

COVID-19 PANDEMIC, FEDERALISM AND NIGERIA'S LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The trajectories of Covid-19 undoubtedly reached all national structures and functions, and their international equivalents. This paper examines the nexus between the global onslaught of the enraging pathogens and the leadership challenges still embedded in Nigeria's federalism. Therefore, the general objective of the paper is to study Covid-19 pandemic, federalism and Nigeria's leadership challenges. The paper is anchored on structural functionalism as theoretical framework using qualitative and normative methodological design. The work prognosticates that after Covid-19, the deadly viruses are coming again and advises that when they come back, structurally and functionally, they must not meet Nigeria the way the novel coronavirus found it. The paper recommends the development of an inexhaustible pool of leaders in the country by converting the current senatorial zones (with the exclusion of Abuja where the Federal Capital Territory Minister performs functions of similitude with that of a state governor) into Nigeria's new federating states, and the current state demarcations converted into 37 senatorial zones. This translates to 109 senatorial zones and 360 federal constituencies in the country.

Keywords: COVID-19, federalism, leadership challenges & federation

Introduction

Coronaviruses belong to a sizeable family of pathogens which can cause sicknesses such as common cold and other severe types of ailments, like Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Coronavirus was discovered in 2019 by the Chinese authorities in Wuhan. It was a new type of coronavirus never previously identified in humans (WHO, 2020). The fresh coronavirus received the

global sobriquet of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease of 2019). In lexical connotations, apandemic is a widespread epidemic that affects people in many different countries, while an epidemic is a fast-spreading disease, with an outbreak that spreads more quickly (and more extensively) among a group of people than would normally be expected. COVID-19 was accordingly a pandemic of epic trajectories. It ranks among the most egregious cataclysms to have ever befallen humanity. The COVID-19 hurricane pursued Homo sapiens to wherever they resided on the planet, and left in its wake globally unprecedented levels of ill-health related deaths and destruction. The COVID-19 pandemic devastated the global economy, caught economic pundits unawares and kept perpetually confused (as its deadly onslaught lasted) most of the world leaders that were spared its fatal pangs. Life as the world knew it (socioeconomic, sociopolitical and industrial existence) came to a standstill in most part of the world. Lockdown became an international idiom spoken universally. The Federal Republic of Nigeria was not spared the pangs of COVID-19 pandemic and their mortal onslaughts. The country received its own share of the monumental socioeconomic and sociopolitical devastations, industrial and institutional dislocations, infections and deaths. But this contribution is focused on the pandemic, federalism and Nigeria's leadership challenges. It is motivated by the possibilities of locating some political realities in Nigerian federalism, arising from the COVID-19 occurrence and its leadership expositions. According to Watts (1998), the degree to which federal system of government can contain political realities are not dependent on ordinarily adopting the federal structure but hinges more on the specific type of federal arrangement chosen or developed, and the attendant processes of its evolution, and if all these, give sufficient expression to the desires of the society. Invariably, federalism entails a practical and astute approach to statecraft, and its appositeness in varying situations may actually depend on other modifications in the institutional models selected.

The objective of this paper is to study COVID-19 pandemic, federalism and Nigeria's leadership challenge as drawn from the experiences of managing COVID-19 in the country. Anderson (2012) posits that despite the large body of existing studies on the

federal system of government, issues bordering on the characteristics of the component units in such systems, such as the consequences of having more, rather than fewer component units, remain relatively sidelined. The interests of this study thus extend to the desirability or otherwise, of having fewer or more of such federating subunits, in the context of leadership husbandry in the Nigerian nation-state. The methodology is qualitative and normative, while structural functionalism was adopted as its framework.

Theoretically, the hue of structural functionalism originated from the field of sociology and principally linked with the academic maneuver of Talcott Parsons. Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer and Robert Merton are also easily linked with the development of functionalism. Parsons wrote more than 150 works on it. But functionalism sees society as a social system based on a value formation, in which individual participates by interacting with the other members, based on the roles and positions such individuals hold in the system. The system itself consists of hierarchical sub-systems, marked by matching institutionalized patterns, supposedly congruent with society's integrated value system, also determining the expectations and rules attached to specific positions and roles (Parsons, 1977; Bourricaud, 1981; Schneewind, 2001; Macionis, & Gerber, 2011; Urry, 2012; Izueke, 2014; Schneewind, 2015; Crossman, 2020). Accordingly, functionalism view society through an inclusive-level orientation, focusing on a macro-social structure that shapes the society. It looks at society in terms of functionality of its constituent trajectories. But Parsons additionally saw functionalism as a particular stage in the methodological development of the social sciences, rather than a specific school of thought (Parsons, 1977; Bourricaud, 1981; Schneewind, 2001; Gerber, 2011; Urry, 2012; Izueke, 2014; Schneewind, 2015; Crossman, 2020). In the application of structural functionalism to this paper, it is on this note that the paper argue that the proper practice of federalism obviates the incidence of leadership crises in federal systems as a tradition of structural functionalism.

