

## **Federalism and Challenges of Nation-Building in Nigeria: A Critical Review**

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### **Abstract**

**T**he fact that federalism is considered a suitable government for countries with varied ethnic, religious, cultural, language and otherwise characteristics, its practice in Nigeria seems to have been difficult in sustaining nation-building. This study became imperative to investigate federalism and challenge of nation-building in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought; to determine the extent to which federalism contributed in addressing ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, to examine the extent to which federalism has contributed in resolving issues of minority question and state creation in Nigeria among others. The study was anchored on social contract theory propounded by Thomas Hobbs in (1651). The study adopted qualitative research design. Data for the study are collected from secondary sources. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis. Findings revealed; that federalism has not contributed in addressing ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, which federalism has not contributed in resolving issues of minority question and state creation in Nigeria among others. Based on the findings, it was recommended; that leaders in elective positions in Nigeria should endeavour to preach more peace and unity to the public to ensure that every ethnic/religious group is carried along in the government affairs as it will go a long way to address the challenged of ethno-religious crisis in the country, that federal government should ensure that more states are created especially in the geopolitical zones with lesser number of states than others.

**Keyword:** Federalism, Challenge, Nation-Building, state creation, federal character

### **Introduction**

Plethora studies on federalism across the globe have indicated that heterogeneity among people is one of the major reasons for its adoption in a given country. Federalism as aptly captured by Onuoha, Bassy & Ufomba (2018) refers to a political structure that allows states to unite under a central government to maintain a measure of independence and interdependence. This governance pattern which appears as a compromise formula allows for power sharing between national, state governments and the component regions (Mustapha, 2018). Historically, the origin of federalism can be traced to the ancient political structures in city-states of ancient Greece such as Athens and Sparta which had a system of governance that involved a balance of power between a central authority and semi-autonomous regions (Okon, 2019).

Consequently, philosophical enlightenments of great thinkers such as Baron de Montesquieu, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 17th and 18th centuries contributed to the development of ideas related to the separation of powers and the distribution of authority in

which federalism is built. Montesquieu's work, especially in his book titled "*The Spirit of the Laws*," is said to have greatly influenced the concept of federalism in modern political thinking as it advocated for a system of checks and balances. Furthermore, the United States Constitution drafted in 1787 is often considered a landmark in the development of federalism in the contemporary era (Okotoni & Adegami, 2021). According to Yusuf (2022), the U.S. model of federalism gave opportunity for the development of federal systems in many other countries such as Canada, Australia, Germany and Switzerland particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today many countries in different parts of the world including Nigeria have embraced federalism. To that effect, Awofeso & Obah-Akpowoghaha (2017) opined that federalism, as a system of government is very relevant to countries with people of diverse background as it provides avenue for the distribution of powers and responsibilities between the government at the national level and the component regions. According to him, this power distribution helps prevent the concentration of power in one authority, reducing the risk of tyranny, promoting a more balanced governance structure, protection of minority, accommodation of diverse cultures, languages, and regional identities.

Nigeria is a country with an estimated 350 ethnic groups which have largely contiguous territories and diverse cultures, religion and tradition. These features naturally made Nigeria a candidate for the adoption of a federal system of government (Onuoha, Basse & Ufomba, 2019). Going down on a memory lane, it could be understood that what we know today as Nigeria is the product of the 1914 amalgamation by the British colonial masters who brought north and southern parts together. However, during the colonial rule, Nigeria was divided into two irreconcilable parts of North and South protectorates which reflected in different administrative ramifications such as land tenure systems, local government administration, educational systems, and judicial systems among others. It was contrary to what was obtainable in large British colonies like India and Sudan which had a single administrative system (Ibaba, Sanubi & Okoye, 2019).

The political posture of the colonial era made it almost appear as if the two protectorates of Nigeria were two separate countries held together only by shared currency and transportation system. The situation in the opinion of Okon (2019) made some members of Nigerian elites especially those who had their education and political aspirations in the 1950s and 1960s to be influenced by their regional institutions. Suberu (2015) noted that political polarization of Nigeria into North and Southern protectorates with different administrative orientations made it possible for some Nigerian elites to have little or no understanding of their neighbouring regions. As such, it was easy for prejudice and fear to thrive. Thus, during the period of decolonization struggle, Nigerian nationalists from different regions at some point fought each other as much as they fought the British colonialists.

