

**POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 1979 FEDERAL CHARACTER
PRINCIPLE AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS**

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Abstract

Addressing the national integration course by the various past administrations in Nigeria seems to appear as a rather unrealisable task, most especially in relation to state-building and nation-building. Since the inception of the entity called Nigeria, efforts have been made to ensure policies geared towards national integration. How has this fared? Has Nigeria been able to achieve national integration? With such impediments such as ethnocentrism, poor leadership, socio-economic cum religious factors, geographical elements, amongst others, the idea of building a united Nigeria seems far-fetched. Despite the efforts by past administrations through different policy measures and programmes such as the infusion of the federal character into the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria in a bid to address this anomaly, the country has through the years seem to majestically walk down the drain of disunity. This paper examines the national integration course in Nigeria through the years with focus on the ‘Federal Character Principle’. It argues that this Principle was built on a wrong foundation which invariably presupposes failure. It attempts to unearth other reasons why national integration in Nigeria has remained a failure throughout time. The qualitative and quantitative methods of research was employed in the course of this work and data were collated and critically analysed from secondary sources i.e., books, journals, internet materials, government publications, etcetera. There is optimism that with the introduction of certain inclusive policy measures by purposeful political leadership, the goal of national integration will be a won course. The paper therefore, concludes that in order to achieve a unified Nigeria, a consensual truce must be reached by the leaders and the different ethnic groups across the country.

Keywords: Leadership, National Integration, Federal Character, Unity and Ethnicity.

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries with over 160 million people, constituting a federation of quite a number of different nations. The country is divided into 36 states and about 748 local government areas. The diverse ethnic, religious and cultural divides indeed makes it unique (Asaju and Egberi, 2015). However, despite its

uniqueness, it is plagued with massive political instability, making nation building a necessity. According to Idowu and Sayuti (2016), the trademark of instability in Nigeria's socio-political and geo-economic sphere is not new. This can be traced from the constitutional pre-colonial era to the independent era which includes the civilian regimes and military interregnum in Nigeria. An example of such instability was seen at the time of the introduction of the 1922 Clifford Constitution which established legislative council. The council was to legislate for the colony and the southern protectorate to the exclusion of the northern protectorate. The southerners therefore participated in their legislative affairs before the north and the northern and southern protectorates were not brought under one legislative body until 1947. Furthermore, Sir Bernard Bourdillion as Governor of Nigeria divided the Southern protectorate into East and West Provinces, thus creating structural imbalance between the North and South. The 1946 Richards Constitution introduced regionalism and these regions had majority and minority ethnic groups. The regions were unequal. The Northern region was far greater than the west and east combined together in both population and landmass.

The idea of regionalism further sharpened the dichotomy between the north and south, encouraging major ethnic groups within their majority regions. It has been argued that this also cleared the way for sectionalism, by promoting the interest of one region at the expense of another. By the 1950s, the northern region had more representation in the national legislative body than the East and west regions combined and this further ushered in fears of minorities in the three regions. The fears were majorly on dominion, marginalisation and oppression as it had to do with distribution of government positions and amenities (Idowu and Sayuti, 2016). The introduction of the federal character much later, was meant to curb the fears and mutual distrust in these respective regions and ensure even power distribution most especially, within the regions. However, this has remained a mirage.

Oyadiran and Olorungbemi (2015), opines that as the clamour for independence in the mid and late 1950's deepened, the expectations of an egalitarian society was far from being accomplished. For example, in 1954, when Nigeria opted for a federal form of government, certain observations were apparent. There existed a level of distinction in culture, level of political awareness of citizens and even the stages of socio-economic development. There was disparity in educational development in the various sectors of the country which resulted in some sections, having recognizable advantages in employment of their indigenes in the public service. Therefore, in 1954 when Nigeria opted for a federal system of government, the concept of Quota System as a policy of government was adopted in the recruitment into the Officer's Corps of the Armed Forces and Police as well as admissions into educational institutions. The Federal Character concept which came years later and was officially infused in the 1979 constitution appeared to be another valid step towards achieving an egalitarian society. However, with the uneven recruitment into public service, cut across the different regions in the country, and the lopsidedness in the country's political structure resulting in unequal power distribution, the quota system and federal character appear to be a goose chase than a plausible attempt towards national integration. This work intends to proffer solutions that will render the federal character principle rather effective. The study made use of mostly e-library books and journals, while the descriptive method of research was used in analysing data. It is organised in four themes – Literature

