

The Nigerian Political Structure and the Urgent Need for Restructuring

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Abstract

In recent times, there has been a wide range clamour for the dismantling of the Nigerian polity as presently structured. This constitutes the bone of contention in this current study. Thus, the study conducted an assessment of the current political structure in Nigeria against the background of the spate of agitations for restructuring by a wide spectrum of the community. Data was obtained from secondary sources such as – books, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers and the internet. Wheare's (1964) Version of the American Federal Model was adopted as its theoretical framework just as the mode of analysis is content analysis. Results emanating from the study revealed that the present political structure in the country is most unacceptable to many Nigerians who believe that they have been denied control and access to resources in their home lands, states, and zones which constitute a threat to the fragile peace in the country. The study recommended that the issue of restructuring of the country be addressed urgently to avoid the consequences of agitations and imminent civil strife.

Keywords: *Political structure, Restructuring, Agitations, Resource control, Civil strife*

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Background to the Study

State creation has been a front burner issue in the Nigerian political space since the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by Lord Lugard. In the wake of the institutionalization of the Willink Commission (1956), there were agitations for the creation of additional states. For instance, there were agitations for creation of states/regions in each of the then existing regions: viz, from the North, there was the demand for the creation of the Middle Belt region/state; from the East a Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) States and from the West, apart from the demand by the region's minorities for the creation of the Mid West, Willink (1956) observed that:

There were also demands for new states from among the majority ethnic group itself-the Yorubas. This refers to the demands for a central Yoruba state which would cover the provinces of Oyo and Ibadan, and for an Ondo central state, which would cover the Ondo province only. Although each of these provinces comprised at least 85 percent Yoruba, they contained also the main strength among the Yorubas of the NCNC opposition to the Action Group.

The agitations notwithstanding, however, there were no state creations prior to independence. It is for this reason that state creation in the Nigerian federation has continued to be very volatile and contentious. Scholarly opinions vary widely, almost creating confusion with particular reference to the timing of the first exercise. This is why it is necessary to go down one or two steps along the memory lane to clear this confusion.

From historical perspective, state creation in Nigeria dates back to 1963 with the carving out of the Mid West from the former western region by the Balewa administration. The nation was further divided into twelve states by the Gowon administration in 1967. This progressive increase in the number of territorial units continued in 1976 when the Murtala regime created an additional seven states, totaling 19. Then came the General Babangida regime which in two separate exercises between 1987 and 1991 created additional states. Thus bequeathing a 30-state structure on the country. In 1996, the Abacha administration created six more states to make the territorial units of the country 36.

For quite some time now, probably since 20years ago, there has been agitations by individuals, geo-cultural groups, geopolitical associations for the restructuring of Nigeria. The various heads of states and government who had been in power over the period did not see reasons for a serious consideration of these agitations. The closest they had ever come is to call a national conference as Jonathan did in 2014 or establish a reconciliatory commission as done by Obasanjo or issue a press statement as the presidency (Buhari) did in 2017 which was reported in the front page of the Nation of 31st May 2017. Three major reasons have been given for this non-challance on the part of heads of government on the issue of agitation. First, some people believe the exercise cannot move the nation forward, second, prior to 2015, the people who were calling for restructuring were neither specific about the scope, modalities or even the timing of such exercise, third, up till 2015, most of the calls for restructuring had been from individuals and groups from the southern part of

the country especially South-south geopolitical zone. Others from the North probably think that such agitation is because the South controls the major mineral resources which constitute the mainstay of the nation's economy.

In recent times (since 2016) however, prominent northerners are joining their southern counterparts in the agitation. Former vice president, Atiku Abubakar, GCFR recently called for restructuring Nigeria. Again, it was also recently reported that the speaker of the House of Representatives suggested constitutional amendment that will deliver the local government from the hands of governors, which is actually a form of agitation for restructuring. Thus, the agitations continue to pour in from all parts of the country.

Statement of the Problem

Politics is all about interests and democracy is believed to provide the best platform whereby such interests and needs are met. Restructuring has become the latest buzzword in the political landscape with political and non-political actors pushing forward ideas of the word that was not too long ago an anathema to many state actors. Given the view of some that Nigeria is presently a federation, it is not surprising that different political actors would give different perspectives to the concept of restructuring. Whatever the perspective, the fact that the clamor now comes from various parts of the country makes it a matter of urgent concern. Against this background, this study seeks to investigate the need for restructuring in this most populous black enclave-Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

Generally this study seeks to evaluate the need for restructuring the Nigerian polity. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the political reasons for agitations for restructuring the Nigerian current federal structure.
2. Identify the economic reasons for agitations for a restructured Nigerian polity.

