

**GOVERNANCE, POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION AND THE RESTRUCTURING DEBATE
IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Many African states are currently grappling with a myriad of existential challenges stemming from leadership and institutional failures over the years. These challenges, although similar to a considerable extent in form, scale and expression, are unique to each African state but they all call for an unprecedented political response. Nigeria is not an exception. Arguably, Nigeria's case is most troubling because of the imminent collapse it portends for the country and the far-reaching negative implications for neighbouring African states. Quite uniquely, the rising tensions include but are not limited to a failing economy, seeming incapacitation of the security architecture to curb the mutating insecurity crisis, increased clamours against injustice, tyrannical tendencies of government and political imbalance perceived to be a deliberate attempt to shortchange certain ethnic identities in the country. This paper argues that at the core of these mutating challenges, is the continued failure of the political class to strengthen a governance structure that allows for an equitable delivery of the dividend of democracy as understood in the Nigerian context. Furthermore, the paper establishes a historical background to the governance crisis in Nigeria, identifies critical offshoots of this crisis (including agitations of political marginalisation) and draws the nexus between the crisis and the issue of restructuring which is the newest register in Nigeria's socio-political lexicon. The paper further explores an empirical approach into the issues of governance, political marginalisation and contributes to the restructuring debate. Is restructuring the way to go, is it feasible given the current socio-political dynamics, or will it be an effort in futility?

Keywords: democracy, governance, marginalisation, restructuring

Background

For a world, and in a century considerably shaped by an unending series of disruptive tendencies and innovations that birth solutions that stretch the frontiers of possibilities, the coronavirus pandemic presented a social, health and economic scourge that the world hasn't recovered fully from. Beyond these crises wrought on the social, economic and global health fronts, the pandemic also exposed a number of critical socio-political dilemmas in many countries particularly developing ones who, paradoxically, were less hit by the coronavirus scourge compared to some other countries like the United States of America, India and Brazil.

The narrative with the coronavirus pandemic has been presented to set the tone for this paper with certain intents. First, to underscore the fact that countries are grappling with a challenge that they neither created nor were adequately prepared for. Second, to highlight that response, successful or otherwise, to the global health crisis largely dependent, amongst other things, on the state of public health institutions and infrastructure in countries around the world. It is important to note in this connection that the coronavirus pandemic, amongst other things, exposed the poor state of public health infrastructure in many African countries including Nigeria, which it proved was not adequately equipped to deal with a public health emergency. At the centre of this dilemma is the leadership question, which Obi-Ani, Ezeaku, Ikem, Isiani, Obi-Ani and Chisolum (2021) corroborate. Lastly, and more relevantly to the issues of this discourse, to point out that while no African country is as severely hit by the scourge of the coronavirus pandemic when compared to countries worst-hit like the United States, India and Brazil (Statista, 2021), African countries have been severely scourged by a perennial crisis of governance (Murungi, 2003; Bräutigam & Knack, 2004; Animashaun, 2009, Kelechi, Mainangwa & Peter, 2019). That, perhaps, represents a worse pandemic when viewed against the backdrop that this crisis is attributed to be at the core of Africa's stunted development through the years (Bräutigam & Knack, 2004; Iheriohanma & Oguoma, 2010; Kelechi, Maiangwa & Peter, 2019) some of which include increasing political instability and tensions, worsening poverty levels, insecurity, economic failings and the collapse on public institutions deliver on public goods.

These are interesting times for Africa. Many African states are currently grappling with a myriad of existential challenges stemming from leadership and institutional failures over the years. These challenges, although similar to a considerable extent in form, scale and expression, are unique to each African state but they all call for an unprecedented political response. Nigeria is not an exception. These are also interesting times for Nigeria, Africa's most populous state (World Atlas, n.d), largest economy (Statista, 2021), and disappointingly, the country with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty (World Data Lab, 2021). Considering these dynamics, it may even be argued that the situation in Nigeria is more dire, together with the far-reaching negative implications that an imminent collapse of Nigeria portends for other African states.

