

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONALITY AND LEGALITY OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY AND SUSPENSION OF ELECTED OFFICERS IN RIVERS STATE BY TINUBU ADMINISTRATION IN MARCH, 2025: THE WAY FORWARD FOR SUSTENANCE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the constitutionality and legality of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025. The analysis interrogates whether these actions align with the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, particularly regarding the circumstances under which a state of emergency can be declared, and the processes for removing or suspending elected officers. This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the constitutionality and legality of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025. The methodology combines doctrinal legal analysis, case law review, and comparative analysis to assess the constitutional and legal implications of these actions, as well as their impact on democratic governance in Nigeria. By reviewing relevant constitutional provisions, case laws, and principles of federalism and democratic governance, the study critically assesses the constitutionality and legality of the federal government's intervention in Rivers State, and its implications for the rule of law, political rights, and democratic stability in Nigeria. The study further explores the role of judicial review in ensuring that such actions comply with constitutional standards, and it offers a roadmap for safeguarding democratic governance through the strengthening of legal institutions, political accountability, and electoral integrity. The findings underscore the importance of adhering to constitutional processes to prevent executive overreach and maintain the legitimacy of democratic institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: *State of Emergency, Constitutional Legality, Democratic Governance, and Federalism,*

Introduction

The relationship between the federal government and the States in Nigeria has been a subject of considerable debate and legal scrutiny, particularly in the context of the powers of the federal government to intervene in state affairs. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended, provides a framework that ensures the autonomy of states, while also granting the federal government certain powers to declare a state of emergency in cases where national security is threatened. Section 305 of the Constitution outlines the circumstances under which a state of emergency can be declared, but the use of this power has often been contentious, particularly when it is perceived to be politically motivated or lacking in constitutional justification.

On Tuesday, 18th March, 2025, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu declared a state of emergency in Rivers State, a move that included the suspension of elected officers, particularly the state governor, deputy governor and elected legislatures. This action has raised significant constitutional and legal concerns regarding its compliance with the Constitution, especially in terms of its alignment with the principles of federalism, democratic governance, and the rule of law. The powers of the president to declare a state of emergency are explicitly outlined, but there are doubts about whether the Rivers State situation met the constitutional criteria for such a declaration. The suspension of elected officers without following the constitutional procedures for impeachment or recall has further complicated the issue. The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025 has sparked a significant constitutional and legal debate in Nigeria. These actions, which involved the suspension of elected state officials and the assumption of federal control over state affairs, have raised crucial questions regarding the balance of power between the federal government and state governments within Nigeria's federal system. At the heart of this issue is the interpretation of the Nigerian Constitution, which allows for federal intervention in state matters, but only under specific conditions, such as national security threats or extreme circumstances. The Constitution provides that a state of emergency can be declared only in situations that jeopardize

national security, peace, or the integrity of the country. Furthermore, the suspension of elected officers—including governors and local government officials—requires adherence to strict constitutional processes, including impeachment by the state legislature or recall by the electorate. The actions of the Tinubu administration, however, did not appear to follow these prescribed processes, leading to concerns about the legitimacy and constitutionality of the intervention.

This study seeks to interrogate the constitutionality and legality of these actions and examine their implications for the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria. It is necessary to explore how the federal government's intervention in state matters, particularly through the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers, can be reconciled with the constitutional protections afforded to both elected officials and citizens. This study aims to critically examine the constitutional framework surrounding the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers, and also, assess whether the Tinubu administration's actions align with the provisions of the Constitution, particularly regarding the grounds for declaring a state of emergency and the procedural requirements for the removal or suspension of elected officials. Additionally, the study will explore the implications of these actions for democratic governance, focusing on the potential undermining of democratic principles such as electoral legitimacy, citizens' rights, and state autonomy.

By engaging with the constitutional provisions, legal precedents, and the broader implications for democratic stability, the study will provide insights into the future of governance in Nigeria. It will highlight the importance of adhering to constitutional norms to ensure that democratic institutions remain strong and that the rule of law is upheld in all levels of government. Ultimately, the study will propose measures to ensure the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria, advocating for stronger legal institutions, greater accountability, and a commitment to constitutional democracy.