review; the federal character principle, leadership and national integration in Nigeria; hindrances to the national integration course; and conclusion/recommendation.

Review of Extant Literature

Leadership

Leadership according to Kruse (2013); and Northouse (2016), entails a process whereby a certain individual influences a group of individuals to arrive at a common goal. It cumulates inspiration, persuasion, amidst others in a bid to cajole certain individuals to pursue a vision orchestrated by the leader within the set calculated perimeters to the extent that it becomes a shared vision/effort. While these writer's works shed light into what is expected of leadership, they however attempt a general analysis of the subject matter while this paper will focus strictly on the quality of leadership obtained in Nigeria which has continued to stall cohesive growth, national integration and development in the country.

To Nwagboso and Duke (2012: 231), leadership is the capacity to set goals and is in fact the cornerstone for the accomplishment of such desired goals. To them, it must not only be people-oriented, but must also involve leader(s) quest to administer the affairs of the organisation/institution, implicit in the history, cultures, norms, values, yearnings and aspirations of the organisation. Their work seems to establish a correlation between leadership and service delivery; thus they argue that the primary responsibility of leadership generally, is anchored on service delivery. However, their work laid so much emphasis on the Umar Yáradua's administration, while this study will address the dearth in literature up to the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.

Adelaja (2016); Asaju, Arome and Mukaila (2014: 119) perceive leadership as a necessary tool for the survival and progress of any group or society. The centre point of their argument is on the depleted moral values of the said leaders which could be adduced for the high rate of corruption, greed, financial aggrandisement of government officials/looting of public funds most especially; which has crippled development in the Nigeria. While this paper agrees with their position on the implications of poor morals of leaders on national development, it goes further to pitch how this to a large extent obstruct the national integration course, instilling feelings of fear, antagonism and mistrust within the various ethnic clans in the country.

National Integration

Onyeakazi and Okoroafor (2019), poise that national integration as a concept and phenomenon, creates a sense of national consciousness, uniqueness of identity and loyalty among people with different socio-cultural identities into a single territorial political society. They posit that national integration is interwoven with the political state of a nation and its citizen's level of awareness and quality education. While this paper agrees with the writers on the idea that human capacity building and stable political atmosphere, encourages cohesion and unity necessary for national integration, their work however focuses on the philosophical aspect of national integration while this paper will lay emphasis on the historical dimension of the subject, in relation with

the federal character principle of 1979 and contemporary political leadership in Nigeria.

Writers such as Suberu (2001); Ibodge and Dode (2007); Fatile and Adejuwon (2012); Idowu and Sayuti, (2016), see national integration as a multi-dimensional concept because it takes into account, the question of cultural, socio-political and economic integration, serving as a unifying and consolidating tool. They agree that national integration is a process whereby several groups within a given territorial confinement are united together or perhaps tend to cooperate under conditions which do not appear to permit satisfaction of their system needs in any other way. They posit that the integration is somewhat a gradual process that eventually leads to political cohesion that promulgates sentiments of loyalty towards central political authority/institutions by individuals who may belong to different socio-political groups. These writers also believe that for national integration to take place there must be a central unit of authority to serve as a rallying point; while the citizens are expected to respect the overriding supremacy of this central force. In turn, the political actors in distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre whose institution possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing nation state. Their works however, argue that such loyalties are farfetched in the Nigerian situation mostly as a result of ethnic consciousness. While this paper agrees with their position, it also attempts to uncover the changes that have occurred through time on the national integration course in Nigeria up to recent times. In other word, it covers the dearth in literature up to the second quarter of the year 2020.

