



## The challenges of democracy, federalism, national unity and integration in Nigeria: A conceptual approach

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### Abstract

*Democracy in Nigerian context has been unable to promote national unity and integration. This is due to many different interrelated factors such as ethnicity, religiosity, regionalism and corruption and as well the manner in which the Nigerian state evolved as federal entity. This paper sought to examine the practice of democracy in Nigeria's federal state with the aim of exploring its impact on Nigerian national unity and integration. In achieving these, Findings from the study reveal that ineffectiveness of leadership and the orientation of Nigerians toward Nigerian state have been the bane of democracy and Nigerian national unity and integration. Although, several institutions and policies have been established to promote national unity and integration, these, have yielded inadequate results. The study recommends among others the proper institutionalisation of the many good policies directed at inculcating the spirit of national unity and integration. Also leaders should embrace the principles and practices of good governance characterized by effectiveness, participatory, accountability, responsiveness, equitable and inclusiveness, as against the politics of divide and rule.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Federalism, National Integration, National Unity, Nigeria

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### 1.0 Introduction

Democracy in Nigerian context has been unable to promote national unity and integration. This perhaps, is due to the way and manner the Nigerian state itself evolved as one entity and the continued use of divisive lines in such areas such as ethnicity, religion and regionalism by the political leaders. The evolution of Nigerian state can be traced to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the erstwhile colonial masters in their attempt to perpetuate the exploitation of Nigeria's human and economic resources. Upon the

regain of national political independence on the October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960 the country's first political leaders institutionalized federal system of government which allowed each and every region to operate with the government at the centre Kurfi, 2014, Gambari, 2016).

The idea for the institutionalization of federalism as a system of government was primarily for national unity and integration. The founding fathers of Nigerian State subscribed to the idea of federalism in various degrees as a form of government best suited for Nigeria. Awolowo, Azikwe



and Tafawa Balewa had all called for the adoption of federal system of government even earlier before the regain of independent. The choice of federalism as a system of governance was born out of the desire of the founding fathers to nurture and preserve “unity in diversity” (Kurfi, 2014, Gambari, 2016). This has been ineffective in the provision of the smooth terrain needed for national unity and nationhood to thrive, instead, it provided a highest regional tension, ethnicity, and sub-regional agitation in the country (Hassan, 2006). The plural nature of the Nigerian society and the apparent ‘cold war’ among the different competing ethnic nationalities have tended to aggravate the situation. There were intense concomitant struggle among different competing ethnic nationalities to ensure that the governance of the country is dominated by one region or the other. This has been more compounded with the emergence of a new politico-educated elites on whom the mantle of leadership has fallen and who, in order to further their individual personal and selfish ambitions, have largely sown, and continue to nurture, the seed of discord among Nigerians (Ajayi, 2006). It has been observed that democracy as a system of government has a universal acceptability. Nigeria as a nation has had several democratic regimes but were all truncated by military intervention. However, Nigeria was fully ushered into a democratic dispensation on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1999. Nigeria paraded democracy as a symbol of progress, development and modern civilization with its tentacles of peace, unity and progress (Tersoo & Ejue, 2014).

Democracy by its tenets should serve as a driving force for national unity, integration and development of any country. However, the realities in Nigerian democratic practices negate the ideal ways of its practice. No

doubts several issues particularly, insecurity, corruption, marginalization, ethnicity, religiosity, regionalism, national question, separatism and secession are on the increase. The quest for self-determination by the ‘marginalized’ group in the Southeast of the country and the subsequent ultimatum given to the Igbo people living in the Northern part of Nigeria, the taken over of seventeen Local Government Areas in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states by the Boko Haram militia in the Northeast, the rise of farmers/herders conflicts in the North central part of Nigeria, the rise of banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest and its subsequent movement to the Southwest of the country raised a fundamental question on the practice of democracy in a federal republic of Nigeria and as well the future of Nigerian national unity and integration (*emphasis mine*)

According to Tersoo & Ujue (2014) the introduction of democratic rule in Nigeria acted like a pressure which enables the people to vent their pent-up anger and express their group interest and further demand for more political power and equitable distribution of natural resources. However, a true democracy is build up on freedom, justice and equity. Although democracy in Nigeria has increased the freedom of association, religion and participation, in turn it contributed to the disunity among different nationalities in the country. In spite of having passed the post-transition election test, Nigeria’s democracy is still considered as ‘nascent democracy’. This trial started for more than twenty years now, by now the attention should have been on the quest for a practical and sustainable national integration for greater development. The emphasis now should also have been on the content of democratic politics rather than the type of democracy in operation



(Dawood, 2015). Although, many scholars such as Jamo (2013) and Arodoye (2017) contend that, Nigeria attain fastest growth in democracy. However, the growth is observed to be mostly in the people's participation in electioneering processes. The prevailing reality in Nigeria's democratic practices is characterized by low level or even complete absence patriotism especially among the political leadership of the country at all levels of government (Oyadiran & Adeshola, 2016). These unpatriotic democratic practices jeopardize national unity, national integration and national development.

