

# Redefining the Nigerian System of Government: The Error of a Copied Democracy without True Federalism

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## Abstract

The political life of Nigeria has been characterized by years of switching to different forms of government: from colonial to parliamentary, military, and presidential systems of government. From independence, the country has maintained the appellation of Federal Republic, even though in reality, true federalism cannot be pointed to; which begs these questions: 1) Does Nigeria really have true democracy? 2) What led Nigeria to adopt federalism and was this the right choice? 3) Could there be a hidden agenda for democracy, particularly in Third-world Nations like Nigeria? Did any nation really become developed with democracy or are there developed nations using democracy as a tool for sustainable development? 4) Does the principle of currently practiced federalism enable dictatorship? 5) What did Nigeria get wrong that Singapore got right, seeing as both nations gained independence around the same period? This paper will reflect the story of how Nigeria attained federalism, albeit a seemingly fake one. The flaws of Nigerian democracy will be identified to justify the assertion that democracy is not healthy for the country. The hidden motive behind the retention of federalism will also be unearthed in order to establish how much of a disservice the present arrangement is doing to the stability and progress of the country. Finally, upon the aforementioned premises, a case for a system of government that ensures continuity in order to impact on the progress of a developing pluralistic nation will be made.

## Keywords

Politics, Government, Federalism, Democracy, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Every country has a unique story. Behind its present are past struggles that require a painstaking count. These may include riots, civil wars, forceful and manipulative change of governments, fight for freedom from invasion of varying forms including colonialism, terrorism and an unhealthy lot of other anomalies that would leave its present generation of citizens shocked to learn about. Nigeria is no different. The answers to why it adopts its brand of democracy and federal system is laid bare through a meticulous retrospection.

By definition, federalism can be said to be a system of government in which powers are constitutionally shared between a center and the regions (Amah, 2016). Given the vision of shared sovereignty as a way to bring about balance in a culturally diverse society, this sounds ideal and promising for Nigeria. It was hoped that pluralist democracy, human rights, independent judiciary, freedom of choice and protection of minorities could be secured by these means. Unfortunately, successive governments have overturned this purpose by disregarding the tenets of the system (Muhammad, 2006). Hence, unity becomes more difficult to achieve by the day.

This has led to the clamour for true federalism. How is true federalism to be defined and implemented? The answer to this lies in the ability to domesticate the system as appropriate to the interplay of cultural and social dynamics as well as the material conditions that makes Nigeria peculiar.

This paper will be retracing the root of Nigeria's brand of federalism, with focus on how military intervention which brought about the unitary form of government continues to leave its trace on the present democracy (Okolo & Raymond, 2014). This is with a view to properly X-ray the structure and uncover the nuanced motives of the elite that must be discarded in order to usher in a form of government that is suited to the peculiarity of the people of a diverse nation whose unity is on a fragile edge.

## 2. What Is Federalism? A Conceptual Analysis

There is a measure of diversity in most societies. It is no wonder therefore, that all over the world, federalism has become one of the most preferred forms of government as it is favourable to the need to demystify the complex nature of multi-ethnic and multi linguistic societies (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017).

Yet, the concept is an ever-ambiguous term with no universally acceptable definition.

In his famous book, *Federal Government*, Professor K.C Wheare defined federalism or federal government as the method of dividing power so that general and regional governments are each coordinated and independent (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017). This conceptualization of federalism points to the indispensability of a structure that is made up of bi-cameral legislature, independent electoral system at each level, constitutional delimitation of powers among the tiers of government, two (or multi)-party system, a supreme court and many more. According

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to K.C, federalism is not as institutional as it is a process, arguing that any given design no matter how effective, is merely a phase (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017). Federalism is therefore a political reality subject to evolution.

While the structure of a federal government varies from one state to another, one common element required for a government to be so-described is the existence of a central government and governments of at least two component units. In addition to this, the components have equal level of autonomy within their respective boundaries and are subordinate to the central government—which distinguishes it from confederalism. Also, it is different from a unitary state in which there is devolution of powers as opposed to constitutionally established power sharing between the centre and the units (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017).

