

Elite perceptions about power-sharing in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines the perceptions of the elite about the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria. It looks at the range of meanings the elite attribute to power-sharing, their assessment of its effectiveness, and how the practice can be modified. Elite perceptions of power-sharing in Nigeria were investigated through a series of interviews with selected federal legislators. The article observes that the elite interpret power-sharing in institutional and communal terms, although the communal perspective appears more widespread. The study also found that there is a strong feeling among the elite that power-sharing is working. This belief is based on the claim that power-sharing has effectively widened the scope of political representation in Nigeria, eliminated uncertainty and tension in political competition, and inspired the people to easily converge around political institutions and organisations. The study notes that power-sharing is however limited by its tendency to discourage the application of merit in the recruitment of political office holders while overemphasising communal and sectarian differences among Nigerians.

Keywords: democracy, elite, Nigeria, power-sharing, politics, zoning, power rotation

Introduction

Decades of institutional engineering, which received its greatest impetus in the 1970s following the transition to civil rule programme initiated by the administration of General Murtala Mohammed, mark out Nigeria as a model for the discussion of power-sharing in Africa. The idea of power-sharing is based on the belief that in a multi-ethnic society, elite classes from two or more ethnic groups would have to collaborate to be able to govern peacefully and effectively (Schneckener, 2002, p. 203). The institutional changes that characterized Nigeria's search for peaceful inter-group coexistence and democratic stability include several constitutional amendments, restructuring of states and local governments, revision of office distribution arrangements, reform of political parties, and review of the revenue allocation system (Phillips, 1980; Whitaker, 1981; Ayoade, 1986; Diamond, 1982; Ekeh & Osaghae, 1989; Adebayo, 1990; Akinola, 1996; Suberu, 2001; Ejobowah, 2009; Bogaards, 2010). The unprecedented institutional transformation that has occurred in Nigeria was a response to the deadly ethnic conflicts that engulfed the country in the 1950s and 1960s (Nnoli, 1978), which eventually culminated in a civil war in 1967. As analysts acknowledge, the Nigerian civil war occurred mainly as a

result of the deep-seated mistrust and tensions between the predominantly Muslim communities in the North and the mostly Christian population in Southern Nigeria (Panter-Brick, 1970; Kirk-Greene, 1971; Dudley, 1973; Post & Vickers, 1973). The main aim of institutional engineering in Nigeria, therefore, has been to equitably distribute state resources, including political power, and to create a national polity that would accommodate the interests of diverse regional, religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities in the country (Oyovbaire, 1983; Horowitz, 1985). Since the 1970s, Nigeria's institutional setting has been tremendously tinkered with in order to yield the dearly desired 'unity in diversity'.

Since the 1990s, some African countries confronted by the challenge of violent conflicts and democratic instability have followed Nigeria's footsteps by embarking on institutional engineering aimed at reallocating or sharing state power. Power-sharing has therefore become a key remedy for conflict and political instability in Africa (Mehler 2009a; Cheeseman 2011). Although Nigeria offers an early model of power-sharing in Africa, there is an amazing predisposition to neglect Nigeria's experience in scholarly accounts. There are two major reasons for this development. The first relates to the tendency of contemporary studies of power-sharing in

Africa to focus on countries experiencing civil war and violent conflict (Cheeseman & Tendi, 2010; Mehler, 2009b; Lemarchand, 2007; Rothchild, 2005; Tull & Mehler, 2005; Spears, 2000). The second reason for the lack of scholarly attention on power-sharing in Nigeria has to do with what appears to be memory loss of the origin, meaning, goals, and achievements of power-sharing in Nigeria. Many students of Nigerian politics and the 'new generation' of the Nigerian elite tend to accept and work with the repertoire of institutional measures in the country's political toolbox, without constantly reflecting on the origin, purpose and results of the measures. This attitude reflects in the inadequate documentation and analysis of Nigeria's experience with power-sharing by both academics and policymakers (however, a few exceptions include, Agbaje, 1998; Akinyele, 2000; Njoku, 2000; Isumonah, 2001; Suberu, 2001; Mustapha, 2004; Orji, 2009).