Federal Character

Yakubu (1999), defines the federal character as a tool to ensure the integration of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, through the zoning and rotation of offices. This according to him was to foster peace, equality to access both state and federal resources, while monitoring integration of less advantaged states for improved conditions of living, and act as a check on the overriding majority over the minorities. He however, argues that against this backdrop, rather than provide national cohesion, the provisions in the Article 123 of the CDC Report on the 1979 Constitution which stated that “at least, one minister of government of the federation shall be appointed from among Nigerian citizens, who belong to each of the state comprising the federation”, encourages divisiveness and incompetence, since national interest may be jeopardised in the quest for ethnic balance with the appointment of mediocre leaders. However, this research strongly affirms that the federal character is indeed a possible integrative tool, and dislodges the claim that it encourages mediocrity especially where most of these ministers are critically scrutinized/screened by the national assembly, which supposedly constitute the elite class. In other words, the current study intends to correct this impression.

The Federal Character, National Leadership and Integration in Nigeria

National integration according to Narain (1976: 913) and Siddiqui (1971: 11), is a multi-dimensional concept because it takes into account, the question of cultural, socio-political and economic integration, serving as a unifying and consolidating tool in a polity. Most writers of Nigerian history seem to have established that the incursion of the Federal Character principle into the 1979 constitution of Nigeria was to foster

peace, unity, and equality in accessing state resources as well as to promote the integration of the less advantaged states for better improvement and better living conditions in the country. The concept of federal character according to Okolie and Greg (2013:5) is a policy mechanism that ensures equitable distribution of government appointments and economic resources for the benefit of the citizens of a given country. Aderonke (2013) sees the federal character as that which promotes national loyalty, unity and harmony, giving the citizenry a sense of belonging. Asaju and Egberi (2015:4) posits that federal character is a positive reaction aimed at correcting the wrongs of the past in Nigeria, most especially in the conduct of public service and to exploit the great diversities of the country. It is also a reaction measure to such practices that may place selfish and parochial biddings over what is deemed the national interest (Onimisi Et al, 2018:173). The principle of federal character touches on array of problems in the political process which includes ethnicity, the national question, minority problems, discrimination based indignity, resource allocation, power sharing, employment and placement in institution amongst others (Idowu and Sayuti, 2016: 75).

In Section 14(3) of the 1979 Constitution in Nigeria, it clearly pitches the idea of the federal character thus: “the distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish and harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.” Question is, how much of this has been achieved today? Why is there so much clamour/agitation for secession amidst such luscious provisions?

Through the years, the Federal Character has initiated a huge repertoire of both formal and informal practices that seek to ascertain balance and rotate the presidential and other major public offices among the country’s diverse ethnic lines and geopolitical zones. The principle of federal character amongst others was just one effort to national integration, aimed at addressing and hopefully mitigating against the problem of diversity in Nigeria, to ensure a peaceful, stable and united country (Idowu and Sayuti, 2016: 76).

As Oyadiran and Olorungbemi (2015: 41) observes, the federal character principle was to offset past discrimination, counteract present unfairness/injustice and to achieve future equality; all, geared towards the drive for reforms. The eventual creation of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) in July 2002 – a regulating body that would see to the execution of the federal character principle – came as a result of two waves of reform aimed at consensual national integration. The first wave began in 1967 and included dismantling the old regional institutional framework and replacing the regions with smaller states, making ethnic mobilization more difficult. The main objectives was to deny regional elites the instructional platform, so to speak, for ethno-regional politics; create administrative cleavages with ethnic majorities while administrative autonomy is given to ethnic minorities; and finally, to shift whatever balance of power that existed away from regions to the centre. More so, there was a deliberate attempt to tilt the attention away from the regions by dismantling the relics of native authority in the North and the suppression of secessionist attempts from Biafra. Finally, the introduction of the Quota System as basis for representation within the federal cabinet

and the admission process in federal educational institutions sealed the deal in this first wave.

