

Quest For State's Creation in Nigeria: An Harbinger of Development Or Underdevelopment?

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Abstract

Since Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960, there have been continuous calls for creating more "new" states within Nigeria to provide administrative voices for minority ethnic interests as well as increased networks for patronage. Beginning with three four regions prior to the Nigerian Civil War (1966-70), the Nigerian Federation was later divided into 12 states in May 1967. The federation grew to 19 states by March 1976, 21 states plus a new federal capital territory at Abuja by 1987, 30 states by August 1991 and 36 states by 1996. Creating more states out of a constant land area can be seen as an attempt on one hand to blur the country's regional, ethnic and religious distinctions and on the other, to create additional "patronage fiefdoms" which cut into regional power bases of traditional political elites. This study examines the seemingly implacable and intractable agitation for the creation of new states in Nigeria through a descriptive study analysis of the performance or otherwise of the existing states within the Nigerian federation. The study finds that there is no need for the creation of additional states as this will only serve as an additional avenue for the country's ruling elite, without grassroots inputs, to milk the country dry.

1. Introduction

"... *The country has a long history of well-articulated demands for states... But in this moment of serious National Emergency... these states are being created simultaneously*" (Gowon, 1967). This is an excerpt from Colonel Yakubu Gowon's broadcast to the nation on May 27, 1967 lamenting the imminent breaking away of the Eastern region of Nigeria and the need to clip the wing of the then Eastern Military government being headed by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu. While it is true that since 1960, the country had had a long history of the demand for new states especially by the minority who always nursed the concern that they may never realize their clannish socio- economic potentialities as long as they continued to remain within the same geo-political configuration with the majorities of the country, ironically, the country's structure has been altered six times through the state's creation by the country's ruling elite neither by their desire to bring government nearer to the citizenry nor for the purpose of administrative convenience. Rather, it has been done either to serve their political interests, ensure their continuous domination over the country's affair or to guarantee that those troublesome elite who found themselves outside the boundaries of the national cake's partitioning would have access to the country's wealth as the carving out of an additional mushroom fiefdoms will ensure their accessibility to the national cake (Ogunna, 1983).

The structure, adequate number and the viability of the existing states in the Nigerian federation have become the central theme of national consideration and dialogue lately. This is explicable since Nigeria as a sovereign or geographical entity emerged through a method of forceful fragmentation rather than the strategy of consensus agreement. But while people are still lamenting over the obvious non-performance, bureaucratic corruption and the geographical disputes that are ongoing among virtually the existing thirty-six states, the country has been inundated lately with the quest for the creation of additional states. On September 25, 2012, the Senate, through its leader, Senator Ndoma Egba announced that it has received 57 requests for new states. It is our position in this paper that there is no need for the carving out as the country, at this time, cannot afford to cope with the challenges that always came at the heels of the state's creation. It focuses on the administrative problems attendant on the creation of past states. The next section of the paper reviews the brief history of states creation in Nigeria. The issue of corruption is also examined while the conclusion highlights the adverse implication of creating new states on the Nigerian polity.

2. Federalism and the Evolution of the Nigerian States

Federal systems by their nature are complex administrative designs because they involve multiple levels of government. The federal systems in developing countries are confronted by additional challenges as a result of the socio- economic underdevelopment and ethnic pluralism of these countries (Omotoso, 2009). In Nigeria, the demand for the creation of newer states tends to emanate from sub-state groups, often ethnic- or tribal-interest groups, which accuse the current larger state governments of subverting or ignoring the interests and necessities of the more local regions. Also, it is a general believe that the astronomic rate at which the population of Nigeria is increasing, only a federal system of government could be used so that the wish of the people could be ascertained since government is brought nearer to the people and regions are autonomous through this avenue, the available resources of the subordinate regions can easily be used to render essential services to the people.

The unusual desire for state creation in Nigeria can be said to have emanated largely from minority opposition to the three regions of federal structure which secured autonomy and hegemony for the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo Eastern Regions respectively (Suberu, 1998).

