governance and address governance crises, a substantial focus must be placed on current socio-economic and political realities. Treating fellow Nigerians with fairness, justice, and tolerance is emphasized as essential for progress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

REFERENCES

- Agbaje, A. (2000). Theoretical perspectives on federalism. In T. Babawale and B. Olasupo (Eds.), *Devolution of powers in a federal state*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Agbaje, A., & Adebani, A. (2003). The political economy of the problem of Nigerian statehood. In Olaniyan, R. A. (2003). *The amalgamation and its enemies: An interpretive history of modern Nigeria*.
- Ake, C. (1996). *Democracy and development in Africa*, Washington, D.C., Brookings.
- Akinyemi, B. (2003). Ethnic militias and the national question in Nigeria. In T. Babawale (Ed.), *Urban violence, ethnic militias and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

- Amuwo, K. (1998). Federal systems: A theoretical perspective. In T. Babawale, K. Olufemi and F. Adewumi (Eds.), *Re-inventing federalism in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Amuwo, K., Agbaje, A., Suberu, R., & Herault, G. (2004). *Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Anifowose, R. (2015). Power, influence and authority. In R. Anifowose and F. Enemu (eds.), *Elements of Politics*. Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publications.
- Asobie, H. A. (1998). Centralising trends in Nigerian federalism: Issues and perspectives. In T. Babawale, K. Olufemi and F. Adewumi (Eds.), *Re-inventing federalism in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Awolowo, O. (1974). *Path to Nigerian Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Babawale, T. (1998). The impacts of military rule on Nigerian federalism: Issues and perspectives. In T. Babawale, K. Olufemi and F. Adewumi (Eds.), *Re-inventing federalism in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Babawale, T. (2000). The imperatives of power devolution in the Nigerian context. In T. Babawale and B. Olasupo (Eds.), *Devolution of Powers in A Federal State*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Babawale, T., & Olasupo, B. (Eds.) (2000). *Devolution of Powers in a Federal State*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Beer, S. H. (1993). *To make a nation: The rediscovery of American federalism*. Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press.
- Burns, C. D. (1935). *Democracy: Its defects and advantages*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dudley, J. B. (1968). *Parties and politics in northern Nigeria*. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd,
- Elaigwu, J. I. (1979). The military and state building: Federal-state relations in Nigeria 'military federation 1966-1976. In A. B. Akinyemi, P.D. Cole, and W. Ofonagoro (Eds.), *Readings on federalism*. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.
- Elaigwu, J. I. (2000). Devolution of powers in a federal state: Some preliminary observations: Keynote address. In T. Babawale and B. Olasupo (Eds.), *Devolution of powers in a federal state*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Fashagba, J. Y. (2021). Nigeria: Understanding the contour of the political terrain. *Nigerian Politics*, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50509-7_1

- Fowler, W. W. (2020). The realisation of democracy: Athens: from The City-State of the Greeks and Romans (1893). In *The City Reader* (pp. 40-50). Routledge.
- Gauba, O. P. (2009). *An introduction to political theory* (5th ed.). New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India Ltd.
- Gberevbie, C. C. (2024). Nigeria federalism and fiscal federalism. *JPP Jurnal Politik dan Pemerintahan*, 8(2), 89-111. <https://ojs.unimal.ac.id/jpp/article/view/15237>
- Ifidon, E. A. (2003). A review of studies of dysamalgamation in Nigeria. In Olaniyan, R.A. (2003). *The amalgamation and its enemies: An interpretive history of modern Nigeria*.
- Ijalaye, D. A. (1979). The civil war and Nigerian federalism. In A. B. Akinyemi, P. D. Cole and W. Ofonagoro (eds.), *Readings on Federalism*. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.
- Innocent, A. P., Yusoff, K. Z., & Rajanthiran, S. P. (2017). Incumbency factor, internal party democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Journal of Governance and Development (JGD)*, 13(2), 61-74. <https://repo.uum.edu.my/id/eprint/29774/>
- Jinadu, L. A. (1979). A note on the theory of federalism. In A.B. Akinyemi, P.D. Cole & W. Ofonagoro (Ed.), *Readings on Federalism*. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.
- Jinadu, L. A. (2002). Ethnic conflict and federalism in Nigeria. ZEF Bonn: Centre for Development Research.
- Johari, J. C. (2009). *Principles of modern political science*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd.
- Kapur, A. C. (1996). *Principles of political science*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.
- Kasai, H. (2024). The politics of 'multiculturalism' in language education: An analysis of curriculum guidelines in Taiwan. *Comparative Education*, 60(1), 177-194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2245690>
- Kirk-Greene, A. H. M. (1971). *Crisis and conflict in Nigeria: A documentary sourcebook: 1966-1970*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Laski, J. H. (1967). *A grammar of politics*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Lasswell, H., & Kaplan, A. (1950). *Power and society*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lugard, F. D. (1965). *The dual mandate in British tropical Africa* (5th ed.). London: Frank Cass.

