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Effects of the Practice of Federalism in Nigeria on its International Image

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Abstract	Original Research Article

Nigeria is a heterogeneous State whose many ethnic groups were outlandishly merged by Britain purely for administrative purposes during the colonial era and without regard for their characteristic diversities. The amalgamation gave rise to the adoption of federal system of government by Nigeria in 1954 as well as the subsequent evolution of federal character principle, all with the aim of managing the diversity for the sake of national survival. Regardless of the efforts, the practice of federalism in the country has continued to be plagued by various challenges. How these challenges affect the international image of Nigeria was the major task of this study. The study was anchored on the Group Theory while the qualitative mechanism of data collection and analysis was applied in this study. Among other things, the study found out that among the challenges confronting the practice of federalism in the country was the ineffective application of the federal character principle. It also found out that the international image of Nigeria suffers unthinkable damages as a result of the challenges associated with the practice of federalism. In view of the findings, the study therefore recommended the need for the political class to show commitment to the practice of true federalism by way of promoting national, rather than ethnic and divisive interests. It equally recommended that the National Assembly must amend the constitution to request any president who disrespects federal character principle in allocation of benefits to resign his or her position.
Keywords: Federalism, federal character principle, international image, ethnicity, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the multiplicity of perspectives linked to it, federalism represents a system of government that establishes a constitutionally-specified division of powers between different levels of government thereby allowing distinct communities, defined by their territorial boundaries, to exercise guaranteed autonomy over certain matters of particular importance to them while being part of a larger federal union through which shared powers and responsibilities are exercised over matters of common concern (Bulmer, 2017). That means that certain factors account for the adoption of federalism by states. In fact, there is a consensus among scholars today that federalism as a system of governance is not only pragmatic and utilitarian, but a vehicle that assists the State to organize for the sake of national unity through the preservation of characteristic diversities (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2009; Majekodunmi, 2015).

In essence, federalism sets out to achieve integration of peoples of a State who share diversity ethnically, culturally, geographically and religiously speaking. It means that federalism provides an answer to ethnic pluralism and is usually a product of yearnings by the people. That explains why it is often contended that federalism is a doctrine which advocates and promotes the form of organization of a State in which power is dispersed or decentralized by contract as a means of safeguarding local identities and individual liberties (Babalawe, cited in Majekodunmi, 2015). To that end, it is reputed to be an effective political cum constitutional design for managing complex governmental problems usually associated with ethnic and cultural diversity (Ojo, 2002).

Notably, Nigeria is a State with multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic conglomeration. It is home to well over 350 ethnic groups. Whereas the three largest ethnic groups in the country are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, other large ethnic groups exist and they include the Fulani, Ekoi,, Idoma, Igala, Kanuri/Beriberi, Nupe, Urhobo, Tiv, Ibibio, Edo, Jukuri, Gwari, Itsekiri and Ijaw/Izon. For the country characterized as one of the most ethnically diverse states in the world with well

over 350 ethno-linguistic groups, her federalism is a creation of the British, with her eventual transformation into a federal State starting in 1954 (Ojo, 2009; Majekodunmi, 2015).

Today, Nigeria is a federation consisting of thirty six states and a Federal Capital Territory (Amah, 2017). It is in view of this that the federal character principle was adopted as a veritable instrument for equal treatment of citizens, equal distribution of amenities and a formula for fair distribution of the country's political cum economic powers (Ojo, 2009; Talib, 2005; Okotoni and Adegbami, 2021). Put differently, the federal character principle in the country constitutionally enforced by the Federal Character Commission (FCC) is intentioned to inspire a sense of belonging and loyalty by seeking to correct the anomalies which emanated from the uneven distribution of natural and economic resources of the country. In other words, the Nigerian federal character principle requires that there is no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the federal government and its agencies.

However, many challenges currently plague Nigeria's federalism as well as the federal character principle application to the extent that there is today a growing concern that the situation produces some ripple effects on the country's international image. This is premised on the fears already expressed by certain stakeholders, including scholars. Instructively, scholars like Ajagun (2006) and Majekodunmi (2015) have argued that Nigeria's adoption of the federal system was not as a strategy to manage problems of pre-independence period, but more importantly as an enduring strategy that would help detonate a major source of threat to the future political stability of an independent Nigeria.

A key question that has lingered on for some time now is, how has federalism in Nigeria supported the country's image abroad or otherwise? This study seeks to interrogate this concern. It is therefore in that light that the study has approached the task through avid subtitles which include Conceptual Perspectives on Federalism, Nigeria's Federalism within the Context of Historical Evolution, Nigeria's Federal Character Principle and Surging Debate on Relevance, Federalism in Nigeria: Subject of Integrity or Circumstance of Internal Contradictions?, Nigerian Federal Character Versus Implementation Jinx, Nigeria's Federal Character Principle and Struggle against Discrimination and Humiliation as well as Federalism and Dynamics in Nigeria's International Image Crisis.

Statement of the Problem
Ideally, federalism was opted for in Nigeria in order to redress the ills that afflict the heterogeneity of the federation. It was intentioned to midwife justice, equity, patriotism, unity and collaboration for the survival of the country. The need for equal representation and wider participation of citizens in the affairs of their state, need for government that will be close to the grassroots, desire to prevent dictatorship and promote effective government, as well as the decision for recognition of socio-economic, political and cultural diversity of the people form the basis of Nigeria's federalism. The federal system is expected to ensure greater protection of the interest of the minority, even as these gains, ultimately, are anticipated to help build and sustain positive image for Nigeria.

However, there is no gainsaying the fact that federalism in Nigeria, against all hopes, suffers from centrifugal dislocation. The country's federal system is plagued by various contradictions and contrived arrangement articulated by the ruling class for some personal gains (Uhunmwuangho and Ekpu, 2011; Ihejiamaizu, cited in Majekodunmi, 2015; Ilesanmi, 2001). Certain forces beyond its control push it into failure. In essence, it is the political class that have weakened and indeed murdered the application of the usefulness of federalism to the disadvantage of Nigerians.