Central to the federal arrangement is the need to unify a diverse collection of people. Hence, the success of federalism is measurable by how effective the governmental and institutional structure is in addressing the task of maintaining unity without trying to cancel its diversity (Tella et al., 2014).

This underlines Wheare's submission on the process of federalism which points out the two-way direction of the system: the direction of integration and the direction of differentiation. As a result, federalism is a process that organizes both unity and diversity in a way that includes phenomena, ideas, persons and institutions put differently.

K.C Wheare is believed to have laid the foundation of scholarly conceptualization of federalism. Menon & Schain (2006) defined it as a means of dividing state powers to regional governments with a degree of independence and expected coordination.

As Wheare's work served as the bedrock of the conceptualization of federalism, so did it attract criticisms that dominated the 1950s and 1960s. Livingstone, Vile and Friedrich challenged the validity of Wheare's definition when they emphasized on the emergence of interdependence between levels of governments in the twentieth century, with focus on the dynamic equilibrium in the polity (Abdullahi & Ozden, 2021).

Apparently, each scholar had rendered their definition as shaped majorly by their experiences, environment and their study of federalism in nature and practice in different countries of the world (Lenshie & Yenda, 2015).

Oyovbaire (1979) did an extensive study and analysis of the interplay of factors and influences behind the practice of federalism in various countries of the world. In particular, he studied closely the perceptions of scholars on the perception of American federalism, by which means he concluded that the challenge with the study of federalism lies in empiricism. He opined that, "empiricism in political science is an exercise in observation, analysis and explanation of social phenomena at one time in one place, or at one time in several places, or at different times in one place" (Oyovbaire, 1979).

This bears an implication that a generalisation is unrealistic, both theoretically and in practice. Contextual understanding is what really holds water. Therefore,

if federalism must be precisely described, an understanding of the nature and features of the relationship in a given country is required. What is obtainable or applicable in any given system is subject to the place and time as well as the political and economic climate that characterises the country (Abdullahi & Ozden, 2021). Hence, even though countries like the United States, Germany, Australia and Canada amongst others practise federalism, the structures and realities are different from one state to another. This ties back to Wheare's assertion that federalism is a non-static, ever-evolving phenomenon. It is subject to change as warranted by internally occurring conditions.

Bottom line, however, is that each unit of a federation has to deliberately decide to come together on terms that are mutually agreed upon, and on an equal pedestal in order to form a united front for the purpose of achieving collective advantage which may include, but may not be limited to higher military might against potential aggressors, economic advantage and consolidation of shared identity. This fact can hardly be said of Nigeria, hence its status as a federation remains capitially questionable.

This was the foundation of federalism in the United States of America. Initially, the country practised a confederal system based on a constitution called the Articles of Confederation. The articles gave power of consent to the confederating units through their representatives before decisions were made. Even at that, no unit was under compulsion to pay due taxes. It is also important to note that the Articles of Confederation was adopted by the 13 North American colonies that declared independence from Great Britain in 1777 (Lutz, 1990). It was meant to facilitate cooperation with each other in areas such as military affairs and foreign policy. But soon, it became clear that the confederation lacked the military strength needed to sustain its territorial integrity due to insufficient funds. This was why when the state of Massachusetts tried to contain the Shays rebellion, they could only rely on an emergency militia (NCC, 2019). Then there were growing concerns that the articles lacked the basis to solve all states' problems. Hence, the need for a more powerful national government was realised, which birthed federalism.

Though the existence of a federal state which was constitutionally enacted in 1789 has gone through modifications over the centuries, the framework of that constitution is what remains in force (United States Senate, 2023). Nigeria is one of the countries whose constitutions have been inspired by the American constitution. Unfortunately, it only reflects its ideals in theory; in practice, it is a different reality.

### **3. The Chronicle of Nigerian Federalism**

Every federation has its unique administrative model, but there exist common denominators, namely; a centre that controls defence, monetary policies and diplomatic relations. Other powers and functions are shared according to the provisions of the law, which differ in every country. In Nigeria, powers are con-

stitutionally shared between the federal (central) government and the state (unit) governments as articulated in three lists: the exclusive list (federal), concurrent list (federal and state governments) and residual list (state governments) (Arowo-segbe, 2014). Also, while most other federations consist of two tiers, Nigeria practises a three-tier system comprising the national government, 36 states and 774 local government areas (Majekodunmi, 2015). It has been pointed out that each country adopts its version of federalism as suited to its peculiarity, but the uniqueness of Nigeria's third-tier system does not appear to have addressed the major stumbling blocks to the country's advancement, namely; resource control, ethno-political tension, and multi-dimensional imbalances that prompt complaints of marginalisation.