This apparently made it difficult for Nigeria to have a central figure like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana or Nelson Mandela of South Africa, rather each region threw up its own ethnic champions (Okotoni & Adegami, 2021). After the Nigeria's independence in 1960, successive governments in Nigeria have tried with different degrees of commitment and effort to operate federal institutions that can accommodate the country's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversities and nurture a sense of national unity (Ibaba, Sanubi & Okoye, 2019). It was the belief

of the Nigerian nationalist that a federal system of government was most suitable for the country as this will generate stability which will eventually lead to a strong and united nation. For instance, while chief Awolowo contended that;

*the constitution of Nigeria must be federal and noted that any other constitution will be unsuitable and will generate ever-recurring instability which may eventually lead to the complete disappearance of the Nigeria composite state (Yusuf, 2022: 18).*

Sir Ahmadu Bello, on his own opined that;

*federalism provides the only guarantee that Nigeria as a country will grow evenly all over and added that we can spend the money we receive, the money we raise, in the direction best suited to us (Yussuf, 2022: 18).*

Despite, the frantic efforts and aspirations for adoption of federalism as a governance strategy in Nigeria in order to accommodate the variegated ethnic, culture and religious backgrounds, effective nation building seem to have been elusive in the country over the years. Nation building is seen as a complex and multifaceted endeavor that typically involves various social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the country.

Thus, in the opinion Nwolise, (2021) nation-building is seen as the process of constructing or structuring a national identity, fostering a sense of unity and cohesion among the people as well as developing the institutions and infrastructure necessary for the functioning of a stable and sovereign state. Walker (2017) further noted that nation-building can involve the use of necessary mechanisms to promote development, foster social harmony and economic growth in the country. Different scholars, such as (Eme & Onyeishi, 2014; Ibaba, Sanubi & Okoye, 2019) have indicated that federalism is considered a suitable system of government that can promote nation-building since it is such a government that is capable of reducing the risk of tyranny and promote a more balanced governance structure, protection of minority, accommodation of diverse cultures, languages, and regional identities.

In view of this fact, assessment of federalism in terms of promoting nation-building in a country like Nigeria should be viewed from the extent to which it has contributed in tackling multiple issues which are capable of tearing the country apart. Such issues range from inability to manage diverse ethno-religious disparities, minority quest and state creation, federal character principles, resources control and revenue sharing problem, political instability and bad governance, security challenges among others.

Looking at ethno-religious disparities, it could be understood that Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, cultures, and historical backgrounds. Managing these diversities within a federal structure can go a long way to promote national-building as it will bring about regional balances in accommodating cultural differences, religious tolerance, political representation, and economic development (Suberu, 2015). In the same vein, minority question" and state creation in Nigeria revolves around the challenges and concerns of ethnic and

religious minorities within the country particularly in terms of political representation, economic opportunities, and social inclusion. Nigeria is known for its diverse ethnic and cultural composition and this diversity has often led to issues related to representation, resource allocation, and political power-sharing.

Over the years, some ethnic and religious minorities have felt marginalized and underrepresented in the political and economic spheres, leading to concerns about fairness and equity. State creation in Nigeria has been one of the responses to address these concerns. The country has gone through several phases of state creation, resulting in the current 36 states and one Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The creation of states was partly aimed at ensuring that various ethnic groups, including minorities, have a more significant voice in governance and access to resources.

The Federal Character Principle in Nigeria refers to the constitutional mandate aimed at ensuring equitable distribution of political appointments and socio-economic amenities across the diverse ethnic and geographical regions of the country. Enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, this principle seeks to address historical imbalances, promote national unity, and prevent marginalization of any particular group. However, the application of the Federal Character Principle has been generated considerable debate and criticism in recent times for not working. In terms of resource control and revenue sharing; Ikelegbe, (2019) noted that equitable distribution of resources, especially revenue from oil to a great extent can bring about collective sense of belonging to every state in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the over-dependence on oil revenue has led to economic vulnerabilities and intensified competition among regions for a share of the national wealth. It is believable that when these resources are evenly shared in a way that marginalization is eliminated; quality service delivery from government to the people can be achieved.