Research Questions

This study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the political reasons for agitations for the restructuring of Nigeria?
2. What economic factors favor the agitations to restructure the Nigerian nation?

Conceptual Clarification

Federalism: This is a system that creates a division of governing power and authority between national (federal) government and regional (state) governments. It is commonly identified with the theory of federal government. Going by this interpretation, by the Anglo-Saxon school, federalism is a specific form of government, a constitutional government with a historically determined judicial structure. There is therefore, an American federalism, a Swiss federalism, a German federalism, and Australian federalism, etc.

In a federal system, the functions of government are divided in such a way that the relationship between the legislature which has authority over the whole territory and those legislatures which have authority over parts of the territory is not the relationship of superiors to subordinates but it is a relationship of co-ordinate partners in the governmental process (Wheare, 1990).

Federalism as used in political science and legal scholarship, refers to, “a means of governing a polity that grants a partial autonomy to geographically defined subdivisions of the polity” (Matcom et al., 2008). Clearly, such a regime lies somewhere between a fully unitary state and an alliance of separate ones. A political entity that is governed by a single central government making all significant decisions cannot be described as federal without abandoning the ordinary meaning of the term.

Political structure: Politics is, “the process of making decisions that applies to members of a group” (Hagu and Martini 2003). It refers to, “achieving and exercising positions of governance - organized control over a human community, particularly a state” (Merriam-Webstar, 2018). A political structure is also referred to as a political system.

It is a set of institutions concerned with formulating and implementing the collective goals of a society or of groups within it. Political systems have institutions, agencies, or structures such as political parties, parliaments, bureaucracies, and courts which carry on specific activities, or perform functions which in turn enable the political system to formulate and enforce politics (Almond, Powell and Mundt, 1993).

Restructuring: Against the background of the view that Nigeria is presently a federation, various political actors have given different perspectives to restructuring. Some of those that have given life to the concept of restructuring are General Ibrahim Babangida, former vice President Atiku Abubakar and some prominent democracy activists. They present the following ideas on what restructuring means in the Nigerian context. For General Ibrahim Babangida, the advocacy is for “devolution of powers to the extent that more responsibilities are given to states while the federal government is vested with the responsibility to oversee our foreign policy, defence and economy” (Aziken, 2017).

In the views of Atiku Abubakar,

There is no doubt that many of our states are not viable, and have not been so once you take away the federation allocations from Abuja. We have to find creative ways to make them viable in a changed federal system. We can constitute a body of non-partisan experts to suggest other ideas. But in all, we must devolve more powers and resources from the federal government and de-emphasize federal allocations as the source of sustenance of states. We need to start producing again and collecting taxes to run our governments in a more sustainable way with greater transparency and accountability. (Atiku Abubakar in Vanguard, 30 June 2017).

In an interview granted to Daily Sun Newspapers, Professor A.B.C Nwosu, onetime political Adviser to President Obasanjo, viewed restructuring as follows; Let us change the restructure. What is the structure? There is too much power at the centre. The federal government has too much power, too much responsibility, too much money, much to waste.....

Is there anybody who does not see that the federal government has too much power and too much responsibility? Is there anybody who does not see that over 60 to 70 percent spent on recurrent expenditure is wrong? Is there anybody who does not see that the federal government has over 800 parastatals and that it is wrong? Is there anybody who does not see that having over 42 ministries is wrong?

In another interview by Dr. Arthur Nwankwo, he defined the restructuring process as:

The reinvention of the 1963 constitution; constitutionalizing the six geopolitical zones as federating units and devolving considerable powers to the regions. Restructuring simply means divesting the central government of certain powers and limiting its areas of influence to such issues as fiscal policies, military defence, foreign policy, immigration and national elections.