My primary concern in this article is not to debate the status of Nigeria's institutional engineering or to present a history of power-sharing in Nigeria since these have already been addressed elsewhere (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Jinadu, 1985; Agbaje, 1998; Orji, 2009). Instead, the goal of this article is to appraise the level of knowledge and perceptions of the contemporary

Nigerian elite¹ about the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria and to show that a systematic examination of the Nigerian case can provide critical insights into the functioning of this very important aspect of political governance in Africa. It is interesting to note that some of the difficult questions troubling contemporary analysts of power-sharing in Africa, such as the issue of dimensions of power-sharing, inclusiveness, extent or degree of power-sharing, and local level power-sharing (Mehler, 2009b; LeVan, 2011) can be addressed by looking closely at the Nigerian case, considering that the practice of power-sharing has been a longstanding strategy of political settlement in some parts of Nigeria (Orji, 2009) and that it has been applied extensively in the four dimensions of power,² later identified by scholars (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003).

¹ The concept of elite is used here to denote persons who hold top positions in important organisations or who have held such positions in the past and 'who participate in or directly influence national political decision-making' (Burton and Higley, 2001, p. 182). These persons include members of the House of Representatives.

² The territorial dimension deals with the creation of states and local governments; fiscal dimension entails the application of principles of derivation and equality of states in revenue allocation; political dimension involves the application of the principles of zoning and federal character in office allocation; while the military dimension has to do with ethno-regional consideration in the location of military formations and appointment of top military commanders (see Orji, 2009).

Investigating elite perceptions about power-sharing

This study investigates the perceptions of the Nigerian elite about power-sharing through a series of interviews with the members of Nigeria's lower federal parliament - the House of Representatives. The members of the House of Representatives are well suited to provide the required information in this study because, in the first place, they mostly belong to what might be termed a 'new generation' of Nigerian elite and have been involved, to some extent, in the interpretation, implementation and preservation of power-sharing arrangements in Nigeria. Consequently, they are better placed than any other section of the society to provide an assessment of power-sharing in Nigeria.

Secondly, the members of the House of Representatives have a much broader, and more national view of politics than most Nigerians. As such, they can provide a national perspective to the topic, and at the same time reflect the perspectives of their local constituencies.

Finally, the members of the House of Representatives are the largest pool of elite from where one can conveniently draw a good sample. The House of Representatives provides a diversified mix of elite members, representing different ethnic, regional,

political, religious, educational, generational and occupational backgrounds.

The sample of respondents was strategic in the sense that it was aimed at ensuring a spread across states, ethnic groups, geopolitical zones, gender groups, and political parties. A total of seventy-two members of the House of Representatives (representing twenty percent of the House) were selected to participate in the research, out of which eleven were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured and took an average of twenty-five minutes. Bearing in mind that politicians of the level of federal parliamentarians are very busy people, and the fact that it was quite difficult to get them to grant oral interviews of several minutes, I distributed questionnaires (with the same questions in my interview guide), which prospective respondents who could not grant an oral interview could answer in writing at their convenience. A total of eight written responses were returned out of thirty-six distributed. The field research for this study was carried out between December 2009 and February 2010.

Interpreting power-sharing

My assessment of elite perceptions of the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria began with a brief review of the respondents' understanding of the concept of power-

sharing. The responses I received show two distinct interpretations of power-sharing among the respondents: what I call the communal view and the institutional perspective. The majority of the respondents hold the communal view of power-sharing. This view emphasizes the division of powers among communal groups and highlights political inclusiveness as the kernel of democratic governance. One can identify two different shades of opinions among the communalists. The first focuses on the alternation of political offices among different communal groups. Many respondents see the essence of power-sharing in the practice of zoning and rotation of offices among different communities at federal, state and local levels. They provided several illustrations of how zoning and rotation of offices work at the state and local levels.³

One example focuses on Imo State, which, like every other state in Nigeria, is politically divided into three senatorial zones,⁴ and where debates about power-sharing are very strong. As one respondent asserts:

³ I focused on power-sharing at the local level because the functioning of zoning and rotation of offices at the federal level has been sufficiently described in the literature (see, for instance, Suberu, 2001; Orji, 2008).

⁴ Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri senatorial zones

the people [of Imo State] have so far kept faith with some form of power-sharing; that was what produced Governor Achike Udenwa. When he finished, Okigwe said they must take power, which they are doing now through Governor Ikedi Ohakim. Some people are saying that the next governor would come from Owerri zone (Maduabum 2010).

