

## The Interplay between Presidential Democracy, Federalism, and the Push for Political Restructuring in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Federalism initially conceived to accommodate Nigeria's diversity, grapples with challenges such as centralization, power imbalances, and governance issues, prompting a reevaluation of its structure. A static approach to federalism has proven ineffective, highlighting the need for a dynamic process that evolves through negotiation, adaptation, and consensus-building. This study utilizes qualitative data collected from secondary sources, including books and journal articles, to explore the intricate relationship between presidential democracy, federalism, and the push for political restructuring in Nigeria. The analysis reveals that democracy and federalism share commonalities with the doctrine of Separation of Powers, operating based on established rules and processes. However, certain undemocratic elements, such as concerns about local government autonomy, perceived biased appointments, growing insecurity, and campaign strategies, contribute to the clamor for political restructuring. The study concludes that a fundamental shift is necessary, emphasizing the devolution of power, resources, and responsibilities from the central government to states. This decentralization can effectively address grievances related to resource allocation and enhance regional autonomy. Furthermore, revisiting historical regional structures or considering a two-tier system involving the federal government and states, potentially subsuming local government areas under the states, could promote better governance and resource management at the regional level.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Federalism, Presidential, Push, Restructuring

### Introduction

Nigeria stands as an intricate tapestry woven together by Britain's colonial policies, emerging as one of the most populous black nations globally and a significant player in Africa's economic landscape (Musa, 2022). The nation gained independence from Britain in 1960, formalizing its status as a Federal Republic in 1963 (Musa, 2023). The early post-independence era witnessed Nigeria's transition from a Parliamentary to a Presidential system of government—a system that persists to this day. Under the 1963 constitution, Nigeria operated with four distinct regions: Northern, Eastern, Western, and Mid-Western Nigeria (Musa, 2023). During this period, these regions competed independently, reliant on export crops, as oil revenue was not yet a significant factor in the nation's economy. The adoption of the Presidential system of government significantly shifted the dynamics of Nigerian federalism, recalibrating the power dynamics between the central government and the regions (Musa, 2023). However, the journey of Nigerian federalism since independence has been riddled with persistent political conflicts, ranging from accusations of marginalization among minority groups to tensions between major ethnic groups,

notably the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba communities. These tensions have occasionally flirted with secessionist movements, becoming integral parts of Nigeria's evolutionary political landscape.

Presently structured as a federation with 36 states, a federal territory, and 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs), including Abuja, Nigeria operates under a federal system where the central government wields considerable power over the federating units. Unlike the model seen in more established federations like the United States, Nigeria's central government controls a lion's share of the country's resources, notably oil and natural gas. This has led to a scenario often described as "Feeding Bottle" federalism, where revenues pooled in the Federation Account are monthly allocated to states and LGAs. Consequently, the federating units can become dependent on federal allocations, viewed at times by the central government as liabilities. This structural imbalance has resulted in profound economic, political, and social challenges for the federating units, prompting widespread calls for the restructuring of Nigeria's federal system across various regions (Musa & Hassan, 2014a).

Nigerian federalism grapples with multifaceted issues, hindering its true operational efficiency. These challenges encompass the dominance of the federal government in revenue allocation, centralist fiscal relations, over-reliance on oil revenue, disputes over resource sharing, unequal representation, geographical disparities, and discordant federal-state relations (Tamuno, 1998; Musa & Hassan, 2014a; Musa, 2022). In light of these complexities, this paper aims to delve into the intricate interplay between presidential democracy, federalism, and the compelling push for political restructuring in Nigeria.

### **Conceptualising Federalism, Political Restructuring, Presidential Democracy, Accountability and Good Governance**

Federalism delineates a government structure where power is distributed between the national government and other governing bodies (Musa, 2022; Musa & Hassan, 2014b). Bulmer (2017) extends this by defining federalism as a constitutional mechanism ensuring substantial autonomy for federated units in specific policy areas while sharing power per agreed-upon rules in other domains. In essence, federalism involves shared sovereignty among constituent units (Rath, 1978). Particularly in diverse nations like Nigeria, federalism enhances service delivery, democratic resilience, appropriate decision-making, guards against power concentration, and fosters democratic participation (Bulmer, 2017).

