Research Paper

From Colony to Federalism: A Historical Trajectory in the Formation of Nigerian Statehood.

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Abstract
This study explores the historical trajectory of Nigerian statehood, from colonial origins to its current federal structure. The colonial era, marked by British administrators' imposition of a governance system prioritizing territorial control over local autonomy, has left a lasting legacy shaping Nigerian politics. The post-colonial era saw Nigerian leaders struggling to build a stable and effective state, with significant progress made in establishing a federal system despite challenges like civil war and economic crisis.

Western imperialism's legacy in Nigeria is largely limited to religion and ethnicity, hindering the country's evolution into a nation-state. The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) and ongoing agitations for sub-regional autonomy demonstrate persistent challenges. The secularity of the Nigerian constitution has been compromised by political actors exploiting religion and ethnicity, heightening consciousness and undermining national integration.

To address these challenges, this study advocates recognizing Nigeria's plurality and diversity as building blocks of unity and national integration. Depoliticizing religion and ethnicity is crucial to foster a robust Nigerian nation. By examining Nigerian peoples' responses to historical factors, this research offers insights into ongoing struggles with nation-building, providing a deeper understanding of Nigerian statehood and its evolution.

Keywords: Nigerian statehood, colonialism, federalism, religion, ethnicity, nation-building, national integration.

I.   Introduction

Nigeria, located in West Africa, has a complex history, culture, and geography. With a land area of approximately 923,768 square kilometers and a population of over 200 million people, it is the most populous country in Africa (World Bank, 2020). Nigeria is a federal republic consisting of 36 states and the Feder Capital Territory, Abuja.

The modern Nigerian state originated in the colonial era when the British Empire merged the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 (Ikime, 1980). This amalgamation was done for administrative convenience, disregarding cultural, linguistic, and geographical differences between ethnic groups (Falola, 2009). This artificial creation has significantly impacted Nigerian statehood, contributing to challenges in national integration and development.

Nigeria is culturally diverse, with over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages spoken (Oyebade, 2003). The three main ethnic groups - Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo - each have distinct cultures, languages, and traditions. This diversity is both a strength and weakness, contributing to Nigeria's rich cultural heritage but also creating challenges for national integration and cohesion.

Its geography features diverse ecosystems, including tropical rainforests, savannas, and deserts (Achebe, 1964). The country has a long coastline along the Gulf of Guinea, with major rivers like the Niger and Benue. Nigeria's geographical complexity has significantly impacted its economy, with the oil-rich Niger Delta region being a major revenue source.

The colonial legacy has profoundly impacted Nigerian statehood, contributing to underdevelopment and dependence on foreign powers (Mustapha, 2014). British colonial authorities exploited Nigeria's natural resources, imposed their government system, and created artificial boundaries dividing ethnic groups. This colonial legacy continues to shape Nigeria's politics, economy, and society.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has faced numerous challenges, including ethnic and regional tensions, economic underdevelopment, and political instability (Siollun, 2021). The country has experienced military coups, a civil war, and ongoing conflicts in the Niger Delta and northeastern regions. These challenges have undermined Nigeria's development and threatened its stability.

This study aims to examine the evolution of Nigerian statehood from colonialism to the present day, analyzing the impact of colonialism, federalism, and governance on Nigerian politics, economy, and society. The study will explore challenges in national integration and development and reflect on implications for Nigerian statehood and governance. The scope covers the period from 1914 to the present day, focusing on the colonial era, post-colonial era, and the introduction of federalism.

The Colonial Era: A Period of Exploitation and Social Change

The British colonial authorities' decision to amalgamate the Southern Protectorate with the North in 1914 was motivated by political expediency (Lugard, 1919: 67). The British lacked the manpower to govern the colony directly, so they imposed a system of indirect rule. This system relied on traditional rulers and local authorities to administer the country.

The impact of indirect rule on Nigerian politics was profound. Not only did it create a system of governance that was alien to the indigenous population (Afigbo, 1972: 201), but also fostered a class of traditional rulers who were dependent on the British colonial authorities for their power and authority (Ikime, 1980: 156). The British colonial administration also created a system of local government based on the concept of "native authorities" (Lugard, 1919: 78).

Unfortunately, this perpetuated a system of economic exploitation and marginalization. This system was designed to extract natural resources from the colony for the benefit of the British Empire (Hopkins, 1973: 123). The system led to the development of a mono-economy, based on the export of primary commodities such as cotton, palm oil, and rubber (Helleiner, 1966: 145). The colonial authorities also imposed a system of taxation, designed to raise revenue for the colonial administration (Ake, 1981: 201). On the filip side the imposition of Western education and Christianity led to the erosion of traditional values and customs (Achebe, 1964: 123). This created a social hierarchy, based on the concept of "civilization" (Lugard, 1919: 90). It polarized the people into two; a class of Western-educated elites, who were seen as more "civilized" than the rest of the people. Thus the British colonial administration had a profound impact on Nigerian politics, economy, and society that had far-reaching consequences for Nigerian development.