Statement of the Problem

The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025 raises critical constitutional and legal questions regarding the balance of power between the federal government and state governments in Nigeria. These actions, which involved the suspension of elected officials without adherence to the constitutional procedures for impeachment or recall, have sparked debates about the legitimacy and constitutionality of such federal interventions. The problem at the core of this study is whether the federal government's intervention in Rivers State was justified under the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended). The Nigerian Constitution outlines specific grounds and procedures for the declaration of a state of emergency, but there are concerns about whether the circumstances in Rivers State met these constitutional requirements. Furthermore, the suspension of elected officers, without following the due process for removal, raises questions about the legality of such actions and the potential undermining of democratic governance in the country.

The lack of clear guidelines and the potential abuse of executive powers for political purposes threaten to erode the principles of democratic governance, federalism, and the rule of law in Nigeria. This intervention, if found to be unconstitutional, could set a dangerous precedent for the future of state autonomy, electoral rights, and political stability. Thus, the problem that this study seeks to address is twofold: first, whether the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State were constitutional and legal; and second, how such actions, if found to be unconstitutional, impact the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria. The study will explore the consequences of this federal intervention on Nigeria's democratic institutions, political rights, and the autonomy of states, offering recommendations for the preservation of the constitutional order and democratic practices in the country.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the constitutionality and legality of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025. The study seeks to assess the impact of these actions on the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria and to explore whether such federal interventions undermine the principles of federalism, rule of law, and electoral rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The objectives of the Study include:

- i. To examine the constitutional provisions that govern the declaration of a state of emergency in Nigeria, particularly the criteria and procedures outlined in Section 305 of the Constitution, and to assess whether the federal government's action in Rivers State adhered to these provisions;
- ii. To assess the legality of suspending elected officers in Rivers State, focusing on the constitutional procedures for the removal or suspension of state governors and other elected officials as stipulated in Section 188 and Section 69 of the Nigerian Constitution, and whether the federal government's actions violated these provisions;
- iii. To explore the implications of the federal government's intervention for the principle of state autonomy within Nigeria's federal system, and to assess whether the federal government's actions encroach upon the powers and rights of the state government and elected officials;
- iv. To evaluate the potential erosion of democratic principles such as electoral legitimacy, representative democracy, and citizens' rights as a result of federal overreach, focusing on the consequences of undermining the political rights of the electorate in Rivers State;
- v. To investigate the role of the judiciary in overseeing and reviewing the legality of the federal government's actions, and whether judicial intervention could serve as a safeguard against unconstitutional acts by the executive;
- vi. To propose recommendations for safeguarding democratic governance in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on strengthening constitutional checks and balances, ensuring greater political accountability, and protecting electoral integrity to prevent executive overreach in the future; and
- vii. To analyze the broader consequences of such federal interventions on political stability, social trust, and rule of law in Nigeria, and how these can be mitigated to preserve the democratic fabric of the nation.

By achieving these objectives, the study will contribute to the ongoing debate on federalism, the rule of law, and democratic governance in Nigeria, offering insights into how constitutional principles can be upheld in the face of political challenges.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the constitutionality and legality of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025. The methodology will combine doctrinal legal analysis, case law review, and comparative analysis to assess the constitutional and legal implications of these actions, as well as their impact on democratic governance in Nigeria. Based on qualitative research design specified by Marshall and Rossman (2016), the study's methodology is structured as follows:

- i. Research Design: The study adopts a doctrinal legal research design, which focuses on the examination of legal texts, constitutional provisions, and relevant case law. It also incorporates legal comparative analysis to compare Nigeria's constitutional framework with those of other federal democracies that have faced similar issues.
- ii. Data Collection Methods: The primary source of data is the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended), specifically sections related to the declaration of a state of emergency (Section 305) and the removal or suspension of elected officers (Sections 188 and 69). These legal texts will serve as the foundational framework for examining the legal and constitutional validity of the federal government's actions in Rivers State. Relevant judicial decisions and court rulings were reviewed to analyze how Nigerian courts have interpreted these constitutional provisions in the past, particularly with regard to federal interventions in state governance and the protection of democratic rights. Official government statements, including declarations by the presidency, the National Assembly, and the Rivers State government, is also reviewed to understand the legal justifications and political rationale behind the federal intervention in Rivers State. Scholarly articles, books, and academic papers that explore constitutional law, federalism, state of emergency declarations, and the suspension of elected officials in Nigeria is analyzed to provide a theoretical and comparative framework for the study and reports from civil society organizations and media outlets will be reviewed to gather perspectives on the political, legal, and social implications of the federal government's actions in Rivers State.
- iii. Legal Analysis: The research conducted a doctrinal analysis of relevant constitutional provisions to assess whether the federal government's actions were in compliance with the letter and spirit of the Nigerian Constitution. Key areas of focus include; the criteria for declaring a state of emergency under Section 305 of the Constitution, particularly the necessity of national security threats or public disorder, the procedures for suspending or removing elected officers, specifically the impeachment process under Section 188 and the recall process under Section, 69 and the role of the

