

Politics of Nepotism and National Integration in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of Federal Appointments under President Muhamadu Buhari's Administration

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ABSTRACT: In the background to this study, it was established that primordial sentiments based on ethnic bigotry always define social relations in any society with multi-regional, multi-tribal, multi-lingual, and multi-religious diversities. The study further noted that typical of the Nigerian situation, political office holders exploit the avenues of nepotism to secure discriminatory socio-political benefits for their various constituencies, with a view to sustaining their electoral value and relevance. This study specifically appraised the impact of politics of nepotism on national integration in Nigeria, using the federal appointments under President Buhari's administration as the study's specific focus. This study was anchored on the theory of distributive justice. Data were predominantly obtained through the secondary source and supplemented by interviews, while content analysis and logical deductions were used in data interpretation. Through several literature reviewed, this study revealed that the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, since its inception in 2015 made several lopsided federal appointments, to the advantage of the northern region, but to the obvious marginalisation of other ethnic nationalities. The study further revealed that the nepotistic administrative style of President Muhammadu Buhari in the appointment of persons into public service positions has over time, created ethnic disharmony, propelled divisive perception, and promoted the growth of secessionist agitations. In conclusion, this study recommended among other things, for a constitutional overhaul that would henceforth, incorporate a section that will emphatically spell out the compulsory application of federal character principle in the determination of appointments into public service positions in Nigeria.

KEYWORD: Nepotism, Public Service, National Integration, Ethnicity.

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Introduction

It is an objectively held opinion that in any nation-state, which corporate existence is defined in terms of its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural composition, identity-based sentiment predominantly characterise its socio-political, and in most cases, economic relations. The pursuit for overriding political relevance by a section or some sections of any country with diverse ethnic components, would entail a pinch on the sensibilities of other ethnic nationalities that make up the polity. Invariably, the ensuing resistance and disaffections consistently expressed by disconcerted and disgruntled groups which represent the diverse ethnic nationalities, gradually birth the narrative of national disintegration.

In most cases, the resort to bigotry by some sections of a variously diversified nation-state is intensively exploited to serve as determinants for occupation of political and top, but juicy bureaucratic positions in a country. According to Akinyetun (2020), ethnic bigotry constitutes a primordial sentiment that characterises a federating unit with multi-ethnic unions. Hence, Akinyetun remarks that a major identifiable attribute of such a system is the tendency for nepotistic sharing of political power and positions. Such a prevalent political trend, according to Adegami & Uche (2015) is antithetical to the fundamental principles of federalism. Hence, nepotistic inclination by leaders, especially in any democratic clime subtracts from the consummate actualisation of the core purpose of federalism-the latter which is anchored on the desire by separate nationalities to come together to form a common union, where the rights and privileges of the various groups will be equally and fairly protected.

The Nigerian federal structure, from the outset of its creation in 1954 has failed to justify the essence of its creation. Politics of nepotism, bigotry and segregation has continued to characterise the existence of the Nigerian state and defines the pattern of appointments into political and bureaucratic positions. The quest by Nigeria political office holders to tread the path of nepotism in filling vacant public office positions has remained antagonistic to the observance of federal character principle-the latter which fundamentally emphasises that appointments into public offices must reflect considerations given to the cultural, tribal, religious, and linguistic diversities of a country. In a similar view, Lenshie (2014) informed that the undermining of the application of federal character principle in public service appointments during the military era still persists in the current democratic dispensation. Lenshie further asserted that, the fact that nepotism constitutes an aberration to section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as amended, is summarily offensive to democratic tenets. Accordingly, section 14(3) of the extant Nigerian constitution clearly captures emphasis on the application of federal character principle as a guide to federal-state public service appointments.

In their views, Ezumah (2018) and Sholade (2020) have separately observed that nepotism is inimical to aggregate national growth and development in Nigeria, hence, nepotistic politics always advocates divisiveness and promotes selective developmental initiatives and execution. Particularly, Sholade (2020) posits that the practice of nepotism by the Nigerian leadership “depeens the betrayal of the symbolic representation of Nigeria’s coat of arms which is anchored on the fact that the nation’s progress and peace is tied to national unity” (p. 97).

