
Government Policies and Its Constitutional Implications for National Unity in Nigeria

Udeoba, Catherine Ekenma

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.

Laura Chinenye Oranika Umeasiegbu

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.

Citation: Udeoba, Catherine Ekenma and Laura Chinenye Oranika Umeasiegbu (2022) Government Policies and Its Constitutional Implications for National Unity in Nigeria, *International Journal of Vocational and Technical Education Research*, Vol.8, No.2 pp.1-8

ABSTRACT: *The research work focuses on government policies and its constitutional implications for national unity in Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consists of one thousand politicians in Anambra State. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample three hundred (300) respondents. The questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection and it was validated by two experts in public administration and political science. The mean statistics was used to analyzed the data collected. The findings of the study showed that government discriminatory policies on appointment into government positions, discriminatory policies on state of origin for employment and admission into tertiary institutions among others are policies that impede the achievement of national unity in Nigeria. The paper also discovered that the negative implications of government policies are ethnic bitterness and rancour, formation of ethnic militia, disharmonious co-existence and increased in poverty. The paper concluded that most of the government policies at the state and federal level are detrimental to the welfare and rights of the Nigerian citizens. The implications are rivalry, distrust, opposition, disharmonious co-existence which has Nigerian and made the constitution a mockery and a lame duck. Relevant recommendations were made.*

KEYWORDS: Government, policies, constitutional, unity.

INTRODUCTION

Government policies and programmes are meant to promote the welfare and happiness of the people through good governance and enthrone of the fundamental rights of the citizen which promote the unity of the country. It is however, very unfortunate that most of the government policies at the states and Federal level are detrimental to the welfare and rights of the citizens and promote dis-unity among Nigerians. Some of the government officials and their agents make policies which infringe on the fundamental human rights as enshrined in Nigerian constitution. The constitution is meant to guide the policies and programmes of government but this is not so in Nigeria and the implications are rivalry, opposition and disunity. In the present regime of General Mohammadu Buhari, almost all the military service

chiefs are northerners and all the sensitive ministerial and executive positions such as minister of justice, education, finance, secretary to the Federal government, among others are all northerners. These appointments do not reflect the Federal character as stipulated in the constitution and it is also a serious threat to national unity.

According to Mezieobi (2015), the most astounding feature of President Mohammadu Buhari appointment was the slant towards one tribe and religion. He said that no sane Igbo man shall celebrate Buhari for upgrading tribalism to an art to the extent that in a national security council meeting, no Igbo man or woman shall be there or trusted. The problem of ethnicity is made clear everyday by individuals and government alike either consciously or unconsciously. A look at our application forms for offer of jobs and admission into higher institutions often show the request for information on name, local government and state of origin. This information form the basis for discrimination, opposition and rejection. The constitutional provisions for equality of rights and privileges of every citizen are neglected by policy makers and administrators.

Achebe (1983), thus: *“Not long ago, I was writing a recommendation for a post graduate seeking admission into the University of Pittsburgh, USA, the form has the following direction in bold print to recommenders, please make no statement which would indicate the applicant’s race, creed or national origin”*.

This no doubt has been a negation of Nigeria practice. The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates even allocation of economic and infrastructural resources within the federating states, but this has not been the practices by the policy makers in Nigeria. There is always conflict arising over the allocation of resources. The ethnic sentiment was seen by many as a useful tool for securing greater access to the limited resources in the country and so ethnic conflict developed between various ethnic groups in Nigeria for greater access and control of the scarce natural resources. Each ethnic group soon came to perceive the control of the federal and state governments as an important strategy for acquiring a greater share of the nation’s resources.

This struggle for the control of the scarce resources also appeared in the heated debate among the regions/states as what should be the criteria for sharing the national revenue, whether emphasis should be laid on derivation or whether greater emphasis should be laid on population as well as other factors. This lack of consensus on the basis for revenue allocation in the country has brought about a great deal of distrust and suspicion between various states and the policy makers at the federal level. According to Udenta (1998), the marginalization of the Igbo nation goes beyond military and political appointments, social infrastructure is one area where the Igbo nation has continuously held the short end of the stick. The few federal roads in the East exist in a permanent state of disrepair. He also observed that the federal government is always in a hurry to execute afforestation projects and purchase fertilizer with public money for distribution to farmers in the North but has continually downplayed the issues of gully erosion, which has devastated the East, sometimes cutting parts of it from the rest.