In the aspect of political stability and governance, Nwolise (2021) maintained that Nigeria as a country has experienced periods of political instability, marked by military coups, authoritarian rule, and a series of transitions between civilian and military governments. These experiences till date create fear and tension in the Nigeria political system. It is expected that effective federalism should be able to bring about development of stable democratic institutions and such governance that can impact positively in the lives of people and overall process of nation building. Unfortunately, it seems that these issues as indicated by the aforementioned scholars seem to have not been effectively addressed in Nigerian despite the lofty expectations of federalism which is practiced in Nigeria. It is based on this backdrop that this study becomes imperative to investigate the challenges of federalism to Nation building in Nigeria.

### **Reasons adoption of Federalism**

Adoption of federalism can be triggered by different factors. Some of the of the factors according to Appadorai (1975) as cited in Awofeso & Obah-Akpowoghaha (2017) include the following;

- i. **The desire for union:** Wheare (1963) as cited in Awofeso & Obah-Akpowoghaha (2017) noted that the desire for a union among independently existing states is one of the major reasons for adoption of federalism. According to him, this may be born out of a sense of military insecurity and of the consequent need for common defence or out of a hope of economic advantage from

the union. A typical example of this is the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Australia in 1900.

- ii. **The desire for local independence:** Onwubuiko (2014) noted that while there must be a desire for a union, there is also a strong desire by the component states for the preservation of their independence in all but essentially common matters is a precondition for the formation of a federal organization. It is the desire to be independence that brings about the need to federalism.
- iii. **Geographical contiguity:** Onuoha, Bassy & Ufomba (2018) noted that one of the reasons for the adoption of federalism among states is the need to preserve their common geographical territory. In order words, the federating components have to share common boundaries or in the least not be too far apart or the desire for a union will not easily emerge”.
- iv. **The absence of marked inequalities among the component units:** Eme & Onyeishi (2014) observed that for states to adopt federalism, the federating units must not show significant disparities in terms of strength as the stronger units may attempt to control the federation. An example is the German empire established in 1871 where the preponderant dominance of Prussia negated the federal principle.
- v. **Political education and legalism:** Ibaba, Sanubi & Okoye (2028) opined that the survival of a federation depends on the capacity of the people to appreciate the meaning of double allegiance and to prevent the centrifugal principle of political action from overcoming the centripetal. It also involves a general willingness of the people to defer to the authority of the law courts.

### **Challenges of Federalism in Achieving Nation-building in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, opinions have been expressed by some scholars and concerned citizens on the suitability or otherwise of federalism in the country. Indeed, some have concluded that the maintenance of federalism as a system of government in Nigeria has become more problematic than expected. And such has attributed to the fact that some of the burning issues that warranted its adoption in the country have not been addressed over the years. To that effect, some of the challenges facing the success of federalism in Nigeria are as follows:

**Historical Evolution:** Regionalism remains one of the major challenges to nation-building in Nigeria. Our founding fathers tried to deal with this challenge by adopting federalism and advocating a policy of unity-in-diversity (Yusuf, 2022). Unfortunately, the lack of consolidation of Nigerian federalism commonly shared values and positions means that this challenge of divisive historical legacy continues to undermine our efforts at nation-building. One current manifestation of this historical legacy is the division between ‘indigenes and settlers. This division has been a source of domestic tension and it has undermined our efforts at creating common nationhood. While we should learn from history so as not to repeat its mistakes, we must never see ourselves simply as victims of our history; it is our responsibility to overcome the challenges posed by our history.

**Political Challenges:** Nigeria’s federalism is presently faced with a number of critical political challenges. Some of these political challenges are traced to the defects of the constitution being the supreme documents that mediate the political activities and processes of governance (Onuoha, Bassy & Ufomba, 2019). Nigeria is still yearning for a truly acceptable constitution

that can mediate the social contract between the Federal government and the constituents (states and Local Governments). Also one of the greatest challenges of nation building is the challenge of institution building. Whether nations are able to manage their political and social disputes peacefully, without lapsing into conflict, or sustain economic growth without creating huge inequalities, critically depends on the quality of the relevant national institutions. Nigeria needs to create or strengthen institutions that would help achieve the national goals of democratic governance and sustainable development. It is generally believed that Nigeria does not need a strong leader to make a change but a strong political institution where systems and processes are strengthened.

**Corruption:** Corruption remains one of the debilitating problems confronting Nigerian Federalism and National Development efforts. Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable; they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient (Onwubiko, 2014). The impact of corruption continues to undermine governance, stability, and progress. It however, distorts and undermines efficient allocation of resources, and by extension the country's capacity of competitiveness. It reduces the net value of public spending as well as quality of services, public infrastructures and the volume of tax revenues, and it encourages misappropriation and misallocation of resources.