This is why Ajagun (2006) contended that the federal government in Nigeria was tending progressively towards a unitary State, especially in the area of sharing of functions and resources available in the country between the central government and the component units, on the one hand and between the government and citizens, on the other. Equally, Ogbe, *et al*. (2011) observed and aptly described the federal structure of Nigeria as a bad marriage. It is, indeed, such a problem today that many voices have risen to call for either restructuring of the federalism practice in the country or outright break-up of the federation.

Obviously, Nigeria, by allowing the central government to usurp the powers which were formally exercised by the regional governments, has not been forthright applying the principle of federalism to the letter, and the result of this has been the heightening of ethnic tension, mutual distrust among ethnic groups, and minority rights problem among others. In fact, from every indication, even the application of the federal character principle as an statutory antidote has proven incapable of resolving the problem of national suspicion among the ethnic groups as it has failed in its objective of redressing the imbalance in the structure and ethnic domination in government and other public institutions so that national integration could be achieved. Obviously, it has so far failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts and centripetal agitations in Nigeria (Kayode, 2015). As it is, the principle, itself, engenders federal instability rather than integration that it was intended to serve, and has merely promoted ethnic and sectional consciousness (Osifeso, 2011).

As Ojo (2009) and Suberu (cited in Osifeso, 2011) emphatically stated, the federal character principle in Nigeria was designed for the benefit of the ruling class in the Nigerian context as against the benefit of the underprivileged and this has resulted in further disempowerment of the powerless. In the overall, it made nonsense of the checks and balances embedded in the original arrangement, resulting in geometric diffusion of mediocrity, public service ineptitude and manifest decline in public morale. In fact, Osifeso (2011) puts it more aptly that the federal character is a fine idea in principle but the practice is tricky.

Sadly, Nigeria's federalism under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration has not fared better and has indeed generated diverse and heated debates. The federalism has not helped to resolve the ethnic-based polarization characteristic of the country. It has even worsened the situation. In other words, federalism under Buhari has worsened the problems which the administration inherited in many fronts. The administration has not helped the course of federal character principle application either, as it has severely come under criticism for promoting ethnic-based agenda and thus, making Nigeria a laughing stock in the comity of nations.

As a result of these challenges therefore, the concern is that federalism in Nigeria could have some damaging implications for the country's international image. This is strongly premised on the observation raised by Fayomi *et al.* (2015) to the effect that Nigeria's image crisis is rooted in the character of her federalism. What this implies, among other things therefore, is that the challenges which have come to characterize Nigeria's federalism may not be helpful to her international image in any way. If that is so, then it not only shows lack of capacity on the part of Nigeria to effectively resolve her national challenges but presents a picture of a country at crossroads, a weak state and one incapable of playing global role of resolving any international crisis. It is therefore in this context that this study attempts to investigate the impacts of Nigeria's federalism on her international image.

Research Questions
This study is guided by the following research questions:
1. How has the practice of federalism in Nigeria affected its international image?
2. How can federalism contribute to good image for Nigeria abroad?

METHODOLOGY
The qualitative mechanism of data collection and analysis is applied in this study.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on the Group Theory which has its intellectual roots in the principle of pluralism as developed by early twentieth century English writers including John Figgis and G. H. Cole (Verma, 1975) with a focus on pluralist model in which power, instead of being concentrated in the hands of a group of class, is treated as diffused among many interest groups competing with each other for power (Kayode, 2015).

The Group theory was propounded by Arthur F. Bentley (1908) who while trying to highlight the importance of group in politics observed that society consists of dynamic processes (actions) rather than specific institutions or substantive contents (values). He observed that society; nation and the government are all made up of group of men, each group cutting across many others and engaged in the state of perpetual interaction with each other (Kayode, 2015). Instructively, Bentley conceived group as a mass of activity and not merely a collection of individuals, and defined group as a certain portion of men of a society, taken not as a physical mass cut off from the masses of men, but as a mass of activity. He argued that group represented a pattern of process rather than a static form, and as such could emerge only when the interaction among its individual members were both relatively frequent and sufficiently patterned to produce directional activity (Kayode, 2015).

The theory is based on the doctrine of pluralism which states that politics is mainly a competition among groups, where each interest group presses for its own policy preferences but where all interests are represented (Nowaczyk, 2015). The main gist of the theory is that modern society consists of large number of groups which remain engaged in a perpetual struggle for power and domination over each other. As such, power becomes diffused among the many set of interest groups which are competing against each other for power. Basically, organization of the groups is motivated by interest while activity characteristic of any given group is viewed as more important than its structural composition. It is therefore through each group that demands are made of the society and the most influential group is decided by the amount of competition and the quality of the competing groups.

This theory is therefore apt for this study as it highlights the imperativity and the circumstance surrounding formation of ethnic groups as well as the motivation behind the organization. It is in that light that one observes the fact that the various groups which make up the Nigerian federation engage in competition while placing certain demands on the government for the betterment of the group. It is equally observed that certain national leadership tends to favour their ethnic groups when in office, thereby favouring one group at

the detriment of the rest. It is this nepotism that accounts for ethnic-based tension, national insecurity, instability as well as other agitations including secession moves. In turn, such agitations, favouritsm, nepotism and dangerous ethnic-based politics begin to haunt the federal structure of the society, while damaging Nigeria's international image in the process.

Literature Review

Conceptual Perspectives on Federalism
Principally, federalism as a political arrangement has faced serious crises of conceptualization as there have been several varieties of political arrangement to which the term has been applied (Amah, 2017). However, the concept is used to describe a system of government in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and constitutional political units, like states or provinces; it connotes the existence of two levels of government, each constitutionally or jurisdictionally empowered to make decision independent of each other within the legislature sphere assigned to it (Majekodunmi, 2015). It is a system of government that establishes a constitutionally-specified division of powers between different levels of government thereby allowing distinct communities, defined by their territorial boundaries, to exercise guaranteed autonomy over certain matters of particular importance to them while being part of a larger federal union through which shared powers and responsibilities are exercised over matters of common concern (Bulmer, 2017).