In the opinion of Chukwuma et al (2018), nepotism breeds mutual distrust, suspicion and hate among ethnic nationalities. According to them, these variables further fuel agitations for secession from the federating union. Sholade (2020) traces the root cause of agitations by the various ethnic nationalities to the declining level of political legitimacy and sovereign status of the Nigerian state.

The main thrust of this study is to critically examine the extent to which nepotism in Nigeria has determined federal appointments under the current Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, as well as its implication to national integration.

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Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research method. Data collection was predominantly through secondary sources like textbooks, journals, unpublished academic materials, and internet materials. Data collection was also partially supplemented through a strictly limited structured interview. The study also adopted the descriptive and logical deductive method of data analysis.

Conceptual Clarification

Politics of Nepotism

Nepotism, according to Ezumah (2018) refers to an aberrational practice by political office holders to unduly exploit the privileges of their official power or authority to influence the appointment of their relatives or kinsmen into public offices, to the disadvantage and detriment of the majority of qualified job seekers. In corroboration to the above definition, Umeze (2019) posits that nepotism denotes an aspect of inordinate favouritism, resulting from flagrant abuse of power by political office holders. Consequently, such is given to family members or acquaintances without recourse to their qualification or meritorious status. To Sholade (2020), nepotism simply involves an unjust, unfair and discriminatory favour granted by political office holders to relatives and contemporaries.

By extension, nepotism according to Onyibor (2016) involves a calculated political expediency by political office holders wherein they majorly pitch appointment into public offices and positions on a particular ethnic society. In consonance with the above definition, Akinyetun (2020) asserts that nepotism entails a deliberate boycott by political office holders, of due process and constitutional guidelines to secure a dominant percentage of public office appointments for persons who share the same ethnic identity with them. In a separate definition, Lenshie (2014) sees nepotism as an aspect of corruption that enables political office holders to negate lawfully established protocols and meritorious standards, required for appointment into public offices. Alternatively, according to Lenshie, these leaders elect to pick from the fold of their relatives and members of their ethnic nationality, in order to cover their shady administrative deals.

Accordingly, Chukwuma et al (2018), established a thin distinction between nepotism and cronyism. According to them, while the former denotes an unjust proclivity on the part of political leaders to appoint people into public offices and positions on the basis of family tie or clannish sentiment, the latter specifically means a situation where a political leader concentrates on filling vacant public service positions with persons from among friends and associates. Nonetheless, Chukwuemeka et al clarified that in essence, while nepotism could consist in everything that cronyism represents, the latter is strictly exclusive in definition.

In the light of the explanations tendered above by various authors on the concept of nepotism, this study unequivocally states that nepotism is fundamentally descriptive of a political system where the leadership class subscribe to the patronage of ethnic politics and clannish sentiment in public service appointments.

National Integration

National Integration as defined by Osimen et al (2013), involves a conscious but systemic approach of foisting the feeling of togetherness by people from diverse ethnic and racial orientation who co-exist in one identical geographical definition. In fact, Obilor (2019) emphatically submits that National Integration is “the consciousness that simply emphasises the all-inclusive enthronement of the administration of unity in diversity by the political class of any country” (p. 20). Also, Usifo (2019) views national integration as a collaborative emphasis, inductive, and re-orientation preachments on the need for citizens of a country to imbibe the consciousness of unity, existential cooperation and oneness among them, irrespective of their lingual, tribal, cultural, and religious dissimilarities. Hence, it is the philosophical view of Usifo that national integration should connote a fundamental national agenda which central objective can only be attainable on

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the basis of political leadership class's administrative forthrightness and sensitivity to tendencies that preclude good and inclusive governance. In addition, Usifo identified four distinct factors that frustrate the cohesive existence of a state. They include:

