



SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS AND NIGERIA'S STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

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Abstract: This study addresses the reasons of separatist agitations in Nigeria since its inception as a British colony and protectorate, as well as potential remedies for halting the country's fragmentation. The stability of the Federation of Nigeria, which was formed by colonialists from a jumble of ethno-cultural groupings, has frequently been threatened by separatist agitations by Nigeria's different ethnic groups. The continuance of separatist is attributed to the ethnocultural diversity of Nigerian peoples and their mutual dread of dominance, which is exacerbated by divisive colonial policies. Furthermore, following decades of military rule, over-centralization of the federal system has ensured Hausa/Fulani hegemony in the federation and subjugated the states to the centre, undermining the underlying principles of Nigeria's federal arrangement that no ethnic group shall be dominated by others and that states shall be encouraged to develop at their own paces according to their respective fiscal capacities and comparative advantage. Re-inventing Nigeria's federalism in line with its basic principles through devolution of authority from the centre to the component states, which will strengthen the states and lessen the center's dominance, is the solution to the ongoing threats of separatist.

Keywords: Nigeria, Federalism, Separatism, Political Stability.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's past is littered with separatist agitations. Given the diversity of Nigeria's peoples and differences in population, land mass, natural resource endowment, educational, social, and economic development, this may not surprise attentive watchers of the country's political growth (Adamolekun, 1991). These discrepancies, it is argued, have bred mutual mistrust, acrimony, and fear of ethnic dominance not only among Nigeria's 250 ethnic groups, but also within the majority groups themselves and between them and the ethnic minority (Afigbo, 1991). The centrifugal pressures caused by Nigeria's ethnocultural diversity have continued to stoke separatist in the country, with each disadvantaged ethnic minority pushing for more freedom to express themselves (Bolleyer and Thorlakson, 2012). The military dictatorship that controlled Nigeria for the longest time after independence effectively suppressed

these tendencies through ruthless force, but without necessarily exterminating them. However, since May 29, 1999, when the country returned to democratic rule, separatist agitations have resurfaced, polarising the country along ethnic, regional, and religious lines, supporting Emerson's theory that democratic institutions can exacerbate ethnic divisions in ethnically divided countries (Bolleyer and Thorlakson, 2012).

The ingrained ethnic rivalries among Nigeria's disparate ethnic groups were arguably not hidden from the colonial government, as Secretary of State for the Colonies Oliver Lyttelton once boasted, "the only cement which kept the rickety structure of Nigeria together was the British... left to themselves they would clearly fall apart in a few months (Coakley, 2007)."

Although the above dire prognosis has not come true, there is little doubt that the country is more divided than it has

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ever been. Several ethnocultural and militant groups, such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), the Niger Delta Avengers, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, Northern Elders Forum, Arewa Youths Consultative Forum, and others, are unmistakable signs of Nigeria's fractured state (International Crisis Group, 2016). The IPOB's leadership recently issued a "sit at home" order to all Igbos on May 30, 2021 to honour Ndigbo who were murdered during the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War, which has seen disturbing success in most Igbo-dominated States in South-Eastern Nigeria, indicating that while the Igbos were defeated during the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War, the Biafra spirit is still alive (Ekeh, 1990).

The goal of this study is to look at the developing separatist movements in Nigeria and their underlying reasons, as well as propose ways to avoid the federation's dissolution. It is believed that a constitutional restructure of the federation characterised by devolution of authority to the constituent states is a viable alternative for preventing the federation's dissolution (Oyovbaire, 1983).

There are six sections to the paper. The study's backdrop and the urgent necessity to draw attention to the challenges to the Federation's stability posed by the developing separatist movements in the Federation are discussed in the introduction. The paper's second section looks at theoretical perspectives on Nigerian separatist agitations. Separatist threats, it is believed, are deeply based in ethnicity and reflect not only mutual animosity among Nigeria's ethnic groupings, but also an engrained feeling of injustice perpetrated on areas of the country by Nigeria's federal policy.

The discussion in this section leads to the third segment, which identifies and analyses specific separatist risks. The paper's fourth section examines previous attempts to address Nigeria's political unrest. The fifth section of the paper lays out the path forward by advocating that the federal system be reformed in accordance with its basic principles. The final portion contains the closing remarks.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SEPARATIST AGITATIONS IN NIGERIA

The term "separatism" can refer to a variety of things, from a demand for more regional autonomy or a loosening of political control by the centre by a unit of a federal state to outright secession of a federating unit by declaring its own political independence. As a result, "separatism" has been broadly defined to include both increased regional autonomy and secession (Price, 1973).

Separatism refers to the desire of a vocal segment of a population in a section of a sovereign state (typically a province) to weaken or break the political and legal ties that bind the part to the whole (Coakley, 2007). If the goal is merely relaxing, it is called autonomy; if the goal is secession of a province or a member of a federation, there may be additional goals of independence or union with another, generally adjacent sovereign state (Price, 1973).. However, the term "separatism" is most commonly used in its restricted sense to refer to agitation by a distinct political unit within a polity for greater decentralisation of authority by the central government in order to provide the sub-national unit greater autonomy in specific activities.

