FEDERAL CHARACTER IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE: A HINDERANCE TO EFFECECTIVE POLICING

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Keywords

Federal Character, Nigeria Police, Crime Control, Ethnic Groups, Effective Policing

Abstract

Research Problem:
The Nigeria Police is having challenges in carrying out its role in crime control as crimes keeps increasing and insurgence has taken over the peace in the country. Federal character policy was established to ensure equal representation of the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, this has its disadvantage in term of the effect has in crime control as it hinders more capable personnel's from entering the Force and getting to a high position where they can make more impact.

Methods/Theory:
The study adopted a mixed-method design of both quantitative and qualitative methods, with questionnaire and in-depth interview as the instruments for data collection. Functionalist theory was used to explain the role of the police in crime control and pluralism throw light on the reason federal character policy is been implemented.

Results:
The results show that federal character policy hinders effective crime control. Although it encourages representational balance and lessens marginalization, its application frequently puts quota-based hiring ahead of professionalism, ability, and quality. In certain instances, this has led to decreased operational capability, eroded discipline, and ineffective crime prevention and control.

Conclusion:
Although it is essential for national integration, the Nigeria Police Force's current execution of it needs to be changed.

Key Contribution to Knowledge:
This study exposes the limitations of the federal character policy as it discourages merit and efficiency in the force.
Recommendation:
Federal character policy implementation should be re-addressed. Officers who through personal efforts achieved higher academic qualification should be promoted accordingly.Officers who through personal efforts achieved higher academic qualification should be promoted accordingly.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the federal character principle was established to ensure equitable representation of various ethnic and regional groups in governmental institutions, hence fostering national unity, equity, and inclusivity. However, there has been much discussion over how it may affect operational effectiveness and professionalism in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Nigeria as a country has more than 250 ethnic groups, but three ethnic groups are dominant which are Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. These three ethnic groups gain more and are consider first before other ethnic groups in the society. This system is what is termed Federal Character Policy Implementation.Federal character policy is an issue that has affected the Nigerian police in different areas. A system called divide and rule, were placement or posting are done based on ethnic, religious and geographical diversity of the country with the three main ethnic group (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) given more priority. The Federal Character policy implementation base recruitment on the quota system and not on merit(Ayua, &Dakas, 2005).

The first criterion is on the geographical region the recruit hails from, before considering whether he/she is qualified for the position. The other area affected is promotion, as a result of this system, many officers are denied or affected when they are due for promotion. Some remain in one position for a long time, while others are promoted. In this case, you find officers who started or joined the Force at the same time, but one is promoted while the other is left in the same position. For instance, a Yoruba police officer and a Bini police officer may be employed at the same time, but the Yoruba police officer will rise to the post of a Police Commissioner while the Bini police officer will remain as a Superintendent of Police or at most, a Divisional Police Officer (DPO). This may definitely affect the morale, discipline, efficiency and effectiveness of the institution. Because the Nigeria Police Force is supposed to be armed with the responsibility of the maintenance of law and order in the society, the protection of lives and properties of its citizens and the preservation of internal security.

The police as the primary law enforcement agency in Nigeria has a crucial responsibility of advancing social stability, public safety, and national development. This however is hampered by issues such as insufficient personnel, corruption, negative public impression, low professionalism, and operational inefficiency despite a number of reforms and policy interventions (Alemika&Chukwuma, 2018).Given the growing complexity of crime and insecurity in Nigeria, the topic becomes especially important. Terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, cybercrime, communal conflicts, and other criminal acts have become more rampant in the nation. And a highly qualified, effective, and competent police force isrequired to combat

crime, conduct investigations to address these issues. This therefore raises the concerns whether applying the federal character principle helps or hinders achieving these goals.

This study therefore, is set to find out how the quota system implementation has affected the Nigeria Police in carrying out their duties effectively and to consider the way forward.The study adds to current discussions on public sector reforms, national integration, and security governance in Nigeria by examining the connection between federal character implementation and police effectiveness.

Research Problem

The Nigeria Police is mandated to protect the lives and property of its citizens, maintain law and order as well as ensure safety and security in the society. However, the NPF experience lots of challenges in carrying out this role as crimes keeps increasing and insurgence has taken over the peace in the nation. The study seeks to examine the effect of the quota system on the performance of the Nigeria Police Force in crime control. While some authors have written works on federal character policy, their focus has been on national integration and governance, rather than on the effectiveness of the police in crime control. This is the gap this study intends to address.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study is to:

1. Ascertain the effect of federal character policy implementation on police performance in crime control
2. Determine if police officers are promoted based on federal character policy or merit.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Federal character is one policy that is applied in the recruitment and promotion in the Nigeria Police Force. The 1979 Constitution of Nigeria's second republic included the principle as one of the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy. It was formalized in 1996 when the Sani Abacha regime established a Federal Character Commission (Onimisi,Samsu, Ismail, Mohd, 2019). The principle is now enshrined in the current 2009 Constitution, a section of which prescribes the setting up of the Federal Character Commission that will have the powers to:

a) Work out an equitable formula subject to the approval of the National Assembly for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the public service of the Federation and of the States, the armed forces of the Federation, the Nigeria Police Force and other government security agencies, government owned companies and parastatals of the states.

b) Promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principles of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government.

c) Take such legal measures, including the prosecution of the head or staff of any ministry or government body or agency which fails to comply with any federal character principle or formula prescribed or adopted by the Commission.

