Reforming the Nigerian Polity: Unpacking the Challenges and Possible Solutions

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Abstract
This article examines the political challenges facing Nigeria, and suggests remedial measures to tackle them. It contends that three main problems, namely, the fear of ethno-regional domination, the problem of stronghold, and the minority problem, provide the undercurrent for much of the tensions and violence that have become serious and endemic feature of Nigerian politics. Using the metaphor of medical therapy, the article examines the origin of Nigeria's political problems and evaluates efforts to ameliorate them. The article argues that the lack of follow up on the initial reforms adopted by the Nigerian political elite has resulted to the persistence and transformation of the country's political maladies. It suggests that further institutional reforms are required to strengthen Nigeria's institutions and fill the gaps in the country's institutional arrangement. The article suggests two measures to tackle institutional breakdown in the country, namely constitutionalising the principle of rotational presidency and adopting the proportional representation system.

Keywords
Institutional reforms, constitutional engineering, democracy, Nigerian politics

Introduction
Institutional reform, as Andrew Reynolds reminds us, is like medical therapy - 'just as a doctor seeks to diagnose and chart a treatment course for a sick person' he argues, 'the constitutional expert looks at an ailing society and tries to map a path to long-term health' (Reynolds 2005, 55). Three major reasons for the failure or success of institutional reforms can be deduced from Reynolds' use of the metaphor of medical therapy. Firstly, the failure of institutional reform often results from misdiagnosis. It is now commonly known that wrong diagnoses lead to wrong prescription, and in turn, a failure of therapy. This then implies that knowing the true state of a country is essential in diagnosing its problems, making the right prescription and applying the correct therapy. Secondly, institutional reforms often fail because particular maladies are treated in isolation, without considering the patient as a whole or the likely side-effects of a particular treatment. Thirdly, institutional reforms often fail because the sequencing of therapies does not follow the medical continuum of emergency medicine, convalescence and long-term health management. Institutional therapists have often failed to grasp the medical tenet that different stages and severities of illness require different treatments, and that follow up therapies are essential to prevent relapse. Institutional reforms are, therefore, unsuccessful because problems are often viewed on a short-term and quick intervention applied to resolve the immediate crisis without considering long-term care.

Drawing on these postulations, this article examines the implementation of institutional reforms in Nigeria. It focuses on the origin of the country's political pathologies, the remedies applied and their results as well as the prescriptions for long-term care. The first part of this paper deals with two issues: the British colonial administration's misdiagnosis of the main sticking point in Nigerian politics – which is how to establish an acceptable framework for governance and power sharing, and the administration's implementation of a therapy that not

only failed to address the country's political problems, but compounded them by producing enduring dangerous side-effects. The second part discusses the post-independence remedies to Nigeria's complicated institutional problems and their results, and examines the gaps in Nigeria's institutional arrangement. The third part of the paper prescribes measures required to fill the existing gaps and strengthen Nigeria's institutions.

Regionalism: a failed therapy

Nigerian federation is not a product of consensus or voluntary union of several formerly independent states as the American or Swiss federations. Rather, it emerged out of the aggregation of different communities by the British colonial authorities – a model of federal formation that Alfred Stepan (2004, 33-37) describes as 'putting together' federalism. The communities joined by the British colonial administration were a multiplicity of groups with diverse linguistic, genealogy, and religious backgrounds (Afigbo 1991). The occupation and consolidation of the communities followed three main routes – Lagos, Calabar and Lokoja, from where the British authorities extended into the Yoruba hinterland in the southwest region, the lower areas of the River Niger up to the southeast region, and northern region, respectively (Osuntokun 1979, 92). The British colonial administration encountered two major challenges as it tried to settle down after its occupation of Nigeria. The first was the challenge of policy – how to govern the disparate and complex communities that constituted Nigeria, while the second was the challenge of logistics - related to problems of communication and financial and personnel shortages. In addressing these challenges, the choices of the colonial government were influenced by its perception of the societies it had just conquered.

The colonial government had two diametrically opposed interpretations of pre-colonial Nigeria. The first, the social distance thesis, highlights the cultural distinctiveness among Nigerian communities, and was shared by many senior functionaries of the colonial government, including Arthur Richards, Governor of Nigeria (1943–1948), who argued, 'it is only the accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country. Socially and politically there are deep differences between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different stages of culture' (quoted in Osuntokun 1979, 99). The second interpretation, the social proximity thesis, was advanced by a few anthropologists and historians in the colonial administration. It emphasized the cultural and ethnological commonalities and linkages among pre-colonial Nigerian communities. The following statement contained in a colonial government memo illustrates the social proximity thesis: 'linguistically and culturally, there was no part of Nigeria where a line can be drawn and it can be said here the North ends and the South begins. Tribe has followed tribe, cultural conception followed cultural conception, but though the extremes visibly differ, there is a distinguishable woof running through the whole while the web is mainly varied by environment' (quoted in Iwaloye and Ibeanu 1997, 56). The social distance thesis was obviously the preferred outlook of the colonial government as well as the fundamental philosophical foundation against which the institutional framework of the nascent Nigerian state was crafted.

