

Federal character policy implementation and governance in Nigeria

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Abstract: Against the backdrop that the crisis of governance in Nigeria will be resolved with the adoption of equitable representation of people from their various tribes to participate in public service, the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria introduced the Federal Character Policy. Even with this, Nigeria is still battling the politics of trying to conciliate the regional blocs to solve the governance crisis. This paper examined the state of federal character policy in the governance process of Nigeria. The paper is theoretical in nature, and it relied on data sourced from relevant textbooks, journals, newspapers, and other official records. A descriptive method was used to analyze the data. Using the participation approach as a theoretical framework, the paper found that the federal character policy was good for protecting the interests of minority groups and promoting national patriotism and unity in diversity. The paper also found that the federal character policy was badly implemented as it was hijacked by ethno-regional patrons in the North, South and East to serve their selfish interests, which has deepened the governance crisis in Nigeria. The paper concluded that the federal character policy has not been implemented to improve the governance process in Nigeria. It recommended, amongst others, that Nigeria should have leadership that will not allow the federal character policy to be hijacked by one or a few ethno-regional patrons to pursue their selfish interests.

Keywords: Policy, constitution, Federal Character Policy, governance.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the unequal representation of members of its numerous tribes and ethnic groupings in public service, Nigeria continues to experience governance challenges even after many years of independence. Even though leaders of successive and incumbent governments have continued to express their intention to promote unity and integration of diverse ethnic and sectional groups in Nigeria, some of them are still influenced by tribal and sectional sentiments. This supported Usigbe (2021, p. 2) who cited Yemi Osinbajo as saying: "Nigeria needs leaders without ethnic bias or other sentiments to bring this country together". Against this backdrop, Amucheazi (1985, p. 160) pointed out that Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa and Fulani tribes dominated the over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups that made up Nigeria. According to him, "these dominant tribes have been desperate in their struggles to grab political power at the federal level at all costs". However, these struggles to grab political power are not just at the federal level. It is also applicable to the state and local government levels. Within each state or each local government, the ethnic groups that make up such a state or local government are also engaged in the struggle to grasp political leadership. Beyond all the above, each clan of all the Nigerian communities equally struggles with one and another to maintain political dominance. The worry here, is that where people from diverse ethnic groups



are allowed to engage in the ‘do’ or ‘die’ struggle to gain power and govern, will it not be difficult for such a country to enjoy unity in diversity? Also, in a country where unity is lacking, how easy will it be for such a country to enjoy peace and integration in governance? As noted by Azelama (2016), unity of diverse ethnic groups, religious bigotry and other sectional interest groups are connected with governance towards integration, peace and the progress of a country. To put it differently, the unity in diversity and governance for national integration are preconditions for a nation’s socio-political stability, economic order, peacebuilding and development.

In Nigeria today, religious intolerance, tribal politics and sectional struggles for political power domination have continued to cause crises of unity, integration, coexistence and governance. In fact, this trend has led to unpleasant secession agitation, hostile relations and a crisis of trust amongst the federating units, with deteriorating threats to the public order, unity and the corporate existence of the country. To this end, Chief Rotimi Williams led the 1979 Constitution Drafting Committee, inaugurated on 18th October 1975 by the then-General Murtala Ramat Muhammed discussed the issue and recommended a policy of federal character to strengthen the course of governance in Nigeria towards integration and unity in diversity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). The Military Government accepted the recommendation, and the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions adopted the federal character policy to promote integration, unity in diversity and improve governance. According to section 14 (3) and (4) of the amended 1999 Constitution, the three levels of government in Nigeria (federal, state, and local) are to enforce the federal character policy. Also, section 153 (1) (c) of the same Constitution established the Federal Character Commission to make the policy more operational.

As expected, such constitutional provisions should be enough to properly solve the lingering governance deficit in the aspect of unequal or imbalanced representation of most Nigerians federating units in public service, national unity and integration questions and marginalization of the minority tribes, amongst others.