**Ethnic Groups:** Nigeria as a country has over 350 ethnic groups. A minority ethnic group is one which is numerically lesser than the major ethnic of a given state. This ethnic group may possess ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics which differ from those groups. It usually shows a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving its culture, tradition, religion, or language. According to Tella, Doho & Bapeto (2014), the issue of rights and freedoms of minorities and ethnic nationalities concerning marginalization and exclusion have constituted a serious challenge to Nigeria's Federalism. The three most dominant ethnic groups in the country are the Hausa/Fulani, Ibo, and Yoruba.

The major challenge here is on how to mitigate the issue of discrimination and marginalization as well as those petty rivalries existing in inter-ethnic relationships which tend to impact negatively on the living conditions of most members of minority and other ethnic nationalities in the country. The structural composition of Nigeria's Federal System has come under critical scrutiny in recent years. There is strong agitation for a review of the legislative lists of the federal government with a view to reducing the legislative powers at the federal government with a view to reducing the legislative powers at the federal level and devolving to other tiers of government (state and local governments). As conceived, the problem is that there is an over-concentration of power at the center to the detriment of the federating units of the country. A skewed power arrangement in favor of the federal government has greatly resulted in bloated administrative machinery at the center; with disconnect between the center and its developmental policies and the intended recipients at the grassroots (Eneji, 2012).

**Leadership Challenge:** Jimoh (2021) noted that leadership is a critical factor in nation-building. Nigeria is suffering from bad leadership, which is a major challenge for nation-building. Olu & Obah-Akpowoghaha (2017) observed Nigeria as a country with varied ethnic, religious and cultural groups does not need leaders who see themselves as champions of only

some sections of our population. It does not require leaders who do not understand the economic and political problems of the country, not to talk of finding durable solutions for them. It does not need leaders who are more interested in silencing their opponents, than in pursuing justice. It does not do not need leaders, who preach one thing and do the exact opposite. We do not need leaders who place themselves above the constitution and the laws of the country, but leaders who lead by upholding and respecting the law. We do not need leaders who have no sense of tomorrow, other than that of their private bank accounts. Unless we have leaders with ability, integrity, commitment, and vision, we cannot succeed at nation-building. Therefore, we must not relent in this struggle for quality leadership, as it is the key to building our nation.

**Socio-Economic Inequalities:** The denial of equal opportunities for Nigerians is a major challenge to nation-building in Nigeria. The building of common citizenship is an important aspect of nation-building. In the opinion of Okotoni & Adegami (2021) in Nigeria, many citizens denied opportunities of enjoying basic as access to basic infrastructures education, roads, water, health, employment, and electricity. This has caused the rate of impunity to soar, increase in the illiteracy, unemployment and insecurity rate, and above all, economic depression. The failure of the Nigerian government to address the contentious resource control conundrum has caused violence protest in the Creeks of the Niger Delta leading to the militarization of the oil-rich region and loss of oil revenue to the country. It is also worthy of note that the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta as a result of oil exploration with no commensurate compensation from the Federal Government and the various multinational Corporation and the socio-economic prosperity in the North at the expense of the oil-producing region briefly explains the grievances of the region.

Due to socio-economic inequalities, there is serious variation in the enjoyment of these rights across the country. Consequently, the citizen is not motivated to support the state and society, because he or she does not feel that the society is adequately concerned about their welfare. Socio-economic inequalities across the country fuels fear and suspicions which keep our people divided. From the above, Agbu (2014) believes that the contestation over federalism in Nigeria has manifested itself not only in the quest for access and control over political but also as access to federally generated revenue. This assertion best describes the situation in the South-South where the people are clamoring for a considerable upward review in the current 13 per cent derivation. Nigeria's is not a healthy federalism as it has long been plagued by "infection" from the "viruses" of anti-federalism. As such, it must be tended carefully and tenderly if it is to survive contemporary strains and the stresses (Aderonke, 2015).

**Lack of Transparent Fiscal Federalism:** Onuoha, Bassy & Ufomba (2017) observed that Nigeria lacks transparent fiscal federalism which has become contentious in the Nigerian federalism that hampers nation-building. The economy of the country is majorly dependent on oil sourced from the Niger Delta. The 13% accruable revenue from oil to oil-producing States in Nigeria has been contested by the Niger Delta region given the environmental degradation and sustained neglect by the leaders whose developmental interest are other regions especially the North at the expense of the polluted Niger Delta. Despite this and the creation of Niger-Delta Ministry with it 3% set aside (federal government of Nigeria report 2002) there is still agitations

which cast doubt whether this amount of money is translated through actual development programs.