The paper is structured into sections and subsections. In section one, we provide the background to the study and problem statement. In section two, methodology of the study was explicitly explained. In section three attempts has been made to conceptualized and reviews empirically certain concepts and works relevant to the study on one hand, and adopts a theory which guides the working of the study. Section four of the paper attempts to explore issues revolving around federalism, democracy and Nigerian national unity and integration on the one hand and on the other hand the mechanisms adopted by different government to ensure national unity and integration. In the final section attempt was made to conclude and make certain recommendations.

## **2. Methodology of Study**

This paper adopted documentary research where data was collected from existing literatures on democracy, federalism, national unity and integration from sources such as books, journal publications, online newspapers and internet. Data was presented by the use of content analysis so that the issues will be dealt with according to the information gotten from literatures. The

scope of the study was restricted to Nigeria while the time frame is 2015-2020. Specifically, the study utilizes resources for both conceptual, empirical and theoretical review and analysis.

## **3. Literature Review**

The concept of democracy is not restricted to a single or generally acceptable definition. Several scholars define it in a way and manner they perceived and understand it. The evolution of democracy is linked with the small city state of Athens in Greece, where all adjudged male adult citizens were allowed to directly participate in decision-making and implementation (Dawood, 2014). Political philosophers articulated this form of democracy as a remedy to dictatorship, monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy and feudalism (Isekure 1992). However, with the growing complexity of modern states in terms of vast territory and population, the classical democracy has become impossible to succeed. Thus, in contemporary times, democracy has been referred to as the expression of 'popular will' of the political community through elected representatives (Dawood, 2014).

Democracy is defined by Abraham Lincoln as the government to the people, for the people and by the people. In spite of its deficiencies, this definition has however sends a strong message on what democracy should be, because it takes into cognizance of people in all its processes. Oyovbaire (1987) defines democracy as a system of government which seeks to realize a generally recognized common good through collective initiation, and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegates authority to agents to implement the broad decisions made by the people through majority vote. This definition attempts to incorporate peoples'



participation in policy initiative and practices of representative democracy but, it however failed to recognize the eminent role played by the political parties in every democratic dispensation. The deficiency of this definition has been taken care of by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (in Beckman, 1989) as a meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties - freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (Diamond, Linz, & Lipset 1988 in Beckman, 1989). From the foregoing discussion, it is understood that democracy has universal appeal. In fact, as a principle or style of governance, democracy is considered as the best way of ruling in contemporary global community and therefore should serve as mechanism for national unity and integration.

Like the concepts of democracy, national unity and integration, enjoy various definitions by different scholars. Ojo (2009) noted that integration as a concept is common to social science disciplines and means different things to different scholars. He identifies economic integration, socio-cultural integration as well as political or national integration. Also Weiner (1967) has attempted to describe five senses in which the concept of integration has been used in the literature, and they cover an extraordinary range of political phenomena.

He cites national integration, territorial integration, elite-mass integration, value integration, and integrative behavior (Weiner 1967). Again, (Weiner, 1971 as cited in Ibodje & Dode 2007), opined that integration presupposes the existence of some elements of pluralism, which may be ethnic, sociocultural, economic, language or political whereby each consciousness can hinder the process of creating a sense of territorial nationality. Olawore & Adisa in (Tersoo & Ejue, 2014) refers to national integration as the attempt at uniting or bringing together the hitherto multi-ethnic groups of people with diverse cultural, historical, language, religions and beliefs systems into one which would remove primordial and subordinate loyalties and sentiments to ethnic nationalities. Adenike and David (2013), define national integration in a rather comprehensive way:

as a process that produces an omnibus of initiatives put in place by a state, its representatives or institutions guided by respect for the unique traditions and cultural backgrounds of ethnicities sharing the same polity with the goal of harmonising all interests through a form of dialogue and representation and addressing differences that may be divisive and conflictual using the instruments of fairness, justice and equity in the sharing of resources, benefits, opportunities and responsibilities in order to guarantee stability, longevity and prosperity of the polity as long as the inhabitants decide to remain within the polity.

National integration is a process whereby political actors in distinct national setting are persuaded to shift their loyalty specification and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing nation state' (Earnest, 1991 cited in Dawood 2014). National integration is the awareness of a



common identity amongst the citizens of a country. This simply means that although citizens of a country belong to different castes, religions, regions, cultural background and speak different languages, they still recognize themselves as one (Asaju and Egberi, 2015). From the foregoing, it can be deduced that national unity and integration centered on creating consciousness and instilling sense of oneness among the citizens of the country. It is very important to state that if the tenets of democracy are to be followed with diligence, sense of patriotism and sincerity, democracy will promote national unity and integration even in the federal republic of Nigeria.

The concept of federalism received numerous scholarly attention. However, it is basically refers to the system of government where powers and responsibilities are shared between the central government and other sub-units of government usually the state. Federalism emerges when the hitherto independent societies felt the need of coming together for mutual benefit usually security or socioeconomic benefit. According to Britannica Encyclopedia, federalism is a form of political arrangement that brings together separate states or other polities within an overarching political system in a manner that allows each of the state or polity to maintain its own integrity. The theory of federalism lays stress on the original meaning of the term of federalism (foedus) in Greek, which it had had in the Ancient Greece. Namely, the term of "federalism" described the relationship between the alliance and the union of independent subjects, with the purpose of reaching common goals. Just because of that, the cities - states at that time made use of the principle of federalism and united to special alliances, the so-called "leagues" for

the purpose of defense, a common life or in order to realize other goals (Bataveljic, 2012). Federalism is a formation of a union and a voluntary association of different territorial unions of people within the scope of a state, or between several states and political unities for different purposes. Federalism allows a solution of national conflicts in countries with a multinational structure. Through federalism, the subsidiarity principle is realized most clearly in the area of allocation of competences. As fundamental aims of federalism, according to Bataveljic (2012) shall include the; Safeguarding of diversity and different identities; Protection of specific features of every minority community; and Protection of the individuality of every nation, the federal state or the region. Ideally, federalism creates an avenue where multi-ethnic and multicultural states live in harmony not only because they have forgotten their difference but there is enabling environment which specifies how their difference is being addressed.