Separatism and secession are not synonymous in this sense, despite the fact that both reflect various forms of political instability or disintegration, with secession resulting in the polity's collapse.

According to Badal (1976), the goals of any separatist movement can change depending on a variety of factors, including (a) the movement's leadership; (b) the level of mass support it has or can muster; and (c) the occurrence of supervening events such as war or revolution, which may provide separatists with the opportunity to either secede or reach an agreement with the central government for greater regional autonomy. As a result, a separatist movement that desires more regional autonomy inside an existing political territory may form an alliance with another sympathetic party to pursue independence if the conditions merit it.

The history of separatist movements in Nigeria plainly demonstrates that their goals alternate between fighting for



greater regional autonomy and threatening secession altogether. Apart from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which, while reaffirming the Ogoni's desire to "remain a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," explicitly campaigned for political autonomy, including the right to control their own political affairs, most separatist groups have pursued regional political autonomy and secession at the same time (Ijaw National Congress, 2006).

Separatist agitation can be caused by a variety of variables, which differ from one country to the next. The most common of these elements appears to be a long-term perception of dominance and deprivation among members of a culturally homogeneous group within a polity. When a culturally distinct group within a federation believes that their region is not receiving a fair share of the union's benefits from the central government, or that their region has been singled out by the state for marginalisation and neglect, the group's loyalty to the state may erode, alienating its members from the state.

From its early years as a British colony and protectorate, numerous perspectives have been offered on the primary and indirect causes of separatist agitation in Nigeria (Kirk-Greene, 1967). Separatist tendencies in Nigeria are due to the country's "heterogeneous ethnic composition, cultural diversity, huge size... various administrative procedures, and contentious political and constitutional frameworks... and the lack of a strong ideological attraction," according to Tamuno. (1970)

However, according to Rothchild (1961), Nigeria's federalism, which was originally composed of "three enormously populated, semi-autonomous regions," "hardly operates to discourage separatist ambitions because each of the regions possesses all the normal criteria of nationhood." Nigeria's political history, according to Kirk-Greene (1975), had moulded and destined the country for disintegration. "Forces of Nigeria's political past have rarely been on the side of national identity," he writes.

It is argued that the predominance of separatist agitations in Nigeria may be traced back to three important factors: ethnic pluralism, fear of dominance among various ethnic groups, and British colonialists' divisive activities (Lewis and Bratton, 2000). These elements are intricately intertwined, and one cannot exist without the other. For example, the fear of ethnic dominance, which was a significant motivator for Nigeria's federalism, is a result of discrepancies in demographics, land mass, educational, social, and economic advancements among Nigerians in many aspects. Similarly, it is possible that the British colonialists' divide-and-rule policy in Nigeria was driven by the multiplicity of the country's population (Lewis and Bratton, 2000).

There was no unified political entity termed "Nigeria" prior to the arrival of British colonial control in 1861 (Lugard, 1920), which spanned the enormous territory presently known as Nigeria. However, several independent governments known as empires, emirates, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city-states, and village republics existed at various eras, each of which exercised sovereignty within its own region without interference from the others (Lyttleton and Chandos, 1962). The many empires, emirates, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city-states, and village republics were ethnic groups that "were either making wars with one other or establishing alliances, on equal terms" at one time or another.

The actual number of various ethnic groups in Nigeria, however, has been a source of contention. Scholars have "identified approximately 350 ethnic groups in Nigeria," according to the Federal Ministry of Information. "Nigeria is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups," according to the CIA World Factbook (2016). According to Afolabi, (2016), there are around 400 ethnic groups in the country, each with its own language, social customs, and beliefs.

Nigeria has roughly sixty ethnic groups, according to Awolowo (1968). He names 10 ethnic groupings as the main national groups, including Hausa/ Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik/Ibibio, Kanuri, Tiv, Ijaw, Edo, Urhobo, and



Nupe. Hausa/ Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo are the largest ethnic groups.

In his own contribution, Osaghae (1991) estimates that Nigeria has about 250 ethnic groups, but he criticises Awolowo's classification of ethnic communities into "principal national groups" and "ethnic minorities," arguing that before colonisation, all ethnic groups were equal, regardless of any subordinate-superordinate relationships that may have existed.

Despite the fact that Nigerian historians and ethnographers agree that 250 ethnic groupings (with over 400 distinct languages) represent the closest approximation of the ethnic communities in pre-colonial Nigeria, the precise number of these groups appears to be unknown due to a lack of empirical data. The existence of various ethnic groups in Nigeria is sometimes politicised and exaggerated by the political class in order to argue for the creation of new states or local government districts, adding to the uncertainty (Osaghae, 1991). In order to get these political advantages, ethnic groups who were previously deemed homogeneous are presented as diverse groupings in order to develop a broad area and spread out. As a result, one writer has correctly concluded that no one knows the exact number of these groupings.

Historical, cultural, linguistic, economic, and even geographical differences exist among Nigeria's ethnic groupings. In terms of language, social behaviours, cultural beliefs, and religion, the Ijaw (Izon), Ogoni, Kalabari, Andoni, Ikwerre, Ibibio, and Efik of Southern Nigeria differ from the Hausa/Fulani/Kanuri of Northern Nigeria. The ancient federal political system of the Izon, Kalabari, Andoni, Okrika, Ogoni, and Ikwerre in the Niger Delta region of Southern Nigeria differs dramatically from the Igbo's traditional kinship structure and the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba's highly centralised systems (Ukiwo, 2005).