Concept and Practice of Federalism

Most definitions of argue that federation consists of two levels of government (federal and regional/state arrangement). But beyond this position, there is little agreement among

scholars and practitioners, regarding every aspect of federalism. Anderson, 2012, Ugwuja & Ubaku (2014), describe federalism as the structure of government in which the exercise of governmental functions become divided between a central government and some federating units. It is used to describe the system of governance in a country, whereby the exercise of governmental powers is shared through constitutional provisions, among different levels of co-ordinate governments. Furthermore, it is usually believed that federalism provides the effective mechanism for the management of ethnic antagonisms in multiethnic polities such as the Nigerian nation. However, the effectiveness or otherwise of federations as institutional arrangements for the successful management of ethnic conflicts in such divided societies, continues to provoke heated scholarly debates. The concept and practice of federalism therefore are not amenable to straightjacketed formations (Tella, Doho & Bapeto, 2014). Ayeni (2018) also explains that the idea and practice of linking separate and clearly different political and national communities to achieve common objectives is an ancient one, dating back to the Greek City-States, though it was not designated federalism at that time (Thom-Otuya, 2013). What amounted to federalism was also practiced in Switzerland around the 13th Century but it later fizzled out before the US federalism became instituted. Modern federalism thus originated from the USA, largely driven by the country's constitutional reform of 1787 in Philadelphia. But the meaning of federalism is essentially locatable within the context of a federation (Burgess (2006). According to Bednar (2011) federalism is all about the sharing of powers between a central government and subordinate governments. Invariably, the philosophy (concept) and practice of federalism are not suggestive of anti-dynamism. Callander & Harstad (2015) have consequently presented a view of federalism they sometimes referred to as progressive federalism, seen by them as inherently dynamic. But what is the relationship between federalism and the leadership crises in Nigeria?

Federalism and Leadership Crises in Nigeria

The Nigerian federal structure emerged from her colonization by Britain, the purpose of the federation was accordingly not well known to the federating parties (the federating

units) and citizens of the component units of the federation (Tella, Doho & Bapeto, 2014; Amadi, Echem & Nwoko, 2011). If there was enough clarity in the viewpoints of the colonial masters about why the Nigerian regions were federating, it may not be far from mere administrative convenience aimed at abetting the exploitation of the colonial domain in the interests of the colonizers' homeland. Because the federal arrangement was not preceded by selfless negotiations, it became devoid of partnership and collaboration, and seemingly remained aimless. To fill the void of aimlessness therefore, the emergent leaders of the federating regions began to engage in interregional rivalry (Ojo, 2009). Bello (2016) identifies the features of Nigerian federalism to include the following:

- sharing of governmental functions between a federal, regional or subordinate governments;
- derivation of powers of different levels of governments from the constitution;
- adoption of a rigid and written constitution;
- supremacy of a central government;
- existence of supreme court for judicial interpretation and review;
- unified police force;
- decentralization of the public service and judiciary;
- the existence of a bicameral legislature at the federal level;
- the principle of federal character, reflected in all national affairs and opportunities and
- Three tier system of government.

The assumption of sharing government functions between federal, regional or component states in Nigeria remains at that level of supposition. Successive federal governments in the country engages in whatever the officials at that level were elect to do. From the Olympian heights of the policymakers at the federal level, they decided on going to different locations in the country, to give food to school children. But this is the government that is at daggers drawn with university lecturers in its own federal controlled higher institutions of learning, over policy directions and dilapidating infrastructure. Sporting competitions in the country are authoritatively supervised from this level of government in the federation. This is a country of estimated two hundred

million citizens, but central government is undertaking the responsibility of organizing sporting competitions, when uninterruptable electricity power supply is like a fantasy in the country. The leaders that emerge from such scenarios remain self-opinionated and even disoriented. national government structures in this brand of federalism is moribund and deficient of structural functionalism.

