# THE CONTENDING ISSUES AND REALITIES IN NIGERIAN FEDERALISM

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**KEYWORDS**
Federalism, Colonialism, Resource Control, State, Federating Units

**ABSTRACT**
*The paper examines the contending issues and realities in Nigerian federalism. The paper adopted the theory of pluralism as its framework of analysis and relied on the secondary sources of data to explicate the contending issues and realities in Nigerian federalism. Before the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914, Nigeria had empires, emirates, and kingdoms that interacted diplomatically, economically, politically, socially, and culturally. These entities had unique ways of political and justice administration, conflict mediation, conciliation, and resolution processes. The amalgamation of 1914 brought new forms and patterns of exercising power, which were spelt out and entrenched in the Lugard's Constitution of 1914. However, not all regions were represented in the Legislative Council, leading to bitter struggles and agitations towards the formation of a new government. The Richard's Constitution in 1946 provided for regionalism, while the Macpherson's Constitution of 1951 improved upon by introducing quasi-federalism. The Lyttleton's Constitution of 1954 introduced federalism in Nigeria, providing greater autonomy to various regions and functional division of powers between the central and regional governments. This was the first genuine federal constitution of the country, and its adoption was externally motivated for administrative convenience of the expatriates. Nigeria's complex diversity was a major factor that combined with other centrifugal and centripetal forces to produce a federation. The choice of a federal system of government was facilitated by the social, historical, political, and economic differences of the various groups and regions in the country. However, the legacy of colonialism continued to influence the functioning of federalism in the country. The uneven distribution of resources, power and structural imbalances, and ethnic rivalries among others have continued to challenge Nigerian federalism. The paper recommends that Nigeria's fiscal federalism should focus on revenue generation rather than*

*distribution. Future reforms should encourage states to develop fiscal capacity, enabling them to control their own revenue. This will enhance fiscal viability and reduce oil dependency. Also, encouraging a sense of national identity and unity among the diverse ethnic nationalities in Nigeria by emphasizing shared values, history, and common goals that will bridge differences and reduce tensions.*

## Introduction

The history of federal state in Nigeria dates to the period of amalgamation in 1914. Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the World with over 250 ethno-linguistic groups (Ojo, 2009). The Nigerian federalism is a creation of the British. Before the arrival of British colonialists, the area now known as Nigeria was inhabited by peoples who belonged to different empires, kingdoms, and societies, which were traditionally administered (Adigwe, 1974). At that time were the stateless societies in the East, the Hausa state in the North and Oyo Empire in the West. The major difference among these political organizations was the existence of a formal checks and balances system inherent in the then Oyo Empire and all other kingdoms in the West compared to the caliphate and Emirate System of Administration in the North. While the Oyo Mesi constituted a powerful body to check the excesses of the King, the powerful Emirates in the north were governed absolutely, with only the fear of God as guiding principles as well as the restraining force. There were only very powerful chiefs, groups or individuals that could challenge the authoritarian Emirs (Adigwe, 1974). This implies or shows the existence of a small form of democracy and egalitarianism in the West. Furthermore, apart from political ambition, the realization and protection of groups' and individuals' rights and liberty were some of the reasons for the intra and inter-ethnic conflicts and wars particularly among the Yoruba's.

Expatiating further, Aderonke (2015) noted that, in the Eastern part of Nigeria, there was no state organization. The Igbo society was stateless and the only form of political leadership in their domain was council of elders. In the council of elders' membership was chosen based on age consideration. The council of elders was seen as the highest form of democracy and egalitarianism. The attempts by the colonial administrations to create monarchical head like what was obtainable in the North and the West failed. The aim principally was to effect proper colonial administration in line with the policy of indirect rule and as well as system of tax collection; consequently, it led to the 1929 popular Aba Riot. Therefore, traditional institutions were not significant parts of the culture of the Igbo prior to colonial rule.

