

National integration and democratic consolidation in Nigeria

Phillip Oyadiran* and Adekeye J. Adeshola

Department of Public Administration, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

There have been sterile and robust debates on the issue of national integration as an indelible mark of unity. Democratic consolidation comes to mind when the heterogeneity and differences are seen as factors that cannot hinder our peaceful co-existence in a fair, just and egalitarian society where people's voices and inputs are significant. The feeling of national spirit is evident in the sensitivity of the leaders and the led in attending to national issues as touching the plights and yearnings of the citizens irrespective of background and other factors. This paper examined the factors militating against the continuous existence of Nigeria as a united, indissoluble and sovereign nation due to the perceived mistake of 1914 amalgamation by Lord Lugard. Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative technique of data collection through the content analysis of documents, reports, journals, books and articles. At the end of the study, it was discovered that the factors militating against the consolidation of the Nigerian nascent democracy are national questions such as the continuous agitation of resource control, constitutional amendment, minority/majority syndrome, revenue sharing formula, unjustifiable distribution of resources, activities of ethnic militias, unequal representation in the National Assembly, zoning/rotational presidency and corruption. Therefore, the study recommended for the convocation of sovereign national conference through which a true Nigerian constitution would emerge in favour of true federalism.

Keywords: National integration, democratic consolidation, federalism, sovereign national conference, constitution.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: philloy2000@yahoo.com. Tel: 08055247905.

INTRODUCTION

There is a popular slogan that "the problem of Nigerian Federation was as a result the mistake of 1914 Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by Lord Lugard. However, most Nations of the world that are ostensibly yet to face halve of the turbulence experienced in Nigeria since 1914 amalgamation have disintegrated. Instead of Nigeria to disintegrate, the centripetal forces appear to be waxing stronger after a supposedly dicey moment. For instance, the first major historical antecedent that would have disintegrated Nigeria was the Civil War which took place between 1967 and 1970. The second episode occurred in June, 12, 1993 when the election of M.K.O Abiola was annulled by the then Military Head of State, General Ibrahim Badamonsi Babangida. The third scenario was the period of interregnum that trailed the demise of

President Umaru Yar'Adua while the final acid test of Nigeria unity was decided in 2015 general election which led to the overthrow of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) by the opposition Party, All Progressive Congress (APC).

The choice of a federal system by Nigeria as a nation was as a result of fear of domination by the various federating units since Nigeria is heterogeneous societies which consist of diverse culture, traditions, customs, religion, nationalities, race, tribes and languages. According to Olawale (1987) "a federal system is frequently the case in States where the people are not ready to surrender all powers to the central government". Therefore, a lot of negative predictions have been made about the continuity of Nigeria as a united and indissoluble country. However, instead of Nigeria to

disintegrate, there appear to be unity in diversity. In fact the sustenance of the hard earned Nigeria's nascent democracy since 1999 have been threatened on several occasions due to growth and deployment of ethnic and religious militia groups such as MASSOB, OPC, Niger Delta Militant, Bakassi Boys, Boko Haram, and a host of others. In light of the above, this paper seeks to critically assess the factors militating against national integration and democratic consolidation in Nigeria in efforts to determining whether the fourth republic can survive the onslaught against by internal and external forces. Also, the study shall suggest possible ways of ensuring democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve its goals, this paper utilizes secondary method of data collection in form of content analysis of documents, records, reports and periodical articles. To this end, several publications have been consulted on issue regarding national integration and democratic consolidation in the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo, Yar' Adua / Jonathan and Muhammadu Burahi. The study also involves a review of the relevant literatures on this matter.

Content analysis

National integration can equally be referred to as nation-building, national unity, national cohesion, national loyalty and oneness. It can equally means: unity of purpose, agreement and common position to come together as an indivisible or indissoluble national entity. According to Duverger (1976), national integration is a "process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based on an order its members regard as equitably harmonious". This refers to a situation where by members of a community formed a united front to live together in peaceful co-existence. It was also conceived as:

a process by which members of a social system develop linkages so that the boundaries of the system persists over time and the boundaries of sub-systems become less consequential in affecting behaviour. In this process, members of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community (Morrison et al., 1972).