National Assembly and the judiciary in providing checks on the executive's power to declare a state of emergency or suspend elected officers.

iv. Comparative Analysis: To contextualize the Nigerian legal framework, the study also conducts a comparative analysis with other federal democracies, such as the United States and India, which have experienced similar issues with executive overreach and the suspension of elected officials during national emergencies, and this helps identify best practices for managing federal interventions in state governance while maintaining democratic principles.

v. Case Law Review: A review of relevant case law is conducted to understand how Nigerian courts have previously interpreted the constitutional provisions related to state of emergency declarations and the suspension of elected officers. Key cases are analyzed to identify judicial trends and precedents that may influence the outcome of any future challenges to the actions taken by the Tinubu administration.

vi. Expert Opinions: While the study primarily relies on legal texts and secondary sources, opinions of constitutional law experts, legal scholars, and practitioners in Nigerian politics and governance is also considered to gather qualitative insights into the implications of the federal government's actions in Rivers State. The expert opinions enumerate the potential consequences of such actions on democratic governance in Nigeria.

vii. Data Analysis: The data are analyzed using a qualitative analysis approach. The doctrinal legal analysis involves identifying and examining key constitutional provisions and judicial precedents, assessing their relevance to the current situation in Rivers State. The study also analyze the political and legal justifications provided by the federal government and compare them with established constitutional principles. Thematic analysis is equally applied to secondary sources such as scholarly articles, case law, and media reports to identify recurring themes related to federal intervention in state governance, constitutional violations, and the preservation of democratic rights.

In all, the methodology adopted for this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the constitutionality and legality of the actions taken by the Tinubu administration in Rivers State, while contributing to the broader conversation on the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria. By combining doctrinal legal analysis, case law review, and comparative legal perspectives, the study offers valuable insights into the constitutional challenges and the future of democratic governance in the country.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is built on three interrelated legal and political theories that guide the analysis of the constitutionality and legality of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration. The study primarily draws on constitutional theory, federalism theory, and democratic governance theory to frame the legal and political analysis of the federal intervention and its implications for democratic stability in Nigeria as follows;

1. Constitutional Theory: Constitutional theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the relationship between the state and citizens, particularly concerning the allocation and limitations of power within a constitutional democracy (Wheare, 1963). Central to constitutional theory is the idea that the Constitution is the supreme legal document that governs the actions of the state, limits the powers of political actors, and protects the fundamental rights of citizens (Nwabueze, 1983). In the context of this study, constitutional theory helps assess whether the federal government's actions in Rivers State adhere to the principles of rule of law and constitutional supremacy. The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers must be justified by constitutional provisions, particularly Section 305 (state of emergency) and Section 188 (removal of elected officials) of the Nigerian Constitution. The constitutional theory provides the lens through which to examine whether these actions align with the Constitution's limitations on federal power and the protections afforded to elected officials in a democracy. Constitutional theory is also used to explore the doctrine of judicial review, where the courts serve as a check on the actions of the executive and legislature, ensuring that the powers of government remain within constitutional boundaries.

2. Democratic Governance Theory: Democratic governance theory centers on the principles of representation, electoral integrity, accountability, and political rights that define a functioning democracy. In a democratic system, elected officials are the primary representatives of the people, and any interference with their tenure must be justified by clear constitutional procedures to prevent undermining the will of the electorate (Hyden, 1999).

