

Revitalizing Nigeria: Imperative Restructuring for Inclusive Federalism

¹Ugwu Jovita Nnenna, ²Ugwuozor Samuel Ifeanyi and ³Eze Chidinma Esther

¹Department of Publication and Extension, Kampala International University Uganda.

²Department of Political Science and International Relations Godfrey Okoye University, Uguommu, Emene, Enugu, Nigeria.

³Department of Educational Foundation, Kampala International University, Uganda.

ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the urgent need for restructuring Nigeria's political framework, emphasizing inclusivity across its diverse geopolitical zones. Examining the historical backdrop and inherent imbalances stemming from the colonial legacy, it scrutinizes the calls for fiscal federalism to rectify disparities. It assesses the challenges within the Nigerian federal arrangement, emphasizing the interconnectedness of corruption, elite exploitation, and the shortcomings of a rent-collecting state. While advocating for restructuring as a solution, the paper underscores the indispensability of transformative leadership to ensure meaningful progress beyond the benefits of the entrenched political class.

Keywords: Fiscal Federalism, Colonial Legacy, Elite Exploitation, Restructuring and Transformative Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a pervasive demand for fiscal federalism, or "restructuring," in Nigeria, championed by politicians, analysts, commentators, and scholars. This movement advocates an overhaul of the current federal system, rooted in British colonial policies critiqued by [1]. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, driven by economic imbalances, ignored cultural and regional disparities, leading to ongoing discontent, injustice, and division [2]. Though Nigeria adopted a federal system in 1951 and transitioned fully in 1954, the military intervention in 1967 disrupted progress, culminating in the Nigerian Civil War. Attempts to counter the Eastern secessionist movement in 1967 resulted in the creation of twelve states, disproportionately favoring the North [3-5]. This pivotal decision exacerbated ethnic tensions, fueling various crises from terrorism to resource disputes [6-8]. The existing federal structure in Nigeria, marked by inherent inequalities and financial dependency on central allocations, raises doubts about its long-term sustainability [9-11]. This paper critically examines the motives behind the call for restructuring, primarily led by politicians, probing who stands to benefit. It also evaluates whether restructuring alone can adequately resolve Nigeria's multifaceted challenges or if additional measures are necessary for meaningful change [12-14].

The nature and character of the Nigerian State

The Nigerian State, a product of colonial imposition, lacks consensus among its diverse ethnic groups, revealing an imperial legacy that shapes its socio-political landscape. The historical backdrop illustrates how local elites inherited institutions and economic patterns, wielding significant influence over national progress and identity, albeit often at the expense of democratic principles [12-14]. This legacy of imperialism has instilled widespread distrust in the State, perceived as serving the interests of the ruling elite rather than the populace. Consequently,

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citizens navigate the system cautiously, prioritizing personal interests in the absence of a benevolent government, deviating from Aristotle's ideal of societal well-being [15-16]. Post-colonial Nigeria assumed a rent-collecting approach akin to imperial powers, relying on taxation and resource extraction over fostering a self-sustaining economy. This rent-collecting paradigm hindered economic diversification, perpetuating reliance on external factors for growth and stability [17-20]. The government's role as a 'rent-collecting state' emphasizes revenue extraction over productive ventures, hindering direct economic stimulation. This approach, critiqued by [16-17], privatizes the State for the ruling class's interests, often leading to misallocation of public funds and exploitation of national resources. Political power in Nigeria translates to control over finances, enabling potential exploitation of the national treasury to the detriment of the entire system [12]. This connection between political authority and financial control underscores the urgent need for robust checks and balances to prevent misuse of public resources. This entrenched dynamic of the ruling class accumulating illicit wealth perpetuates corruption, undermining genuine developmental efforts even in a restructured Nigeria [11]. The disproportionate accumulation of wealth by the elite continues to negatively impact the populace, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and inequality.