The above quotation perceived national integration as a situation whereby members of a community have sense of belonging among themselves. In the words of Coleman and Rosberg (1964), national integration is the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a

homogeneous political community. This involves laying more emphases on what unites a nation than those things that divide them. It may equally means "unity in diversity" when such nationalities consist of a heterogeneous society. This can only happen when members of such communities are ready to compromise their agitations and treat each other justly, fairly and equally. Also, disputes and area of disagreement must be settled in a non-violence and peaceful manner devoid of bias, sentiment, favouritism and prejudice. For the purpose of this paper, national integration means a selfless and patriotic union of different nationalities and other sub-cultural groups which formed a common front in pursuit of national unity through a harmonious and peaceful co-existence.

It is pertinent to determine the form of government that can guarantee national integration since military administration has become an aberration. In fact, there is a general saying that "the worst form of civilian administration is better than the most benevolence military regime". Currently, military regimes have become unpopular in the comity of nations since democratic governments have received general acceptance globally. Democracy is a global maiden which every nation woos. The democratic obsession is sweeping across the whole world, from the nation-states in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to Africa and Asia. It shows that democracy has gathered momentum across the globe as a result of its immense advantages... (Bello-Imam and Agba, 2004:1).

The origin of democracy can be traced to the ancient Greeks City State which first practiced it in a direct form. According to Sarabjit (2002), the term "democracy" was derived from the Greek word (demokratia) "rule of the people". The word (demos) connotes "people" and (kratos) means "power". Also, Abraham Lincoln, who is generally referred to as the father of democracy conceived it as "government of the people by the people and for the people". Elements considered essential in democracy include; freedom of expression, assembly and press. These citizens are adequately informed and able to vote according to their own best interests as they see them. Many people use the term "democracy" as shorthand for liberal democracy, which may include elements such as political pluralism; equality before the law; the right to petition elected officials for redress of grievances; due process; civil liberties; human rights; and elements of civil society outside the government (Ntalalaja, 2000).

The concept of democracy can therefore be regarded as a governmental system that involves the widest spectrum of participation, either through elections or through the administration of the accepted policies. It is a government

founded on the principle of rule of law which is against arbitrariness, highhandedness, dictatorship and also antithesis to military regime (Dauda and Avidime, 2007).

Democratic consolidation is a function of national integration. By implication, it is difficult, if not impossible to achieve democratic consolidation without national integration. Basically, democratic consolidation is an uninterrupted transition from one democratic government to another in a peaceful, non-violence, free and fair manner. According to Diamond (1999), democratic consolidation is the process of achieving broad and deep legitimating such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. It also connotes the act of reducing the probability of the breakdown of the system to the point where democracy can be said that it will persist. Some scholars view it as regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game. It manifest under enhanced economic development, developed democratic culture, stable party system. Democratic consolidation cannot be attained in Nigeria until stability is attained. This therefore shows that though under democratic regime, Nigeria is striving for political stability. For instance, election in Nigeria is still characterized with violence, rigging, use of thugs, killing, snatching of ballot boxes, militarism and all manner of intimidation. For democratic consolidation to occur in Nigeria there must be free and fair election, maintenance of rule of law, political maturity, issue based campaign, good governance, maintenance of law and order, political stability, independent judiciary, freedoms of the press, assembly and expression, respect and protection for political pluralism, electoral reforms and respect for human right of the ordinary citizens.

FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

An adage says that “the Nigerian federation is a fraudulent togetherness”. This is not unconnected with the fact that there has never been a time when the Nigerian people agree to live together as a nation. It is like a marriage organized for two individuals without seeking their consents whether they intend to live together as husband and wife. Nigeria is made up of about 250 ethnic groups and 350 languages with three dominant tribes (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo). The formation of the Nigeria federation can equally be likened to a situation whereby different kinds of animals were to live together in the same environment. What method can be adopted to ensure sanity and harmonious co-existence among them? If a useful answer can be provided for the above question, then national integration

and democratic consolidation can be achieved in Nigeria.

