

## **Ethnicity, Federal Character Principle and the Bloating of Federal Government Establishments (2015-2018)**

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### **Abstract**

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This paper considered the age-long problem of ethnicity and the application of the Federal Character Principle in appointments into federal government offices as well as the bloated nature of offices in government's establishments since 2015 till date. The principle of federal character which was adopted in 1979 to address the imbalance in Nigeria's politics and wanton struggle for power among the different ethnic groups in the country has not been able to do so after many years. The paper adopted the survey research design through quantitative research approach. Primary data was elicited through the administration of questionnaires. 700 copies of questionnaires were administered to employees in seven federal government ministries and establishments. Findings reveal that ethnicity significantly affects bloating of federal government's establishments ( $R = 0.613$ ,  $R^2 = 0.376$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $F = 388.876$ ), federal character principle significantly affects bloating of federal government's establishments ( $R = 0.747$ ,  $R^2 = 0.558$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $F = 833.824$ ). It was found that appointments into federal government's offices since 2015 has been done with brazen disregard to the principles of federal character, and largely based on ethnicity. The paper posits that federal government's workforce will contribute immensely to the development of Nigeria if merit, federal character and expertise needs are taken into consideration in the composition of the nation's workforce.

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**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Federal Character, Federal Government Establishments, Nigeria

### **1.0 Introduction**

Nigeria is a good example of a society in which cultural divisions appear implacable. Since the merger of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by the colonialists, the problem of ethnic nationality has dominated Nigeria's political landscape even before the country's independence in 1960. The amalgamation, according to Ajayi and Alagoa (1980), brought about the involuntary unification of culturally and historically diverse ethnic groups, some of which had been rivals and overlapping imperialists in the pre-colonial times. Since then, the vilification of ethnicity as the scapegoat of all vices associated with the Nigerian body polity has made the subject a dominant theme in Nigeria's political economy discourses (Ukiwo, 2005). Successive leaders have struggled to uphold a national ideal of a "just and egalitarian society" by reducing inequality, and promoting mutual coexistence and balanced development among various communities in different geographical areas of the country. Nigeria has not been able to manage its ethnic and cultural diversity to the best benefit of its collective existence in order to attain national integration. With over 370 different ethnic groups (Alubo, 2006), the challenge for the country has been how to make these diverse ethnic identities an integral part of an elusive national image it has struggled to create.

Long before independence, the ugly head of ethnic bigotry had reared itself in almost every facet of national life among Nigerians. That sentimental attachment to ancestral and cultural underpinnings was seen in government, religion, education, politics, workplace and business among the country's citizens. For instance, in 1953 when the nationalists representing Nigeria were offered the platform to come to terms with an agreed date of independence, ethnic sentiments and insecurity came to the fore as the Northern (Hausa-Fulani) delegates at the constitutional conference objected to a 1956 date proposed by the Southern delegates, among whom was late Chief Anthony Enahoro who moved the motion (Ikime, 1985).

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The Hausa-Fulani leaders had made it clear by their stout objection that they were not ready for independence as the fear of Southern dominance in a post-colonial Nigeria was rife (Edewor, Aluko & Folarin, 2014). It is on record, that the political parties that emerged as the struggle for independence gained popularity where basically offshoots of different ethnic unions. Taiwo (2000) observed that the Northern People's Congress (NPC) as the name suggests was a cultural movement for Northern peoples' development. The Action Group (AG) was a modified version of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group; while National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons metamorphosed into the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), a Southeastern group led by Igbo ethnic unionists. Other clear ethnic unions that changed to "national" parties included the Northern Elements People's Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), which struggled for the control of the center.

Though each group had their internal wrangling and politicking, both continued the push for relevance until 1960 saw the emergence of one of the tribal parties, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) as the winner of the elections. Subsequently, the NPC constituted the national government and heralded the beginning of an ethnic-based leadership that has stifled the evolution of a truly national government ever since. The events that followed afterwards especially at the national level enshrined a system that emasculated and marginalized ethnic minorities to the point that a civil war broke out in 1967 with the Igbos of the south-east who saw themselves as victims of a purported ethnic cleansing in military barracks and in the northern parts of the country at the fore. The 30-month-long civil war, demonstrated an outburst of the deep-seated ethnic resentment and hate that had etched into the polity before and shortly after independence (Edewor, et al., 2014).