Political restructuring remains contested. Raimi (2020) defines it as transitioning from a skewed federal structure to true federalism, emphasizing inclusivity, constitutional amendments, resource control, electoral processes, political representation, and citizens' rights. Nche et al. (2020) view it as a constitutional reorganization aligning with federalism's core principles. Presidential democracy, characterized by separate elections for executive and legislative branches, prevails in Nigeria since 1979 after the failure of parliamentary democracy in 1966. The president, serving as both Head of State and Government, holds fixed-term office and shares powers with the legislature. This system embodies checks and balances between the executive, legislature, and judiciary (Nwankwo, 2002). Within a federal system, powers are distributed among federal, state, and local governments based on exclusive, concurrent, and residual lists, ensuring balance and autonomy among tiers of governance. An elected President in Nigeria holds significant

powers: as Commander-in-Chief, appointing military officials, making treaties (with legislative approval), and reporting to the National Assembly (Nwankwo, 2005; Tan, 2017).

Accountability, a dynamic concept, encompasses responsibility, ethics, and institutional relationships. It involves setting standards, investigating compliance, demanding explanations, and implementing sanctions (Kenton, 2021; Tai, 2017). Good governance necessitates accountability across governmental, private, and civil sectors, crucially tied to transparency and the rule of law (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). In a broader context, accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusion epitomize the shift in developmental practices since the 1990s. They interconnect governance, democracy, and human rights efforts (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). The terms "governance" and "good governance" increasingly feature in development literature, encompassing decision-making processes and their implementation across various levels—corporate, international, national, and local (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

### **Theoretical framework**

This paper dwells on Rational Choice theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. In essence, the Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals make decisions based on rational calculations to serve their best interests. This theory, often linked to concepts like rational actors and self-interest, suggests that these choices aim to maximize personal gain within the constraints of available options (Ganti, 2021). In the context of Nigeria's federal system, Rational Choice Theory becomes relevant as Nigerians, represented by diverse political entities at federal, state, and local levels, utilize their rational intentions to steer a democratic federal structure. The goal is to foster accountability, good governance, and outcomes aligned with their personal objectives. The anticipated outcomes are driven by shared common interests aimed at maximizing individual self-interest within a framework that benefits all Nigerians, transcending ethnic, religious, or other primordial affiliations.

By employing Rational Choice Theory within Nigerian federalism, the aim is to achieve outcome that offer the greatest satisfaction and benefit to the populace, given the limitations presented by the available options.

### **Methodology**

This paper employs qualitative research methodologies, drawing upon secondary data sources for an in-depth analysis. The data utilized in this study are derived from a comprehensive review of books, scholarly journal articles, and other pertinent academic publications. By leveraging these secondary sources, the paper aims to elucidate the complex interplay between presidential democracy, federalism, and the ongoing advocacy for political restructuring in Nigeria. Through a meticulous examination of existing literature, this study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of how these political dynamics influence and shape the governance and political landscape in Nigeria.

### **Operational Dynamics of Federalism and Presidential Democracy in Nigeria**

The operation of federalism and presidential democracy in Nigeria aims to navigate the nation's multiplicity, which spans geographical, cultural, social, economic, ethnic, and religious diversities. The core objective is to avert the fragmentation of the country through mechanisms

that eschew domination, suppression, and exploitation. Key issues underpinning Nigerian federalism encompass various aspects such as the foundational background, essential requisites, comparison with alternative forms of association, units within the federal system, fiscal matters, political party dynamics, distributional strategies (e.g., representation based on merit and federal character), and intergovernmental relationships (Olowu, 1991:156). These issues serve as foundational elements for studying and practicing federalism in Nigeria.