A return of the governorship position to Owerri zone would have marked the beginning of another circle of office rotation considering that the first governor of Imo State in this Fourth Republic (Governor Evan Enwerem) came from Owerri zone. Evan Enwerem was succeeded by Achike Udenwa (Orlu zone) who handed over to Ikedi Ohakim (Okigwe zone). Governor Ikedi Ohakim could not win a second term perhaps due to the discontentment that followed allegations of poor performance and abuse of power against his administration. After a keenly contested governorship race in April 2011, Governor Ohakim was defeated by Rochas Okorochoa. The emergence of Rochas Okorochoa altered the zoning formula in Imo State, considering that he is from Orlu zone, and some observers feel that it was unfair for another politician from Orlu zone to govern the state not too long after Achike Udenwa completed eight years as

governor (Ugborgu, 2012). The expectation that Rochas Okorochoa's successor would come from Owerri zone in order to correct the rotation formula was dashed after Hope Uzodinma (Orlu Zone) was installed as Governor following a Supreme Court judgement that removed Emeka Ihedioha (Owerri Zone) who was elected as Governor in 2019.

The practice of power-sharing appears to be more entrenched at the local level than the state level. In Edu/Moro/Patigi Federal Constituency of Kwara State, for instance, a respondent paints a picture of a locality where leadership alternation is synonymous with politics:

In the constituency where I come from, there are three local government areas – Edu, Moro, and Patigi. The person that occupied this seat before me was from a different local government area and served for two terms [of four years each] after which I took over. I am from Patigi Local Government Area and am serving my first term... After me, someone from a third local government area would come in (Pategi 2010, emphasis mine).

In Ekwusigo, Nnewi North and Nnewi South Federal Constituency of Anambra State, there seem to be even a stricter application of zoning and office rotation:

'in a community like Nnewi town in my constituency, their House of Assembly and Chairmanship offices are strictly rotated. The person doing House of Assembly now knows that in the next four years another district would go. Their own is an inflexible rule' (Maduabum, 2010). The case of Nnewi is particularly remarkable because of the tendency to limit politicians to only one term. In many places, alternation of office occurs mostly after the incumbent has completed the maximum two terms. It is however pertinent to note that this high turnover of leaders reflects more in legislative positions than in executive offices. One reason for this is that the chief executives (i.e., presidents, governors and local government chairmen) possess greater incumbency powers to preserve their position than the legislators. The practice of alternation of offices at the local level is perhaps the main explanation for the extremely high turnover in Nigeria's National Assembly.⁵ The impact of the high turnover of leaders on policymaking and implementation has already been noted (Fashagba, 2009).

The second strand of the communal view of power-sharing associates power-sharing

⁵ In the House of Representatives of the 7th National Assembly inaugurated on the 6 June 2011, only 100 out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives were re-elected, 260 were elected for the first time, see <http://www.nassnig.org/nass2/index.php>

with the distribution of offices among individuals from different communal groups. The distinction between alternation of offices and distribution of offices lies in the fact that alternation of offices assures each community that it will occupy a particular top position at a particular point in time. So, alternation of office deals with specific offices, say presidency, governorship or local council chairmanship. But in the case of distribution of offices, the focus is on ensuring that all the major groups get a share of political offices available at every point in time. One respondent lucidly illustrates how the distribution of offices works: 'when a Governor wants to appoint commissioners, people would want him to look at communities that are not represented in any office' (Okereke, 2009). According to him, most people would consider it 'politically incorrect' for chief executives at the federal, state or local level to select more than one political appointee from a region/state, zone or community respectively, without first of all ensuring that all the relevant groups have received a fair share. In appointing federal ministers, the president is expressly mandated by the constitution to appoint at least one minister from each of the 36 states of the federation.⁶ This provision delivers the

reference point for office distribution at the state and local levels.

The culture of broad-based office distribution in Nigeria has become deeply internalized to the extent that it is now a core electoral consideration in local, regional/state and national politics (Kendhammer, 2010). Just to illustrate, many Nigerians often base their support or opposition to a particular party or candidate on the strength of assurance they have received that political offices would be fairly distributed. In many cases, as a respondent observes, 'if you don't zone properly you won't win elections. Because when some people know that their area has not been properly captured in terms of their aspirations, they will not vote for you. So, it is a very sensitive matter' (Eze, 2009). The issue of office distribution is indeed sensitive for politicians since political parties and candidates now try to outwit each other based on the aptness of their office distribution formula.

The communal view of power-sharing differs strikingly from the institutional perspective. Let me quickly note that the institutional perspective was articulated mostly by the legislators who approached the subject from a more intellectual standpoint, using this perspective as a framework to drive home the fact that a separation of powers exists between the

⁶ see sections 14(3), *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999.

executive and the legislature, and that the executive should not attempt to subordinate the legislature or usurp its powers. This opinion comes in the throes of a tense relationship between the executive and the legislature – a relationship that was characterized by blatant executive interference in the affairs of the legislature and abuse of powers of impeachment by the legislature (Fashagba, 2009; Lawan, 2010).