As the war ended in 1970, ethnic resentment grew to an alarming proportion among nationals in the Nigerian state, and became the basis for appointment and promotion in the armed forces, employment in the civil and public services, political appointment into public office, admission into institutions of learning, revenue allocation, infrastructural development and formation of political parties as well as coup plots (Omoruyi, 2008). Quota system and the federal character principle, initiated in 1979 and institutionalized by the Babangida administration in the mid-1980s among others, became schemes put in place to ensure ethnic balancing in public life. The high level of separatism and volatility of ethnicity had initially led to the conception and establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) earlier in 1973 (Taiwo, 2000). However, recent observation point to the fact that these government initiatives as laudable as they may have appeared failed to address the canker of ethnic bigotry. Many have made allusion to the amalgamation being an arrangement of convenience for the colonial masters and suggest that not until the various ethnic nationalities come together to agree on terms of mutual co-existence, the end to ethnicity and bigotry might remain a far cry. This paper is therefore aimed at analyzing the issues surrounding the creation and implementation of the Federal Character principle in Nigeria and to demonstrate the bastardization of the rules establishing the initiative as evidenced by the bloating of Federal Governments establishments between 2015 and 2018.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Ethnicity and tribalism are endemic in many African states. Nigeria and many other African nations are bedeviled with the problem of achieving equal distribution of employment across various sectors of national economies with a view to putting an end to perceived marginalization. There is no doubt that the creation of the entity known as Nigeria brought together people of diverse origins, cultures, religions and traditions, who have found it extremely difficult to integrate. The practice of divide and rule at the formative stages consolidated the deepening division and spilled into the social life of the people, with the south exposed to western education/Christianity, while the north was quarantined against the possible influence by the south, hence widening the division, with marginalization and inequity becoming more pronounced (Osifeso, 2011). In recent years, the concept of nationhood is glaringly missing from the operating philosophy of many ethnic groups who feel cut out in matters of national significance in the areas of employment, governance and politics. But before now, the federal character principle was initiated as a government mechanism that would aid the eradication of marginalization, nepotism and ethnic bigotry.

So far, it remains to be ascertained, the extent to which this government institution has been able to correct the wrongs of the past. Consequently, how has the federal character as a policy mechanism used for equitable distribution of appointments, natural and economic resources for the benefit of all Nigerian citizens between 2015 and 2018?

### Objective of the study

The general objective of this paper is to find out the extent to which ethnicity and the Federal character principle affects bloating of federal government's establishments between 2015 and 2018. Specific objectives are to:

1. Evaluate the effect the effect of ethnicity and bloating of federal government establishments.
2. Determine the extent to which the federal character principle affects bloating of federal government establishments.

### Research question

This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of ethnicity on bloating of federal government establishments?
2. In what way does the federal character principle affects bloating of federal government establishments?

### Research Hypothesis

**H<sub>01</sub>:** there is no significant relationship between ethnicity and the bloating of federal government's establishments.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** there is no significant relationship between the provisions of the federal character principle and the bloating of federal government's establishments.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### Federal Character Principle

The Federal Character Principle (FCP) was established in 1979 through a provision in the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The major reason behind its establishment was to enable a national integration as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the incongruent ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements in the country (Asaju & Egberi, 2015). According to Edigin (2010), the federal character principle is an attempt aimed at institutionalizing the accommodation of the diverse groups and interest in the country through process of employment distribution. This position is further captured in the constitution drafting committee (CDC, 1976) reports that sees the federal character principle as a provision or an act created to ensure and promote national unity and to harness the diversities existing in the country. Olagunju (1987) observed that the federal character remains the deliberate effort of the government designed to accommodate less privilege sections of the country, while Afigbo (1989) see the federal character principle as an idea of government initialed to promote national unity and loyalty, to give the people of the country a sense of belonging through the employment process in the public service. It is worthy of note that the federal character principle came as a result of the imbalance and lack of equal opportunity in employment into the federal civil service and other appointments at the national level. According to Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution, "the composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies." This implies that the government at the federal level shall be composed in a manner that reflects the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian state in order to promote national unity and ensure that persons from no few states, ethnic or sections in the country dominate any sector of government or any of its agencies (Adeosun, 2011).

Commenting on the Federal Character Principles as it concerns the Federal Government establishments,, Egbuta,(2016) noted that Recruitment in Nigeria is expected be governed by the Nigerian Labour Act of 1974 and also the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria hence, section 14 (3) states that the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity; and also to command national loyalty by ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies. Be that as it may, it must be noted that the significance of the Federal Character Principle in the matter of Recruitment and selection into the Federal Government establishment including Political appointments cannot be overemphasized but some human rights activists believe that it is a mere euphemism for balancing ethnic dichotomy (Fajana, Owoyemi, Elegbede, & Gbajumo Sheriff., 2011; Ayoadé, 2000; Bodunrin, 1989).