The original structure of federalism, which made for a politically promising country after independence, was destroyed by the intervention of the military in governance in 1966. With the emergence of military government came a replacement of the federal structure by a unitary structure, characterised by command and hierarchy. With this, the federal government became all in all, without any autonomy for the federating units to exercise (Adesiyan & Arologun, 2019).

However, the damage did not start with military intervention. The federation had already been battling the plague of regional strife as an offshoot of perceived imbalances traceable to the political foundation laid by the colonial government (Abada, Okafor, & Omeh, 2020). It is right to say that the sole reason for the adoption of federalism was originally to facilitate ease of governance for the colonial administration.

This was not unexpected since the supposed essence of federalism which is unity in diversity cannot materialise with the lopsided nature of the federal structure. As much as the regional autonomy encouraged a healthy rivalry which gave way for rapid development, the imbalance in representation at the central tier was a pathway for northern hegemony. This hegemony birthed a degree of strife that is a danger to the sovereignty of a country with a weak centre. The northern region was more than half of the country in terms of geographical size. The eastern region (mainly dominated by the Igbo) and the western region (mainly dominated by the Yoruba) occupied the remaining less-than-half of the country. The strife was not limited to the inter-regional level. Within each region, there were minority ethnic group as there still is today, competing for prominence (Oni & Faluyi, 2018).

The Rikerian theory gives prominence to political bargains as a condition that must precede the formation of a federation. In William Riker's assumption, the two conditions that must be present are military condition and expansion condition (Babalola, 2013). The Lyttleton constitution of 1954 made Nigeria a federation and neither of these two conditions were present. From its build up to its constitutional declaration, Nigerian federalism was inspired by the political ambition of the colonial government and dedicated to its administrative conven-

ience. Hence, the country is to date left with the challenge of securing a central government capable of preserving national unity while making the country safe for diversity of language and ethnicity to flourish. This is in spite of the further decentralisation to a three-tier government whereby there are 774 local government areas in 36 states, representing the third tier (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017).

From 1964 to date, federal balancing remains an issue of political concern. The failure to affect it has long sustained complaints about domination and marginalisation that date back to amalgamation. Some school of thought describe the amalgamation as unfortunate, and in their opinion, if the South and North had been kept separated from each other, none of these problems would have risen (Ozoigbo, 2010).

It is from appreciating the Nigerian federal structural arrangement as a brain-child of the Britain-imposed colonial government that it becomes clear that the country is nothing but a forced fusion of culturally disparate geographical expressions. What was meant only for ease of governance, set off a journey that would culminate in the constitutional enactment of a federation, albeit fake, as proven with the passage of time.

Before the milestone of regionalism was ever hit, there had been gradual introduction of the elements that would eventually enable it to take effect.

The 1922 Clifford constitution provided the legislative council, thereby creating the semblance of a second-tier autonomy in Nigeria for the first time. Additionally, the elective principle enabled the formation of political parties, leading to political consciousness among southern Nigerians as well as pre-launching democracy.

In 1946, the Richard constitution introduced regionalism, and by this means, the seed of federalism was sown. Under the constitution, the country was first sub-divided into three major regions under the auspices of the “Unity Colonial State” that was already in existence. This helped to forge the path of unity in diversity in terms of the legislative councillor’s interaction with one another in 1947 (Tella et al., 2014).

Then came the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 which embodied elements of both a unitary and federal system. Hence, it was regarded as a quasi-federal constitution. It enabled the regional legislative houses to make laws that were relevant to the peculiarity of their region, though it was ultimately subject to the approval of the central government.

Even though the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 made provisions for the appointment of a premier for each region created so that a seemingly true federalism was attained, the absence of the conditions stated for federalism to take effect according to the Rikerian Theory, created the void that would carry on post-independence Nigeria.