The theory of democratic governance emphasizes that suspending elected officials without following due process threatens the integrity of democracy, the rule of law, and the political stability of a state. Through this theory, the study examines how the actions of the Tinubu administration in Rivers State could erode public trust in the democratic process, reduce citizens' confidence in the legitimacy of elections, and disrupt the political rights of the electorate.

Moreover, this theory guides the exploration of the checks and balances inherent in a democracy, particularly the role of the judiciary, parliament, and civil society in overseeing executive actions that may undermine democratic norms. The study will investigate whether such actions represent an abuse of executive power and the erosion of democratic institutions.

3. Federalism Theory: The most suitable and appropriate theory to explain the topic of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025 is Federalism Theory. This theory provides the most direct and comprehensive framework for understanding the constitutional and legal implications of the federal intervention in the governance of a state within a federal system like Nigeria. Federalism theory is grounded in the division of powers between central (federal) and regional (state) governments. It explains how authority is distributed and balanced between the federal government and state governments, emphasizing the importance of state autonomy and constitutional limits on federal powers (Wheare, 1963). In the Nigerian context, where the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) outlines the powers and functions of both the federal and state governments, federalism theory helps to assess whether the intervention by the federal government in Rivers State violated the principles of state sovereignty and local self-governance.

The theory of federalism explains the division of powers between the central government and state governments, as well as the principles of autonomy and cooperation that underlie a federal system (Wheare, 1963). In Nigeria, federalism is constitutionally enshrined, where the federal government and state governments each have distinct powers and responsibilities (CFRN, 1999). The theory of federalism underscores the importance of maintaining this balance to ensure political stability, autonomy, and local self-governance. In the case of the federal intervention in Rivers State, federalism theory is used to critically assess whether the federal government's actions constitute an overreach of its powers or whether they are justified by the Constitution in extreme circumstances. The principle of subsidiarity; the idea that matters should be handled by the smallest, most local authority, is central to understanding whether the federal government violated the autonomy of Rivers State by suspending elected officers and imposing federal control. The study explores whether these actions violate the federal balance and undermine the principles of state sovereignty. Additionally, dual federalism is explored to evaluate whether the federal government has exceeded its constitutional bounds in its intervention, which could lead to tensions between federal and state powers.

In this case, the state of emergency declaration and suspension of elected officers in Rivers State represent a critical challenge to Nigeria's federal structure. The Nigerian Constitution recognizes the autonomy of state governments in managing their affairs, and the actions of the federal government must comply with the constitutional procedures set out for federal interventions in state governance. According to a book titled: *Federal Government* by Wheare (1963), the key concepts in federalism theory include:

- i. Division of Powers: Federalism theory underscores that power is divided between different levels of government, and each level has specified responsibilities. In Nigeria, the federal government has its jurisdictional powers, while the state governments retain authority over matters that concern their internal governance. The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officials represent an intervention in the internal affairs of a state, which raises the question of whether such actions are justified under Nigeria's federal system.
- ii. State Sovereignty: One of the core principles of federalism is state sovereignty, which refers to the right of states to govern themselves without undue interference from the central government. In this instance, the suspension of elected officials without due process challenges the principle of state sovereignty, as it undermines the authority of the state's elected representatives and potentially overrides the will of the electorate.
- iii. Checks and Balances: Federalism relies on a system of checks and balances, where each level of government can limit the powers of the other to prevent excessive concentration of power. The federal government's actions in Rivers State must be scrutinized in light of the constitutional limits on executive power. Federalism theory helps explain whether the actions taken by the federal government respect or violate the intended balance between federal and state powers.
- iv. Cooperation and Conflict: While federalism fosters cooperation between federal and state governments, it also acknowledges the potential for conflict over jurisdictional issues. In cases of emergency powers, federal overreach, or political disagreements, federalism theory provides a framework to assess whether such

interventions are constitutionally valid or politically motivated, and how they might disrupt the balance of power.

In Nigeria, federalism is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, which defines the division of powers between the federal and state governments. However, Nigeria's federal system is not without its tensions, especially when there are claims of federal overreach in matters traditionally within the purview of state governments. The actions of the Tinubu administration in Rivers State involve the use of federal powers that may be viewed as undermining state autonomy, a fundamental principle of federalism.

