

Centripetal Federalism

Abstract

Centripetalism is often perceived as a type of a political system for a multi-segmental, especially multi-ethnic, country in order to create among the members of the political elite of integrative and moderate political behavior cross-cutting segmental divisions which, reaching beyond group interests, depoliticize the segmental separateness and, in this manner, reduce their significance. One of the central institutions of centripetalism is decentralization leading to a division of large segments into smaller parts that inhabit different, ideally multi-segmental regions, thus inclining regional political elites of different segments to collaborate. Although both Nigeria and Indonesia have similar centripetal territorial structures, only Nigeria is a federation. This paper focuses on Nigerian centripetal federalism and its link to the so-called federal character principle that is mostly consociational in substance.

Introduction

Centripetalism, like consociationalism, is a model of a political system of power-sharing type^[1], attributed to certain multi-segmental, especially multi-ethnic countries, including Nigeria and Indonesia (Reilly 2011). Centripetalism is intended to assure members of various (ethnic/national/religious/confessional/linguistic) segments of a share in power, but not as part of particular institutions protecting and reinforcing the interests of individual segments (like it is in the case of consociationalism), but in the dimension of supra-segmental, or inter-segmental institutions, i.e., institutions that are open to individuals from all segments. Such an approach is intended, above all, to create among the members of the political elite integrative and moderate political behavior cross-cutting segmental divisions which, reaching beyond group interests, depoliticize the segmental separateness and, in this manner, reduce their significance (Reilly, 2007: 83-91, 2011). Thus centripetalism, in contrast to consociationalism, does not promote institutional recognition of segmental differences and interests. Quite the contrary, the essence of centripetalism is to foster cooperation not so much between segments as between members of different segments and even *sui generis* forcing them to cooperate by creating an integrative institutional framework. The principal formal centripetal institutions include (Reilly 2011, Trzciński 2018b):

- 1) supra-regional and inter-segmental parties and, should the need arise, coalitions between them;
- 2) the election of a supra-segmental (supported by members of various segments) president through the use of the so-called territorial vote distribution requirement, i.e. the need to win an appropriately large number of votes in presidential elections in the majority of states or provinces (meeting this requirement is indispensable to occupy the presidential office, and merely winning a numerical majority of votes is insufficient) (Trzciński 2017a);
- 3) the use mainly in parliamentary elections of electoral systems that promote cross-segmental voting, especially preferential voting^[2] in the form of an alternative vote in single-mandate districts or a single transferable vote in multi-mandate districts, or some other kind of cross-segmental vote-pooling (Reilly 2020);
- 4) decentralization (e.g., in the form of federalization) leading to a division of large segments into smaller parts that inhabit different, ideally multi-segmental states, thus inclining regional political elites of different segments to collaborate.

Although the central centripetal institutions have been identified in the literature, in practice, centripetalism as a model of power-sharing consisting of all these institutions is rather a theoretical concept. Although one may say that pure centripetalism (however, deprived of preferential voting) did exist in Nigeria and Indonesia before those countries re-introduced certain consociational institutions. In both Nigeria and Indonesia, the history of territorial unification, and that of the ethnic and religious groups forming their populations following independence (in 1960 and 1949, respectively) has been turbulent. Both countries experienced conflicts in relations between ethnic and religious segments making up their population, as well as between such segments and the central government. In order to normalize these relations, they introduced institutions of power-sharing. In both cases, especially at the beginning of the period of independence, institutions that were either consociational or corresponding to consociationalism were the preferred ones. With time, Nigeria and Indonesia turned toward centripetal institutions since, in its restricted version, consociationalism did not guarantee political stability. But centripetal institutions also turned out to be insufficient. In consequence, with time, consociational institutions began to be added to the dominant centripetalism. Currently, as a consequence, in both cases, we can rather speak of a hybrid power-sharing model (Trzciński 2016, 2017b, 2018a), which combines the institutions of both centripetalism and consociationalism.

Centripetal Federalism

Although both Nigeria and Indonesia have similar centripetal territorial structures, only Nigeria is a federation. It is the most important state on the African continent, given the size of its economy, and also the most populous. Its population reached 205 million in 2020 according to estimates, and this makes it the world's seventh most populous state (Worldometers 2020).