- a) **Systemic Permissiveness of the Ideology of Ethnocentrism:** This is descriptive of an impression of the superiority of a particular ethnic society over others. This is generally perceived to have a devastating disintegrating force in any society where people co-exist in spite of their differences in race, language or culture. Usifo attributed the Rwanda genocide of 1994 to the impact of the destructive ideology of ethnocentrism. Hence, the Tutsis were considered to be a more superior and socially privileged tribe than the Hutus. That development had engendered mutual disaffection, strife and hatred between the two ethnic societies.
- b) **Unbalanced Development:** Here, Usifo impresses that national development, especially for a country that practises a federal system, should reflect uniformity, fairness and equity. However, when some sections of a country are marginalised, while others are favoured at their expense, the consciousness and desire for alienation and separation may set in.
- c) **Nepotism:** In this aspect, Usifo observes that in a situation where job appointments into political and public service positions tend to favour a particular ethnic society at the expense of others, it breeds strife and series of sustained sectarian complaints and displeasure.
- d) **Insensitivity to Causes of Sectarian Agitations:** Lastly, Usifo observes that when the leadership of a country fails to identify and address forthwith, the fundamental reasons for agitations for secession by groups which represent the interests of some ethnic societies, the unity of such a sovereign nation might continue to be threatened.

Defining the concept from an elaborate and comprehensive perspective, Adegami & Uche (2015) affirm that national integration is an ineluctable attribute and critical aspect of federalism that consolidate its relevance in any sovereign state. This definition was corroborated by Ezumah (2018), when he posited that "national integration constitutes a major virtue in a federal system as it fosters corporate unity and peace among the federating units" (p. 43).

Therefore, it is the position of this study that national integration entails a social condition in any sovereign state or country where socio-political and economic relation among peoples, culled from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural background, is characterised by mutuality and cohabitational stability.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on the theory of Distributive Justice. The theory of distributive justice is an integral of the larger body of utilitarianism, developed in 1971 by John Rawls. The central objective of John Rawls' theory of distributive justice is projected at ensuring that the allocation of social good and benefits in a society reflects equity and fairness. From a statist perspective, social good and benefits consist in the entirety of the commonwealth of the state which by the dictates of natural law, should serve the interest of all equally and equitably, and without recourse to prejudice or discrimination. The fair allocation of social benefits in this context include: (a) equal distribution of collectively owned economic resources among the various ethnic and geographical units of a state, (b) even and equitable distribution of infrastructural development across the federating units of a state, (c) the allocation and dispensation of social justice among individuals, regions and ethnic nationalities, on the mantra of dispassionate equity and fairness, and (d) equitability and fairness in the sharing of public-owned employment opportunities and other governmental positions.

Hence, Mukherjee & Ramaswamy (2011) identified some of the cardinal principles and assumptions of John Rawl's theory of Distributive Justice and they include:

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1. The belief that distributive justice in a state should be a reflection of a social contract entered into, between the people and the managers of a state, where in the latter are expected by the tenets of the contract to protect and defend the naturally-inherited rights and privileges of the former, in the spirit of fairness.
2. The belief that the principles of equity, justice and fairness should guide access to ownership and distribution of economic goods in the society.
3. The assumption that deprivation of equal justice in the distribution of socio-economic benefits and privileges in a state, on the basis of prejudice for ethnic nationality, colour, age, sex, status or race, has the propensity to fuel social dissent, disharmony and disintegration.

The theory of distributive justice as propounded by John Rawls suitably fits into this study as it is in principle, descriptive of the prevalent state of ethnic disharmony in the Nigerian society-a situation largely informed by a trending poor system of distributive justice and nepotistic practices by the country's political leadership class.

An Overview of the Current Nature of Politics of Nepotism as it Relates to National Integration in Nigeria.

The trending nature of nepotism in Nigeria has over time, assumed an ethnic countenance, such that the predispositions, involvements and indulgences of public office holders are ethnically biased. According to Ogundiya (2009), the elites exploit the privileges of ethnic politics to advance the gains of prebendalism and yet, seek absolution from legal indictment on the enablement of tribal attachments. In their contribution, Adegbami & Uche (2015) explain that political elites resort to practising nepotism as a way of buying off the expressed sympathies of relatives in the event the elites are entangled in the web of legal confrontations, arising from their alleged involvement in corrupt practices. Adegbami & Uche further explain that such a trend always sparks off solidarity protests by relatives of corrupt political leaders against political or legal persecutions of their kinsmen.