Experience has demonstrated that the governance challenge has not been addressed despite this federal character policy. The governance deficit has got worse and more tense rather than resolved. For example, the use of violent forces to further sectional interests, tribal politics, and power struggles over other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria by one or two tribes has grown so dangerous and damaging that many Nigerians no longer consider themselves to be part of it. Consequently, Nigeria is becoming more vulnerable to separation, instability, violence and insecurity. It is from this viewpoint that Agboola (2024, p. 8) mentioned the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa’ad Abubakar III, as saying: “Our unity is not negotiable in Nigeria. There is a need for Nigerians to continue to see one another as one”. The Sultan was saying that the leaders of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria should put an end to ethnic conflict and try to unite all

the ethnic groupings. National integration and unity in diversity, where each person will recognize the nation as their own, can only be achieved in this way. The paper examined the state of federal character policy in the governance process of Nigeria. Even though reasonable literature is available on federal character principle issues, the aspect of its intersection with governance for national unity in diversity and national integration is still lacking. Hence, the article is useful as it gave such insightful information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section addressed and debated conceptual concerns that were primarily connected to the paper's topic of discussion. They were all evaluated according to how pertinent they were to the content. This was done in order to gain a more thorough understanding and better information about the contributions that each of the concepts has made to the adoption of federal character policy and the improvement of Nigerian governance. Policy, constitution, federal character policy, and governance are the ideas to be looked at here.

Policy

There is no gainsaying the fact that policy has a myriad of meanings, whether it is public or private. In either way, it can be described as a web of decisions or a selected course of action amongst the available alternatives to address an issue or solve a specific problem. This supported Egugbo and Oikhala (2022) that whether in the public or private sector, policies are characterized by a course of action which is targeted towards achieving streamlined goals. On his part, Dye (2006) focused on the aspect of public policy and defined it as what the government chooses to do or not to do. But other clarifications were not different from the ones given by Dye except that he categorized his definition on the aspect of public. However, since public policy is a proposed government course of action or inaction, it would be sensible to ensure that the quality and kind of any policy formulated and implemented by any government must be influenced by the people, their environment and the system of government in operation in that country.

Sambo (1999, p. 281) quoted David Easton as saying public policy is “authoritative allocation of values.” Here, issues of power and influence are exposed. But all are about the power to direct, control, regulate and influence public affairs through governance to maintain the people’s core values. With regard to values, these have been used to mean things that people cherish and have an interest in pursuing and sustaining. In an analytical sense, exercising authority and power to influence people in governance with reference to policy is central to the legal power quantum of authorities to allocate the core values to whom, when, where and how. It is derived from standing law (Idada, 2018). As contained in Oikhala (2018), the main challenge of governing Nigeria, characterized by people of heterogeneous conflict and was almost torn apart by the

effects of the civil war, has been how to drive an acceptable and implementable policy that would unite and integrate all the country's component parts.

Drawing from the above, the federal character policy is considered as a framework to enlist people from their diverse ethnic groups and sectional interests to be involved in rendering services and supplying goods that will, amongst others, provide reliable social, political and economic order for Nigeria. This, without prejudice, the health, safety, and welfare of all Nigerians, despite their sectional interests or tribal setting, will not just enjoy stable employment, but they will have equal opportunities for securing a means of livelihood and a shared sense of belonging notwithstanding their barrages of heterogeneity in nature. Paramount in this paper is the state of the federal character policy in the governance of Nigeria. Has it been able to improve the governance process for national unity in diversity in such a manner that Nigerians from different ethnic groups now share common love and loyalty to Nigeria above regional interest in the common good of Nigeria?

Constitution

Down the ages, the constitution has had problems with one acceptable definition. Some intellectuals describe it as the general law of a country. Or it is the whole body of rules through which a state is being governed (Idada, 2018). By this, the constitution is presented as the supreme law of a country. It is used to regulate the conduct of a country's affairs by the government. As cited in Babalola (2015, p. 51), A. V. Dicey defined the constitution as a document having special legal sanctity that sets the framework for controlling the operations of the various institutions and organs of government. Azelama (2016) contended that the constitution of a state is the principle which governs all the arms of a government, its operations, objectives and relationship between the governed and the government.

