

## **Federalism Structural Imbalance and the Politics of Restructuring in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigated the nexus between federalism, structural imbalance, and the politics of restructuring in Nigeria. We established that the disjointed federalism and structural imbalance in Nigeria is a consequence of the British asymmetrical arrangement of the federal system. This arrangement has continued to distort the economic progress of Nigeria. We relied on the documentary method of data collection and content analysis for our data analysis, while our theoretical framework was predicated on structural-functional analysis. We found out that the inability of the dominant north to understand that restructuring does not necessarily mean secession, balkanization, or confederation is responsible for jettisoning any attempt to restructure the country. Thus they continue to handle it with a pinch of salt. The study recommended among others that the north especially should see restructuring as a welcome development that will further diversify our economic base and reduce unnecessary and rent-like dependence on oil as the mainstay of the economy.*

**Keywords:** *economy, federalism, structural imbalance, politics of restructuring and revenue allocation formula.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The political class of a nation determines the degree of development it can record at any point in time to a significant extent. Nigerian federalism does not exhibit the principles of a federal system. The Nigerian political class consisting of the ruling and guardian class, having their majority in the North has continued to determine the rule of the game (Asogwa 2002; Obi-Ani 2004). The ideal and political thinking of the political class have a functional relationship with the dominant political ideology. Be this as it may, Nigeria with sound and

progressive-minded individuals can paddle our political canoe to the desired level. Unfortunately, those who find themselves in the political atmosphere have blatantly refused to play the game according to the stipulated rules, while those who are enthusiastic are virtually not given the opportunity. Instead of using federalism as an ideology for national integration, it has become a mere tool in the hand of the elites to play destructive politics to the detriment of a balanced and well-structured government that conform to global best practices. Based on their numerical power, the North usually votes against an idea of a well-structured and balanced federal system and prefers a unitary system in practice but a federal structure in principle. Nigeria became a product of an amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914. It implies that there should be a balance between the two regions on the number of States, including distribution and management of the country's resources. That was the intention of the 1963 constitution. Against this background, this study focuses on federalism, structural imbalance, and politics of restructuring in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification of Federalism and Restructuring in Nigeria**

The terms federalism and con-federalism share a root in the Latin word *foedus*, meaning treaty, pact, or covenant. Their early meaning until the late 18th century was a simple league on intergovernmental relations among sovereign states based on treaties. We owe the Greeks the theory and practice of federalism from the 5th century BC. Karl Fredrick (Ugwu 1998) defines federalism as a situation where the federal and regional (State) governments are limited to their spheres and within those spheres should be independent of the other.

Federalism is a constitutional arrangement, mid-way between the unitary system and confederalism, distributes powers more or less equally between the two levels of government, the centre and the regions or states, provinces, and a clearly defined exclusive, concurrent and residual list, jurisdiction or powers (Igwe, 2002). He further stated that historically, federalism arises either through the coerced authority of a federal power called institutive federalism or the voluntary agreement of constituent units, and constitutive federalism. It is a structural basis for the doctrine of unity in diversity. Wheare (1953), Awa (1976), and Elaigwu

(1977) are among the intellectual giants who devoted some energy to examining the issue of federalism.

However, federalism is a system of government where there is an association of many states, having a certain degree of autonomy, willingly agreeing to form a union, and enjoying equal progress and development without any form of political, economic, cultural, and social marginalization.

### **Meaning of Structure**

The structure is necessary for any political system (Almond, 1966). He called it structural functionalism. Also, political structure refers to arrangements within a political system that perform the functions (Verma, 1975). For an effective political system, we must adopt balanced federalism. A restructured government is the best for a State with multi-ethnic diversity. Examples of restructuring are Glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (restructuring) in the former USSR that pulled down the threatening Leviathan. Again, if power is concentrated at the centre, the regions have their power encroached upon sometimes with impunity.

### **Federalism and Origin of Structural Imbalance in Nigeria**

One of the imperfections of Nigeria's federalism that has continued to threaten its survival is the issue of structural imbalance. It seriously contradicts John Stuart Mill's thesis that federalism should be arranged in a manner that no one state or region is more powerful than the others. Professor Ben Nwabueze has also observed the dangerous structural imbalance that characterized Nigerian federalism. He stated that perhaps the most astonishing peculiarity of Nigeria's federalism was the imbalance in size and population between the north and the other regions. The north has a larger land mass and people than the southern region (Oji, 1997). Thus, Nigerians have accepted the imperfection of their federal constitution which has been very tragic as Professor Afigbo regrettably commented that federalism has not worked in promoting unity, stability, order, and development (Afigbo 1986). Evan Margery Perham described the Nigerian federal structure as a tripod (Asogwa, 2001).