Also, one of the greatest threats to national unity in Nigeria is corruption. Corruption is abuse of the constitution and due process. The constitution of 1963 and 1979 contain elaborate

provision for the maintenance of probity and accountability in public offices as well as the declaration of assets by public officials both before and after leaving office. These policies have achieved little or no results mainly because they are improperly implemented by policy makers.

Even the code of conduct Bureau set up by Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration to combat corruption and misconduct in public office among public officers in government failed. Buahri government launched the war against Indiscipline (WAI) in 1984 in which one of the phases was the eradication of corruption and economic sabotage in Nigeria. The full impact of these policies are yet to be fully realized and felt in Nigeria political system. This is because very often those who serve in the government of the nation are more guilty of financial mismanagement of scarce resources. With the glaring cases of borrowing of funds which are not constitutionally approved, President Mohammadu Buhari government has plunged Nigeria into bankruptcy with 36 trillion naira debt profile. This is as a result of financial recklessness on projects and programmes which in most cases do not have much impact on the common citizens of Nigeria.

Corruption in top public offices has further made Nigerians poorer and divided. Nigerians have continued to point accusing fingers to public officers from different ethnic groups. There are about six hundred and nineteen (619) ethnic groups in Nigeria (Njoku 2011). The big three ethnic groups in Nigeria which are not only recognized by the Federal constitution of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education and which languages must of necessity be studied at the lower Basic Education level, are the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. All the other ethnic groups by implication, directly or indirectly, fall under the classification of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria and are therefore treated as such. In the desperate bid of the minority ethnic groups to be heard in the scheme of things and to be associated with the political mainstream, are neck deep in constant agitations to destabilize governance. Apart from their perpetual grievances which do not augur well for national unity, they are always in the vanguard of the cry for marginalization by the three majority ethnic groups.

The fundamental rights entrenched in the constitution of Nigeria have been abused by policy makers and their agents. The 1999 constitution made provision for fundamental rights in the chapter two and four of the constitution. Some of these “rights and freedom” are rights to life, fair hearing, acquisition of property and the freedom from discrimination have all failed. For example, the waging and prosecution of a thirty months civil war between 1967-1970 which claimed thousands of lives was unwarranted and uncalled for. The gruesome hanging of Ken Saro-wiwa and other human rights crusaders, the murder of Dele Giwa, Kudirat Abiola, Bola Ige, Prof Chimere Ikoku to mention but a few, that took place during the despotic rule of Sani Abacha’s and Babangida’s administration were abuse of fundamental rights.. Igwe (2001), Anozie (1998) and Njoku (2000) observed that the greater population of Nigerians live in sub-human conditions without adequate food, shelter and clothing, lack of employment opportunities and non-payment of salaries.

All the rights of the people of Nigerians have been rubbished, be it freedom of movement, freedom of religion, children’s rights to education has been neglected and women still regarded as second class citizens. Government policies and constitutional abuses have negative

implications for national unity in Nigeria. For instance, ethnic groups have become more conscious of their different ethnic differences and sue for nothing but primordial interests. Okafor (2010) noted that government policies and programmes have engendered irredeemable ethnic bitterness, bitter rivalry, rancor, distrust, suspicion, hatred, ethnic prejudice, disharmonious co-existence and lawlessness. It has also deepened ethnic intolerance and insecurity. The insecurity threat in Nigeria ranges from theft to organized armed robbery, kidnapping and demand for ransom, assassination, repeated invasion, vandalization of government and private property thereby turning Nigeria to a lawless state (Ukeh, 2021).

