

THE RESTRUCTURE OF NIGERIAN FEDERAL SYSTEM: A TASK THAT NEED BE DONE

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ABSTRACT: *Of recent one of the most trending political concepts within the Nigerian political and social landscape has been the concept of restructure or its continuum (restructuring). Ironically, despite the prevalence in usage of this word in social and political discourses across the country and beyond, very little is conceptualized or agreed on by all class of people as what is the actual meaning or the scope of restructuring the country needs. To some the term means minor adjustments in the configuration of power relation between the federal and other composing units of governments. The term in the view of others stands for maximum severance of all form of relationships between the federating units. This severance may mean the decentralization of powers and responsibilities of the state in favour of the regional governments as against the federal level, therefore relationship can only be acknowledged in the form of loosed confederation. But what seems to be agreed on by all, is that the Nigerian federal structure has some fundamental defects that need urgent corrections, the extent of which is left in the imagination and belief of the advocates. This paper provides an insight into conceptual clarity of what is meant by restructure and the act of restructuring. The article is of the view that structural imbalance in the polity is grossly responsible for the high level of mistrust, ethnic and religious crises, lack of accelerated development, political schisms and other social vices amongst the ethnic nationalities that makeup the country. The paper underscores the need for further dissolutions of political and economic autonomy to regions as against the current enormous power currently wielded by the federal government. It also recommends reversal to true fiscal federalism and regional control of the natural resources within their localities as against the current position of federal government ownership and control. Adoption of the six geopolitical zones as regional governments as against the current proliferation of unviable states. Also recommended is the adoption of rotational presidency among the regions. This is to be enshrined in the constitution to address the issue and cry of marginalization in the polity. These recommendations amongst others will serve as panacea to addressing the instability and mistrust question within the polity.*

KEYWORDS: restructure, federalism, Nigeria, autonomy, regionalism.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of what is perceived today as ‘Nigerian structural imbalance’ is traceable to the historical milestone of 1914, when the then British Colonialists under the leadership of Sir Lord Fredrick Lugard amalgamated the Southern and the Northern protectorates to form the Nigerian state. This was however despite the seemingly and glaring social, cultural, religious and economic differences between the two protectorates. While the Northern protectorate was predominantly Muslims and culturally Arabic; the Southern protectorate, on the other hand, was predominantly

Christians and culturally Western, and also economically, educationally and socially at variance with the North. These obvious differences did not deter the colonialists, as administrative convenience was uppermost in their minds on the reasons for merging the two protectorates as one administrative area. According to Omoregie (2013) in retrospect, “since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show in themselves any sighs of willingness to unite...Nigeria’s unity is only a British invention”(Omoregie, 2013: para 4).

Subsequently, since the amalgamation, all efforts to stitch this union cohesively together into a nationalistic whole have been undermined by centrifugal forces; including ethnicity, religiosity and other primordial and mundane forces that tend to pull the country apart (Nnoli, 1980). These forces are fueled by real and imaginary claims and counter claims by both sides, of being the victim of this forced amalgamation. For instance, while the Southern region accused the Northern region of having sharia/Islamic agenda to Islamize the country and the mentality of “born to rule” and therefore exhibit the tendencies of clinching on to political power at the detriment of the South. The North on the other hand, has consistently accused the South of dominating the country economically as evidence in better infrastructures and human capital development at the detriment of the North. These accusations and counter accusations have led to only negative outcomes; mutual mistrust, political strives and sustained conflicts.

This scenario of mistrust although was conceived during the colonial era, gained full manifestation immediately after independence in 1960. Therefore the foundation, upon which the Nigerian post independence structure was built on, was inherently dysfunctional and at best structurally defective. Although it might have been obvious to the agitators for independence then that there were structural imbalances, it will be safe to say that in their world view these were teething issues that will be surmounted as the country progresses on the path of self rule and that they could savage the situation by introducing policies that would engender mutual trust, fairness and sense of brotherhood. However, events since then have not only proven otherwise, they have in fact worsened the situation. A perspective on this argument of lack of nationalism was posed by Amir Abdulazez (2015), when he asked rhetorically whether achieving national unity is something natural or artificial, coincidental or deliberate, divine or man-made. This is against the views of some that, for instance, on the issue of religion, there is no way a Muslim would achieve a meaningful and lasting understanding with a Christian and on ethnic affiliation, it will be very difficult if not impossible for an Igbo man, for instance, to achieve true unity and brotherhood with a Fulani man and so on and so forth. This uncompromising mindset couple with series of events since independence has fundamentally worsened the fragile structure of the country which has resulted in mutual co-existence sliding from bad to worse. Various examples, few as shown below abound to buttress this claim;

Before the discovering of crude oil in Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa State in 1956 (N.N.P.C, 2018) and the subsequent commercialization of the product, Nigerians economic mainstays were predominantly Cocoa production from the western region, Groundnut from the North, Rubber from the South-South, Palm Oil from the South East and mineral resources like Iron Ore from the Middle Belt. The exploration and sales of these products were carried out by the regions where they were found, and these regions in turn pay royalty to the federal government as required.

According to Azaiki (2003), one major character of the Nigerian union was that the three regions of the West, North and the East retained control of their natural resources. He went further to state that “resource control is a basic economic theory grounded in the fact that land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship are factors of production and within the context of federation, it implies that the federating units within a federation have a right to primarily control the natural resources within their borders, and to make an agreed contribution towards the maintenance of common services at the centre” (Azaiki, 2003: 163). This was Nigerian situation before the military took control of governance in 1966 and distorted the existing fiscal federalism of the country.

When crude oil exploration became commercialized and subsequently became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, previous regional resource control arrangements were jettisoned, just as the various products (including cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, rubber e.t.c) that had been the mainstay of the economy were all also relegated to the back burner. All focus shifted to crude oil as the major source of revenue for the three tiers of government. Crude oil received direct exploration, control and supervision of the federal government and all proceeds from its sales went directly into a central coffer and under the management of the federal government, who then disbursed it as per agreed formula. This negates the pre-existing order of regional control over their natural resources. Fiscal federalism in the instance of crude oil was discarded in favour of central control of crude oil explorations and sales (Agbaeze, Udeh & Onwuka, 2015).

As noted, aside the factors bothering on inherent differences between the two protectorates as stated above, the discovering of oil in the Niger-Delta became one of the major issues of contention that further exacerbated the already fragile nature of the Nigerian state. The oil producing region of the Niger-Delta, a minority group, has been at loggerhead with the federal government for the control of crude exploration and management as it were for cocoa, rubber, palm oil, groundnut and other previous mainstays of the Nigerian economy before oil was discovered.