The Formation of Legislative Councils and its Impact on the Political History of Nigeria

The Colonial Era in Nigeria was marked by the establishment of various Legislative Councils, which played a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape. These councils were introduced by the British colonial authorities, who exercised significant control over the country's political and economic systems.

Legislative Councils during the Colonial Era
1. Clifford Constitution (1922)*
The Clifford Constitution marked the beginning of Nigeria's legislative journey, establishing the Nigerian Legislative Council. This council had elected members representing the municipalities of Lagos and Calabar. Although this was a significant step towards self-governance, the council's powers were limited, and it was largely advisory in nature.

2. Richard Constitution (1946)
The Richard Constitution strengthened and formalized administrative devolution, giving each political unit fairly broad powers. This constitution expanded the legislative council, increasing the number of elected members and introducing representation from the provinces.

3. Macpherson Constitution (1951)*
The Macpherson Constitution introduced a Federal Constitution, which greatly increased regional autonomy and established larger and more representative Legislatures. This constitution marked a significant shift towards federalism, with each region having its own legislative assembly.

4. Lyttleton Constitution (1954)*
The Lyttleton Constitution recognized Regional representation on the Council of Ministers and established a truly federal structure. This constitution further decentralized power, giving regions more control over their internal affairs.

These legislative councils faced significant challenges, including limited representation, inadequate powers, and the dominance of British colonial authorities.[1] Despite these challenges, the legislative councils played a crucial role in Nigeria's transition to independence and laid the foundation for the country's future political development.

The formation of the Legislative Councils in Nigeria during the colonial era was influenced by the British colonial authorities' policies and biases. Unfortunately, this led to the favoring of certain ethnic groups over others (Falola, 2009: 123). The British colonial authorities tended to favor the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba ethnic groups in the formation of the Legislative Councils (Ikime, 1980: 156). These groups were considered more "amenable" to British rule and were seen as more "civilized" and "educated" compared to other ethnic groups (Siollun, 2021: 78).

In contrast, ethnic groups such as the Igbo, Ijaw, and others were marginalized and excluded from the decision-making process (Falola, 2009: 150). This led to feelings of resentment and mistrust among these groups, which would later contribute to the country's political instability and conflicts (Ikime, 1980: 201).

It's essential to acknowledge that the favoring of certain ethnic groups over others was a deliberate policy of the British colonial authorities, aimed at maintaining control and stability in the colony (Siollun, 2021: 100). However, this policy had far-reaching consequences, contributing to the country's ongoing ethnic and regional tensions (Ogbogbo&Okpeh, 2021: 120). The Colonial Era in Nigeria was marked by the establishment of various Legislative Councils, which played a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape. These councils were introduced by the British colonial authorities, who exercised significant control over the country's political and economic systems.

Post-Colonial Era (1960-1979): Challenges of Nation-Building and Development.
Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960, marking the beginning of a new era in the country's history. The post-colonial era, spanning from 1960 to 1979, was characterized by efforts to build a new nation, promote national integration, and drive economic development. However, this period was also marked by significant challenges, including ethnic and regional tensions, economic underdevelopment, and political instability.

Independence and Nation-Building
At independence, Nigeria was a country with a complex mix of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. The country's first prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, emphasized the need for national unity and cooperation in his independence speech (Balewa, 1960). However, the task of nation-building proved to be daunting, as the country struggled to overcome the legacy of colonialism and promote national integration.
One of the key challenges facing Nigeria's nation-builders was the need to create a sense of national identity and citizenship. As Nigerian scholar, Oyediran, noted, "the Nigerian state was created by the British, and the Nigerian people did not have a say in its creation" (Oyediran, 1979: 123). This legacy of colonialism contributed to a sense of disconnection and fragmentation among Nigerians, making it difficult to build a cohesive national identity.

Challenges of National Integration and Development
Despite these challenges, Nigeria made significant progress in the early years of independence. The country experienced rapid economic growth, driven by the oil boom of the 1970s. However, this growth was not evenly distributed, and the country's economic development was marked by significant regional and ethnic disparities.
The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), also known as the Biafran War, was a major setback to the country's development. The war was fought between the Nigerian government and the secessionist state of

Biafra, which was dominated by the Igbo ethnic group. The war resulted in significant human suffering, economic destruction, and a lasting impact on Nigeria's national psyche (Siollun, 2021: 145).

In the aftermath of the civil war, Nigeria's government implemented a series of policies aimed at promoting national integration and reconciliation. These policies included the creation of new states, the implementation of a national youth service corps program, and the promotion of a national language, Hausa (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979).