In the early years of colonial rule, logistical challenges and the British administration's perception of Nigerian communities prompted the adoption of the policy of separate administration where the different parts of the country were governed as autonomous territories through local (native) authorities (Yahaya 1980). This loose union of territories was later consolidated and transformed into Nigeria's regional and federal structure. In 1914, hopes of economic benefits from a more compact administration inspired the British authorities to amalgamate the governments of southern and northern protectorates into a single Nigerian state

(Crowder 1966). However, the amalgamation of Nigeria was only in principle; in practice, the southern and northern Nigeria were run separately (Okonjo 1974).

Nigeria's first constitution, the Clifford Constitution of 1922, was designed to follow up the initial British occupation of the country by introducing (representative) modern state institutions (Kirk-Greene 1997, 34). However, the introduction of a legislative council in which the people of the northern region were excluded, was the first act of constitutional separation of northern and southern Nigeria. For more than three decades after amalgamation (1914 – 1947), the political leaders of southern and northern Nigeria were formally separated, precluding their interaction in any common political forum. On the implications of this system, C.M. Ngou (1989, 85) asserts, 'it is likely that if the north had participated in the council in the same way as the south, the roots of wider popular democracy in Nigeria might have gone that far – with all the implications for democratic stability which long experience could give'.

The Richards Constitution of 1946 was introduced to remedy the flaws of the 1922 constitution. It established a legislative council in which southern and northern Nigeria were represented. However, the constitution, ironically, was fundamentally flawed by its entrenching of the regional divisions it sought to bridge. The constitution's provision for a formal division of Nigeria into three regions was a targeted differentiation, aimed at granting self-rule to the three geo-political zones of the country, while leaving the control of the centre to the colonial government.

The regionalisation policy produced three enduring problems. The first is the fear of regional domination arising from the fact that one region (Northern Region) was geographically and demographically larger than the other two regions combined, giving the Region an electoral advantage over the other regions. The structural imbalance in Nigeria's regional system created the fear of Northern hegemony and encouraged an intense struggle by each region to dominate or avert being dominated (Kirk-Greene 1975; Dudley 1973; Post and Vickers 1973). The second problem is the minority problem. Regionalism enabled the three biggest ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) to take command of regional and national institutions and to block opportunities for minority representation. This gave rise to intense pressure by the minority communities for greater autonomy and representation (Okpu 1977; Akinyele 1996). The third problem is the problem of stronghold. Under a plurality/majoritarian electoral system, three political parties dominated by the three majority ethnic groups emerged as the leading parties at the regional and federal levels. The emergence of ethnic parties led to ethnic voting which, in turn, resulted to the division of Nigeria into political strongholds (Diamond 1988; Mackintosh 1966; Sklar 1963).

The Nigerian political scene during the First Republic (1960-1966) consisted of three main regions; although a fourth region, the Mid-West Region, was created in June 1963. Each of the three regions was controlled by a single ethnic majority and a party representing it. With guaranteed access to power at the regional level, each group used its party to compete for power at the centre (Mackintosh 1965; Nnoli 1978). This set up was enhanced by a system of apportionment of seats which ensured the overrepresentation of the regional majorities; the Hausa-Fulani were the most overrepresented, controlling nearly three-quarters of the Northern Regional Assembly seats from 1961 to 1965 with little more than half of the region's population (Horowitz 1985, 603). The Hausa-Fulani, using its party – the Northern People's Congress (NPC), won most of the federal seats in the northern region. This majority ensured the party's control of not only the northern region but also its domination of the federal government; a domination that was keenly challenged by Igbo and Yoruba politicians. It was the southern challenge and the determined efforts of the north to preserve its hold on power that caused the series of crises that culminated in the military intervention of 1966 and the civil war of 1967.

Post-independence remedies

The advent of military rule and the outbreak of civil war provided the context against which institutional reforms were implemented in the first two decades after Nigeria's independence. Nigeria's constitutional engineering of 1966-1967 and 1976-1979 was motivated by the search for solutions to the crises that engulfed the First Republic. In particular, framers of the reforms tried to tackle the effects of regionalism by modifying the framework for distributing political power and encouraging politics of moderation and integration (Suberu 2001, 1998; Ayoade 1986; Phillips 1980). Series of remedies including territorial restructuring, electoral reforms and revision of office distribution arrangement were targeted mainly at removing fears of regional domination, breaking down political strongholds and protecting the minorities.