Okeke-Uzodike & Subon ,2015; Fajana et al., 2011; Gberevbie, 2011; Gerevbie &Ibietan,2013;Briggs, 2007 in their various empirical studies on the Nigerian public sector found that, though there are rules and regulations stipulated in the recruitment policy to guide the recruitment processes, implementation and adherence to these rules is a continuous challenge facing Nigerian public service HRM professionals. The social structure and the political nature of the Nigerian system: political consideration, nepotism, and ethnicity influence recruitment processes in the federal government ministries and departments in Nigeria and inhibit professional excellence and developmental goals.

Asaju and Egberi (2015) enumerated that the principle of federal character was formulated and put into use by successive governments in Nigeria to address and hopefully mitigate the problem of diversity to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria. However, underpinning the above provisions and enumerations is the reality that the federal character principle since 1979 has failed to address the problem of ethnic imbalance in governance, appointments and employments into federal government offices in Nigeria. The major challenge in Nigeria is that government after establishing the necessary framework for the management of strategic business organizations, violates the same rule it has made to regulate social relations at work sometimes through political interference from political office holders; thus quota system as an instrument of employment is questionable as it sometimes serves as conduit for the recruitment of unqualified persons and the incompetence of these individuals to a large extent has led to the inability of strategic organizations to accomplish their goals (Agbodike 2003, Egbuta, 2017; Okeke-Uzodike & Subon, 2015& Palmer, 1997).

### **Nigerian Federal Civil Service**

Governments in all countries of the world usually operate through the services of a dedicated workforce whose duty it is to ensure that government's policies result in tangible services for the populace. In Nigeria, these set of workers are known as civil servants, without whose input, government cannot function effectively and efficiently. The federal civil service refers to the service within government ministries and departments charged with the responsibility of implementing public policies at the federal level. El-Rufai (2011) pointed out that civil service comprises all employees working in the public service including those in parastatals, police force and armed forces. The federal civil service as an institution of government in Nigeria is known to have played a vital role in the day-to-day implementation of government policies since its inception.

Although a number of reforms have been embarked upon to help articulate new patterns aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service over the years from post-independence era to contemporary times, the structure has largely remained the same. A structure, which many believe is largely responsible for the existing rot and gross inefficiency that the system is known for. Ogunrotifa (2012) enumerated that the Federal Civil Service in Nigeria has been characterized by a weak governance structure, red-tapism, weak accountability, low professional standards, waste and corruption, poor productivity, and lack of control, redundancy and over-bloated staff structure, ever since the country's independence from Britain in 1960.

The Northern People's Congress (NPC) spear-headed the national government that was constituted at independence, but rather than towing the part of national integration and inclusiveness, the inherent practice of sectional domination held sway. The staff structure of various federal establishments were over-bloated and northerners littered every section of the federal civil service leading to an outcry by citizens from other parts of the country. The over-bloated staff structure of the federal civil service in Nigeria viz-a-viz the effective or otherwise implementation of the federal character principle among other initiatives by successive governments with the aim of eradicating ethnicity and nepotism across all tiers of government has been a major issue which the country's government has struggled to resolve. The outcry against marginalization and inequity in governance has no doubt defined the political landscape and heated the polity in post-independent Nigeria.

This has given rise to the suggestion in some quarters that the federal character principle has failed to proffer any form of solution to the problem as a result of which it was created. Yahaya (2018) established that the federal character principle (FCP) which was designed with the intent of dousing tension and fostering nation building amongst diverse ethnicities and nationalities resulting from the 1914 amalgamation has largely failed to do so. He further cited the incessant ethnic violence; allegations of regional marginalization, clamour for self-actualization, and so on as justifications for such claim. There is no doubt that as laudable as the policy is, there exists a wide gap between intent and actual practices and this is making it counterproductive.

Although the civil service that emerged after independence became more involved in formulating and executing public programmes and economic development policies, the unequal distribution of political powers on the basis of ethnicity, and regional composition resulted in uneven socio-economic development. This is because both the elected and appointed government officials were more interested in bringing home the bacon to their respective regions. The politics of regional affiliation has deprived Nigeria of a national character and a sense of national interest as well as brought other issues such as zoning, federal character and quota system into the lexicon of Nigerian civil service with minimal result to show for their existence (Mukoro, 2005).