The country cannot be absolved from the governance crisis which has fuelled some of its manifest socio-economic and socio-political ills. Beyond these ills is a more fundamental question of the country's governance structure which, there seems to be a consensus, is partly responsible for the country's governance crisis. In this context, Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) assert that the leadership problems as well as the governance crisis are "actually compounded by the lop-sided federal arrangements with the centrality of authority" which is at variance to what obtained in the periods between 1960 - 1966 (early post-independence) where the three regions - North, East and West, as the country was then divided into - operated on an autonomous basis. The issue of federalism has always been a contentious one in Nigeria. And while the subject of Nigeria's 'false federalism, despite being known as federal republic, has always occupied a prominent place in the wider national discourse, the ostensible collapse of security architecture to curb the mutating insecurity crisis, worsening levels of extreme poverty, political imbalance perceived to be a deliberate attempt to shortchange certain ethnic identities in the country, agitations for secession in some quarters, and the increased clamours for restructuring can be regarded as fall-outs of the failure of governance. On a much deeper level, they are indicative of problems the country has consistently failed to address through the years. Where does Nigeria go from here? How do we navigate the murky waters of ethnic agitations of marginalisation? What needs to be done, and by who? These questions are the thrust of this paper. The paper critically examines the subjects of governance, political marginalisation and restructuring both conceptually, and in the wider context of Nigeria's wider socio-political question.

Theoretical Framework

This paper fundamentally touches on the core issue of structure as well as associated issues within a political context. To this extent, the theoretical basis can be critically examined using a number of theories. However, the theory of federalism is considered appropriate to explain the variables which are central to this paper. There is, however, no theory of federalism in the real sense. Adeola and Ogunnoiki (2020, citing Duchacek, 1970) assert “there is no accepted theory of federalism; nor is there an agreement as to what federalism exactly is”. It is, therefore, imperative to note that while there is no generally-accepted theory of federalism, attempts to explain the concept have given rise to a number of categories of theories. Rath (1978) and Paleker (2006), in this connection identify three major categories, namely: the classical theory of federalism, the origin theory of federalism and the functional theory of federalism. The theories are relevant, to significant degrees, to understanding the concept of federalism. The classical perspective attempts to explain what federalism is, and central to it is the idea of a two-level form of government - general and regional - which are independent of each other (Paleker, 2006; Gebeye, n.d). This perspective stems from the work of scholars such as Wheare, Bruce, Brown, Garran and others who also argue that in order for the “independence” of the both the central and regional governments to be real, the following conditions should subsist:

written constitution. (II) The constitution is to be rigid. (III) There is to be an independent judiciary. (IV) Both levels of government directly operate on the life of the citizens; and (V) There should be allocation of adequate sources of revenue for the government at each level, general and regional. (Paleker, 2006)

The functional approach was developed as a result of criticisms of the origin theory which sought to explain federalism in the context of the circumstances that favour its adoption. This view is substantiated by the observations of Rath (1978:577) reproduced below:

It is pointed out by the critics of federalism that the classical theorists concerned themselves with a legal-institutional explanation of what federalism is; they did not take into account why federal systems were at all created. This gap is sought to be filled up by what we call the origin theory of federalism which explains the circumstances favourable to the establishment of a federal system, and which thereby seeks to define federalism in terms of the circumstantial factors and forces.

The thrust of the functional approach is in relation to welfare and social services which is regarded as a basic function of modern society. Rath (1978) echoes this point. An inference may be drawn that the declaration: “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”, enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Chapter II - Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy), is deeply rooted in the functional approach to federalism.