Of all factors, the multi-ethnic nature of the country was conveniently disregarded. Instead, marginalisation was intensified with further political dominance and demographic prominence of the north. Consequently, the voices of the mi-

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nority groups were further drowned and relegated to the shadows of the majority. And as though the raging protest of these groups were mere noise, the British government ignored their demand for further subdivision of the country. This was in total disregard for indications of possible political instability stemming from a system where a region had a population advantage over the others (Amah, 2017).

After the British government left the terrain, the newly independent state grappled with the fragility of a disjointed structure. The tensions that arose became the impetus of the military elite who forcefully took over the rule of the nation, marking the end of the first republic.

The constitution was suspended and the false federalism was replaced with an actual unitary system (though the nomenclature “Federal Republic” was retained). It was the belief of the military that Nigeria was not ripe for federalism. But the new dispensation only did more harm as it further silenced calls for equity.

The only matching response to the brute force of the military was a counterforce. Therefore, military take-overs were staged in intermittent successions as a reflection of inter-regional strife that climaxed with the eventual break out of the civil war that lasted for 30 months. The breakout of the civil remains the highest threat to Nigeria’s sovereignty to date, and the fact that it happened during military rule is proof that centralisation or unitary system is not the best to keep the centre formidable (against the military’s justification of their political involvement). Nevertheless, in spite of the enforcement of a unitary structure, the military governments took steps that courted a direction towards a federation. The creation of states from the four regions was a welcome development, but it proved to favour the majority ethnic groups more. Also, the first phase of military dictatorship enjoyed a level of mass acceptance because of its political inclusiveness. For example, the central government gave some autonomy to the military administrations at the state level—as previously enjoyed by the regional governments of the first republic. Also, civilians were appointed as ministers with ethnic and religious considerations. This way, policies aimed at re-democratisation were formulated, which eventually served as a launching pad for the inauguration of the second republic in 1979 (Amah, 2017).

But the ruins of military rule resumed with the coup that ended the second republic in 1983, and continued till the death of General Abacha in 1998. Between these years, abuse of power took centre stage with the concentration of the machinery of government in hands of the Head of State. Northern dominance intensified and the minorities suffered for it. Fiscal federalism was made an alien concept with the collapse of federal structure. Centralisation was glorified in various ways. This included, but was not limited to:

- 1) The subjection of constituent state governments to the unified military command system through the central government’s appointment and the elevation of junior officers as state governors;



2) The weakening of local government administration by the army through their ceaseless reshufflings;

3) Total fiscal dependency on the central government, institutional impotence of the judiciary;

4) The dubious revenue sharing arrangement among the tier of government which reinforced the financial dependence of the units of the central power; and,

5) The proliferation of units which was a scheme to facilitate the continuity and legitimacy of the military government rather than make power cascade further down to the people through the lower tiers of government.

So reduced to a shadow is the state of Nigeria that a prominent political actor once described it as a “mere geographical expression”. Another concluded that it is the “mistake of 1914”. Along the same thought line, Nigeria’s first and only Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa while addressing the Legislative Council in 1958, said, “Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country” (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017).

#### **4. Diagnosing the Flaws of Nigerian Democracy**

Democracy in modern times has become ambiguous, both by definition and in practice as a system of government. This owes majorly to the its wide acceptability all around the world, so much that different brands of it have been manufactured to suit the agenda of the political actors. Military governments are not left out, as seen in the first phase of military rule in Nigeria, where civilians were made ministers in order to give the people a “feel of democracy”, even though violation of human rights was rampant.

According to Ukana Blankson, as cited by Ajayi and Ojo (2014), democracy must be truly understood through a retrospection to its ancient definition. Made up of two Greek words, demos and kratia, which mean people and rule respectively, democracy in the simplest terms denotes rule by the people.

The return to democracy in 1999 was welcome with relief as Nigerians believed that once again, their voices would be heard and they would have the power to make political decisions devoid of force and suppression. However, in a system that promises equality of all voices as its essence, the minorities still suffer an unfair share of voice. Voting for leaders is just one feature of the democracy. To truly give life to democracy as a government of the people, then all-encompassing inclusiveness must be considered. For this reason, the clamour for right to fair political representation by minorities must be given prominence. Lack of economic equity is also a talking point in the polity.