Similarly, despite sharing the same southern belt as the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria, the Igbo of South-East Nigeria differ from the Yoruba in terms of historical origin, language, custom, cultural beliefs, and traditional

economics (Ukiwo, 2005). Language, cultural customs, perspective, and manner of life distinguish the Igbo from the Hausa/Fulani/Kanuri, making these ethnic groups distinct peoples. The Igbos, as noted by Ezera, a constitutional historian of Igbo descent, are temperamentally dissimilar from the Hausa and Yoruba:

The Ibos, unlike the Hausas, but like the Yorubas, have been quick to adapt to new and innovative ideas. They are temperamentally different from both the Hausas and the Yorubas in that they are not only very competitive in spirit and prone to place considerable value on earned status, but they are also dramatic and excitable (Ukiwo, 2005)..

Religion added even more layers of complexity to these basic racial distinctions. Islam arrived in Northern Nigeria over a thousand years ago, and Muslims now make up roughly 70% of the population (Nwabueze, 1993). Christianity and African traditional religion battled for place within the Middle Belt. The population of the South-West was pretty evenly split between Islam and Christianity, whilst the population of the South-East and South-South was roughly 90% Christians and 10% animists.

From the following brief overview of pre-colonial Nigeria, two aspects stand out: first, pre-colonial Nigeria was made up of ethnically, culturally, and historically distinct communities that existed independently of one another (Nwabueze, 1993).

Nigerian society, on the other hand, is unusually plural not only because of the large number of different social groups — about 300 or more — and the large number of different languages, religions, and traditional occupations, but also because the differences in attitude, outlook, character, and way of life of the component groups are so profound and fundamental that they are considered different peoples (Osuntokun, 1979). The Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, and other Nigerian tribes are arguably more different from one another in terms of attitude, outlook, character, and manner of life than the English are from the Germans or the French from the Italians.



Second, Nigerian society was profoundly split and broken along ethnic and religious lines prior to colonisation. Despite Choudhry (2008) observation that the test of a "split society" is the significance of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious divisions rather than the heterogeneity of its population, there is no doubt that Nigerian society was defined along these lines. The ethnocultural divisions that existed in pre-colonial Nigerian culture were so deep that they could not be masked by the exchanges, contacts, and trading links that existed.

It is essential to note that, despite the fact that the 1914 amalgamation is unquestionably the greatest historic event in Nigeria's colonial history, it has continued to generate animosity among the country's different peoples who saw it as a British imperial power imposition (Osuntokun, 1979). To Northerners, the union is still remembered as "the 1914 blunder." Prof. Ango Abdullahi, the leader of the Northern Elders Forum (NEF), reaffirmed the northern position, saying that the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria was "a fundamental mistake" and that "the topic of a possible separation is not a far-fetched characteristic."

To the Niger delta's Ijaws (Izons), joining the Nigerian State as a result of the merger was a "involuntary voyage" that stripped them of their sovereignty. Even one of Nigeria's most prominent federalists, Obafemi Awolowo, could not spare the Nigerian State built on the amalgamation idea, which he rightly called as a "abominable, disruptive, and dividing British heritage."

As a result, Nigerians saw the 1914 amalgamation as bringing "nations and peoples who had no reason to think of themselves as members of a common society" into one entity. As a result, the country has remained primarily a collection of ethnic communities brought together by force by Britain, with no unifying factor. Lord Milverton's argument that "it is only the accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country" is obviously justified by the peoples of Nigeria's hatred of the 1914 amalgamation.

The Constitution Drafting Committee (1976), which noted in its report that "as a general rule, every Nigerian owes or is expected to owe some loyalty to his community and/or sub-community," recognised the origins of ethnicity in Nigeria – a person's familial attachment to his ethnic group that manifests in a sense of allegiance or loyalty to the group.

Although the Committee also stated that ethnic loyalty "ought not to be allowed to inhibit or detract from national loyalty, that is, loyalty to the Nigerian State," ethnicity's persistence in ethnically-plural Nigeria is far too obvious to be disputed. Gbolabo Ogunsanwo, a public analyst, puts it bluntly:

We now have Yoruba-Nigerians, Hausa-Nigerians, Fulani-Nigerians, Igbo-Nigerians, and so on, free of our hypocrisy. We all declare our allegiance to Nigeria in public, but our primary devotion is to our individual tribes behind closed doors.

According to a poll conducted in Northern Nigeria in 1967, 74% of respondents aged 17 agreed that a person's loyalty "should be to his region, rather than to his country." In a poll of public opinion conducted in 2000 with a random sample of 3,603 respondents, ethnic identification was determined to be the strongest type of identity among Nigerians. According to the poll, "almost half of all Nigerians (48.2%) preferred to define themselves with an ethnic identification, compared to nearly a third (28.4%) who chose to label themselves with a class identity."