Relying on the above, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) made lots of provisions. Some of them are contained under sections 33-42, providing for the fundamental rights that every citizen should enjoy. These include the Right to Life (s.33); Right to Dignity of Human Person (s.34); Right to Personal Liberty (s.35); Right to Fair Hearing (s.36); Right to Private Life (s.37); Right to Freedom of Expression and the Press (s.38); Right to Peaceful Assembly and Association (s.39); Right to Freedom of Movement (s.40); Right to Freedom from Discrimination (s.41); and Compulsory Acquisition of Property or Right to own Moveable and Immoveable Property in any Part of Nigeria (s.42). Also, the constitution defined the fundamental obligations of the Nigerian government. According to its section 14 (2) (b), the security and welfare of citizens are the responsibilities of the government. In this regard, section 4 of the aforesaid constitution empowers the legislature to make law for the good order of the country; section 5 is recognized for the implementation of the law; and under section 6, the judiciary is recognized



for interpreting the law and, equally use the provisions of the law for adjudication. Under section 14, the Federal Republic of Nigeria should be governed in accordance with the doctrine of democracy and social justice. It instructed that the powers of the state belong to the people and their governments are accountable to them. The constitution also instructed that the composition and conduct of public affairs at any level of government within the federation must reflect the policy of federal character. According to the foregoing overview, the constitution addresses the people, their nation, their government, and the governance process.

The Federal Character Policy

As a constitutional structure of governance in Nigeria since 1979, the federal character policy has attracted quite a lot of literature. From the report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, the federal character policy is the desire of Nigerians to maintain governance that would be effective in promoting national unity, foster national loyalty and give all Nigerian citizens the same sense of belonging, even though the constituent parts are characterized by diverse ethnic groups and sectional interests (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977). With this, the federal character policy can be considered as a working device by which the collective efforts through potentials of Nigerians from different ethnic groups are sourced, utilized and protected to enhance governance to build a better Nigeria through love for all with shared interest, and unity in diversity.

In the view of Ejimbeonwu (2020, p. 81), the federal character policy is a principle that entails recognition of the diverse ethnic condition of Nigeria's component parts in sharing recruitment both in administrative and political offices, including other resources of the country as a governance feat for Nigeria's unity in diversity. The scholar also used the federal character principle to mean a quota system that was designed to forestall the aggressive political struggle in Nigeria's first republic. However, Okotoni and Adegbam (2021, p. 49) saw the quota system as a by-product of the federal character. In their opinion, the quota system was introduced by the federal government in Nigeria as far back as 1954 to surmount the challenges of governance arising from poor allocation of core values. These values were in relation with who gets what, how, and when, amongst others. It is also aimed at improving the act of marginalization that is being inflicted on minority groups amongst the Nigeria federating units. In other words, the federal character policy is the framework for promoting equitable ethno-regional representation in government. It, therefore, laid down the modus operandi in all levels and arms of government to enhance governance in Nigeria.

From the preceding, the federal character policy focusses on the need to consider ethno-regional diversity in the composition of public offices. This supported section 14 (3) of the 1979 constitution and this was included in the amended 1999 constitution that the composition of the Nigeria government and its governance shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character policy with the aim of promoting national unity and national loyalty; and making sure that no predominance of persons from a



few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or its agencies (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979; and Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

As stated under Section 14 (4) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the composition of government of a state, a local government council, or any of the agencies should carry out governance activities to recognize the diversity of the people within their respective areas of authority, in order to encourage a sense of belonging and loyalty amongst all the people of the federation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). It was in this sense, that section 135 (3) of the amended 1999 Nigeria constitution instructed the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to appoint at least one minister from amongst the indigenes of each state of the federation. Further, the president, by virtue of section 157, is to ensure that the appointment of persons to such offices as those of the secretary of the federal government, head of civil service of the federation, ambassadors or high commissioners, permanent secretaries or other chief executives of federal ministries or extra-ministerial departments and offices such as the personal staff of the president are well spread (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Furthermore, section 203 (b) of the same 1999 amended constitution stated that members of the executive committee or other governing body of a political party shall not be less than two-thirds of all the states of the federation.

