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**FEDERALISM AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN NIGERIA: IS A DANIEL
COMING TO JUDGMENT SOON?**

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Abstract

It has been observed by scholars, social commentators, and politicians that Nigeria's model of federalism, ever since the military intervened in the body-polity in January 1966 is flawed. Consequently, it has exacerbated the inability of the nationalities to resolve what has been described as the "national question". The study employs a multi-dimensional approach in its analysis which draw from current literatures, theoretical postulations and arguments of scholars, politicians, social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs) and other experts to foreground with some degree of precision the numerous factors responsible for the erosion of federalism in Nigeria. How the flawed federalism has heightened tensions among ethnic nationalities and their leading elite "front" organizations, with some of them drumming for the balkanization of Nigeria are discussed. Nonetheless, the study does not foreclose the possibility of Nigeria's renaissance. The country can be rescued from the brink of a constitutional crisis and balkanization. The new administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is expected to tinker with the present warped structure and practice of federalism in Nigeria with a view to repositioning the country for developmental federalism that respects the diversities and identities in the country. But, can President Tinubu dare the reactionaries and anti-federalist forces in the country today? Can he be the Daniel of our time?

Keywords: Nigeria, federalism, national question, fiscal federalism, ethnic nationalities, separatist forces and inter-group relations.

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Introduction

The concept of federalism has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry and debate, particularly in the context of diverse and multiethnic societies. Nigeria, as a nation comprising numerous ethnic groups and distinct regions, adopted a federal system of governance upon gaining independence in 1960. Federalism was intended to promote unity, accommodate diversity, and distribute power between the central government and the constituent states. However, contemporary Nigeria has witnessed a series of flaws and challenges to the principles and functioning of federalism, raising concerns about the implications for the national question. This study critically examines the extent to which the federalism in contemporary Nigeria problematizes the national question by analyzing the key manifestations of the flawed federalism and their impact on the country's political, social, and economic well being.

The national question in Nigeria pertains to the fundamental issues surrounding national identity, unity, and equitable distribution of resources among diverse ethnic and regional groups. The marring of federalism refers to the erosion or violation of the principles and provisions that define the relationship between federal government and states in a supposedly federal state. The contemporary period, characterized by political instability, economic challenges, and social unrest, has witnessed several instances of federalism flaws that have significantly negatively influenced the national question in Nigeria. Several scholars have highlighted the implications of the flawed federalism in Nigeria. For instance, Olowu (2015) argues that the centralization of power in the federal government has weakened the autonomy of the states and impeded their ability to provide essential services to their citizens. Similarly, Akindele and Adetula (2016) contend that the overconcentration of power in the hands of the federal government has contributed to the marginalization of minority groups and fueled calls for secession.

Furthermore, the flawed federalism in Nigeria has also been linked to corruption and inefficiency in governance. As noted by Adeyemo and Ojo (2016), the centralization of power has created a rent-seeking mentality among politicians, who use their positions to amass wealth and exploit the resources of their regions. This has led to a lack of accountability and transparency in governance, which has further eroded public trust in the government and exacerbated the national question.

The study, basically, a library research, relies on secondary data to examine how the controversies surrounding Nigeria's federalism, especially, the practice of federalism in the post-1966 era have complicated the issues of the national question in the country. Thus, rather than getting close to the resolution of the national question, the Nigerian polity has inadvertently exacerbated the acrimonies generated by the national question. Thus, inadvertently pushing and pulling the nationalities apart, towards some centrifugal direction, thereby threatening the very survival of the nation-state. The study finds that the flawed federalism in the country is majorly intoxicating the separatist forces in the country who now hold the country by the jugular. But, there may just be light at the end of the tunnel if President Bola Ahmed Tinubu does not shed his convictions on federalism now that he pilots the affairs of the troubled country. If he doesn't do so, then a Daniel may well be coming to judgment. This discourse is in five parts. While the introductory section is naturally the first section of the study, discussing the concept of federalism, the theoretical framework, and other related matters, section two examines the concept of the national question, and how it plays out in Nigeria. Section three examines the practice of federalism in Nigeria today and how it has made it near-impossible to resolve the national question and engender healthy inter-group relations. Section four discusses the consequences of the flawed federalism in Nigeria, and how the presidency of Bola Ahmed Tinubu is expected to rework Nigeria's federalism and get history to absolve him. But can he? Would he? Section five concludes the discourse with some recommendations on how Nigeria can return to federalism.

By Way of Theorizing: Fiscal Federalism and the National Question

The theory of Fiscal Federalism was developed by Kenneth Arrow, Richard Musgrave, and Paul Samuelson. Samuelson's papers in 1954 and 1955 focused on the theory of public goods. Arrow discussed the roles of the public and private sectors in 1970, and Musgrave's book on public finance in 1959 provided the framework for understanding the proper role of the state in the economy. This theory later became known as the "Decentralization Theorem" (Ozo-Eson, 2005).

Each level of government aims to maximize the welfare of its citizens within its jurisdiction. This becomes crucial when dealing with localized public goods, which benefit

specific areas rather than the entire nation. In such cases, providing local outputs that meet local demands yields higher social welfare compared to centralized provision. However, it is acknowledged that no level of government can achieve a perfect mapping for all public goods, as different goods have varying consumption patterns across jurisdictions. Some public goods may have spill-over effects beyond local boundaries. For instance, a road may benefit areas outside the local jurisdiction. In such cases, the local authority may underprovide for these goods.

Based on the basic theory of fiscal federalism, the roles of government are assigned as follows: the central government ensures equitable income distribution, maintains macroeconomic stability, and provides national public goods. The decentralized levels of government, on the other hand, focus on providing local public goods, with the central government providing targeted grants in cases of jurisdictional spillovers associated with local public goods.