Evidently, the concept implies the construction of a system where consensus is reached between current demands of the union and the territorial diversity within an emerging society, by the creation of a single political system within which central and provincial governments are assigned coordinated authority in a manner defining both the legal or political limits of equality or subordinate functions (Agbu, 2004). According to Wheare (cited in Majekodunmi, 2015), the system contrasts with a Unitary system in which the component units are legally subordinate to the central government. In essence, by talking about federalism, we refer to an arrangement that split governmental duties, powers and other agreed State compositions between the constitutionally-permissible layers of governance within that specific territory. For Nigeria, it is important to trace the history of her federalism.

Nigeria's Federalism within the Contexts of Historical Evolution and Justification
Specifically, arguments have been advanced regarding the origin cum relevance of federalism in Nigeria with such scholars as Majekodunmi (2015) insisting that its source is traceable to what he described as plurality of colonial administrative traditions imposed by the British, evident in the northern and southern dichotomy, rather than the much-touted

pluralities of economic and geographic regions. By implication, the western-induced administrative creation gave rise to regional rivalry which has become entrenched in the Nigerian polity and has, by extension, become the basis for post-independence conflict.

Primarily, Nigeria is one of the most ethnically-diverse countries of the world, characterized by multiplicity of languages, culture, religion, socio-political and economic developments (Okotoni and Adegbami, 2021; Agbodike, 2003). These diverse ethnic groups were, however, incongruously merged without regard to their differences in what has come to be associated with the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates and the Lagos Colony by Britain during colonialism and often described as involuntary and forced marriage and thereafter necessitating incessant political mending and panel beating (Okotoni, 2006; Ayoade, 2003). This heterogeneity resulted in the adoption of federal system of government by Nigeria in 1954, in the quest to manage the diversity for the sake of national survival. To achieve this, Okotoni and Adegbami (2021) hinted that the federal government in 1954 introduced the quota system (reviewed in 1967) which sought for equalization of inter-regional opportunities in education and federal appointments. Sadly, mutual mistrust and animosity among various ethnic groups continued until it degenerated into civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970.

Scholars like Ezeibe (2009) believe that the problem with Nigeria's federalism is connected with the way it emerged, being imposed by an outsider, that is, the British. His particular belief is that this situation made the federalism both complex and hard to understand, and consequently accounts for the practice of different types of federalism by the country. According to Okotoni and Adegbami (2021), the country's leadership took a number of policy measures to ameliorate ethnic rivalry, principal among which was the introduction of the Federal Character Principle entrenched in the 1979 and 1999 Constitution. It is also known with multiple nomenclatures such as zoning formula, quota system, affirmative action and positive action (Adeosun, 2011).

Federalism in Nigeria: Subject of Integrity or Circumstance of Internal Contradictions?
The good intentions behind the adoption of federal character principle in Nigeria notwithstanding, it is evident that the principle is neither entrenched nor allowed basic freedom to operate by the severe internal contradictions within the country. The very politics which created it has refused to allow it to succeed. For instance, there has been gross imbalance in and lack of consideration for major regions in the country on many fronts, including national leadership. This is shown on table 1.

Table-1: Nigeria's Leadership in Terms of Ethnic Tenure, 1960-2018

S/N	Name	Title	State	Ethnicity	Zone	Period	Ethnic Tenure
1	Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe	President (Ceremonial)	Anambra	Igbo	South East	1/10/1960-15/1/1966	5 years, 5 months and 8 days
2	Alh. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa	Prime Minister	Bauchi	Jarawa	North East	1/10/1960-15/1/1966	5 years, 5 months and 8 days
3	Maj.Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi	Head of State	Abia	Igbo	South East	16/1/1966-29/7/1966	6 months and 13 days
4	General Yakubu Gowon	Head of State	Plateau	Angas/Beron	North Central	29/7/1966-29/7/1975	9 years
5	Gen. Murtala Muhammed	Head of State	Kano	Hausa	North West	29/7/1975-13/2/1976	6 months and 15 days
6	General Olusegun Obasanjo	Head of State	Ogun	Yoruba	South West	13/2/1976-30/9/1979	3 years, 7 months and 17 days
7	Alh. Shehu Shagari	President	Sokoto	Fulani	North West	1/10/1979-31/12/1983	4 years, 2 months and 30 days
8	Maj. General Muhammadu Buhari	Head of State	Katsina	Fulani	North West	31/12/1983-27/8/1985	1 year, 7 months and 26 days
9	General Ibrahim Babangida	Head of State	Niger	Hausa	North Central	27/8/1985-26/8/1993	8 years
10	Chief Ernest Shonekan	Head of State	Ogun	Yoruba	South West	26/8/1993-17/11/1993	2 months and 23 days
11	General Sani Abacha	Head of State	Kano	Kanuri	North West	17/11/1993-8/6/1998	4 years, 6 months and 22 days
12	Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar	Head of State	Niger	Hausa	North Central	8/6/1998-29/05/1999	11 months and 21 days
13	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	Executive President	Ogun	Yoruba	South West	29/05/1999-2905/2007	8 years
14	Musa Yar'Adua	Executive President	Katsina	Fulani	North West	29/05/2007-05/05/2010	2 years, 11 months and 6 days
15	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	Acting Executive President	Bayelsa	Ijaw	South South	6/05/2010-29/05/2011	1 year and 23 days
16	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	Executive President	Bayelsa	Ijaw	South South	29/05/2011-29/05/2015	4 years
17	Muhammadu Buhari	Executive President	Katsina	Fulani	North West	29/05/2015-Date	6 years (As at 29/05/2021)

Source: Ohaneze (2002). Minor adjustment by the researcher.