The second wave of reforms started in 1979 when the criteria for presidency was drawn, culminating, a national majority of votes cast, in which the votes must cross a threshold of not less than 25% of votes cast in at least two-third of all the states across the federation. The period also witnessed the emergence of pan-ethnic rules, so to speak, which was replaced by the formation of more political parties and the emergence of the federal character principle – a consociational power-sharing system (Oyadiran and Olorungbemi, 2015: 41). It became an eyebrows-raising-situation when despite the whole clamour for the federal character and its successful infusion in the constitution of 1979, it was not until 2002 (Twenty-three years later) that the body known as the Federal Character Commission was set up as executive agency to implement it. As Aderonke (2013) rightly observes, the implementation before this period by various administrations that graced the seat of leadership was more or less a mirage or perhaps a haphazard representation of the set objectives. With the establishment of the FCC, one would think that such anomaly would be rightly addressed. However, with a faulty foundation as regards unequal dissemination of states, unequal geographical divides and educational privileges amongst others, the various integrative attempts such as the establishment of the Quota System, Federal Character, etcetera, has become a shadow of itself illuminating failure at every juncture. The incompatible ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements in the country, no doubt, has continued to impede every efforts made at national integration as applies to building a united front in the country. Even the FCC on the other seems to just exist as though without a purpose, resulting in a massive loss of confidence of the citizenry in the body. The leadership at the national level in the country has shown further lopsidedness in its representation, judging from the table below.

Table 1 National Leaders in Nigeria since Independence

S/N	Names	Date	State	Region
1	Tafawa Belewa	Oct. 1,1960 – Jan. 15, 1966	Bauchi	North-East
2	J.T.U. Ironsi	Jan. 15, 1966 – July 29, 1966	Abia	South-East
3	Yakubu Gowon	July 29, 1966 – July 29, 1975	Plateau	North-Central
4	Murtala Mohammed	July 25, 1975 – Feb 13, 1976	Kano	North-West
5	Olusegun Obasanjo	Feb 13, 1976 – Oct. 1, 1979	Ogun	South-West
6	Shehu Shagari	Oct. 1, 1979 – Dec 31, 1983	Sokoto	North-West
7	Muhammadu Buhari	Dec. 31, 1983 – Aug. 27, 1985	Kastina	North-West
8	Ibrahim Babangida	Aug. 29,1985 – Aug. 26, 1993	Niger	North-Central
9	Ernest Shonekan	Aug. 26, 1993 – Nov. 17, 1993	Ogun	South-West

10	Sani Abacha	Nov. 17, 1993 – June 8, 1998	Kano	North-West
11	Abdusalam Abubakar	June 8, 1998 – May 29, 1999	Niger	North-Central
12	Olusegun obasanjor	May 29, 1999 – May 29, 2007	Ogun	South-west
13	Umaru-Musa Yaradua	May 29, 2007 – May 5, 2010	Kastina	North-West
14	Goodluck E. Jonathan	May 5, 2010 – May 29, 2015	Bayeslsa	South-south
15	Muhammadu Buhari	May 29, 2015 Till Date	Kastina	North-West

Source: Sunday Tribune, 7th August, 2016.