Nigeria's internal boundaries were the first area to be amended after independence. They were adjusted from the initial three regions to 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory, in separate state creation exercises. The motive of each state creation exercise differs, but (for the purpose of conflict management) state creation has been used to achieve two main goals. Firstly, to ameliorate the problems of the minorities by insulating them from majority dominance. Secondly, to address the fear of regional domination by moderating the influence of the three majority ethnic groups that dominated the former regions. The three regions were divided into twelve states in 1967, specifically, to counter allegations by secessionist Biafra that Nigeria was dominated by the large northern region, to secure the loyalty of northern minorities, and to keep the eastern minorities away from Biafran control (Horowitz 1985, 604). The motivation for creation of states has, however, changed dramatically following the revision of revenue allocation formula in favour of the federal government in the 1970s (Suberu 1991). At this time, the three major ethnic groups which hitherto opposed state creation became the main agitators of new states. Because the military administrations transformed state governments to main conduits of federal resource distribution in the 1970s, groups interpreted having more states as a way of expanding their share of federal resources. This perception has persisted, fuelling interminable demands for new states.

A second measure – the Federal Character Principle – was developed as an important guide to the distribution of jobs and resources among Nigeria's diverse groups and a mechanism to address minority exclusion and fear of regional domination. To ensure that no one group or a combination of them dominates the government, the federal character principle requires Nigerian president to form a broad-based government by selecting at least one member of the federal cabinet from each state. The government is also required to distribute senior civil service, military, para-military and diplomatic positions among individuals from various states (Ekeh and Osaghae 1989; Kirk-Greene 1983). The federal character principle was further extended to the formation of political parties, requiring parties to reflect Nigeria's federal character in the spread of their offices, membership, and leadership. This doctrine was reaffirmed in the 1999 Constitution, which established a special commission to enforce the principle (see Third Schedule, Part 1, Section 7, 1999 Constitution). Since 1979, the federal character principle has become the fundamental philosophy of distributive politics in Nigeria.

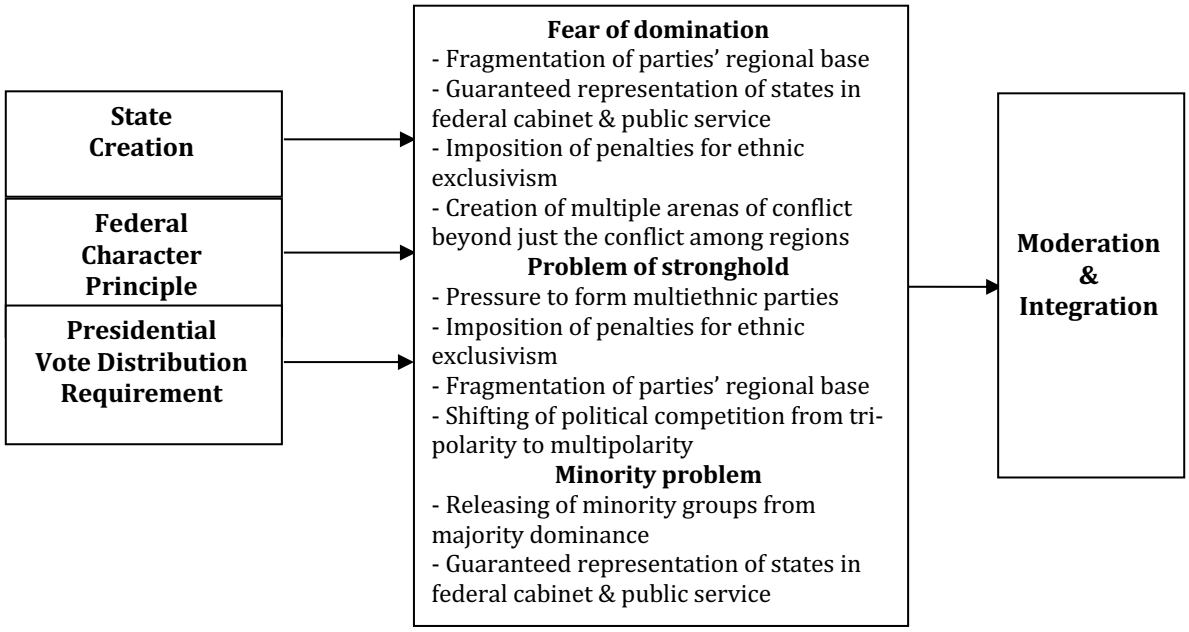
Electoral innovations were the third measure adopted to encourage moderation and integration in Nigeria. Two innovative reforms were undertaken - the first was the replacement of Nigeria's parliamentary system with the American-style presidential system, while the second was the introduction of rigorous electoral formula for election of the president and state governors (Ayoade 1986; Phillips 1980). The aim of the measures is to have a nationally elected president that might be more broadly representative and to establish a system of separation of powers that could prevent an ethnic group that dominates one arm of government from dominating the entire state (Horowitz 1985, 636). The principal device designed to encourage