According to Zamare and Karofi (2015) the terms used for National unity have included national cohesion, national integration, nation building and social solidarity. Ojo (2009) see national unity as the process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious city, based upon an order its member regard as equitably harmonious. Jacob and Tenue in Ojo (2009) described national unity as a relationship of community among people within the same political entity. He stressed that it is a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive, to act together, and to be committed to mutual programmes. Morrison quoted by Onifade and Imhonopi (2013) sees it as a process by which members of a social system become less consequential in affecting behavior. In this process member of the social system



develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community. Etzioni, in Alvan (2017) defined national unity as solidarity within citizens of a nation, with minimum sectorial practices and close adherence to order and order. However, he maintained that national unity does not implies homogeneity. It rather advocates for what he called “community of communities” which respect diversity and shared values, experience and geographical relativity. National unity is creates sense of togetherness, oneness and mutual respect by the citizens for the overall development of the country. In line with the above assertion, Zamare and Karofi (2015) noted that concept of national unity can be seen as a feeling of being united as a country especially in terms of trouble. In other words, it is the processes of coming together to fight against anything that effect the human development of a particular group of people. The general idea of democracy, federalism, national integration and national unity is to expedite development in a multi ethnic and multicultural community.

### **Empirical Review**

Researches have been conducted to study democracy, federalism and Nigerian national unity and integration. For instance, Dawood (2015) in his paper “the fragility of the Nigerian federal system and the quest for national integration: some contending issues and way forward” notes that in spite of the fact that Nigeria operates federal system of government, the inadequacies of the federalism have continue to endanger the cooperate existence of the polity not only because of the artificiality and haphazard nature of its arrangement but also due to the failure and collapse of the state apparatus in ensuring democracy and good governance. He notes that Nigerian government has put forward different policies, programmes and

institution capable of promoting national unity and integration. The study recommends among others minority-majority, indigene-settler issues must be addressed to give all and sundry sense of belonging in national affairs. In another study conducted by the same Dawood (2015) “Fifteen years of democracy, 1999-2014: Reflections on Nigeria’s quest for national integration” the researcher reveals that democracy in Nigeria fails to promote national unity and integration. He observed that the ruling elites were unable to understand and manage the system they are operating. The author recommends the implementation of socially just and welfarist policies based on new social contract that will ease the suffering of Nigerians. He posits that a new democracy from below, rooted in the people will ensure national unity and integration, he furthers by advocating for institutionalizing democratic tenets that will inculcate the idea of national integration. Paul (2015) in his study on “National integration: A panacea to insecurity in Nigeria” notes that thoughtful reflection on the Nigeria system from independence reveals that several domestic forces militate against national integration in Nigeria. While the race toward national integration has been an unrelenting task in the development of the Nigerian state, it is sad that this task has not adequately achieved its objectives. He identified insecurity, conflict and crime, and insurgency as bane to national integration in Nigeria. He advocates the adoption of a “New Crusade on National Integration (NCNI)” obliged with the objectives of propagating and expanding the ideology of collective responsibility in tackling insecurity across the nation; propelling a redirection in the actualization of national integration through existing schemes,



programmes and structures. In another study by Asaju & Egberi (2015) on “Federal character and national integration in Nigeria: The need for discretion and interface” shows that federal character principle has fail to achieve the aims and objectives of promoting national unity due to the elitist interest. They recommend however, that for federal character to achieve its objective of national integration, it is imperative for Nigerians to see themselves as belonging to one indivisible country, where ‘thou tribes and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand’. The reign of justice, equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law and the rights of all citizens will go a long way in guaranteeing true national unity and integration in Nigeria. Although, these researches attempt to bring to fore the effects of democracy, federalism and Federal Character Principle on national integration, these did not take into cognizance, the current problems bedeviling the country’s unity and integration so, the need for filling this gap.

#### **4. Presentation of Findings**

##### **The practice of federalism in Nigeria**

The evolution of Nigerian state can be traced to the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates in the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1914 by the then British colonial administration. The practice of Federal system of government started 1954. The federal system of government was bequeathed to Nigeria as a viable option to govern multi-ethnic setting like ours. Over the years, there was convergence of opinions as to the desirability of political union in Nigeria. In 1948 for instance, Sir Arthur Richards acknowledged that “.... It is only the accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically...” (Dawood, 2015,

Idowu & Satuyi, 2016). Again Sir Abaubakar Tafawa Balewa argued during the Legislative Council debate in 1948 that ‘many Nigerians deceived themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one. This is wrong. I am sorry to say this presence of unity is artificial and it ends outside this chamber’ (Nigeria 1948 in Omoruyi, 1981). These assertions are akin to what Obafemi Awolowa said in 1947 that:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no ‘Nigerians’, in the same sense as there are ‘English’, ‘Welsh’, or ‘French’. The word ‘Nigerian’ is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. There are various national or ethnical groups in the country It is a mistake to designate them ‘tribes’. Each of them is a nation by itself with many tribes and clans. There is much difference between them as there is between Germans, English, Russian and Turks for instance. The fact that they have a common overlord does not destroy these fundamental differences (Bukar, 2016, Dawood, 2015).