A simple take from the table is that persons from the south east and south south zones of the federation have been greatly marginalized in national leadership of Nigeria. For instance, the south east zone has registered its presence at leadership at the centre for only five years, 11 months and 21 days through Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi who were both ceremonial president and first military Head of State respectively. Azikiwe was in office for five years, five months and eight days as a ceremonial president (without executive powers). Ever since the regime of Ironsi was terminated on July 29, 1966, no other person from the region has ever governed the country again, and that is more than 55 years after (Okeke, 2018).

As for the south south zone, the former president, Goodluck Jonathan was president for only five years and 23 days. It is instructive to note that he moved from vice president into becoming acting president and later substantive president when his boss, Musa Yar'Adua (a Fulani) became indisposed and later died in office.

During the 2019 general election, the two major political parties in the country – the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) failed to pick candidates from neither the south east zone nor south south zone. This is without prejudice to the unofficial zoning of the top post between the north and south. 2019 was considered as part of the northern slot.

Sadly, marginalization and injustice which are characteristic of Nigeria's federalism equally manifests in some other fronts. For instance, the south east region has only 5 states. Its counterparts have more. For instance, the north central, north east, south west and south south regions have 6 states each and north west topping the rest with 7 states. The south east zone also has the lowest number of local government areas in the country. Consequently, very low allocation accrues to it from the federation account monthly while there is very

little federal impact in terms of project execution and appointments in the region.

Another major instance of conscious exclusion, marginalization and lopsidedness against the south east zone in Nigeria manifests in the way of cut-off marks for each of the regions in the country for entrance into federal government-owned unity schools. Okeke (2018) which shares the data on the cut-off marks on table 2 remarked that the discrepancy therein reinforces the belief by the south east zone that policies of the government are designed to either exclude or punish people from the zone.

Table-2: Cut-off Marks for Entrance into Nigeria's Federal Unity Schools

S/N	STATE	MALE	FEMALE
NORTH			
1	Adamawa	62	62
2	Bauchi	35	35
3	Benue	111	111
4	Borno	45	45
5	Gombe	58	58
6	Jigawa	44	44
7	Kaduna	91	91
8	Kano	67	67
9	Katsina	60	60
10	Kebbi	9	20
11	Kogi	119	119
12	Nasarawa	58	58
13	Niger	93	93
14	Plateau	97	97
15	Sokoto	9	13
16	Taraba	3	11
17	Yobe	2	27
18	Zamfara	4	2
19	FCT	90	90
SOUTH EAST			
20	Abia	130	130
21	Anambra	139	139
22	Ebonyi	112	112
23	Enugu	134	134
24	Imo	138	138
SOUTH SOUTH			
25	Akwa-Ibom	123	123
26	Bayelsa	72	72
27	Cross River	97	97
28	Delta	131	131
29	Edo	127	127
30	Rivers	118	118
SOUTH WEST			
31	Ekiti	119	110
32	Kwara	123	123
33	Lagos	133	133
34	Ogun	131	131
35	Ondo	126	126
36	Osun	127	127
37	Oyo	127	127

Source: Okeke (2018).

The table shows that states in the southern part of the country, particularly Anambra, Imo and Enugu, have the highest cut-off requirement in the country, which means that prospective students from the three states must score 139, 138 and 134 respectively before they can gain admission into the government-owned schools. Indeed, the lopsidedness is against the south, generally (that is, south east, south west and south south zones). This means that candidates from the south east, south-west and south-south zones (apart from Bayelsa and Cross River states) are required to have very high scores in order to qualify for admission into the unity colleges.

According to Okeke (2018), this is in a country where candidates from the north are favoured to score less. In fact, for states like Yobe, Taraba and Zamfara, their male applicants are required to score mere two,

three and four points respectively to gain admission. The obvious implication, therefore, is that a lot of students from the southern region aspiring to gain admission into the schools are denied the chance, even when they score far above their counterparts from other zones (Okeke, 2018).

Sadly, Nigeria is home to several internal contradictions. For instance, peaceful co-existence among citizens is difficult to achieve across the country. Indeed, challenges with cohabitation apply to all the zones.

In a study conducted in some northern states, Human Rights Watch (2014) observed that persons from some ethnic groups who have lived in Plateau and Kaduna states for generations are still regarded as settlers and cannot benefit from certain economic and social opportunities. Farmers and herdsmen, as well, have generally found it increasingly difficult to live peacefully and respect sanctity of each other's source of livelihood despite living together for years and this has resulted in endless clashes between the two and a good number of casualties have so far been recorded (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Evidently, the Middle Belt region, particularly Plateau and Kaduna states have been the scene of several violent inter-communal clashes among ethnic and religious communities over the past decades, resulting in over 10, 000 deaths since 1992 (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In the states located in southern Nigeria, co-habitation among same Nigerians from the north and their hosts in the south has also proven impossible. Intermingling, inter-marriage and socio-cultural bonding among the residents has not worked for several years. Building any form of affinity has remained a mirage, so are such necessities as tolerance, compromise and peace-building. The problem is not just that these have not worked. The sad fact is that there is nothing to show that they will work soon. The simple fact is that peaceful co-existence among Nigerians has been difficult. It is still practically complicated to accept persons from one region as members of another region in one big Nigerian family. This is indeed a huge national shame which does not speak well of the country within the international system.

Certainly, factors rooted in poverty, insecurity and human development index compound Nigeria's federalism and sends wrong signals outside. World Bank (2013) revealed that Nigeria's poverty rate has reached 48 percent of the population, with stark disparities between regions and particularly concentrated in the northern region. In fact, previous studies had ardently revealed that minority communities such as the Ogoni in Niger Delta are heavily affected by poverty and other low socio-economic conditions characteristic of Nigeria's federalism.

According to World Data Lab (cited in Onaleye, 2020; Nwanolue, Obiora and Okeke, 2021), Nigeria had largest extreme poverty population in June 2018. The country performed poorly when compared with India, Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia and Uganda with 86.9 million people living in extreme poverty. It also performed poorly in human development index between 2010 and 2013 when compared with other African countries, as table 3 clearly shows.