The Constitution provides specific mechanisms for the removal or suspension of elected officers at the state level (through impeachment or recall), and any suspension or removal beyond this legal framework constitutes an interference with the democratic processes of the state government. According to federalism theory, such an intervention must be justifiable and constitutional, raising questions about whether the federal government respected the legal processes for state governance or if it violated the constitutional autonomy of Rivers State.

Federalism theory allows this study to critically examine whether the federal government's actions were in compliance with the letter and spirit of the Nigerian Constitution. Specifically, it assesses: whether the state of emergency declaration in Rivers State adhered to the constitutional requirements for such an intervention under Section 305 of the Constitution, and whether these actions were justified by a genuine national emergency; whether the suspension of elected officers was carried out within the constitutional framework for removing or suspending state officials, particularly through impeachment (as defined in Section 188 of the Constitution), or whether it represented an unconstitutional act of executive overreach; and the implications of such federal actions for the autonomy of state governments and the preservation of democratic institutions in Nigeria.

The theory therefore provides a lens for understanding how the balance of power between the federal government and state governments could be further strengthened or undermined by actions that challenge state autonomy. It helps to identify whether such interventions could set a dangerous precedent for future executive actions that bypass constitutional safeguards and violate democratic rights. In short, federalism theory is adopted by this study since it offers the most comprehensive and appropriate framework to explain and analyze the constitutionality and legality of the federal government's intervention in Rivers State. By focusing on the principles of state sovereignty, division of powers, and constitutional limits on executive authority, federalism theory provides a clear lens through which to evaluate whether the actions of the Tinubu administration violated the constitutional provisions that safeguard the autonomy of states within Nigeria's federal system. This theory is central to understanding the tension between federal intervention and the preservation of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications of Key Related Concepts

This study clarifies key concepts relevant to the study of the constitutionality, legality, and impact of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration. These concepts include state of emergency, suspension of elected officers, constitutional legality, democratic governance, federalism, and executive overreach. A clear understanding of these terms is essential to grasp the nuances of the study.

1. **State of Emergency:** The state of emergency is a constitutional mechanism that allows a government to assume extraordinary powers during periods of national crisis or unrest. According to Section 305 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended), a state of emergency can be declared when the country faces a serious threat to national security, such as war, armed rebellion, or widespread civil unrest. A state of emergency is not a tool for routine governance or resolving political disagreements. It is meant to address extraordinary circumstances where normal governance structures are unable to function (Igwe, 2017). However, its use must align with constitutional requirements and should be subject to scrutiny to prevent it from being used as a political tool to suppress dissent or undermine democracy. In Nigeria, the National Assembly must approve the declaration of a state of emergency by a two-thirds majority of its members, and the President must seek such approval within a specified period after declaring the emergency. Therefore, the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration is examined to see whether it meets these criteria and whether the emergency powers were used appropriately.

2. **Suspension of Elected Officers:** The suspension of elected officers refers to the removal or temporary suspension of elected officials from office. In Nigeria, this process is governed by Section 188, which relates to impeachment and Section 69, which relates to recall in the 1999 Constitution. The Constitution outlines specific procedures for the impeachment or recall of elected officials, such as governors and state assembly members. Impeachment requires the involvement of both the state legislature and judicial scrutiny, while recall is a process through which voters directly

remove an elected official through a referendum (Akinyemi, 2020). The suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration is analyzed in light of these provisions. If the federal government bypassed these constitutional processes, it would likely be deemed unconstitutional and a violation of the democratic rights of the electorate.

3. **Constitutional Legality:** Constitutional legality refers to whether actions taken by government authorities are in strict accordance with the letter and spirit of the 1999 Constitution (Folarin, 2022). In the context of this study, constitutional legality is used to determine if the federal government's declaration of a state of emergency and suspension of elected officers was legally permissible under the Nigerian Constitution. This concept entails assessing whether the federal government's actions were grounded in the Constitution, specifically whether the powers invoked were constitutionally mandated and whether the necessary procedures and checks were followed. The Constitution of Nigeria grants specific powers to both the federal and state governments. The judiciary plays a critical role in ensuring that actions taken by either government are constitutionally valid. A declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers must be carefully scrutinized to determine if they align with the constitutional safeguards designed to prevent abuses of power.