We can understand from the above assertions that problems of Nigerian national unity and integration does not just happened today. Even the founding fathers seemed to have contentions with the unity of Nigerian state. Federalism as a system of government emerged as a results of different independent nationalities with different culture, languages, economic, social and political orientation decided to form a strong and formidable country. Like democracy, the origin of federalism could be traced to Greek civilization with their efforts to describe the legal relationship between the leagues and the city states, modern federalism began with the works of Jean Bodin. He was followed by others including



Otto Cosmanus, Hugo Crotins and Pufendorf. To these writers, federalism was a voluntary form of political association of independent authorities, for special common purposes, such as defense against external aggressors, for the interest of trade, communications and other reasons deemed necessary by member units (Mogi 1913, in Dawood, 2015). According to A.V. Dicey, federalism is a political invention which is intended to reconcile national unity and power with the maintenance of the rights of the separate “member states”. As he puts it “whatever concerns us as a whole should be placed under the control of the national government and all matters which are not primarily of common interest should remain in the hands of the several states” (Dicey cited in Aderonmu 2010).

According to Frank (1968), the major cause of failure or partial failure of federations does not lie in the analysis of economic statistics or an inventory of social-cultural or institutional diversity but could only be found in the absence of a sufficient political-ideological commitment to the major concept of federalism itself. To the scholar, the presence of certain secondary factors such as common colonial heritage, a common language, the prospect of economic advantages were useful but not sufficient conditions to ensure success in federal state. In another point, the rationale behind the federalism is seen in power sharing. This position is supported by Wheare (1963) where he conceptualized federalism as a constitutional arrangement which divides law making powers and functions between two levels of government. To him “... by the federal principle” I mean the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each, within a sphere co-ordinate and independent”. Dawood observed that Wheare’s proposition was

legalistic, rigid and static when he asserts that “I have put forward uncompromisingly a criterion of federal government the delimited and co-ordinate division of governmental functions and I have implied that to the extent to which any system of government does not conform to this criterion, it has no claim to call itself federal” (Whear, 1963 in Dawood, 2015). The point of departure in this discussion remains that traditionally federalism is established everywhere with the major aim of promoting unity and integration of hitherto independent nationalities whose for different reasons decided to surrender their loyalty to the central government.

#### **Challenges of Democracy on Nigerian National Unity and Integration**

Empirically, national unity and integration has been for years the concern of many multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries of the world. The experience in Sudan, India, Rwanda, Kenya and Yugoslavia posed a serious concern for national unity and integration. As multi-ethnic country, Nigeria has been grappling with the issues of national unity and integration for decades. In line with this fact, Gambari (2016) noted that quite number of multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies constantly have to contend with tension and conflicts arising from the ramifications of their diversity. He furthered by saying it usually requires “the highest level of statesmanship, patriotism and astute brinkmanship to maintain the requisite delicate balancing that keeps the whole together”. When Nigeria became independent in 1960 the problem of national unity and integration remained one of the greatest challenges which the founding fathers had to deal with. Tersoo and Ejue (2014) posit that investigation shows that one of the disturbing problems before and





immediately after independence was the issue of ethnic conflicts in Nigerian democracy and nation building. They further contend that factors such as political crisis, corruption, tribalism, and insecurity among others hinder true democracy and national integration in Nigeria. In their view, ethnicity, tribalism and corruption are the major impediment to national integration. Nigeria is a country of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with different backgrounds.

It would appear that since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an escalation of violent and disintegrative conflict among different ethnic groups and sections of the country. These conflicts have largely been identity driven, such as; communal, ethnic and religious. The ‘we’ against ‘them’, ‘indigenes’ versus ‘settlers’ and ‘insiders’ versus ‘outsiders’ relations of inclusion/exclusion, marginalization or even suppression, have been continuously mobilized and deployed in the rivalries and violent struggles for access to power and resources (Dawood, 2015). This identity driven conflicts further aggravate intolerance, and exclusion and as well ethnicity and religious jingoism, constantly perpetrated by selfish ‘politicians’ and ‘leaders’ whether religious or secular in order to meet their ulterior motive (Gambari, 2016). It is on this reality Lanre (2007) argued that it is not entirely surprising that the nation has witnessed a series of successive ethnic rivalries which challenges the national integration efforts of the federal state. He emphasizes that as long as the Nigerian elites continue to comport themselves in this contradictory way, so long will ethno-regional groups such as Arewa Peoples’ Congress (APC), O’odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Ohaneze Ndigbo, Ijaw Youth Movement, Movement for the

Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and Egbesu, continue to find popular support from the people of their respective ethnic group. This singular support in our own view is a symptom of an unstable democracy, and thus, the point of departure is that democracy in spite of its enduring legacy in promoting good governance, popular participation, due process and discipline, has not in Nigerian case promote national unity and integration which is one of the symbol of democracy in the country.