This and more came to the fore when in 2014, the government of President Good luck Jonathan convoked a national constitutional conference aimed at reviewing the constitution to reflect consideration of everyone as a demonstration of the government’s recognition of every unit as a significant part of the whole entity called Nigeria.

The call for restructuring came loudly as the perfect device for the actualiza-



tion of true federalism. This is a result of the insecurity that has reached an all-time high in the Buhari administration. In this regard, the 2014 national conference was recalled as it had potential to correct the false federalism that Nigeria has been from its inception as well as finally deliver the dividends of home-made government, rather than a copied democracy that reflects no true federalism.

One of the well noted elements of a restructured Nigeria is the establishment of state police, National Border Force, and Coast Guard which was one of the recommendations of the conference. It believed that this will impact remarkably on the efforts to bring sanity to the security situation of the country.

The refusal to consider the recommendations of the Buhari government underlines the two major problems of Nigerian democracy:

1) Absence of a real and truly representative government in a pluralist entity; and

2) Lack of progress occasioned by periodic change of leadership.

Lack of community is the greatest bane of Nigerian democracy, and indeed any democracy in the world is under the threat of same tendency.

Apart from the establishment of security apparatus in the federating units, there were other noteworthy recommendations that would have helped in initiating a progress in deliberations of previous conferences. The recommendations have the potential to correct the falsity that had characterised the present federalism from its inception and finally deliver the dividends of true native democracy to all Nigerians.

They included the following:

### **1) Creation of New States**

The creation of 18 new states, 3 in each of the six geopolitical zones was recommended at the 2014 National Conference (Babalola & Onapajo, 2019).

In 2005, the National Political Reform Conference had said that the existing 36 states were already too expensive to run and given the request for more states to be created, the burden would only increase (Premium Times, 2014). Nevertheless, it was necessary to grant it for the sake of peace and economic stability.

Further earlier, the constitutional conference of 1994/1995 had recommended the creation of 20 states, 6 of which were created by the regime of General Sani Abacha in 1996.

While states creation alone is not sufficient for the realisation of true federalism, it is a basis for other variables of equity to be delivered through other recommendations as recounted further below.

### **2) Resource control, Derivation principle, and Fiscal Federalism**

A percentage increase of the derivation principle was proposed alongside special intervention funds dedicated to the solid minerals as well as reconstruction and rehabilitation of areas suffering the consequences of insurgency and communal conflicts.

At the 2005 NPRC, an increase from 13% to 17% was proposed as expert reports were awaited. Additionally, it recommended the organisation of pro-

grammes for human resources and infrastructural development.

In the 1995 constitutional conference, consideration of allocation factors such as population, land mass, internal revenue generation, equality of states, and terrain was proposed, provided that the principle of derivation ensures that at least 13% of revenue accrues directly to the federation account, irrespective of what the approved formula is. The federal government retains the control of mineral resources with the involvement of the Oil Producing States and Communities. Specifically, rights and privileges bestowed on states, local governments and communities as well should be applicable to petroleum resources (Chukwuemeka & Iloanya, 2023).

### **3) Revenue Allocation**

In the 2014 conference, revenue allocation among the three tiers of government was proposed to go as follows: 42.5% to the federal government, 35% to the state governments and 22.5 to the local governments. While the reduction of percentage given to population and equality in the existing sharing formula was proposed, an increase in percentage allocated to the social development sector was recommended in order to facilitate timely development of all parts of the country.

Although the 2005 constitutional conference made no specific recommendation in this regard, it did advise that number of local governments in states should not be a determinant of revenues that accrue to them.

By the recommendation of the 1994/1995 constitutional conference, every revenue allocation formula as decided by the national assembly shall be in effect for at least five years before being subjected to another review (Orobah & Iyoha, 2023).

### **4) Form of Government**

2014 National Conference recommended a modified presidential system—a hybrid of the parliamentary system as operated in the first republic and the presidential system that took effect in the second republic. The president would choose a prime minister from the legislature.

Also, the president must appoint a maximum of 18 ministers from the 6 geopolitical zones of the country and at most, 30% of his ministers from outside the legislature.