While this tussle has led to series of legislative debates and adjustments on the revenue sharing formula over the decades, the right of exploration and sales still resides with the federal government and what however resides with the Niger-Delta region have been tales of catastrophic degradation of the region’s ecological system (Ugboma, 2015). The Niger-Delta environment has been decimated and devastated by pollution emanating from the exploration process of crude oil and unfortunately little or no concern have been extended by the federal government and the various multinational corporations engaging in explorative activities in the region. Even the 13% derivation proceeds as provided by the 1999 constitution as amended, have been grossly mismanaged by both states and local stakeholders (Ugboma, 2015).

A related event that has also shaped nationalistic spirit in Nigeria was the occurrence of the Nigerian civil war. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and by 1967 the country was already at war. Between 1967 and 1970 Nigeria fought one of the fiercest civil wars in contemporary history of African continent. Most of the ingredients that brewed the war predated the war itself. They were already been gathered right from the early days of independence. Therefore the occurrence of the Nigerian civil war is traceable to both remote and immediate causes. Factors remotely connected to the war could be chronicled as follows:

1. The division of the country into three regions, along the major ethnic line of Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa-Fulani by the British in 1946. This division raised tensions in the polity in two key ways.

Firstly, it raised consciousness and subsequently energized other ethnic groups within each region to agitate for equal recognition in term of representation in the configuration of power. Secondly, a form of power struggle ensued among the major ethnic groups on who would have control of the power at the centre.

2. A complement to the above was the emergence of political parties along ethnic lines. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) was dominated by the Ibos and was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Action Group (AG) dominated by the Yorubas was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the third party, the Nigeria People Congress (NPC) was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani and was led by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. This further entrenched ethnic politics in Nigeria.

Other events that also laid credence to the occurrence of the civil war include; the creation of the mid-western region out of the Western region by the Balewa Administration. This action angered the other regions and other minority groups, who also demanded for creations such as the Mid-West out of their regions. Also the political crises resulting from the census of 1962-1963 which acknowledged more population in the Northern region as previously anticipated and the 1964 first general elections that was largely boycotted in the Western region added to the heat in the polity. Also of relevance were the lingering accusations by other political parties that the NPC rigged the general elections in its favour.

Among the immediate causes of the war was the killing of prominent political figures of the Northern and Western extractions; including the Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of the Northern region Sir Ahmadu Bello, his wife and some officers of Northern extraction. In the Western region the Premier Chief Ladoke Akintola and some young Yoruba officers were also killed. However, in the Eastern region, the President Sir Nnamdi Azikiwe was on vacation in the West Indies. The Premier of the Eastern region was spared; also no military officer of the Eastern region was killed. Although the coup failed, the most senior military officer became the Head of State and he was Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi, and he was Ibo (Madiebo, 1980). His attempt to introduce a unitary form of government was short-lived, as he himself was killed in a counter military coup, this time led by young officers of Northern extraction headed by Col. Yakubu Gowon. The coup was perceived as an attempt to avenge the killings of Northern political figures and to reverse the country from the course of a unitary government. Gowon subsequently went ahead to create 12 states in an effort to calm the nerves of minority regions that have been agitating for autonomous states. This effort although was welcome by minority groups, did not sway the then Military Governor of the Eastern region, Col. Emeka Ojukwu, who felt that Gowon's was insensitive to the killings of Ibos in the Northern region. Moreso, he also felt that Gowon aim was to weaken the Regional structure of the country, especially the Eastern region by splitting it into pocket of states. According to Obi (2001) another issue that Ojukwu was concerned about was that the unification attempt of Gowon was a ploy to gain direct access into the oil rich region of the Niger-Delta. This was the state of the country when Col. Ojukwu declared the breakaway of the Eastern region to form the Republic of Biafra. The declaration was the final stroll that literally broke the camel's back. The country was finally plunged into a civil war between the federal government and the separatist Biafra Republic on the 6th of July 1967 (Akpan, 1976).

At the end of the war which was tagged ‘no victor, no vanquish’ about three million people lost their lives, properties worth billions of dollars were destroyed and a record number of people were displaced (Stremlau, 1977). The leadership of the Eastern region has alleged that, ever since the end of the war, the region has never really been reintegrated into the Nigerian political system (Osuji, 2016). The current agitation by Independence People of Biafra (IPOB) for a sovereign state of Biafra is conceived out of the belief that despite the slogan of ‘no victor no vanquish’ and the promise of the three Rs, Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the then Head of State General Yabuku Gowon; events since then confirm that there has been a victor (Federal Government) and there has been a vanquished (Biafra).

These incidents and many others have greatly hampered the prospect of the country attaining nationhood in the true sense of it.

Conceptual Clarity

Restructure

The term restructure according to Rooney (1999) denotes to change the basic structure of something. To restructure means to rearrange, reorganize or reposition a system, to correct the structural defects with the hope for better and more effective performance. According to Bello (2017), restructuring, simply put “is the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that makes up a system and re-defining the inter-relationship between them in such a way that the entire system perform more efficiently” (Bello, 2017 para 10). There are many dimensions to restructuring; this could include political, economic, educational, social, accounting, administrative restructure e.t.c. Within a political milieu, restructure is necessitated when there are fundamental flaws in the structural arrangement of a political system. More appropriately, this is when power and authority configuration of a country is visibly lopsided in favour of the central government to the detriment of the composite units. When this is the case, the dominant unit will inadvertently be the power broker at the center. The ethnic group that has the advantage by way of number of states, number of local government councils, federal legislative members and control of federal executive authority will overwhelmingly dominates the central government to the disadvantage of other regions. In the instance of Nigeria, the Northern region has this advantage. In a true federal state, powers should gravitate from the composing units towards the central. That is, the power accruing to the central ought to be at the discretion of the federating units and not the other way round. But in an imposed federal state like Nigeria, regional powers/authorities are at the mercy or discretion of the federal government. In this latter instance, the call for restructuring will always be continuous and unending until such a time when requisite and appropriate powers have been devolved to regional government. However, when this is the case, the region that is in control of the center will be unwilling to alter the status quo.