In the view of Obilor (2019), nepotism remains an active form of corruption in Nigeria, hence, aspirants for political positions have their aspirations effectively processed and secured on the condition that in the event such political positions are acquired, they would be used to massively patronise ethnic interests in the form of job appointments, award of contracts, and discriminatory citing of infrastructural developments, at the expense of national interest.

According to Abada & Onyia (2020),

When one is occupying a privileged position in government, his kiths and kin are not expected to suffer any material deprivation. The occupant of such office is expected to appropriate the position of his office to dispense favour and patronage to his relations with a view to improving their material condition. It is because of this belief, that appointments into public offices are usually greeted with cheers and celebration by associates and relatives of the appointee. Such excitement does not stem from the fact that the appointee has been given an opportunity to serve the country, rather it stems from the fact that the appointee is going to use the discretionary powers of his office to improve the living standard of his relatives and associates. (p.8)

The above citation demonstrates the prevalence of nepotistic and prebendal system of politics over national politics and interest. The core gist in the above excerpt tersely illustrates the preference of politics of ethnic identity to the governance style that would promote national integration in Nigeria. According to Umeze (2019), the acquisition of political position or the occupation of any highly-ranked but tenured public office in Nigeria is often viewed by the relatives or cronies of such a public figure, as an opportunity to appropriate

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and amass material wealth and opportunities for themselves, their immediate family and cronies, and not for the service of the entire country.

In the opinion of Onyibor (2016), politics of nepotism in Nigeria is being grossly exploited to serve the interest of sustaining the obnoxious practice of ‘secret system of governance’ (p. 4). By implication, the act by political office holders, of giving out very sensitive and high-profile public service appointments to family members, relatives, friends and other close allies, with little or no recourse to adhering to meritorious criteria, is primarily targeted at undermining the essence of transparency in governance. Thus, the thriving of opacity in public governance in the typical Nigerian situation is commonly sustained when the administration of either a state or agencies of government is turned into a family affair. In addition, Chukwuma et al (2018), informed that in most states of the federation, nepotism is being practised as a form of ethnic or family hegemony. They observed that the common practice by state governors to appoint Chief of Staff for their various states, from the same ethnic background with the Governor, is a typical display of politics of nepotism and a brazen practice of ethnic hegemony at the state level. A typical example can be cited from experiences in Rivers state where in the year 2007, the then elected Governor, Celestine Omehia who hailed from the Ikwerre ethnic group in the state, appointed Mr. Glory Emeh who was also an Ikwerre descent as his Chief of Staff. Again, Omehia’s successor, Rt.Hon. Chibuike Amaechi appointed Mr. Nyesom Wike-an Ikwerre man as his Chief of Staff. In 2011, Amaechi appointed a replacement for Nyesom Wike as the Chief of Staff, in the person of Mr. Tony Okocha, still an Ikwerre man. When in 2015 Mr. Nyesom Wike assumed the position as the Governor of Rivers state, he also appointed an Ikwerre man-Chukwuemeka Woke as his Chief of Staff. In a similar situation, the present Governor of Abia state, Dr. Okezie Ikpeazu who is of the Ukwa-Ngwa sub-ethnic group, has Anthony Agbazuere, still of the Ngwa sub-ethnic nationality as his chief of staff. In Borno state, the present governor, Babagana Zulum is of the Kanuri tribe and still has Isa Marte Hussaini-a Kanuri man as his chief of staff. The former governor of Imo state, Rochas Okorocha appointed his son in-law, Uche Nwosu as his chief of staff (Idika, 2021).