### Establishments of the Federal Government

Federal Government Ministries are civil service departments that are responsible for delivering various types of government service. Each ministry is headed by a Permanent Secretary who reports to a Minister in the Federal Cabinet. Some government functions are provided by commissions or parastatals (government-owned corporations/establishments) that may be independent or associated with a ministry. A government-owned establishment is a legal entity that undertakes commercial activities on behalf of an owner government. Such establishments have distinct legal forms and are established to operate in commercial affairs. While they may also have public policy objectives, they are distinct from other government agencies primarily established to pursue purely non-financial objectives. Such establishments in Nigeria include the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), and the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) among others. Also, there are some government establishments that are service oriented. They exist to render exclusive services to the populace such as the Fire Service Corporation and other emergency service providers.

### 3.0 Methodology

The design adopted for this study is the quantitative research design using the descriptive survey design. This design was considered appropriate to investigate the relationships that exist among variables of the research. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire. The research instrument was validated and reliability was carried out using the Cronbach alpha analysis. A total of seven hundred federal civil servants were surveyed using a structured questionnaire in three Federal Ministries, three Federal establishments and the office of the Head of Civil Service of the federation. Each ministry and establishment was provided with One hundred copies of the structured questionnaire to elicit various information from the respondents. Data was analyzed by inferential statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

### 4.0 Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

Seven hundred (700) questionnaires were distributed to employees of seven Federal government establishments, ministries and the Office of the Head of the Service of the Federation... Six Hundred and Sixty-three (663) of the questionnaires were retrieved indicating a 94.7% response rate. Table 1 shows the demographic and descriptive distribution of respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic and Descriptive Distribution of Respondents**

Demographic and Personal Information		Population of Respondents	
Variable	Information	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	417	62.9
	Female	246	37.1
Age	Below 25 years	54	8.1
	25- 30 years	90	13.6
	31- 35 years	89	13.4
	36- 40 years	122	18.4
	41-45 years	161	24.3
	46-60 years	147	22.2
Ethnic Background	Yoruba	178	26.8
	Hausa	286	43.1
	Igbo	143	21.6
	Others	56	8.5
Level of Compliance with Federal Character Principle	High	112	16.9
	Average	230	34.7
	Low	321	48.4
Influence of Power Sharing on Staff Competency	High	367	55.4
	Average	219	33.0
	Low	77	11.6

From Table 1, the study revealed that majority of the respondents are male (62.9%), and are between the ages of 41-45 years (24.3%), were Hausa (43.1%), the level of compliance with Federal character principle in their organizations was low (48.4%) and influence of power sharing on staff competency is high (55.4%).

**Restatement of Hypothesis 1:** there is no significant relationship between ethnicity and the bloating of federal government’s establishments.

**Table 2.1: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.613 <sup>a</sup>	.376	.375	7.28371

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethnicity

**Table 2.2: Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	F	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	11.846	1.755		6.750	388.876	.000
	Ethnicity	1.421	.071	.613	19.972		.000

a. Dependent Variable: Bloating of Federal Government Establishments

Model 1 for (H<sub>01</sub>) is stated as  $y_1 = f(x_1)$  and  $y_1 = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \mu = 11.846 + 1.421 x_1$

**Interpretation**

The results in table 2.1 and 2.2 shows that there is a statistically determinant relationship between ethnicity and bloating of federal government establishments. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between ethnicity and the bloating of federal government’s establishments is thereby rejected considering  $P < 0.05$ . The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates that ethnicity explains (37.6%) in the differences of bloating of federal government establishments, while the increasing degree in ethnicity will increase bloating of federal government establishments by (0.613).

**Restatement of Hypothesis 2:** there is no significant relationship between the provisions of the federal character principle and the bloating of federal government’s establishments.

**Table 3.1: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.747 <sup>a</sup>	.558	.557	6.13317

a. Predictors: (Constant), Federal Character Principle

**Table 3.2: Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	F	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	9.424	1.304		7.229	833.824	.000
	Federal Character	1.545	.054	.747	28.876		.000

a. Dependent Variable: Bloating of Federal Government Establishments

Model 2 for (H<sub>02</sub>) is stated as  $y_2 = f(x_2)$  and  $y_2 = \alpha_0 + \beta_2 x_2 + \mu = 9.424 + 1.545 x_2$

The results in table 3.1 and 3.2 shows that there is a statistically determinant relationship between federal character principle and bloating of federal government establishments. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between federal character principle and the bloating of federal government’s establishments is thereby rejected considering  $P < 0.05$ . The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates that federal character principle explains (55.8%) in the differences of bloating of federal government establishments, while the increasing degree in federal character principle will increase bloating of federal government establishments by (0.747).