Those who hold the institutional perspective of power-sharing were particularly concerned that there is an over-emphasis on the distribution of state power among communal groups in Nigeria. They insist that power-sharing should also highlight other dimensions of power distribution such as the division of power among government institutions, particularly the separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judiciary as well as devolution of power among the various tiers of government.

Some respondents maintain that one reason why power-sharing among government institutions should be given due consideration is because it has been part and parcel of the traditional political culture. Specifically, a respondent cites the case of the African traditional governance system, where power is divided among institutions such as the village council,

elders' council, and the age grades. He insists that the strict division of powers between the political and religious institutions in Igbo societies, for example, is a form of power-sharing: 'I remember that in [Igbo] traditional societies, there is power-sharing between the Eze [King] and the spiritualist [Eze Mmuo]' (Okereke, 2009). The *Eze Mmuo* is the spiritual leader of the community, while the Eze is the secular/political leader.⁷ The roles of the Eze and the Eze Mmuo are well defined so that both institutions co-exist. The goal of institutional power-sharing then is to delineate responsibilities and avoid the kind of institutional conflicts that were prevalent in the first decade of the Fourth Republic.

Although it is interesting to discuss devolution and separation of powers within the context of power-sharing, the danger of 'concept stretching' (Sartori, 1970, p. 1034) makes it pertinent to limit the idea of power-sharing within the communal view as it has been used in the literature. Another reason why the idea of power-sharing should be restricted to the communal view, particularly in the Nigerian case, is because it is the view that appears most relevant to the people. Some of the respondents who call for a

⁷In some Igbo communities, the Eze is also known as Igwe, Obi, or Ezeogo.

consideration of the institutional perspective of power-sharing equally acknowledge that the communal aspects of power-sharing have far greater significance to Nigerians: '[G]overnance is about making an impact on the people. The distribution of powers between the executive, legislature, and the judiciary does not really make any impact on the people. But ethnic power-sharing affects the people directly because it is about even distribution of resources among different communities' (Okereke, 2009). In Nigeria, the political accommodation of communal groups is a more genuine goal than creating a balance among formal governmental institutions. This is because, as we already know, Nigerian politics is basically framed in communal and informal terms, and not in terms of formal institutions (Joseph, 1991; Daloz, 2005). Nevertheless, neither the communality nor the informality of Nigerian politics poses a serious obstacle to power-sharing since, as new institutionalist scholars admit, the existence of formal structures is not a precondition for the effectiveness of institutions (March & Olsen, 1984; North, 1990).

Gauging the efficacy of power-sharing

There is a strong feeling among the federal legislators I interviewed that power-sharing is a positive aspect of Nigerian politics, and that it is generally successful:

[E]very political environment has its own peculiarities. Because of the ethnic nature of the Nigerian environment, it is good therefore to assure all ethnic nationalities that they can rise to the highest level in [the] political administration of this country. This is why the issue of zoning came up. It is a welcome development that even though it is not yet in the constitution, but conventionally, it is being adhered to and that is a wonderful agreement. Power-sharing has received unanimous support that is why it is being practiced in every ward, local government area, and state (Eze, 2009).

Those who suggest that power-sharing has been effective in Nigeria base their position on four major arguments. The first is that power-sharing has successfully widened political representation in Nigeria in the post-civil war era. As several studies have documented, political representation has been broadened by the conscious efforts by successive regimes since the 1970s to share key political positions at the federal level among the major ethno-regional blocs in Nigeria (Orji, 2009; Ekeh & Osaghae, 1989). This practice has been extended to state and local levels. In this way, power-sharing has led to greater integration of communal groups into the government, which helps to prevent the likelihood that some groups

would 'agitate in the opposition permanently' (Maduabum, 2010). Power-sharing also appears to have diluted the polarizing effect of zero-sum electoral competition in Nigeria (see, in particular, Ebo, 1984), which divides communal groups into winners and losers on the one hand, and the government and opposition on the other hand (Suberu, 2007; Orji, 2010). Considering all these, it seems plausible to claim that power-sharing has been generally successful in Nigeria.