These ethnic groups were characterized by conflict and ritual killings in some parts of the nation (Adigwe, 1974). The differences among these ethnic nationalities in history, politics, culture and even geography were carried into amalgamation. There were differences in culture and orientation among the people of Lagos colony, the River protectorate and Niger territories. They were different and conflicting systems of administration employed by the British to govern these areas as well as boundary frictions. The boundary friction and other problems made the British govern these areas by setting up the Lord Lugard committee to consider the future administration of Nigeria. This was due to the outcome of the report that led to the River protectorate and Niger territories to unite and form southern protectorate in 1900 (Aderonke, 2015). Thus, the other remaining part of the Niger, Idah for instance, was merged with part of the Northern Nigeria ruled by Fredrick Lugard. Similarly, the southern protectorate was ruled and exposed to executive and legislative councils with laid down laws. However, there were no such arrangement in Northern Nigeria. All powers were regulated by proclamations and there was no uniform policy for the two protectorates. These were some of the factors that made indirect rule to succeed in the North.

Therefore, Nigeria as a plural society, its constituent groups are detached from each other by substantial differences of ethnicity, language, culture, and traditions. These

differences in character, outlook, and attitudes indicated that federalism was the solution (Aderonke, 2015). Nigeria accepted federalism as a means of accomplishing its much-needed goal of national unity among people of different religion, ethnicity, and culture. The federal state structure adopted was expected to lessen the massively destructive inter-ethnic competition and tension, alleviate the usually assumed fear of majority and minority domination, bringing government closer to the people and give these diverse groups more opportunities, thereby integrating the country.

The federal system of government was set up for the purpose of national unity in the plural society like Nigeria and to preserve the distinct social identities valued by various nationalities. The federal system in the Nigeria has continued to work with minimum unity to resolve issues of diversity. Competition among these ethnic nationalities prompted by cultural common distrust progressively deteriorates the stuff of Nigerian Authority (Ola, 1995).It is within this premise that the study examines the contending issues and realities in Nigerian federalism.

## Conceptual Clarification

**Colonialism:** Colonialism is an act of a powerful nation directly controlling a weaker nation and using that nation's resources to advance its own wealth and power. Ake (1981) explains that colonialism was a process of incorporating African societies into the world capitalist system which was effected through monetization, forced labour, imposition of tax, and plunder of resources. To Onimode (1983), colonialism is the achievement of the expansionist drive of capitalism through the subjugation, domination and imposition of its political will, culture, and economic needs. The major objectives of colonialism in Africa were to subjugate the people politically and militarily, under a repressive system of law and order to create a conducive atmosphere for economic exploitation, plunder, and transfer of resources.

**Federalism:** Federalism is a system of government that shares power between two or more levels of government. To Amah (2017), federalism is a system of governmental organization whereby two or more independent states agreed to form a common government while retaining their distinctive autonomy. It is a concept that attempts to give meaning to a form of government in which, rather than power being concentrated in one body, is decentralized between the central authority and the component units. They come together for one or more significant reasons and exist under constitutional arrangement exercising specific powers to avoid clashes and the provision for a means of compromise where and when clashes are inevitable. Federalism is a constitutional arrangement which divides the lawmaking powers and functions between two levels of government in such a way that each within its respective spheres of jurisdiction and competence, is independent and coordinate (Wheare, 1953). It is a system of government in which sovereignty is divided between the central and state governments. The central and regional governments are co-ordinate in the sense that neither level of government is subordinate to the other in legal authority. In this system of government, each level of government is limited to its own sphere and within that sphere, it is independent of the other. This system of government can therefore be contrasted with a Unitary System in which the component units are legally subordinate to the central government (Wheare, 1967). A federal system of government often arises from the desire of the people to form a union without necessarily losing their identities.

**The State:** The concept of state has been defined variously by scholars based on the way they perceive it according to their ideological standpoint. Ijere (2014) asserted that, the state is a community of persons occupying a definite territory, independent of external control, and possessing an organised government to which the inhabitants render habitual obedience. This suggests that there are four distinctive characteristics of the state, namely: population, sovereignty, government, and territory. The state is the most powerful and universal organisation. The primary purpose of the state is to maintain order and security. It does so by means of a system of laws backed by force (Agi, 2003). A state is an institution that make, interpret, and enforce laws that are binding on the people within a defined geographical territory.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the theory of pluralism by Bentley (1908), Truman (1951), Latham (1952), Robert A. Dahl, Miller (1983) among others as its framework of analysis. The theory traditionally explained the complexity and heterogeneity

nature of the nations such as ethnic and religious differences in the federating units. It is premised on the assumption that citizens of different backgrounds are accommodated under federal arrangement. It prefers working together as a single entity to protect the interest of all the citizens. It believes that political power and resources should be shared equally to secure the genuine welfares of the citizens and none of these groups should be dominated by the other groups in the federating units (Miller, 1983).