Analytically, it can be understood that the act, by some state governors in Nigeria, of giving the position of chief of staff to persons of the same tribal affiliation or family background is linked to the desire to maintain ethnic hegemonic control of the political structure of the state, with a view to deliberately blocking all avenues for instilling the culture and practice of administrative transparency and accountability in state governance. Hence, the office of the chief of staff to the governor of a state is paradoxically synonymous with the office of the state governor. The chief of staff, by virtue of job routine designation is the custodian of all the administrative nitty-gritties attached to the office of the governor of a state. A chief of staff acts as the closest confidant and adviser to the chief executive of a state. In most cases, they covertly perform some key functions of chief executives of states. By implication, the chief of staff is principally privy to the discretionary powers and privileges of the state chief executive for appointments, dismissals and sanctions. To that effect, the chief of staff could be at liberty to hijack public job recruitment/appointment processes and sustain the tide of nepotistic public positions’ appointment style.

Aside the aspect of nepotistically-motivated system of job appointments, there are also concerns about the lopsidedness in citing infrastructural developments- a direct consequence of nepotism. Accordingly, Odiegwu (2021) reports that in Rivers state, there is a public show of discontent and dissatisfaction over Governor Wike’s decision to continue to cite developmental projects in Obio-Akpor local government-the local government from where Wike hails. Odiegwu recounted a statement credited to the former spokesperson of the state chapter of the All-Progressive Congress (APC), Ogbonna Nwuke, to the effect that the governor’s attitude of marginalising other sections of the states in terms of developmental projects was projecting him as a tribalised governor.

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In view of the analysis conveyed above, it simply follows that at the state level, unity and cooperation among the various ethnic localities that make up the state would be threatened. In the place of harmonious co-existence would be mutual distrust, strife, and unhealthy competitions among the local units, to capture regional power so as to explore, exploit and consummate the myriad of benefits, inherent in that seat of power, mostly to the advantage of a favoured unit, at the expense of others. As a consequence, corporate regional development would be sacrificed for the actualisation of sectional interests. This situation invariably reflects very significantly, experiences at the national scene.

A Critical Assessment of the Practice of Nepotism in Federal Appointments under President Muhammadu Buhari’s Administration.

Right from the year 2015 when the present Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari was inaugurated, the Nigeria state has been enmeshed in the doldrums of cold antagonism between the northern and the southern parts of the country. The sectarian divides of the Nigerian nation, defined in terms of religion and ethnicity have been co-existing in an atmosphere of ethno-rival acrimony and ill-will. In recent times, the extent of the existing animosity that exists between the two main geographical poles that make up the country has degenerated into demonstrated agitations and protests. The fundamental trace to this problem is not far-fetched; it can be narrowed down to the controversies and concerns that have attended the lopsided and north-favoured pattern of appointments into sensitive and strategic federal positions under President Buhari’s Administration. This extant trend in the political life of the Nigerian state has continued to provoke criticisms, condemnations, and overtly expressed concerns by well-meaning Nigerians which include renowned public analysts and academics. Hence, Umeze (2019), unequivocally characterised President Buhari as “a chronically tribalised leader who stops at nothing to demonstrate his predilection for a divided Nigeria and his aversion for a united Nigeria” (p. 73). As a reinforcement to Umeze’s position, Sholade (2020) posits that:

Under Buhari, Nigeria has witnessed the crudest and worst form of nepotism and cronyism. Since assuming the mantle of leadership as the president of a geographically vast, and ethno-religiously diverse entity like Nigeria, the President has not hidden his preference to discriminatorily favour the north, at the expense of the southern bloc of the country. This situation has over time, created narratives that have continued to disintegrate the country along ethnic sentiment. Thus, the President’s tendencies portray him more as a northern Nigeria president than the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (p. 98)

President Buhari’s nepotistic style of governance has not only been perceived by critics along ethnic lines, but also along religious consideration. The president has severally been viewed as one who has, since he assumed office as Nigerian president in 2015, continued to inundate the public space with federal appointments almost restricted strictly to the northern muslim elements. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) had in 2018, through its president, Rev. Samson Ayokunle, maintained its stance on the alleged lopsided federal appointments by Buhari, which according to the apex Christian religious group was discriminatory, ethno-religiously biased, and not a true reflection of strict adherence to federal character principle. The Christian religious group faulted President Buhari’s replacement of Mathew Seiyefa, a southern Christian from Bayelsa state with Yusuf Magaji Bichi, a northern muslim from Kano state as the DG of the Department of State Service. It would be recalled that Mathew Seiyefa had replaced Lawal Daura as the Director of DSS, following Daura’s sack by the then acting president, Prof. Yemi Osinbanjo, on the allegation of abuse of office. It then followed that Mathew Seiyefa, being the highest-ranking officer in that agency of government was promoted to head the DSS. However, Buhari, upon his return from a medical trip in London, hurriedly replaced Seiyefa with Bichi, probably because he felt that the position of the DSS DG was too strategic to be occupied by a southern Christian (Yahaya, 2018).