The issue of derivation of powers of different levels of governments from the constitution is inextricably interwoven with the expositions already being made in this paper. The powers assumed to have been derived from the constitution are sometimes merely beautifying. For instance, what powers are the local government councils (as governments in the local government areas which constitute the third tier of government in the Nigerian federation) exercising in their areas of jurisdiction? What powers are the state governors exercising as chief security officers of their states when policemen that follow them up and down in their states of jurisdiction, are paid by the federal government? Nigeria's constitution may be said to be rigid and written, but how does that help in leadership grooming in the country's federalism? The relationship between the rigidity of the constitution and the engendering of transformative leadership designs in the country is therefore remote. The dominant issue of dysfunctionality in federalism in Nigeria is the overbearing character of the central government, as governors of the federating states usually defer to the president of the country as *Baba* (Father). For such deferring personalities to aspire to lead the country at the national level, they usually need the blessings of the incumbent *Baba*. This tendency detracts from structural functionalism as the paternal leadership figure in the country continues to portray himself in conceit as the way and the truth. He is the de facto custodian of national funds and the ultimate superintendent of all sources of such reserves, and controller in chief of all the other possible mechanisms of revenue generation. In these capacities, he summons the national legislators to his chambers for briefing and debriefing as he pleases.

The principle of federal character sums up all the incapacitating characteristics of Nigeria's federalism. This principle of national affairs management in the country, demands that the federal nature of the state be reflected in all positions and opportunities

available to the citizens. It is a system of anti-merit mechanisms and mediocrity-promoting tendencies as tenets of federalism, so that unqualified candidates are offered existing opportunities because it is their turn to fill a vacancy. Consummate national leaders will not easily emerge from the scenarios under interrogation in this paper. The question then is, have these arrangements generated generic leadership competencies in Nigeria or on the other hand, why has the leadership factor not acted on these federal designs to catalyze self-evident national development in Nigeria?

It is therefore no longer hyperbolic to postulate that the leadership issue in Nigeria, under the country's brand of federalism has become egregiously gargantuan. Leadership in this paper is delimited to political leadership as the focus is on federalism. Political leadership has then turned into a cul-de-sac in Nigeria. Within the generic political leadership cycle in the country, there is a lamentable lack of innovativeness, spiritedness and credibility of personal principles. Before Covid-19 came, it was highly politically vogueish for Nigerian political leaders, to always be in London, United States, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, China, Ghana, and other places, as if these locations were parts of the nation's federating units. Every breed of leaders from the subnational locations, every generation of politicians from the state level federating units seemingly accepted the supremacy of the central government in Nigeria (over the federating states) as a *fait accompli*. But Covid-19 came and necessitated the beaming of a certain searchlight on the nation's federalism, and its apparent political seizure.

COVID-19 in Nigeria: Lessons in Federalism and Leadership

Any account of federalism, argues Gerken (2013) must begin with the values it serves. What then are the values served by federalism in Nigeria? It must include the breeding of national leaders. Such leaders may not emerge in a suffocating atmosphere where the government at the center acts as a smoldering behemoth to the federating states. Federalism is expected to promote economic development and additionally, unity in diversity (Ogunnoiki, 2017). But in Nigeria, federalism has only promoted economic development in contention, and additionally diverged the country from unity. But it became self-evident that the federal and state governments could inadvertently engage in

a wholesome competition among them on which government may be more decisive and result-oriented. This happened as they attempted to fight the coronavirus pathogens. State governors did not wait for the government at the center before making pronouncements on what must be done in their areas of jurisdiction. State governments did not wait for meetings of the different geopolitical divisions of governors' forums before speaking up and giving instructions on what the citizens were required to do. Officials at state levels were largely not afraid of being queried from the center of Nigeria's federal structure for taking action in their component states. There is certainly the need for anew Nigerian federation that could compel such healthfultendencies among the putative leaders.

On the reverse side of these expositions however, what were the various state governments and their functionaries truly doing differently, other than announcing that the states' borders and markets, and schools and places of worship by religious organizations were all being closed down with immediate effect? The fight against the novel coronavirus was globally likened to warfare. Then what wartime infrastructure promptly emerged anywhere in the Nigerian states as catalyzed by any of the crusading State Governors? Nigerian citizens were advised like their counterparts elsewhere on the planet to keep washing their hands. As Governors of the various states were issuing orders that people should remain in their houses, there were no emergency constructions to make water available for those who may eventually decide to come out, to enable them to be washing their hands too. Moreover, there were no such new constructions / arrangements to make water available to those already inside the houses, to also engage in the same washing of hands as critically necessary. It was accordingly taken for granted that Nigerians had water everywhere but this was completely untrue. What new leadership breakthroughs were recorded in the different states of the Nigerian federation in the COVID-19 emergency situation, other than the exhibition of capacity to close borders, lockdown educational institutions and markets, and order churches and mosques, not to open their doors to anyone?