broad-based politics was the presidential electoral formula. The 1979 Constitution introduced a provision which required candidates to win a plurality of votes nationwide together with 25 per cent of the votes in at least two-thirds of the states to be duly elected as president (see Sections 125 and 126). Since no one or two ethnic groups had voters distributed widely enough to meet this requirement, it was expected that politicians would mobilise broad multi-ethnic support under a small number of parties.

Evaluating the post-independence reforms

Like medical treatment, institutional reforms are less likely to succeed unless prescribed remedies are properly aligned with one another. As Reynolds (2004, 61) notes 'when political institutions do not work in concert, measures that individually seem fitting and positive may combine to produce an outcome that is far less than the sum of its parts or may even make things worse'. The alignment of Nigeria's post-civil war institutions is perhaps the underlying reason for the relative success of the institutions. When assessed individually, each of the three post-independence remedies appears to be grounded on a plausible but incomplete logic. Although the presidential electoral formula, for example, created incentives for party consolidation, 'by itself it was not sufficient to produce broadly multiethnic parties' (Horowitz 1985, 636-637); countervailing incentives were surely needed to achieve that goal. Independently, the three reform measures produced distinct effects, but together they contributed to, some extent, the achievement of the desired goal of moderation and integration. The results of Nigeria's institutional reforms are presented in the following graphic illustration.

Figure 1: Outcome of Nigeria's institutional reforms



Source: designed by the author

In practice, the post-independence institutional reforms have produced relative realignment of party politics in Nigeria (Diamond 1987; Paden 1997; Akinola 2014). For instance, in the 1979 and 1983 elections, they made it possible for the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) with strong base in the south to draw large support in the north-central Plateau state, while the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which is associated with the north also received

strong support in the southern states of Rivers and Cross River (Diamond 1982; Ollawa 1989; Joseph 1991). Since 1979, only multiethnic political parties with substantial cross-regional support have been able to win the presidency (Paden 1997; Bogaards 2003; Kendhammer 2010). The practice of reflecting Nigeria's federal character in appointments into the federal cabinet and public institutions have produced an awareness of the need for fair distribution of key offices and, to a large extent, devolution of power and resources to the state and local levels (Mustapha 2009). The quest for broad-based support has encouraged political parties and candidates to behave more moderately. Studies show the increasing tendency of political parties to engage in issue-based campaigns rather than in ethnic or religious-based appeals (Kuenzi and Lambright 2015). Even when ethnic or religious mobilisation occurs, one study finds that political parties have developed the capacity to compartmentalise such ethnic actions and to cover up for the chauvinistic statements or campaigns of their members (Kendhammer 2010). Previously, parties would indeed strive to outdo each other in ethnic or regional appeals. The results of Nigeria's post-independence institutional reform has been remarkable – one analyst sees it as one of the country's 'real political achievements since the civil war' (Diamond 1997, 474).

Gaps in Nigeria's institutional arrangement

Although Nigeria's institutional reform has been hailed as relatively successful (Horowitz 1985; Suberu and Diamond 2002; Filippov et al. 2004), the passage of time and changes in context have created room for improvement. Like medical treatment, institutional reform is a temporally defined task - different stages and severities of illness require different treatments (Reynolds 2004, 58-59). This means that institutional reform process could stretch from emergency treatment to convalescence period and long-term case management. Yet, this basic medical tenet has been essentially neglected in the Nigerian case. Framers of Nigerian institutions have ignored the warning that institutional problems 'do not [just] disappear when new institutions are adopted and put into operations' (Horowitz 1993, 23). As such, they have failed to follow up the 1967-1979 reforms with convalescence and long-term case management. Efforts to implement further reforms after 1979 have been largely unsuccessful (Read 1991; Oyediran and Agbaje 1991; Ihonvbere 2000; Ibrahim 2006; Orji 2020).