Governance

Like other administrative concepts, governance has the problem of one-best-fit definition. Because of this definition challenge, scholars chose to clarify governance in a manner that would suit the object of their study. This was applied here. The World Bank (1994) described governance as the way power is exercised to administer resources to achieve the political, administrative and socio-economic development of a country in a manner that can be sustained. This clarification can be termed in tandem with the framework of mobilizing, harnessing, harvesting and applying the state resources to provide public goods. The public goods, in this case, include provision for a sufficient and effective security network, health, education, electricity, potable water, food, good road network, market system, technology and other infrastructures that are preconditions to fulfilling the safety and welfare needs of the citizens and the country at large. In other words, governance involves the science of ruling, directing, and controlling the affairs of an organization or state.

This paper is focused on the State, so, in this case, governance is referred to the exercise of political, economic and administrative powers by governments at all levels and their agents to create and maintain conditions for good order and to rule through collective actions that will guarantee the common good and prosperity of the country. In other words, governance entails the functions of government at all levels to transform both the political, economic, social and cultural fortunes of a country to maintain a stable, safe



and development. This is in line with Fukuyama (2013), who opined that governance is about the execution of government policies in all ramifications to make the goals set by the state a reality. It is also useful to determine the transparency of these government authorities in policy implementation, utilisation of public funds and their dedication to the service of the country. In all, governance is all embracing. It is needed anywhere a group of people choose to live together to pursue and accomplish their ends. Here, governance is being perceived as a means to achieving that end. Therefore, it was not to have transcended the public by including the private sector and other non-governmental organizations to ensure collective action to meaningfully accomplish the overall needs of the people and the country (Turner & Hulme, 1997).

Dibie (2014) argued that it is through governance that citizens are able to hold their government (those in authority) accountable. With this, governance is viewed as mechanisms and processes for measuring government performance. In essence, the transparency of government authorities; their commitment to policy implementation; equitable utilization of public funds in the public interest; and service delivery for national development are determined through governance. Importantly, it helps to give a clear insight that people are rightly concerned with the government's ability to respond to their desires. They are, therefore, curious about the level of justice in the court of justice established for them by the government. Thus, it is central to the ability of the government not just to provide for their welfare needs, but to protect their rights in terms of their opportunities for freedom of movement, freedom from discrimination, freedom of human dignity, freedom from injustice, freedom of speech and freedom of equal participation in their government and so forth. It is from the foregoing that people are better placed to assess government performance. They are disposed to read the scorecards of government authorities as against what is being experienced in Nigeria in this dispensation in which government authorities are the ones parading themselves with their scorecards and rating themselves as performing excellence. In all, governance is all embracing. It is needed anywhere that a group of people choose to live together to pursue and accomplish their common or diverse ends. Here, governance is perceived as a means to achieving that end. Thus, governance transcends public regions by including the private sector and other non-governmental organizations to ensure collective action to gainfully accomplish the needs of the people and the country.

In a related manner, Chibueze (2009, p. 115) argued that everything about governance is “providing conditions for a good life”. In this sense, governance is about a sound economy for prosperity and development and good order for political, economic, social and cultural justice, amongst others. There is a caveat here. That is, where the government at any level cannot assure these, it will become certain that such a government has not lived up to expectations. Hence, there is a constant need for the government to intensify efforts to improve governance. At this juncture, it cannot be contended that how to get governance

right has been a global challenge. Even though, such governance problems had earlier pushed Nigeria into an unforgettable civil war that claimed large lives and property, the crisis is still lingering. Then, it was attempts at improving it to enhance conditions for good order and harmony, which would build a national spirit of one love; a sense of belonging, unity, and integration amongst the diverse federal units of Nigeria to create opportunity for development and progress for everyone that has motivated the adoption of the federal character policy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The participation principle advocated under Section 14 (2) (c) of the amended 1999 Constitution of Nigeria is adopted as the theoretical framework of this article. According to the Constitution, “the participation of the people in their government shall be ensured.” This is not only central to the inclusion of Nigeria's federal units in conducting their public affairs at the federal, state and local government levels, but the policy direction and conduct of all government businesses should be done in a transparent manner whereby all government functionaries shall be accountable to citizens. Also, the participation principle is a mechanism for fostering equal representation of diverse nationalities towards building national unity, integration, or true federalism with a view to promoting governance in Nigeria (Azelama, 2016).