The onshore-offshore dichotomy has also been called to question by aggrieved group; all these posed serious crises to Nigerian federalism and have direct consequences to our sustainable development. Thus, there have been agitations for up to 50% if not 100% revenue from oil going to the oil-producing States. The present situation in which the constitution empowers the federal government to keep the custody and determines the terms and manners of the allocation of the funds that accrue to the Federation Account is generally regarded as a negation of the principles of fiscal federalism. This imbalance has been seriously criticized as fostering dysfunctional ties which have been adversely affecting the concept of Nation-building. Indeed, this situation has in fact pitched the states against the federal government in some instances.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on Social Contract Theory as propounded by Thomas Hobbes (1651). Social contract theory is one of the theories that gave an account of the condition of man in the state of nature and the reason why man decided to abandon the state of nature and choose an organized state. The assumption of the theory is that lives of people in the state of nature were not safe. It was man against his fellow man. In the words of Thomas Hobbs, the society was characterized by "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". It was more of a condition where self-interest prevailed and the absence of respect for human rights and dignity was the other of the day. As such people lived in anarchy. The theory further maintained that man in a way to avert such condition of living, decided to come together to submit their natural rights to the state (leviathan) or authority of the state who will then take care of protecting their lives and properties.

This resulted in the establishment of modern State, a sovereign entity with a leadership structure to make laws, regulate social interactions and cater for the needs of the people. The theory is considered relevant to the study because it underscores the responsibility a state especially in a federal system in nation-building. In line with the social contract theory, Nigeria as a nation is made up of people with variegated ethnic, religious, traditional and cultural backgrounds who were brought together through amalgamation of the British colonial masters in 1914. It was in a way to ensure that these people with diverse backgrounds co-exist in harmony and pursue a common purpose that adoption federalism becomes necessary. This in others in words implies that they were able surrendered their natural right completely to enable the state through the acts of governance control them for effective nation-building which could lead to improvement in their welfare. Based on this understanding, it is clear that when nation-building is lacking through her governance, the state is said to have failed in the social contract.

### **Methodology**

A research design according to Obasi (2000) cited Ogungbayi, Olatidoye, Agbebi (2019) is the set of methods and procedures used in collecting and analyzing measures of the variables in a research. It is the systematic process by which information for study is gathered and analyzed.

The design employed in carrying out the study is the qualitative research design. This design was adopted to analyze secondary data on the challenges of federalism on nation building in Nigeria. Data for this study were gotten from secondary source. Secondary data is a type of data that has already been published in books, newspapers, magazines, journals, online portals etc. Data collection method for this study is purely based on the secondary sources. The data for this study were analyzed using content analysis method.

## **Data analysis and Discussion**

### **Extent to which federalism has contributed to address ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria**

Ethnic and religious crisis has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria's federal experiment. Ethnic crisis on one hand refers to a situation in which different ethnic groups within a society engage in violent or non-violent struggles over political, economic, social, or cultural resources (Nwolise, 2021). These conflicts often arise from historical grievances, competition for resources, political power, or issues related to identity and belonging. Ethnic conflicts can manifest in various forms, including discrimination, exclusion, displacement, or even armed conflict. Religious crisis on the other hand involves tensions, conflicts, or violence that arises between different religious groups or within a particular religious community (Egbeblem, 2011). These crises can be sparked by various factors, including religious differences, theological disputes, discrimination, or political and socio-economic issues intertwined with religious identity. Religious crises can manifest in different forms, ranging from peaceful protests and social tensions to outright violence and conflict.