It is instructive to note that none of these three categories of theories are in themselves perfect, but each possesses useful elements, and are complementary in providing a robust perspective to the understanding of the different aspects of federalism. In this connection, Paleker (2006:309) analyses:

The first one seeks to explain what federalism is when viewed from a legal angle; the second provides explanations of the forces and factors that play an active part in the origin and formation of federal systems; and the third and the last provides an analytical framework to study federalism not as a rigid legal structure but as a dynamic and flexible process of cooperation and sharing between two levels of government of one and the same people.

Literature Review

Governance

The concept of governance is a very unique concept by the nature of its widespread use and its multicontextual appreciation. The term has since gained prominence in development discourse since the 1980s when the World Bank attributed the “crisis of governance” to be at the root of Africa’s problems (Keping, 2018). Even though there are different positions by international development organisations, development scholars on the concept of governance, there is a general sense, within the context of public leadership, that it refers to an action or set of actions carried out by the government in the interest of the governed (i.e public). It is in this connection that it encompasses the decision-making processes, structures and institutions put in place by the government to facilitate the management delivery of public goods, which is at the core of the work of government. In the World Bank’s reckoning, governance is concerned with how power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources.” The “how” in this instance fundamentally speaks to the structure by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources. The position of the World Bank also recognises “power” to manage which, in a strict sense, is situated in the helms of the political leadership of a country.

The views of Weiss (2002, citing the Institute of Governance) are along similar lines with the submission that governance “comprises the institutions, processes and conventions in a society which determine how power is exercised, how important decisions affecting society are made and how various interests are accorded a place in such decisions.” This definition makes some points that should be re-echoed. One, governance is not a personal project. It is beyond an individual or group of individuals. Two, it is about institutions, processes and conventions. Three, these institutions, processes and conventions are not generic across board but differ across societies. Four, governance is the public, and therefore is hinged on making decisions that are in the best interests of the majority of people. The various demands of the people must be taken into account, and reflected in the policies and programmes of the government in order to engender an equitable distribution of the public good. These ‘institutions, structures, processes, in more specific terms, include, but are not limited to are rules, legal instruments, as well as actions of the different arm of government. In this regard, the position of Hill and Lynn (2004:4, citing Lynn, Heinrich & Hill, 2001:7) is very apt when they conceive governance as “regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the provision of publicly supported good and services.”

Going further, along the reasoning of previous positions, Onichakwe (2016:178, citing Sharma, Sadhana & Kaur Harpeet, 2013) defines governance as “the manner in which authority, control or power of government is exercised in mobilizing a society’s social and economic resources, to add the issues of public interest.” This submission also raises similar points about structures at work in the management of a society’s resources in the general interest of the public. The argument of Fukuyama (2013) on governance centres on the ability of the government to make rules, enforce the rules, and deliver services to the public; further noting that these ‘abilities’ must be present irrespective of whether the government is a democracy or not. Again, in this argument, as in previous submissions, the place of the public interest is accentuated.

The position of Keping (2018) allows for a more critical appreciation of the concept of governance, and it also covers, to a considerable extent, some of the positions previously referenced as well as the view of the authors. This is evidenced in the submission below:

governance means exercising authority to maintain order and meet the needs of the public within a certain range. The purpose of governance is to guide, steer and regulate citizens’ activities through the power of different systems and relations so as to maximize the public interest. In terms of political science, governance refers to the process of political administration, including the normative foundation of political authority, approaches to dealing with political affairs and the management of public resources. It particularly focuses on the role of political authority in maintaining social order and the exercise of administrative power in a defined sphere (2018:3).

The submission of Kelechi, Maianggwana and Peter (2019) are also relevant to the understanding of the concept. In the reckoning of the scholars, governance is a process whereby a society develops a deliberate line of action to ensure the collective dreams and maximum potentials of its citizenry are realised.