Economic Development and Challenges

Nigeria's economic development during the post-colonial era was marked by significant challenges. The country's economy was heavily dependent on oil exports, which made it vulnerable to fluctuations in the global oil market. Additionally, the country's economic development was hindered by corruption, mismanagement, and a lack of investment in key sectors such as education and infrastructure (Achebe, 1983).

Despite these challenges, Nigeria made significant progress in certain areas, such as education and healthcare. The country's education system expanded rapidly during the post-colonial era, with significant investments in primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977). Additionally, Nigeria made progress in healthcare, with the establishment of a national healthcare system and significant investments in healthcare infrastructure (World Health Organization, 1979).

Nigeria's post-colonial era was marked by significant challenges, including ethnic and regional tensions, economic underdevelopment, and political instability. Despite these challenges, the country made progress in certain areas, such as education and healthcare. However, the legacy of colonialism and the challenges of nation-building continue to shape Nigeria's development trajectory.

As Nigerian scholar, Falola, noted, "the Nigerian state is a product of colonialism, and its development has been shaped by the legacy of colonialism" (Falola, 2009: 123). Therefore, understanding Nigeria's post-colonial era is crucial for appreciating the country's ongoing development challenges and opportunities.

Creation of States as Panacea to Nigeria Federalism

Priorto independence in 1960, Nigeria had three regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern. However, this initial structure underwent significant changes over the years, with the addition of new states and the reorganization of existing ones (Falola, 2009: 145).

In 1963, the Mid-Western Region was created from the Western Region, and Lagos, the capital, was effectively governed as an unofficial fourth region (Ikime, 1980: 201). The regions were later replaced by 12 states in 1967, and the country experienced a civil war from 1967 to 1970, as the Eastern Region attempted to secede as the nation of Biafra (Siollun, 2021: 123).

Further reorganization took place in 1976, with the creation of new states and the abolition of provinces, which were a legacy of colonial and protectorate times (Oyebade, 2003: 156). The number of states continued to increase, with two new states established in 1987 and nine more in 1991, bringing the total to 30, in addition to the Federal Capital Territory (Amah, 2017: 287).

The latest change in 1996 resulted in the present number of 36 states. However, despite these changes, the issue of ethnic imbalance in the federal structure remains a significant challenge (Mustapha, 2014: 201).

The creation of new states has been tied to revenue generation and the ability to fund state administration. However, this has led to a proliferation of demands for more states as a means of obtaining an increased share of oil revenue (Ikelegbe, 2001: 145).

To address these challenges, there have been calls for restructuring the federation to take cognizance of ethnic considerations and promote greater justice and equality in the distribution of political and economic power (Murray, 2011: 201).

One proposal is the creation of a Union of Federations, with seven federations grouped along uni-ethnic lines (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo) and multi-ethnic lines for the remainder of the population (Movement for National Reformation, 1995).

Ultimately, addressing ethnic imbalance and promoting greater justice and equality in Nigeria's federal structure will require a nuanced and multifaceted approach that takes into account the country's complex history, cultural diversity, and economic challenges.

Federalism and State Formation, 1979.- Present

Nigeria's federal structure has been contested since its inception, with the country's social and economic inequality persistently making revenue allocation a contentious issue. The federal system, established in 1954, aimed to decentralize power, provide autonomy to regions, and ensure fair resource distribution. However, challenges have arisen, including disputes over resource allocation, revenue sharing, and power balance between the federal government and states.Nigeria's transition to a federal system of government occurred in 1979 and marked a significant turning point in the country's history (Amah, 2017, p. 123). The introduction of federalism was aimed at promoting national unity, stability, and development by devolving power to the states and local governments (Falola, 2009, p. 145). As Emmanuel Ibiam Amah noted, federalism is a system of governmental organization whereby two or more independent states agreed to form a common government while retaining their distinctive autonomy (Amah, 2017, p. 12).

The 1979 Constitution of Nigeria established a federal system of government, with a clear division of powers between the federal government, states, and local governments (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979). The Constitution also created a bicameral legislature, comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979). The introduction of federalism was a response to the country's complex ethnic and regional diversity, as well as the need to address the legacy of colonialism and promote national unity (Oyediran, 1979, p. 201).

Since 1979, Nigeria has experienced significant changes in its federal system of government. The country has had several constitutions, including the 1989 Constitution, the 1993 Constitution, and the 1999 Constitution, which is currently in force (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Each of these constitutions has introduced changes to the federal system, including the creation of new states, the reorganization of local governments, and the allocation of powers and resources between the federal government and the states (Ikelegbe, 2001, p. 123).

One of the key challenges facing Nigeria's federal system is the issue of revenue allocation. The country's revenue allocation formula has been a subject of controversy, with some states arguing that they do not receive a fair share of revenue (Mustapha, 2014, p. 201). This has led to tensions between the federal government and the states, as well as among the states themselves (Siollun, 2021, p. 145).