According to Ebenezer (2014), the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria lied against itself and the Nigerian people by falsely impersonating the persons of the Nigerian people as if they were responsible for its writing. The preamble of the document reads: “We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: having firmly and solemnly resolved: to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign Nation under God dedicated to the promotion of Inter-African solidarity, world peace, international cooperation and understanding: and to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of Freedom, Equality and Justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people: do hereby make and give to ourselves the following constitution” (FGN, 1999). The reference point in the excerpts above is the emphasis “we the people”. The document was loudly affirming the process under which it was given birth as if referring to the same process which produced the American Constitution in 1778 in which peoples of diverse interest, values, and origin but with same aspiration and orientation met in San Francisco to deliberate and give to themselves a document which truly represents their ideas of a system of government, yearnings and aspirations. Surprisingly, the emphasis in the excerpts denoted by the words written in capital letters received much attention as if they truly happened. In view of the above, certain factors which militated against national integration and democratic consolidation in Nigeria are discussed below:

Constitutional crises

There has never been a time when Nigerian people as a nation jointly agreed to be governed under a constitution. The 1960, 1979, 1988 and 1999 constitution was drafted by the military junta. Therefore, the journey through first, second, third and fourth republic has not been a smooth one. Although, the constitution claimed that “we the Nigerian people agreed together to be governed under a constitution” but the statement is far from being correct. The question to ask is “who are those that constitute the Nigerian people?” Is it the military, political elite or judiciary? Since the inception of Fourth Republic in 1999, the National Assembly has not been able to amend the constitution successfully. Also, most of the National Conferences organized for the purpose of coming up with a true Nigerian Constitution have ended in stalemate. Until the opinions of Nigerian people are sought before we can have a legitimate constitution drafted. Issues that required urgent attention by the constitution include: the kind of federalism to operate, local government autonomy, succession in office after the death of president or Governor, rotational presidency, federal character, legislative list, revenue generation and sharing formula.

Minority/majority syndrome

Every citizens of Nigeria has the right to hold political offices but the idea of protecting the interest of majority at the expense of minority in terms of appointment, allocation of resources, and admission have heated up the polity. The minority/majority issue is one problem that threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria as one indivisible and indissoluble geo-political entity. In the First Republic, the Action Group (AG) was dominated by the Yoruba in the West; Northern People's Congress (NPC) was dominated by the Hausa/Fulani in the North while the NCNC was dominated by the Igbo in the East. The domination by these three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo) was so pervasive that the minority groups in these regions made frantic but futile efforts to liberate themselves. Thus, we had Mid-West State movement, the Calabar, Ogoja-River State (CORS) movement and the movement for the Middle-belt State. The period between 1951 and 1959 saw what Professor Elaigwu rightly called "aggressive Ethno-Regionalism" a potent virus of disunity.

Resource control

The federal government is very overbearing as it controls about 80% of the country's resources leaving state and local governments at its mercy. Where regions, states or geographical zones have the power to control their resources and to have access to the necessary funds for community development programs, democracy thrives. In fact, it is only true federalism that can guarantee fairness and justice in the society. More importantly, it enables each locality to progress according to the aspiration of the people. A durable and enforceable people's constitution is an indispensable tool to make this feasible, as the constitution protects the people and determines socio-political activities in a society. As noted in the philosophy of Aristotle "we can decide the identity of a state only by examining the form (and contents) of its constitution". In Nigeria we lack the reality of such a federal constitution and true federal state (Awuudu, 2012).

Expectedly, the Governors of the 17 southern states rose from its third summit in Benin City, the Edo State Capital, March 27, 2001, and proclaimed its preference for fiscal Federalism based on the principles of national interest, need and derivation. Its communiqué at the end defines resource control as "the practice of true federalism and natural law in which the federating units express their rights to primarily control the natural resources within their borders and make agreed contribution towards the maintenance of common services of the government at the centre. The division of powers into exclusive, concurrent and residual legislative lists in 1999 Constitution has made it difficult for any State to control its resources. Also, Section 162(1) of the Constitution categorically stated that "all funds collected

by the Federal Government with the exception of the personal income tax of the police, armed forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja accrues to the Federation Account. The idea behind the 13th percent derivation for the development of oil producing states was in response to the agitation for resource control. The continuous vandalisation of oil installations, bunkering and illegal refineries in Niger Delta can be traced to issues of resource control.