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At the inception of the first tenure of President Buhari's administration in 2015, the President's lopsided appointments which had favoured the north the more, were severely criticised from various quarters in the country. Among the first batch of his appointments into various federal positions, only one, out of the nine appointees was a southerner. Apart from Sen. Ita Enang as the Senior Special Assistant (to the President) on National Assembly Legislative matters, the rest were northerners. Regrettably, the President replicated same in the appointments into the offices of security service chiefs (Baiyewu, 2016). Statistics shows that President Buhari's candidates for the post of security service chiefs were predominantly northerners. Accordingly, the table below descriptively captures President Buhari's appointments into positions of service chiefs and heads of some selected federal agencies during his first tenure in office.

NAMES	POSITION	REGION
Alhaji Abba Kyari	Chief of Staff	North
Babachir Lawal	Secretary to the Government of the Federation	North
Lawal Daura	DG, Department of State Service	North
Amina Zakari	Ag. Chairman of INEC	North
Mahmood Yakubu	Chairman, INEC	North
Danteni Baba Ladan	Director, Department of Petroleum	North
Ahmed Idris	Accountant General of the Federation	North
Abdulrahaman Mani	Chief Security Officer	North
Abdullahi Kazaure	Chief Protocol	North
Muhammed Abubakar	Aide-De-Camp to the President	North
Garba Shehu	SSA Media and Publicity	North
Femi Adesina	SA, Media and Publicity	South
Ita Enang	SSA, National Assembly	South
Hameed Ali	Comp. General Customs	North
Martin Abeshi	Comp. General Immigration	North
Winifred Oyo-ita	Head of Service	South
Babagana Mongonu	National Security Adviser	North
Abdullahi Gana Muhammadu	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps	North
Gabriel Abayomi Olonishakin	Chief of Defence Staff	South
Ibok- Ete Ekwe Ibas	Chief of Naval Staff	South
Tukur Buratai	Chief of Army Staff	North
Sadiq Abubakar	Chief of Air Staff	North
Ibrahim Idris	Inspector General of Police	North
Ibrahim Magu	Economic and Financial Crime Commission	North
Ayodele Oke	National Intelligence Agency	South

Source: Punch online news, 26th July, 2016.

In analysing the table above, it is very obvious that the volume of appointments as displayed in the table, by up to 94% favoured the northern region of the country. Again, by inference, the President's propensity for religious bias in appointments was clearly manifest during his first tenure. Hence, from the table, it is evident that more than 95% of the appointees from the north are Muslims.

Undoubtedly, the President, upon assumption of office would have declared on oath, to promote, protect and defend national unity. It is expected that the President, while being under obligation to protect and defend the unity of the Nigerian state should be well and compulsorily guided by the extant constitution. However, President Buhari, by virtue of the lopsided nature of his appointments which was basically north-centric had

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violated the implication of section 14 (3) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (as amended) which stipulates that:

The composition of the Government 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 or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.

Incidentally, this explains why the inability of the President to faithfully comply with the dictates of the law, with regard to appointments into public offices has over time, degenerated into disintegrations along ethnic and religious lines in the country. By allowing tribal-based sentiment, instead of corporate national interest to guide his choice of appointment of persons into public positions at the federal level, President Buhari has continued to demonstrate complicity in undermining strict adherence to federal character principle as the constitutionally-backed administrative condition for the composition of the national government.