Nigeria is also a vast country with an area of nearly 924,000 km². It is inhabited by members of about 250 ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Hausa-Fulani (about 36% of Nigeria's population), the Yoruba (about 15%) and the Igbo (about 15%) (Index Mundi 2019). It is estimated that more than 53% of Nigeria's inhabitants are Muslims, who live mainly in the north of the country, while Christians make up about 46% of the population and live mostly in the south of the country (Index Mundi 2019).



After independence, Nigeria made use of two distinct models of federalism, one after the other: ethnic and centripetal. From 1960 to 1966, Nigeria was divided simply into several regions, initially into three (North, West, and East), and from 1963 (following the separation of the Mid-Western Region from the Western one), into four. In each of the first three regions, one of the country's largest ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, or the Igbo) was predominant. Nigeria's territorial division thus had the characteristics - admissible under consociationalism - of ethnic federalism. Until 1967 the northern region, amounting to over 2/3 of Nigeria's area, was the most important of all, because it was inhabited by over half the country's population and had the greatest number of electoral votes. As a result, the Hausa-Fulani consistently sought to play a dominant political role in the federation (Horowitz, 1985: 612).

After the army took power in 1966, centripetal federalism began to take shape in Nigeria. In 1967, after the four regions were replaced by 12 states, the three largest ethnic groups found themselves living in as many as seven of the new territorial units. As Horowitz (1985: 604) points out, this, along with the de-legalization by the army of ethnic parties, freed the smaller ethnic groups from the control of regionally dominant groups and paved the road to new alliances. The situation changed again in 1976 when, as a result of the country's successive reorganizations of the territorial structure and the creation of 7 new states, Nigeria now had a total of 19. Horowitz has calculated that the Hausa-Fulani then lived in about half of them, the Yoruba in five, and the Igbo in two. Inter-state competition for a share in development projects financed by the central government led to an increase of intra-ethnic disputes (Horowitz, 1985: 604-5). What was also significant was the fact that in the new situation over half of the states were ethnically heterogenic. Within the new multi-ethnic states, inter-ethnic political coalitions emerged to defend state interests. Disputes at the intra-ethnic level and inter-state rivalry reduced the risk of conflicts at the inter-ethnic and, at the same time, the federal level.

These trends became more pronounced at a later time with the introduction by the army of further changes in the territorial division. In 1987, two more states were established in Nigeria, followed by nine in 1991, and another six in 1996. Suberu (2006: 73-4) points out that Nigeria's present territorial division into 36 states has led to a situation where the Hausa-Fulani

are a majority in 9 states, the Yoruba in 7, and the Igbo in 5.

Federal Character Principle

The various centripetal institutions established in Nigeria, mainly in the 1970s, did not ensure a balance of power between the three largest ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo) and the two central religious communities (Muslims, Christians) in government and appointments to public positions. Nor did they guarantee a measure of participation in power for smaller ethnic groups.

In consequence, the requirement for public bodies in Nigeria to comply with the federal character principle was introduced to the Constitution of 1979 (art. 14 [3]). This rule allows members and representatives of different ethnic groups and religious communities to participate in these bodies. In keeping with the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (art. 318 [1]), the federal character principle is to promote national unity, support national loyalty, and to give each Nigerian citizen a sense of belonging to the nation, irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliation. Its wider aim is to strengthen the integration of a multi-segmental society, to achieve political stability and to facilitate civilizational development.

The effect of a multi-segmental composition of the council of ministers and other public bodies in keeping with the federal character principle can be sought in concordance with either the consociational or centripetal logic. The federal character principle takes on a consociational essence when it introduces parity in the form of quotas in some bodies, as is the case in the Nigerian government. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria mandates that the cabinet be made up of at least one minister from each of the 36 states. This minister needs to be indigenous to that state (art. 147 [3]). Nigeria's division into 36 states, in force since 1996, has led to a situation in which the three main ethnic groups are a majority in 21 states, while 15 states are governed by smaller ethnic groups (Suberu, 2006: 73-4). By combining the constitutional requirement with the realities of the territorial structure, a formal parity of regional representation in government has been established and, at the same time - and indirectly arising from it - a parity of participation in the government of the main ethnic groups^[3] and religious communities,^[4] de facto in the form of seats reserved for their members. Simultaneously members of smaller ethnic groups were allowed to take part in the exercise of power. In the case of states in which none of Nigeria's three main ethnic groups is dominant, there is a greater probability of rotation of positions in government between the representatives of the smaller indigenous ethnic groups, for example in successive cabinets, than in the case when in a given state the majority of the population are members of one of Nigeria's main ethnic groups.^[5]