Ethnic militias

It was high hopes in 1999 when Nigeria returned to civil rule after long years of military rule which many have persistently blamed for the nation's underdevelopment. For the citizenry then, it was freedom at great cost and must be jealously guarded. However, the resurgence of ethnic militias nearly derailed the consolidation of the hard earned democracy. The most prominent among these militias include the Niger Delta militias like the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, and the Chikoko Movement. Other recent and more visible militias include the O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, Arewa People's Congress (APC) and Boko Haram. The activities of ethnic militia have threatened the survival of the Nigeria's nascent democracy since 1999 to date. Persistent attacks by ethnic militias can lead to military incursion into politics which may have catastrophic effect on democratic governance.

Uneven distribution of basic infrastructure and social amenities

The location of social amenities from experience is usually motivated by political considerations. Political leaders and the elite usually site industries, roads, hospitals, schools, electricity and portable water schemes in their villages or sometimes at the backyards of their houses at the expense of other desirable and suitable places. Worse still, these political leaders use this as a veritable weapon to frustrate or punish their political opponents and this does not augur well for our federal arrangement which presupposes equitable distribution of these amenities. Also, appointments into key offices are not evenly distributed as they are done in violation of the federal principles. Appointments are dictated by the whims and caprices of the political leaders of the day.

Corruption

Corruption is a persistent phenomenon in Nigeria.

President Muhammadu Buhari defined corruption as the greatest form of human right violation. Since the creation of modern public administration in the country, there have been cases of official misuse of funds and resources. The rise of public administration and the discovery of oil and natural gas are two major events seen to have led to the increase in corrupt practices in the country. The government has aimed at containing corruption through the enactment of laws and the enforcement of integrity systems, but success has been slow (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). This is not unconnected with the fact that war against corruption has ethnic coloration. Everybody is ready to defend his or her people accused of corruption since they belong to the same ethnic group. Corruption has created a lot of tension in the Nigeria's body polity.

Military intervention in politics

Before the infamous military incursion into governance in Nigerian politics, life was good and expectation for a better and greater nation was high. The military intervention into Nigerian politics is an invention introduced by the military coup of 1966. Military intervention is an act made by active members of the military heads, outside the conventions of the military institution with the aim of disrupting the political status quo, in the pursuit of their political interest. The truth of the matter is that real federalism has never and may never be practiced in a military dispensation given its command structure and the traditional concentration of powers at the centre which negate true federal ideals.

Greed and selfishness on the part of political elite

There obviously exists insatiable greed amongst our political elites. This has so eaten into their hearts that they are only interested in amassing wealth. Consequently, they lack principles, sincerity of purpose, vision and the will-power to carry the country forward. The "chop-chop" syndrome or the sharing of the so called "National cake" has overtaken their sense of responsibility. Their major pro-occupation is partisan politics as they engage themselves in endless blackmail, mud-sliding, thuggery and deliberate frustration of one another efforts. This has made everybody to be tired with the practice of democratic government in Nigeria.

RELENTLESS BATTLE FOR THE SURVIVAL OF DEMOCRACY IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

The Nigerian citizens were full of hope and great expectations when General Abdulsami Abubakar handed over power to a democratically elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 after 16 years of military rule. On assumption of Office, President

Olusegun Obasanjo in his inaugural speech promised to fight corruption and assured Nigerians that the activities of government would not be business as usual. However, the opposition party, All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) claimed that the election was characterized with irregularities such as; rigging, snatching of ballot boxes, thuggery, extra judicial killing and violence. Therefore, the Presidential candidate of ANPP, General Muhamadu Buhari threatened to embark on mass action. Subsequently, the aftermath of the election witnessed sporadic outbursts of communal violence across the country. Clashes between religious and ethnic groups, often spawned by local political disputes, have killed thousands of Nigerians.