Explicitly, line 4 of the above cited excerpt from the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (as amended) implies that the application of federal character principle in the occupation of public service positions in the country is a requisite for national loyalty. To buttress this fact, section 15(4) of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria clearly provides that “the State shall foster a feeling of belonging and of involvement among the various peoples of the federation, to the end that loyalty to the nation shall override sectional loyalties”. Put differently, the reflection of federal character in the composition of personnel in the various federal organisations and other aspects of public service appointments, would go a long way to ensuring popular leadership support and cooperation from the masses. In effect, such would also strengthen the status of the nation’s political sovereignty. The seemingly sheer negligence of the expedient need to expunge the ills of nepotism in public governance by the Buhari-led administration has been responsible for fanning the embers of sectional disloyalty and divisiveness. Descriptively, such tendencies of polaristic disloyalty in the contemporary Nigerian context have been defined in terms of ethnic-based insurrections, separatist agitations and civic unlawfulness/uprising. Hence, the feeling of alienation and deprivation could have spurred the exhibition of such instabilities in the country’s social cycle.

The series of outcry and complaints about President Buhari’s lopsided public offices appointment style during his first term in office, had warranted the President’s Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Garba Shehu, in the build-up to the 2019 general elections to impress on the Nigerian populace that the President would, in his second tenure, balance federal appointments between the northern and southern Nigeria. In reality however, President Buhari’s pattern of appointments into public office positions in his second tenure was an exact, or a slightly stretched reflection of experiences during the President’s first tenure. Hence, according to Idika (2021), not only that the President failed to, in the least, increase the number of southerners in the occupation of public office positions in his government, even some positions that were hitherto, occupied by southerners, like the former minister of finance, Kemi Adeosun and the former Director of National Intelligence Agency (NIA), Ayodele Oke were replaced by northerners.

A Brief Appraisal of Public Perception on President Muhammadu Buhari’s Appointment Style: Its Implication on National Integration

The resolve by President Buhari to base his choice of federal post appointments on ethnic sentiment has been roundly criticised. In a field study conducted by Usifo (2019) on “The Crisis of National Integration in Nigeria”, the result of the purposive sampling exercise indicated that majority of the respondents affirmed that President Buhari, by virtue of his nepotistic inclination with regards to federal appointments was consciously deriding the sustainability of the feats achieved by the “50 wise men” who incorporated the

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federal character principle into the 1979 constitution. Accordingly, Usifo (2019) had reckoned that the drafters of the 1979 constitution, having carefully analysed the degree of inter-ethnic rivalry and resentments which in the past, attended the attempt to tribalise federal appointments, resolved to inject into the then new constitution, a section that would accommodate an inter-ethnically, inter-religiously, and inter-lingually-faced workforce at the federal level.

In reaction to the decision by President Muhammadu Buhari to replace a one-time serving acting DG of DSS, Mathew Seiyefa of Bayelsa state (a southerner) with Magaji Bichi from Kano state (a northerner), Obilor (2019) captured a statement, credited to the editorial board of the guardian newspaper on October, 9, 2018. Thus:

With each passing day, it is becoming apparent that President Muhammadu Buhari's ethnocentric and nepotistic tendencies are attaining an embarrassing proportion. The latest demonstration of this suspicion was the appointment of Mr. Yusuf Magaji Bichi as Director-General of the Department of State Service (DSS) to replace Mr. Mathew Seiyefa. Going out of the State Security Service system to appoint an officer who has retired and placing him over a serving most senior officer, sends wrong signals about deployment of institutional memories, loyalty, respect for seniority and order in the service. It is as corruptive as it is disruptive, in this regard. (p. 44)