There are those against the idea of quota system for appointments, arguing that its geographical considerations encumber merit, and allows mediocrity to thrive (Suberu, 2022). It is quite easy to argue that there is a link between federal character and the dismal levels of efficiency in the civil service. This also may

have an effect on the Nigeria Police Force. As much as it is important to carry every section of the country along, the most important questions we should be asking regarding persons who will be holding public office should be about their managerial abilities and competence. Federal character principle has its effect on crime control because it is causing distraction in the Police Force. Most of the minority ethnic groups feel cheated and marginalized. Critics wonder why most of the high positions in the Nigeria Police Force such as the Inspector-General of Police, IGP; Deputy Inspectors-General, DIGs and Assistant Inspectors-General, AIGs, are dominated by some particular ethnic group (Aghamelu, 2026; Suberu, 2022).

A police source told The News magazine 2011 that, it is disheartening to see that among the 21 AIGs, at that time, 13 were from the North, made up of the Hausa-Fulani, while the Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri and others share the rest. Recently in Nigeria the IG elevated officers in the police force, 13 AIGs were promoted of which 6 are from the Northern part of Nigeria fondly referred to as Hausa/Fulani, 3 are from the South-West known as Yoruba, 1 from the South-East (Igbo) and 3 from South-South (Ige, 2026).While it may be beneficial to apply Federal character in the recruitment of personnel, promotion in the Police Force should be strictly based on efficiency and merit. This then will create a more balanced Police Force and give police officers a sense of belonging. Often times, those more competent officers do not get the opportunity to be promoted to the high ranks where they can make much impact and as such the country is left in the hands of those not competent enough to tackle crime in the society. Though some works explicitly examine federal character within the Nigeria Police Force, itcan be suggested that recruitment procedures influenced by governmental and ethnic characteristics couldcausean adverse effect on effectiveness of the police in crime control. Consequently, it is expedient to have a police force that is efficient and effective in delivery of its duties so the citizens can have confidence in them. Though some works explicitly examine federal character within the Nigeria Police Force, itcan be suggested that recruitment procedures influenced by governmental and ethnic characteristics couldcausean adverse effect on effectiveness of the police in crime control. Consequently, it is expedient to have a police force that is efficient and effective in delivery of its duties so the citizens can have confidence in them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The functionalist theory is used to explain this study. The functionalists are of the opinion that societies require an essential order, balance, coherence and stability for minimum degree of integration. They view society as a system: i.e., as a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is society, and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole. Emile Durkheim one of the founders of functionalism was aware of the possibility that societies might not function smoothly. In his work on division oflabour, every structure has its role to play in the society (Durkheim 1947; Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). The police are a structure of the society and its function is to ensure order and stability in the society. For the entire system to function properly, the police have to play their role in the maintenance of law and order as well as crime control in the society. This can be supported by the idea of the pluralist theory that there are diverse perspectives that coexist in a society and as such, different ethnics can also exist and live harmoniously in a society.Federal character principle is a system

the Nigeria Police Force uses to create order in the structure, the initiative was to provide a balance in recruitment into the force to ensure even distribution of the ethnic groups in Nigeria. This however should be done with fairness, equity not leaving out merit and competence of personnel recruited. Because the main function of the Police Force which was the reason it was established, is to make sure that they are able to perform their role in the maintenance of law and order as well as crime control in they society.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Benin City and it involved the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaires and in-depth interview was used. The sampling population for this study constituted the police and members of the community in the selected study area. Five police divisional headquarters was selected from the twenty police divisions in Benin City through a purposive sampling method for adequate representation. Two hundred (200) copies of questionnaires were administered to the respondents. Hundred (100) copies was administered to members of the police force, 20 copies for each police division, and 100 copies was also administered to members of the public. The interview was conducted in English language on the Divisional Police Officers (DPO) in three police divisions and two retired police officers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the study carried out is shown in the table below, and it's supported by some response from the in-depth interview conducted.

The Effect of Federal Character Policy on Efficiency of Police Officer

The effect of the implementation of Federal character especially in relation to the promotion of police officers cannot be over emphasized. As one of the objectives of this study, the table below reveals the effect of quota system on the morale of police officers.