Lord Lugard is responsible for the structural imbalance in Nigeria's federalism. On this note, current limitations and contradictions inherent in Nigeria federation have been heavily and directly moulded by her colonial antecedent and further reinforced by her successive exposure to the negative impact of military dictatorship and autocracy. Unfortunately, the federal system was not created by the coming together of separate States and ideas like in the case of America and Canada but was due to the subordination of nations that had been ruled as single units. The British divide and rule system introduced in Nigeria inflamed division, suspicion, chaos, and discrimination among diverse ethnic groups (Okpata *et al.* 2000; Obiaga 2016). The 1954 Lyttleton constitution institutionalized regionalism by establishing a federation of three regions (Ojo, 1976). It was a total disregard for the multifaceted nature of the country. The structure of the three areas further strengthened the political hegemony and demographic eminence of the north over the south region combined (Okibe, 2000). This ugly incident consequently created structural calamities aggravated by the British colonial government conservatively resisting all calls for a further subdivision of the country to cater to minority ethnic groups. It occurred despite the loud warning that a federal system in which one region had a population majority could be a potential cause of instability (Djebah & Aderibigbe, 2001).

Consequent to this ill-faced and disjointed federal structure, war broke out because the nationalist could not shadow the bitter acrimony that culminated in the demise of the first republic (Ezeh, 2004). The military intervention was initially a welcome development but later escalated inter-regional tension since almost all the military heads of states came from the North. Sir George Goldie advocated the amalgamation of southern and northern Nigeria but admitted that the two countries had separate governments, customs, and general ideas about life. Again, several Nigerians have expressed their contending views about amalgamation. For example, in the Northern House of Assembly in 1952, Sir Tafawa Balewa, who later became the Prime Minister of Nigeria (1960 – 1966) dismissed the amalgamation by stating that "the southern people who are swarming into this region daily in large numbers are intruders. We don't want

them and they are not welcome here in the north (Ezeh 2004). Tafawa Balewa said that since the amalgamation of northern and southern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper. For Arthur Richard, it is only an accident of British suzerainty which made Nigeria one country, it is still far from being one country or one nation (Okadigbo 1987). The cry by all well-meaning Nigerians, not the political thieves and internationally acknowledged men, to strengthen the political history of Nigeria in the form of restructuring fell on deaf ears (Uju, 2000); the present-day restructuring has remained a national question.

The mistaken unification of Nigeria has entrenched structural imbalance for economic rather than political reasons. Northern Nigeria had a budget deficit, and the colonial administration sought to use the budget surplus in southern Nigeria to offset the budget deficit (<http://Nigeria.com> the inside of 1914 accessed on 1/3/2022). Indeed, the distinction between north and south Nigeria led Sir Ahmadu Bello to describe the amalgamation as the mistake of 1914. It explains why a structural imbalance in our federalism necessitates restructuring. In the post-independence era, it portrayed a strong north Nigeria and a balkanized southern region created as occasion demanded. The division of the Western State into Western and Mid-Western States was a deliberate attempt to weaken the stronghold of the opposition parties in Nigeria in 1964 (Okibe, 2000; Alapiki, 2010).

The creation of 12 States by Yakubu Gowon's military administration in 1967 (Ezeh, 2004) appeared as a panacea to cushion the equity and structural imbalance problem. But further State creation was lopsided to the advantage of the north over the south. This became obvious in the 36 States structure of the federation, 19 States in the North and 17 States in the South with South East being the only geopolitical zone with 5 States, which when completed will make 18 States in the north and 18 states in the south.

## **Politics of Restructuring in Nigeria**

Lasswell (1958) clarified the nature and concept of politics that the word politics is derived from the Greek words polis, meaning city state. In his treatise on human association, Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) stated that the most sovereign and inclusive association is the polis, whose essence is the government (Oji, 1997). Thus, there is a link between politics and government. And the power of the government has been used to prevent the restructuring of the Nigerian state. Easton (1965) defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values. Politics is all activities directly or indirectly associated with the emergence, consolidation and use of state power (Nnoli, 2003).