In Nigeria as in some other federal states, demands for centralization and decentralization of powers and responsibilities are constant political pulls by opposing units; such demands are propelled by ideological, social and economic conflicts. Depending on the side of the divide an individual or group interest is best served, people and groups tend to align on issue of centripetal

or centrifugal positioning. In the view of some political analysts this opposing positioning might also be the ‘balancer’ of a federal state (Bouchat, 2013).

The fact that federalism debates and talks is centered around restructuring rather than on disintegration means that Nigerians are in agreement that there is unity in diversity. What the country need is to strengthen its federating structure to make the union more functional based on competitive mutual benefits for all concerned.

Federal State

A federal relates to the central government and not to the government of a region or a state of a country, such as California, Texas, New York etc as in the case of United States of America. According to Bin (2011) a federation, also known as a federal state, is a type of sovereign state characterized by a union of partially self-governing states or regions united of the component states is typically constitutionally entrenched and may not be altered by a unilateral decision of the central government (Bin, 2011). The form of government or constitutional structure found in a federation is known as federalism.

A state is therefore regarded as federal when there exist more than one level of government and each level having its own constitutionally proscribed powers and responsibilities. U.S.A, Canada, India, Switzerland and Brazil are some of the examples of countries practicing federal system of government. The spectrum of a federal system ranges from states that are almost co-federal in nature in which the constituent units hold most of the powers and therefore dictate the structure and direction of the country, for example, Swiss federal system approximates this type of federal arrangement. At the other end of the spectrum are federal systems that consolidates much powers at the central authority and less at the units level, Nigeria and Russia could well be regarded as such (Bin, 2011).

In the case of Nigeria the amalgamation of 1914 was more or less a form of unification rather than an attempt at creating a federal state. In the view of Osadolor, as cited in Amuwo (2003:35) “the decision of Lugard to create a unified Nigeria on 1st January 1914 did not result from the pressure (consent) of local political groups, it derived from considerations of administrative convenience as interpreted by a colonial power”. This directly implies that the inputs, interest representation and aspiration of the political groups were not sought in the evolutionary, creation and unification of the Nigerian political and administrative system. According to Okadigbo (1987:14);

“after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914, the country was more or less run as unitary colony with twenty four provinces (12 in the North and 12 in the South) until the establishment of the federal order vide the Richards constitution of 1946. Thereafter, ethnic politics (otherwise known as tribalism) and regionalism became definitive features of Nigeria federalism”.

It is apparent that the history of the evolution of the Nigerian state is anything but nationalism. Regionalism was inadvertently made the bedrock of the Nigerian state and this was to later give way to statism, which in effect engendered a greater sense of loyalty to one's state of origin than to Nigeria as a nation. Accordingly, statism assumed the form of sub regionalism and sub-ethnic irredentism or mini irredentism at the state levels. Nationalism, therefore, as Rodney (1972:242) defined it is "a certain form of unity which grows out of historical experience. It is a sense of oneness that emerges from social groups trying to control their environment and to defend their groups". Nevertheless, the amalgamation of 1914 of the Northern and Southern protectorates generated a sense of inward – looking and antagonistic tendencies within the union. This is because the British colonialist failed to first of all create a common forum to bring the two differing entities together to understand each other (Takaya in Elaigwu and Akindele 1996:73).

Despite the inherent flaws in the federal system as practiced in the country, it is curious to observe that the system still encourages federal system of governance in Nigeria as against the evolution of a unitary system. Oyediran (2008) and Oneyeye (2001) summarized the factors that necessitated the adoption of federalism in Nigeria as follows:-

Heterogeneity/cultural differences: Nigeria is made up of diverse ethnic groups, religions, customs, traditions and languages. These diversities are a problem to the operation of a unitary system. The peoples therefore will continue to opt for federalism to retain as much as possible their identity.

Size and Population: The country is too large both territorially (size) and in population for a unitary system of government, and federalism became inevitable for administrative convenience.

Historical /Colonial factor: The different ethnic groups in Nigeria had developed different administrative structures. The colonial principle of indirect rule allowed each region to preserve its cultural and traditional practices different from those of other regions.

Economic factor: In Nigeria, natural resources are scattered, therefore component units must unite as a federation to harness the resources for their overall benefit in addition to even and rapid economic development.

Fear of Domination: There has been suspicion among the various ethnic groups, particularly the major ones like the Yoruba, the Igbo, and the Hausa-Fulani. There was also fear by the minority groups that they would be dominated by the majority ones. Federalism therefore offers opportunity for self-preservation by different groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Federalism

Federalism is derived from the Latin word "foedus" which can be interpreted as a union or alliance where equal parts agree to create a common union with its own identity and integrity but at the same time the different parts will keep their own identities and integrities (Peterson, 2004). It is a political concept in which a group of members are **bound together by covenant** with a governing representative head. The term is also used to describe a system of government in which **sovereignty**

is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and constitutional political units (like states or provinces). Federalism is a system in which the *power to govern is shared* between national and state governments, creating what is often called a federation (Akindele, Olaopa and Obiyan 2002). It is a political theory that is divergent in concept, varied in ecology and dynamic in practice. It has to do with how power is distributed or shared territorially and functionally among the various units in a federation.

According to K. C. Wheare, who is widely regarded as the doyen of federalism, federalism could be defined as a "method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinate and independent." He further noted "that each government should be limited to its own sphere and, within that sphere, should be independent of the other" (Wheare, 1967). In the view of Itse Sagay (2008) federalism is;

“an arrangement whereby *powers within a multi-national country are shared* between a federal government and component units in such a way that each unit, including the central authority exists as a government separately and independently from others, operating directly on persons and properties within its territorial area and with a will of its own apparatus for the conduct of affairs and with an authority in some matters exclusive of others” (Sagay, 2008: 11)

In analyzing this purview, it is apparent that each unit of government within a federation exists, not as an appendage of another government, but as an *autonomous entity capable of conducting its own will free from directive by any other government*. Asobie’s (1985: 26) perspective places emphasis on the intricacies of federalism. He identified two broad areas of cooperation in federalism. The first relates to capacity of citizens, as individuals and groups, to relate to each other federally, that is as partners respectful of each other’s integrity while cooperating for the common good in every aspect of life, not just in the political realm alone. The second area views federalism as a social phenomenon which emphasizes the existence of essentially permanent religious, ethnic, cultural or social groups, camps or pillars around which a polity is organized.