According to Omotoso (op cit, 2009), following the tribal profits attached to the state creation, there were so many agitations for creation of more regions before independence that the imperial government had to set up the Willink Commission, which was asked to “ascertain the facts about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and to propose means of allaying those fears, whether well or ill founded”. In its final report, the Commission refused to recommend the creation of additional regions to cater for the minorities.

After independence the attitudes of the major parties toward the formation of new states that could accommodate minority aspirations varied widely. The NCNC espoused self-determination for ethnic minorities but only in accordance with its advocacy of a unitary state. The Action Group also supported such movements, including the restoration of the northern Yoruba area (Ilorin) to the Western Region, but as part of a multistate, federal Nigeria. The NPC steadfastly opposed separatism in the Northern Region and attempted with some success to win over disaffected minorities in the middle belt.

Proposals were introduced for the creation of three states as a means of restructuring the regions along ethnic lines. The most extensive revision sought the separation of the middle belt from the Northern Region, a move the United Middle Belt Congress promoted. Serious riots in Tivland in 1960 and 1964 were related to this agitation. Another plan was put forward by the Edo and western Igbo to create the Midwestern Region by separating the whole tract adjacent to the Niger River from the Yoruba-dominated Western Region. At the same time, Ijaw and Efik-Ibibio ethnic groups proposed that the coast between the Niger Delta and Calabar become a new region in order to end Igbo dominance in that area. At this time, however, only the Midwestern Region achieved formal approval, despite opposition of the Action Group. The creation of the region was confirmed by plebiscite in 1963.

The creation of the Midwestern Region reopened the question of the internal restructuring of Nigeria. One motive for a more drastic restructuring was the desire to break up the Northern Region. That region, having more than half the country's population, controlled a majority of the seats in the House of Representatives. It was obvious that the first adventure of state creation was embarked upon in order to nip the formidable dominance of the Action Group in the bud and to ensure the continuous dominance of both the NPC and the NCNC over the country's polity.

The second attempt at state creation in Nigeria was made on May 27th, 1967 by the then Head of State, Colonel Yakubu Gowon who attributed it to the need to redress some of the anomalies that existed in Nigeria federation. On the contrary however, it was obvious that the states creation was done at that point in time to prevent the Igbo people from seceding from Nigeria. In his broadcast to the nation, Gowon maintained that “the twelve new states will therefore be as follows: North-Western State comprising Sokoto and Niger Provinces. North-Central State comprising Katsina and Zaria. Kano State comprising the present Kano Province. North-Eastern State comprising Bornu, Adamawa, Saruana, and Bauchi Provinces. Lagos State comprising the Colony Province and the Federal Capital Territory of Lagos. Western State comprising the present Western Region but excluding the Colony Province. Mid-Western State comprising the present Mid-Western State. East-Central State comprising the present Eastern Region excluding Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces. South-Eastern State comprising Calabar and Ogoja Provinces. Rivers State comprising Ahoada, Brass, Degema, Ogoni and Port Harcourt Divisions” If it achieved anything, it is that the state creation exercise overturned the structural hegemony of the north, assuaged ethnic minority fears in their former regions and ultimately undermined the imminent secessionist bid in the Eastern Region. (Suberu, 1994).

In 1976, six years after the end of the civil war, the states were further reorganized by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime. Benue-Plateau state was divided into Benue (Makurdi) and Plateau states; East-Central state divided into Anambra and Imo states; Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) formed from parts of Niger and Plateau states; North-Eastern state divided into Bauchi, Borno, and Gongola (Yola) states; Niger state split from Sokoto and Western state divided into Ogun, Ondo, and Oyo states.