In 2005, NPRC, the retention of the presidential system of government was recommended, but with few alterations in ministerial appointments: the government should appoint a minimum of 15 to 18 ministers and a minimum of 10 at the state level. This was the same with the 1994/1995 constitutional conference (Obiyan, 2005).

### **5) Tiers of Government**

The National conference recommended the phasing out of local government as the third tier of government. A two-tier government to be established—federal and state. State governments on their own initiative have the freedom to create local governments with chairmen nominated by the governor.

The 2005 NPRC favoured the retention of a three-tier government. The 1994/1995 constitutional conference also favoured the existence of local government as third tier under the leadership of a chairman, vice chairman and councillor. However, there should be no legislative arm in order to save cost of governance (Premium Times, 2014).

Fiscal considerations on relations to resource control and derivation remains one of the greatest concerns. The concern is further worsened by the environmental pollution that comes with the extraction of crude oil in the Niger-Delta region. It creates an irony of imbalance whereby the greatest export of the country is derived from a region inhabited by minorities who are being impoverished because their main source of livelihood is being compromised in favour of oil-derived national wealth.

Many movements have been created to voice the agony of the people of this region, one of which is the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa in the 90s, non-violent protests were staged against the environmental degradation of the lands and waters of Ogoniland. Unfortunately, he was executed by the military regime of General Sani Abacha over unverified allegations of masterminding the murder of some Ogoni chiefs.

With the national conference of 2014, the recommendations concerning resource control and derivation principle would have been a consolation to the bloody military actions. But lack of continuity has proven to be the bane of democracy in Nigeria as successive governments lack the will to proceed from where the previous ones stopped.

Though it seems ideal, a brand of democracy that slows down progress due to periodic change of government is not in the best interest of the people. And if so, it lacks the merit to qualify as a government of the people.

## **5. The Perfected Illusion of Federalism and the Covert Dictatorship behind It**

The agenda behind the retention of the present brand of federalism becomes clear when compared to the government of the United States which the Nigerian government was theoretically modelled after.

Unlike Nigeria, the US presidential system is premised on a federal structure where every federating unit is run without being dictated to by the central government. In fact, the 50 states that make up the US are autonomous to the degree that is just first among "equals" with the governors (Adekanmbi, 2021). This is why citizens of the country interact more with their unit governments, unlike Nigeria where conversations about governance is dominated by the central government's actions and inactions.

The units' autonomy gives them the power to run a structure that best suit them, and do not have to replicate the three-arm structure of the central government. This is different from Nigeria where the units do not only have to align

with the federal government in this aspect and more, the Nigerian president wields executive power to a degree that amounts to borderline dictatorship. For example, the Nigerian president is in charge of all powers that pertain to security and law enforcement. This makes the security apparatus a ready tool in the president's hands in a way that renders state governors incapacitated and at the mercy of the central government when the defence of the unit and protection of lives and property is concerned, since the police is deployed to states at federal discretion. This situation provides no escape route from the compromising consequences of a president's nepotistic tendencies as being witnessed in Nigeria. A case in point is the herdsmen's attack on farmers in Benue state in 2017 and 2018, whereby the Benue state governor became powerless in attempt to protect his people as much as he was willing to. This is directly opposed to the US where each state has its own police department.

Unlike Nigeria, the states have the power to generate revenue from the resources in their domains. This is because control of natural resources in the US is closely tied to land ownership. There are federal lands as well as there are state and local lands. Additionally, there also Native American lands which include tribal land held in trust by the federal government for a tribe's use and allotments that the federal government holds in trust for Native Americans' use. There are cases of split estate where the owner of surface is different from the subsurface owner. This implies that natural resources on the surface of the land accrues to the surface owner while those below the surface are owned by the subsurface owners. While in the federal government owns the mineral resources below surface of a total of 57 million acres of land in the US, the ownership of natural resources is shared between the federal government and the state governments. With states having primary ownership of all natural resources within every three mile range from their coasts, substantial economic autonomy is realised (U.S. Department of Interior, n.d.).

Based on these disparities between Nigeria and the US whose government whose system Nigerian government was seemingly modelled after, the constant leaning towards borderline dictatorship is unstoppable.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

For a country that is far behind in development, a long-term blueprint for transformation, coupled with the will to bring it to actualisation is the way out. However, this is not feasible with a continuous change of government every four years. This is why democracy is doing more disservice to Nigeria.