Ethno-religious crisis is one of the major problems that have faced Nigeria as a country over the years especially in her quest to achieve a formidable nation building. Ethno-religious crisis which usually manifests in form of physical violence especially in the northern and some parts of southern Nigeria is traceable to the high level of poverty, ignorance, distrust and mutual hatred among ethnic and religious groups. This has greatly hampered the forging of a united nation and politicians prolong the unhealthy situation by promoting religious sentiments for selfish purposes (Ntui, 2019). A typical instance of ethnic crisis in Nigeria could be seen the armed conflicts which manifested in places like Jos, Plateau state where the indigene/settler debacle between the Birom indigenes and Hausa settlers has resulted in countless loss of lives and destruction of property. This situation also results in communal clashes even at an intra ethnic level such as experienced between the Umuleri and Aguleri clashes over boundaries in Anambra East Local Government area and also at an inter-ethnic level as demonstrated in the violence between the Itsekiri and Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo of Delta state, Jukuns and Kutebs in Taraba State, Tivs and Jukuns in Benue state, Ijaws and Ilajes in Ondo state, Ezza and Ezillo in Eboyi State, Izzi and Ikwo in Ebonyi State, Ezza and Effium in Ebonyi, Izzi and Cross River and between the Hausa-Fulani against the northern minorities in most of the northern states. Recent crisis of this nature include the Eggom case in Nasarrawa and the many cases of Fulani herdsman guerrilla styled attacks in Plateau, Benue, Taraba and even Delta state (Nwolise, 2021).

The Religious crisis on the other hand has also posed more debilitating to the peace and unity of Nigeria. Nigeria as a federal state is housed with thousands of different religious groups. However, each of these groups is controlled under three major institutions namely; the

Christianity, the Islam and the African Traditional Religion (ATR). It could be understood that each of these religious groups are meant to bring about, moral and social harmony for peaceful co-existence among people in the country. Unfortunately, these religious groups which is somewhat polarized along ethnic lines have brought series of crises at one time or the other in the country. A typical instance of this is the terrorism of Boko Haram set which is highly operational in the North-Eastern part of the country (Yusuf, 2022).

Etymologically, Boko Haram is translated as “Western Education is forbidden, sinful (Adesoji, 2010). It employs modern-day innovations and technological advances to perpetuate its violent campaigns. The sect became an issue of security concern in 2009 when the security forces clamped down on the sect’s members, which later resulted in the extra-judicial killing of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf in Police custody and hundreds of members (Agbibo 2013). Over a decade now, the country has witnessed the vulnerability of terror, criminality and instability. The disheartening phenomena include, but not limited to devastation and annihilations of several towns, villages, churches, mosques, Police stations, schools and other public institutions with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) bombs planted and small arms and light weapons by the Boko Haram insurgents in Niger, Bornu, Adamawa, Yobe, and Nassarawa states respectively (Abiodun, 2016).

Their first major attack was recorded at the Eagle Square, Abuja during the 50th Independence Day, 1 October, 2010 in which no fewer than 12 people were killed; the Nyanya Motor Park bombing on April 14, 2014 also claimed more than 75 lives and injured several dozen others, bombing of the UN Building in the FCT and abduction of about 216 girls of in Chibok, Borno State the next day leaving the country in a state of insecurity (Abiodun, 2016). Up till date, the crisis has not ended. Today most communities have been deserted by their inhabitants in the north-East to avoid becoming the next victim. The issue of the religious crisis cannot be complete without talking about the atrocities of the Fulani herdsmen. Fulani herdsmen are people of Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria who depend on nomadic farming or pasturing of their livestock (mainly cattle) for the sustenance of their livelihood (Alimba, 2017).

Fulani is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria that constitutes a greater percentage of herdsmen in Nigeria that had their origin in the north but has gradually dispersed to different parts of the country. Cattle rearing are part of Fulani life from birth to death. And it is intricately linked with their cultural identity. Fulani herders or nomads carry with them different sophisticated weapons ranging from clubs, bows and arrows, machetes, guns among others in the process of their nomadic activities (Ignatius, 2018). Statistically, in 2004, herder-farmer conflicts resulted in ‘near-genocide’ of Christians and Muslims in Plateau State, with more than 20,000 refugees fleeing to neighbouring Cameroon (Moritz, 2010). Crisis resulting from cattle grazing actually accounted for 35% of all reported crisis between 1991 and 2005 in Nigeria (Fasona and Omojola, 2005). Between June 2006 and May 2014, about one hundred and eleven violent attacks by fulani herdsmen were reported by the press across the 36 states of Nigeria with seven incidents in 2006, nine in 2007, six in 2008, thirteen in 2009, nine in 2010, fifteen in 2011, seventeen in 2012, twenty seven in 2013, and eight as at May 2014 (Olayoku, 2014).