The first strength of this theory is that it discusses and recognizes the reality of diversity among different groups in the federating units in the nation. It suggested for equal power and resources allocation as well as equal opportunities to all citizens whether minority or majority to have equal access to power and resources in the nation, based on their political interests. This is because the government is meant to guard them to ensure that they get the same treatment at all levels of power and resources allocation.

Secondly, the strength of pluralism theory is that it inspires minority groups to grow their plans by maintaining their political ambitions. The assumption of the theory centered on unity among the diverse ethno-religious groups and that the government should try to overcome existing problems in the federating units by mediating all conflicts between the various regions, states, and the interest groups. Therefore, the theory leads to averting power domination or over-concentration of power in the hands of few states or in the hands of some regions this is to ensure the principles of equality through check and balance system in the federating units (Arif, 2013; Miller, 1983; Self, 1985).

This framework exemplifies the complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity of Nigerian society. The theory explicated that the complex, diverse and heterogenous nature of Nigeria. The federal state structure in Nigeria is because of the heterogeneity, diversity, and complexity present within Nigerian society such as ethnicity and religion. This means that people of different religion, ethnicity, culture, geography, and history can be accommodated and unified under federalism. The unification of these differences led to a series of violence and crises among the various ethno-religious groups across the nation, because of majority and minority domination and inequality in power and resources allocation. The people of different background compete in sharing power and resources allocation among themselves. This unhealthy competition leads to conflict among these religions and ethnic groups, because of the differences in culture and tradition. All the above problems resulted from the amalgamation of the two regions under system call federal system.

**The Evolution of the Federal State Structure in Nigeria**

Before the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914, Nigeria had empires, emirates, and kingdoms. These entities were autonomous and sovereign within their respective spheres of jurisdiction. They interacted diplomatically, economically, politically, socially, and culturally, and had unique ways of political and justice administration, conflict mediation, conciliation, and resolution processes. Awofeso (2014) argued that all the functions of modern-day government were performed by rudimentary, non-differentiated and non-secularized structures which cut across different levels of administration. Laws were made, executed and adjudicated. Decentralized, semi-centralised and centralised political administration could be identified within the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa/Fulani political systems, respectively. This showed the ways and manners in which the pre-colonial Nigeria was administered.

However, with the official conquest and annexation of Lagos in 1861, colonial rule was established in Nigeria. Since 1900, when the British government decided to take full charge of the administration of the entire country through embarking on progressive amalgamation policy in the country. After a series of efforts at pacification and conquest, effective British occupation of the area took place from the Royal Niger Company, whose charter was revoked in that year. After this, three separate territories emerged. These were Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (Aderonke, 2015). The British government divided the entire country into three administrative units - the Northern Protectorate, the Southern Protectorate, and the Lagos Colony in 1900. Similarly, two administrative units - the Protectorate of the Southern Nigeria and the Colony, and the Northern Protectorate were created in 1906, and then into a single unit of administration in 1914 (Awofeso, 2014).

The amalgamation of 1914 brought with it new form and pattern (indirect rule) of exercising power which was spelt out and entrenched in the Lugard's Constitution of 1914. The inadequacies of the Lugard constitution of 1914 led to the introduction of Clifford constitution of 1922. However, not all the regions were represented in the Legislative Council due to the introduction of Elective Principle. The unnecessary exclusion, marginalization of certain sections of the country and Europeanization of the Order-in-Council, Legislative Council and Executive Council, led to bitter struggles, agitations and increase in tempo towards the formation of a new government. The federal structure began to form in 1939 under Sir Bernard Bourdillon who divided the Southern Protectorates into two. Again, the government headed by Sir Arthur Richardson came into existence with the Richard's Constitution of 1946 which provided for regionalism as against Unitarianism earlier adopted. The 1946 Constitution which aimed at promoting unity for the diverse elements that made up the country provided the groundwork for eventual evolution of federalism in Nigeria. The Macpherson's Constitution of 1951 improved upon the Richard's Constitution by introducing quasi-federalism. The Macpherson constitution of 1951 gave further concrete and solid support to the emergence of Nigeria as a federal state because:

i. the constitution appointed Lieutenant Governors to head these three regions,

ii. legislative powers were also granted to the legislative and executive councils that were established.