- MacPherson, C. B. (1976). *Democratic, theory: Essays in retrieval*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mahajan, V. D. (2013). *Theory (Principles of political science)*. New Delhi: S. Chand and Company Pvt Ltd.
- Michels, R. (1962). *Political parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*. New York: Free Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1960). *Utilitarianism, liberty and representative government*. London: Aldine Press.
- Mosca, G. (1939). *The ruling class* (ed. Livingston). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Nicolson, I. F. (1989). *The administration of Nigeria, 1900-1960: Men, methods and myths*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ogunwa, S. A. (2013). *Rebranding federalism in Nigeria*. Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing
- Okeke, C., & Omojuwa, K. A. (2022). Effects of the practice of federalism in Nigeria on its international image. *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(6), 299-313. <https://10.36347/sjahss.2022.v10i06.009>
- Olaniyan, R. A. (2003). *The amalgamation and its enemies: An interpretive history of modern Nigeria*.
- Olaniyan, R. A., & Alao, A. (2003). The amalgamation, colonial politics and nationalism, 1914-1960. In Olaniyan, R.A. (2003). *The amalgamation and its enemies: An interpretive history of modern Nigeria*.
- Oyedele, E. (2020). Nigeria at sixty. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 29, 1-41.
- Oyediran, O. (2007). *Nigerian constitutional development*. Ibadan: Daybis Limited.
- Parry, G. (1971). *Political elites*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Pickel, S., & Pickel, G. (2023). The wall in the mind—Revisited stable differences in the political cultures of western and eastern Germany. *German Politics*, 32(1), 20-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2072488>
- Sabine, G. H., & Thorson, T. L. (1973). *A history of political theory*. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
- Saidu, B., & Rasheed, Z. H. (2016). The origin and practice of federalism of federalism in Nigeria. *Journal of Governance and Development*, 12(2), 87-102. <https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/jgd/article/view/13389>
- Shively, W. R. (2008). *Power and choice: An introduction to political science* (11th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill higher education.

- Soremekun, K. (2000). Review of re-inventing federalism in Nigeria. In T. Babawale and B. Olasupo (Eds.), *Devolution of powers in a federal state*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Soyinka, W. (2003). The Federal quest in Gana, AT and Egwu, SG (eds.), *Federalism in Africa Volume One: Framing the National Question*. Asmara.
- Sule, B., & Sambo, U. (2024). Historical background of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In *Presidential Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic* (pp. 1-30). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Tamuno, T. N. (1991). *Peace and violence in Nigeria*. Ibadan: The Panel on Nigeria since Independence History Project.
- The Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1966). Constitution (Suspension and Modification) (No. 5 Decree No. 34. In *Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Lagos: Government Printer.
- Valsangiacomo, C. (2022). Clarifying and defining the concept of liquid democracy. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 28(1), 61-80. <https://p3.snf.ch/project-191719>
- Watts, R. L. (1999). *Comparing federal system* (2nd ed.). London: McGill-Queen's University Press
- Wheare, K. C. (1963). *Federal government* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Yusuf, M. Y. (2000). Constitutionalism and power devolution in a federal state. In Babawale, T., and Olasupo, B. (Eds.), *Devolution of powers in a federal state*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.