On the 29th of July 2015, while speaking on behalf of the Pan Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohaneze Ndigbo in an interview with the Anambra Broadcasting Service in Awka, Dr. Chris Eluemuno, a former chairman of the Anambra state chapter of Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo socio-cultural organisation confessed that President Buhari had, by side-lining the Igbos in the various federal appointments he made, demonstrated his hatred for the Igbos. Dr. Eluemuno complained about how Buhari had deliberately excluded Igbos from the first set of service chiefs he appointed, even though there were Igbos who merited such positions. Furthermore, Eluemuno suggested that the nepotistic proclivities of President Buhari could have had a great influence on the administration of his political party (the APC). The Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo Chairman made this allegation against the backdrop of the realisation that the composition of the principal officers of the House of Representatives in the 8th National Assembly was without a south-easterner. He also added that President Buhari had only fulfilled his post-election promise of favouring only those that voted for him. The Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo chieftain was then of the opinion that hence Buhari's election to the office of the President of the federal republic of Nigeria represented the majority of votes cast, regardless of the region from where the bulk of the votes sprung, it is presumed that he has the mandate of Nigerians. By implication, his office supposedly, should exist to serve the interest of Nigerians equally, without discrimination or prejudice to ethnic affiliation (Ujumadu, 2015).

In congruence with the above position, an anonymous interview conducted by the authors of this research work with some key stakeholders of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) in the south-east and south-south regions, revealed that the party faithful in these two regions decry that the deliberate marginalisation of the south east and south-south regions in the area of federal appointments by the Buhari-led Administration was affecting them. According to them, such does not justify the resolute sacrifices they made for the two-time emergence of Buhari as Nigeria's democratically elected President. In their view, if President Buhari should base his preference for public position appointments on the regions that gave him majority of votes during presidential elections, then his actions would have culminated in administrative injustice and a denial of due compensation for the votes he garnered from other regions which of course, ultimately added up to his total number of votes at the polls.

By inference, it is understandable that the politics of nepotism that describes President Buhari's administration is beyond political party consideration. For instance, from records, in the last two presidential elections that produced President Buhari, majority of votes that turned out from the southwest region were to

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the credit of Buhari. However, in spite of the massive support from the southwest for President Buhari's two consecutive election victories, the region has not been justifiably compensated in terms of federal appointments. The information as captured in the table above, which is descriptive of the major federal appointments by President Buhari during the latter's first tenure is a clear proof. Also, the nature of federal appointments by Buhari in his second tenure, which represents a broader reflection of his first tenure's pattern, corroborates this proof.

A field survey carried out by Enebraye (2019), on the impact of ethnic politics on sectarian agitations in Nigeria shows that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that President Buhari's discriminatory and lopsided federal appointment style which majorly favours the north, is partly responsible for the speedily growing spate of secessionist movements across Nigeria. Furthermore, one of the major findings from the research carried out by Ekeke (2020) on the effects of regional sentiment on national unity in Nigeria indicates that up to 75% of the respondents, drawn from select number of states, representing the six geo-political zones of the country, were of the opinion that the nature of exclusive ethnic patronage and pampering which characterise President Buhari's administration was counter-productive to national unity.

Conclusion

The realisation of national unity and stability in a heterogenous state like Nigeria can only be dependent on the deployment of inclusive system of governance by the leadership class, in the administration of the diversities and peculiarities of interests that the country represents. The unification of these interests towards the actualisation of national integration must be anchored by a leadership class that shuns nepotism and bigotry.

The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, as reviewed by this study has demonstrated, right from its inception in 2015 till date, acts of nepotism, especially in the area of federal appointments. Again, as established by this study through its findings, the consequences of the nepotistic disposition of President Buhari have led to the current experiences of socio-political instabilities and divisiveness.

Recommendations

In order to prevent the present situation from escalating to a brazen inter-ethnic war in Nigeria, this study recommends that as the recent clamour for the replacement of the 1999 constitution with a new one continues to assume a wider spread nationwide, the 'would be' framers of the new constitution should foresee the incorporation of a section which would embody a sanction for indulgence in nepotistic practices by political office holders. In line with this, it is suggestive that the sub-section in the anticipated new constitution should accommodate the compulsory application of federal character principle in the appointment of persons into public service positions at the federal level.

In the interim, this study also recommends that regions, persons or groups who feel aggrieved or dissatisfied with President Buhari's lopsided and tribalistically biased system of federal appointments should approach the court of law for remedy. Consequent upon that, civil society organisations, as well as other stakeholders should prevail on the judiciary to be proactive in interpreting section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution whenever litigations with regards to lopsided public service appointments are made.

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