The lack of fiscal federalism in Nigeria has had significant implications for the country's federal structure and has contributed to breaches in peaceful coexistence. Fiscal federalism refers to the division of fiscal powers and responsibilities between the central government and subnational entities (such as states or regions) within a federation. In Nigeria, the federal structure was established to accommodate the country's diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups. However, the concentration of fiscal powers at the central level, particularly in the control and allocation of revenue, has created imbalances and tensions among the different regions. Here are some ways in which the lack of fiscal federalism has affected Nigeria:

1. **Revenue Allocation:** Nigeria relies heavily on oil revenues, which are primarily controlled by the federal government. The revenue allocation formula used has often been criticized for favouring the central government and leaving the states with inadequate funds to meet their needs. This has resulted in a lack of fiscal autonomy for the states, impeding their ability to deliver essential services and infrastructure development.
2. **Resource Control:** The centralization of revenue control has led to disputes over resource ownership and control, particularly in oil-producing regions like the Niger Delta. Communities in these areas feel marginalized and deprived of their fair share of the revenue derived from their resources. This has resulted in protests, conflicts, and a sense of alienation, negatively impacting peaceful coexistence.
3. **Inequitable Development:** The lack of fiscal federalism has contributed to significant disparities in development between regions. Some states, particularly those with a lower share of revenue allocation, struggle to provide basic amenities like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. This imbalance has led to feelings of resentment and marginalization, fueling tensions and conflicts.
4. **Dependence on the Center:** With limited fiscal autonomy, many states in Nigeria rely heavily on federal allocations to sustain their operations. This overreliance on the central government for funding creates a sense of vulnerability and weakens the financial independence of the states. It also increases their susceptibility to political interference and undermines their ability to make independent decisions.
5. **Political Instability:** The fiscal imbalances and perceived injustice in revenue allocation have heightened political tensions in Nigeria. Competing interests and power struggles among political elites seeking control over resources have often led to conflicts and instability. This hinders the peaceful coexistence of different groups and undermines national unity.

Addressing the loss of fiscal federalism in Nigeria requires comprehensive reforms that promote greater fiscal autonomy and equitable distribution of resources. This includes revisiting the revenue allocation formula, devolving more fiscal powers to the states, enhancing transparency and accountability in financial management, and promoting inclusive governance practices that accommodate the interests of all regions and communities.

Understanding the Concept of Federalism

To further explore the ideas above, it is imperative to explain the concept of federalism. Federalism is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been extensively studied and analyzed by scholars from various disciplines. It refers to a system of government where power is shared between a central authority and regional or constituent units, with each level of government possessing a degree of autonomy within its designated sphere of influence. Federalism is characterized by the division of powers and responsibilities between the central government and subnational entities, with both levels of government exercising independent authority over certain policy areas. There are various scholarly interpretations and definition of the term "federalism". **In all these definitions one important idea persists, which is that federalism stresses on power sharing between a central governmental body and constituent or regional units.** According to Riker (1987), federalism is defined as follows: "Federalism is a political arrangement in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent units. In a federation, the central authority is limited by a constitution, which also defines the relationships between the central government and the constituent units." Similarly, Yoo (2005) argues that federalism is a means to protect individual liberties. Hence, Federalism is not about states' rights; it is about individual rights. It is about creating a balance of power between the national and state governments so that each government will check the other's abuses of power. Also, KC Wheare's perspective on federalism emphasizes its nature as a governmental and institutional structure. He sees federalism as a deliberate legalistic approach to governance, aimed at maintaining unity while respecting diversity. According to Wheare, federalism serves important political functions such as common defense, political and economic freedom, and the need for political association. In this regard, federalism entails a political system where authority is coordinated between the central and state governments. Enang (2020, p.14) supports this notion by highlighting the need for the two governing bodies to collaborate and share power.

More so, Tocqueville (2000), highlighted the benefits of federalism in his seminal work, "Democracy in America". According to him, federalism promotes diversity, experimentation, and competition among regions, fostering innovation and preventing the concentration of power. It allows local communities to govern themselves according to their distinct needs and values, while maintaining a unified national identity. Furthermore, on the benefits of a federal system, Watts (2008), emphasizes the flexibility of federal systems. He asserted that Federalism provides a framework that can accommodate diverse regional, linguistic, and cultural differences within a single political entity. It allows for the accommodation of regional demands, while maintaining a sense of unity and cooperation among the constituent units. Elazar (1991), in explaining federalism identified three key elements of federalism. According to him, federalism comprises shared rule, self-rule, and shared rule of self-rule. Shared rule refers to the division of powers between the central and subnational governments, while self-rule pertains to the autonomous decision-making authority of the subnational entities. Shared rule of self-rule involves cooperation and coordination between the levels of government to address common challenges and pursue shared goals. It is in this sense that Okonta (2021) characterized federalism:

Federalism is by design a system that depends on consensus, give and take and ability to take the long view for it to work. Where political leaders adopt opportunism and “winner takes all” practices as political weapons then federal government is liable to breakdown.

The opportunism exhibited today by individual political actors, and sometimes, collective actors in Nigeria and the flawed structure and practice of federalism make federalism to suffer double jeopardy in the country. We shall discuss how this plays out in the succeeding sections of this study.

Federalism in the Nigerian Political System

In Nigeria, the adoption of federalism was a response to its diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural composition. The historical reference by Afigbo (1991) outlines how federalism emerged as a compromise during the pre-independence negotiations between regional leaders. The 1946 Richards Constitution, as discussed by Tamuno (1981), laid the foundation for federalism in Nigeria, providing a framework for power-sharing between the central and regional governments. Over the years, federalism in Nigeria has played a crucial role in power-sharing and resource allocation among the different tiers of government. The works of Suberu (2001) and Olowu (2003) elucidate how federalism facilitates the decentralization of power, enabling regional governments to address local needs and concerns effectively. The derivation principle, as stated in the 1999 Constitution, ensures the equitable distribution of resources among the states, as emphasized by Adetula (2010).

The federal structure in Nigeria was meant to serve as a mechanism for managing ethnic diversity and promoting political stability. Osaghae (1991) and Isawa Elaigwu (2005) illustrate how federalism allows ethnic groups to maintain a degree of autonomy while remaining part of a unified country. Through the system of federal character, as highlighted by Ikelegbe (2001), federalism fosters inclusiveness in political appointments, addressing ethnic tensions and promoting national cohesion. As well as a means for effective administration and governance. Nwabueze (1982) provides insights into the administrative structures that facilitate federalism in Nigeria, such as the fiscal federalism framework, state creation process, and intergovernmental relations. These mechanisms, as studied by Suberu (2001) and Bakare (2015), ensure coordination, cooperation, and accountability between the federal, state, and local governments. However, while federalism offers numerous benefits, it also presents challenges in Nigeria. Okolie (2010) and Oyedele (2017) discuss issues such as revenue allocation disputes, ethnic tensions, and the centralization of power.