Restructuring does not imply the merger of states as some people would prefer. Rather, it is a thorough process that allows each region to control its resources and pay royalties to the central government. It is a process that is anchored on the principles of “from each according to each according to his needs” (Nwankwo, Guardian newspaper, 2017). There are several studies on Nigeria's political structure and the need for restructuring. Adesoji (2017) studied the structure of Nigeria's restructuring rhetoric. The paper reviews the recent ongoing agitations for restructuring Nigeria with a view to understanding the structure and reconciling the views. The paper examined the views and contributions from former leaders and public office holders including former president, vice president and former governors. It also reviewed the views of the academia, civil societies, professionals, students, politicians, religious leaders, serving governors etc. Further, the paper observed that, laudable as the call sounds, there is a wide disagreement over the real meaning of restructuring or what exactly needs to be restructured. It reached the conclusion that unless the structure of the clamored Nigeria's restructuring is understood, the whole brouhaha might be a travesty eventually.

Another study titled “Nigeria's Federalism and state reorganization and restructuring: attempts at national integration through fragmentation was conducted by Adetoye (2016). The study examined the notion that federalism, additional state creation and the adoption of the federal character principle in sharing national resources (at the federal, state, and local government levels) among the various peoples that constitute the country, would or could engender unity, covariance and integration among the disparate Nigerian population. It finds out that inspite of the fact that Nigeria has assumed a 36 state structure, from a 3-region structure in 19960 at independence, further agitations and demands for creation of

additional states have not abated, so also is ethnic attachment and primordial sentiments among the lingua-cultural groups in the country. The paper noted that this is evidenced in the various ethno-religious conflicts that pervade the 'nation'.

Again, a study by Suberu (2014), titled, “the Nigerian federal System, Performance, Problems and Prospects”, observed that the transformation and centralization of the Nigerian federation by 'soldiers and oil', has produced contentious and contradictory outcomes. Many commentators describe the current centralized system of federalism as a veritable source of, rather than a credible solvent for, the country's multi-faced crises of unity, democracy, and development. Thus, as listed by Egwemi (2008) and Omodia (2009), a number of problems are associated with the current political structure in Nigeria. These include, electoral fraud, the politics of zoning, Godfatherism, defections, etc.

Theoretical Framework

Wheare's (1964) Theory of Federalism

The adoption of this theory is predicated upon the fact that this scholar is universally acclaimed as the reputed father of modern federalism. The doctrine of federalism, while recognizing the inevitability of contracts among the components of the federation or any federation, prescriptively advocates mechanism for constitutionally dealing with such conflicts to include the following;

1. The division of governmental responsibilities between levels of government.
2. A written constitution spelling out this division and from which federal and state authorities derive their powers.
3. A judiciary independent of both levels of government that acts as an arbiter in cases where there are conflicts over a number of jurisdictions.

“The federal arrangement emphasizes equal supremacy of the various levels each in its respective fields of operation- the citizens of the federation being currently under two authorities and owing loyalties to them” (Wheare, 1964 in Akindele).Put together, Wheare views federalism as a form of government which embodies, “the federal principles” (Vanloon and Whittington, 1976).However, the workability of these principles is contingent on the recognition of the dual prerequisites of federalism which according to him,

Firstly, the communities of states concerned (i.e. federating) must desire to be under a single independent government for some purposes....secondly, they must desire at the same time to retain or establish independent regional government in some matters at least.(Whittington, 1976)

Research Methodology

In this descriptive study, data obtained from secondary sources are synthesized by content analyses in the following sequence:

Research Question One (1): what are the political reasons in favour of the agitations for restructuring in Nigeria?

Writing in the Vanguard Newspaper of the 19th September, 2017, Yinka Odumakin asserts that;

Anyone who has honestly observed how Nigeria has steadily and systematically moved from being a country of great promise to a country of great problems; anyone who knows that you have to look back to the past, instead of looking forward, to see this country's best years of national and regional progress, its years of great public and missionary schools and great education of proud infrastructural achievements and the best life experiences---any such honest observer? Can easily list more than a hundred reasons why Nigeria needs restructuring to stop the drift towards the development abyss.