Theory of federalism according to Malcolm (2012) is linked to discussions present since the Middle Ages about subsidiarity, the principle that argues that the lowest level of government capable of exercising authority effectively should be permitted to do so. Federalism in the view of Ajayi (1997) refers to a “political system where there are at least two levels of government. In such case, there is the juxtaposition of two levels of power, one a central government otherwise called the federal government and another labeled variously as states, regions, republics, cantons or unions” (Ajayi, 1997:150).

Summation of the various definitions highlighted above, viewed federalism as institution bound together by covenant; sovereignty that is constitutionally divided; power to govern is shared between national and state governments and autonomous entity capable of conducting its own will free from directive by any other government. But they all fell short in bringing out the theoretical essence of emergence of federal state. Of what relevance or essence is it for a federal state to come

into being? Why would a state be interested in sharing its powers and authorities with or ceding its power to another abstract entity? Thereby losing its political independence and sovereignty?

This is where the views of Filipov, et al (2004) become relevant. They outlined the purposes for which a federal state can come into being, these includes the need for smaller states to form alliance in order to avert potential enemies that have annexation ambitions. It could also be for the purpose of using the power of numbers (population) to strike better bargains in international transactions. The origin of the E.U (European Union), for instance, could be attributed to this latter perspective. If these are the theoretical circumstances under which a federal state could emerge, devoid of imposition, therefore it would be correct to say that the process that led to the emergence of the Nigerian federal state contradicts the theoretical disposition that inform the emergence of federal states. It must however be noted that most federal states today, although did not conform to this theoretical process analyzed above, have however built a nationalistic consciousness overtime to be able to operate a successful and stable federal system of governance; Canada, Germany approximate this idea.

The Nigerian Federal Structure

- Political Structure

The FEDERAL nature of the Nigerian state is more evident in her name, 'FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA' than in reality. The origin of the Nigerian state that took its root in 1914 seems a semblance of an imposed federal configuration of the Northern and Southern protectorates. Subsequent balkanizations of the country both in pre-independence and post-independence periods were carried out along this same artificial and imposition foundation. The Nigeria federal structure has the semblance of a federal state by the fact that it is composed of three levels of government, the federal government, 36 states and 774 local government councils with their constitutionally assigned powers and responsibilities. At both the federal and state levels there are three organs of government; the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary that should act as checks and balances against each other. However in actual practice, the Nigerian system operates more or less like a unitary system because of the enormous powers the constitution confers on the executive arm of the federal government (Osisu, 2015). Powers ordinarily ought to have been conferred on the other lower levels of government. With the enormous power concentrated at the federal executive arm, every ethnic group will naturally aimed at a bigger chunk of it. The only way to get this power is for political parties and their candidates to appeal to ethnic consciousness and sentiment for political leverage and electoral advantage. The Northern region has used their numerical strength to play this ethnic and religious cards and manipulations to hold on to power at the centre more than any other ethnic group in the country. This quest is really based on the knowledge that whoever controls the center will directly control the country as a whole.

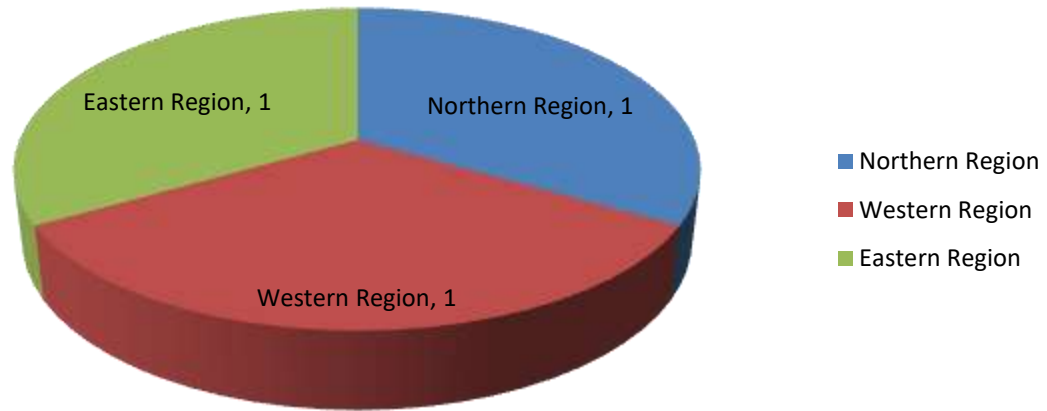
The timeline of the balkanization of the Nigerian state can be diagrammatically represented thus;

TABLE 1: Timeline of state Creation since 1947 after the amalgamation of 1914

DATE CREATED		REGION		
1914	Northern Protectorate	Southern Protectorate		Total State
1947	Northern Region	Western Region	Eastern Region	3
1963	1	2	1	4
1967	6	3	3	12
1976	10	5	4	19
1987	11	5	5	21
1991	16	7	7	30
1996	19	8	9	36
Total Current Number of States	19	17		36

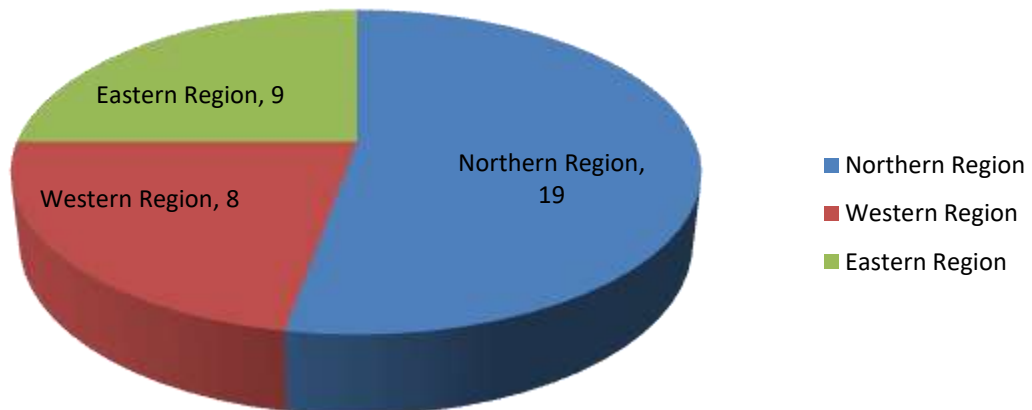
Source: Adapted from History of state creation in Nigeria by Babalola (2016)