Scholars have articulated diverse reasons behind the adoption of a federal system of government in Nigeria. While some attribute it to colonial imposition (Falola, 1988; Osuntokun, 1979), others view it as a product of rational choices among regional political leaders (Awolowo, 1966). Nigeria initially operated under a parliamentary system of government consisting of a ceremonial President as Head of State, a Prime Minister as Head of Government, and regional Premiers. However, this system ceased due to the 1966 military coup and subsequent countercoups. Subsequently, the military transitioned the governance structure to a presidential system. Concurrently, the original four regions were reconfigured into states, primarily to foster national integration and prevent secession attempts. The presidential system in Nigeria ensures a robust separation of powers. However, fiscal federalism has been a persistent challenge, marked by debates, calls for change, and even violent agitations, such as the resource control movements in the Niger Delta (Arowolo, 2011; Ewetan, 2012). Issues plaguing fiscal federalism include the dominance of the federal government in revenue allocation, a centralist fiscal relations system, over-reliance on oil revenue, conflicts over sharing principles, and disharmonious federal-state relations.

Contention persists over fiscal relations among government tiers, often fueling demands for restructuring in Nigeria. For instance, economic downturns and declining oil revenue have hindered many states' ability to pay civil servant salaries. Consequently, the federal government intervenes by disbursing funds to the states, contradicting the principle of fiscal federalism where each level of government should be financially autonomous (Premium Times, 2016). The imbalance in revenue sharing, heavily favoring the federal government, perpetuates financial dependence on allocations from the federation account (Tamuno, 1998). This centralization of financial resources, rooted partly in pre-independence trends but consolidated during military rule, accentuates states' reliance on central funding. Intergovernmental relations in Nigeria, as delineated by the 1999 constitution, establish a hierarchical framework. Despite provisions for facilitating relations among government tiers, power remains disproportionately concentrated at the federal level, conferring undue advantage to the federal government over states (Adedeji, 2017; Akinsanya, 2005). This asymmetry sometimes blurs the line between *de jure* federalism and *de facto* unitary governance.

The complexities within Nigerian federalism, while multifaceted and challenging to fully explore in this discourse, continue to evolve. Federalism remains a means to an end, necessitating political actors at both federal and state levels to craft policies that address pertinent questions without impeding the federal process.

### **Discussion of findings:**

## **The Interplay between Presidential Democracy, Federalism, and the Push for Political Restructuring in Nigeria**

The relationship between democracy and federalism is foundational in political systems worldwide. The embrace of democratic principles within federal states equates to infusing federalism with egalitarian, transparent, accountable, and responsible characteristics, incorporating social justice and equality. Federalism, in this context, can be seen as an artifact of democracy, fostering free elections, a multi-party system, and accountable opposition, as noted by Wheare (1946). Federal states, typically comprised of diverse and heterogeneous populations and cultures, are fundamentally opposed to forms of dictatorship that suppress free elections.

Democracy stands superior to autocracy, totalitarianism, oligarchy, or unitary systems due to its provision for equity, justice, and inclusiveness for all individuals, as emphasized by John Stuart Mill (cited in Appadorai, 2004). The alliance between democracy and federalism is evident in the adoption of federal structures imbued with democratic principles in countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, among others. Such advanced federal democracies continue to maintain their stability and integrity. Democracy and federalism both function on laid down rules and processes, guided by institutions and popular representatives, akin to the doctrine of Separation of Powers.

In Nigeria, the symbiotic relationship between democracy and federalism is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. Section 14 highlights principles of democracy and social justice, emphasizing sovereignty, the security and welfare of the people, and the need for inclusive governance to reflect federal character and promote national unity. The concept of separation of powers is integral to democracy. It aims to prevent power concentration and establishes checks and balances between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution delineates the roles and duties of these branches, ensuring a system of accountability.

However, certain undemocratic spaces have propelled the agitation for political restructuring in Nigeria. These include:

### **Devolution of Power:**

There is an advocacy for a decentralization of power from the central government to the states. Devolution of power in Nigeria advocates for the decentralization of authority from the central government to the states, aiming to foster greater autonomy and decision-making capabilities at sub-national levels. This concept holds significant implications for the country's political landscape, governance structure, and distribution of responsibilities between the federal and state governments.