Okonta (2021) makes the point that there are levels or shades of federalism in different polities across the world: quasi federalism, cooperative federalism, organic federalism, dual federalism, confederation, and decentralization. And then, identifies two debatable conditions for federalism to thrive. First, liberal democracy and second, effective political leadership. Yet, Nigeria has operated federalism under military dictatorship and the so-called liberal democratic setting, especially since 1999 to date, which is commonly referred to as the Fourth Republic. The Nigerian experience has been one which put federalism in bad light and fails to cater adequately (successfully) for the diversities and identities which make up composite Nigeria. Ekeh (2001) advanced some profound reasons for the sad experience of federalism in Nigeria:

But Nigerian federalism was bedeviled right from its beginning by lack of experience in the give and take of politics. Traditions of national politics are acquired from continuous practices and usages. In the political history of colonial Nigeria, such practices were lacking because British colonial rulers banned

politics and even criminalized them. The small window of the 1950s for practicing politics was clearly inadequate for establishing a tradition of national politics. Instead, at independence in 1960, the dominant tradition of politics was expressed in notions of conquest of the opponent's powers. Threats and violence replaced discussions and compromises. Respect for the people's vote was scanty in every corner of the country. All of these might well have been remedied and domesticated through repetitive practices of politics in the Post-independence era if they were accompanied with further discussions and mutual compromises...

On how the federalism which the founding fathers and mothers of Nigeria agreed to prior to independence in 1960 was fractured by the military junta, Ekeh (2001) writes:

But the military intervention of 1966 changed the nature of Nigerian public affairs and our practice of federalism forever. Forcible military rule also changed the character of the national question completely, in a sense, native military rule pushed us backwards to the mode and restriction of alien colonial rule in a vicious manner.

As faulty as the federalism bequeathed to Nigeria at independence was as several writers on Nigerian federalism have noted (Awolowo, 1968; Nwabugbuogu, 1996; Okonta, 2001); the point should be made that the founding fathers of the Nigerian federation were comfortable with the federal arrangements in which federating regions were given some leverage of autonomy to run their affairs and generate revenue to develop their regions while paying agreeable percentage of revenues so-generated to the central government. Yet, another fundamental flaw of the federalism bequeathed to Nigeria by colonial Britain is the unequal in fact, unbalanced geo-political structure of Nigeria as designed by the British. Putting this in perspective, a scholar commented thus:

In Nigeria's First Republic however, the Northern Region was as great, if not greater, both in population and size than the rest of the three other regions put together. Of the 312 seats in the House of Representatives, 167 were allocated to the North, 70 to the East, 57 to the West, 14 to the Midwest and four to Lagos on the basis of population. Thus, the North had 22 seats more than the whole of the South put together. The 1959 general elections which ushered in the First Republic clearly demonstrated this lopsidedness. While the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) did not bother to campaign in the South, it won the majority of the seats in its own region, enough to put it in a position to control the federal government. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) won the majority of the seats in the East and also had a good showing in the west. The Action Group (AG) was able to win majority of the seats in the west. Given its numerical superiority, the NPC was able to form the government in the centre in a coalition with the NCNC. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the NPC became Prime Minister while Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC became

ceremonial President, Obafemi Awolowo of the AG became leader of the opposition (Okonta, 2021).

The faulty foundation of federalism laid by the British, instead of being redressed was reinforced by the military. But what is astounding to watchers of Nigeria's political development is the inability of the civilian wing of the Nigerian ruling class to address the fault lines of the Nigerian federalism. All efforts and agitations of the minority ethnic groups who bear the burden of the flawed federalism in Nigeria have either yielded minimum positive results and rather generated more negative consequences which are at the roots of the echoes of instability and activities of separationist forces which characterize the Nigerian polity today. Thus, federalism in Nigeria, battered and manipulated by the ruling class, has continued to negate all good tidings of inter-groups relations and rather, throw up resistance by groups who are disenchanted with the flawed federalism. The situation degenerated since 1999 when the country returned to the so-called civil democratic rule. The ruling class, indeed, successive governments since 1999 made half-hearted efforts to address the flawed federal system in the country. Those efforts, because they were not genuinely made were trashed by the same ruling class. But, Non-state actors, both the armed wing and the unarmed wing continue to demand the restoration of the pre-1966 federalism in Nigeria. With the coming on board of the presidency of Mr. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, himself, a renowned advocate of federalism (which in local parlance is called "true federalism") on May 29, 2023, critical watchers and deep students of Nigerian politics are waiting to see whether President Bola Ahmed Tinubu will turn his pre-power, ascendancy rhetoric of "true federalism" to reality by moving pointedly and decisively towards the enthronement of fiscal federalism and devolution of more powers from the federal government to the federating units – the states. His decision to sign the electricity bill, by decentralizing the distribution of power is seen by many persons as a step in the right direction. It is important to point out that former President Muhammadu Buhari in the twilight of his administration (2015 – 2023) may have kick-started the process of returning the country to federalism, away from the present unitarism couched as federalism. President Buhari, on March 16, 2023 signed 16 constitution alteration bills into law. Some of the new laws which will devolve more powers to the states include the removal of the railway, prison and electricity from the exclusive legislative list to the concurrent list. Others are the law on financial independence of State Houses of Assembly and State Judiciary. Commenting on the positive takeaways from the new laws, a former Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Wase stated inter alia: "Essentially, four devolution of powers/promoting true federalism. And also strengthening of State Houses of Assembly and Judiciary" (Majeed, 2023). While these efforts at devolving more powers to the federating units is a pointer to gradual restoration of federalism in Nigeria, these efforts are yet a tip of the iceberg. There are more fundamental issues to address if Nigeria must return to the federalism of pre-1966 political arrangements in the country. Policy issues and legal instruments which negate the principles of "true" federalism (to use the common Nigerian phrase) are still operational. Nigeria is nowhere close to "true" federalism today. Some of these legal instruments are the colonial Mineral Oil Ordinance of 1914, which was amended in 1923 and 1950. The terms of this law stated that the entire and mineral oil was vested in the colony. Another such colonial law that extinguished the rights or owner-resource control in Nigeria is the Mineral Act, 1946, Cap 121 laws of the federation of Nigeria and Lagos section 3(1) of the Act provides: "The entire property in and control of all minerals in, under or upon any land in Nigeria, and, off rivers, streams and water that coursed throughout Nigeria, is and shall be vested in the crown". This Act is now enacted as Minerals Act, cap 226, laws of the federation of Nigeria, 1990. It came into effect in Nigeria on 25th October 1946. Also, the 1960 independence constitution and the 1963 Republican

constitution vested in the federal parliament exclusive powers to legislate on, among others mines, minerals including oil fields, oil mining, geological surveys and natural gas. The 1963 Republican constitution also retained the above position but both constitutions provide for fifty (50%) percent derivation fund to be paid to any mineral producing region. The controversy over ownership and control of all petroleum resources and its revenue was paid to rest with promulgation of the petroleum decree of 1969 now enacted as Petroleum Act, Cap. 350 Laws of Federation, 1990. There are also the Territorial Water Act, Cap. 428, Laws of the Federation, 1990, as amended by the Act No. 1 of 1998, the Exclusive Economic Zone Act Cap 116 Laws of the Federation, 1990 as amended by Act No. 42 of natural resources in the territorial waters and exclusive economic zone of Nigeria in the Federal Government of Nigeria. (See Offiong and Oriakhi, 2005).