Also, the fear of domination among ethnic groups has exacerbated the polarisation of Nigerian society along ethnic lines, and this is by far the most serious pathology of Nigeria's federal experiment. Because of its land mass and population supremacy, Southern Nigeria fears that the North has immense political clout (Ukiwo, 2005). The North, on the other hand, was greatly concerned about the



South's economic and intellectual progress, which it thought could be used to dominate the central government under any unitary organisation. According to Alan Lennox Boyd (1954-59), Secretary of State for the Colonies, "the North fears and dislikes the better educated Southerners, and if they were not economically wedded to the Federation, would be pleased to be rid of it." As a result, "the major stimulant of the northern awakening" was fear of southern dominance.

The Igbo's dread of Northern dominance was not veiled either. In response to the 1966 Northern Nigeria pogrom, which resulted in the deaths of over 20,000 of their kin, the Igbo, through the Eastern Nigeria delegation to the Ad hoc Conference on Constitutional Proposals for Nigeria 1966, advocated for a union of four autonomous regions and a weak central government as a means of reducing northern dominance (Ukiwo, 2005). The Yoruba were concerned not just about Hausa/ Fulani dominance, but also about the oppressive impact of the highly industrious Igbo ethnic group. Birch is correct in concluding that the Yoruba political leaders were encouraged to accept "the idea of a federation of three states, hoping to ensure that the central government's powers would be fairly limited" by "the feeling that a two-state federation of Southern Nigeria would also be dominated by the politically ambitious easterners."

Numerous minority groups, both in the Northern and Southern regions, including the Niger Delta ethnic minorities, were caught in the middle of the intrigues and rivalries among Nigeria's three majority ethnic groups. They specifically claimed domination by the majority groups at regional levels, and thus feared that achieving political independence from British rule would herald a new form of internal colonialism by the three dominant ethnic groups.

Fear of dominance still exists in modern-day Nigeria, as evidenced by some regions' bitterness over lopsided

appointments to key positions and agencies in the federal government, as well as the skewed formation of states and local government councils. All of the country's major security agencies are currently led by officers from Northern Nigeria. 63 of Nigeria's 36 states were built from the defunct Northern region alone, while the remaining 17 were formed from the defunct Eastern, Western, and Mid-Western areas, providing northern Nigeria overt political supremacy over southern Nigeria. Northern Nigeria has 405 local government councils out of a total of 774, leaving the south with 369 local government councils.

The federal government's ownership and control of natural resources, such as oil and gas and solid minerals, is vested in the federal government under section 44(3) of the current 1999 Constitution, which also means that states with abundant natural resources are barred from participating in their exploration, exploitation, and management (Ejobowah, 2000). As a result, oil-producing nations in the Niger Delta region are unable to develop policies and legal frameworks for natural resource extraction that maximise benefits to local populations while maintaining environmental and safety requirements.

The current hyper-centralization of power and resources has the effect of allowing any ethnic group that dominates the federal government machinery to exert dominance over others in terms of redistribution of federally created income. Given that Nigeria's three majority ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba, benefit from the federal government's structure, these two ethnic groups have effectively manipulated federal power to their own benefit and the detriment of other groups, including the oil-producing ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta region (Josiah, 2013). Considering that Nigerian politics is all about securing access to oil wealth from the Niger Delta, centralization has enabled the bulk of the oil wealth produced from the Niger delta to be "captured by the federal state and distributed to the so-called "ethnic



majorities” in the politically dominant northern and western states (Ejobowah, 2000).”

The arbitrary and discriminatory manner in which the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba ethnic groups have granted oil rights to their kinsmen in the Niger Delta demonstrates ethnic dominance. According to a recent report, past Nigerian military leaders of northern extraction arbitrarily allocated oil blocks in the Niger Delta to their cronies, friends, family members, and oil moguls from Northern Nigeria through the dubious process of discretionary allocation of oil blocks to indigenous oil firms (Josiah, 2013). Senator Ita Enang, the former chairman of the Senate Committee on Rules and Business, claims that "eighty-three percent of all current oil blocks are controlled by northerners" as a result of this blatant abuse of government power (Josiah, 2013).

The threat of ethnic dominance has undoubtedly fueled a rising tide of anger against the Nigerian state among members of numerous ethnic groups, particularly the Igbo, the federation's third biggest ethnic group. Separatism becomes appealing as a gesture of overt disloyalty to the State as distinct ethnic groups within the polity begin to regard the State as a symbol of domination constructed to favour one group over the other (Gbadamosi, 2017). As a result, one agrees with Falae that Nigeria's primary problem is that it is an unjust and warped federation that has been managed to favour one segment over another. "There is no way such an unjust arrangement can last or promote peace and stability," Falae declares (Gbadamosi, 2017).

SEPARATIST AGITATIONS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ethnic nations in Nigeria have threatened to break away from one another often throughout the country's political history. In the early years of the federation, these dangers began to surface, and they have not subsided since then. Political leaders of many ethnic groups have used

separatist threats as a political negotiating strategy in order to gain concessions from other ethnic groups.