The political experience of Nigerian Fourth Republic as relate to democracy and national unity and integration has been characterized by corruption, embezzlement of funds, ethno-religious conflicts, master/servant relationship, tribalism, insecurity and misplacement of national priority occasioned by absence of patriotism by political leaders. In fact, leadership in Nigerian state, at all level appeared to be the cause of Nigerian national disunity, regional tension, agitation for self-determination by the secessionist in the Southeast and preponderance of insecurity across the regions of the country. Gambari (2016) noted that General Murtala Ramat Muhammad had captured the characterization of Nigerian political experience more succinctly by saying **‘despite our great human and material resources, we have not been able to fulfil the legitimate expectations of our people. Ethnicity, religiosity, tribal and divisive considerations have denied us of the focus that was the promise at independence to build a respectable democratic and economically vibrant nation deserving the**



**respect of all’.** Unfortunately, this observation remains very relevant even after the 20 years of return to civil democratic rule, our political leaders at all level are yet to imbibe the spirit of nationalism and patriotism driven by the principle of democracy and good governance devoid of ethno-religious sentiments. Specifically, Tersoo and Ejue (2014) identify weak democratic institutions, corruption, power shift and ethno-regional tension, clash of political interest or differences and ethnic and religious differences as the major challenges of democracy on Nigerian national unity and integration. The activities of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) a hitherto armed group based in Niger Delta region which emerged from 2005 to 2009 had threatened the unity and integration of the corporate existence of Nigerian state. Although the main motive of the group was rather economic, it had caused lots of tensions and suspicions within Nigeria state ([www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/mend.html](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/mend.html)). The rise of Boko Haram insurgency which transform into terrorism has created a negative impression on the unity and integration of Nigerian state. Looking at the early attacks of the sect, majority of the Nigerian Christians have been accusing the group of deliberate attempt to decimate if not eliminate completely the Christians population and Christianity in the Northern part of Nigeria. For instance Nweke (2015) argued that; The truth remains that Boko Haram poses greater challenge to the problem of integration in consideration of the dichotomy between the reality and the perception. Whereas could mean that Boko Haram is an international terrorist group, its perception by the citizenry could assume various dimension. For perceiver, the fact

that Boko Haram is an Islamist sect already couches it in an ethnic garb. The spate of an attacks of Christian dominated areas in Northern Nigeria and burning of churches presents an ethnic undertone to the situation (Nweke, 2015).

The position taken by Nweke has been with myriad of Non-Muslim Nigerians. To further buttress this Akpogena (2012 cited in Nweke, 2015) advised that all Christians be sensible of people around them especially ‘your guard’, ‘your driver’, ‘your domestic staff’...get necessary information on security and “activities of terrorist especially Boko Haram and Islamisc Jihadist”. The abduction of over 270 Chibok secondary schools girls in 2014 by the sect add intense pressure to the already dichotomized country. There is no denying the fact, activities of Boko Haram created distrust and disunity among the already divided lines, thereby threatened the country’s national unity and integration.

The resurgence of agitation for Indigenous People of Biafra led by Nnamdi Kanu has further threatened the corporate existence and independence democratic state. It should be noted that, in an attempt to secede Kanu came up of with Biafra Independent Radio Station, Biafra national anthem and Biafran currency and even declared Nigeria as “Zoo”. These, no doubt prompted the Nigerian state to launch a military operation to be known as “Operation Python Dance” in Abia state the home state of Nnamdi Kanu which had received condemnation by the leadership of Igbo and some so-called human rights lawyers. For instance Dr. John Nwodo and Femi Falana faulted the decision and described it as illegal (<https://punchng.com/ipob-and-the-national-question/>).

The intensity of farmers/herders conflicts in the North central states and its subsequent



movement to the Southwest of the country has degenerated to yet another issue of national concern. The accusations put forward by many non-Hausa/Fulani and Christian community of Islamization and Fulanization agenda of President Muhammadu Buhari administration caused serious concern on national unity and integration. For instance, former President Olusegun Obasanjo while given a keynote address at the 2019 Synod of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion held in Oleh, Isoko South Local Council of Delta State said, It is no longer an issue of lack of education and lack of employment for our youths in Nigeria, which it began as, it is now a West African Fulanization, African Islamisation and global organized crimes of human trafficking, money laundering, drug trafficking, illegal mining and regime change. This comment elicited harsh criticism on one hand and encomiums on the other hand. For example former governors of Kaduna and Jigawa states Alhaji Balarabe Musa and Sule Lamido criticized him heavily while pan-Yoruba socio-political organization, Afenifere, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the pan Niger Delta Forum and former Aviation Minister, Femi Fani-Kayode said he was right ([www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/storm-over-obasanjo-stance-on-fulanisation-agenda/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/storm-over-obasanjo-stance-on-fulanisation-agenda/)). Accordingly, Eyoboka and Akinferon (2017) opines that National Christian Elders Forum which comprises of top government official has insisted that the Federal Government was planning to “Islamise” Nigeria through Jihad. The forum maintains that Islamists have been interfering in the governance of Nigeria using “Takiyya (approved deception)” while Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen as violent Jihad were more aggressive in their objective of destroying democracy in

Nigeria. He buttress that the aim is to remove democracy as an ideology and entrench Sharia ideology as a source of legislation in the country (Eyoboka and Akinferon cited in Ele, 2018). The declaration of Rivers state as Christian state and subsequently the alleged demolition of mosques by the governor of the state challenged the democracy and unity of the country. Like many other republics and military regimes, the fourth republic witnessed far reaching problems of national unity and national integration.