Graph 1: Nigeria Federal Structure as at 1947

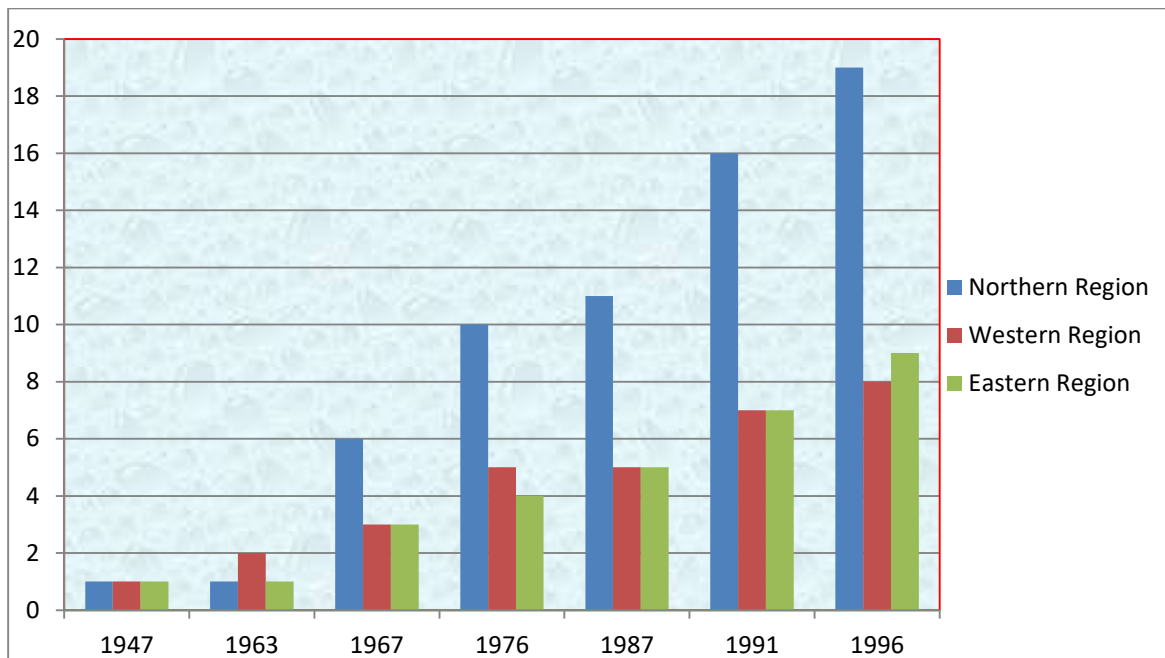


Source: Adapted from History of state creation in Nigeria by Babalola (2016)

Graph 2: Nigeria Federal Structure as at 1996



Source: Adapted from History of state creation in Nigeria by Babalola (2016)

Graph 3: Progressive lopsided Balkanizations of Nigeria since 1947

Source: Adapted from History of state creation in Nigeria by Babalola (2016)

The table 1 above indicates how the country has progressively moved towards Northern dominance in term of state creations. While in 1946 when the idea of federalism was being touted by the colonialists, agreement was reached that led to the creation of three regions viz, the Northern, Western and the Eastern Regions. The regions were roughly delineated based on ethnic, cultural and religious affinities. However since independence, successive military regimes, headed by elements from the northern region have strategically pushed for northern domination through state creation (Dummar, 1989). While the north has moved from one region in 1946 to 19 (nineteen) states as at 1996, the Eastern and the Western regions have only moved from one to 8 (eight) and 9 (nine) states respectively, within the same timeline. The two southern regions today account for 17 states in total as against the 19 states for the Northern region. This is aside the fact that the Federal Capital Territory is also located in the Northern region; it was relocated from Lagos (South-West) to Abuja (North Central) in 1991 during the regime of Ibrahim Babangida. The political and fiscal implications of this deliberate domination speak to the truth of the perceived injustice that most federalists' advocates talk about, is self evidence in Nigeria.

Of the 109 members of the Nigerian senate the North contributes a total number of 58 while the South has 51 therefore there is the tendencies for the north to always dominate on all sectional, ethnic and religious issues that require a simple majority vote. As it is with the States and Senate so it is with the Federal House of Representative. Of the 360 House members the North has 191 and the South has 169. In term of the Local Government Councils of 774, the Northern states control a total of 418 while the South has 355; the list of this lopsidedness goes on and on. Therefore the Nigerian political structure is fundamentally skewed in favour of the northern region. Aside the basic injustice identified in the structure of those institutions as highlighted above, the

current leaderships of the three organs of the federal government; the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary is also skewed toward northern advantage. The President is of northern extraction, so also are the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representative. Of the 11 security chiefs, only 2 are from the southern part of the country.

- Fiscal Structure

Resource allocation and management as well as fiscal federalism/decentralization, according to Ekpo and Englema (2008) have remained contentious issues in federal states and Nigeria is no exception to this. On the contrary, the country has been immersed or embroiled in this controversy since inception. A little insight into the evolution of fiscal tussle shows for instance, in 1946 the derivation formula for the regions which controlled their resources were 100 percent. In 1951 the British recommended 50 percent derivation, where as in 1953, the western region actually disbursed a 100 percent of resources they controlled. The 50 percent derivation continued from 1960 at independence up to 1970 when Gen. Gowon reduced the derivation formula to 45 percent and by 1975 it was further reduced to 25 percent. It should also be noted that in 1983 under the regime of Gen. Mohammadu Buhari the percentage was crashed to a mere 1.5 percent and Gen. Babangida raised it to 3 percent before it was ascribed into the 1999 constitution at the current 13 percent derivative formula (Aziken, 2017).

The issue of fiscal arrangement is contentious because governments at all levels want to have the financial capacity to cater for the responsibilities that come with governance and this include the ability to bring about rapid economic development through adequate provision of social and economic infrastructures for the citizenry. The fiscal arrangement within a federation should, therefore, adequately cater for the federating units to enable them have the financial capacity to discharge their constitutional responsibilities. Consequently, the struggle for control of power and equitable distribution of resources by the component units that make up a federation is driven by the need for financial autonomy, balance development, fiscal justice and fair play. According to Okwesili (2012) the contending issues and challenges of fiscal federalism could be in form of mismatch between revenue sources and the functions of the various tiers of government. It could also be as a result of mismatch between the sources of revenue and how the revenue is disbursed among the federating units. Sharma (2012) also discussed the concept of fiscal federalism as encompassing both horizontal and vertical fiscal relations. He asserts that the notions to horizontal fiscal relations are related to regional imbalance and horizontal competition. Similarly, the notions related to vertical fiscal relations are related to vertical imbalance between the centre and the states/provinces. While the concept of horizontal fiscal imbalance is relatively non-controversial, the concept of vertical fiscal imbalance is quite controversial (Sharma, 2012).