For example, during the British Colonial Office's constitutional conferences, negotiations between representatives of diverse ethnic groups were nearly derailed by separatist impulses displayed by most delegations. As part of the General Conference on the Review of the 1946 Constitution held at Ibadan in 1950, the Northern delegation stated its firm and irreversible position that unless the North was allotted 50 per cent seats in the proposed House of Representatives, it would seek "separation from the rest of Nigeria on the arrangements existing before 1914 (Bourdillon, 1946)." Before the Eastern Region members of the Legislative Council caved in to rescue the country from fragmentation, the Southern delegation was initially opposed to this demand. To save the country, according to Ezera, (1964) the eastern members of the legislative council backed down from their resistance to the North's demand for equal participation in the legislature with the two southern provinces.

Additionally, the Yoruba had vowed to withdraw from the projected Nigerian federal government if Lagos was made the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria by the British colonialists. The Colonial Office swiftly responded to this warning, deeming it to be a threat of force.

Following the pogrom of 1966, the Igbo demanded a reorganisation of Nigeria's federal government to finish the separatist cycle. In July 1967, the Igbo staged an unsuccessful secessionist attempt to proclaim an independent Republic of Biafra, resulting in the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of 1967-70, which was the country's first war of secession.

Ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region of south-south Nigeria joined the majority ethnic groups in pursuing secessionist ambitions before the fall of Nigeria's first republic. Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, an Ijaw from the Niger Delta region, led the NDVF in a failed attempt to secede from Nigeria (Nwachukwu, 2016) by declaring an



independent "Niger Delta Peoples Republic" on February 23, 1966, forty days after the first military coup on January 15, 1966, which was the first documented history of such resistance in post-independent Nigeria (Boro and Tebekaemi, 1982).

Because of their concern that they would be excluded from the exploration and management of vast hydrocarbon deposits in the region by an Eastern Region government predominately made up of Igbos, the Niger Delta ethnic minorities sparked the revolution. This government was led by an Igbo, General Aguiyi-Ironsi. They were so afraid that they issued an order cancelling all current oil contracts and instructing oil firms operating in the area to deal directly with them.

First coordinated violent campaign by Niger Delta ethnic minority against exploitation and neglect by the Nigerian State, even though it was crushed exactly 12 days after it was initiated by federal soldiers (Boro and Tebekaemi, 1982). In the Niger delta, the spirit of resistance may have been sown by the failed revolt and maintained until the mass mobilisation of the 1990s. Adaka Boro's twelve-day revolution clearly inspired other resistance efforts in the region (Boro and Tebekaemi, 1982).

There were three eras of military rule in Nigeria (January 15, 1966-October 1979, December 31, 1983, and November 17, 1993-May 28, 1999) during which all kinds of ethnic revolt and separatism were outlawed by ethnic groupings. The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, allegedly won by Yoruba politician M. K. O. Abiola, may have been the only time the country's unity was publicly threatened by separatist threats while under military administration. It was on June 23, 1993, that Nigeria's self-styled military president, Ibrahim Babaginda, annulled the result of that election, which sparked protests and civil disturbance in the south-west of the country. Separatist activity in the federation decreased

dramatically during the military's authority (Ajayi and Umoru, 2015).

Since the restoration of democracy on May 29, 1999, separatist movements have seen a comeback. Following the militarization of the agitations for resource control in the Niger Delta region, the tone for this phase of separatist movements was set. Diverse commanders led a slew of violent groups that claimed to be devoted to resource control in the area. Many of the armed organisations had threatened to declare an independent Niger Delta People's Republic at some point or another. As an illustration, on August 1, 2016, the Adaka Boro Avengers issued a three-month notice declaring the Republic of Niger Delta independent from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As a result of pressure from regional officials, notably former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, the Avengers were planning to publish a statement later that day cancelling their intended proclamation of secession.

The Yoruba have also been seen as a separatist danger since 1999. At an emergency summit held in Ibadan, prominent Yoruba leaders threatened to review their status in the Nigerian federation following recurring murderous attacks on several Yoruba farming communities by some Fulani herdsmen and the abduction of a prominent Yoruba politician, Olu Falae, by the same Fulani herdsmen. Because Nigeria's federal structure could no longer provide their safety and that of their property, the Yoruba leaders claim, they have no choice but to pursue political independence for the Yoruba (Ajayi and Umoru, 2015).

Since 1999, there have been two Igbo grass-roots groups that have launched a fierce separatist movement, the Movement for the Actualization of a Sovereign State in Nigeria and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB). As secessionist organisations, both parties, which are directed by different individuals, have consistently called for the declaration of an independent "State of Biafra."

Both organisations want to see the five main Igbo states in South-East Nigeria break away from Nigeria and form an independent sovereign state called Biafra. Since 1967,



when Col. Ojukwu initially stated his intention to establish an independent state in the land of Biafra, the conflict between Nigeria and the Biafra People's Liberation Army (BPL) ensued. To educate the Igbos in South-East Nigeria about the Biafra idea, the organisations have held various rallies and maintained a pro-Biafra radio station.

Igbos have not been re-integrated into Nigeria since the end of Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, and their homeland, South-East Nigeria, has been subjected to constant neglect and abysmal marginalisation by the Nigerian government in terms of federal appointments, social infrastructure, and economic development.

The federal government's persistent disregard for south-east Nigeria cannot be seriously questioned, yet this does not only apply to the south-east geopolitical zone. In spite of her great contributions to the country's economic development and survival, the South-South geopolitical zone continues to be overlooked.