From the above definitions, the basis of politics is the state power which may be illegitimately and legitimately used to bless friends and punish enemies. The point is that power or state is used to prevent restructuring or to insist on the type of restructuring that is not favourable to citizens.

## **METHOD**

To generate data for this study, we focused on documentary methods, which consist of textbooks, journals, newspapers, dictionaries, encyclopedias, public lectures, internet material, and government documents. Thus, our source of data is the secondary source. More importantly, gathering information from secondary sources does not need the cooperation of the people whom information concerns. Hence we deem it most appropriate for this study. Our method of data analysis is content analysis. The strength of this method is that numerous documentary materials can be analyzed clearly and systematically. Content is what is in a document, while analysis is the process of systematically analyzing what a message contains, what is in a message automatically becomes a basis for drawing inferences about the content. In this regard, content could be textual or written reports, interviews, or speeches.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is predicated or anchored on the structural-functional analysis. Structural functionalism as a theoretical framework explains the basis for order and stability in a society and the arrangement that maintains the said order (Haralambos and Heald 1980). Almond (1966) developed the theory for political analysis. It has its origin in the works of eminent scholars of Anthropology like Radcliff-Brown, Bronislaw Malinowski and Sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parson and Robert Merton (Igwe, 2002). Verma (1975) stressed that structural functionalism revolves around function and structure. Based on these, three basic questions are posed - what basic functions are fulfilled in any given political system? By what structure? And under what condition will they function?

However, while functions deal with the consequences involving objectives, the process of a pattern of actions, structure refers to the arrangements within the system which perform the functions (Verma, 1975). The basic proposition of the structural-functional framework is that all political systems have structures that perform functions within the system necessary for its persistence. Thus, Almond (1966) perceives that every political system must perform a specific task if that political system is to remain in existence. According to the theory, all political systems are mandated and perceived to perform two functions, itemized into seven variables four are input functions, and three are output functions. The input functions are political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, and interest aggregation. and political communication. The output functions are rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication (Laswell, (1958). According to Easton (1965) and Almond (1966), the political system here can therefore be analyzed and compared in terms of the degree to which their political structure (legislature, executive, and judiciary) specialized in performing their functions.

The proposition and explanation of the theory, according to Verma (1975), revolve around structure and function. It means that each government arm should constitutionally be allowed to perform its functions without hindrance or intimidation by another; it might be the federal or the state, which is necessary for

the system to exist. Under this arrangement, the President (the executive) has no political power to sack the Chief Justice who heads the judiciary, such as in the case of the sack of Justice Walter Nkanu Onnoghen in Nigeria in 2019 by President Muhammadu Buhari's administration.

The significance of this theory is its recognition that all political systems must be structured or arranged in a manner that allows them to perform functions that will ensure or enable their existence. Stakeholders from southern Nigeria are clamouring for proper structuring or restructuring of our political system for peace to reign. The maintenance of order and stability in a political system by different political structures will ensure that there will be no or minimal conflict in the society. The maintenance and adoption of balanced and well-structured federalism as practiced in states like the USA will help solve or ameliorate the problem of incessant conflict and contradiction between the federating units, especially the north and the south. It will also help in eradicating the hydra-headed problems of resource control and inequitable revenue-sharing formula that has remained a cog in Nigeria's federal system. The imbalance has been a nebulous, pejorative, and retrogressive concept that does not add value to the growth of Nigeria. The theory is equally relevant in the area of interest articulation and aggregation because the south has been complaining and clamoring for restructuring since their interest has not been adequately articulated and aggregated in this line of thought. It is perceived by Almond (1966) that all political systems, regardless of their type, must perform the task of interest articulation and aggregation. It must be for Nigeria to remain as one indivisible and indissoluble entity. It is on this note that the theory is used for the analysis of this study.

### **Historical Instances of Restructuring**

Federalism as a political structure accommodates people of diverse cultures and values while providing an opportunity for harmonious existence. People of different ethnic backgrounds have different views about the restructuring question based on the legal status and what to restructure. It is the geographical terrain, the politics, the people, and the state system, whose constitutional stamina is to be amended or changed. Or is it our mind or character that requires



restructuring? It implies that restructuring appears to be prone to various interpretations. But this study argues that the type of restructuring in Nigeria is more of devolution of at least some central powers to the state, especially control of resources and giving a certain amount to the federal government. It implies that resources discovered in a state must be controlled by that state and that state pays an agreed percentage of the revenue to the federal government. The twelve state structures by Col. Yakubu Gowon were a form of restructuring in that it was an attempt to calm the nerves of minority regions that agitated for autonomy. But the southern part of the country felt that such a unification attempt of Gowon was employed to gain direct access to the oil-rich region of Niger Delta (Ojo, 1976). By 1966, the exploration and sales of produced resources were carried out, by the three regions that originally formed Nigeria the region, in turn, paid royalty to the federal government as required the areas were the West, North, and East each was in control of its resources. The implication was that each federating unit controlled its resources.