How many Governors in Nigeria can convincingly state the number of people in the areas they superintend? Consequently, did they know the specific number of people

that needed their welfare-oriented actions as COVID-19 struck? Data in Nigeria are guess works. They are at best, professional estimates. The notion of figures not telling lies is not applicable to the country. Who knows the number of buildings and number of families in each of the Nigerian states? Without such knowledge, every emergency situation would hit truly hard on everyone and take prisoners of the governors as they attempt to reign in staccato styles. The COVID-19 danger created such a scenario and exposed the fallacies embedded in leadership pretenses in Nigeria and the ambiguities in the country's federalism. In the United States, disadvantaged adults were to receive \$1,200 checks and \$500 received by such children (Nguyen, 2020). The fiscal value is not yet the issue here but the availability of the technological structure which would make these funds reach the intended beneficiary citizens, inclusive of children.

In England, letters were being sent to 1.5 million people most at risk of coronavirus contamination, devastation and death, advising them to stay at home (Eardley, 2020). Which means that government is in possession of the personal details of these citizens? Then the Canadian government cut its citizens a check, and the checks were directly and automatically deposited into the citizens' accounts days later (Wright & Campbell, 2020). There must therefore be lessons in federalism and leadership tendencies learnable from the COVID-19 pandemic as it pertains to the Nigerian nation. Pundits of global renown and credibility are already predicting future onslaughts on the planet by the merciless pathogens. In Nigeria, government(s) and citizens must begin to get ready to stoutly repel the attacks of the cruel microorganisms, when they return. According to Ojo (2009) Nigerians need to find a solution to the country's challenges in crafting feasible mechanisms for fiscal federalism. But above everything else, the nation needs a national culture that unleashes the leadership potentials in her component units and her federalism. According to Watts (1998), once established, "federal systems are not static structures, they are dynamic, evolving entities". But the center in the Nigerian federation is currently seen in the format of a static structure, a source of immutable wisdom, while the federating units are the sources of insurgencies that must be checkmated at all times. In the resultant scenario, every indication of regional leadership uniqueness is totally

crushed in favour of some inchoate philosophy of national cohesion. But federations are not cast on stone or made to stand as the axiomatic Rock of Gibraltar. The driving forces of federalisms are in their structural functionalisms.

Conclusion and Suggestion

To facilitate the development of an inexhaustible pool of leaders in the country through federalism, it is recommended in this paper that the current senatorial zones in Nigeria be converted into federating states, and the current state demarcations converted into 36 senatorial zones. Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory, FCT) where the Minister in charge of the territory performs functions of similitude with that of a current State Governor is excluded from the recommended conversion. This translates to 108 states in the country and 37 senators. The proposed new structure requires constitutional amendments, whereby the senators only meet when they have work to do. The dualities and duplications in Nigeria's current bicameral legislature indeed, add nothing to structural functionalism. What value for instance, does it add to Nigeria's governance methodologies, when nominees of the President for any public office have to appear before the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for confirmation of their selection, as currently obtainable? Ibrahim Magu was appointed Acting Chairman of Nigeria's anti-graft agency in November 2015 by President Muhammadu Buhari. Each time Mr. Magu appeared before the Senate of the country for the confirmation of his appointment, he was rejected by the distinguished Senators (as they are called). Magu accordingly remains unconfirmed as the Chairman of Nigeria's EFCC, from November 2015 to the time of this research as the COVID-19 pandemic was devastating the world in 2020. The country's Police Service Commission (PSC) had even in April 2018 promoted Magu to the rank of a Full Commissioner of Police from Deputy Commissioner, as the ding-dong scenario between Nigeria's President and the Senate remained operationally of no effect (Ogundipe, 2018).