This signifies that greater autonomy was given to the various regions.

The Lyttleton's Constitution of 1954 introduced federalism in Nigeria. By this, greater autonomy was provided to various regions thus giving room for functional division of powers between the central and regional governments. It was the first genuine federal constitution of the country. The constitution was introduced following defects in the Macpherson constitution, the motion of self-government, and the Kano riots of 1953. These events convinced the colonial administration that considerable regional autonomy must be granted to the regional governments and that only federalism could hold the Nigerian peoples together. The constitution for the first time provided for the division of powers into three lists include:

**a.** The exclusive list
**b.** The concurrent list
**c.** The residual list

The exclusive list gives powers to central government to deliberate on exclusive matters such as security, defense, printing and minting of currencies, foreign relations among others. The concurrent list takes care of matters that can be handled by both the central and component parts. Such as healthcare services, education, water, among others. More so, residual power considers powers not specifically mentioned in the constitutional division of power and both level of government can exercise authority on such issues like local government creation, community development among others (Ogundiya & Abdullahi, 2012).

Therefore, the realities of the Nigeria's historical past coupled with perceived economic reasons, geographical and political factors made federalism appealing to both expatriates and nationalists prior to independence. These factors were reinforced by growing suspicion and fear of domination by the North against the West and the East against West or the North. Thus, it became appropriate to have a system of government that will grant units' considerable freedom and autonomy in the internal governance of their people. This desire was found fulfilled in federal state structure because of its inherent decentralization and deconcentration of powers. The emphasis here is that Nigeria's nationalist leaders long before independence became convinced and reached the conclusion that the country could only survive based on a federal option. For instance, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first President (1960-1966) canvassed for a 'federal commonwealth of Nigeria' (Azikiwe 1945). Similarly, Nigeria's first Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was reported to have argued the case for a federal option in the following words:

> *I am pleased to see that we are all agreed that the federal system is, under the present conditions, the only sure basis on which Nigeria can remain united. We must recognize our diversity and the peculiar conditions under which the different tribal*

> *communities live... therefore... we must do all in our power to see that this federal system is strengthened and sustained (Elaigwu, 2000, p.41-42).*

However, the adoption of federalism in Nigeria was externally motivated. Federalism was seen as a British imposition meant to serve the political interest of the British alone. Alapiki and Odondiri, (1992) noted that British introduced federal state structure in Nigeria for the purpose of administrative convenience of the colonial state apparatus. Even before 1954 when federalism formally evolved, the country had been a conglomeration of different subcultures administered unitarily, to later introduce the federal system therefore reflects nothing but the self-interest of the British. It was a shared notion of achieving "unity in diversity" that federalism was introduced as a divide and rule strategy and to this extent was an abominable, disruptive, and divisive British heritage (Awolowo, 1968). To Okhaide (1992) federalism was imposed on the country in order to maintain a neo-colonial state apparatus for effective control of the country after independence because British colonialists had the opportunity to de-emphasize the particularistic tendencies of the different ethnic groups in the country but for selfish reasons, they ended up creating 'structural imperfections to bedevil inter-ethnic relations after independence'. The above signifies that Nigeria's federalism arose as an imposition by the British government. Though, it remained the sole and feasible political resolution to the Nigerian state as a united political entity (Aliyu & Isa, 2018). Nigeria as a nation with large and heterogeneous population, geographical, cultural, political, and religious settings and organizations operates better on federal structure.