### **Mechanism for National Unity Integration Adopted by Nigerian Government**

Democracy and national integration as it implies are contested terrain in the context of Nigerian polity. The Nigeria’s federation has been played by instability of war and other numerous outbreaks of ethno-religious conflicts across the country. In spite of the setback, Nigeria has not disintegrated. There have been vigorous efforts and established institutions and policies implemented by different governments in the country with the main objective of promoting unity and national integration (Tersoo and Ejue, 2014, Ahmed and Dantata, 2016). Some of these mechanisms are discussed as follows;

**Adoption of Federal system of government** As noted by A.V. Dicey, federalism is a political invention which is intended to reconcile national unity and power with the maintenance of the rights of the separate “member states” (Dicey cited in Aderonmu, 2010). Through this, the concept of national integration is given expression. As opined by Obafemi Awolowo, “if a country is bilingual or multilingual, the constitution must be federal and the constituent states must be organized on linguistic basis”. He goes further to stress that “only a truly federal constitution can



unite Nigeria and generate harmony amongst its diverse racial and linguistic groups (Fagbamigbe, 1981 cited in Dawood, 2015). Basically, the amalgamation of the North and South in 1914 laid the historical foundation for federalism in Nigeria and the outcomes of constitutional conferences agreed on the use of federalism as an ideal system for the country. This assertion is further confirmed by Gambari (2016) and Bukar (2014) where they noted that federal system of government was adopted by the founding fathers with the main aim of ensuring unity and integration of Nigeria. Although federalism was adopted as the system of government which recognizes the needs and aspiration of every Nigerians including the minorities, cries for marginalization, suppression etc does not come to an end.

**Adoption of Federal Constitution:** The adoption of federal constitution was considered by many scholars as a measure to promote national unity and integration of Nigerian state. According to Dawood, (2015) as an integrative measure, the federal government abolished the regional constitutions which was used by Regional Governments and evolved a single document for the whole country. Equally, several provisions for national unity and integration were enshrined in all the constitutions adopted thereafter including the current 1999 constitution, such as articles that are expected to promote national integration (Dawood, 2015). For instance section 2 (1) of the 1999 Constitution as amended 2011 says “Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state...”. Again section 23 of the same constitution says “ The national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance and patriotism”. Apart from these

sections there are other section and sub-sections which are enshrined in the constitutions to promote unity and integration in Nigeria (1999 Constitution of FRN). In spite of these constitutional pronouncement unity and integration of Nigerian state remains a mirage.

**Establishment of National Youth Service Corps Scheme:** This scheme was established by Major- General Yakubu Gowon administration in 1973 after the longest Nigerian civil war. The scheme makes it mandatory for fresh Nigerian graduates of below thirty years of age, to undergo one year mandatory national service in states other than theirs. The main objective of the scheme was promotion of peace, national unity, national integration and national development. Specifically, one of the objective says as follows; to develop common ties among our youth and promote national unity by ensuring that as far as possible, youth are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin; each group assigned to work together is as representative of the country as possible; the youths are exposed to modes of living of the people in different part of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups (Ujo, 1994 in Ahmed and Dantata, 2016). NYSC scheme has resulted in the encouragement of inter-ethnic marriages and domiciliation in ethno-regional areas other than one's own. However, Odunnuga (1999) observed that there are some negative aspects of this scheme which hinder national integration. For instance, many of the graduates are either not employed or are themselves unwilling to take up appointments in the area they served because of the uncertainty of future prospects in those states, for reason



of statism arising from the vexed issues of Indigeneity (Odunnuga, 1999 in Ahmed and Dantata, 2016). Another disturbing problem of contemporary NYSC scheme is corruption, nepotism, insecurity, and laziness among the youths. These problems have successfully defeated the objectives NYSC scheme.

**Establishment of Federal Character Commission:** Federal Character Commission was established to entrenched Federal Character Principle in the area of appointment of Federal Civil and Public Service, political appointment, infrastructure services and anything that has national appeal. Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor (2009) noted that the Federal Character Principle is another measure adopted to promote national unity and integration. This principle means that the distribution of appointment to high offices must reflect the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria. The state and local governments must be similarly run to reflect the different ethnic groups that make up the place. It is pertinent to note that the principle of federal character has instead of promoting national unity and integration created another one in the sense that the principle 'subverts the principle of justice and fair play to the individual citizen, It sacrifices national progress and development on the altar of ethnic sectarianism as mediocrity takes' precedence over meritocracy in the conduct of national affairs'(Ojie and Ewhrudjakpo, 2009 cited in Ahmad and Dantata, 2016).Accordingly, Asaju and Egbiri (2015) observed that federal character principle has been manipulated and channeled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeois ruling class. They maintained that, members of this class formulate and operate the principle to achieve their selfish desires under the guise of the federal character principle.