In two consecutive times between 1987 and 1991, the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida created additional nine states. In 1987, Akwa Ibom state was split from Cross River while Katsina state was split from Kaduna. In 1991, Abia state was split from Imo; Bendel state was divided into Delta and Edo; Enugu state was split from Anambra; Gongola state was divided into Adamawa and Taraba; Jigawa state was split from Kano; Kebbi state was split from Sokoto; Kogi state was formed from parts of Benue and Kwara; Osun state was split from Oyo and Yobe state was split from Borno. In 1996, General Sani Abacha created additional six states: Bayelsa state was split from Rivers; Ebonyi state was formed from parts of Abia and Enugu; Ekiti state was split from Ondo; Gombe state was split from Bauchi; Nassarawa state was split from Plateau; Zamfara state was split from Sokoto.

3. Critical Assessment of the Performance of the Existing States

A much immediate effect of the new states creation is the emergence of a political subclass of state

bureaucracies, often headed by governors who are accused of syphoning the resources of their various states and sometimes some of them have been successfully prosecuted for monetary corruption. In fact, the performances of the existing states serve as pointer to the reasons why creating additional states can only compound the woes of the country. According to Akinnaso (2012), it is common knowledge that the intimidating numbers of the existing states are in distress as inadequate capital and the lack of necessary infrastructure continue to hamper their ability to establish job-creating institutions, attracting manufacturing industries, and facilitate the growth of small businesses. In the absence of job creators such as these, state governments became the largest employers of labour. This is particularly true of states such as Kano, Katsina, Niger, Nasarawa, Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Niger, Borno, Osun, Ekiti and Zamfara states which spend 50 per cent and above of their gross annual revenue on a small percentage of the population, consisting of elected officials, political appointees, and civil service personnel.

To complicate the matters, majority of the existing 36 states are deficient in raising enough internally generated revenue to supplement their Federal allocations. The result is a recourse to local banks for short-term loans and to the capital market for long-term loans to finance capital projects. That's not all. According to the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission earlier this year, the 36 states and the Federal Capital territory were under a \$2,165bn (about N339.9bn) foreign debt. The cumulative effect of these developments is diminished capacity to finance developmental projects. The critical question then is: By what magic will newly created states sidestep this conundrum? (Akinnaso, 2012).

With 36 states and 774 Local Government Areas (and countless Development Centres created by the Governors) across the federation, it becomes obvious that these states have not brought any effect any meaningful development on the lives of their people except the establishment of a numerous ministries that only serve the interests of the people in government and their cronies. The argument that the creation of new states will bring the government closer to the people to the people becomes anachronistic when the activities of the existing one actually succeeded in taking government far away from the very people it is meant to serve. The real beneficiaries are not the people but politicians who don't even stay in these new states as have been witnessed from the experience of most governors (This Day, 2012).

4. State Creation is not the Solution to Economic Crisis: Good Governance Is

In the colonial period towards the independence, the various nationalist bourgeois political class, as a way of ensuring their political influence had canvassed for regional governments as the best means of bringing their 'people' into the limelight of civilization. But aside the fact that the regionalization of the country was not a product of democratic decisions of the oppressed people, the demand played into the manipulative hands of the colonial administrations, which was seeking exit route from the self-created contradiction of granting self governance to the colonies and sustaining control of the colonial economy in favour of imperialism and capitalism. It took very little time before the self-interest of the nationalist bourgeois politicians truncated their own regional arrangement as exemplified by a new contradiction of who to control the central government, and the internal schisms within each region. This eventually led to the military take-over in 1966 and Civil War which lasted 30 months.

The continuation of the bankrupt policy of dividing the country as a way of curtailing internal strife amongst the political class, led to the creation of 12 states in 1967. When the strife could not be curtailed by this policy, the country was further divided into 19 states by the Murtala/Obasanjo military government in 1976. The central argument was to give identity to the minorities and create a sense of nationalism as against sectional interests. But the reality is that the real reason for the balkanization is to divide the people along artificial geographical enclaves so as to make the undemocratic rule over the people easier. Thus, between 1987 and 1996, the Babangida and Abacha's highly corrupt military regimes almost doubled the number of states from 19 to 36 without any taken into account the opinion of the working and poor masses to be divided.