The evolution of federalism in Nigeria was driven by factors such as ethnic differences, religion, fear of domination, desire for unity among others made it desirable for the country to remain united. It is on this premises, Watts (2000, p. 5) aptly made this point while describing the relevance of the federal idea in the post 1945 period. He opined that:

> *… the creators of the new states approaching independence found themselves faced with simultaneous conflicting demands for territorial integration and balkanization. They had to reconcile the need, on the one hand, for relatively large economic and political units in order to facilitate rapid economic development and to sustain genuine political independence, with the desire, on the other hand, to retain authority of the smaller political units with traditional allegiances representing racial, linguistic, ethnic and religious communities. In such situations, where the forces for integration and separation were at odds with each other, political leaders of nationalist independence movements and colonial administrators alike found in the "federal solution" a popular formula, providing a common ground for centralizers and provincialists.*

One important question that arises from the previous analysis is: if the federation of Nigeria was driven by various compelling factors, including mutual fears and suspicion of domination among groups, the quest for self-determination, economic prosperity, and the desire for unity in diversity, to what extent have these imperatives been resolved after many years of its adoption?

**The Contending Issues and Realities in Nigerian Federalism: An Assessment**

Federalism has emerged as one of the most preferred forms of government based on its integrative competence to accommodate the diverse political life of multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic societies. The practice of federalism in Nigeria suffered significantly due to twisted nature of federal system leading to serious contestations among the integral populations resulting in limitless fiddling and dissolution. The problem Nigeria has had to face is how to save an efficient and effective central government that would help preserve national harmony and allowing free choice for the diversities of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual integral parts (Lanre, 2017). Some of the problems of federalism are discussed below:

**The Issues of ethnicity and regionalism:** In Nigeria, there are three dominant territorially concentrated ethnic identities (Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and Igbo) together with some 350 linguistic minorities distributed across the country. This depiction provides an explanation for why the social and political, as well as the economic import of ethnic grouping is central to

the analysis of politics in Nigeria. The ethnicity variable remains a significant factor in determining who gets what and when in Nigeria. Ethnic cleavage in Nigeria 'appears permanent and all-encompassing, predetermining who will be granted and denied access to power and resources' (Diamond and Plattner, 1994, p.18). This inherent centrifugal force explains why ethnic conflicts have become almost inevitable in the country. As remarked by Hameso (2001, p.38), the 'forced unification of different ethnic groups with different traditional values with memories of animosity and history of warfare worked to harness the basis for conflicts.

Colonialism through its system of divide-and-rule which pitched one ethnic group against the other partly sowed the seeds of ethnic conflicts in the former British colonies, but it would be erroneous to suggest that colonial rule is to blame for the resentment that characterises social relations in contemporary Africa (Babalola, 2014, p. 20). However, the lumping together of different peoples laid the foundation for the assertion of ethnic identity among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria and other similar multi-ethnic countries. The colonial rule policy which resulted in the regionalisation of politics in Nigeria particularly brought about a situation in which the three major ethnic groups in the country see themselves as constituting the tripod-stand upon which the country stands (Babalola, 2014, p.21). Moreover, the process also brought into sharp focus the majority/minority dichotomy, marking the 'cradle of ethnic minority problems in Nigeria' (Osaghae, 1991, p. 239).

Nigeria's politics is characterised by fierce struggle for national resources with one group doing everything possible to out-compete the others. It is common for Nigerian political elites to promote ethnic sentiments in their quest for political and economic aspirations. When a situation like this becomes the norm, certain groups, especially, the ethnic minorities become marginalised, and when the cry of marginalisation sets in, the agitation for self-determination becomes part of the political lexicon (Babalola, 2014, p. 22). The separating effects of ethnicity and regionalism in Nigerian federalism are noticeable in the political history of Nigeria. For instance, the 1962 declaration of a state of emergency in the Western region; the bitter ethnic-regional dispute over the 1962-63 census; the 1964 federal election crisis; the 1965 western election disaster; the military takeover from the First Nigerian Democratic Republic in 1966 after a bloody ethnic military coup; the complete disintegration and politicization of the military formation along ethnic- regional background; the struggled secession of the Eastern region, under the leadership of its Igbo military governor, Odumegwu Ojukwu, as the independent Republic of Biafra; and, the eventual outbreak of the 30-month civil war, which claimed an estimated one million lives, mainly in the ill-fated Biafra (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005, p.18). These traditions shaped regional rivalry and conflict that were rooted in Nigerian society by the processes of alliance and nation-building. After independence, regional opposition has become the basis for causing conflicts between people of the different regions, region, because of the culture economy and ethnicity. In efforts to minimize this rivalry under the federal system, more states were created to accommodate numerous group interests (Majekodunmi, 2013).