In addition, the Land Use Decree of March 8, 1978, promulgated under the General Olusegun Obasanjo led-military government, like the earlier proclamations of the British colonial administration also sought to appropriate land from the people whenever the government requires land for any purpose. This was incorporated into the 1979 and 1999 constitutions. Also, section 44, subsection 3 of the 1999 constitution vests ownership of minerals, oil and natural gas, deposits on the Nigerian state. This law states inter alia:

Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this section the entire property in and control of all minerals, mineral oils and natural gas in, under or upon any land in Nigeria or zone of Nigeria shall vests in the government of the federation and shall be managed in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly (see 1999 constitution).

To consolidate its ownership of oil in the Niger Delta, and in any region of Nigeria thereof, and to control same, enacted the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Act Cap 320, Laws of the Federation 1990. The Act dissolves the Nigerian National Oil Corporation set up by Decree No. 18 of 1971 and to establish the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to engage in all commercial activities relating to the Petroleum industry and to enforce all regulatory measures relating to the general control of the Petroleum inspectorate department. The Petroleum Industry Act, 2021 otherwise called the (PIA) which was signed into law on August 16, 2021 by President Muhammadu Buhari replaced the former Petroleum Act. The PIA of 2021 apart from restating emphatically that the property and ownership of petroleum within Nigeria and its territorial waters, continental shelf, and exclusive economic zone is vested in the Government of Nigeria, the PIA made provisions to address the needs of host communities. The Law provides that exploration and production companies (referred to as settlers in the PIA) will be required to set up a Host Communities Development Trust (HCDDT) for the benefit of the host communities where they operate.

HCDDT will be funded by a contribution from each settler of an amount equal of 3% of its actual annual operating expenditure in the immediately preceding financial year, with respect to its upstream petroleum operations affecting the host communities (Lanre and Abdulao, 2022).

The point should be made that the PIA is yet a new face of existing laws with some little modifications which reinforce the continuous negation of fiscal federalism in Nigeria with the Federal Government of Nigeria inheriting the rights over the entire property in, and control of minerals in, under or upon any land in Nigeria, and of rivers, streams and water courses throughout Nigeria. The PIA like other existing legal instruments only give tokenistic grants to host communities and states where crude oil are found. This continuous deprivation of the citizens of oil-bearing regions and communities in Nigeria have negated

the federal principles to the extent that some scholars have described it as portending internal colonialism which should be challenged and dismissed for a better or “true” federal arrangements in the polity (Darah, 2003). Among other aspect of the abuse of fiscal federalism by the Federal Government of Nigeria is the take-over by the federal military governments (now-civilian governments) of all off-shore oil royalties and rent and with it the erosion of the principles of derivation in fiscal allocation from about 50 percent to less than 10 percent rising to the current level of 13 percent of the distributable pool. Other aspects are discontinuation of export duties and sales tax on agricultural produce; standardization of personal income tax rates throughout the country, thereby ensure that the state governments become powerless to change the rates; and the introduction of uniform fuel prices throughout the country, thereby removing the power of state governments to levy petroleum sales taxes (Adedeji, 2001). As we have noted elsewhere over eighteen (18) years ago, the cumulative impact of the erosion of the tax autonomy of the state, is that the states have become excessively dependent on the central authorities, i.e., the Federal Government, thereby dismantling the pre-1966 federal arrangements in Nigeria and disarticulating the universal concept of federalism. The renowned political economist of blessed memory, Professor Adebayo Adedeji laments this travesty of federalism in Nigeria:

As against the average of 13.8 and 35 percent of total national revenue raised by Brazilian and Indian states, the Nigerian states are raising in a mere 10 percent on the average. Thus, in Nigeria, it is Fiscal Unitarism and not Fiscal Federalism that is in very essence of federalism. If fiscal federalism constitutes the essence of democratic participation in a federal polity by guaranteeing unity in diversity, promoting economy, efficiency and equity, fiscal federalism imposed through Federal Government hegemony is a sure source of conflict and of resource mismanagement and corruption. Fiscal Unitarism in a federal polity offers too great an incentive to macro-economic mismanagement and instability. It is also an open licence for uneconomical competitiveness in the provision of public services and public goods (Adedeji, 2001).

This is the crux of the matter about Nigeria’s so-called federalism as practiced today with the 1999 constitution. With the autonomous tax powers of the states removed, and the states left to depend on the Federal Government, which has become a leviathan and patrimonial in structure and activity, the national question has become a recurring decimal on the frontiers of national discourse with some centrifugal ethnic forces calling repeated attention to the overbearing powers of the federal government which has been perpetually skewed against nationalities’ interest. As Adedeji correctly noted, “the Federal Government hegemony has become a sure source of conflict and anti-democratic culture and of resource mismanagement and corruption” (Adedeji, 2001). The echoes of instability in Nigeria today largely stems from this unfederal federalism practiced in the country. Issues which bother on the national question and continuous survival of Nigeria as a composite nation-state are becoming more compounded as successive civilian administrations since 1999, in this so-called Fourth Republic have been seemingly unable to unbundle the current “unfederal” federalism in Nigeria, and return the country to the pre-1966 federalism. This matter is at the heart of the nationality question which the current administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu should deal with. Himself, having demonstrated his preference for federalism when he was governor of Lagos state has history beckoning on him to rework Nigeria’s federalism irrespective of the forces that might conspired against that enduring goal. Watchers of

political development in Nigeria expect him to retool the “unfederal” federalism in Nigeria today. Can he? Would he?

The National Question in Nigeria: History, Changes, and Present Form

The national question is the question about how possible it is for varied ethnic nationalities to live together harmoniously, to build a nation-state, and possibly a nation. The national question has consequently become a recurring issue, often debated with passions, sometimes snowballing to bloody wars in new states of Africa, Asia and South America.