There seem to be a deliberate attempt by the leadership of the various political parties in Nigeria to ensure a certain region of candidacy is maintained in national leadership. Idowu and Sayuti (2016) rightly observe that the imbalance in presidential representation in Nigeria is the most controversial contemporary political problem in the country’s political structure. From the unequal power relationship between the various regions, judging from the period spent in office as executive president since 1960 till date, the Northern part seems to have dominated about seventy three percent(73%) of the time in office and still counting, while the south have spent about twenty-seven percent (27%) of the total period since independence. The domination of the presidential positions/seat by the northerners has also revealed the dominance of most ministries by this same group most especially, in the economic sector of the country. A good example can be drawn from the May, 2020 appointments made by President Mohammed Buhari in the oil and gas sector - NNPC, which is the backbone of the Nigeria’s economy. The president’s appointments reek of a skewed composition of the executive management of the corporation and its subsidiaries, being that these seats are occupied by mostly Northerners and Hausa-Fulani in particular, such as Sadeeq Mai Bornu – Deputy Managing Director Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Limited, Ali Uwais – Project Director, Inuwa Waya – MD, NNPC Shipping, Lawal Sade – MD, NNPC Trading Company amongst others. The table below shows the current executive management of the NNPC which further buttresses the foregoing.

Table 2 The Executive Management of the NNPC as at May 2020

S/N	Name	Position	Region
1	Mele Kolo Kyari	Group Managing Director	North-East
2	Yusuf Usman	Chief Operating Officer, Gas & Power	North-East
3	Mustapha Y. yakubu	Chief operating Officer, Refining	North-central
4	Roland O. Ewubare	Chief Operating Officer, Ventures & Business Development	South-South
5	Umar I. Ajiya	Chief Finance Officer, Finance & Accounts	North-West
6	Adeyemi Adetunji	Chief operating Officer, Upstream	South-West
7	Lawrencia N. Ndupu	Chief operating Officer, Downstream	South-East
8	Farouk G. Sa’id	Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Services	North-West
9	Hadiza Y. Coomassie	Corporate Secretary and Legal Adviser to the Corporation	North

Source: <<https://nnpcgroup.com/about-nnpc/pages/executive-management.aspx>> Assessed 13th June, 2020.

From the table above, it is clear that the lopsided NNPC management structure further ridicules the concept of federal character; little wonder there seems to be so much dissatisfaction, mistrust and agitation across the country which has impeded the national integration efforts so far. Therefore it is necessary to objectively highlight some of the major problems of national integration in order to procure possible solution(s) to address the issues.

Hindrances to the National Integration Course in Nigeria

Ethnic Allegiance: The country Nigeria, is plagued with the problem of ethnic patriotism rather than national patriotism. This in itself negates all efforts towards national integration, fuelling disparity/disunity. With reoccurring situations whereby a certain ethnic group uphold dominance unapologetically, in certain positions of power in the country, it would not be surprising to observe that the leadership of such group will only pay lip service to such programmes as the Federal character, quota system as well as other attempts towards a unified Nigeria. This is owing to the fact that such group has every tendency to assert themselves as superior to others. A good example can be drawn from Ahmadu Bello's remark in 1960, where he proclaimed that, "The new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather, Othman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the North as willing tools and the South as conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us and never allow them to have control over our future" (Shilgba, 2011). In fact, few years after the incursion of the Federal Character Principle in the 1979 constitution, a certain Sokoto prince, Alhaji Shehu Malami and one of the Nigeria's bureaucrat, Alhaji Maitama Sule, instilled a storm among southerners when they respectively informed their listeners of Hausa/Fulani superiority over other ethnic groups in the country. These men claimed that they, the Hausa/Fulani, were endowed with leadership qualities, insinuating they were born to rule (Idowu and Sayuti, 2016). Such notions has continued to play out in contemporary politics judging from the tables presented above, which pitches dominance of the Hausa/Fulani in most sensitive political seats in the country. Northerners such as Alhaji Smaila Isa Funtua, a Life Patron of Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria in January 2020, unapologetically posited on Arise Television's The Morning Show, that the SouthEast has not done enough to deserve the presidential seat in the country, thus, cannot be president come 2023 presidential elections, despite the whole media clamour for Igbo presidency. Such entitlement-mentality and bold proclamation on politics from a certain group/tribe tends to obstruct the good intentions of the Federal Character Principle and promotes antagonism, mutual hate and mistrust which is absolutely unhealthy for national growth and integration.