Issues in the Nigerian federal arrangement

The Nigerian federal framework, originating from a 1966 attempt to centralize power under General Aguiyi-Ironsi's military regime, saw the decentralization under General Gowon, only to be altered again in 1967 with the creation of twelve states amid regional unrest. This led to today's centralized federal system, marked by a shift from agrarian to oil-centric economy. However, this shift neglected agriculture, fostering corruption and governance issues. The allocation of oil wealth exacerbated disparities, particularly evident in the Niger Delta's neglect amid environmental degradation. The ongoing dispute over revenue allocation from the Federation Accounts further fuels contention among governmental levels, despite numerous commissions' attempts to resolve this since pre-independence [10]. Corruption remains a pervasive issue, influencing institutions and hindering progress. Minority concerns, secession threats, and debates around religious, ethnic, and national unity, alongside the challenge of federal character, compound Nigeria's complexities. Addressing these challenges necessitates restructuring the political landscape to rectify perceived injustices and inequalities, fostering genuine and inclusive development for Nigeria.

Restructuring of the Nigerian State and the likely benefactors

Advocates urging the restructuring of Nigeria propose embracing a fiscal federalism model. This approach decentralizes revenue management to local, regional, or state governments, allowing them to control resources within their domains and contribute a portion to the central government. Nigeria once operated under a decentralized federal system until General Yakubu Gowon's intervention in 1967 restructured the nation into twelve states, altering the federal landscape significantly. The current Nigerian model leans towards "centralized federalism," concentrating substantial power at the center. This is evident in the revenue distribution, where the federal government retains a majority share, contradicting federal principles and hindering state autonomy. This has stunted innovation and revenue diversification beyond oil, exacerbating economic imbalances and neglecting critical sectors [11]. The heavy reliance on oil revenue has sidelined other economic sectors, resulting in environmental degradation, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Calls for restructuring stem from regional disparities, contentious policies, security issues, and pervasive corruption in the political arena. However, restructuring alone won't suffice. It must be coupled with a fundamental shift in leadership culture [12]. The prevailing self-interested political elite, historically focused on resource exploitation, could thwart the true benefits of restructuring without reform. Ultimately, while restructuring offers promise in redistributing authority, its success hinges on addressing deeper-rooted issues. Nigeria requires a transformative shift in leadership to truly serve the nation's development beyond benefiting the entrenched political class.

REVITALIZING NIGERIA

The essence of autonomy within a federal government system is pivotal, especially in diverse nation-states like the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, Nigeria, and India. This paper emphasizes the urgent need to restructure Nigeria's political framework, aiming to ensure inclusivity for stakeholders across its six geopolitical zones, fostering a more unified nation [12]. The alteration of Nigeria's federal system in 1967 by the military government sparked discontent due to its inherent imbalance, resulting in structural contradictions and regional disparities that hindered overall development and growth. This skewed federal setup has given rise to various grievances and calls for change, including demands for resource control, state creation, secession, sovereign national conferences, and restructuring to enable regions or states to manage their resources while contributing royalties to the central government [13]. While a federal structure suits Nigeria's cultural diversity, effective management of both human and natural resources hinges on capable leadership. Essential is a forward-thinking, integrity-driven leader who prioritizes the State's interests over personal relationships, political alliances, or considerations of religion and ethnicity. Upholding the rule of law and valuing merit over mediocrity are vital traits for such leadership. Restructuring, without this brand of leadership, would yield little progress. Therefore,

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the Nigerian political class must be accountable to the populace, adhering to established rules and promoting good governance principles. Only then can restructuring not only hold significance but also foster substantive development across all sectors.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian state, shaped by historical impositions, lacks consensus among its ethnic groups, fostering distrust in the government and perpetuating a rent-collecting approach. The existing federal structure, rooted in historical disruptions and oil-centric revenue allocation, exacerbates disparities and hampers holistic development. While advocating for restructuring towards fiscal federalism, this paper highlights the necessity of transformative leadership to steer Nigeria towards genuine inclusivity and development. Emphasizing accountability, adherence to established rules, and good governance principles, it posits that restructuring alone cannot drive progress without a paradigm shift in the political class's ethos. Therefore, for Nigeria to achieve substantive growth, a symbiotic relationship between restructuring and transformative leadership is imperative.

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