Indeed, as Onimode (2011) rightly observes, “the upsurge of micro-nationalism from the end of the cold war has reinforced the momentum of self-determination in the dialectics of the National Question across the world”. Indeed, the national question, which remains largely unresolved in most new nations has triggered off civil wars and conflicts in countries. Some so-called advanced democracies are still battling with the national question. When the Scots went for a referendum in the United Kingdom ten years ago or so, and lost, it was the national question that was at stake, which sought a resolution. The national question manifest itself in various sectors of national life, especially, the political life, the economic life, cultural, social and religious life of a nation. Ade Ajayi, the renowned Nigerian Historian of blessed memory conceives the national question thus:

The National Question is the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same rights and privileges, access to power and equitable share of national resources. (Ade Ajayi, 2001)

Apart from the major political, social and cultural dimensions of the national question, Onimode (2001) elaborated the economic dimension of the national question to include:

1. The demand for equity in the distribution of national resources and the gains of development;
2. Democratic control over environmental resources;
3. Popular participation at all levels of development, process and decision-making;
4. Periodic review of the fiscal system; and
5. The review of the distribution of legislative powers over national resources and revenue.

As stated earlier, the national question manifests in one way or the other in different countries of the World. Labinjoh (2001) briefly captures this reality when he argued that if one assumes that the single problem confronting Nigeria is one of ethnicity, then one must realize that there are hardly any society in the world which enjoys cultural homogeneity. The crisis of national integration has not been confined to Asia and Africa. He continues:

After centuries of assumed social stability in the west, similar centrifugal tendencies have become manifest. In Canada, the French Canadians, in France the Breton, in Switzerland the Jurassiens, in Spain, the Catalans and in Britain the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish have at one time or the other demanded greater autonomy and a corresponding loosening of the bonds of a long unquestioned national integration. In fact the Northern Ireland has fought bitterly recently, demanding severance from the United Kingdom and an incorporation into the Republic of Eire. The former

Yugoslavia is the only one recently that has fragmented into "nations" after years of savage brutality perpetrated in a civil war of cessation. And it only took the Soviet Union to collapse for several nationalisms to surface. (Labinjoh, 2001).

To resolve the national question is a challenge which all states are facing. The articulation and resolution of the national question are usually marred with serious disagreements, tension and conflicts. The origins of the national question often lie in the forced lumping together of the diverse groups by colonialists in Africa, elsewhere and the subsequent attempts, to force national unity, while keeping intact, or in fact, accentuating, the extant inequalities and contradictions that have arisen (Onimode, 2001).

The national question in Nigeria refers to the complex and multifaceted issues surrounding the country's diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural composition, as well as the struggle for power, resources, and identity among its various constituent groups. The national question in Nigeria has its roots in the colonial era. British colonization played a pivotal role in the amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups into a single political entity in 1914. The amalgamation was motivated by economic and administrative considerations rather than the ethnic, cultural, or historical affinities of the constituent regions (Obaro, 1991). According to Osaghae (1991), the British amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 and the subsequent establishment of a centralized administration contributed to the emergence of the national question, as it created tensions among various ethnic groups.

Nigeria since its formation is home to over 250 distinct ethnic groups, with the largest being the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. These groups possess diverse languages, cultural practices, and historical experiences, contributing to deep-rooted ethnic and religious divisions (Suberu, 2001). The northern region is predominantly Muslim, while the southern region is largely Christian, further accentuating the religious divide. Obi (2001) highlights that ethno-religious divisions have been a significant factor contributing to the complexity of the national question in Nigeria, resulting in conflicts and tensions among different groups. Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960. However, the country's federal structure and political system soon became the stage for ethnic and regional power struggles. The First Republic (1960-1966) witnessed significant regionalism, as political power and resources were concentrated within each region, intensifying the national question (Osaghae, 1994). Adebanwi and Obadare (2011) argue that the struggle for resource control and political power has been a key factor exacerbating the national question, with marginalized regions demanding a fairer distribution of resources and political representation.

The national question reached its peak during the Biafra secessionist movement from 1967 to 1970. The secessionist state of Biafra emerged from the Igbo ethnic group's quest for self-determination, leading to a brutal civil war that resulted in significant loss of lives and deepened ethnic tensions (Heerten & Moses, 2018). The recent form of the national question in Nigeria revolves around resource allocation, federalism, and power sharing. There is ongoing debate regarding the equitable distribution of revenue generated from the country's vast oil and gas reserves, with accusations of marginalization by certain ethnic and regional groups (Suberu, 2001). In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a resurgence of secessionist agitations. The Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and other groups have rekindled demands for an independent state, citing perceived marginalization and unequal treatment (Ukiwo, 2015).

The national question in Nigeria is a complex issue rooted in the country's colonial legacy, ethnic and religious divisions, and struggles for power, resources, and identity. The

historical context, including the colonial amalgamation and the Biafra secessionist movement shaped the trajectory of the national question. Today, the issues revolve around resource allocation, federalism, and secessionist agitations. The national question in contemporary Nigeria has also unfolded in the way and manners that herders-farmers conflict across the country has remained unresolved by the federal authorities. Throughout the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015 – 2023) the Fulani herdsmen continued to attack and kill farmers in the Middle Belt region and even in some South-South, South West and South East states. The Federal Government could not come out with any workable solution to what apparently is a national calamity. The Fulani herdsmen invade the rest parts of the country with their cattles and destroy farms, with the herdsmen armed with all sorts of weapons, including Ak-47 weapons, destroying lives and properties in different parts of the country. The recurring decimal of fiscal unitarism instead of fiscal federalism, and the perennial North-South divide in national politics and power-sharing have all compounded the national question in contemporary Nigeria. Even the question of the religious divide between the north and the south; the continuous marginalization of the oil-bearing states and continued snubbing of the people of the Niger Delta form the core of the nationality question in Nigeria today which are yearning for resolution. These problematic of the national question are at the core of Nigeria's flawed federalism. Therefore, can the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration address the national question in contemporary Nigeria? Are the issues around the national question in Nigeria today resolvable? Issues around economic development and corruption of the ruling elites across all tiers of governments in the country also form part of the national question. Is President Bola Ahmed Tinubu the "Daniel" Nigeria is waiting for? Given the fact that he advocated for the resolution of the national question when he was on the barricade of agitational politics and advocacy in the 1990s before he was elected in 1999 to govern Lagos State, can he now walk the talk?. Now the chicken has come home to roost, what can President Tinubu do to resolve some if not all of the critical aspects of the national question in Nigeria?

Nigeria's flawed federalism: Isolating the Misfires

Federalism, as a system of governance, aims to distribute power and resources between a central government and regional or state governments (Suberu, 2001). In Nigeria, a country with a diverse ethnic and cultural makeup, federalism was adopted to accommodate the interests of its numerous ethnic groups. However, Nigeria has experienced significant breaches in federalism, resulting in the centralization of power, resource allocation disparities, and weak intergovernmental relations (Okoye, 2019; Oyedele, 2017; Okolie, 2010).