Accepted in this sense, would help to relax the worrisome rivalry to secure domination of government by one intertribal threatening Nigeria's socio-political and economic framework for transformation, development, unity, integration and governance. Hence, the principle underscores the development of ethnic-regional conflicts, clamors for secession and interethnic struggles for political domination, religious bigotry and sectional interest as the failure of the various federating units to gain opportunities for participation in their government in Nigeria (Oikhala, 2022).

In addition to national unity and integration, it has been argued that national loyalty, the sense of belonging of citizens to their country and a spirit of oneness exist when all the federating units of Nigeria participate in their country's affairs. This conformed to the Constitution Drafting Committee Report that: “the appointment of people into various posts in public service must reflect federal character to avoid ethnic antagonism” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977). In other words, the participation principle is synonymous with the policy of federal character that is designed to forge unity out of diversity by giving opportunities to all ethnic groups to serve in their government at all levels.

METHODOLOGY

The paper collected data from relevant and reliable published textbooks, journals, newspapers and other official records. A descriptive method was adopted to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The State of Federal Character Policy in Governance of Nigeria

To fully appreciate how federal character policy has interfaced with governance in Nigeria, the need to interrogate the reasons behind such a policy will be of help. The quest to fashion out a relevant framework of governance to transform the socio-economic, political, cultural and administrative facets of Nigeria that are characterized by ethnic-regional conflicts, religious bigotry, secessionism and other sectional interests were issues of concern. No wonder that, under Section 318 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), it defines the federal character as the unique desire of the people of Nigeria to maintain national unity, raise national loyalty and give every citizen a sense of belonging to the country as stated in section 14 (3) and (4) of the constitution. With reference to the foregoing, one would be curious to know stance of governance in Nigeria. Abia (2008) maintained that the policy will make for a more equal federation to which more people will owe loyalty because they see themselves well represented. This would mean that the policy will improve governance in Nigeria and command public confidence with greater cooperation amongst the federating parts of the country. For Adejuwon and Ehiane (2011:177), the purpose of the policy is laudable as it highlights the need to consider ethno-regional diversity in the composition of public office. Idada (2018) noted that the application of federal character policy has not only led to poor appointments at ministerial levels and boards of extra-ministerial departments, it has enhanced mediocrity rather than merit to further weaken governance. In fact, the policy has made corruption in the public sector and mismanagement of public resources become a new approach to governance in Nigeria (Azelama, 2016).

As observed in Oruebor (2020), historians will probably agree that one of the greatest threats posed by the policy of federal character is the way it has done damage to the prospect of economic, political and social development by attacking the doctrine of excellence in Nigeria, which other modern nations would not have accepted. Hence, at the moment, Nigeria is being rapidly left behind by such countries as Brazil, Indonesia, India, Malaysia and even South Africa, because it cares little about governing through doctrines of merit and excellence. Driven by the mandate of the federal character policy, Nigerians have consciously chosen an extensive increase in burden on the educational, health, infrastructural, electoral, and industrial as well as other allied institutions of governance across Nigeria, with more damaging consequences for standards. With innovation of the federal character in Nigeria today, both the federal government now have university



institutions in all the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, at a time when the older ones are in a state of serious decay. This is also the situation with the state government. Besides, the Nigeria federal character policy has introduced the appointment of two ministers to supervise one ministry to deepen the cost of governance (Idada, 2018).

Furthermore, Okoye (2017) states that in the name of representation of federating units to participate in the governance process to maintain national unity in diversity, national integration, and true federalism, amongst others, the Nigeria federal character policy has ended up in creating opportunity for ethno-regional patrons and their cohorts to exploit and mismanage the nation resources without contribution to any meaningful growth and progress of the country. As he observed, by focusing on the ethno-regional interest, the federal character policy has exacerbated differentiation instead of enhancing mutual trust, accommodation, consciousness of national loyalty, national unity and building conditions for reconciliation with a sense of love and belonging to Nigeria by people of different ethnic backgrounds and interests (Okoye, 2017).