Ironically, none of the official reasons for more state creation has been justified by reality. On the issue of unity, the country has been divided more than ever with crises such as the Aguleri/Umuleri, Warri/Itsekiri, Ife/Modakeke etc., arising from such division of the country. We are witnesses to how indigene-ship is used by state political actors to determine distribution of scholarship, employment, appointments, etc. Despite creation of states, the country is bedevilled with serious internal strife, most of which occur within states as exemplified by the recent Jos crisis.

Moreover, virtually all these states are dependent on petro-dollar from the federal purse; thus they are unviable economically. Withholding of state allocation for just a month is enough to cause total economic standstill in many states. Meanwhile, unlike in the late 1970's and early 1980's, when as a result of the existence of welfare state and Stalinist Soviet system, states invested in the economy and industry, the current neo-liberal system with a mix of the worst neo-colonial/imperialist spices, have meant destruction of the minimally functional economy of many states no thanks to privatization of state industries, commercialization of public service and pervasive corruption of the political class, among others.

Creation of more states is just another means of siphoning public resources and resolving sharing formula crisis

among the corrupt political class. Already, just 17, 474 politicians in power consume over N1.3 trillion of the nation's wealth. Therefore, creating more states, aside providing some few jobs will only be another means of looting public resources by a new political class in these new states. This explains why politicians and big businessmen are the arrowhead of the agitation.

Also, the point that more state creation will assuage the feeling of marginalization by various ethnic groups is a ruse. The fact is that the process that leads to creation of the states is usually undemocratic as no platform or forum is provided for the working people to decide democratically whether they want new state or not. In other words, state creation usually only reflects the self-interests of the bankrupt capitalist politicians who want their own empire. Sooner rather than later, this will give way to further quest by other political class for control.

It should be stressed that the growth of ethnic feeling is a reflection of economic and political isolation of the working masses, and absence of viable pan-Nigerian working class political alternative to galvanize the anger of the working and poor people for genuine political change. With the absence of this political platform of agitation, the masses are left with no other choice than expressing their frustration and disillusionment through sectional, ethnic, communal and religious means, which are generated by the bankrupt bourgeois political class but sooner than later can consume the whole society with multiplicity of sectional crises. This is why the labour movement must lead other pro-worker, pro-masses organizations in building a fighting bottom-to-top, democratic, mass political party of the working people that will chase away the current capitalist politicians and enthrone a working people's government committed to massive development of human and material capacities of the country for the benefit of all as a step towards a genuine socialist society, against the current divisive but exploitative neo-colonial capitalist system.

Conclusion

The balkanization of the Nigerian federation through the creation of states began partly as a Northern reaction to General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi's Decree 34 which abrogated the federal structure in favour of a 'unitary' system in which the centre became much more powerful than ever before. It was also done in order to curtail the excesses of Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu who planned to secede from Nigeria in reaction to the counter-coup that was majorly led by the Northern military elite which toppled Ironsi's regime. Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon, who succeeded Ironsi after a coup that eliminated him, kept the strong centre but created 12 states to diffuse Ironsi's unitary system as well as curtailing Ojukwu's excesses. And that was the beginning of the agitation by minorities locked in the big states for the creation of their own states. As the governments responded to their demands, the number of states kept increasing until we arrived at the present 36 states.

Beyond the superfluous demands for the creation of new states, such adventure will never serve the interests of the people. Agree that the doctrine of decentralization teaches that the nearer any institution is to the people the better they are served, otherwise has been our experience in Nigeria. In the Nigerian experiment, only the conspirators in favour of states creation at any given point in our history are usually the ultimate beneficiaries. In any case, if what currently obtains is any guide, it is safe to project that the new states, if they eventually emerge, will not be economically viable. The interesting thing, however, is that the proponents also know this but their cold calculation is based on the oil money which states share every month and to which they could become the custodians if they have their fiefdoms by way of new states (This Day, 2012).

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