With the foregoing submissions, the following deductions can be made about the concept of governance:

1. Governance is about effective institutions, not individuals;
2. It is about competent management of public resources (social, economic) and the equitable distribution of such resources;
3. Central to the workings of governance are the governed, not the people in government. The overarching objective of governance is to recognise the different interests of people that make up a society, protect these interests, and reflect the significant majority of these interests in the decisions made.
4. Governance, in the context of this paper, is can be significantly influenced for good, or otherwise, by the action and inaction of the political class
5. Every society can only flourish or flounder to the extent of the quality of governance it gets.

Stemming from the above submissions, it can be deduced that the oft-referenced crisis of governance in Africa in general, and Nigeria, in particular, are offshoots of fundamental systemic maladies such as the prevalence of incompetent managers of public resources, dearth of effective insitutions to identify and distribute public goods on the basis of fairne, a contrast between the interests of the political class and the interests of the public.

Political Marginalisation

The attempt is made in this section to examine the concept, or more aptly put, the construct of political marginalisation. At the moment, there is no generally accepted definition of political marginalisation. To this end, an appropriate approach to the understanding of construct - political marginalisation - would begin with an understanding of the root word - marginalisation.

Marginalisation is a global phenomenon with far-reaching adverse effects on societies across the world (Kagan & Burton, 2005; Mowat, 2015). The direct implication is that the issue of marginalisation is not unique to any society, although some form(s) of it might be predominant in some societies than others. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to note that there are types of marginalisation such as social marginalisation, economic marginalisation, educational marginalisation, psychological marginalisation, and political marginalisation (which is the focus of this paper). Oshewolo (2011, citing Ojukwu, 2005:141) explains marginalisation as a state of relative deprivation, a deliberate disempowerment of a people by a group or groups that, during a relevant time frame, wields political power and control the allocation of material and other resources at the center.”

Kagan and Burton (2005:5), in a narrower perspective, submit that marginalisation is at the core of exclusion from fulfilling and full social lives at individual, interpersonal and societal levels.” These views shed some light in understanding that the major thrust of marginalisation is some form of exclusion in the efforts to maximise the fullest potentials in a particular endeavour. This exclusion can be conceived as a state in which individuals are unable to effectively participate in a process. So, for example, if social exclusion means that individuals are marginalised from a society they live in (Mowat, 2015), it follows that political exclusion should mean that individuals marginalised from effectively participating in a political system that they are a part of.

In a strictly political context with Nigeria in mind, this could imply an exclusion or a sabotage in the exercise of political rights at the highest levels (for example, the Presidency), or a biased disposition in the distribution of political benefits (such as appointment into federal offices) that should accrue under ideal circumstances.

The issue of political marginalisation has become a recurring decimal in Nigerian's unending quest to foster unity among the various ethnic identities that make up the federation of Nigeria. In this connection, it has become commonplace for concerned groups to speak against a political imbalance perceived to be a deliberate attempt to create an ethno-political hegemony where an ethnic group is favoured at the expense of other ethnic groups in the federation. And this has largely spurred a general dissatisfaction expressed in numerous agitations against political marginalisation. These sorts of agitations have increased in recent times.

Although there is a consensus that the different geopolitical zones of the country suffer some form of marginalisation, there is also the consensus that the Igbos are victims of political marginalisation.

Before going further, it is imperative to note that the issue of political marginalisation cannot be divorced from issues and events rooted in Nigeria's chequered political history. In this connection, Orji (2001:433) comments:

For thirty months, between 1967 and 1970, a civil war ravaged Nigeria's eastern region following an attempted secession by the Igbo people under the name of "Republic of Biafra." Thirty-one years since the ethnic-motivated pogrom and consequent bloody civil war, ethnicity and abuse of fundamental rights and freedom continue unabated. The permanent state of militarism that lasted for over three decades in Nigeria did not help matters. The ethnic biases, sectionalism, and bitterness resulting from the civil war, have refused to go away. It is felt, seen, and lived daily in Nigeria. It has become a way of life.