This has remained unresolved till date. Presently, the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) are agitation for self- determination. The Vanguard News (2016) reported that over 80 protesters for the secession of the Biafiran region from Nigeria have been arrested, detained, and imprisoned. However, on 28-29 November 2008, there was serious religious crises between the Muslims and the Christians over the results of a local election, this was as a result of uniting people of different background under one federating unit, this culminated into conflict because of power and resources allocation among the religious groups (AFP., 2008).

**Structural Flaw and imbalance in Nigeria Federalism:** The implication of the preponderant size of the defunct Northern as the constituent unit was politically more powerful than any of the other units. It also had numerical advantage in the central government, and this resulted in a situation in which the other two Regions perceived themselves as being at a disadvantage in the competition for national resources. Having one unit of a federation bigger than others is a negation of the principle of federalism. Wheare (1963, p. 50) argued that 'the capacity of states to work as a federal union is also greatly influenced by their size; it is undesirable that one or two units should be so powerful that they can overrule the others and bend the will of the federal government to themselves'. Therefore, the constant division of the country into several constituent units, in consonant with the federal principle, is the minimisation of the cry of

marginalisation, which was the sing-song in the country in the immediate post-independence period. Also, the 36- state structure has gone a long way in sparing Nigerians a return of the electoral controversy that surrounded the 1979 presidential election over what constituted the two-thirds of the then 19 States of the Federation.

The defective federal structure has the propensity to engender conflicts that would endanger the unity of the country which is one of the reasons for opting for the federal system. Ojo (1985, p. 13) asserted that, the regional imbalance with three main ethnic groups, the Hausas in the North, the Ibos in the East and the Yorubas in the West created undue fears, for the East and the West felt threatened by the preponderance of the population of the North, while the minorities also at the approach of independence did not feel sufficiently safe at the hands of the various Regional Governments once the paternalising hands of the British colonial administration were withdrawn.

**The Struggle for power and issues of power shift:** The Nigerian federalism suffers from the problem of satisfactory sharing of governmental functions and powers between the federal government and component units. The problem is that, if greater powers are assigned to the component units, it leads to a weak center while if greater powers are assigned to the central government, it leads to centralization and very weak state government. In Nigeria today, state government have no substantial share of governmental functions and power especially in areas of security, defence, printing of currencies, revenue mobilization and fiscal allocation (Ogundiya & Abdullahi, 2012).

Adamolekun (2018) noted that the sharing and allocation of responsibilities would be reliable with the decentralized federal system and would follow closely the provisions in the 1954 and 1960 Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution a short exclusive federal list as well as national defense, the macro economy, and foreign affairs; joint responsibility in respect of some crucial functions that are presently allocated completely to the federal government precisely, “internal security and policing”; and main obligation of the sub-national government in line with some roles in the Second Scheduled of the 1999 Nigerian Constitutions.

Uhunmwuangho and Epelle (2007) assert that ethnic pressure in Nigeria resulted because of the unequal distribution of power and resources among the citizenry. This is because those individuals who are marginalized from the power and resources arrangement and allocation were also clamoring for power and equal resources allocation. They believe it is essential to cooperate with their ethnic groups which will provide them with the necessary services and good ground for opposing with others for resources and against domination by the dominant ethnic groups. This can intensify or deteriorate and lead to conflict among the citizens. In addition to this, it is understood that ethnic politics has become the order of the day as it is believed that a merger with other ethnic groups gives room for access to power and resources easily.

Awa (1976) and Uhunmwuangho and Epelle (2007), reveals that power distribution is an unpredictable problem which if not appropriately overcome would lead to numerous forms of disasters which are certain to crop up. It is clearly observed that Nigeria has not been put on this principle of equal power and resources distribution among the individual in the nation. This has resulted in intensifying ethno religious tension, mutual mistrust among ethnic groups, majority/minority problem, and appeal for an answer to the National questions.

