

The political situation in Nigeria

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Preamble

Nigeria, a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation, currently with about 200.96 million people, became an independent state when she gained political independence from the British government in October 1st, 1960. However, Queen Elizabeth II, the British Monarch was still the Head of State until 1963 when the nation became a republic, having adopted a new constitution. Since this period, the country has witnessed four republics in addition to several years of military intervention in government.

System of Government

Before Nigeria gained political independence from Britain in 1960, the country was running a regional government under the colonial rule. At independence, she continued with a regional government, comprising three regions inherited from the colonial government. The regions, which were Eastern, Northern and Western Regions; each had its own constitution, regional legislatures and some level of autonomy. In 1963, a fourth region (Mid-West region) was calved out of the Western region. However, by 1967, the regions were broken into twelve (12) states, with each governed by a state governor. By 1976, seven (7) more states were created to make a total of nineteen (19) and in 1987, two (2) additional ones were formed, making twenty-one (21) states in all. Furthermore, in 1991, nine (9) more were created to increase it to thirty (30), and by 1996, six additional ones emerged thereby raising the total number of states in the country to thirty-six (36).

So, Nigeria, which has three tiers of government (federal, state and local) with 36 states, a Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and 774 local government areas, at present runs a federal/presidential system of government, with power shared among the executive, legislative and the judiciary. The constitution, which is written, makes provisions for areas where both the federal and state governments can exercise their powers. For instance, the exclusive list has items that only the federal government can legislate; the concurrent legislative list contains items that the federal and state governments legislate while the residual legislative list is reserved solely for the states.

The legislative arm of government, which is saddled with the responsibility of making laws for the country, is the national assembly, and it's the first branch of government. The national assembly is bicameral, comprising the Senate (upper chamber) and the House of Representatives (lower chamber). Members of the assembly are elected for a four-year term, and can continue to seek for reelection as much as they wish. The Senate consists of 109 senators because each state has 3 senatorial districts, with a senator per district while the FCT has one. The Senate president heads the Senate. The Speaker is the

head of the House of Representatives, which has 360 members representing the 36 states (ten members per state).

The executive (the second branch of government) is headed by the president who doubles as the head of state and the head of government. He is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The constitution permits the president to be elected by majority votes in addition to winning 25% of the votes cast in 24 States. Moreover, he/she can serve for a maximum of eight years of two terms, after which he/she cannot seek for a re-election into that office. The president who also has a vice appoints ministers (senior ministers) and minister of states (junior ministers) as well as several other political appointees that assist to run the government at the federal level.

The judiciary, (the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, the High Courts, and other trial and specialized Courts), which is the third arm of government however, is headed by the Chief Justice of the country, who also presides over the highest court (Supreme Court) in the land. The president appoints the justices and presidents of the federal courts, including the Chief Justice of the Federation, based on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council. However, such appointments must be confirmed by the Senate. On the other hand, the governor of each state appoints the judges of the state courts on the recommendation of the State Judicial Service Council, which must be confirmed by the State House of Assembly.

There are four codes of laws in the nation's judicial or legal systems. These are the customary, common, statute and the Sharia laws. The customary laws are the native regulations resulting from indigenous traditional norms, beliefs and practices. The courts, chaired by the traditional rulers always administer the customary laws. The common laws develop from the post colonial independence. However, the statute laws are English laws, which are British colonial legislations inherited from the colonial masters, and have since been revised and improved upon. The Sharia laws (Islamic laws) on the other hand apply to Moslems in the Northern part of the country and are administered by the *Hadis*, which are Islamic judges.

At the state level, every state has a governor (in whom the executive powers of such state are vested) and a deputy, in addition to commissioners and other appointees for the smooth administration of the state. However, the federal capital territory has a minister to oversee the affairs of the territory. The legislative system practiced at the state level is unicameral in which only a legislative house (the State House of Assembly) exists.

With respect to administration of local governments, each of the local government areas has a chairman as the chief executive, with elected councilors to run the affairs of the council. All the states and local government areas of the federation depend on the revenue allocation from the federal government, without which majority of them cannot function.

Nigeria runs a multi-party system, with about ninety-two (92) registered political parties as at 2019. However, early this year (2020), the electoral body (Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC) deregistered 74 political parties for failing to meet the requirements to continue as parties. With this development, the nation is now left with only eighteen (18) out of the 92. Moreover, in May, 2018, the president signed a constitutional amendment, which now permits an independent candidate to run for elections at the federal and state levels. Furthermore, the president also signed a bill (Not Too Young to

Run bill), which allows young persons to run for political offices in the country. This has raised awareness among young people and during the 2019 presidential election; many youths vie for political office, including that of the presidency.