This view is re-echoed by Uduma (2015) with the submission that marginalisation, which the author describes as predicament, of the Igbos can be traced to the Biafran war. The author further stresses what is considered an intense form of marginalisation against the Igbos to the extent that "no Igbo man, however good his credentials can today expect to command a nationwide acceptance as a leader in the government and politics of Nigeria." This view is, in effect, shared by Nsoedo (2019:428) when he asserts that there appears to be deliberate attempt to undermine the ability of the Igbo people "to maximise their political and economic potentials."

While it may not be totally correct in principle that the Igbos are politically marginalised since Igbo person is deliberately excluded from participating in the political process, there is however, some merit in the argument when considered against the backdrop that no Igbo person has been president of Nigeria in 50 years since the end of the Civil war, and 22 years since this beginning of this democratic dispensation.

Restructuring

The term - restructuring has, in recent times, assumed a somewhat unprecedented prominent feature in the discussion of issues on the socio-political arena in Nigeria. The reasons for this development are not far-fetched. Nigeria is currently going through what many regard to be a most defining era with the potential to make or break the country considering the myriad of existential challenges the country faces which call for an unprecedented political response. It would appear that response is found 'restructuring' which appears to be the go-to solution proffered at almost every national forum. The conversations around restructuring, and how it is conceived by different people, are not new to this particular period but they have reached new heights so much so that a number of agitations have been woven around it. And while the agitations may possess some merit, Othman, Nazariah and Mohammed (2019) argue that some members of the political class have also toyed with the word 'restructuring' in order to shore up some political capital. It is no longer unsurprising to hear statements such as 'devolution of power to the states', 'decentralisation of powers', 'weak-centre-strong-states/regions', 'reduction of items on the exclusive list', and similar statements by proponents of 'restructuring' to support the case for why Nigeria should be 'restructured'.

These statements, which can be appraised on the merits or otherwise, do not only present a strain of similar thoughts, but also express the understanding of the proponents on what ‘restructuring’ means. Beyond that, the statements point to the likelihood of some form of dysfunctionality with the federal system of Nigeria. Abah and Nwokwu (2017) concur on this note. It is imperative to note that the federal system was originally adopted to make for an arrangement where the ethnic nationalities are each autonomous to manage the affairs within their jurisdiction, and can, to determined extents, collaborate to achieve certain ends (Babalola, 2015; Uwa, Aghemelo & Oyewole, 2018). There is an historical context to the adoption of the federal system in Nigeria, particularly in the pre-independent and pre-military rule era. The submissions of Adamolekun (1991:1) are reproduced below to support the argument:

The federal system adopted in 1954 comprised a national government and three regional governments: Eastern, Northern, and Western. The Eastern and Western regions became self-governing in 1957, followed by the Northern Region in 1959. National independence was won in 1960. A federal system of government was maintained in the independence Constitution of 1960, which replaced the 1954 Constitution, as well as in the subsequent constitutions: the republican Constitution of 1963, the presidential Constitution of 1979, and the revised presidential Constitution of 1989.

This historical veracity of Nigeria’s experience with the federal system presented by Adamolekun (1991) is confirmed by Owasa (1995), Babalola (2015), Majekodunmi (2015), Amah (2017), Abah and Nwokwu (2017), Uwa, Aghemelo & Oyewole (2018), Othman, Nazariah and Mohammed (2019). It is imperative to note that the status-quo, in terms of the adoption of the federal system, was maintained in the 1999 constitution even though the contents have been the subject of criticisms and controversies over the years. Nwaeze (2017:28) presents some insight:

Politically, Nigeria’s federal system could be best described as unitary, unbalanced and unsustainable. Firstly, power is highly concentrated at the centre or the Federal government at the expense of the other two levels of government (state and local government). Secondly, the 1999 constitution upon which the country is presently running is basically a military, unitary and imperfect constitution, which does not have much bearing to the will or wish of the people. Thirdly, there is also the lack of social justice or the rule of law; while the tussle for power is not motivated by service, rather by self-accumulation of wealth and greed by the elites.