Table-3: Human Development Index (HDI) for Nigeria/other Countries, 2010-2013

Year	No. of Country	Nigeria	Botswana	Ethiopia	Ghana	Namibia	Malawi	South Africa	Uganda	Zambia
2013	187	152	109	173	138	127	174	118	164	141
2012	187	153	108	173	138	127	174	119	164	143
2011	187	156	118	174	135	120	171	122	161	163
2010	169	142	98	157	130	105	153	110	143	150

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2014).

According to the United Nations Development Programme (2014) and Okeke (2020), Nigeria ranked 142 out of 169 countries surveyed in 2010 on human capital development. It ranked 156 out of 187 countries in 2011, 153 in 2012 and 152 in 2013, all out of 187 countries. That showed a poor human development index. Nigeria occupied 127th position in terms of productivity in 2014. This placed it behind countries such as Botswana (74th); Ghana (111th); Namibia (88th); South Africa (56th); and Zambia (96th) (World Economic Forum, cited in Okeke, 2022).

On the other hand, conflict across the country has displaced millions from their homes and caused disruption to agriculture in the fertile middle belt, with particular impacts on women and girls (Okeke, 2021). World Bank (2020b) highlights these challenges on table 4.

Table-4: Quick Facts about Nigeria's Current Challenges and Opportunities

S/N	Challenges
1	With more than 200 million people, Nigeria accounts for about half of West Africa's total population and one of the largest populations of youth in the world. About 3.5 million young Nigerians are entering the labour market every year.
2	Ranking 152 of 157 countries in the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index, Nigeria has one of the lowest human capital scores in the world. One in five girls gets married before turning 19 and 19 percent of them are already mothers or pregnant with their first child.
3	Access to electricity and improving service delivery remain a priority, with 80 million Nigerians lacking access to grid electricity, and annual economic losses due to unreliable power are estimated at 28 billion dollars.
4	Conflict across the country has displaced millions from their homes and caused disruption to agriculture in the fertile middle belt, with particular impacts on women and girls.

Source: World Bank (2020g). Tabulation by researcher.

Aside the challenges, insecurity in Nigeria flourishes and has become multi-dimensional. There are cases of terrorism, kidnappings, banditry, ritual killings, robbery and other vices. The reported cases on insecurity heightened under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari whose campaigns prior to 2015 general election that brought him into office centred on stamping out insecurity.

Sadly, less than a year and six months to the end of his administration on May 29, 2023, terror groups and other perpetrators of crimes have become emboldened and their attacks across the country audacious. The terrorist group – Boko Haram designated by the United States Department as a foreign terrorist organization in November 2013 (National Counter-terrorism Centre, n.d) has been responsible for numerous deadly attacks across the country, particularly in the North and the Middle Belt, including bomb attacks resulting in more than 2000 deaths in the first half of 2014 alone (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Of the 18, 814 deaths caused by terrorists around the world in 2017, four groups – Boko Haram, Islamic State, the Taliban and Al Shabab were responsible for 10, 632 (Dudley, 2018).

The implication is that Nigeria witnessed unprecedented incidences of insecurity for six consecutive years. Among other factors, the root causes of the violence in the country involve several indicators among which are competition for resources and polarization of ethnic and religious characteristics. Mainly, it is unthinkable that encouraging number of foreign direct investments will flow into the country in the face of the heightened insecurity.

Federalism Challenge: Federal Character Principle as Interventionist Strategy

Available literature indicates that scholars approach the concept of federal character as well as its usefulness using different lens. Some of them insist that it is intentioned to inspire a sense of belonging and loyalty by seeking to correct the anomalies which emanated from the uneven distribution of natural and economic resources of a country. Thus, it is a veritable instrument for equal treatment of citizens, equal distribution of amenities and a formula for fair distribution of a country's political cum economic powers (Ojo, 2009; Talib, 2005; Okotoni and Adegbami, 2021). What this means is that the inspiration and belief underpinning the concept is the need to achieve even development and eliminate rancor within a State. This accounts for the introduction of federal character principle as a vehicle of political fairness in a poly-ethnic society.

Specifically for Nigeria, chapter 2 of the 1999 constitution (as amended) provides for federal character by stipulating in section 14, sub-section 3 that the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies as well as the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of the country and the need to promote national unity and 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 any of its agencies (Okotoni and Adegbami, 2021). By implication, the constitution projects federal character as a non-discriminatory tool to guard against monopolization of government activities or the apparatus of the state by a particular section of the country which is capable of undermining the unity and development of the State. It was established to work out a formula to ensure equitable and fair representation of Nigeria's diverse groupings in public service, monitor public service recruitment exercises and prosecute violations of the federal character principle (Demarest et al., 2020). In other words, efforts were made by those that crafted the constitution to accommodate every section of the country in governmental activities through the mandatory application of the federal character principle.

It is in that light that scholars like Obiyan and Akindele (2002) maintain that the federal character is about consideration for the pluralist and diversity feature of the country in all national stakes so as to promote sense of belonging in all citizens. In essence, every disadvantaged group in the federation gets considered in publicly-funded opportunities via federal

character application and through it, an end is put to any form and manifestation of discrimination. Through federal character, equity, fairness, oneness, and equal representation are consciously achieved. Gains which accrue from such act include end to ethnic dominance and rivalry, in addition to greater political stability.

The Nigerian federal character principle requires that there is no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the federal government and its agencies. As such, the Federal Character Commission was created via a decree in 1996 by the military regime of Sani Abacha to implement the responsibility of the federal character principle. The 1999 Constitution subsequently included it as one of the 14 independent federal executive bodies.

According to Federal Character Commission (2016), the commission is composed of a chairman, 37 commissioners representing the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, and the Secretary of the Commission. The chairman, commissioners and secretary are appointed by the President upon nomination by the state government and confirmation by the National Assembly. It is supported by civil servant staff responsible for data gathering and monitoring, administration and so forth, with established 24 committees to monitor recruitments into about 600 ministries, departments and agencies of the federal government while the state branches monitor the states and local government areas (Demarest *et al.*, 2020).