In exploring the intricacies of devolution, Ojo (2016) emphasizes the need for a constitutional framework that clearly delineates the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and resources between the federal and state levels. Such delineation aims to create a conducive environment for effective governance, ensuring that state governments can make decisions aligned with their specific needs while contributing to the overall national development agenda. One of the primary arguments in favor of devolution of power revolves around the idea of enhancing participatory democracy. Adeleye (2014) contends that decentralized governance promotes citizen engagement and empowerment, allowing local communities to have a more direct role in

decision-making processes that affect their lives. This participatory approach not only strengthens democratic principles but also enhances accountability and transparency within governance structures. However, proponents of a centralized system often argue that devolution might exacerbate regional disparities and fragment national unity. They express concerns about potential challenges in maintaining uniformity in certain critical policy areas, such as infrastructure development and national security. Striking a balance between devolved powers and maintaining the cohesion of a nation as diverse as Nigeria remains a key challenge.

**Fiscal Federalism:**

The discourse on fiscal federalism in Nigeria remains a central theme within the governance framework, with stakeholders advocating reforms to establish a more equitable and efficient fiscal structure. Achieving a balance between equitable resource distribution and national unity presents a formidable challenge, necessitating nuanced negotiation and thoughtful policy formulation. Nigeria must prioritize mechanisms that enhance transparency, accountability, and fiscal discipline while fostering inclusive growth and development across its diverse regions. This equilibrium not only promotes economic prosperity but also contributes to overall stability and national unity (Ojo, 2020; Arowolo, 2019).

**Creation of Additional States:**

Calls for the establishment of new states in Nigeria persist, driven by the desire to enhance representation and governance. Historical roots of this demand trace back to the post-colonial era when ethnic groups sought political recognition and autonomy. Advocates argue that increased states would facilitate better representation and governance, enabling localized administration and development planning. However, the creation of new states poses challenges, involving legal, political, and socio-economic considerations impacting national unity. Criteria such as population size, geographical viability, economic viability, and cultural homogeneity are debated, leading to negotiations and tensions among interest groups (Ibeanu, 2008; Afolayan, 2021).

**Establishment of State Police:**

The proposal for state-controlled police forces in Nigeria sparks intense debate and advocacy. Advocates emphasize the need for localized law enforcement to address specific regional security challenges effectively. State police, proponents argue, can enhance responsiveness, bridging the gap between communities and law enforcement. However, critics express concerns about potential abuse of power, politicization of law enforcement, and lack of uniform standards across states. Legislative and constitutional reforms, including funding, training, and coordination with federal agencies, are deemed paramount but require careful planning to strike a balance between state autonomy and national security imperatives (Oyewole, 2019; Mustapha & Umar, 2017).

**Local Government Autonomy:**

The clamor for local government autonomy involves persistent calls for greater independence, improved governance effectiveness, and increased grassroots development. Advocates stress the significance of local governments as crucial channels for citizen engagement. However, challenges arise due to the current structure, leading to overreliance on state governments, hindering effective governance. Issues of administrative competence, capacity building, financial

transparency, and accountability mechanisms need attention to ensure that autonomy translates into improved governance and development outcomes. Legislative reforms and institutional capacity building are deemed essential for meaningful autonomy (Ayodele, 2017; Adebayo, 2022).

**Perceived Lopsided Appointments:** Concerns over unequal appointments favoring specific regions or ethnic groups generate debate on equity, fairness, and inclusivity. Critics argue that such appointments perpetuate exclusion, fostering ethnic tensions and undermining national unity. Calls for merit-based appointments and transparent, fair criteria are advocated to ensure diversity and inclusivity across various sectors. The debate emphasizes the need for policies prioritizing competence, fairness, and equity, contributing to effective governance and sustainable development (Adewumi, 2018; Adisa, 2020).