**Fiscal federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria**: The idea of Nigerian federal structure and its fiscal federalism has been enmeshed in contradictions, controversies, and crises. The issue has become a national question as socio-cultural groups, with varying ideological learning severally demonstrate interest and concern especially on the issue of resource control. As a national question, the seriousness of Nigerian federalism has translated into question of national unity, local government autonomy, self –determination and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, rewards, and powers (Anifowose, 2004). Meanwhile, given the rising concern endangering the peaceful co-existence of the multi-ethnic nationalities that confederated, engendering the palpable need for Nigerian nation, some Marxist scholars, see the Nigerian federalism as presently unworkable; given the collaborative politics of emergence socio-cultural group, thus the situation itself canvases for the dissolution of the federal union. The issues of decentralization of power and fiscal resources have ranked very highly in Nigeria federalism. In fact, one of the major issues in the federal restructuring is the imbalance in the distribution of resources and

needs among the federating units and has thus become sensitive to the question of fiscal federalism as an issue in Nigeria, government, the function of resources allocation distribution and stabilization of the polity (Okpata, 2007).

Tensions between the federating units and central government, between the constituent units themselves, and of various interests often fuel the demands for restructuring. Various interests insist on a voice and the correction of perceived structural defects. Demand for equity and justice in the allocation of political space from minorities and marginalized groups have all made for a consistent and perennial stream of agitations for restructuring, which suggests that the search for a national community has remained elusive in Nigeria. In fact, the destabilizing effects of these agitations or even the potential for destabilization have always constituted a question mark on the legitimacy of the political order in Nigeria (Abutudu, 2010). However, there are substantive issues that need to be addressed through the restructuring process, but a lack of agreement on what should qualify for inclusive in the restructuring agenda has been a weighty obstacle on launching the process. Equally fundamental, therefore, are the procedural issues that have to do with representation in the restructuring process, and in fact, the structure of the restructuring process itself.

**Issues of Resource Control, Revenue Allocation and Distribution of National Wealth:** Resource control involves the access of communities and state governments to natural resources located within their boundaries and the freedom to develop and utilize these resources without reference from the federal government (Hedayo, 2010). Dickson and Asua (2016, p. 5) posited that, resource control is the principle that every federating unit must be empowered to be self-governing. It amounts to an expression of self-determination by the zone which places a collaborative duty on other parts of the country to assist the zone in the realization of their objectives. Afoyemi (2013) argued that resource control is the way and manner the government revenue is shared among the various tiers of government – the federal, state, and local governments, as well as how resources available are harness and determined. Ya'u (2001, p.46) asserted that resource control may be taken to mean the substantive power for the community to collect monetary and other benefits accruing from the exploration, exploitation, and use of resource in their domain and deploy some to its developmental purposes.

Another inherent feature of the Nigeria federal systems is the contentious nature of the distribution of national wealth. The adoption of a federal system of government is usually trailed by the fundamental problem of how to share revenue between the central government and those of the constituent units on the one hand, and among the constituent units on the other. Just like in any federal state, political leaders in Nigeria also must contend with the problem of how to distribute national resources. Nigeria's history of revenue distribution is about each ethnic group or state seeking to maximise its share of the scarce national economic resources, and this has often led to rancour between the central government and the federating units. The main reason for the acrimonious revenue allocation system is not far-fetched: Nigeria's constituent units lack viable sources of revenue of their own. Also, the economic disparity that has given rise to unequal development among them is another source of contention. Not only that, but the political sensitivity of revenue sharing has, also been compounded by the 'perceptions of regional ethnic dominance' among the ethnic minorities (Baker, 1984, p.5).