One prominent manifestation of federalism breaches in Nigeria is the centralization of power in the federal government. Despite the constitutional provisions that grant certain powers to the state governments, the federal government has continually encroached upon these powers, undermining the autonomy of the states. For instance, the central government has taken control of vital sectors such as security, education, and revenue allocation, limiting the decision-making authority of the states (Salau, 2021). The centralization of power is evident in the overreliance on oil revenue, with the federal government controlling the distribution of oil resources and revenue. This has led to a lopsided dependency on oil, neglecting other sectors and creating an imbalance in resource allocation (Okoye, 2019). Consequently, this centralization has weakened the fiscal capacity of the states, stifling their ability to effectively govern and address the needs of their respective populations. As Nwabueze (2016) contends, "Nigeria operates a skewed fiscal federalism which concentrates financial resources in the hands of the central government." This concentration of resources

at the center has led to a disproportionate distribution of revenue and stifled the economic development of the states. Consequently, the states are heavily reliant on the federal government for funding, impeding their capacity to make independent decisions and pursue region-specific policies.

The persistent disparities in resource allocation are yet another problematic issue. The federal government's control over revenue collection and allocation has resulted in uneven distribution, with certain regions receiving a disproportionately small share of resources (Awofeso, 2021). This imbalance is particularly evident in the Niger Delta region, which bears the brunt of environmental degradation caused by oil exploration but receives little in return (Akpan, 2022). Moreover, the disparities in resource allocation exacerbate regional inequalities and heighten ethnic tensions. Non-oil-producing regions often feel marginalized and deprived, leading to social and political unrest. This breach of federalism undermines the principles of equity and fairness upon which federalism is built, further widening the gap between different regions in Nigeria (Agba, 2020). Furthermore, Nigeria's federalism breaches have exacerbated existing ethno-religious tensions, leading to heightened security challenges. The uneven distribution of power and resources, combined with the lack of effective mechanisms for resolving intergroup conflicts, has fueled ethnocentrism and religious intolerance (Nnoli, 1978). This has resulted in recurrent clashes, communal violence, and insurgency, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and clashes between herders and farmers in central Nigeria. These security challenges not only threaten national unity but also hinder socio-economic progress and stability (Ojo, 2023).

Also, weak intergovernmental relations pose another challenge to federalism in Nigeria. The relationship between the federal and state governments is characterized by tension, mistrust, and an absence of effective coordination mechanisms. The lack of a robust framework for intergovernmental relations hampers policy implementation and impedes cooperation between different tiers of government (Balogun, 2021). The absence of strong intergovernmental relations is particularly evident in areas such as security, where coordination and collaboration are crucial. The inability of the federal and state governments to effectively work together in combating security challenges like insurgency and banditry has resulted in a lack of accountability and poor responses to these threats (Okolie, 2010). As Soludo (2012) argues, "the relationship between the tiers of government in Nigeria is characterized by tension, mistrust, and conflicts." This strained relationship hampers effective coordination, collaboration, and cooperation among the different levels of government. The lack of synergy and cooperation negatively impacts the implementation of policies and the delivery of essential services to citizens.

Furthermore, the manipulation of the state structure by the central government is another manifestation of federalism breaches in Nigeria. According to Adesina and Ndulu (2008), "the creation of states and local governments in Nigeria has been politically motivated rather than driven by objective criteria." This political manipulation of the state structure undermines the principles of federalism, as the creation and dissolution of states are often used as tools for political expediency rather than genuine considerations of administrative efficiency or regional aspirations. Consequently, this undermines the effectiveness of governance and exacerbates inter-regional disparities (Mohammed & Sulaiman, 2018).

Finally, another significant manifestation of flawed federalism in Nigeria is the erosion of state autonomy. The increasing encroachment of the federal government on the legislative and executive powers of the states has undermined the principles of decentralization and devolution of powers. The proliferation of federal agencies, overlapping jurisdiction, and the concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch have

weakened the capacity of states to govern effectively, stifling local initiatives and impeding democratic governance (Osagie, 2022).

The manifestations of federalism breaches in Nigeria are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in the country's political, economic, and social fabric (Pepple, 1985). Violations of fiscal federalism, erosion of state autonomy, ethno-religious tensions, and neglect of resource control have collectively contributed to a state of fragility and heightened social divisions. Addressing these breaches requires comprehensive reforms that promote equitable resource allocation, strengthen state autonomy, foster intergroup dialogue, and prioritize regional development (Osaghae, 2001). Only through genuine commitment to federalism's fundamental principles can Nigeria forge a path towards inclusive governance, sustainable development, and national unity.

Flawed Federalism and the National Question in Nigeria

The flaws of federalism in Nigeria have had a significant impact on the national question, particularly in relation to issues of identity, ethnic tensions, and demands for regional autonomy. One of the key impacts of breaches of federalism on the national question in Nigeria is the exacerbation of identity-based divisions. Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, and federalism was established as a means to accommodate this diversity and promote peaceful coexistence (Suberu, 2001). However, the concentration of powers at the federal level, coupled with the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, have led to heightened identity politics. Groups that perceive themselves as disadvantaged or marginalized within the federal structure have become more vocal in asserting their identities and demanding greater recognition. According to Agbaje (2011),

Centralization of power undermines the autonomy of regional units, often leading to ethno-regional tensions and demands for restructuring. In Nigeria, the breach of federalism through excessive centralization has intensified the national question.

The assertion above highlights how breaches of federalism, specifically through the concentration of power at the central level, can create a sense of alienation and marginalization among different regions, thereby contributing to the national question (Osadolor, 1998). For example, the Niger Delta region, which is predominantly inhabited by the Ijaw, Ogoni, and other minority groups, has experienced long-standing grievances related to the exploitation of its oil resources and the environmental degradation caused by the oil industry (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). The centralization of power and resources at the federal level has resulted in the neglect of the region's development, leading to a sense of marginalization and a demand for regional autonomy (Ugbegili, 2014). The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Niger Delta Avengers are among the groups that have emerged to advocate for the rights and interests of these communities (Okafor, 2015; Ikelegbe, 2005).