The North, too, has recently shown signs of separatism. On the heels of the operations of MASSOB and IPOB, a coalition of Northern Youth Groups recently released the "Kaduna Declaration," in which they supposedly issued a "quit notice" to all Igbos now residing in Northern Nigeria to leave by October 1, 2017 (Akinloye, 2017).

Igbo people were described as "barbaric, uncultured, criminals and abusers of the law" by the northerners, who used that description to justify declaring war on them without warning. Also stated that the north was not interested in coexisting with the Igbos and would take a clear action to dissolve the alliance by withdrawing from the federal setup.

Professor Ango Adullahi, the NEF's spokesperson, issued a statement backing the northern youths' call for the Igbos to leave the north, according to reports. Even Shettima Yerima, the leader of the Arewa Consultative Youths Forum and a co-convenor of the coalition of northern youth groups, recently claimed that he had the support of northern elders in sending a quit notice to the Igbos (Akinloye, 2017).

THE SEARCH FOR STABILITY

Nigeria's ethnic nations have threatened to split off on numerous occasions during the country's political history. These dangers first surfaced during the federation's early years and have not subsided since. Separatist threats have been used by political leaders of various ethnic groups as a political bargaining strategy to achieve favourable concessions from other ethnic groups on occasion (Afolabi, 2016).

For example, during the British Colonial Office's constitutional conferences, a series of negotiations between representatives of various ethnic groups were nearly thwarted by separatist impulses displayed by the majority of the delegates. During the General Conference on the Review of the 1946 Constitution in Ibadan in 1950, the Northern delegation stated unequivocally that unless the North was given 50% of the seats in the proposed House of Representatives (equal to the representation of the Western and Eastern regions combined) in proportion to its population, it would seek "separation from the rest of Nigeria on the arrangements in place before 1914." The Southern delegation was initially opposed to this demand, but members of the Eastern Regional Legislative Council eventually caved in to rescue the country from fragmentation. According to Ezera (1964), the eastern members of the Legislative Council's decision to drop their opposition to the North's demand for parity in the legislature with the two southern provinces saved the country from implosion.

The Yoruba had also vowed to leave the planned Nigerian federation if the British colonialists' choice to make Lagos the country's Federal Capital Territory was not reversed. The Colonial Office quickly opposed this threat by treating it as a threat to employ force.

Following the 1966 pogrom, the Igbo demanded the federation be restructured to complete the circle of separatist agitations by Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups. Sensing that their call for federation restructuring would fail, but determined to end the perceived



Hausa/Fulani dominance, the Igbo attempted a failed secessionist attempt to declare an independent Republic of Biafra in July 1967, plunging the federation into the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of 1967-70, which became the country's first secession war (Osaghae, 2001).

Separatist agitations have resurfaced with the return to democratic governance on May 29, 1999. Following the militarization of resource control agitations in the Niger Delta, the tone for this phase of separatist movements was set. Several terrorist groups with different commanders have developed in the region, all claiming to be pursuing a resource control objective. Many terrorist groups have vowed to separate from Nigeria by proclaiming an independent Niger Delta Peoples Republic at various times. The Adaka Boro Avengers, for example, issued a three-month notice in 2016 to declare the Republic of Niger Delta independent on August 1, 2016 (International Crisis Group, 2016). The Avengers, on the other hand, were to make a statement later cancelling the intended secession proclamation, claiming that certain significant personalities in the region, including former President Goodluck Jonathan, had intervened to prevent the announcement (Addeh, 2016).

There is also evidence of the Yoruba threatening secession after 1999. Following a series of murderous attacks on Yoruba farming communities by Fulani herdsmen, as well as the kidnapping of a prominent Yoruba politician, Olu Falae, by the same Fulani herdsmen, notable Yoruba leaders rose from an emergency summit held in Ibadan and issued a secessionist threat, threatening that the Yoruba would review their status in the Nigerian federation (Gbadamosi, 2017). The Yoruba leaders claim that because Nigeria's federal system could no longer ensure their safety and property, they were left with no choice but to pursue political independence for their people.

Two Igbo grass-roots organisations, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)

and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, have started the most intense post-1999 separatist campaign (IPOB). Both parties, which are led by different leaders, have consistently advocated for the declaration of an independent "State of Biafra," indicating that they are separatist organisations (BBC, 2017).

Both organisations want the five main Igbo states in South-East Nigeria to separate from the Federal Republic of Nigeria and form Biafra, an independent sovereign state. The parties hope to resurrect the spirit of the Biafra Republic, which was first founded by Col. Ojukwu in 1967 and resulted in the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War. In addition to maintaining a pro-Biafra radio station, the organisations have held multiple pro-Biafra rallies in major cities in South-East Nigeria to educate Igbos about the Biafra project (BBC, 2017).

The major grievance of pro-Biafra agitators appears to be that the Igbos have not been reintegrated into the Nigerian State since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, and that their homeland, South-East Nigeria, has been neglected and marginalised by the Nigerian State in terms of federal appointments, social infrastructure, and economic development (BBC, 2017).

While the federal government's persistent neglect of south-east Nigeria cannot be seriously disputed, it is crucial to note that this is not unique to the geopolitical zone of the south-east. Despite its great contributions to the country's economic development and survival, the geopolitical zone of the south-south is similarly neglected.