One of the most recent effort at revising Nigeria's institutions is the National Conference inaugurated by President Goodluck Jonathan on 17 March 2014. The product of the Conference is a report containing over 600 resolutions. A cursory look at the report shows that it did not substantially depart from the 1979 Constitution on many critical questions. The report touches on a wide variety of issues and proposes many policy and constitutional changes that are not relevant (Ejobowah 2009). It is very unlikely that the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference will be implemented because of the difficulty of mobilising the consensus needed to implement the several constitutional changes it proposed. Experience has shown that reforms are more likely to succeed under Nigerian civilian regimes when they are targeted and minimal rather than indiscriminate and extensive. Besides, the 2014 National Conference did not propose innovative solutions to key political questions. For instance, on the crucial indigeneity question, the Conference recommended a constitutional provision guaranteeing the right of any Nigerian to be resident or domiciled in any part of Nigeria, and the removal of the constitutional requirement of indigenity in the appointment of federal ministers.[1] Such measures are, of course, necessary but not sufficient to address an issue such as the indigeneity question, which

[1] See pages 547-550 of Final Draft of Conference Report, National Conference 2014. Available at: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/wp-content/uploads/National-Conference-2014-Report-August-2014-Table-of-Contents-Chapters-1-7.pdf.

is embedded with deep social and cultural connotations. A more robust and innovative strategy is required to create incentives for inter-group accommodation.

The failure to implement follow up reforms has resulted to the inability to resolve the three main problems deriving from regionalism. The problems of stronghold, fear of regional domination, and the minority problem have persisted. Although creation of states released the minority groups from majority dominance and condensed the sphere of influence of the three majority groups, it has not substantially changed political networks, coalitions and symbolisms. Nigerian politics has continued to play out in ethno-regional terms (Paden 1999), and the climate of inter-group fear and mistrust has remained pervasive. For the first three decades after independence, there were strong sentiments in southern Nigeria against the prolonged northern domination of power (Okeke 1992, Ekwe-Ekwe 1985). However, in 1999, important shifts in presidential politics led to the rebalancing of the power relations between the north and the south. As a result of the informal power sharing arrangement set up by Nigeria's ethno-political elite, all three political parties in the 1999 elections selected only southern candidates in the presidential elections. In a replay of the inter-elite concession of 1999, the three major parties in the 2007 elections nominated northern candidates. The inability of northern politicians to control the presidency for a full four-year term following the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua in May 2010 created the perception that the North has been systematically outmanoeuvred and disempowered (Hoffmann 2014; ICG 2010). The elevation of Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian from the Niger Delta region, and his subsequent election as President in 2011, overturned the informal power-sharing arrangement established by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 1999. It brought back the calls for a power shift, this time, to the north. Recent studies suggest that the sense of marginalization and frustration in the North was the primary cause of the deadly post-election violence in 2011 (Orji 2013; Bekoe 2011; Gberie 2011). In 2015, Muhammed Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) defeated President Goodluck Jonathan in that year's general elections. The emergence of President Buhari and his re-election in 2019 ensure that the north received and retained power for the last nearly eight years. Politicians from southern Nigeria, particularly from the South East Nigeria, are canvassing for a powershift during the 2023 general elections.

The second longstanding challenge deriving from regionalism is the problem of stronghold. A stronghold is a constituency in which the winning candidate can count on a voting lead of at least 20 per cent over the next candidate (Kriele 1979, 354). In Nigeria, political strongholds are sustained by ethno-regional sentiments and voting – 'the propensity of people from a particular ethnic [or regional] group to vote en masse for candidates or parties identified with their group' (Madrid 2011, 274). Data on party representation in the House of Representative since 1959 have shown strong regional concentration of party support and ethno-regional voting (Ehwarieme 2011, 188). Ethno-regional voting in Nigeria reached a disturbing level in the 2011 presidential election, raising fears of possible relapse to the ethnic politics of the 1960s. In that election, the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), which appeals mostly to the Muslim North, won the entire Muslim North (12 states), while the ruling PDP and its southern Christian candidate, Goodluck Jonathan, won the entire south (with the exception of Osun state) and Christian areas of the north-central (Orji and Uzordi 2012, 37-38). If the problem of stronghold persists, it could shut out the minorities from the political system, erode their interest in politics, and make them susceptible to radical ideas. In addition, the existence of stronghold strips election of its value as an integrating factor. A genuine election campaign, which is an opportunity for candidates to attract supporters, becomes unnecessary if candidates and parties are assured of victory even before the election.