According to Demarest *et al.* (2020), the Federal Character Commission collates data on ministries, departments and agencies' nominal rolls by year and produces an annual report for the President. They equally noted that the commission monitors recruitment exercises. In essence, the commission has since 1996 been mandated to monitor and enforce the constitutional principle of federal character in government employment and public expenditure and it is in that light that Mustapha (2009) described it as a positive step towards dealing with Nigeria's nagging problem of national representation. It could be in that light that Ammani (2014) described the federal character principle as arguably the best solution to solving some of the defects and fundamental problems of Nigerian lopsided federal system. In the same vein, Osman (2004) believe that it is an effort to re-address the unbalanced structure and ethnic domination in government in order to achieve national integration.

Ammani (cited in Chukwuma (2014) summed up the merits and successes of federal character in Nigeria as having provided an equitable formula for the distribution of socio-economic service and infrastructural facilities, provided modalities for redressing imbalances, ensured equitable admission into

federal universities, ensured that no one section of the society unduly dominates the elective or appointive positions, provided equal access into armed forces, the police, etc; protected the interest of minority ethnic groups, ensured even spread in the recruitment into federal civil service among civil servants, ensured the corporate existence of Nigeria and doused the centripetal agitations. Evidently, the federal character principle has avoided the capture of government institutions by a single group and has important symbolic value in strengthening power-sharing norms (Demarest *et al.*, 2020).

Nigeria's Federal Character Principle and Struggle against Discrimination and Humiliation

Historically, federal character practice in Nigeria has faced intense struggle against political forces that constantly struggle to discriminate against and humiliate some integral groups within the state, in the name of nepotism and favouritism. The State has witnessed conscious effort to violate the federal character principle and render it an obvious toothless bulldog and a toy in the hands of wielders of State power and apparatuses.

Mainly, the origin of Nigeria's image crisis rooted in her federalism is the violent electoral politics in the first republic that culminated in the first military coup of January 15, 1966 (Akinsanya, 2005), followed by the July 29, 1966 counter coup (Achebe, 2012), and trolled through to the faulty electoral process of 1979 (Nwolise, cited in Fayomi *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, scholars have reached the consensus that Nigeria's image crisis attained the peak under Abacha's regime and was in tatters when he left office (Fayomi *et al.*, 2015). In the same token, even though Obasanjo's regime attempted to reposition Nigeria towards restoration of her good image, certain overriding happenstances, culminating in Yar'Adua's long absence from office over health challenges, became damaging instances in relation to Nigeria's international image. Meanwhile, the audacity of terror groups which operated in Nigeria during Jonathan's presidency further damaged Nigeria's international image.

Under Buhari, international image of Nigeria has become an issue (Akinterinwa, 2017). As he succinctly rendered it, Nigeria's international image under President Buhari is gradually being tainted without much attention being paid to it. According to him, the president as at toady is praised for his efforts but no one is talking about the international reservations underlying the songs of praise since international politics is about praising and undermining for purposes of national interest. It is his contestation that Nigeria's international image under Buhari cannot but become very negative by the end of his term. How this benefits the country, bearing in mind that perception cans is an important factor in the evaluation of bilateral ties,

attitudinal disposition of states and particularly in decision-making? This, indeed, is a tall dream.

Nigeria's Federal Character Versus Implementation Jinx

Federal character application in Nigeria suffers implementation challenge (Okotoni and Adegbami, 2021). Its workings remain plagued by legal and administrative constraints, chronic underfunding and political dependence, such that it is easily one of the most contentious and debated constitutional innovations introduced to manage and curtail horizontal inequalities in the political-administrative sphere (Demarest *et al.*, 2020).

Basically, the federal Character Commission has not been able to redress historical imbalances in federal governmental activities; in fact, some of the main reasons undermining the functioning of the federal character commission have remained the same (Mustapha, 2009; Demarest *et al.*, 2020). The incapacity of the commission to address a situation where the president is perceived to violate the federal character principle is a major challenge as the commission is beholden to the president which appoints its members and approves its rules and budgets (Ojeme, 2018). Even in the states, the commission requires the governor's approval to operate in their respective states (Demarest *et al.*, 2020).

On the other hand, even though the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information (IPPIS) system used by the federal government offers the opportunity for the commission to acquire the full staffing lists of ministries, departments and agencies, yet unfortunately, the commission has no direct access to the system; cooperation and data access is also a pertinent issue at the state level (Demarest *et al.*, 2020). As they observed, the commission, legally speaking, has far-reaching powers and can take chief executives to court for prosecution, but this rarely happens. In fact, Ibeh (2015) disclosed that the commission has been sued itself for failing to ensure federal character.

Another major blow to the operations of Federal Character Commission is lack of adequate funds. As Demarest *et al.* (2020) puts it, the lack of adequate funds is consistently regarded to be the most serious impediment to the workings of the commission, such that while it receives numerous complaints, the commission often lacks the resources to deal with them effectively and in particular to start court cases. Another challenge is that one of the privileges of state commissioners is that they can occasionally nominate people for employment in MDAs, a rule which appears to encourage patronage and slot-selling (Umoru, 2018).

On the other hand, there is wide concern with the costs and inefficiencies of 37 full-time commissioners in the commission as well as the political dependence of appointed commissioners. The prescription for rotating the posts of the executive chairman and secretary of the commission between the north and south has been jettisoned as all past chairmen have originated from the north which has led to criticism (Oloja, 2017; Mustapha, 2009). All past acting chairmen prior to 2019 have also originated from the north and this has led MDAs and other stakeholders to question the commission's integrity (Bello, 2018; Demarest *et al.*, 2020). These are regardless of the fact that the appointments were made by the president and as such, the commission should not directly be blamed for this infraction.