Separatist aspirations have recently surfaced in the north. In apparent response to MASSOB and IPOB's actions, a coalition of Northern Youth Groups recently published the "Kaduna Declaration," in which they supposedly sent a "quit notice" to all Igbos currently residing in Northern Nigeria to leave on or before October 1, 2017 (Premium Times, 2017).



The northerners claimed they were seeking independence and freedom from the Igbo, whom they described as "barbaric, uncultured, criminals, and law breakers." They also stated that the north was no longer willing to coexist with the Igbos and that they would take concrete actions to dissolve the alliance by withdrawing from the current federal system. Following up on the "quit notice," northern (Arewa) youths wrote a letter to Acting President Yemi Osinbajo, pleading with him to let the Igbo to separate and form their own Biafra Republic through universally "entrenched democratic alternatives."

Acting President Yemi Osinbajo, reportedly shaken by the above fast-developing dangerous drama, convened a meeting with governors of the 36 states, at the conclusion of which the nation was reassured of the federal and state governments' commitment to the protection of the federation's sovereignty and indivisibility. It will be seen in the coming days whether this new assurance will be enough to stop the country's disintegration.

THE WAY FORWARD

We need a fresh look at Nigeria's federal structure if we are serious about restoring its original vision and protecting the interests of all its constituent entities. This is where the search for peace in Nigeria must begin. To put it another way, because the end goal of federalism might differ from one country to another, any given country's federalism will take on the characteristics of the political and economic issues it is intended to address (Ukiwo, 2005).

Because federalism is a "pragmatic, prudential approach" that is meant to solve specific problems, the shape it takes should reflect those goals. Otherwise, any discrepancy between federalism's stated goals and its actual practise could put the system at risk. Federalism is consequently a pragmatic and flexible system that is capable of adapting to difficulties in Nigerian politics.

A form of government is not all that Federalism is about. Also, it is a continuing negotiating process, a conflict resolution technique, and a strategy built on cooperation

and compromise... Federalism's biggest benefit is its ability to adapt to the needs of its citizens (Bolleyer and Thorlakson, 2012). Flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of its constituent regions and groups are essential if the federal structure is to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Here, the point is being made that the federal system of governance is not a static one. As a result, it should be flexible enough to meet the needs of the people it is meant to serve. It is been compared to a "molten wax ready to accept impression," which is exactly how it feels. To maintain the usefulness of federalism as a means of integrating and accommodating multiple identities inside one country, this must be the case (Ekeh, 1990). It is because of federalism's dynamic nature that the system is able to respond to new challenges that arise from the many forces in society.

Federalism is not just about securing self-rule and shared-rule inside the same polity; it is also about creating subnational units to which functions are devolved by the national government, which may also be done in a unitary state (Coakley, 2007). When it comes to achieving federalism's primary objective of preventing a central government from becoming overly powerful and vulnerable to misuse, the two separate and autonomous levels of government, each having a constitutionally guaranteed existence, play a key role. Federalism ensures that all interests are protected, including ethnic and national minorities'.

Because of this, Nigeria's federalism must be reimagined in order to focus on its essential values and underlying ideas. When it comes to Nigeria's federalism, it is now assumed that the mutual fear of domination among Nigeria's disparate ethnic groups caused by the country's deep cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as the marked differences in population size as well as economic, educational, and social advancement, was the driving force behind it. Nigeria's federal system was designed to ensure that "no one group could readily control the rest," according to a press release. Nixon had rightly established



the connection between Nigeria's federalism's development and the country's dread of dominance:

An important assumption in Nigerian thinking was that under a federal system, no region would be able to achieve dominance over another, and no region would be forced to endure the effects of another's dominance. The federal structure was largely shaped by this apprehension of being dominated (Ekeh, 1990).

Ethnic dominance among our diverse groups must be eliminated if our federalism is to remain stable, since it is both a basic value and a remedy. Hence, they have constantly opposed all forms of ethnic domination and pushed on a federal structure that is predicated on the equality of its constituent units and ethnic groupings (Ukiwo, 2005). According to the Presidential Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution's report, the issue is clearly stated as follows:

The ideal political system for Nigeria was a common theme in many of the submissions and representations... A voluntary union (not a forced entity or unity) where no sector or unit is dominant over the others and where no unit dominates the central apparatus was underlined in practically all responses on this topic.

An important consideration in the debate about ethnic domination was the importance of encouraging each region to grow at its own speed in accordance with its natural resource and budgetary capabilities. Fearing a common enemy, the Founding Fathers of Nigeria's federalism envisioned a structure in which each area could take charge of its own development and not be constrained by a single central authority (Ukiwo, 2005).

How to create a political system that is itself a present advance, a system within which the diverse elements can progress at varying speeds, amicably and smoothly toward a more closely integrated economic, social and political unity, without sacrificing the principles and ideals inherent in their divergent ways of life.

Rather than leaving all the constituent units economically dependent on the centre but cooperatively collaborating with one another, a development process based on the

resources and economic endowments of each constituent unit would strengthen national unity by encouraging cooperative action and interdependence between them. One of the great advantages of allowing the regions to develop each along their own distinctive lines will be that the unity of Nigeria will be strengthened," according to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Osaghae, 2004).