The second argument in support of the efficacy of power-sharing in Nigeria claims that the practice has the capacity to eliminate uncertainty in political succession and douse political tensions. Strict adherence to power-sharing, the argument claims, assures the people that at a particular point in time, specific communal groups would produce individuals that would occupy specific offices. In this state of affairs, communities relate with each other with a strong sense of awareness of their political prospects. This way, one of the triggers of violence in political competition between rival communal groups is substantially defused. It also makes it possible to partition and localize conflicts within the political system as political competition is more or less limited to regions, zones or communities where offices have been allocated. Experts believe that this aspect

of power-sharing has helped Nigeria avert the kind of generalized violence that has engulfed some African countries (Kendhammer, 2010; Orji, 2010; Suberu, 2007).

The third argument in support of power-sharing maintains that the practice has been effective in promoting 'unity in diversity'. The point here is simply that the culture of power sharing inspires the political elite to easily converge under different institutions and organizations regardless of Nigeria's deep diversity:

[T]o get communities to come together for the purpose of national development, all you need is to talk to the relevant stakeholders within each enclave and you will be shocked at the extent to which people can easily come together.... Before this democratic dispensation [beginning from 1999], it took us just six months to form the mega parties we have today. So, that is how Nigerians have used the system [of power sharing] so well to be able to come together. So, anytime there is a political party, you can be sure that there will be somebody from one of the 774 local government areas in it. And in that way, Nigerians have been able to create a kind of sense of belonging

in most of the political institutions that have emerged since independence (Pategi 2010, emphasis mine).

This fascinating tendency to converge is linked to two specific aspects of power-sharing. The first is a constitutional provision introduced in 1979 which requires political parties to ensure that the members of the executive committee or other governing body of the parties hail from different states of the federation.⁸The second is also a constitutional provision that requires individuals and parties vying for the office of president or governor to get not less than one-quarter of the votes cast in two-thirds of the states or local government areas to be deemed to have been duly elected as president or governor respectively.⁹ These requirements were aimed at ensuring that parties and politicians transcend regional, ethnic, and religious differences (Bogaards, 2010). Interestingly, measures aimed at expanding the organizational scope of political parties have now become useful in creating a sense of national belonging and unity in society.

⁸ see section 223(2), *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999

⁹ see sections 134(1&2) and 179(2), *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999

Finally, the respondents argue that a good measure of the efficacy of power-sharing lies in the fact that although many of its components are not legally binding, the people have come to accept it and work with it at all levels of governance. The most eloquent articulation of this view reads as follows:

Political offices are not zoned constitutionally, but we have managed it [the zoning arrangement] so well that eight years of power in the South, and then it comes to the North for another eight years; it is working. It is not in the constitution but the people have come to accept it. This is a way of showing that Nigerians are very resilient and they are able to fashion out ways of managing themselves politically (Pategi, 2010).

Couched in the above argument is the assumption that the self-sustaining capacity of power-sharing constitutes a key indicator of its effectiveness, the informality of some aspects of it notwithstanding.

To further appraise their level of satisfaction with Nigeria's power-sharing arrangement, I asked the federal legislators whether they think that it has reached a point where power-sharing should be abolished. They were all against the

abolition of power-sharing, insisting that the arrangement needs to be preserved until a time when the significance of communal cleavages in politics would have been drastically reduced. One legislator warned: 'you know our people have not developed the psyche of even development. If you remove power-sharing, people might be tempted to concentrate everything in their own place and this will create problems in Nigerian politics' (Okereke, 2009). Another argues: 'you cannot do away with power-sharing because that is what keeps us together. So if you want to have harmony, you have to have power-sharing' (Shagari, 2010). The third advised:

[W]e are still in a transitional phase, a nation that is emerging from civil war, a nation that is still bedevilled by ethnic, religious and other divisions. A country that is striving to become a nation, that its fabrics are being torn by mundane things, we need to be careful in order not to disintegrate the federation. So in this transitional phase, I support that we maintain the power-sharing arrangement' (Maduabum, 2010).

Engrained in the above comments is the value that the elite attach to power-sharing. It is interesting to see how a latter generation of the elite have imbibed the practices developed by an earlier generation, and the tendency of this

practice to be transmitted beyond the present generation.