Among the most prominent advantages of the recommended new formation in Nigeria's federalism is a drastic reduction in the level of functional asymmetry occasioned by the existing order. It was the need for this asymmetric diminution that the

demarcation of each of the states into three senatorial zones was intended to achieve. This recommendation now takes the leveling intention to its ultimate next level. The 774 Local government areas in the country would remain intact. Critics of proposals for the creation of more states in Nigeria usually table as their most superior argument, the issue of the viability of the existing and proposed states. The counter position to such viewpoints is that it is merely based on the notion of survival of the states from the ever-flowing largesse from federal sources. But politicians who seek public office should fundamentally go into such positions to serve, and above everything else, they are expected to come on board with what differentiates them from the rest of the people, in terms of capacities, creativity and zeitgeist.

Like great CEOs, Governors of states in Nigeria should be capable of leading the human resources in their various domains, to turn whatever minimal physical and natural resources in their areas of jurisdiction into self-evident gold. But historically and currently, such governors merely see their positions as opportunity for receiving worship from the rest of the people, and the public office-holder designated as Governor, continues to see himself as an *Übermensch* whom all and sundry deferred to as the Excellency. Federalism as a system of government should protect and not dominate the diversities of the various interests that make up the federal system (Ayeni, 2018). The current number of states in Nigeria diminishes these diversities. It needs to be restated that fundamentally, more states in the country means more work and the more the number of states, the more the work, and the embedded enhanced national productivity. It truly remains astonishing that the national notion of leadership in Nigeria borders on pleasure, razzmatazz, coziness and the wellbeing of the presumed leader. The national idea of leadership increasingly dispenses with work, service and sacrifice.

Nigerians have a weakness for visiting the magnificent city of Dubai. But this place was fundamentally a desert. Lexically, a desert is a dry location. Although the Dubai desert may have oil and other mineral deposits but every Nigerian location also has such endowments by providence - about 34 solid minerals identified in 450 locations - with less than 5% of these minerals currently being mined, processed and marketed. Hence,

solid minerals presently contribute as low as 3% to the country's GDP (Lar, 2018). National progress is not even about natural resources. If it were accordingly, places such as South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Belgium, Switzerland, Taiwan and Italy, would have been stinking with poverty and underdevelopment. National progress and growth are driven by leadership commitments. The concept of more states in the Nigerian federation, as more opportunities to loot the treasury, must be decisively and permanently abandoned.

Potential decriers of this proposal are wont to posit that the United States of America (USA) have only 50 federating states, India 28, Germany 16, etc. The truth is that there is no global minimum standard for number of component units of a federation, neither is there a maximum number. Moreover, structural functionalism is not rooted in minimum and maximum standards but in progress and functionality. There is still a large degree of operational and functional chasms between the population of Nigerian states and their leaders. To precipitate developmental functionality in the country, dreams about mammoth territorial sizes for the component states, and the luxury of their governors have to be deemphasized. The stress on the number of automobiles in the Excellency's usual motorcade, and the prominence placed on the intimidating status of the governor's official police squadron all need to be jettisoned. COVID-19 has after all taught the world that all these are mere airs and vanities, when weighed against the mortal powers of some invisible microorganisms.

Confronting the leadership challenge in the country entails a radical multiplication of the number of operating leaders in the federating states as opposed to the breeding of political tin gods at the center and some stunted versions of such individuals at the state levels. Despite all experimentations since the 1914 amalgamation in Nigeria, the current reality in the country is that Nigerians neither identify with their states nor the center. This calls for a radical reorientation that would give Nigerians the needed identity focus, from the states to the center, through some new and engaging leadership emphases and challenges. After COVID-19, when the deadly pathogens come back (as they are certainly returning) they must not meet Nigeria the way the novel coronavirus found it.

The Nigerian state must be in a position to bewilder the lethal supergerms by the new structural functionalisms in her federalism.

Federalism should enable the diversities in Nigerian peoples to flourish and also protect the embedded arrays of endowments from being smothered. A certain regrettable thought-pattern that has continued to survive in Nigeria is that new states can only be created in the country when there is an assurance of abundance (in ceaseless trajectories) for those who aspire to govern such states. There should also be plausible provisions for the greed and vanities of such leadership pretenders; if not, the proposed new states are declared unviable. What then would be the leadership challenges for those who want to lead such states? The country has accordingly continued to create colonial lords at the state leadership levels in place of human catalysts of progress, prosperity and development in these places. These leaders accordingly reside in secluded opulence in the Government Houses and other chalets, when there is so much work to do out there. They keep waiting for the next round of allocations for running the states, to come from the center of the nation's federalism. And whenever the citizens are unfortunate enough to set their eyes on these their (mis)leaders, their joys illogically remain endless. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity for leadership attitudinal changes and generic structural reforms in the Nigerian state and everywhere.

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