**Establishment of Unity Schools and FGCs:** The establishment Unity Schools and Federal Government Colleges across the country was born out of the desire to inculcate national unity among the youths in the country. This assertion was noted by Ahmad and Dantata (2016) where they posit that unity schools and federal government colleges were established to bring youths from the diverse ethnic groups and regions into close contact very early in life and create an enduring environment of love and trust for each other that will lead to a reduction in mutual suspicion and mistrust. These scholars however view that unity schools as strategy of integration has instead of promoting national unity and integration, has ended up creating discrimination of children of the so-called educationally advantaged states.

**State and Local Government Creation:** Promotion of unity and national integration has been the argument put forward by the governments that create states and local governments in Nigeria since its inception in 1967 by the military administration of Yakubu Gowon. The creation of states from 1967 to 1996 was born out of the contention that when states are created there would be reduced marginalization, national unity and speedy economic growth and development. According to Dawood (2015) Decree No.14 of 1967 introduced by the Gen. Yakubu Gowon's regime created twelve states in Nigeria on May 27, 1967 six in the north and six in the south. This move was made to satisfy the yearnings of Nigerians for state creation since colonial times. The government equally felt that such decision will help strengthen national unity and integration. Along this trend, by 1996, the numbers of states have risen to thirty-six with continues agitation for many more. Despite the creation of many states and local



government areas cries for marginalization persist.

**Movement of Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja:** As part of integrative mechanism by the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was moved from Lagos to Abuja. This largely was aimed at achieving administrative convenience looking at the terrain of Lagos. Ojo (2009) noted that, the removal of federal capital from Lagos to its present site at Abuja was intended to be an integrative policy. He however, laments that the whole essence of the concept of a new federal capital territory as a symbol of unity and nationhood has been completely put into abeyance. In a nutshell, Abuja, it appears is organized as 'a revenge project'. (Ojo, 2009). In whichever way one looks at the movement one can argue with fact that situating FCT in Abuja has achieved its major aim of administrative convenience.

**Formation of National Political Parties:** This is another integrative mechanism adopted by the federal government to ensure the unity and integration of Nigerian state. It was hitherto known that political parties were the creation of respective regional government. Each region has its political parties with regional appeal, for instance in the First Republic northern Nigeria was dominated by Northern Peoples' Congress and Northern Element Peoples' Union, while in the west and East there were Action Group and National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon respectively. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides room for the formation of political parties that have national appeal. Section 223 (2b) of the constitution states: The members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party shall be deemed to reflect the federal character of Nigeria only if the members thereof belong to different States not being

less in number than two-thirds of all the States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Unlike in the First Republic where each region has its political parties, the 1999 Constitution as amended compels the political parties' membership and leadership to reflect federal character. This policy albeit did not completely changed the perceptions of Nigerians from aligning political parties with their tribes and religion. The experience of 2019 election in selected states of federation confirmed the assertion and at the short and long run did not contribute very much to the national unity and integration.

**Zoning of Presidency and Rotation of Power:** Although it is not enshrined in any section or sub-section of the constitution of FRN or any extant law, the zoning of presidency was aimed at tackling cries for marginalization and promoting national unity and integration among the geo-political zones of the country. In line with this observation Dawood (2015) stressed that in line with strong and determined desire to further strengthen the spirit of national unity, Gen. Sani Abacha's 1995 Constitution in section 229(4), made provision for zoning of presidency and rotation of power between the six geopolitical zones (Dawood, 2015). The six geo-political zones were believed to have certain shared cultures and features. The six geo-political ones are presented thus:  
First; North-Central: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and FCT.  
Second; North-East: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe.  
Third; North-West: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara.  
Fourth; South-East: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.  
Fifth; South-South: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River Delta, Edo and Rivers.



Sixth; South-West: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo.

**Fiscal Federalism:** Resources or revenue allocation is another integrative mechanism adopted to check the excesses of national unity and integration in Nigeria. To further strengthen national integration, revenues which are generated are pooled into a common account, known as the “Federation Account” from which each state and local government received its monthly allocation. Section 162(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the FRN as amended 2011 says: “The federation shall maintain a special account to be known as ‘the Federation Account’ into which shall be paid all revenues collected by the Government of the Federation...” Again the constitution has specified very clearly the revenue sharing formulae of national resource for instance, the allocation of 15% to oil producing states via the derivation principle. In spite of having this policy implemented, there still exist cries for marginalization by these states on one hand, and it further creates room for other states that control one form of resources to demand for their 15% derivation. This can be exemplified in the request put forward by the Niger State Governor to be paid 15% for the generation of power from his state. Resources are adjudged to be the binding force that hold Nigeria as one entity, without the availability of resources the country would have crumbled and disappeared for long, that is why instead of having national patriotism what we have in Nigeria can be termed as Resources Patriotism.