The federal character principle, in turn, seems to take on a more centripetal nature when it generally promotes in some public bodies their multi-segmental character, as is the case in the army, for example, without having a parity character. However, the problem lies in how, the federal character principle in the version reminiscent of centripetalism is carried out in practice, without formally guaranteed quotas, as in the case of the army of Burundi, for example (Vandeginste, 2017: 169).

The Federal Character Commission (FCC) is the guarantor of a just division of positions in Nigerian public bodies. Specifically, the FCC's task is to promote, monitor, and enforce compliance with the principles of proportional sharing of all posts in Nigeria's public bodies (Constitution of 1999, Third Schedule, Part 1 C, art. 8 [1] [b]). Recommendations issued by the FCC, however, show a preference for representatives of the larger ethnic groups in appointments to positions and very frequently are of a quota character (Mustapha, 2007: 11). Ultimately, the practice of dividing positions is more consociational. Representatives of the smaller ethnic groups are the most disadvantaged by this system. The federal character principle gives rise to criticism also on account of the fact that non-professionals are employed in various positions because they have the "appropriate" ethnic and/or religious affiliation. The allocation of positions in public institutions on the basis of knowledge and experience is called for, for example, by Kayode (2015).

Conclusion

The multiple modifications of Nigeria's territorial division after 1966 consisted of creating from the federation's larger parts new, smaller states which, in the first years of Nigerian independence, were part of the above-mentioned three regions dominated by Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups. In addition to "breaking up" these groups so that their members would inhabit different states and, at the same time, to creating states dominated by other groups than the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba or the Igbo, the changes in Nigeria's territorial structure have also led to the division of areas in the oil and natural gas rich Niger River delta (initially mostly a part of the Eastern Region) into as many as 6 states controlled by smaller ethnic groups (Suberu, 2006: 74). In consequence, the principal area of extraction of energy resources has been effectively stripped of domination by the Igbo who, from 1960 to 1967, had administered the Eastern Region and governed, from 1967 to 1970, the secessionist Republic of Biafra which emerged in its stead, in its entirety or parts thereof, as the Biafra War unfolded.

The federal character principle, more consociational than centripetal in nature, satisfies the interests of the main ethnic groups to a greater extent and those of minority groups to a lesser extent. It nonetheless creates a balance between large segments and, in this manner, constitutes some form of revision of centripetal institutions. The federal character principle is certainly not perfect in practice and has, therefore, many critics, but it is difficult to imagine what relations between Nigeria's largest ethnic groups and religious communities would look like if this principle was absent. Last but not least, the formal federal character principle is supplemented by some informal institutions of consociational type. In Nigeria, the rotation of the presidency between the North and the South (in fact between Muslims and Christians), similarly to that of the presidency and vice-presidency for different religious communities and ethnic groups, increases the balance of power between Muslims and Christians and, at the same time, between the main ethnic groups. In consequence, it helps prevent any of the large segments from acquiring a dominant position, and this also indirectly benefits the smaller segments.

[1] Some scholars (e.g. Wolff, 2007) consider power-sharing just a strategy (and a set of political and legal arrangements serving it) aimed at conflict management or resolution.

[2] Preferential voting, thanks to a ranking of candidates conducted by the voters, makes it possible for them to indicate preferences among candidates from different parties/organizations. In the case of centripetalism, the aim of such voting would be to reduce the chances of the election to parliament of politicians showing little restraint in their political views and actions, particularly with regard to inter-segmental relations.

[3] My discussions with Nigerian political scientists in Nigeria in 2018 indicate that the situation in which a member of an ethnic group having a dominant status in a given state becomes minister - or the "representative" of that state in government - is typical.

[4] Usually, the majority of members of specific ethnic groups is Christian or Muslim. And so, almost all Hausa-Fulani are Muslims, while the majority of the Yoruba and almost all Igbo are Christians.

[5] These conclusions derive from my discussions with Nigerian political scientists in Nigeria in 2018.

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