The pitfalls of power sharing

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of power-sharing underlined above, a number of drawbacks associated with power-sharing were highlighted by the federal legislators I interviewed. Many of the concerns raised by the legislators were part and parcel of the standard criticisms against power-sharing in the literature (Ekeh & Osaghae, 1989; Bach, 1989). The first point relates to the tendency of power-sharing to discourage 'competitive spirit' and the application of merit in political recruitment: 'the best hands don't emerge sometimes because they are schemed out due to zoning and rotation. It would be good if we are doing zoning and rotation [in a way] that the best hands in every area should emerge but sometimes they can't just come up' (Maduabum, 2010). As this argument is traditionally put forward, power-sharing fails to consider the possibility that the 'right candidates' may emerge from areas that have been 'zoned out' of the arrangement, and following the zoning formula in its strictest form would lead to the elimination of the best candidates. The result is that at the end: 'you have a square peg in a round hole, just because we want our own to be there' (Shagari 2010).

The second shortcoming attributed to power-sharing by the legislators is that it encourages poor performance among elected state officials in Nigeria. The proponents of this view suggest that the term limit that power-sharing often imposes impedes continuity in government and reduce politicians' commitment to national development. To them and in line with principal-agent theory, the expectation of the chance of getting a second term is a major incentive for politicians to deliver their campaign promises during the first term (Besley and Case, 1995). However, the practice of alternation of office (zoning) in many local communities rules out the chances of rewarding many politicians who perform creditably with a second term. Precluding politicians from getting a second term, as the argument goes, is a disincentive to meritorious public service. However, this argument does not quite consider that poor performance in public office is not just a function of how long one spends in office. Apart from term limits, other factors such as the quality of party and legislative control as well as concern for political reputation can shape how officials perform in office (Besley and Case, 1995). A more resounding line of this argument considers the failure of community members to control their representatives as the main reason for poor performance by state officials: 'they [community members] feel

that it is not how much a person is doing or how good he or she is at the job that matters. They feel, look you have done your own, it is now our turn' (Shagari, 2010). In other words, rather than press for improved public service delivery, community members are more concerned with the communal identity of their representatives, thereby allowing their representatives to operate with little accountability.

Another downside of power-sharing underlined by the legislators is that it overly emphasizes the differences among Nigerians. Although it has been argued that splitting Nigerians into several political boundaries is a positive phenomenon because since the groups are now many that none of them can individually threaten the entire country (Horowitz, 1985), the legislators insist that the proliferation of political units has intensified separatism among communities and compartmentalization of individuals. The desire to get a share of state resources has fuelled this differentiation among the people who were hitherto part and parcel of a single community. Today, in a bid to include or exclude some people from partaking in the share of 'power', obnoxious notions of 'indigene' and 'non-indigene' or 'settler' and 'son of the soil' have been used in many communities, leading to the escalation of mindless

violence like the one happening in Jos, Plateau State (Orji, 2011).

Finally, there is an agreement among the legislators that although power-sharing has contributed to conflict management in Nigeria, the arrangement has not been able to translate into an effective instrument of democracy and good governance. This sounds a bit contradictory since it is difficult to effectively manage conflicts in the context of bad governance, poverty and underdevelopment. However, in Nigeria, we seem to be witnessing a situation where democracy and peace appear mutually exclusive. As many of the legislators maintained, conflict management in Nigeria has come at the cost of democratic competition, and the culture of political consensus has tended to shade poor performance in governance. The deficit of democracy and development in Nigeria tend to reproduce the conflict and tensions that power-sharing seek to mitigate. In the context of underdevelopment, the people in: 'every single village, locality, enclave, local government area or state feel divorced from the government because the government has not done its duty to the people' (Pategi, 2010). Many Nigerians are increasingly becoming discontented with power-sharing because representatives that used the arrangement to secure public office have failed to cater for the material

needs of the people. In the light of this, one legislator warned:

(Those in power should know that they hold the resources in trust for the people. And until they begin to understand that and work at ameliorating the suffering and the high poverty level that pervades the nooks and cranes of Nigeria, I am telling you [that] we would be going down the slippery slope where one day probably there might be a revolution, because there's a limit to which the people would continue to suffer anger and so much decay of infrastructure (Pategi, 2010).

The above discussion highlights the need to transform power-sharing from an instrument of resource distribution to a mechanism of democratic accountability. Power-sharing should not end with communities sending representatives to the government; community members also need to use it as a framework for controlling and receiving feedback from their representatives.