According to a report published by SMB Intelligence over 2,000 people have been killed in conflicts between the herdsmen and different host communities in 2015 alone Ciboh (2017), these attacks have continued to spread across Nigeria with more sophisticated dimensions as they have learnt to adopt new strategies and different types of weapons and communication devices (Olayoku, 2014). The most recent of such crises were those that occurred in Agatu community in Benue State and that of Nimbo community, Uzo-Uwani Local Government area of Enugu State, Nwori Community in Ebonyi local government area, and uncountable attacks on residents of different communities in Chikun Local Government of Kaduna State and in Plateau state respectively (Ogu, Akaose & Nwokocha, 2022). Unfortunately, in all these attacks, several lives were lost while properties worth millions of Naira were also destroyed.

Going by the rate at which ethno-religious crisis escalate in the country today, one is left with no option than to question the functionality of federalism in Nigeria. Interestingly, scholars such as; Onuoha, Bassy and Ufomba (2019) have argued that federalism is one of the most suitable system of government for countries with diverse ethnic-religious group like Nigeria as it helps to allay the fear of domination of one group over another. However, reserve appears to be the case. Of the truth is that every Nigerian including the political elites is so much attached to his ethnic group and religious belief. This has been the major challenge in addressing the issue of ethnic and religious conflict. The inability to address these crises in order to foster nation-building can be attributed to the ineffectiveness of governance institutions in the country which manifest in the form of weak law enforcement, corruption, and a lack of accountability among others (Seburu, 2015).

### **Extent to which federalism has contributed to resolve issues of minority question and state creation in Nigeria**

The agitation of minority groups in Nigeria for adequate representation pre-dates independence to the colonial era. This has been one major problem to nation building in Nigeria as groups attach their survival in the Nigerian project to ethnic representation and access to federal resources (Yusuf, 2022). This has led to the formation of political parties along ethnic lines such as the Benin and Delta People's Party (1953), Mid-West Movement (1956), Calabar-Ogoja Rivers states Movement (1954), United Middle Belt Congress (1955) and the Borno Youth Movement (Nwolisa 2021). Their agitations have always led them to demand for state creation as a means to determine their own development as distinct from the other major ethnic groups. To address the minority question and their clamour for states, the Willinck's commission had advised against state creation but the fostering of a sense of belonging. Since the creation of the first 12 states in March, 27 1967 to the current 36 in 1995, the agitation has not dissipated.

The reason for agitating for more states in Nigeria is based on the fact that some regions in Nigeria have more state than others. For instance, North-East include; Adamawa Bauchi Borno Gombe Taraba Yobe, North-West include; Zamfara Sokoto Kebbi Katsina Kano Kaduna Jigawa, North-Central (Middle Belt) include; Plateau Niger Nasarawa Kwara Kogi Federal Capital Territory Benue, South-East include; Imo Enugu Ebonyi Anambra Abia, South-South include; Rivers Edo Delta Cross River Bayelsa Akwa Ibom and South-West which include; Ekiti Lagos

Ogun Ondo Osun Oyo (Onuoha, Bassy & Ufomba, 2019). A look at these regions in accordance with their states shows that some regions have more state than others.

Basically while some regions have about six states, some have seven while some have only five. In addition to that, some minor ethnic groups are submerged with other major groups making it difficult for the minority groups to have equal representation in the government or have a say in the decision making as it affects them. An instance of this can be seen among Gbagi people in Kanuda State, the Igbo speaking ethnic group are clamouring for the creation of an “Anioma state” as a response to the perpetual domination by the Urhobo people. The Kanuri people in Bornu State among others. The truth remains that when states are not evenly created to balance the tensions of marginalization against the minorities, agitations must occur.

That is why in Nigeria today, we have different ethnic and tribes agitating for self actualization or independence in order to overcome the marginalization (Ogu, Akaose & Nwokocha, 2022). Federalism in Nigeria is expected to address the challenge of state creation and marginalization of the minorities since it is the best form of government that brings about unity in diversity. Unfortunately, this has not been possible in Nigeria. It could be understood that most of the states that were created in the past were possible under the military regimes. Ever since Nigeria had her transition to the civil administration, it has been very difficult to create more states in the country. Despite different conferences, seminars, and symposium held to see if more states can be created but no result has been achieved. And this goes to prove that Nigerian Federalism has not been capable to address the issue of minority quest and state creation.

### **Extent to which federalism has enhanced effective application of federal character principle in Nigeria**

The Federal Character principle is an important feature of the 1979 constitution. The federal character principle is enshrined specifically in Chapter II Section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution as amended 2011. Its enacting law in the 1999 constitution summarizes it as “the composition of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states, a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies (Eneji, 2012).