With the foregoing, it can be inferred that while Nigeria has experimented with the federal system of government for over six decades, it is yet to make a success of the system. And this position is supported by many scholars who have critically examined Nigeria’s federalism through the years (see Majekodunmi, 2015; Babalola, 2015; Nwaeze, 2017; Egobueze, Ojirika & Ikuinyi 2021). It is, therefore, against this backdrop that the clamours for restructuring Nigeria can be understood. - that is, if the current structure is dysfunctional or defective, then it follows that there should be a restructuring.

To restructure, in its literal sense, is to readjust or realign or to reconfigure, or reorganise a setup. The operative element of these descriptions is the prefix “re-” which indicates that an action is redone. It follows in this connection, in a political sense, that restructuring can be understood as reconfiguring a political setup. Some scholars have attempted a definition of ‘political restructuring.’ For example, Uwa, Aghemelo & Oyewole (2018:103) posit that “restructuring refers to the reorganisation of the existing state structure of any given country to achieve certain objectives.” This submission harps on the “reorganisation” of the state structure, which in Nigeria’s case, is the federal structure. With this and previous submissions in mind, it can be argued that the demand for restructuring is not completely in good order, since what is in question is not merely a readjustment or reconfiguration or reorganisation of the current federal structure but an alignment to a ‘true’ federal structure.

With the foregoing, it can be presented that the restructuring debate is, to a significant extent, about federalism in Nigeria. And a significant body of thoughts on federalism both in a general perspective and in a Nigeria-relevant context are available for critical interrogation. Before delving into the submissions, it bears mentioning there is, in principle, no such as true federalism. In practice, however, a country's practice of the system may be faulted. The point is: federalism is federalism, although its definitions may slightly differ depending on the school of thought the scholar approaches it from. Nonetheless, the submissions seem to derive from a common base. A number of submissions would be examined to validate that position. Wheare (1953:11) conceives federalism as "the method of dividing powers so that the general regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinated and independent." This definition falls into the classical school of thought, and presupposes some form of power-sharing arrangement such that every territory, conceived as sections within a larger society, can superintend over its own affairs. Harnessing the elements of the the classical, origin, and functional theories of federalism, Paleker (2006:309) offers a robust definition reproduced below:

Federalism is a political system which creates in society broadly two levels of government with assigned powers and functions originating from a variety of factors and political bargain, and displaying a tendency to persist through active response to the challenges of changing environment by a process of adaptation through creative modes of institutional as well as functional relationship"

Along similar lines, Adeola and Ogunnoiki (2020, citing Elazar, 1995:1) define federalism as "the mode of political association and organization that unites separate polities within a more comprehensive political system in such a way as to allow each to maintain its own fundamental political integrity".

It follows that a federal state can be understood as a state in which the centre and the federating units operate on an interdependent basis, with each federating unit having the autonomy to conduct its own affairs. This point of interdependence is, in effect, corroborated by Babalola (2015) when the author submits that a federal state is "characterised by territorial division of power between the central (federal) government and the constituent/federating/state governments with the citizen being subjected to at least two main levels of authority: that of his state; and that of his country."

Awolowo (1966), in *Thoughts on the Nigerian Constitution*, makes the following submissions about federalism, with particular emphasis on the conditions that should determine its adoption:

ONE: If a country is unilingual and uni-national, the constitution must be unitary; TWO: If a country is unilingual or bilingual or multilingual and also consists of communities which over a period of years, have developed divergent nationalities, the constitution must be organised on the dual basis of language and nationality; THREE: If a country is bilingual or multilingual, the constitution must be federal, and the constituent-states must be organised on a linguistic basis, FOUR: Any experiment with a unitary constitution in a bilingual or multilingual or multinational country must fail in the long run (1966:49).