Reforming power-sharing

There are a variety of proposals put forward by the legislators on how Nigeria's power-sharing arrangement can be modified to make it more relevant and effective. The reforms suggested sought to expand the scope and constitutionalize more aspects of

power-sharing. Some legislators, especially those from the South, think that the constitutionalization of zoning and rotation of offices would improve the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria. They argue that the measure would remove all doubts around the commitment of various groups to the arrangement: '...rotation of offices should be constitutionalized since there are some that believe they are born to rule. If not, one day some would begin to deny that there is no agreement to rotate offices' (Okereke, 2009). The elite from Southern Nigeria have always desired codification of the principle of zoning and rotation of offices (Panter-Brick, 1978; Orji, 2008). For them, this would ensure the credible commitment of all parties to the arrangement. However, their counterparts from the North prefer an informal arrangement, based on the argument that power-sharing is a temporary conflict management mechanism that would be abolished later on, and so, constitutionalizing it may not be necessary. The authors of Nigeria's constitutions appear persuaded by the latter argument; hence they have repeatedly left the zoning principle out of the constitution, except in the case of ministerial appointment at the national level. Bearing in mind the heated debate generated by the issue of codification of zoning in the past, sufficient consensus is required to push this proposal through.

The second reform proposal wants the extension of the economic dimension of power-sharing to ensure more equitable economic development in Nigeria. This can be done through a legislation that would mandate the federal government to ensure that a minimum amount of money is spent to cater for the specific needs of the different geopolitical zones. The weight of the equity criteria in the distribution of Federation Account among the states already ensures that minimum resources get to all the states. Also, the offer of a 13 per cent derivation fund to the states in the Niger Delta region is another measure of fiscal power-sharing. But as the legislators note, there is a need to employ a more targeted revenue distribution strategy to address specific challenges in the different regions of Nigeria.

Some legislators suggest that power-sharing in Nigeria can be improved by broadening the arrangement to integrate traditional chieftaincy. Here is the justification for the suggestion:

(We don't respect our traditional institutions. Other societies are trying to recreate their traditions. We are destroying our own. A society cannot grow like that. There's nothing wrong in, for instance, creating a council of chiefs because the chiefs are there

and we defer to them. The emirs have authority without power. The governors have power but most of them don't have the authority that they require. When there's a religious crisis anywhere in Nigeria or [an]ethnic crisis, it is these royal fathers that the government goes to and say please help us talk to the people. So you see the difference between authority and power. Why not recognise them, why not inter-marry it so that we can move forward. We should respect our traditional institutions and make sure that we are able to find a way of allocating power to them and you'll see that local government administration will improve' (Pategi 2010).

This reform proposal echoes an earlier debate about the role of traditional chieftaincy in modern Nigeria. The main question then was whether a formal, institutional role for the chieftaincy was desirable. At one extreme were those who feel that the modern-day government in Nigeria is incomplete without the traditional chiefs because: 'Chiefs... are the fathers of their people...the custodians of the people's culture and ...a link between the past and [the] present. In this revered and exalted position [they are] a symbol of authority whose proverbial wisdom and mature counsel...are greatly cherished'

(cited in Miles, 1987, p. 246-247).

However, the dominant view insists on the insulation of the chieftaincy from partisan politics to avoid politicization of the sacred institution. This view has been the position of most regimes/administrations in Nigeria since the 1970s, and this position has found expression in the policy of strictly separating the chieftaincy from national, state or local politics. Traditional rulers are not only barred from running as candidates in elections but they are also expected to maintain neutrality in the contest. But these restrictions only apply in theory because in practice it is common knowledge that some traditional chiefs are actively involved in politics. This is why both serving and aspiring politicians make constant 'courtesy calls' on them to secure their support (Offiong, 1984). Integrating traditional chiefs in modern government might be reasonable, especially in the North where the institution still wields considerable influence, but it would be better for individual states to deliberate and resolve this matter.

The final proposal for modifying Nigeria's power-sharing arrangement addresses some of the challenges associated with the multiplication of representation structures and the use of states and local government areas as a basis for office distribution. One classical argument against this arrangement is that it has tremendously

increased the cost of governance due to the tendency of the federal, state and local government area chief executives to hire a retinue of advisers and assistants as a way of accommodating diverse communities in their government. To illustrate, the number of ministerial portfolios at federal and state levels, which was about 80 in 1963, reportedly jumped to more than 350 in 1983 (Bach, 1989). Today, there are 44 federal ministers and several advisers and assistants to the president, the vice-president, and the first lady. Of course, it would be simplistic to blame power-sharing alone for the excesses of Nigerian state officials, but the point is that the practice has provided a framework for clientelism and abuse of office. As was suggested in the past, there is a need for restriction of the number of officials that can be appointed by the chief executives.¹⁰

Again, as one legislator suggests, 'the focus of power-sharing should be on the six geopolitical zones rather than on states and local governments' (Shagari, 2010). This is especially because states and local governments have been proliferated over the years and distributing offices along that line, as experience has shown, constitutes a major drain on national resources. In addition, using states and

local government areas as a basis for resource distribution reinforces the demand for the creation of more states and local governments. In the final analysis, 'the fact that there have not been demands for the creation of more geopolitical zones in Nigeria is an indication that these zones are more acceptable and durable territorial units than the states', as such, they could serve as a more stable framework for power-sharing (Shagari, 2010).