The third longstanding problem associated with regionalism is the minority problem. The minority problem has evolved over time. It began as ethnic minority problem, in which 'ethnic

minorities were defined in contradistinction to the major groups with whom they coexist in political systems, as groups which experience systemic discrimination and domination because of numerical inferiority and a host of historical and sociological factors, and have taken political action in furtherance of their collective interests' (Osaghae 1998, 3). However, since the 1970s, the minority problem has transformed. The proliferation of new states and local governments has produced new majorities and new minorities, and spurred new forms of competition, discrimination and conflicts (Bach 1989; Ekeh and Osaghae 1989; HRW 2006; Ejobowah 2013). Moreover, population shifts and internal migration in the past six decades have meant that many Nigerians no longer live in their native land, but are scattered around the country as settlers.[2] This has contributed to the so-called indigeneity problem. In many urban centres in Nigeria, people who think their ancestors arrived earlier have tended to demand political priority by virtue of indigenousness over those deemed to be immigrants or 'settlers'. Where such demands have met stiff resistance by the 'settlers' conflicts often ensue. Some of the most violent conflicts in contemporary Nigeria have occurred between the recognised inhabitants, or 'indigenes', of a particular place and supposedly later 'settlers' (Harnischfeger 2004; HRW 2006). The 'indigene'-'settler' conflict is usually very volatile because it reinforces and is reinforced by other identity-based cleavages (Sayne 2012). The territorial solutions to the minority problem have proved inadequate because no matter how the boundaries of the states are adjusted to resolve the problem, they would always carve out new minorities. Using legal instruments to address the problem as some have prescribed (Ejobowah 2013), may also not suffice because of the government's low capacity for law enforcement (Orji 2010). What is required is a measure that would create incentives for the accommodation of the minorities.

Strengthening Nigeria's political institutions: a prescription

The fundamental problem with Nigeria's institutional arrangement is that it has failed to eliminate the country's longstanding political challenges. The country is therefore faced with an urgent need to contain the deterioration of its political situation. Any measure geared towards addressing Nigeria's current political challenges must focus on guaranteeing group accommodation and moderating the salience of territory in politics. Of the three contemporary challenges, alleviating the fear of regional domination appears to be the least complicated task. There is a consensus among the Nigerian political elite that rotation of the presidency between the northern and southern regions is the most acceptable mechanism for peaceful and democratic succession (Ekwueme 2005; Uwazurike 1997; Akinola 1996; Abatan 1994). This consensus reflects in the decision by the 1995 National Constitution Conference to constitutionalise the rotation principle.[3] It also provides the basis for the reaffirmation of the 1995 decision by the National Political Reform Conference of 2005, the 2014 National Conference, and the 2016 Constitutional and Electoral Reform Committee. However, questions regarding the intentions of the sponsors of the conferences led to the rejection of the proposal.

Before 1995, the more centripetalist group of Nigerian reformers opposed the constitutionalisation of the rotational principle. This group generally rejected any measure which recognises ethnicity or regionalism as a building block of politics. During the 1979 constitutional review, the proposal for the constitutionalisation of the rotational principle was rejected on the grounds that Nigeria's constitution should emphasise 'only those ideas and values which render the area or ethnic origin of a person irrelevant in determining his quality as an individual' (Panter-Brick 1978, 314). In 1986, constitutionalisation of the rotational

[2] Nigeria's urban population has increased from 6.0 million in 1960 to 102.8 million in 2010 – the figure will reach 148.9 million in 2020, see Onibokun and Faniran 1995, 6.

[3] Report of the Constitutional Conference Containing the Resolutions and Recommendations, vol. II., 1995.

principle was again suggested during the national debate coordinated by the Political Bureau in preparation for the transition to civil rule. For a second time, the proposal was rejected based on the claims that 'a constitutional provision for rotation amounts to an acceptance of our inability to grow beyond ethnic or state loyalty'[4]. Perhaps, it was the tensions that stemmed from the annulment of the 1993 presidential election that convinced the Nigerian elite that institutionalisation of their commitment to accommodation and integration is required, and from then, efforts to constitutionalise the rotation principle gained a new impetus.

The principle of office rotation has a deep cultural and historical foundation in Nigeria. Several scholars have reported the evolution of the idea of representativeness in political governance in various parts Nigeria even before the advent of Islam and colonialism (Dent 1966, 465; Akinola 1988, 445, fn. 19). The quest for inclusive political systems was driven by the autonomist tendencies of local communities and their demands for a voice in the conduct of their own affairs (Isichei 1983, 178-201). Analysis by Uwazurike (1997, 335) showed that 'historically, no monarch or body of elders made decisions except through procedural consensus building. And among the autonomous communities, notions of numerical supremacy had no bearing: each group, no matter how small, possessed an embedded sovereignty that did not acknowledge the sort of marginalisation that might imperil its corporate existence'. In these traditional societies, offices were shared and rotated among the 'ruling families' or 'dynasties' (Akinola 1996, 18; Abatan 1994). Thus, the contemporary idea of rotation of presidency is seemingly a reinvention of a deep-rooted heritage. What can be derived from the foregoing is that there is a strong cultural and political support for the principle of rotational presidency; however, failure to institute an acceptable process for its constitutionalisation has reduced it to an informal arrangement. The constitutionalisation of the rotational principle is more likely to succeed if the proposal is presented as a single legislative bill, without subsuming it in the all-inclusive National Conference model which has often failed.