Other integrative mechanisms established by the Nigerian government include; the establishment of National Orientation Agency, establishment of Ministry of Niger Delta and Niger Delta Development Commission, Nigerianization of Civil

Service, National Language Policy, national anthem, organization of FESTAC by the military administration of Obasanjo in 1977, fight against Boko Haram terrorism, unified civil service across the country and even the civil war and its aftermath such as the Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement policy were all put in place to promote Nigerian national unity and integration. In spite of these policies, institutions and programmes the cries for marginalization, calls for secession, and ethno-religious conflicts did not stop.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is postulated on the theory of patriotism by Nathanson 1993. Patriotism in its basic and fundamental sense refers to the love for one’s country. In the context of modern nation-state, patriotism has received a notable concern. It has been formally recognized that patriotism can take various forms. In the words of Stevenson, 1992 (cited in Bart-Tal, 1997) patriotism has to do with sense of responsibility which is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotions, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime. A patriotic citizen is seen as one who developed not only the love for his country but has a sense of unity amongst the members of the country irrespective of religious, ethnic or regional affiliation. This study adopts ‘moderate patriotism’ developed by Nathanson in 1993 as (cited in Bart-Tal, 1997). Nathanson attempts to develop a model of patriotism that can be functional and constructive in the present times. He asserts that patriotism is necessary precondition for the existence of any nation-state in that the love for one’s country must be developed to motivate people to cooperate and broaden their range of concerns and interests, while at the same time avoiding hostility toward outgroups and taking a moral, humane and constructive



attitude. According to Nathanson's model, patriotism comprises 'a special love for one's country, a desire that one's country flourish and prosper, a special but not exclusive concern for one's own country alone, support of morally constrained pursuit of national goals and conditional support of one's country's policies. In Nathanson's view patriotism, is not blind love for whichever policy, programme, or projects government comes with, rather patriotism emphasizes the support of government that pursues pro citizens' policies. The rationale for the adoption of this theory in this work relied on the fact that the problem of Nigerian's national unity and integration is not due the absence of good policies or established structures and institutions, but due to the lack of patriotism among Nigerians especially the political class. If Nigerians will reorient themselves to see the country as a one, there will be fewer tendencies for embezzlement of public funds which as well restore confidence in the heart of common man in the country.

### **5. Summary of findings**

This paper sought to examine the challenges of federalism, democracy, national unity and integration in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. From the foregoing, we understand the problem of Nigerian national unity and integration does not started with the present democratic dispensation. It was clearly presented in the previous sections that problems of national unity and integration started with the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 and of course the subsequent hand over of power to the indigenous political leaders after the regain of political independence in the 1960. The study reveals that in spite of the fact that concerted efforts have been made by the national governments through the establishment of various structures and new institutions of

government, formulation and implementation of policies and programmes and as well the amendments of constitution and other extant laws, Nigerian national unity and integration remains unfinished business. Until present time, the quest for self-determination and secession by Indigenous People of Biafra is still noticeable, the cries for marginalization by one group or the other is still in existence, ethno-religious conflicts is on the rise as day passes by, and the rise of mutual distrust among the already divided society is skyrocketing.

There is no modicum of doubt; the practice of democracy does not contribute much to the promotion of national unity and integration in Nigeria. Instead, democracy has largely succeeded in promoting division between one ethnic groups with another, between one religions with another, and of course between one geo-political zones with another which is largely sponsored by political leaders in their concomitant struggles to maintain the status quo.

Although, Nigeria is not in short of policies or institutions of promoting national unity and integration, what we observe however as the missing link is effective leadership and orientation of Nigerians to the Nigerian state itself.

### **Conclusion**

Democracy was accepted in Nigeria with high anticipation and excitement as it has the capacity of ensuring political stability, unity and socioeconomic growth. But this dream was soon dashed as the political landscape of the nation was turn to a war ground. The nation is now defined and marred by political chaos, rather than peace, stability, progress, and an equitable society. Many political analysts are surprised that Nigeria has been able to withstand the opposition to the smooth handover of power





from one civilian president to another since 1999. The battle for the soul of democracy in Nigeria has been formidable and relentless. Only few people believed that Nigeria would have survived the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections due to negative predictions being peddled both locally and internationally by political analysts and observers.

### Recommendations

In view of the above we recommend as follows:

- i. It is observed from the foregoing discussion there are numerous policies formulated by the government especially at the federal government level to promote national unity and to douse tension of secessionist, but there is no strong adherence to the intention of those policies. Firstly, we recommend the proper institutionalization of these policies in our public and private life, as this would assist in promoting national unity and integration in the country.
- ii. Secondly, as a federal entity, the study notes that, many Nigerians identify themselves with their region, tribe or even religion before their country. These problems of regional, tribal or religious identification promote disunity and disintegration in the country. A true citizen identifies himself with his country before any other thing. If the entire citizens of Nigeria behave like the Tanzanian or United State of American citizens whom regarded their country 'first' before anything, our problem of national disunity and disintegration would surely become a matter of history.
- iii. Thirdly, since political leadership, has been identified as one of the great challenge to our quest for national unity and integration, the study recommends citizens should vote leaders with the

nationalistic and progressive thinking. This would reduce the tendencies of having bad leaders that hide under the canopy of religion, region or tribe to divide and rule.

- iv. Fourthly, real democratic tenets of equity and fairness, justice and unity, participation in policy and decision making by all and sundry, and good governance must be institutionalized in our public affairs through the process of free and fair elections.
- v. Additionally, government should incorporate in syllabus of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions compulsory subjects on Nigerian history and geography and as well the history of disintegrated countries such as Sudan and Yugoslavia. So the youth will grow up to understand their true history as well as appreciate the beauty of unity in diversity.

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