Already, this paper has shown that Nigeria's current federal system and the power balance between the centre and federating states threaten our federalism's foundational principles and, as a result, its long-term stability. Calls for reforming Nigeria's federation have proliferated in recent months, but there appears to be no consensus on what exactly "restructuring" means or how it should be implemented.

A return to the four regions of the First Republic, or six federating regions based on the existing six geopolitical zones, is the most likely option for Nigeria's restructuring. Some have pushed for reorganising the federation in a way that gives the 36 current federating states more responsibility and financial resources. A new kind of federalism, in which each state has its own constitution that must be consistent with the national constitution and legal system, is what some believe Nigeria's political reforms should allow for (Osaghae, 2004).

Re-establishing federalism in Nigeria in accordance with its basic values and principles is the solution to the problem of separatist, according to the authors. The only federal system that would work in Nigeria is one in which ethnic dominance is eliminated and the federating states are given more freedom to grow at their own pace, according to their own resource endowments and budgetary capacities. If this is to be achieved, it will necessitate decentralising power and giving more power to the constituent units, so that they may provide real self-rule and meet the reasonable demands and expectations of their citizens.

Growth and development can be encouraged at regional levels as each constituent state will be allowed to establish and implement its own development plan, which is not dependent on the central government, thanks to the



devolution of authority. With more decentralisation, the centre will become less attractive since it will become stronger and more capable of engaging the federating units collectively and cooperatively and thereby fostering unity in variety.

Power must be redistributed between the federal and state governments if devolution is to be pushed forward. To begin with, the federating states should be given more power to legislate on issues like labour, prisons, drugs and poisons, tourism marketing, and the registration of business names, which were re-centralized under the 1999 Constitution (Osaghae, 2004).

First and foremost, the federal balance established by the 1954, 1960, and 1963 constitutions should be restored and codified in the current 1999 Constitution, which has no such provision. When it comes to banks and banking, regional legislatures have always had the power to create their own authorities, as long as they do so in conformity with federal legislation. This is true in Nigeria as well as in other countries where banks and banking are regulated by the federal government.

Regional governments have the power, under appropriate regional laws, to create regional commodity boards or purchasing bodies to engage in the purchase and processing of agricultural commodities for export, as recognised by Section 77 of the 1963 Constitution. Participation in these economic operations by regional governments not only reduced the acrimonious competition among the numerous ethnic groups to dominate the central government, but also boosted regional economic growth.

Third, rather with the current centralised system of natural resource ownership and governance, a decentralised structure based on shared competencies between the federal and state governments is advocated. "A situation in which two levels of government are assigned sub-aspects within the same policy fields" is what the term "shared competences" means in this context.

So, in order to safeguard and preserve national and regional interests in natural resources, the idea relies on federal and

state governments working together. Onshore natural resources, including oil fields, oil mining, geological surveys and natural gas, will have to be devolved to the federating states while the federal government retains legislative competence over mines and minerals, such as oil, so that the ownership rights devolved on states would be exercisable within the framework prescribed by federal legislation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A rising tide of separatist sentiment puts the Federal Republic of Nigeria's unity and stability in jeopardy. It was widely predicted that Nigeria would not survive the 2015 presidential election unless political leaders took strong steps to prevent anarchy and disintegration from taking hold of Nigeria.

There is an issue with Nigeria's federal structure, which has been exploited to benefit one ethnic group at the detriment of others, according to the findings of the research. Though Nigeria's federal system was designed to eliminate ethnic domination and encourage the development of the constituent units at varying speeds, military rule has done irreparable harm to these twin pillars of the country's federalism by enforcing an unjust and hyper-centralized federal structure that facilitates ethnic domination and subjugate the constituent states to the fiscal dominance of the centre.

As a result, the federal government becomes an instrument for ethnic dominance when a single ethnic group holds political power at the federal level. Nobody who cares about Nigeria should expect her to continue in her current shape, according to political heavyweight Olu Falae of Yoruba descent, who made the observation not long ago (Gbadamosi, 2017).

As other disadvantaged ethnic groups strive for more space, the federal government of Nigeria, which falls under the permanent leadership of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic minority, offers the greatest threat to the federal system's stability. It is a question of the fundamental foundation and spirit of the federal state that Nigeria's multi-ethnic



federation is an institution that protests against ethnic supremacy.

National cohesiveness cannot be created through the concentration of authority and resources at a single location, according to the authors of this research. Having a powerful central government that represents and defends the interests of one dominant ethnic group cannot force various ethnic groups to perceive themselves as one people. In a country as fractured as Nigeria's, it seems naive to assume that a federal structure dominated by the centre will be sufficient to eradicate tribalism (Osaghae, 2004).

Federalism in Nigeria needs to be reinvigorated to clearly articulate its core values and underlying principles or the recent spate of separatist movement would persist. The report proposes decentralising power from the central government to the constituent states as a long-term strategy for halting the rise of separatism. Most separatist agitation stems from a desire for more regional autonomy, and devolution will help to alleviate the central government's hegemonic rule and the acrimonious struggle among ethnic groups for its control.

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