### Multiple Regression of Ethnicity, Federal Character Principle and the Bloating of Federal Government Establishments

**Table 4.1: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.761 <sup>a</sup>	.579	.578	5.98865

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethnicity, Federal Character Principle

**Table 4.2: Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	F	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	4.907	1.494		3.284	453.922	.001
	Fed. Character	1.267	.071	.612	17.827		.000
	Ethnicity	.459	.080	.198	5.770		.000

a. Dependent Variable: Bloating of Federal Government Establishments

The results in table 4.1 and 4.2 shows that there is a statistically determinant relationship between ethnicity, federal character principle and bloating of federal government establishments. The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between ethnicity, federal character principle and the bloating of federal government's establishments is thereby rejected considering  $P < 0.05$ . The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates that federal character principle and ethnicity explains (57.9%) in the differences of bloating of federal government establishments, while the increasing degree in federal character principle will increase bloating of federal government establishments by (0.612 and 0.198).

### Discussion

The formal adoption of the federal system in Nigeria, which came into existence with the introduction of the Lyttleton constitution of 1954, signaled the need for representative bureaucracy that could address the problem in the composition of the federal public service anchored on effective service delivery (Ayoade, 2000; Ikelegbe, 2004). Federal character policy purports to deal with distribution of privileges and benefits among the primordial components in the Nigerian state. However, as earlier noted, this policy has failed to address issues surrounding its initiation from inception. Okolo (2014) enumerated that issues such as ethnocentrism, elitism, mediocrity and mutual suspicion are largely responsible for the failure of federal character principle. Conversely, Akinwale (2014) and Ikelegbe (2004) observed that the federal character principles in itself is a constraint to the implementation of other recruitment policies in Nigeria since it negates the application of meritocracy in recruitment processes. In the opinion of Akinwale (2014), whereas the federal character policy can be justified from the angle of equal representativeness in public sector operations and practices, adopting meritocratic approach without reference to federal character will affect negatively the sustenance of national integration.

Previous researches such Mustapha (2006) cited the educational imbalance between the North and South existing since pre-independence era as reason why southerners outnumbered their northern counterparts in civil service despite that the latter is more in terms of population. For instance, in the 1969/70 academic session, only 19% of the students in the Nigerian universities were from the Northern states, the Western States alone accounted for 48% of the students (Orji, 2008). In the 1974/75 academic session, the Northern states had 24% enrolment in the Nigerian Universities while the Southern states had 74 % (Okolo, 2014). In the 2000/2001 session, the North had only 20% of the candidates admitted into Nigerian universities (Mustapha, 2004). The same reflected on the ethno-regional formation of human capital in the federal government workforce. Okolo (2014) highlights that the South was ahead of the North in the production of skilled manpower that took over the public service after independence. This was in congruence with Orji (2008) who found that the North had only 7%, 4% and 3% of the engineers, doctors and accountants in Nigeria respectively, in the mid-1960s. Similarly, in a research conducted by Mustapha (2006), the Northern zones with 53% of the population had only 10% of engineers, 15% of the professors, 10 % of the

architects, 25% of the lawyers, 8% of bank executives and less than 2% of insurance practitioners. This translated to Southern predominance in both public and private spheres.

The argument here, however, is not to show how or not civil servants from either region have dominated different sectors of public service over the years, but to drive home the point that at no time has the federal character principle been able to balance the ethno-regional formation of federal government workforce since its creation. Statistics available from the records at the Federal Character Commission show that while there has been an influx of workers across most government ministries and parastatals since 2015, the majority has been from the Northern part of the country. The federal character policy approach of over-emphasizing the sharing of vacancies in recruitment across geo-political zones rather than the application of merit is its greatest undoing. The Federal Civil Service of Nigeria will attain giant strides in her operations with harmonious application of merit, federal character, quota, representativeness and vacancy needs in the implementation of personnel policies in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

The problem created by ethnicity and ethnocentrism has resulted in many devastating experiences since the bringing together of different ethnic nationalities to form one Nigeria by the colonialists. It is the argument of this paper that the federal character principle and the Commission saddled with the responsibility to implement it have failed to address the obvious imbalances in the various segments of the country in the area of employment into various federal government offices. Although the policy was introduced to help address ethnic imbalances and integrate the country, its wrongful or none implementation in some quarters has hurt severely some section of the country. This has no doubt led to the over-bloated staff structure seen in majority of federal government's offices across the country as meritocracy and vacancy needs are sacrificed on the altar of nepotism and ethnic bigotry.

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