Poor Leadership: Every society mirrors the quality of its leadership. In Nigeria, the level of distrust and mutual suspicion on leadership is one major problem of national integration. This widespread distrust arising from empty promises by leaders, which has gradually become the norm in politics, permeates geo-ethnic relations which militate against unity (Bakari, 2017). Hackman (2006: 11), categorises leadership in four major themes. To him, leadership entails "what you are" (the traits, attributes characteristics of the individual); "how you act"(which has to do with influence); "what you do"(focuses on the leader's action or the roles he/she plays in the areas of influence); and finally, "how you work with others"(which entails collaborative spirit).

Again, it has been established that there is a nexus between leadership and service delivery. Therefore poor leadership can be said to be the presumable explanation for the poor service delivery of the federal character principle in the country right from its inception in 1979, up till date. As Nwagboso and Duke (2012: 233) rightly observes, the leadership in Nigeria is heavily characterised by non-adherence to the constitution, corruption, poor educational background and political recycling of leaders with questionable character. This in itself adversely affects service delivery of the federal character which in turn permeates further dichotomy in the country.

Mutual suspicion amongst ethnic group and regions: Suspicion and hatred amongst the citizenry are some of the major factors that militate against national integration today. There seem to be a choking socio-economic cum political competition amongst the various ethnic group in Nigeria, made manifest in the constant ethno-regional conflict and tension, such that the relationship between these groups is characterized by fear and suspicion of domination of one state or ethnic group by another. In retrospect, one would agree that mutual suspicion has led to a lot of major crisis in the country, taking into cognizance the civil war for example, the crisis of violence that became eminent in the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections, that saw the threatening and killing of mostly the Christian Igbo by Hausa/Fulani Muslim, vis a vis the killing of the Hausa/Fulani Muslims by the Christian Igbo. These elections further saw political alliances tour ethnic lines than national patriotic line that encourages unity. More so, by singling out three major groups (Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba), as major tribes amidst over 200 other tribes who are thus referred to as minority; so much unhealthy room is given to competition for control of the ‘limited resources’ in the country. This in itself has the tendency to destabilise/disintegrate the polity and stifle economic growth (Idowu and Sayuti, 2016) as well as socio-political development. Little wonder some groups such as IPOB, Odudwa Republic movement are seen in recent times clamouring for a breakaway from Nigeria. The suspicion further provides impetus for the lopsidedness in representation of offices across the federation, which abhors unity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, the problem of disunity, cut across religious, ethnic and regional ties, has led the various administrators whom have at different point in time graced the seat of leadership in Nigeria, work towards pioneering the national integration course in the socio-political cum economic affairs of the country. Attempts to this have birthed various policy measures/programmes, one of which is the infusion of the federal character principle into the constitution of Nigeria, to foster cooperative unity and growth. However, it is said that once the foundation is faulty, the building eventually collapses irrespective of its beauty; perhaps, a perfect case scenario of the federal character principle in Nigeria. With a faulty foundation as regards unequal dissemination of states, unequal geographical divides and educational privileges amongst others, the various integrative attempts in Nigeria has through the years, continued to fail; little wonder our leaders continue to struggle with this course.

In light of this, the paper posits that to achieve national integration, there should be cognitive effective policy measures and programmes, put in place to set up independent institutions more powerful than the leaders – not just one institution that can be easily

manipulated. This is to serve as a check on leadership and to ensure accountability, most especially to the masses. The introduction of certain inclusive policy measures by the leadership must be accompanied by an active regulating and implementing institutions to ensure that every individual or group is carried along. The leadership should engage in the sensitisation and reorientation of the masses on the need for national integration in the country. Every government level should embark on an intensive reorientation of the leaders and potential leaders; establish institutions whose sole task/responsibility will be to train government officials – both officials in view and those currently serving on the need to be nationalists, abhorring every ethnic pressure that might become a threat to national unity. There must have to be a consensual truce between the leadership and diverse ethno-religious groups across the country for any meaningful unity to emerge.

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