That was the situation before the Aguiyi Ironsi government took over and distorted the existing beautiful structure that calls for restructuring today, although that was the nature of military government (unitary). When crude oil became commercialized as the mainstay of the economy, previous regional resource control arrangements were abandoned.

Consequently, fiscal federalism in the instance of crude oil was rejected in favour of central control of crude oil explorations and sales (Okpata et al. 2000, Ezeh, 2004). On 30th May 1967, three days after the restructuring of Nigeria from 4 regions to 12 states by Yakubu Gowon, Ojukwu still proclaimed the former Eastern region the Republic of Biafra on 3rd February 1976, General Murtala Mohammed's regime created seven new states making Nigeria a restructured 19 states. General Ibrahim Babangida created Akwa Ibom and Katsina states in 1987 to make Nigeria 21 states. General Babangida also created 9 more States to bring the number to 30 excluding Abuja, FCT. Sani Abacha's administration created 6 additional States on 1st October 1996 to bring the total number of states in Nigeria to 36.

Even though there is unnecessary politics in the present structure of the Nigerian state, in that the south east is the only geographical zone with 5 states, what the south needs especially the south east is not so much state creation but the devolution of power and economic restructuring (Obi-Ani, 2004) or something more than that. Here each state will have control over its resources and pay some agreed percentage to the government. This will make each state depend less on the federal government for revenue.

However, to the northerners, restructuring in the form of resource control is a selfish agitation and demonstration or display of excessive greed on the part of southern governors. But for the Niger Delta, it's a struggle for their natural rights. The issue of resource control which is the hallmark of the restructuring agenda has been creating a gulf of suspicion between the north and the south, hence the continuous search for the best and most acceptable revenue-sharing formula.

Democracy is synonymous with freedom of expression as opposed to the totalitarian military Junta that nearly gave the north the power to produce almost all the heads of state during the era of the military government (Ojo, 1976, Uju, 2000, Obi-Ani, 2004).

Nevertheless, the discovery of oil has become a problem rather than a solution for Nigeria. During his administration in the 70s, General Gowon said that in Nigeria "money was not the problem but how to spend it". But at that time, Nigeria was infrastructural dead. The question is why not use the money for critical infrastructural development. Thus, the restructuring controversy has similarly enunciated inferiority or superiority complex among the oil and non-oil producing states and regions, coupled with horizontal and vertical disagreements. It has created a situation where oil resources come from a single source and rent-like dependence on oil by the federal government with blatant neglect of the non-oil sector. What Nigerians should know especially the northerners is that restructuring must not be confused erroneously with balkanization division or secession or confederation. States in the north are richly blessed with abundant natural resources but the current structure of Nigeria discourages the potential of

such states. The northerners should not see themselves as parasites (Saturday Vanguard Newspaper, October 19, 2019) and consequently continue to cling to the concentration of power at the centre and stark opposition to restructuring. The south should understand that one cannot clap with one hand because they need each other to have workable federalism.

### **Politic of Revenue Allocation Formula in Nigeria**

The revenue allocation formula is the proportion of resources accruing to the federation that goes to each of the components states; it equally defines the slice of resources retained in the territories where they have generated as well as the proportion of the revenue accruing to the collecting agencies of government (Mbanefo and Egwaikhinde 1998). The perceived absence of fairness and equity in the distribution of the resources often accounts for tension, acrimony and controversy that culminated in the continuous quest for restructuring. Established in 1989, the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) came up with the current formula in 1992 during the military era. The government thwarted the efforts to tinker with the formula for fear of losing its earnings. President Jonathan could not present the newly drafted formula to the National Assembly before leaving office in 2015. President Buhari equally rejected the draft from RMAFC when he assumed office. It is therefore surprising that the federal government has more than a fair share of resources of the country to the disadvantage of the component units with numerous responsibilities. Under the current formula, the federal government gets 52.68 percent, the 36 states share 26.72 percent, while the 774 local government areas share 20.60 percent every month. Thus a review of the existing revenue allocation formula shows why the need to restructure continues to escalate like a bushfire in the harmattan.