If constitutionalisation of rotation of presidency is the recipe for alleviating the fear of regional domination, what then can be done to ameliorate the problems of stronghold and minority exclusion? In the existing repertoire of institutional solutions for divided societies, revision of the electoral system to encourage cooperation and integration appears to be the most plausible choice. Analysts agree that Nigeria's plurality electoral system is a primary cause of minority exclusion and ethno-regional exclusiveness (Kriele 1979; Diamond 1997; Bogaards 2003). Nigeria's electoral system design for federal and state legislatures replicates the Westminster model in its simple election by majority rule. The candidates that receive a simple majority in each of the country's 109 senatorial districts, 360 federal constituencies, and 990 state constituencies are deemed elected.[5] This system based on pure majority rule is known for its many drawbacks and risks (Lijphart 1977; Horowitz 1985). Since the 1990s, there is a clear consensus in favour of the proportional representation system because of its capacity to de-emphasise territorial exclusiveness and to promote minority inclusion (Reynolds 1999; Bogaards 2003).

What form of the proportional representation system is ideal for Nigeria? A history of failed elections has led to a general loss of confidence in Nigeria's electoral institutions. This therefore implies that only a system that is simple, clear and easy to understand by the voters and politicians would appeal to Nigerians. The country also requires a system that is economical and easy to administer. Hence, the list proportional representation system becomes the preferred option (Reynolds, Reilly, and Ellis 2005, 153-156). By making it imperative for political parties to appeal to a wide spectrum of society in order to maximise their overall vote,

[4] See, Government's Views and Comments on the Findings and Recommendations of the Political Bureau, Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, 1987: 23.

[5] see Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Sections 48, 49, 77, and 117

the list PR system addresses our primary concern – which is to eliminate ethnic exclusivity and encourage minority inclusion. It achieves this by the use of party lists, where political parties present lists of candidates to the voters on a national/regional/state basis in multi-member districts. The electorates are expected to vote for a party; seats are then distributed to parties in proportion to their overall share of votes in the electoral district and winning candidates are selected from the lists in order of their position on the party list.

How would a list PR system be implemented in Nigeria? The PR system will apply to only federal and state legislative elections, since a proportional electoral formula already applies to the election of the president and governors. For the purpose of electing federal and state lawmakers, the country's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, will be used as multi-member electoral districts. The adoption of the pre-existing administrative divisions means that there may be wide variations in their sizes, however this approach eliminates the need to draw new boundaries for elections and makes it possible to relate electoral districts to existing identified and accepted communities. In the transition period, the electoral districts will maintain their current magnitude ranging from 2 to 24 seats per state in the House of Representatives and 3 seats per state and one seat for the FCT in the Senate. The number of seats per district can be subsequently modified by the electoral commission to reflect proportionate distribution of seats among the states and FCT.[6] To maintain the simplicity of the proposed system, a closed list system is recommended. In a closed list system, the order of candidates elected by that list is predetermined by the parties themselves; voters simply choose the party they prefer. In this way, the system also provides the political space for parties to include members of minority groups (including women, youths and people with disability) who might otherwise have difficulty getting elected.

The above proposal differs, to some extent, from the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) inaugurated by the government in 2007 to examine the country's electoral process and suggest improvements. The Committee proposed a mixed system which combines the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and modified proportional representation for legislative elections at federal, state and local levels.[7] The mixed system proposed by the Committee retains the FPTP in the election of the existing 360 seats, and recommends the creation of additional 108 seats (30 per cent of the existing seats) to be filled through a closed list PR system. Besides providing for a gradual shift away from pure plurality system, there is really no need for a mixed system. If the goal of the reform is to encourage inclusiveness and cooperation, then the FPTP may not be needed at all. One salient problem with the ERC report is that it did not contain any clear explanation for recommending an increase in the number of Nigerian law makers by 30 per cent. If accepted, this measure could spiral the already high cost of governance in Nigeria.