The issue of ethnic militia has emerged as a result of government policies that promote discrimination and injustice. According to Ekwonwa (2010), the ethnic militia groups birthed due to unequal treatment against the minorities by the majority ethnic groups. They include: The movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Odua People's Congress (OPC), Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), Myette Allah Cattle Breeders Association etc. The emergence of these groups and their mode of operation have made the constitution of Nigeria impotent and a lame duck.

These Militia groups have continued to fuel ethnic violence and instability in the country. At the international arena, the incessant ethnic hostilities in Nigeria have not only badly dented the image of Nigeria, it has scared the foreign investors from doing business in Nigeria. It is not hard to fathom with regret that sixty years after independence, Nigeria is still beset with these kinds of problems which are preventing her from achieving national unity. The forces necessary for unity are not just there. Easton and Denis (1969) give a list of these forces as a common language, geographical unity, a frame of political thought, a common area of economic mutuality and sometimes the fear of a common foe. Of these five cohesive forces, Nigeria, strictly speaking cannot claim even one. As a way out, Fawahinmi (2000), insists that the time has come for the government to convoke a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) where all stakeholders in Nigeria can discuss and come to a genuine understanding not only how to make Nigeria work as a country but also how to reverse the socio-economic stupor in which the majority of Nigerians are put to by the reckless past regimes. Nwabueze (2000) as the former scribe of Ohanaeze Ndigbo canvasses that the only choice is either confederation or complete break up, his allies in the South West, the Afenifere or Yoruba Parapo, remain steadfast in their belief that only a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) will offer an appropriate platform for Nigerian's future. For the South-South zone, they called for a National Conference that should lead to constitutional restructuring. Akinyele (1998), as the chairman of the defunct National Reconciliation Commission (NARECOM) acknowledged that the experience he gathered after a tour of the whole country during his tenure as the NARECOM chairman clearly showed that all sections of the country are complaining of one injustice or the other, he is of the view that despite these grievances, no single section can go it all alone since all the sections are interdependence even in the supply of the basic food necessities.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the government policies that impede national unity?
2. What are the constitutional implications of some government policies to Nigerians?
3. What are the solutions to Nigerian's problem of Unity?

METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population is made up of one thousand politicians in Anambra State. Using purposive sampling technique, three hundred respondents were sampled for the study. The instrument for data collection is the questionnaire which has 16 items designed to elicit information on government policies and its constitutional implications for national unity in Nigeria. The instrument was first validated by an expert in public administration at Imo State University Owerri and expert in Political Science at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State. The reliability of the research instrument was determined through a measure of internal consistency of the items. The Cronbach Alpha was used to establish the internal consistency of 0.75. This measure is high enough for the instrument to be considered reliable. For data analysis, the research questions were analyzed using mean. Any mean of 2.5 and above is said to be high and effective and those below 2.5 are said to be low and ineffective.

RESULTS

The following are the results of the data analysis.

Research Question 1: What are the government policies that impede national unity?

Table 1: Mean rating scores on the government policies that impede national unity.

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	REMARKS
1	Discriminatory policy of appointment into government positions	3.5	Agree
2	Discriminatory policies on state of origin for employment	3.1	Agree
3	Discriminatory policies on state of origin for admission into tertiary institutions	3.3	Agree
4	Government discriminatory policies on allocation of infrastructural and economic resources	3.4	Agree
5	Government discriminatory policy on adopting three major indigenous languages to be studied at lower basic education and neglecting others	3.2	Agree
6	Government policies that impede fundamental human rights of Nigerians	3.5	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2021

The result presented in table 1 shows that Item 1 – 6 were rated high by the respondents. This was clearly indicated from their respective mean scores of 3.5, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.2 and 3.5 which are above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. It means that discriminatory policies of appointment into government positions, discriminatory policies on state of origin for employment and admission into tertiary institutions, government discriminatory policies on allocation infrastructural and economic resources and discriminatory policy on adopting three major indigenous languages to be studied at lower basic education are some of the government policies that impede national unity.

Research Question 2: What are the constitutional implications of some government policies to Nigerians?