Conclusion

It seems evident from the above analysis that the Nigerian elite have a good grasp of the functioning of power-sharing in Nigeria. Their interpretation of power-sharing and their evaluation of the arrangement fully capture all the dimensions along which power-sharing is implemented in Nigeria. This study demonstrates that there is deep continuity in the understanding and practice of power-sharing in Nigeria.

Based on insightful illustrations provided in this study, one can perceive the robust application of power-sharing, especially in the local arena. This is not surprising considering that power-sharing is a longstanding practice in many local communities and that the practice of power-sharing has been deeply entrenched. For example, in the Ibibio community in Southern Nigeria, zoning and rotation of

¹⁰ See Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Report of the Political Bureau*, Federal Government Printer, Lagos, 1987, pp. 66.

offices is a core element of the community's political organization. As one anthropological study notes, 'the village head is selected from among the elders in the various extended families and he is thus *primus inter pares*. The village headship is *rotated* among the various extended families in the village' (Offiong, 1984, p. 103, emphasis mine). Similarly, in Tivland, recurrent tensions among various subunits of the society led to the evolution of a system in which chieftainship rotates among the subunits based on the principle of 'eat and give to your brother' – this way, a balance is kept among the subunits of the Tiv society and agreement is easily reached on how to share political benefits among them (Dent, 1966). Zoning is also popular in Yorubaland as 'ruling families' and 'dynasties' are used as the basis for the selection of traditional chiefs (Akinola, 1988; Akinola, 1996; Abatan, 1994). These traditional practices provide the underpinning for the application of power-sharing in contemporary Nigeria.

One key lesson that can be learned from the study's discussion of power-sharing in Nigeria relates to the way the democratic ideal of political alternation has been defined, and its implication for democracy and durability of power-sharing arrangements. Theoretically, there are two forms of political alternation: leadership alternation and ideological alternation.

Leadership alternation entails a personnel change in the control of executive or legislative office, whether or not the elected official is from the same party as his/her predecessor. In contrast, ideological alternation involves a turnover of power across parties or coalitions with different ideologies¹¹ (Hoff, Horowitz and Milanovic, 2005). Typically, political alternation is perceived from the standpoint of party alternation (Sartori, 2005). However, based on Nigeria's experience, power-sharing places more emphasis on leadership alternation than party alternation. Conversely, the stability of power-sharing is better protected in leadership alternation than in party alternation. The latter view is corroborated by the case of Switzerland where 'a magic formula' has precluded party alternation ensuring that a coalition of only four political parties control the country's executive council since 1959 (Kriesi and Trechsel, 2008; Linder, 2010).

Moreover, as demonstrated by the earlier analysis of Imo State, party alternation has a great potential to disrupt power-sharing arrangements. The election of Rochas Okorochoa (from Orlu zone) under the platform of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) disrupted the zoning arrangement

¹¹ In much of Africa, there are no strict ideological differences between political parties. As such, I will replace the term ideological alternation with party alternation.

which would have ensured that Governor Ikedi Ohakim's successor would come from Owerri zone. Similarly, the emergence of Hope Uzodinma of the All Progressives Congress (APC), following a Supreme Court ruling, further disrupted the power-sharing arrangement and the expectation that a candidate from Owerri zone would emerge as governor. In all, there is a complex relationship between power-sharing and political alternation, which requires further investigation.

Finally, Nigeria's experience with power-sharing underlines the insufficiency of the colonially imposed formal state institutions in providing the framework for peace and

democracy in post-independent Africa. The fragility of these institutions is demonstrated by the fact that Nigeria's parliamentary democracy, for example, could not endure for more than six years after independence. Again, the turbulence being experienced in various parts of Africa may not be unconnected with the unfitness of their colonially imposed institutions. One thing that Nigeria's experience with power-sharing demonstrates is that achieving authentic democratic development and durable peace require reform of not just the political institutions, but also the attitudes and behaviours of the leadership and the led.

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