However, what this means by implication is that the commission persistently has an issue with how the institution itself respects federal character. And there is only very little (if any at all) that it can achieve when it, in itself, is a violator, and publicly too. Again, while annual reports are produced by the commission and sent to the president on a yearly basis, no president has discussed the report with the commission since President Musa Yar'Adua nor have there been written responses to the commission (Federal Character Commission, 2018b).

As Ojo (2009) and Suberu (cited in Osifeso, 2011) observed, the federal character principle in Nigeria was designed for the benefit of the ruling class in the Nigerian context as against the benefit of the underprivileged and this has resulted in further disempowerment of the powerless. In the overall, it made nonsense of the checks and balances embedded in the original arrangement, resulting in geometric diffusion of mediocrity, public service ineptitude and manifest decline in public morale. In fact, Osifeso (2011) puts it more aptly that the federal character is a fine idea in principle but the practice is tricky, maintaining that for national integration to be achieved and sustained, there must be policies or some sort of ethnic arithmetic that must be ensured in Nigeria's national representative institutions.

Indeed, the application of the federal character principle shows that it is not capable of resolving the problem of national suspicion among the ethnic groups as it has failed in its objective of redressing the imbalance in the structure and ethnic domination in government and other public institutions so that national integration could be achieved; obviously, it has so far failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts and centripetal agitations in Nigeria (Kayode, 2015). Expressing frustration with it, Osifeso (2011) lamented that the principle is engendering federal instability rather than integration that it was intended to serve, and has merely promoted ethnic and sectional consciousness. He argued that no unity can result where the application of the principle discriminates against one group and favours another.

Trends in Nigeria's International Image from Independence

Generally speaking, international image of Nigeria has experienced oscillation right from political independence in 1960. During the First Republic, the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, through his pioneering foreign policy anchored on Afrocentricism, was able to lay the foundation for Nigeria's roles and influences in international politics. He spelt out both the objectives and principles of the foreign policy. These helped to give direction to the new independent state in terms of her external relations. By extension, it assisted in giving a credible image for the country in the comity of nations (Ajayi, 2005). Also, the expulsion of apartheid South Africa, breaking of ties with France and participation in the non-aligned movement rang positive bells for Nigeria's image abroad (Folarin, 2013).

Equally of importance and worthy of note is the radical opposition to colonialism in Africa as well as rage against racism demonstrated by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime. Thus, it is on record that the regime engaged in a large number of peace keeping missions and was alert to issues of injustice mostly in Africa. Through those measures, it promoted the cause of African freedom fighters and Pan Africanism in general (Ajayi, 2005; Garuba, 2008). Also, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime intensified efforts aimed at restoring the battered image of Nigeria after Shehu Shagari's tenure by championing anti-drug and anti-corruption policy to brighten the country's image (Folarin, 2013). The regime undertook deliberate course of action to tackle the country's economic challenges in general and the huge debt incurred by Shagari's administration, in particular. Specifically, the regime promptly paid for all imports and eschewed further external borrowings in the bid to improve the country's image abroad.

In the Fourth Republic, President Olusegun Obasanjo, made efforts to build Nigeria's image and re-integrate the country into the world through shuttle diplomacy. These efforts paid off. Not only was Nigeria able to recover most of the stolen funds in foreign banks but the country assumed leadership of several international organizations which included the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU) and G-77. She also hosted several international summits including those of the Commonwealth Heads of State and Government and the AU in 2004, as well as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) in 2005. The president himself was guest of honour to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in May 2004. Indeed through the shuttle diplomacy, Obasanjo held periodic meetings with Nigerians in the diaspora where he discussed issues of common interest and updated them on government policies, as well as possible ways they can contribute in moving the country forward. Ajayi (2005) outlined the implication of these efforts and their outcome by contending that they facilitated the restoration of confidence on Nigeria by the international community.

Nigeria during the Obasanjo's administration played a frontline role in the relations between the G8 and other developed countries. The administration played a central role in the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). In fact, Obasanjo, in partnership with the United States Government, restructured the Nigerian Military Professionals Resource Incorporation and recorded resounding achievements in the areas of peace and security; mainly through active engagements in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Darfur (Sudan).These were outside the efforts aimed at restoring peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Specifically in Liberia, the Obasanjo's administration sponsored ECOWAS peace efforts that got Charles Taylor to give up power and facilitated the second track of peace and reconciliation in Sierra Leone, in collaboration with ECOWAS and its member-states (Garuba, 2008). Obasanjo's government also championed projects such as Gulf of Guinea Commission and attempted to strengthen bilateral relations with Cameroon with which it settled the long dispute over Bakassi through the Nigeria-Cameroun Border Commission and the Republic of Benin with which it tried to address issues of cross-border crimes (Garuba, 2008). There is no doubt that these actions, over time, boosted Nigeria's image abroad.

Contemporary Domestic Factors Impacting Nigeria's International Image

Presently, certain issues within the federation trouble Nigeria's international image. These are corruption, poor human rights records, terrorism as well as insurgency. Others include banditry, kidnapping, political instability and secession movements.

It is clear that corruption and human rights are two themes central to Nigeria's external image problem (Chidozie, *et al.,* 2014; Akinboye, 2013). High-rate of corruption and human rights abuses have remained the bane of Nigeria's federalism, including the frequently-reported cases of communal and sectarian violence that result in the death of scores of people. These problems smear the country's external image.

Since the emergence of terrorism in the country, extrajudicial killings by security agents have persisted, thereby damaging the image of the country abroad. Corruption, on the other hand, contributes to image crisis for Nigeria. For instance, from 1999 when the country returned to unbroken democracy, corruption has remained high. As a result, Nigeria has ranked among the highest in terms of corruption as table 5 shows.

Table-5: Corruption Perception of Nigeria, 1999-2019

Year	Rank among countries surveyed (Corruption Perception Index) score	Number of countries ranked
1999	98 (1.6)	99
2003	132 (1.4)	133
2007	147 (2.2)	180
2011	143 (2.4)	183
2015	136 (26)	168
2016	136 (28)	176
2019	146 (26)	180

Source: Transparency International (cited in Ibukun, 2021).