Table 2: Mean rating scores on the constitutional implications of some government policies in Nigeria

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	REMARK
7	Government policies have brought about irredeemable ethnic bitterness and lawlessness in Nigeria.	3.1	Agree
8	It has increase the rate of insecurity turning Nigeria to a lawless state	3.3	Agree
9	Government policies have brought about ethnic militia threatening the corporate existence Nigerians as enshrined in the constitution	3.5	Agree
10	Government policies have brought about disharmonious co-existence and making the constitution a lame duck.	3.2	Agree
11	It has led to misinterpretation of the constitution making it a mere literature.	2.9	Agree

Source: field survey, 2021

The result presented in table 2 shows that items 7 – 11 were rated high by the respondents. This was clearly indicated from their respective mean scores of 3.1, 3.3, 3.5, 3.2 and 2.9 which are above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. It means that lawlessness, irredeemable ethnic bitterness and rancour, insecurity and disharmonious co-existence. All these have led to mis-interpretation of the constitution which are the implications of some government policies in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What are the solutions to Nigeria's problem of unity?

Table 3: Mean rating scores on solutions to Nigeria's problem of unity.

S/N	ITEMS	\bar{X}	REMARK
12	Convoking a sovereign national conference where all stake holders in Nigeria can discuss Nigeria's problems.	3.5	Agree
13	Constitutional restructuring of Nigeria.	3.3	Agree
14	Adopting confederation system of government will solve Nigeria's problem.	3.1	Agree
15	Complete break up of Nigeria into different countries.	2.9	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2021.

The result presented in table 3 shows that items 12 – 15 were rated high by the respondents. This was clearly indicated from their respective mean scores of 3.5, 3.3, 3.1 and 2.9 which are above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. It means that the solutions to Nigeria's problems of unity are; convoking a sovereign national conference for major stake holders, constitutional restructuring of Nigeria, adopting confederation system of government and complete break up of Nigeria into different countries.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The result of the analysis of research question one shows that discriminating policies on appointment into government positions, discriminatory policies on state of origin for employment and admission into tertiary institutions, government allocation of infrastructural and economic resources among others are some of the government policies that impede national unity. These findings are in line with Udenta (1998), who observed that the federal government marginalization of the Igbo nation goes beyond military and political appointment, social and infrastructure is one area the Igbo nation has continuously held the short end of the stick. He observed that the federal government is always in a hurry to execute afforestation projects and purchase fertilizer with public fund for distribution to farmers in the North but has continually down played the issue of gully erosion which has devastated the East.

The result of the analysis of research question two shows that some government policies have negative constitutional implications such as increase in insecurity, lawlessness, and made our constitution a toothless bulldog and laughing stuck. These findings are in agreement with Okafor (2010) who noted that some government policies and programmes have increased insecurity in Nigeria and made the constitution a mere literature and a lame duck.

The result of the analysis of research question three shows that convoking a sovereign national conference of all stake holders in Nigeria, constitutional restructuring of Nigeria, adopting confederation system of government or complete break up of Nigeria into different countries are solutions to Nigeria's problem of unity. These findings are in agreement with Fawehinmi (2000) who insists that government must convoke a sovereign national conference (SNC) where all stake holders in Nigeria can discuss and come to a genuine understanding on how to make Nigeria work as a country. Nwabueze (2000), canvasses that the only choice in Nigeria is either confederation or complete breakup.

CONCLUSION

Government policies and programmes are meant to promote the welfare and happiness of the people through good governance and enthrone of the fundamental human rights of the citizens which promote the unity of the country. It is however, very unfortunate that most of the government policies at the states and federal level are detrimental to the welfare and rights of the citizens and promote the dis-unity of Nigerians. The implications are rivalry, distrust, opposition, disharmonious co-existence and these have made the constitution a mockery and a lame duck.

Recommendations

Based on the issues raised above, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. There is need to convoke a sovereign national conference (SNC) where all stake holders in Nigeria can discuss and come to a genuine understanding on how to make Nigeria work as a united country.
2. Loose federation (confederation government) can be operated in Nigeria with a central capital.

3. Nigeria is a very big federation and therefore can break up into different countries.
4. The constitution of the country can be restructured to meet the needs and desires of different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

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