### **Structural Imbalance the Need to Restructure**

In Nigeria's situation, the fact remains that the structural imbalance in Nigeria's federalism and the mal-federated nature of the Nigerian state has grossly eroded the federal system and rendered it defective and impracticable. The financial and political autonomy of the 36 federating states leaves much to be desired (Otthman

and Osman 2019). The foremost federalist, Wheare (1953), stressed the imperative of giving coordinated and independent power to each level of government in a federation. In our federalism, it thus appears that those stark opponents of restructuring seem to be fundamentally bereft of the literal meaning of the concept rather, they are allotting to it a secessionist colouration. Such a monographic and parochial mentality introduces monumental or colossal confusion and misinformation into the smooth running of Nigeria's federal system.

There is a chasm between restructuring and secession or dismemberment from the federation as explained by the 17 Southern governors and the Middle Belt Forum in Nigeria in 2021. Their agitation boils to the idea of resource control. The issue of revenue allocation in Nigeria has become a recurring decimal and grossly controversial. The point is that the federal government has become an indomitable and burgeoning leviathan since the revenue allocation formula has remained monographically in favour of it. It has dominated the most lucrative sources of revenue. Consequently, the component States are almost wholly dependent on the federal (central) government for funding. It has inflicted a formidable negative impact on the operation of Nigeria's federal system and crippled the component States (Ugwu, 1998).

It is unfortunate in Nigeria that the federal government in this 21st century directly controls the sources of revenue, like oil, company taxes, custom and excise revenue. It has eroded the financial autonomy of the states. Nigeria stands to gain a lot if she restructures her economy. Many States in Nigeria are endowed with abundant natural resources, but excessive concentration on oil alone has caused more harm than good to the country. All states in Nigeria should explore their resources and pay a certain percentage to the federal government. This practice will halt the primitive accumulation of capital by respective Presidents and other top bureaucrats at the central level. It is because the centre will be less attractive. It will also bring an optimistic spirit to the federating states because they will be directly involved in controlling their resources (Sabowale, 1997).

The hydra-headed issue of unemployment will take a drastic reduction because states will also be generating employment through Public Private Partnerships.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Nigeria's government has violated or swept under the carpet the spirit and tenets of a federal system adopted from the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 and the 1963 Constitution that gave power to the regions. The growth and development of an economic system is the essence of the political economy, according to the Classical Political Economist, Adam Smith. He treated political economy as the study of how politics interplay with the economy to determine the distribution of wealth. Restructuring is a form of how political power helps an economy positively. Thus restructuring here will provide plentiful revenue or subsistence for the population or provide an enabling environment for the people to generate revenue for themselves. It will propel development from the classical political economy perspective. The 36 States' structure has made the States weak and unviable. It took the wisdom, talent, and skills of USA leaders like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and George Mason to make the people come to through dialogue. In Germany, Bismark had to bring his political wizardry and diplomacy to bear on the territories to agree on going into a federation in 1871. The effect of Tupper (the Premier of Noval Scotia) resulted in the Canadian federation. We need people that have such political will in Nigeria.

Nigeria must rise to the challenge and adopt a restructured and economically independent federal State and not secession since we have a lot to gain if we stay together. A restructured federal system in Nigeria will help restore peace and security because the primary purpose of government is to secure life and property. Moreover, devolution of power will help reduce this colossal insecurity of life and properties. It will be achieved through the establishment of state police and instrument of state power at the state level to combat insecurity and unnecessary threat to the federal system. Some states in the southern part of the country were threatened by Fulani jihadists while legitimately calling for a stop to the barbaric and atavistic open grazing. For details of this threat see Daily Sun Newspaper of Monday, June 14, 2021, page 6. "Unknown person threaten

mayhem in Delta" It is high time to say no to unnecessary threat and yes to a peaceful restructured and indivisible federal system.

Based on the above conclusions, we hereby proffer the recommendations below. The study recommended that the north especially should see restructuring as a welcome development that will further diversify our economic base and reduce unnecessary and rent-like dependence on oil as the mainstay of the economy.

Secondly, the Nigerian government should go back to the doctrine of federalism, we must see a federal government not as a tool for balkanization but rather as that of unification.

Finally, the creation of States in the form of restructuring should be based on the objective principle that States would be allowed to control their resources, or at least the revenue accruing to the States should be reviewed upward.

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