Table1: Federal Character Policy on Police Officers Efficiency

Items	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Police Officers are promoted based on the quota system rather than merit	Yes	174	87
	No	26	13
	Total	200	100
Police Officers in the minority ethnic group are sometimes better than those in the majority ethnic groups that are promoted	Strongly Disagree	27	13.5
	Disagree	19	9.5
	Agree	110	55
	Strongly Agree	44	22
	Total	200	100

Federal character policy implementation affects police performance in crime control	Strongly Disagree	27	13.5
	Disagree	3	1.5
	Agree	52	26
	Strongly Agree	118	59
	Total	200	100

The table above shows that police officers are promoted based on federal character policy. Likewise, it was agreed by the respondents that police officers in the minority ethnic groups are sometimes better than those of their mates promoted in the dominant ethnic groups. The table also reveals that federal character policy implementation affects their performance in crime control. This findings also corresponds with some of the responses provided during the IDI sessions.

When the respondents were asked if they were in support of Federal character implementation, their response was thus:

"Absolutely No. This has led to the collapse of discipline in the Force, especially when a junior officer suddenly gets promoted above his boss, it demoralizes and this invariably does not motivate officers. Federal character should be implemented during recruitments and thereafter merit should be used as yardstick for promotion". (IDI comment by a retired police officer)

This reveals the effect of quota system on the promotion of police officers. The effect in the opinion of this respondent is that federal character policy demoralizes the officers and has led to indiscipline in the Force. He therefore, does not support the idea of federal character policy implementation in the Police Force.

Another's response was:

"My answer is Yes and No. Yes, in the sense that, in order to balance the equation on the strength of every segment of the country, it is desirable at the point of entry. No, in the sense that efficiency in the Force should not be slaughtered on the altar of balancing the equation, efficiency should be the yardstick of making promotions. Quota system should not be used on a reason for promoting an officer rather, efficiency should be used". (IDI comment by a retired police officer)

This respondent does not also support the implementation of federal character policy in the promotion of officers. He however, agree that if the federal character policy must be implemented at all, it should be used as a criteria for recruitment of officers into the Force.

The third respondent supports the others thus:

"Federal character should not be used in the promotion of officers because it does not effectively motivate officers." (IDI comment by a Divisional Police Officer)

Another's response was thus:

"No, I do not support it. The reasons are, the qualified officers who supposed to be there, will not have the privilege to be there." (IDI comment by a Divisional Police Officer)

This opinion is also against the federal character principle as the respondents are not in support of the idea.

Discussion of Findings

The result from the field shows that both recruitment and promotions are based on federal

character policy. Also, that it affects the performance in crime control, this because officers in the minority ethnic groups who are marginalized feel cheated and this discourages them from putting in their best. This is in support of opinion of Suberu (2022) that the federal character policy allows mediocrity to strive. Most of the respondents do not support the idea of quota system as they see it as an unfair principle which demoralizes officers and has led to indiscipline in the Force. There is no gainsaying the fact that the implementation of quota system or federal character has adverse effect on the morale of police officers. It is the opinion that while recruitment could be based on quota system, promotion and advancement on the job should be based strictly on merit and efficiency on the job. This, it is reasoned would promote the zeal to work hard to control crime and criminals. The question of security and enforcement of law and order in the society is too important to Nigeria and Nigerians to be left in the hands of inefficient and uncommitted senior police officers who have attained their status because of place of origin.The retired senior police officers interviewed gave their honest opinions on the issue of quota system in the Force. They agreed that it should be discarded as far as the Police Force is concerned. It therefore shows that the policy of federal character is not idea especially in regards to promotion in the Nigeria Police Force. Promotion should strictly be based on merit and the number of years put in service rather than on the geographical region or the ethnic one comes from. This will provide a sense of belonging of equity and fairness in the minds of officer which I turn will result in their effectiveness in crime control.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigerian Police is charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives and properties of the citizens. The only way they can perform their duties effectively is for the recruitment of capable Officers, based on merit and not sentiments. The implementation of federal character policy has adverse effect on the morale of the police officer thereby affecting their performance in crime control. The idea of the promotion of officers based on quota system or federal character is not suitable for the morale of the officers. It therefore affects the effectiveness of the police in crime control. Consequently, the suggestion is that quota system could be applicable only at the recruitment level, while promotion should be based on efficiency and merit. Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that

- Officers who through personal efforts achieved higher academic qualification should be promoted accordingly. This will encourage others to strive for self-improvement.
- The issue of Federal character policy implementation should be re-addressed. Recruitment and promotion in the Nigeria Police Force should not be based on quota system because it demoralizes the disadvantaged police officers. If at all quota system is to be a criterion, it should be at point of entry, i.e. recruitment into the Police Force.

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