**Increasing Level of Poverty:** The escalating levels of poverty in Nigeria demand urgent attention and comprehensive strategies. Factors such as inadequate access to education, limited employment opportunities, economic inequality, and political instability contribute to persistent poverty. Comprehensive poverty reduction strategies focusing on job creation, skill development, and social protection programs are advocated. Effective governance and policy frameworks, including pro-poor policies and sustainable economic reforms, are crucial. International collaborations and partnerships are seen as pivotal in addressing Nigeria's poverty challenges (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Lal, 2006; Onuoha, 2019).

**Growing Insecurity:** Addressing the multifaceted nature of insecurity in Nigeria requires a holistic approach involving security measures, socio-economic interventions, and robust governance reforms. Factors such as socio-economic disparities, weak governance structures, and ethno-religious tensions contribute to insecurity. Effective law enforcement, intelligence gathering, and capacity building for security agencies are crucial. Community engagement, inter-communal dialogue, and addressing root causes of conflicts are emphasized. International collaborations and partnerships are essential in combating transnational threats and securing porous borders (Obi, 2018; Mustapha & Umar, 2017).

**Campaign Strategy:** The call for political restructuring in Nigeria has become a strategic aspect of political campaigns, aiming to mobilize voters and address socio-political grievances. Utilized as a rallying point, the restructuring agenda is employed to appeal to diverse interests and regional sentiments. However, challenges arise from diverse interpretations of what restructuring entails, leading to political polarization and conflicting interests. While effective during campaigns, the implementation of restructuring often faces challenges post-election, with limited progress in translating promises into tangible reforms (Olaopa, 2018; Adagba & Isitor, 2020).

In conclusion, these issues underscore the multifaceted challenges within Nigeria's governance landscape, requiring careful consideration, comprehensive strategies, and collaborative efforts to foster inclusive development and responsive governance. These factors have galvanized the demand for political restructuring, aiming to address various shortcomings within the Nigerian political landscape and promote a more inclusive and equitable governance system.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The study underscores the dynamic nature of federalism in Nigeria, highlighting its evolution and the challenges it faces in its current state. Federalism, once designed to accommodate the country's diversity, has encountered issues of centralization, inequitable power

distribution, and governance concerns, which have led to calls for political restructuring. Moreover, it is evident that a static approach to federalism is ineffective. Instead, embracing federalism as a dynamic process—one that evolves through negotiation, adaptation, and consensus-building—is crucial for its successful operation in Nigeria.

The following are recommended for government and stakeholders:

1. *Devolution of Power*: Prioritize the devolution of power, resources, and responsibilities from the central government to states and regions. This decentralization can enhance regional autonomy and address grievances regarding resource allocation.
2. *Reconsideration of Regional Arrangement*: Revisit the historical regional structure or consider reverting to a two-tier system involving the federal government and states, potentially subsuming local government areas under the states. This move might facilitate better governance and resource management at the regional level.
3. *Dialogue and Negotiation*: Encourage inclusive dialogue and negotiations among stakeholders—political leaders, representatives, civil society—to craft viable restructuring frameworks that accommodate diverse interests and promote national unity.
4. *Constitutional Amendments*: Undertake constitutional amendments that address the power dynamics between the central government and federating units. Amendments should prioritize equitable resource allocation, representation, and autonomy for states.
5. *National Unity and Cohesion*: Emphasize policies and initiatives that foster national unity, inclusivity, and mutual understanding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups. This can mitigate tensions and promote a shared national identity.
6. *Public Engagement and Education*: Foster public awareness and education about the benefits and implications of political restructuring. Informed citizenry can contribute positively to the discourse and facilitate consensus-building.

Examining the interplay between presidential democracy, federalism, and the push for political restructuring in Nigeria reveals a dynamic landscape that requires thoughtful consideration and strategic actions for improvement. As we draw conclusions and propose recommendations, it is evident that Nigerian federalism is not a fixed construct but an evolving system influenced by historical, political, and socio-economic factors.

In conclusion, while navigating the complexities of Nigerian federalism, a concerted effort towards equitable power distribution, inclusive governance, and national unity is imperative to address the challenges and realize the potential of a restructured political system that reflects the aspirations of all Nigerians.

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