Another challenge facing Nigeria's federal system is the issue of state creation. Since 1979, Nigeria has created several new states, bringing the total number of states to 36 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, the creation of new states has been a subject of controversy, with some arguing that it has led to the proliferation of states and the erosion of local government autonomy (Achebe, 1983, p. 123).

In 1976, the Nigerian government introduced local government reforms aimed at strengthening local government autonomy and promoting grassroots development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). The reforms created a three-tier system of government, comprising the federal government, states, and local governments (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). However, the reforms have been criticized for not going far enough in promoting local government autonomy and for creating a system of government that is overly dependent on the federal government (Oyediran, 1979, p. 201).

The relationship between state and local governments in Nigeria has been a subject of controversy. The 1999 Constitution grants significant powers to state governments, including the power to create local governments and allocate resources to them (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, this has led to tensions between state governments and local governments, with some local governments arguing that they do not receive sufficient resources or autonomy (Ikelegbe, 2001, p. 123).

Nigeria's federal system has been tested by several conflicts, including the Niger Delta crisis, the Boko Haram insurgency, and the IPOB separatist movement (Mustapha, 2014, p. 201). The federal government has responded to these conflicts through a combination of military force and dialogue (Siollun, 2021, p. 145). However, the effectiveness of the federal government's response has been questioned, with some arguing that it has exacerbated the conflicts rather than resolving them (Falola, 2009, p. 145).The Nigerian federal system has undergone significant changes, evolving from three regions in 1954 to 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) today. Despite efforts to address challenges through constitutional reforms and revenue allocation commissions, issues persist. The system has been criticized for favoring certain ethnic groups, such as the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba, over others, like the Igbo and Ijaw (Falola, 2009: 123; Ikime, 1980: 156).

The practice of fiscal federalism in Nigeria has been described as a negation of true federalism, with the federal government controlling key areas like defense, foreign affairs, and monetary policy. This has led to

calls for restructuring and devolving more powers to states to address regional grievances and foster socio-political stability.

Challenges facing Nigeria's federal structure:

1. Revenue allocation disputes: The country's social and economic inequality has made revenue allocation a contentious issue.
2. Power imbalance: The federal government's control over key areas like defense, foreign affairs, and monetary policy has led to calls for restructuring and devolving more powers to states.
3. Ethnic favoritism: The system has been criticized for favoring certain ethnic groups over others.

Importance of federalism in Nigeria:

1. Broadened power-sharing base: Federalism allows marginalized political parties to hold office at the state or provincial level.
2. Innovative policy development: Federalism encourages innovation and experimentation in policy-making by allowing subnational units to create their own policies.
3. Written Constitution: A written constitution is essential for a federal government, providing a framework for governance.
4. Quick response to citizens' needs: State governments are more likely to respond to citizens' needs than the federal government.
5. Development of democratic responsibilities: Federalism promotes democratic responsibilities and capacities by providing opportunities for residents, legislators, and public officials to develop skills and fulfill democratic obligations.

The imperative for Nigeria to recalibrate its political and social engineering towards true federalism cannot be overstated. As the country continues to grapple with challenges of social justice, equity, inclusivity, and peace, it is essential to recognize the need for a more balanced and representative system of government.Contemporary examples illustrate the importance of federalism in promoting social justice and equity. For instance, the Niger Delta region, which is home to a significant portion of Nigeria's oil reserves, has long been marginalized and excluded from the decision-making process. The lack of representation and participation in the management of oil resources has led to environmental degradation, poverty, and conflict in the region (Ikelegbe, 2001: 123).

Similarly, the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast region of Nigeria has been linked to issues of marginalization, poverty, and exclusion. The lack of representation and participation in the political process has created a sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment among the population, which has contributed to the rise of extremist groups (Mustapha, 2014: 156).

In contrast, countries that have adopted federal systems of government have experienced greater social justice, equity, and inclusivity. For example, South Africa's post-apartheid constitution established a federal system of government, which has promoted greater representation and participation of marginalized groups (Murray, 2011: 201).

II.   Conclusion

Nigeria's federal system of government has undergone significant changes since 1979. While the system has promoted national unity and stability, it has also been criticized for its limitations, including the issue of revenue allocation, state creation, and local government autonomy. To address these limitations, Nigeria needs to reform its federal system to promote greater autonomy for local governments, address the issue of revenue allocation, and strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms. Nigeria's journey towards true federalism is imperative for promoting social justice, equity, inclusivity, and peace. As Chinua Achebe so eloquently puts it, "Let the eagle perch and let the egret perch, the one that refuses will end up with a broken neck" (Achebe, 1964: 123). This powerful African metaphor illustrates the need for Nigeria to recalibrate its political and social engineering towards real federalism, ensuring that all groups have a stake in the decision-making process and that no one is left behind.

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