In line with that, Adeyeri, (2015) noted that federal character is a euphemism for ethnic balancing. It is an instrumentality for ensuring unity in diversity by balancing appointments between groups and within the officer corp and the armed forces”. This principle is not unique to Nigerian federalism alone, as it is obtainable in other countries like USA known as “affirmative Action” and in India as “quota system” in some areas (Yusuf, 2022). The gamut federal character principle presupposes that equitable representation and distribution of resources among the diverse ethnic and regional groups in the country.

## **Extent to which federalism has addressed the problem of resource control and revenue sharing in Nigeria**

Nigeria is rich in oil and natural resources, particularly in the Niger Delta region. The control and revenue allocation from these resources have been a longstanding source of contention. The people in the Niger Delta, where most of the oil is extracted, often feel marginalized and disadvantaged as they witness the environmental degradation caused by oil exploration without corresponding development in their communities (Folarin, 2017). The fact that these resources are found in areas mostly occupied by minority ethnic groups yet laws like Decree 51 and Decree 9 has firmly placed all petroleum resources within Nigeria and all offshore oil wells respectively within the sole control of the central government has created deep feelings of resentment within the minority groups especially those of the Niger Delta.

The struggle for resource control has resulted in conflict like the secession attempts of Isaac Adaka Boro on the declaration of the Republic of the Niger Delta following the inability of the 1957 constitution to resolve the minority question. This issue has also pitted the central government against the south-south states government in the offshore/onshore dichotomy debate (Duru, 2012). The issue of inaccessibility to resources situated within their territory coupled with the impact of environmental degradation arising from oil exploration in the Niger Delta and as Obi, (2010) argues, the relegation of the derivation principle in revenue allocation in favour of the principles of “equality” and “population of states” in response to the shift of the country’s source of wealth from agriculture to petroleum and the desire of the major ethnic groups to continuously control national revenue, has in recent years led to the proliferation of militant groups aiming to re-adjust the perceived imbalance.

### **Findings of the Study**

Arising from the data gathered in line with the objectives of the study, the following findings were made:

1. That federalism has not addressed ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria.
2. That federalism has not contributed to resolve issues of minority question and state creation in Nigeria.
3. That federalism has not enhanced the application of federal character principle in Nigeria.
4. And that federalism has not resolved the problem of resource control and revenue sharing in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The study has established that federalism is a political structure that allows states to unite under a central government to maintain a measure of independence and interdependence. In other words, it is such governance pattern which appears as a compromise formula allows for power sharing between national, state governments and the component regions. Different scholars have indicated that federalism is the most suitable system of government for countries with people of divergent ethnic, cultural, religious and otherwise background. Nigeria is a typical example of such country with heterogeneous people.

This fact had informed the reason for adoption of federalism. Federalism is known to have enormous benefits for a country that adopts it especially in terms of cushioning the fear of domination of major ethnic groups over minor ones, promoting unity in diversity, peaceful co-existence, good governance and championing a common course for growth and development of the country. It is believable that when federalism is able to achieve this and more, effective nation building must have taking place in such country. It is based on this fact that this study becomes imperative to investigate the challenges of federalism in nation-building in Nigeria. However, going by the data gathered and analyzed, it could be concluded that federalism has not been able to address critical issues facing Nigeria especially, ethno-religious crisis, minority quest and state creation, application of federal character principle, resource control and revenue sharing among others.

### Recommendations

Based on the finding made in the course of analyzing the data gathered for the study, the following findings were made:

- i. That leader in elective positions in Nigeria should endeavour to preach more peace and unity to the public and ensure that every ethnic/religious group is carried along in the government affairs. This will go a long way to address the challenged of ethno-religious crisis in the country.
- ii. That federal government should ensure that more states are created especially in the geopolitical zones with lesser number of states than others. At the same time, the position of Presidency in Nigeria should be allowed to rotate among the six geo-political zones of the country in order to reduce the fear of marginalization by the minority.
- iii. The federal government should make laws that will punish people who give employment, admission or any other government representation based on favouritism in order to promote the application of federal character principle.
- iv. That revenue allocation formula should be reviewed to emphasize more on the derivation principle so that larger percentage of revenue will be allocated to states where the resources are found as a way of compensation for biohazard and land degradation.

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