In April 2003 Obasanjo was reelected to another term, winning the election by a wide margin. International observers criticized the election for widespread incidents of electoral fraud in some states. In 2006 Obasanjo and his supporters attempted to amend Nigeria's constitution so that Obasanjo could go for third term in office. However, the effort failed. In the presidential elections in April 2007 Obasanjo's hand-picked successor, Umaru Yar'Adua, won in a landslide with about 70 percent of the vote. Opposition parties charged fraud, and international election observers described the voting process as "flawed." Yar'Adua took office in May (Obadan, 2004). As head of the People's Democratic Party, Obasanjo's influence over Nigeria's government and its policies was expected to continue. From 2007 till date the security situation in the country has worsened, and a major contributor to this serious security challenge is the menace of Boko Haram insurgents.

The Global Terrorism Index in 2015 ranked Boko Haram as the world's deadliest terror group since the insurgents have killed 20,000 people and displaced 2.3 million from their homes. After its founding in 2002, Boko Haram's increasing radicalization led to a violent uprising in July 2009 in which its leader was summarily executed. Its unexpected resurgence, following a mass prison break in September 2010, was accompanied by increasingly sophisticated attacks, initially against soft targets, and progressing in 2011 to include suicide bombings of police buildings and the United Nations office in Abuja. The government's establishment of a state of emergency at the beginning of 2012, extended in the following year to cover the entire northeast of Nigeria, led to an increase in both security force abuses and militant attacks. Out of 2.3 million people displaced by the conflict since May 2013, at least 250,000 have left Nigeria and fled into Cameroon, Chad or Niger. Boko Haram killed over 6,600 in 2014. The group has carried out mass abductions including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

After the Jonathan administration handed over power to General Muhammadu Buhari in May 29, 2015, the problem of insecurity continued unabated. In December 2015 Muhammadu Buhari, the President of Nigeria, claimed that Boko Haram was "technically defeated." On

20 September a series of bombings occurred in Maiduguri and Monguno. The attacks followed an announcement by Shekau refuting the army's claims of defeat. A military spokesman stated that the event showed the "high level of desperation" of Boko Haram. The Arewa Consultative Forum released a statement condemning the bombings and commending the military offensive: The ACF condemns in strong terms the continued use of suicide bombers by Boko Haram terrorists to kill innocent people in the name of a religious war, as no religion condones such cruel and barbaric act. The ACF commended the military and other security agencies for the continued onslaught on the terrorists' enclaves and hideouts, thereby dislodging them from their strong holds. The ACF urges the military not to be deterred by the cowardly act of the Boko Haram terrorists, as their renewed effort and determination will soon end the insurgency. The ACF also appeals to the military to intensify its synergy of sharing intelligence with the community.

CONCLUSION

Democracy was welcomed in Nigeria with high expectation and enthusiasm since it has the capacity of ensuring political stability and socioeconomic development. But this hope was soon dashed as the political landscape of the nation was turn to a battle field. Instead of peace, stability, development and an egalitarian society, the nation is now characterized and marred by political instability. It is a surprise to many political observers that Nigeria is able to survive the onslaught against the successful handover of power from one civilian president to another since 1999. The battle for the soul of democracy in Nigeria has been formidable and relentless. Only few people believed that Nigeria would have survived the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections due to negative predictions being peddled both locally and internationally by political analysts and observers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are provided as possible solutions to the numerous problems confronting the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria after a thorough review of the issues presented above:

1. There is urgent need to call for a sovereign national conference where the Nigerian people would be in position to discuss the myriad of challenges confronting Nigeria as a nation. The outcome of the conference would be the platform on which a brand new constitution which would favour the operation of true federalism shall be drafted.
2. There is need for the urgent review of the current

revenue generation formula in favour of state and local governments in attempt to boost their sources of revenue drive. The will reverse the current practice of feeding bottle federalism where both the State and Local governments depend on allocation from the Federation Account.

3. The current practice of rotational presidency should be enshrined in the constitution in attempts to ensure that the people in six geo-political zones are given the opportunity of emerging as presidents of Nigeria. This will go a long way in solving the current security challenges confronting the nation
4. The virtue of handwork, sincerity, probity and accountability, honesty and scholarship should replace the crave for the accusation of ill gotten wealth.
5. The current war against corruption should be fought and won since there can be no peace in the face of maladministration and bad governance.
6. The Nigeria electoral process should be overhauled to prevent greedy and selfish politicians from buying their way trough. Any politicians who fail to fulfill their electoral promises should be voted out through a free and fair election.

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