Similarly, in the Southeast region of Nigeria, the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) has been at the forefront of advocating for the secession of the region and the establishment of an independent state for the Igbo people (Mohammed & Sulaiman, 2018). The grievances driving this movement stem from a perception of political and economic marginalization, as well as a desire for self-determination and the preservation of Igbo identity (Amadi, 2021). Ethnic tensions have also been heightened as a consequence of breaches of federalism. Oyediran (2008) supported the foregoing sentence when he asserted that federalism provides a platform for negotiating and resolving the national question in diverse societies. In Nigeria, the breach of federal principles has undermined the delicate balance between ethnic, regional, and central power, exacerbating the national question. The

assertion underscores the crucial role federalism plays in managing diverse societies. The concentration of power and resources in the hands of a few ethnic groups, particularly those in the northern part of the country, has fueled resentment and animosity among marginalized groups (Gberevbie, 2016). This has led to inter-ethnic conflicts, such as the clashes between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt region, which have claimed numerous lives and exacerbated existing fault lines.

Moreover, the lack of effective devolution of powers to the states and local governments has hindered the ability of diverse ethnic groups to govern themselves according to their unique needs and aspirations. This has fueled a sense of frustration and alienation, as communities feel that their voices and interests are not adequately represented within the federal structure (Suberu, 2001). Demands for regional autonomy have emerged as a response to these breaches of federalism. As Onwudiwe (2015) posited: the failure to address resource control issues in a federal system like Nigeria's fuels the national question, leading to tensions and conflicts between the central government and resource-rich regions. Various regions within Nigeria have called for greater control over their resources, political decision-making, and cultural affairs. The agitation for resource control and fiscal federalism is particularly pronounced in regions with abundant natural resources, such as the Niger Delta and the Southwest (Awofeso, 2021). These demands reflect a desire to address the perceived inequities and imbalances created by the centralization of power and resources. Furthermore, the lack of effective mechanisms for resolving disputes between the federal and state governments has deepened the breaches of federalism in Nigeria. The absence of a strong and impartial judicial system to adjudicate conflicts and interpret the constitution has resulted in prolonged legal battles and political stalemates. This issue is highlighted by Onuoha (2020), who argues that the failure to establish an independent judiciary capable of mediating disputes and upholding the principles of federalism has perpetuated the challenges associated with the national question.

Also, failure of the federal government to devolve power to the states, particularly in areas such as security and policing. The result has been a rise in insecurity across the country, with states unable to effectively tackle security challenges due to their limited powers (Suberu, 2001). This has led to calls for the decentralization of the security architecture, with some advocating for state police to address the security challenges facing the country. Additionally, the federal government's interference in the affairs of state governments, particularly during elections, has undermined the principles of federalism and contributed to the erosion of trust between the two levels of government. This has also led to a sense of disenfranchisement among some sections of the country, particularly those in opposition-held states, who feel that their voices are not being heard (Adelehin, 2021).

The flawed federalism in Nigeria has had a profound impact on the national question, particularly in terms of identity, ethnic tensions, and demands for regional autonomy. The concentration of powers at the federal level, marginalization of certain ethnic groups, and lack of effective devolution of powers have fueled identity-based divisions and heightened inter-ethnic tensions. Moreover, demands for regional autonomy have emerged as marginalized groups seek greater control over their resources and governance. These issues continue to shape the discourse surrounding the national question in Nigeria, highlighting the importance of addressing federalism-related challenges to achieve a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Flawed Federalism, reworking Nigeria, Tinubu and the burden of history

Nigeria, as a federal republic, relies on a federal system of governance that delegates certain powers to the central government and grants autonomy to constituent states. However, a breached federalism scenario, characterized by centralization of powers and

disregard for state autonomy, poses significant risks to the nation's political stability, socio-economic development, and prospects for national unity (Adangor, 2017).

The current practice of federalism in Nigeria has the potential to undermine political stability in Nigeria as recent events of secessionist groups have shown. It will further be intensified if the issues associated with the faulty federal system practices are not addressed. A Research by Akinsanya (2018) indicates that when power is excessively centralized, it diminishes the checks and balances inherent in a federal system, leading to an imbalance of power between the federal and state governments. This power asymmetry creates a fertile ground for political tensions, regional grievances, and conflicts, thereby jeopardizing political stability at both levels of governance. Also, it can impede socio-economic development in Nigeria. According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2020), a healthy federal system promotes socio-economic progress by allowing states to address local development priorities and harness regional resources efficiently. However, when federalism is breached, the central government's dominance can result in unequal distribution of resources, stifling the development potential of certain regions. This disparity in resource allocation and limited autonomy hinders inclusive growth, exacerbate regional inequalities, and hinder overall socio-economic development.

Furthermore, prospects for national unity in Nigeria can be undermined by a breached federalism. As noted by Adejumobi (2019), federalism serves as a mechanism for managing diversity and accommodating different ethno-cultural groups within a nation. However, when federalism is compromised, it can intensify ethno-regional tensions and foster a sense of marginalization among certain groups. This scenario further erodes trust, cohesion, and the sense of shared identity necessary for national unity. Several case studies provide insights into the consequences of breached federalism on political stability, socio-economic development, and prospects for national unity. For instance, research by Mbah and Akpan (2017) highlights the Niger Delta crisis, where perceived central government neglect and resource mismanagement exacerbated political instability, hindered economic growth, and fueled ethno-regional tensions. Similarly, the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast region, as explored by Ibrahim (2016), exemplifies how centralization of powers and neglect of state governments contributed to the escalation of conflicts and inhibited socio-economic progress.

From our analysis so far, it is the case that the primacy of the material conditions of life is the driving force behind the quest by social forces who currently challenge the flawed federalism in Nigeria. These social forces – ethnic groups, political organizations, civil society activists and other non-state actors contend that Nigeria's federal structure and fiscal federalism, resource allocation formulae, states and local council's creation should be revisited with a view to resolving the national question in Nigeria. Therefore, what social forces are demanding is that Nigeria's federalism as it is today is not good enough, and is unable to cater for diversities that make up the country. As a scholar puts it; "The expectation is that the Nigerian federalism needed to be restructured to give more administrative and financial autonomy to the constituent states". (Okolie, 2005). The idea is that if Nigerian federalism is restructured to fit the requirements of fiscal federalism rather than the present fiscal unitarism (Adedeji, 2001), states will then be able to explore their resources to generate more revenue for economic development and transformation of social and cultural lives of their citizens. But, the irony is that since 1999 when the current Fourth Republic commenced successive elected federal governments have failed to enthrone a mechanism for addressing the flaws of the federalism which was inherited from the military junta. And thus, successive federal governments, and even states governments have taken lightly matters that affect greatly the security and stability of the country – which bother on

resolving the national question. The consequences of this regrettable state failure is the resort to self-help by social forces, especially separatist forces like the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Oduduwa Peoples' Congress, Arewa Youth Congress, Niger-Delta Militant groups, Boko Haram and several others. These separate forces mainly centrifugal in character, form, and activities are dramatizing what a scholar described as "the forcing of auto-restructuring" (Odon-Akhaine, 2018), if the Nigerian authorities fail to restructure the current flawed federalism in Nigeria. This is what Onimode (2011) probably fears when he asserts that "the fatal national mistake of ignoring or under-estimating the seriousness of the National Question (as Nigeria's military dictators have been doing) must be avoided everywhere. The issues involved are fundamental, human and urgent – they must be tackled boldly with vision, political will and appropriate comparison".