Sharma further explain the nature of vertical fiscal imbalance in a federal state, which he termed Vertical Fiscal Asymmetry (VFA) includes thus;

1. Fiscal asymmetry with fiscal imbalance: Vertical Fiscal Imbalance (VFI). In this case there is an inappropriate allocation of revenue power and spending responsibilities. This state according to Sharma can be remedied by reassignment of revenue raising power.

2. Fiscal asymmetry without fiscal imbalance but with a fiscal gap: Vertical Fiscal Gap (VFG). In this instance, it means a desirable revenue-expenditure asymmetry but with gap to be closed. This state can be remedied by re-calibration of fiscal transfers.
3. Fiscal asymmetry without fiscal imbalance and without fiscal gap: Vertical Fiscal Difference: Vertical Fiscal Difference (VFD). This means a desirable revenue-expenditure asymmetry without a fiscal gap and no fiscal imbalance. This state thus, does not need any remedial measure.

The above is a nice framework for understanding and debate on issues surrounding fiscal federalism. Such understanding will enable countries with any imbalance or gap in fiscal arrangement to know the kind of policy to be invoked in order to remedy the situation.

It will be considered as unfair to contribute mega like the proverbial elephant and receive little like an ant, and vice versa.

The success or otherwise of any federal system depends on the nature of fiscal arrangement the state put in place. It is natural for each federating region to try to secure its financial autonomy and resist any attempt to undermine such financial independence. Nigeria is no exception of this. Since 1960 financial tussle have always been at the front burner of Nigeria political discourse. The issue of fiscal federalism according to Arowolo (2011) is a persistent one in Nigeria. This is because it is characterized by constant struggle, clamour for change and, very recently violence in the form of agitation for revenue control in the Niger-Delta region". It has become a case of fiscal centralism as against fiscal federalism. Just like osmotic movement, fiscal authority in Nigeria has gradually moved from regional level to a central authority and this needs urgent rectification.

The Essence of Restructuring Nigeria Federal System

For greater harnessing of inherent natural resources.

If restructuring is not done, and the country continues to forge ahead in this current federal arrangement, the zeal for regional self sustenance would continue to be lost to mono-production of crude oil as the only main source of foreign exchange for the entire country. When the reality that crude oil deposit would sooner than later be depleted, it may be too late to tame the tide and face reality. Data available indicates that the depleting oil resources will be exhausted in less than 40 years period (Kingsley-Akpara & Iledare, 2014; Iledare, 2014). In the absence of any viable foreign exchange earner, post this period will be catastrophic economically for the nation (Agbaeze, Udeh & Onwuka, 2015).

To give each Region the room to develop at its own pace.

In some distant past when regional self reliance was the order of the day in Nigeria, when the various regions were self dependent, healthy competition between regions was one of the vehicles for development. No region wanted to braze the rear in terms of providing the basic infrastructure and mapping out effective developmental plan for their region. For instance, the free educational plan introduced by Chief Obafemi Awolowo saw the western region excelling educationally, before other regions followed suit (Eme & Anyadike, 2012). The Eastern region was setting the pace in terms of entrepreneurial ingenuity while the Northern region was setting the pace in the area

of agriculture, like groundnut, sorghum and wheat productions. By so doing the various regions were progressively competitive. This is one of the benefits of federalism, but the way the country is currently structured, no state is interested in pursuing competitive development, rather the daily complaint by state governors and officials is dwindling allocation from federal government. Since the balkanization of the regions into pockets of states by the military, the issue of viability and ability of states to maintain the huge paraphernalia of government and agencies has been hugely debated. Instead of adopting the popular regional structure of the six geo-political zones, the country has progressively been partitioned into pockets of unviable states, currently 36 states and one federal territory (Table 1). This is a huge burden on the lean resources available to the states. Evidence of this is visible in the dilapidating infrastructure, inability for states to pay salaries and pensions and also meet other statutory obligations, overwhelming security challenges and so forth.

To give room for an all inclusive country where regions will have sense of self autonomy and self reliance

A genuine sense of self autonomy is more possible under regional arrangement than under the current state arrangement that came into being via military fiat without recourse to ethnic delineation and viability of states. When the business of states is to routinely go cap in hand to the federal government for bail out and other forms of assistance and aids, it becomes increasingly impossible to claim autonomy by states.

To dispel the constant sense of conflict and mistrust.

The bane of the Nigerian state has been the issues emanating out of mistrust among the major ethnic nationalities that make up the country (Olu-Adeyemi, 2017; Jacob, 2012; Ayatse & Akuva, 2013). The key players in this regard are the Hausa-Fulanis, Igbos, Yorubas, Tivs and the Niger-Delta ethnic conglomerates. Mistrust breeds mutual suspicions, misinterpretation of intentions, lack of understanding, conflicts and civil strife. Until the issues surrounding fiscal federalism are addressed and the regions given the rights to manage their resources, conflicts emanating from perceived unfair treatments will naturally continue. Another area of conflict is the complaint of political marginalization by some ethnic nationalities, if implemented rotational presidential council as recommended will holistically resolve this issue of marginalization within the political sphere.

To truly give vent to an ideal federal ideology.

The main tenet of federalism is the recognition that the component units have sense of uniqueness and have the desire to retain some sense of autonomy to underscore that uniqueness. Such uniqueness can be by way of geographical particularity, which can give rise to unique crop production, unique natural resources, unique weather, environmental challenges etc. It could also be cultural identity, including unique language, beliefs, mode of dressing, ancestral and historical identity. Ability to recognize and respect these identities, while at the same time recognizing the great potentials of togetherness, will give room to a great co-habitation and a better country. There is always a positive sense in diversity, primarily it creates a sense of healthy competitiveness among the different groups. In the view of the renowned economist, David Ricardo (1817) in his theory of comparative cost advantage, as cited by Akrani (2011), he stated if every region is encouraged to use their unique and comparative advantage to engage in the production of such goods and

services they are geographically and professionally suited to produce best. There will be increase in production and by so doing it will impact more on the country overall economic growth.