It bears mentioning that Obafemi Awolowo, just referenced, was one of Nigeria's foremost proponents of federalism. And it can be inferred, from his views, that heterogeneity should be the major condition for adopting federalism. This position has been significantly validated in that federalism is recognised to be the most ideal system for a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country like Nigeria (Babalola, 2015). To this extent, it can be deduced that federalism considerably has the potential to foster unity amongst the multiplicity of the ethnic identities that are in the federal union, and there happens to be a decent consensus on this point. Ajogwu (2014:3) concurs when he posits on the adoption of federalism as the "appropriate governmental principle to accommodate a country's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversities and nurture a sense

of national unity.” Majekodunmi (2015:116) also admits that federalism seeks to “create harmony from intrinsic or inherent political, social and economic asymmetry vis-a-vis ethnic heterogeneity.”

The views of Amah (2017:289) are largely aligned on this point when he submits that “the main essence of the principle of federalism is to maintain unity in spite of the cleavages among the diverse nations that have agreed to come together.” Whether the “diverse nations” in Nigeria have agreed to come together may be debatable, but there seems to be consensus on the fact that federalism presents significant merits. Some features of federalism have been identified by some scholars. Abah and Nwokwu (2017) identify the following: a written constitution; supremacy of the constitution; autonomy of each government; equality of powers between the regional governments; financial autonomy, and equality of federating units. The position of Nwaeze (2017) is largely similar. He submits that the requirements for ‘true’ federalism include: existence of two constitutions; autonomy of governments; federal/state constitutions; a meaningful number of states/regional governments; meaningful independence; and equality of status between the federating units.

As ideal as restructuring lofty as restructuring may sound, it is not an issue in which there is a general agreement by the six geopolitical zones. There appears to be an on-going North-South schism on the restructuring matter in which the South feels more strongly about the urgent need for the political structure of the country to be urgently reconfigured while the North generally feels indifferent to the matter (Nwafor-Orizu, Chinyere & Tochukwu, 2018). The authors further validate the position when they observe that the history and historiography of the struggle for restructuring of the Nigerian political structure bred conflicts, formation of conflict groups as well as polarising the country along geo-political divides.

Central to the continuous demand for restructuring, in essence federalism, is the need for the country to revert to the 1960 independence political arrangement where the three regions - North, East and South had the autonomy to exploit their natural resources and develop at their own determined pace. This is a marked contrast to what obtains where the federal government virtually determines the pace for the nation. The issue of restructuring in Nigeria has now assumed an urgent need to the extent that it is seeming to be a matter, not of how (which could be finetuned via a national dialogue) but of when. One of the contentions about the country’s political structure is a perception that it is designed to engender a political order unduly skewed in favour of a particular section of the country at the expense of others. This situation brings to the fore the issue of political marginalisation which was raised in the previous section.

Governance, Political marginalisation, and Restructuring: The Nexus

In a sense, the expression ‘dividend of democracy’ is often used to explain what the government is doing or not in the interest of the public and has assumed a prominent use so much that its meaning and essence may be lost. Innocent and Onu (2020:4) raise that “although worn-out and clichéd from overuse, it (dividend of democracy) has emerged in our political linguistics as a shorthand for capturing the performance or non-performance of government in consonant with democratic ethos.” But when ordinary Nigerians talk of the dividends of democracy, it is often in the context of the government’s ability or willingness to build roads, hospitals, schools, provide potable water and electricity, ensure elections are held according to schedule, regardless of the credibility of such elections - nothing beyond the basic offerings which every government should ideally provide to its citizens. While Okeshola and Igba (2013) and Abdurashied (2021) corroborate this submission in effect, Umo-Udo (2014:56) takes it even further when he raises the trend it has become for the government:

at various levels in the present civilian dispensation to hand out welfare packages and implementation of programmes and projects such as building of roads, schools, provision of water, hospitals, free education, electricity etc. to its citizens in the name of the dividends of democracy.