Against popular perception, democracy is not necessarily an ideal form of government despite its universal acceptability. In the final analysis, it is never an end; rather it is a means to an end. There is no one-size-fits-all system even though democracy is venerated as one. It is only one of the formulas to arrive at solutions. Therefore, its potency is determined by the nature of the society where it is being considered.

This is not to condemn democracy. As a matter of fact, some pre-colonial societies in Nigeria and Africa at large, already had elements of it in their political affairs ever before the colonial governments transplanted theirs (Obilor et al., 2018). The Igbo society is well noted for this with an acephalous structure. Rather than having a head or leader making decisions for them, they agreed together on decisions through their different age-based and gender-based groups. The Yoruba society represented then by the Oyomesi was also noted for separation of power such that the Alaafin (king) could not exercise absolute authority without the cooperation of other organs such as the Ogboni who performed judicial functions.

However, times have changed and here is now a merging of different societies that bear no cultural and structural resemblance of structure to each other. To attain uniformity, there is a need for a system that enables them to meet each other half way without significant traits deprivation of any form. Also, such a system must be suited to their development vision.

To this end, there is a need to return to the parliamentary system where the president chooses his prime minister from the parliament. Also, there should be no limit to the number of times the president can go on. This way, there would be ample time to bring to life any vision conceived by the leadership. This is how Singapore was able to get it right, going from having no resources except for humans to being one the economic giants of Asia under Lee Kuan Yew as prime minister. The transformation was made possible because Yew was prime minister for three years, which was ample time to really visualise and actualise development goals without disruptions that come with change of power.

Singapore got to its presents state based on the programmes and policies that formed the foundation of development. These included the increase in expenditure for public utilities, healthcare and education. Even though there were setbacks such as slashing the salaries of civil servants' which was met with mass uproar, and a rise in unemployment by the end Yew's first year in office, a forward-looking vision was in progress with a five-year plan to rebuild industries and attract foreign investors. The expertise that flooded in through foreign investors afforded the country a chance to build the capacity of its human resources. This is because the foreign multinationals were by policy, made to educate their workforce. Technical schools were built and industrial skills were taught (Santhi & Saravanakumar, 2020).

This turned out well for the country's economy: Singapore became an exporter of garments, textiles and basic electronics. Water fabrication became a reality by the 1990s. Other venture Singapore began to trade in include pharmaceuticals, aerospace engineering, integrated circuit design and biotech research (Santhi & Saravanakumar, 2020).

Following the same leadership route, Nigeria stands a greater chance at transformation that eight years is obviously to little a time to achieve. This was the idea behind the third term agenda of Obasanjo. Having made remarkable eco-

conomic strides such as relieving Nigeria of accumulated foreign debts which were crippling the economy, it is recalled how the former president secured agreement of a debt relief worth \$18 billion and Nigeria's debt stock was reduced by \$30 billion leading to final payments that cleared the nation's debts in Paris Club (Center for Global Development, 2011).

Unfortunately, the good signs of further economic prosperity ushered in by the significant boost could not find expression due to subsequent change of government. A shining example of how continuity is key to sustainable development is the retention of the same "political lineage" that the first governor of Lagos state of Nigeria after the return to democracy, Bola Tinubu, is the "progenitor" of. Every developmental initiative and project being witnessed in the state for the past two decades and counting, is a materialisation of the vision of a mega city which he conceived and articulated in details. The same trend needs to be replicated at the national level officially. This is why parliamentary system needs to be re-installed.

Additionally, to prevent all appearances of ethnic or zonal hegemony, every geopolitical zone should have equal number of federating units with equal senatorial representation at the centre. More power such as right to establish security apparatus should be given to federating units. Also, a split resource control formula should be initiated for economic autonomy.

Finally, a two-tier system should be enacted, with federating unit reserving the right to further its own component units like Lagos did with the creation of Local Council Development Areas which enabled government to get further closer to the grassroots.

By executing these changes, Nigeria stands a better chance at giving life to true federalism with equity in several dimensions as its inherent benefits.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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