To foster genuine sense of stability

The overall aim of any government and social system is to provide a genuine sense of stability, social cohesion, economic development and growth. It goes without saying that a stable society engenders development just as unstable system breeds underdevelopment. To be stable in the Nigeria situation requires that justice, fair play and equity must not only be respected, it must be demonstrated in action. When there is a constant sense of injustice, lack of fairplay and inequity in the polity, conflict and strives are inadvertently thrown up to replace peace and harmony. The Nigeria civil war, the Niger Delta militancy, IPOB agitation, Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen terrorisms and other social menaces are all consequences of perceived unfair social occurrences (Udama, 2013). The way the system stand today, it is subject to manipulation by political actors who capitalize on the defects in the system to act for their own selfish and sectional interests. At the end of the day their actions are viewed as constitutional going by the structural arrangements in place. But it can be perceived by all and sundry that something is clearly not right.

Various examples exist under the current administration of President Buhari to validate this position where benefits are routed to the constituent that the political leader prefers or favours. Buhari, while answering a question at the U.S Institute of Peace, once said that, it will be fair to treat those who gave him 97% votes better than those who gave him only 5% votes (Sahara Reporters, July 25 2015), tacitly referring to better treatment for the north than the eastern part of the country. Although he promised not to tend that path, his policies since he assumed office have been in compliance of that belief. On a moral ground, this is very wrong and it is capable of and indeed is generating the current state of mistrust, unrest and agitations across the country for restructuring. The essence of restructuring is to address scenario that encourages or give room for such lopsided action to be possible. A country where structure encourages or creates room for leaders to practice nepotism or tribalism while claiming to be operating within their constitutional jurisdiction is not good enough for a multi ethnic society like Nigeria.

What can bring stability in the policy is not to hope on the goodwill of the political leader to do what is morally right but for the structure to be such that leaders will have little or no room to do what is morally wrong.

To facilitate rotational presidency among regions.

The most tensed political periods in Nigeria as in most other countries are the periods of elections. In the case of Nigeria these periods are most contentious when ethnic consciousness and considerations are brought into the political scene. Since independence, electioneering periods have always been seen as times for prebendal positioning among the ethnic groups. The more proximity regional elements are close to or occupy the seat of power the more favourable it seems the benefits will go to such region (Oni, 2017; Joseph, 2014). This notion has been the underlining motive of political contestation and quest. This is more so given the enormous power that is conferred on the federal level in Nigeria political structure. So long as power configurations continue to favour the centre government at the expense of the other levels and so long as one

particular region continue to dominate the central government this conflictual electoral periods will continue to exist. It is highly recommended that the current structure be jettisoned in favour of a federal system that pushes more powers and autonomy to the regional and local governments. More importantly there is the need to fundamentally adjust the structure and composition of the federal executive branch of government this requires the dismantling of the current political structure of one president and one vice president that over see the affair of the whole country. The solution therefore is going to be both vertical and horizontal in nature. On the vertical front, power and authority should be dissolved from the central to the regions. On the horizontal perspective, the structure should be that every region should have access to the power at the center on a periodic and regular basis.

CONCLUSION

It is abundantly apparent from the analysis of the data gathered that Nigeria is highly polarized along ethnic and religious lines and that there is high level of mistrust among the various ethnic nationalities that make up the country. The pathway to establishing nationalistic spirit seems blink if not out rightly blocked by primordial sentiments and in most cases genuine unfair treatments. For instance the Ibos feel a sense of marginalization, and rightly so, since the period of the civil war; the Niger Delta region feels that they have not been adequately compensated for the ecological degradation that is being daily carried out as a result of oil exploration in the region e.t.c. This level of mistrust has been partly due to unconscious or deliberate attempts by successive leaderships of the country to convert the collective resources for the personal and or sectional benefits to the exclusion of others. It is also evident that successive leaderships have embraced this sentiment rather than working assiduously to inculcate the spirit of nationalism. Moreso, there is the evidence of concerted efforts by a section of the country, the Northern region, to alter the existing federal structure of the country for their selfish gain. These alterations have heated up the polity to the extent that national consciousness has been replaced by ethnic consciousness ('my ethnic first' world view). As notice earlier federalism will be most difficult if not impossible to work under this current system if nationalistic spirit is not developed and sustained, by ensuring fair and equal treatment of all sections of the country. This is possible when issues that cause regional conflicts are removed by allowing regions to have their autonomy.

It is the conclusion of this paper that for Nigeria to be a stable federal state there must be fairness, mutual trust and equity. The way the country is currently structured, those indices are not feasible. The essence of this paper therefore is to make some recommendations that could help in the realization of this noble idea of peaceful and stable federal state