The managerial ineptitude and weakness of the various administrations in Nigeria since the inception of the policy have failed to effectively institutionalize its patronage in ways that would not undermine its consciousness of national loyalty, socio-economic prosperity, and unity in diversity, integration and true reconciliation for the true federalism that the policy was intended to do. Instead, their major concern was the distribution of state patronage on a national level, which has been attracting more political disputes between the federal and the state, and between the state and the local government respectively. Using their regional or sectional links, self-interested politicians band together through this means to pursue wealth accumulation and lobby state powerholders to prevent any definite political concerns from arising from the political rivalry process. Due to needless political pressure from distributive demands, competition for rents, and party patronage, economic management, policymaking, and implementation issues were brought to a complete standstill. What is noted to be the high patronage of this federal character policy was the consistent indiscipline of the political class and elite. All of these have transcended into deep patronage of intra-and inter-party economic mismanagement, hostile electoral processes, poor election management, vote selling and vote buying, rigging of elections, snatching of ballot boxes, political thuggery, other electoral manipulations, widespread electoral violence and forms of disorder (Tobi & Oikhala, 2018; Oruebor, 2023).

As observed in Osigwe (2022), right from its inception, the federal character policy has failed to address the crying of the Niger-Delta and Southeast for marginalization. This situation was rather deepened when both the political and economic restructurings starting from the Obasanjo Administration in 1999 to date were being perceived to be in favor of the North and this has taunted as an attempt not just to reduce the



weight of the federal character policy but to be a cheating to other federating parts of Nigeria, which is not good for equitable governance. The table below shows the Cut-Off Marks for the 2018/2019 Session used to admit students into the Federal Government Schools in Nigeria for the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) is presented as a reference point.

Table 1. The 2018/2019 Session Cut-Off Marks for Admission into Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria

S/N	State	Cut off mark
1	Abia	130
2	Adamawa	62
3	Akwa-Ibom	123
4	Anambra	139
5	Bauchi	35
6	Bayelsa	72
7	Benue	111
8	Borno	45
9	Cross River	97
10	Delta	131
11	Ebonyi	112
12	Edo	127
13	Ekiti	119
14	Enugu	134
15	Gombe	58
16	Imo	138
17	Jigawa	44
18	Kaduna	91
19	Kano	67
20	Katsina	60
21	Kebbi	9 (male) 20 (Female)
22	Kogi	119
23	Kwara	127
24	Lagos	133
25	Nasarawa	58
26	Niger	93
27	Ogun	131
28	Ondo	131
29	Osun	127
30	Oyo	127
31	Plateau	97
32	Rivers	118
33	Sokoto	9 (male) 13 (female)
34	Taraba	3 (male) 11 (male)
35	Yobe	2 (male) 27 (Female)
36	Zamfara	4 (male) 2 (Female)
37	FCT Abuja	90

Source: Ejimbeonwu (2020)

Data from table 1 above shows that, in the name of the federal character policy, some people from some states are made to suffer injustice and unfair play. As shown from the table it means in the federal government common entrance examination, both male and female children in Abia, Lagos, Ogun, Edo, Ondo, Enugu, Imo and Delta are expected to score at least 130, 133, 131, 127, 134, 138, and 131 to be admitted into any of the federal government colleges. But a male child from Yobe that scored 2 and a female

who scored 27 will be admitted into the same college. The data from Table 1 further showed that a male or female child of Imo State is not qualified for admission into a federal government college when such a child scores below 138, whereas a male child who scores just 4 marks and a female child that scores only 2 marks will be considered for admission into any of the federal government colleges in Nigeria. Will low educational standards not be encouraged by this? Does the data from the table under review not present the federal character policy as a government instrument or an official weapon for inflicting inequality and discrimination on some federating units of Nigeria? Probably, it is here that Oruebor (2023) posited that the federal character policy has deepened the governance challenge it was devised to tackle.