Central to the issue of wealth distribution in the post-1999 period is the continual debate on the application of the principle of derivation. In the Nigerian context, derivation is the method of distributing centrally generated revenues to the constituent units of the Federation in relation to the contribution made by each to the country's revenue pot. It simply means that, in addition to the regular federal statutory transfer, some proportion of the revenues collected from a federating unit is returned to the government of that unit (Babalola, 2014, p.121). The derivation principle has particularly generated the most controversy in the history of revenue allocation in Nigeria, thereby reinforcing the view that politics plays a significant part in shaping the distribution of the country's revenue. The near abandonment of the principle became the most debatable topic in the country immediately after the advent of democratic rule in 1999. So, in addition to the typical controversies that surround the vertical and the horizontal revenue sharing was the controversy over the percentage of national oil revenue that should be allocated to States in the oil-producing region. Babalola (2014, p. 121) posited that, derivation witnessed a progressive decline, beginning from 1970 when it was 25 per cent, to 3 per cent towards the end

of military rule, and then raised to 13 per cent at the start of democratic rule in 1999.

Sharing Nigeria's wealth among the contending parties is a daunting task, but the central government has, at different phases of the country's history, adopted different revenue-sharing formulas aimed at ensuring national unity. Nigeria's revenue distribution system has predominantly been tailored towards the Federation's political and economic circumstances. Revenue allocation in Nigeria is a difficult assignment and may result in the dissolution of a federal union if not properly handled by the country's political leaders. Nigeria's federal system has been able to ensure a relatively fair distribution of the country's wealth. For instance, the current revenue allocation formula as entrenched in the 1999 Constitution has, to some extent, provided succour for the contending parties in the country. It is important to remember that a federal system needs to possess the capacity to achieve relative economic equilibrium among constituent units if the union must endure, so Nigeria's federal system deserves some credit in this respect. The central government's unwillingness to let go of huge oil resources and the inability of states to find other viable sources of revenue have contributed to the federal imbalance.

## Conclusion

The evolution of the federal-state structure in Nigeria is traced to colonialism. The British colonial administration established a centralised system of governance that concentrated power at the federal level. However, with the diversity of ethnic groups and regions within Nigeria, there were tensions and challenges in managing the country effectively. During the colonial era, Nigeria was divided into three regions: the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions, each with its own regional government. This regional division reflected the diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic composition of the country.

The central argument is that the federal system of government was set up to unite people with different culture, religion, and language background. The unification has resulted in unequal power sharing and resources allocation among the people across the nation especially between the majority and minority ethnic groups. The problem of inequality in power and resources allocation among the citizens has created a wide gap. This is because the ethnic majority has dominated the few minorities in all spheres of life in the country especially in the power and resources allocation. The domination of some States (regions) as well as the minority ethnic groups has created a wide vacuum which leads to ethno religious conflict across the nation.

## Recommendations

Therefore, addressing the challenges of Nigerian federalism requires implementing the following by governments at all levels, such as:

i. Nigeria's federal system should be reformed to ensure the relative hegemony of the centre vis-à-vis the State governments. Absolute supremacy of the federal centre negates a federal principle, but it should not be forgotten that regional federalism in which the defunct Regions were economically stronger than the centre also had its attendant consequences, as was demonstrated during the First Republic. Besides, the size of the Federation, its diversity and its economic disparity require a relatively strong federal government capable of regulating the competition for national resources.

ii. Nigeria's fiscal federalism should be designed to emphasise revenue generation rather than revenue distribution. Any future reform should be tailored towards encouraging the States to develop fiscal capacity that would enable them to generate and control their own revenue. This will enhance their fiscal viability and reduce their dependency on oil. A State's share of federally collected revenue should only complement its internally generated revenue. Thus, the centre would cease to be the locus of struggle for national resources, and it would assume the role of a referee rather than be an active participant in the distribution of national wealth. The capacity of constituent units to be self-financing is vital to the formation, operation, and survival of a federation.

iii. Encouraging a sense of national identity and unity among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria by emphasising shared

values, history, and common goals will bridge differences and reduce tensions.

iv. Again, transparent, fair revenue sharing and resource distribution among the federal, state, and local governments will help address grievances related to fiscal federalism and revenue allocation in Nigeria.

**v.** Enhancing the capacity and autonomy of state governments will help address governance challenges and improve service delivery. Devolving more powers to the states while promoting accountability and good governance at all levels can strengthen the federal system.

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