The Political Situation and Challenges

The political situation in Nigeria over the years has not been encouraging. It could be said that the military incursion into governance in the country (1966-1979; 1983-1985; 1985-1993; and 1993-1999) has affected the way government is run. Although the political institutions at all tiers of governments have been stable since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, it appears the political officeholders in the nation are still learning and battling with the art of governance, and as such several challenges continue to steer the face of governance in the nation. Successive governments seem not to have satisfied the yearnings of the citizens, as the country moves from one challenge to another.

At independence, Nigeria began with a parliamentary system of government but in 1979, it adopted a presidential system as practised by the United States. However, this has not solved the daunting political and economic challenges facing the country.

In 1999, when the current fourth republic began, the people were full of hope of a better nation; however, by their estimation, not much progress was recorded. Yes, there were some improvements in the area of economic growth, payment of outstanding debts, telecommunication, and so on; these were not enough to give people hope. It looks as if the country has not been lucky in the area of governance, as most of the people occupying the seat of power have not been able to get it right with respect to development of the country.

This has led to a lot of political and development challenges. For instance, there is existence of state incoherence and institutional inefficiency of administrative system. The problems regarding the enforcement of the rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights of the citizens as well as internal security are obvious.

Similarly, the level of poverty is unnecessarily high, with Nigeria being regarded as the poverty headquarters of the world. Corruption is still a major challenge at all levels, notwithstanding the efforts of the anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to fight the menace. Infrastructure decay still persists in the country. Youth unemployment has been rising while insecurity situation yet continues (due to kidnappings, terrorism, armed robbery, incessant conflicts between herders and farmers, cattle rustling, etc). Moreover, the economy depends majorly on oil exports for foreign exchange earnings and income generation. All these have led to different agitations like secession, restructuring, true federalism and so on.

The variant of presidential system practised in the country also makes situation worse, as too much power is concentrated in the centre, thereby making the federating units weak. The centre wields excessive influence over the federating units and controls all the security apparatus. The units depend on the centre for revenue to operate, since it controls virtually all resources in the country.

Furthermore, the cost of government is unnecessarily high, with the nation's lawmakers being among the highest paid globally. Electric power generation in the country on average has not gone beyond 4,000 MW, which has contributed to the development challenges the nation is facing.

All these make people disenchanted with the situation of things in the country, with the youths appearing not to see any hope ahead, in spite of some of the policies (N-power, conditional cash transfer, Not Too Young To Rule Bill, etc) the current administration has put in place to address the problems. The numerous problems have heightened tensions among the youths, who are ready to vent their anger at any slightest provocations, and this became apparent during the endSARS protest across the country in October.

The #EndSARS Protest

The full meaning of SARS is Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The squad was established in 1992 to fight armed robbery and other serious crimes in order to improve the security situation in the country. Selected members of the squad are always drawn from the Nigerian police. The activities of SARS over the years have contributed to reduction in crimes to a reasonable degree. However, the situation latter changed as some members of the squad began to violate the human rights of Nigerians, especially the youths.

The situation became unbearable that in 2018, the acting president, Professor Osinbajo ordered an overhaul of the squad following complaints of harassment and allegations of human right violations perpetrated by members of the unit. On October 3rd, 2020 the youths across the country embarked on decentralized and peaceful protests against police brutality and human right violations tagged #EndSARS. The youths demanded for a complete disbandment of the SARS squad and also requested for a total reform of the Nigerian police force.

The protests and demands were triggered by the killing of a young man by a SARS officer in front of a hotel in Delta State on October 3, 2020, and further compounded by the killing of another young upcoming musician by the same SARS officers. These all sparked nationwide demonstration that attracted solidarity protests across major cities globally. Unfortunately, the demonstration within the country was hijacked by hoodlums, which turned it bloody. In addition, the demonstrators went on rampage and began to loot and burn anything on sight. Several buildings were burnt in major cities in the country, with Lagos State accounting for the highest number of facilities that were destroyed. Moreover, some lives were lost including that of security officers. Furthermore, it was alleged that some military personnel deployed to keep the peace short at protesters in Lagos.

With all these, coupled with other demands of the youths, it became obvious that the protests and agitations were not only due to police brutality and human right violations but the political and economic situations in the country in actual fact were responsible for the protest.

The Way Forward

The way forward is for all the agitations and the fears of the youths and several groups in the country to be addressed. Moreover, the nation needs to practise true federalism as done in the US where the current system of government was borrowed. Nigeria as a matter of urgency also needs to address development

challenges, such as high rate of chronic poverty (40.1%) and youth unemployment level (40.8% of youths ages 15-24 are currently unemployed while 30.7% of those within the age bracket 25-34 years are currently unemployed), general unemployment rate (27.1%, unemployment rate and 55.7% combined unemployment and underemployment rate). The issue of insecurity should be addressed. The country should consider state policing as we have in several countries across the world. The high cost of governance needs to be reconsidered and this should begin with revisiting bicameral legislature the country is currently practising. Greater investment should be undertaken in human capital development (education, health, training, etc) given the youth bulge faced by the country.