Since 1999, the civilian elected leaders have ignored the national question by carrying on with the fiscal unitarist arrangements and other wanton violations of the federal principles with overbearing concentration of powers on the Federal Government. Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo's and Goodluck Jonathan's administration made half-hearted attempts to resolve the national question through their respective national conferences – Obasanjo 2005 and Jonathan 2011. Even General Sani Abacha, the military junta in power (1983 – 1995) also convoked a national conference in 1994 which failed to resolve the national question. However, the Abacha conference came up with the 13 percent derivation policy which the oil-bearing states presently get, and also created the present six-zones structure of the country. The conference could not produce the desire solution to the national question.

From the foregoing discourse, the point can be made that it may not be ideal to say that federalism in Nigeria must take a particular shape. But, the 1960 and 1963 constitutions did inadvertently set a standard for what Nigerian federalism should look like. Nobody is saying that it could not have been tinkered with if the military did not destroy it with its intervention in politics. Perhaps, the Nigerian peoples, through civic culture of debates, national dialogues, politicking and interactions could have modified the federal arrangements for the good and healthy living of the citizens. But the military intervened in national politics and destroyed the existing federalism. The rest is history, as it is commonly said.

Yet, going by Carl Fredrick's theory of federalism as a process rather than a design, a continually evolving political reality (Okolie, 2005), the new President of Nigeria, Bola Ahmed Tinubu has a responsibility to rework Nigeria's federalism. This onerous duty is one thing he can bring to the table to stem the trend of the new waves of centrifugal forces who want to leave the unworking federation. President Tinubu demonstrated his preference for federalism as Governor of Lagos State (1999 – 2003) when he confronted the 1999 constitution and dared the Obasanjo centrist – authoritarian Federal Government to create Local Government councils in Lagos State. Although, the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot create councils without the National Assembly Acts, Bola Ahmed Tinubu made the legal and political points that the country was practicing "unitarism" rather than "federalism" as it claims.

Today, since May 29, 2023 Bola Ahmed Tinubu is President of Nigeria. History beckons on him to reinvent Nigeria and sets in motion the process, democratic process of course, to federalize Nigeria, and move the country away from its present fiscal unitarism and return powers to the federating units (the states) to raise tax, control resources, create councils, establish state police and retain other good tidings of federalism. But can he? Would he? The process theory of Carl Frederick, which sees federalism as a process of both aggregation and disaggregation, the pattern and direction of these depend(ing) essentially on sociological criteria which include the prevailing attitudes, values, preferences, propensities and idiosyncratic motivations/interests of the various actors at the material time" (Okolie,

2005) should guide President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to urgently put in motion the process of reworking Nigeria's flawed federalism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the flawed Federalism in contemporary Nigeria indeed problematizes the national question. The Nigerian federal system, which was designed to accommodate diverse ethnic, religious, and regional interests, has faced numerous challenges that have undermined its effectiveness and cohesion. The centralization of power, weak institutions, and lack of fiscal autonomy at the state and local levels have contributed to the erosion of federalism, exacerbating ethnic tensions and deepening socio-political divides in the country. The flaws in Nigeria's federal structure have resulted in a concentration of powers at the federal level, leaving the states and local governments with limited authority and resources. This has led to a sense of marginalization among different ethnic groups and regions, creating grievances and fueling secessionist movements. The lack of effective intergovernmental relations and cooperative federalism has hindered the proper implementation of policies and programs, resulting in avoidable poverty and undevelopment across the country.

Moreover, the issue of revenue allocation has been a major bone of contention within the Nigerian federation. The over-dependence on oil revenues and the unequal distribution of wealth have further deepened economic disparities and fostered a sense of injustice among various regions. This has contributed to feelings of alienation and mistrust, challenging the unity and stability of the nation. To address the challenges posed by the flawed Federalism in contemporary Nigeria and resolve the national question, the following recommendations should be considered:

- **Devolution of Powers:** There is a need to decentralize powers and grant greater autonomy to the states and local governments. This can be achieved through constitutional reforms that redefine the responsibilities and powers of each tier of government, ensuring a fair distribution of authority and resources.
- **Fiscal Federalism:** The revenue allocation system should be reformed to promote equitable distribution of resources among the different regions. This can be achieved by diversifying the economy, reducing dependence on oil revenues, and exploring alternative sources of revenue. Additionally, mechanisms for revenue sharing should be transparent, inclusive, and based on objective criteria. Also, all existing laws which rob resource-bearing states and communities of their resources should be abolished. The tax powers of the states in some critical areas which the federal government has taken over should be returned to the states. Some of these tax powers include taxes on agricultural and commodities, natural resources like minerals, etc.
- **Strengthening Institutions:** Efforts should be made to strengthen democratic institutions, including the judiciary, electoral bodies, and anti-corruption agencies. This will enhance accountability, ensure the rule of law, and build public trust in the system. Additionally, intergovernmental relations should be improved through regular consultations and cooperation among different levels of government.
- **National Dialogue:** A national dialogue should be initiated to provide a platform for open and constructive discussions on the national question. This dialogue should involve representatives from various ethnic, religious, and regional groups, as well as civil society organizations. The aim should be to address grievances, build consensus, and forge a common vision for Nigeria's future.
- **Social Integration and Inclusion:** Efforts should be made to promote social integration and inclusivity. This can be achieved through policies that encourage inter-ethnic and

inter-religious dialogue, promote cultural understanding, and address historical injustices. Additionally, initiatives to reduce poverty, improve education, and enhance social infrastructure should be prioritized to create a sense of shared prosperity and opportunity. By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can work towards reestablishing a functional federal system that addresses the concerns of all its citizens. It will contribute to fostering a sense of national unity, stability, and inclusive development, ultimately resolving the national question, and ensuring a prosperous future for the country. We are convinced that this is the path that the Bola Tinubu presidency should take to rework Nigeria's federalism and stop the on-going flight to balkanization or civil war.

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