It often seems like a remarkable feat when a politician commissions a road project, however poorly built, or a school, however inadequate, or a hospital, however under-equipped and understaffed, or any basic facility, the conversation is that the dividend of democracy has been delivered to the people. And as basic and central

to the welfare of the people these ‘dividends’ are, the government continually fails to deliver them. This very fact shines through in the positions of Okeshola and Igba (2013), Umo-Udo (2014), Innocent and Onu (2020) and a host of others. It would seem that Nigerians don’t ask for much. There are no widespread yearnings for space exploration, incorporation of the latest digital technologies in education, or adoption of artificial intelligence and other innovations. Perhaps, these are not yet being considered as ‘dividends’ of democracy to the political class.

While the provision of water, education, electricity amongst others are not in themselves extraneous, the dividends of democracy transcend that. It is also about values (Edigin & Otoghile, 2011; Okeshola & Igba, 2013); values such as values such as the rule of law, social justice, equality, equity, and in more relevant context, political balance that reflects the unique nature of Nigeria’s heterogeneity. It can only be expected that when there is the failure to deliver on these dividends - both in terms of provision of amenities that aid the lives and livelihoods of Nigerians as well as upholding democratic values some of which have been previously highlighted - is bound to illicit dissatisfaction in the body politic, which then is manifested, as had been established in the crisis of governance. Stemming from this, it can be argued that at the core of the agitations for political marginalisation may not necessarily be political exclusion, in the strictest sense, but a dysfunctionality of the existing structure which that allows for the inequitable distribution of resources and a overall departure from the values (such as the rule of law and social justice) that equitably allow every section of the country to realise the fullest of its economic and political potentials. Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) concur, in effect with these submissions when they argue that most of Nigeria’s challenges are significantly borne out of “multiple socio-economic injustices, including but not limited to marginalization, social inequality, political exclusion, corruption, economic deprivation, unequal allocation and distribution of state resources, among others.” Similarly, Obomanu (2020) argues on the issue of injustice as being central to grievances articulated by various minority groups of the country.

The thrust of the agitations of political marginalisation, and similar ones, is a breakdown of governance in the ideal sense of it. And at the core of the crisis is the dysfunctionality of a political structure that needs to be tinkered with. There is enough motivation for this to be done. Some of them include the crisis of the socio-economic life and the biting effects on the average Nigerian, the seeming incapacitation of the security architecture to curb the increased spate of banditry, kidnapping, insurgency amongst other security distress situations, political lopsidedness and the attendant agitations across various sections in the body politic.

Conclusion

Nigeria is at a major crossroad in its socio-political journey. These are interesting times, and it seems the restructuring debate will continue until some form of consensus is reached by the peoples of Nigeria on the modalities of a ‘truly’ federal structure for the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Restructuring is a way to go. But it bears mentioning that restructuring will not solve all of Nigeria’s problems. There is still a long way for the country in truly understanding and respecting its heterogeneity. In this connection, the realisation of political rights at the highest level should be an opportunity open to sections of the country. And there is the perennial issue of the quality of leadership. These are some of the germane issues that the country will have to come to terms with in future. There is too much at stake for the country, and so there must be a sense of urgency and deliberateness in navigating these issues.

The Way Forward

The political elite complicit in the crisis of governance that has held the country the jugular for years. It is to their action and inaction that the governance structure has been altered to serve and further the interest of the political class at the expense of the interest of the generality of the Nigerian people. This situation represents an aberration to the notion and practice of governance in its entirety. One of the offshoots of this aberration is the systematic undermining of democratic values and the preference for building individuals at the expense of effective institutions. Paradoxically, no progress will be made without a significant input of the political class. This represents a fundamental dilemma. The solutions lie in an honest appraisal of the existential challenges as well as unprecedented political pressure mounted on the political class to garner the political will to alter the political structure in order to salvage the country from disintegration.

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