A shift from plurality to proportional representation system, offers some specific benefits to Nigeria. Firstly, the capacity of the PR system to faithfully translate votes into seats can help reduce the problem of malapportionment which has historically affected the country. Secondly, one of the major impacts of the plurality system on Nigerian politics is that it reinforced the territorisation of politics. The system exaggerated the phenomenon of ethno-regional strongholds where one party has a guaranteed prospect of winning all the seats in an area. The PR system will moderate the significance of territorial representation and emphasise party and ideological representation. In addition, it will promote 'descriptive representation' – a tendency

[6] A minimum number of representatives per state can be set to ensure equity. Quotas on the inclusion of specific groups like women and youths can also be applied.

[7] See Report of the Electoral Reform Committee, Volume 1, Main Report, 2008, page 52, available online at: http://eie.ng/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/JusticeMohammedUwaisReport.pdf.

of the legislature to truly mirror a country's national character (Reynolds, Reilly and Ellis 2005, 9).

Two drawbacks of the PR system could, however, water down its relevance to Nigeria. The first is the possible intensification of the democracy deficit in Nigerian parties. Many Nigerian parties are run like mafia organisations by political godfathers who use money and violence to control the political process and to decide party nominations (Hoffmann 2010; Ibrahim 2007; Omobowale and Olutayo 2007). If a list PR system, in which the process of candidate nomination is squarely in the hands of party leaders, is added to this picture, it may reinforce the undemocratic behaviour of party leaders. Yet, an increase in inter-party competition, which is very likely under a PR system, and the need to reduce dissent and splits, could force party leaders to democratise. The second potential risk of the PR system is possible fragmentation of the party system, leading to frequent legislative gridlock. Nigeria currently has 18 registered political parties of which the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) are dominant. It is likely that the introduction of PR system will enable more parties to enter the parliament, making it more difficult to garner the consensus needed to pass laws. Even under the current dominant party system, Nigeria has had to deal with threats of legislative gridlock, where the parliament has found it difficult to pass important laws such as the appropriation bill (Aborisade 2014). This problem may intensify under a PR system. However, Nigeria's presidential system and its electoral formula may moderate fragmentation and impasse as smaller parties may be forced for form alliances in order to be nationally attractive and relevant.

Conclusion

Nigeria has had a long and challenging history of institutional reforms. The nearly one century of Nigeria's constitutional development has been devoted to the search for remedy to the country's changing political problems (see Table 1 below for a summary of the remedies prescribed in Nigerian constitutions from 1946 to 1979). Each new constitution reflects the determination to correct the proven failures of its predecessors and the side effects emanating from past remedies. This article argues that the inability to follow up the reforms introduced by the 1979 constitution has resulted in relapse and mutation of Nigeria's political maladies. What is now required are innovative measures that will repair the impaired institutions and prevent recurrence of the problems. This article sees a potential in combining consociational and centripetal remedies. The proposal for the constitutionalisation of the principle of rotational presidency draws from the consociational idea of resolving problems by establishing a regime of agreed guarantees. Conversely, the prescription of proportional representation system is based on the centripetal strategy of creating incentives, particularly electoral incentives, for integration and cooperation.

The core question now is the possibility of adoption of these prescriptions considering the many obstacles to constitutional change (Horowitz 2014). The constitutionalisation of the rotation principle appears more likely to succeed because there is already a cultural and political basis for the measure and its desirability is widely accepted. The adoption of the PR system is less likely. First, there is a burden of history. Nigerians are deeply accustomed to the plurality/majoritarian system bequeathed by the British, and many will be hesitant to embrace change. This hesitation is often associated with a general tendency of risk-aversion – a strong inclination to stay with what is familiar. Second, there may be conflict of interests. The political elite may want to know the relative benefits and costs of the proposed change to them and their parties, and to explore alternative courses of action. In negotiating change, what is good for the nation may conflict with individual and party preferences. There is, however, a major opportunity to overcome the adoption problem. Nigeria is presently dealing with one of the

most difficult crises of governance in its history. The failure of the government to provide adequate security, curb corruption and conduct credible elections has inspired demands for institutional change. The question of desirability of the PR system could be introduced to the on-going discussion. The question can be linked to the debate of the past constitutional conferences and committees report. Considering the mounting pressure for institutional change, there is no doubt that Nigeria will continue its interminable search for stability.

Table 1: Summary of major remedies prescribed in Nigerian constitutions, 1946-1979

Constitution	Malady diagnosed	Remedy prescribed
1946	Unitary or federal government Non representativeness of parliament	Limited dyarchy - regionalism Expansion of parliament
1951	Inadequacy of a single government	Expansion of regionalism
1954	Failure of shared government	Federalism
1963	Minority demand for autonomy	Creation of Midwest Region
1979	Minority demand for autonomy Strong regional governments Fear of regional domination Existence of political strongholds	Creation of states Creation of multiple states Federal character principle Presidential vote distribution requirement

Source: adapted from Kirk-Greene (1997: 50).

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