Yinka (2017), goes ahead to cite some of such reasons as follows:

1. A Nigeria earnestly restructured, is a Nigeria positively restored: a country restored to a previously-travelled path of development, progress, rapid educational advancement, robust and committed public service, which genuinely and competently served the Nigerian public-both at federal and regional levels. Restructuring will bring back THE CONDITIONS for a return to that golden era of public service and effective governance, regionally and at the center.
2. A restructured Nigeria will enhance leadership-building culture where a truly federal system allows each region to locally identify leadership for public governance, nurture and closely monitor such leaders for hard work and spirit of public service, focused on the development of each region, at a pace that reflect the quantum of each region's effort and efficient use of local resources; indeed, the rivalry for regional success resulting from a truly federating Nigeria, will boost sustainable development across all zones of the country.
3. A Nigeria restructured is a Nigeria where the central government along with its lower-level federating constituents, will, and must, be strong.
4. A restructured Nigeria will enhance the removal of the current PERVERSE-INCENTIVES SYSTEM, where many people seek elected and appointive government positions, not to develop the God-given resources of their local areas and local lands, or add to the wealth of their communities, but instead to feed on and loot the unearned monthly allocations from the Centre; a restructured Nigeria will reduce the current mentality and room for manoeuvre by elected and appointed leaders to treat the Abuja monthly allocations, as part of Nigeria current 'Awoof-Economy of unearned monthly allocations'.
5. A restructured Nigeria where every area, region or zone of the country will be able to devote more thinking times, conceptualization research, exploration and analysis to its mineral and agricultural resources, with a view to developing an economic value-change from them, which is the first serious step towards the development of a manufacturing capacity across the country.
6. A restructured Nigeria is a Nigeria where we no longer practice the current system of FUREED EQUALIZATION of 'ever-downwards' educational opportunities across the country, just to ensure federal character, a restructured governance

structure will ensure investment of extra efforts and programmes to bring low-performing students in the Northern part of Nigeria up to the level of better performing students elsewhere in the country.

There are strong empirical evidences in support of the need for the urgent restructuring in Nigeria. Yaqub (2016) in his investigation on “what is restructuring in the era of change in Nigeria politics” exposed the inevitability of restructuring after citing issues, challenges etc bedeviling Nigeria's ascendancy to the enviable height of global industrial grants. Particularly the paper sounded a note of warning to the effect that a second civil war may result if Nigeria is not restructured and that no nation ever survives a second civil war.

All six reasons are as economic as they are political. Thus research questions one (1) and two (2) are adequately addressed and answered.

Findings

Following the analysis in this study, several findings may be listed;

1. Federalism as a model of government encourages and enhances resource control by some communities and states. The current political structure has failed to guarantee such resource control. There is need for a shift in paradigm.
2. The delay in restructuring could lead to second civil war which Nigeria as a nation cannot afford. A second civil war borne out of the current political structure will eventually lead to disintegration. Thus, the nation is exposed to two options – restructuring or disintegration.
3. A restructured Nigeria will enhance development in its entirety as the federating units will be forced to stick to their natural endowments either along the line of the natural resources entrepreneurial ingenuity or human skills.
4. Restructuring Nigeria which genuinely identifies weak region/states/communities with a view to ascertaining the manner of assistance to prop them up.
5. Restructuring Nigeria will stimulate healthy competition rather than unnecessary rivalry for purposes of sustainable growth and development.

Conclusion

Going by the interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon school, federalism is a specific form of government, a constitutional model within a historically determined judicial structure. The system grants a partial autonomy to geographically delineated subdivisions of a given polity which usually allows for control of resources by the regions in which such resources exist. By so doing, the model enhances a sense of belonging, equal participation in governance and peaceful co-existence of citizens in these subdivisions. Unfortunately, the current political structure in Nigeria has failed to guarantee the benefits of this form of government. Hence, agitations for restructuring. Such agitations sometimes degenerate to outright separation and therefore, constitute serious threat to the corporate existence of this nation. There is an urgent need for the restructuring of Nigeria to avert imminent disaster. The early warning signals are here for anyone to see. God's blessing abounds in Nigeria if restructured.

Suggestions

Against the backdrop of the findings listed above, the following suggestions suffice;

1. The federal government of Nigeria should take steps to end the unnecessary rivalry among federating units in the country through the urgent restructuring.
2. There are early warning signals on the imminent looming civil strife which will result from the delay in restructuring the polity. Government must learn to stop ignoring these signs.
3. A genuine desire to a speeding attainment of the lofty ideas of sustainable development in the country can only come through restructuring. Government should also take steps in this regard.
4. Disintegration of the Nigeria polity is not an option. Government must initiate adequate constitutional amendments to facilitate the process of restructuring.
5. Political and economic factors affecting restructuring in Nigeria should be addressed constitutionally to provide enduring solutions and avoid ugly eruptions in the future.

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