Obviously, internal insecurity has worsened in Nigeria. Indeed, the challenge of insecurity in the federation has contributed to her international image crisis. From 2014 to 2019, Nigeria has consecutively maintained the position of third most-terrorized country in the world as table 6 shows.

Table-6: Global Terrorism Index, 2014-2019

Rank	Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	Afghanistan	9.39	9.23	9.44	9.44	9.39	9.603
2	Iraq	10.00	10.00	9.96	10.00	9.75	9.241
3	Nigeria	8.58	9.21	9.31	9.01	8.66	8.597

Source: GTI (cited in Knoema, 2020; Okeke, 2022).

There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria's international image pays a huge price by the fact that for six consecutive years, activities of terrorists in the country have remained devastating, earning her the unsavory reputation of third most terrorized country in the world. As a result, some developed countries within the global system, including the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Germany had issued stern warnings to their citizens to avoid visit to some parts of the country. There are, of course, other damaging effects on the account of the high insecurity in Nigeria, among which is negative image to the country.

Federalism and Dynamics in Nigeria's International Image Crisis

The issues surrounding the interconnectedness between federalism and Nigeria's international image have become perennial concerns. Scholars, policy makers and other stakeholders have expressed worry over what could be the possible impacts of federalism bottlenecks in Nigeria on how the country is rated by other states within the global system. For instance, Fayomi *et al.* (2015) was blunt to assert that Nigeria's image crisis is rooted in the character of her federalism. What this implies, among other things, is that the federalism challenges in Nigeria which have dominated her national discourse for years does not help international image of the country in any way. If not for anything else, it shows lack of capacity on the part of Nigeria as a sovereign state to effectively and swiftly navigate through pressing national challenges. It presents it as a country at crossroads, a weak state and one incapable of playing global role of resolving any international crisis.

Evidently, Nigeria's federalism has shown no capacity in resolving the problem of national suspicion among the ethnic groups that make up the federation. In every sense of it, the objective of redressing the imbalance in the Nigerian geo-political structure as well as resolving ethnic domination in government and other public institutions for national integration to flourish has hit the wall over the years. For instance, the federalism in Nigeria has so far failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts and centripetal agitations rooted in Boko Haramism and agitation for restoration of the Republic of Biafra which has witnessed multi-form varieties of violence, killings by unknown gunmen, arsons, assassination attempts and extraordinary rendition of Nnamdi Kanu who is the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra and British citizen from Kenya. There is equally an agitation for Oduduwa Republic in the South West championed by some interest groups. In the South South region, agitation for greater resource control continues to rage with many militant groups ever on stand-by to hit targeted oil installations in the area in order to cripple Nigeria's economy and secure the much-needed attention.

Currently, terror-linked banditry and kidnapping for huge ransoms have taken over the Nigerian geo-political and economic space with no solution in sight. Highhandedness by security operatives has equally become entrenched with series of extrajudicial killings which reverberate in the international system and cause damage to Nigeria's international image.

From every indication, it is clear that the political class often pay little or zero attention to the image problem of the country. It is not just that their major preoccupation is self-centred enrichment, but

they go to the extent of either discrediting any perception index released by international organizations like the Transparency International and the Human Right Watch Group or accuse them of bias. In fact, such has become a recurring experience in Nigeria. Zimako (2009) had expressed an opinion that the national image of a country is an ethical issue which may appear intangible but the benefits and advantages which a good conduct offers a country are unquantifiable. However, this means nothing to Nigerian political class.

Nevertheless, image building is an essential element in any foreign policy, and its formulation and implementation are so inclusive since these help a country to create and reinforce favourable image externally (Alimi, 2005). Admittedly, image building constitutes a fundamental element of a nation's foreign policy and the way a nation is perceived especially in this 21st century (Adeniyi, cited in Oluka, 2020). By implication, it is a truism that one of the goals of foreign policy is for a State to establish and maintain good or peaceful relations with other sovereign states, build good image and transform these elements into gains for her domestic and external interests.

CONCLUSION
Nigeria is a large and multi-ethnic State. The diverse ethnic groups were strangely merged during the colonial era by Britain without any form of regard for the inherent diversities. This heterogeneity necessitated the adoption of federal system of government by Nigeria in 1954, in the quest to manage the diversity for the sake of national survival. Sadly, the practice of federalism in the country has suffered some challenges.

One of the efforts aimed at redressing the challenges faced by the practice of federalism in the country was the creation of the Federal Character Commission to implement the federal character principle. The principle seeks for common good, justice, equity and non-discriminatory approach to governance. It is intentioned to provide equal opportunity for all and through that ensure actualization of national aspirations. Be that as it may, it is evident that the federal character principle has not been effectively applied. For instance, there has been lack of consideration for many regions in the country in allocation of benefits.

Sadly, Nigeria is home to several internal contradictions owing to her practice of federalism, including the difficulty to achieve peaceful co-existence and co-habitation among her citizens. As a result, international image of the country suffers unthinkable damages.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In view of the findings, the study therefore made some recommendations. Principal among them is

the need for the political class to show commitment to true practice of federalism in the country by way of promoting national, rather than ethnic and divisive interests. The import is that nepotism, ethnicity, favouritism and discrimination must be jettisoned for more inclusive governance, anchored on justice, equity and merit. This further means that development must be spread evenly across the country, and equal opportunities offered to all sections in terms of dividends or benefits.

To achieve this, the study recommended that national leaders, particularly the president, must take the lead in helping true federalism to succeed in the country. The National Assembly must, as a matter of urgency, amend the relevant section of the constitution by making it mandatory for the president to reflect federal character principle in allocation of benefits, including the appointment of all the members of the Federal Character Commission. The National Assembly must reject confirmation of any appointment that violates the principle. It should make respect for federal character principle a matter of national interest and further make it mandatory for any president that goes contrary to the provision of the principle to resign his position. Implementing these recommendations will ultimately encourage the practice of true federalism and result in good international image for Nigeria.

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