With the intention that productivity in public service will be improved through the participation of people at all levels of government, the present patronage of the federal character policy, as noted in the preceding so far, has been weakened in the way that more powers are still being shared with very few tribes of Nigeria federating units. In fact, it was properly documented in Okotoni and Adegami (2021, p. 51) that the promotion exercise within the Nigerian Army in 2013 defied the principles and objectives of Nigeria's federal character. This assertion is supported by the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, who advised the erstwhile President Buhari that the federal character policy in Nigeria is meant to avoid the concentration of key appointments in a few ethnic hands or geographical places, as was noted in his administration. As it was, the sensitive key positions of both the security, economic and other core offices were from the North. These include the Chief of the Army Staff, Chief of Defence Staff, National Security Adviser, State Chief of Protocol, Chief of Air Staff, Inspector General of Police, Comptroller General of Customs, Controller General of Immigration, Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Accountant General of the Federation, Deputy Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, Group Managing Director, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and Attorney General of the Federation amongst others. Unfortunately, this policy violation by government leaders has rather encouraged more struggles and violent succession agitations by those not represented in the governance on one hand. But still, in the name of representation, national unity, integration and true federalism, the application of the policy of federal character has allowed the ethno-regional patrons and their cohorts to exploit and mismanage state resources without contributing to any meaningful improvement in governance. Moreover, by focusing on ethno-regional, religious bigotry and other sectional interests, this policy exacerbated differentiation instead of promotion of mutual trust, accommodation of the minorities amongst the federating units, enhancing national unity and integration with reconciliation to improve governance as intended. So, what this then suggests is that as long as leaders present themselves as ethnic, regional or religious champions and engage in a struggle for the sharing of what they now refer to as 'national cakes',

the aspiration for collective efforts to improve governance in Nigeria through unity in diversity may be hard to see in the light of the day (Osigwe, 2022).

Regarding the Nigerian public service specifically, the federal character policy was intended to improve higher quality service delivery through transparency, careful use of public resources, and hard labor that is people oriented. In this sense, a more equal federation to which more people should be loyal, since they should believe that their country is well represented. It is here Azelama (2016) and Idada (2018) both argued that the quality and productivity of the Nigerian public service can only be done through fair representation, greater cooperation, mutual trust and respect, and public confidence between the public and government authorities and amongst the public servants themselves. This will there and then, reposition governance for better loyalty, unity and integration purposes towards the entire progress of Nigeria. But in practice, it has been that while the policy of federal character stresses the need for ethnic-balancing, it has somehow enthroned ethnicity, doctrine of bias, sectionalism, nepotism, and other nuances which de-emphasized nationality and laid preference to regionalism. This reawakening of parochial orientation with primordial ethnic and sectional attachments has heightened and strengthened the pervading tribal and sectional politics of Nigeria today. Hence, the federal character policy has not properly and extensively addressed the problems of minorities, especially at all levels of government where glaring differences between unequal ethnic groups in the country are quite visible.

As against the expectation of governance of national unity, cooperation and a sense of belonging to Nigeria by all the diverse units of the federation, Kayode (2015) also noted that instead of unity, cooperation with consensus, there has been an unfortunate trend of more division, rifts, and dissension. None of these were not unconnected with the patrons of the policy that hijacked it to lose focus in their attempts to use it for self-benefit. It could be seen that from 1979 to the present, under the disguise of the federal character policy in Nigeria, permanent secretaries at both the federal and state public services have been kicked around, removed, while some are being dismissed just to pave way to appoint unqualified ones for reasons of just personal, sectional, and political interest. The appointment of people to the Foreign Service has also not spared from ill-qualifications and inexperience in disguise of federal character policy. When people are appointed without regard to maintaining standards and national interests other than to just satisfy the wishes of the ruling class, the yearning for governance to produce national unity in diversity and development will be a mere talking drum. Similarly, Oruebor (2023) observed that even though the essentials of the steel industry had hardly gained footing in its initial area of location, it was insisted that a policy of federal character be applied to other areas without any consideration for cost-effectiveness. With this, no one can pinpoint the whereabouts of Alaja Steel Complex, Warri, Delta State or the Ajaokuta Steel Company, Kogi

State. Here, the huge amounts of money invested in these laudable companies were not only wasted, but the good intentions expected benefits by the country were dashed off in the name of federal character policy.