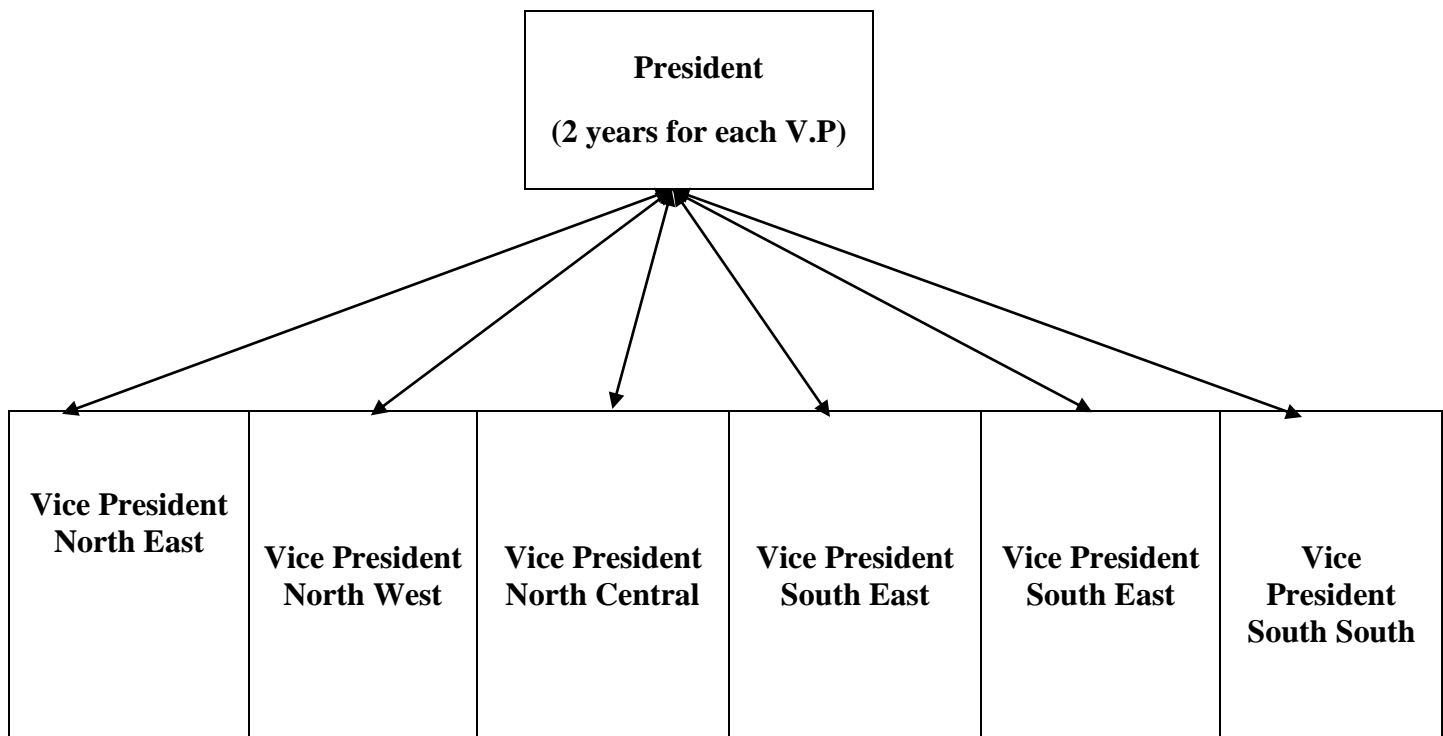
Recommendations

In order for the Nigerian state to be relieved of the aforementioned tensions it is important to make the following recommendations.

1. **On Power Dissolution:** More power need to be dissolved to regions; the current system of over concentration of power at the center, makes the country looks more like a unitary system of government rather than a federal system. The incursion of the military on the country political timeline has systematically led to the sapping of authorities hitherto

bestowed to the state governments on the central. This is in tune to the unity of command structure of the military establishment. Now that the country is back to stable democratic system since 1999, it is high time we reverted those powers back to the appropriate and proposed regional governments. Among others, the key powers that urgently need to revert back to states is the authority to control and manage the natural resources in their locale while paying loyalty to the central government, as practice in most advanced federal states such as the United States of America

2. **On Political Structure:** In addition to the above, this paper further recommends a political structure that might help to solve the periodic tension that is usually associated with electioneering period in the country. Firstly, the country needs to revert back to the pre-1964 regional arrangement as most states as they currently are today are not viable economically. This reversion is one way the country can solve the problem of financial crunch and frequent cap in hand to federal government for financial bailout currently experience by the states. Secondly, the paper further recommends that each region should be saddled with the responsibility of electing their presidential representative who will then represent them in a presidential council to be inaugurated in Abuja. This council will be composed of the representatives of the six (6) regions (North East, North West, North Central, South South, South West and South East) and they are to serve for a single tenure of 12 years. Within this period each of these representatives is to hold the office of the president on rotational bases for a period of 2 years, the mode of this rotation could be by ballot picking or any other method agreeable to them. At the expiration of this 12 years presidential cycle, the council will be dissolved to be replaced by a new one of which the preceding occupants will no longer seek presidential ambition again for life. This recommendation would have save the country from the political tensions and huge financial involvements associated with four yearly elections. Moreso, the current cry of marginalization by some ethnic groups like the Ibos would have been scaled down considerably as every region will have the opportunity of leading the country for two years in every 12 years. Likewise, the enormous powers been wielded by the president in the current structure would have being wound down considerably. This recommendation can also be replicated at the other lower levels of governments.

Table 2: Proposed Rotational Presidency format

Source: Author (2018)

This structure will be replicated at the state and local government levels to cater for the senatorial districts and the various wards across the country.

- On Security Architecture:** The paper also recommends that the current centralization of all security apparatus of the country at the federal level is an aberration that needs to be addressed. The police especially and other internal security agencies should be decentralized and should be ceded to regional governments. Every region should have their own individual security arrangement while the federal government can play a coordinating role of all security apparatus of the country. The advantage of this is to have community policing that understand better their area of jurisdiction in term of culture, language, religion and other unique characteristics of the people. This will aid in intelligence gathering and overall better security management of the country. The believe that state governors could use the officers and men of the state police to intimidate political opponents have become increasingly unsubstantiated due to renewed vigours in citizens' participation in and confidence to interrogate power (Aziken, 2017). Also the fact that the federal government is playing a coordinating role of all the security affiliates like the federal arm of police, the military and other para-military agencies will act as a check on any governor trying to be unruly. The call for regional policing is increasingly important given recent events in the country culminating in the persistent accusation that the federal government has converted the state security agencies into instruments of oppression and intimidation. The increasing level of high handedness of these agencies in pushing the will

of the federal government against perceived political opponents has reinforced this recommendation.

4. **On Natural Resources:** Exploration of oil and other natural resources should be the exclusive responsibility of the regions. It is projected that Nigeria total oil reserve will be exhausted in approximately 40 years from now, that is, going by the current daily output of 2.2million barrel per day (Akuru and Okoro, 2011). With renewed concern on the effects of carbon emission on the environment, and the call for alternative sources of energy by world leaders, the future of Nigeria crude oil faces two blink alternatives. Either the current national reserve last for the next 40 years as projected and got exhausted naturally or global need for oil will be overtaken by technological development that will usher in alternatives and more environmental friendly sources of energy. Whichever comes first, Nigeria faces a terminal end in oil exportation in the immediate future and a blink future as a continuous source of revenue. Therefore it cannot be emphasized enough that exploring alternative sources of foreign exchange earnings is the only way forward for the country. The point of this recommendation is for every region to urgently start to look inward and explore their inherent potentials rather than lay back and wait for federal allocation from proceeds of crude oil sales.
5. **On Constitutional Reform:** the need to carry out a holistic constitutional reform, the one that will conform to the ideal tenet of true federal state, is quite urgent. Over the years and especially during the era of military incursion in politics, series of amendments and dictatorial decrees have tended to coalesce power in a unitary fashion as against a federal and decentralized fashion. A reform is therefore needed to correct the defects currently in the constitution that has made the country not to function more efficiently. The starting point should be the conveyance of a national conference where all challenges facing the country will be tabled and addressed if the country must continue as one.

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