It is based on the foregoing that this article has viewed the state of federal character policy in Nigeria's governance as poor and not helpful to promote national unity in diversity for productive governance in the country. As noted in the preceding, the policy was manipulated to serve the interests of only a few ruling classes. The policy was hijacked by the various patrons from the ethnic groups who operated the policy to serve only their selfish interests. From the analysis, it has also shown that, somehow, one of the most problematic features of the federal character policy as it is currently operated is the complexity of the interests and units being represented by the Northern and Southern Nigerians, including the state and local governments. For example, the appointment of people to various key posts in public service must reflect the federal character policy to avoid ethnic or sectional antagonism. In other words, there must be ethnic, geographical and territorial balancing with other sectional interests in the appointment of people within the public service in both the federal, state and local governments to improve governance in Nigeria. But the federal character policy was subverted as the appointments have always been random patronage arising from political, personal influence, including favoritism, nepotism and other sentiments (Akamere, 2001; Oikhala, 2019).

Therefore, it is clear from everything above that Nigerian governance is suffering more from the current federal character policy than anticipated. Instead, it has exacerbated Nigeria's political instability by fueling further governance crises and power struggles. The Nigerian governing system's high sponsorship of injustice and mediocrity for good order, a sense of belonging, and loyalty to developing Nigeria's unity in diversity is more detrimental to governance when standards, merit, equity, fairness, and justice are compromised.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The status of federal character policy in Nigeria's governance process was investigated in this article. The 1979 Nigerian Constitution resulted in the policy. The nation's governance has not improved as a result of the ongoing interethnic competition to ensure that one main ethnic group dominates the government and marginalizes others. The federal character policy emphasizes the necessity of taking ethno-regional diversity into account when conducting government in Nigeria as a means of moving forward. As intended, the program aimed to create a more equitable federation where more citizens would be loyal to the nation since they would have felt that they were adequately represented to take part in the management of their public affairs.



The paper concluded that Nigeria's federal character policy was a very good attempt to strengthen governance in a way that would lessen the unhealthy power struggle between one main ethnic group or sectional interests to the exclusion of others. To put it another way, the appointment of individuals to various positions at the federal, state, and local government levels will now reflect the federal character policy to prevent ethnic resentment, which means that the governance crisis brought on by the marginalization of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria needs to be addressed.

However, the paper found that the federal character policy was unable to improve the poor state of governance in Nigeria. Instead, it was hijacked by a few myopic ethno-regional patrons and political leaders to achieve their selfish interests. This was found to have worsened the crisis of governance in Nigeria to be more problematic and vulnerable. Besides, one of the major problems that Nigeria has today is that political leaders do not obey the law. They have always bent rules that suit their selfish interests to make survival very difficult for people and promote injustice and unreasonable behavior. It was noted in Okotoni and Adegbami (2021) that because of manipulation and bad application of the federal character policy to hurt some ethnic groups, and with a view to securing admission into federal government colleges or employment means of livelihood amongst others, some Nigerians allegedly forged their states of origin. Therefore, the article concluded that the idea of federal character policy is very good even though it has not improved the state of governance in Nigeria due to myopic and poor leadership influence for its incorrect application. Hence, the federal character policy, through its wrong manipulations to suit the whims and caprices of the leadership, could not strengthen governance ties of unity in diversity, it was even made the state of governance more unstable, problematic and conflict-prone than ever before.

Going by the findings and conclusion, poor leadership was attributed to the failure of the federal character policy to strengthen state governance in Nigeria. As a way forward, the fraught of leadership in Nigeria should be urgently corrected. In this case, Nigerians should only support leaders that have strong affection for citizens. Even, the federal character commission that was established to superintend the policy for better results appeared to be very venerable in conception but vicious in execution because of leaders who have little or no affection for their citizens. Such leaders would neither tolerate lopsided application of policy to strengthen governance nor associate with whoever is not ready to work for the common interest and progress of the people. In the opinion of the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, Nigerians need to always see themselves as one (Agboola, 2024). These were the basic reasons for the federal character policy. Unfortunately, corrupt practices and personal interests by leaders at all levels of government thwarted the policy. Nigerians should therefore seek out a leader who is enthusiastic about their

welfare. A leader like that will always demand governance that strengthens Nigeria's unity despite its diversity.

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