4. **Democratic Governance:** According to Okeke (2018), democratic governance refers to a system of government where power is vested in the people through their elected representatives, and where the principles of rule of law, accountability, and participation are upheld. Democratic governance is centered on the protection of fundamental rights, free and fair elections, and the separation of powers. It ensures that the government is accountable to the people and that the rights of citizens are protected under the Constitution. In a democracy, elected officials are accountable to the people who elect them, and their removal or suspension must follow constitutional processes to prevent arbitrary actions by the executive. Any intervention that disrupts the electoral process or undermines the legitimacy of elected officials could be seen as a threat to democratic governance. Therefore, the study explores whether or not, Tinubu administration's actions in Rivers State violated democratic principles.

5. **Federalism:** Federalism is a system of government in which power is divided between a central government and regional governments such as states, provinces, or territories (Akintoye, 2018). In Nigeria, federalism is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution, which establishes the distribution of powers between the federal government and state governments. In the work of Ezeani (2021), it is posited that federalism is built on the principles of decentralization, autonomy, and shared rule. In a federal system, both levels of government have constitutionally defined powers, and interference by the federal government in state matters is restricted unless specified by the Constitution (e.g., in cases of a state of emergency). The concept of federalism provides the lens to assess whether or not that the Tinubu administration's actions in Rivers State respect the autonomy of the state government. The suspension of elected officers and the imposition of federal control in this case may be perceived as a violation of the federal balance if they are not justified by the Constitution.

6. **Executive Overreach:** According to Ibrahim (2022), executive overreach refers to the tendency of the executive branch of government to exceed its constitutionally defined powers, often encroaching on the roles and responsibilities of the legislative and judicial branches, as well as infringing on state autonomy. Executive overreach occurs when the executive branch uses its powers to bypass or override the legal constraints placed on it by the Constitution. In this context, it refers to the federal government taking actions that violate the autonomy of state governments and undermine the principles of democracy and rule of law. The suspension of elected officers in Rivers State and the state of emergency declaration is therefore scrutinized to determine whether they constitute an abuse of executive power. Executive overreach can lead to the erosion of democratic institutions and the rule of law, as it undermines the system of checks and balances that safeguards against authoritarianism.

The conceptual review of these key related concepts provides a foundation for understanding the constitutionality and legality of the Tinubu administration's actions in Rivers State. Each concept; state of emergency, suspension of elected officers, constitutional legality, democratic governance, federalism, and executive overreach, is interlinked and plays a vital role in evaluating whether the federal government's actions align with the constitutional framework established in Nigeria. These concepts therefore, guides the legal and political analysis of the study, helping to assess the implications of federal intervention for democratic governance and the rule of law in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Examining and interrogating the constitutionality, legality, and implications of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration requires a detailed assessment of several factors. The future of democratic governance in Nigeria hinges on how such actions are managed within the constitutional framework. The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers

State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025 brings into sharp focus the delicate balance between constitutional authority, federalism, democratic governance, and the separation of powers in Nigeria. This thematic literature review critically examines key themes relevant to the topic, drawing from existing legal and political scholarship. The review covers themes such as state of emergency powers, suspension of elected officials, federalism and autonomy, executive overreach, and the sustenance of democratic governance. The issue whether the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu Administration is constitutional or legal, raises significant questions about the balance of power between federal and state governments, as well as the rights of citizens to self-governance through elected representatives.

1. Constitutional provisions on State of Emergency Powers: The Nigerian Constitution provides a specific process for declaring a state of emergency, which must be based on situations like natural disasters, insurrection, armed conflict, or any events that threaten national security and peace. The declaration requires the President to address the National Assembly within two days and obtain approval. If the declaration is not based on legitimate grounds such as an insurrection, war, or national security threat, it may be deemed unconstitutional (Makaju, 2019).

The use of state of emergency powers has been a subject of extensive academic debate, particularly in terms of its constitutional limits and the potential for abuses of power by the executive. In Nigeria, section 305 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) outlines the conditions under which a state of emergency can be declared, including the need for national security threats and approval by the National Assembly (Section 305). Scholars such as Akinyemi (2020) & Oluduro (2021), have examined the role of the state of emergency in limiting civil liberties and the potential risks to democracy. Specifically, Akinyemi (2020) argues that while the state of emergency is constitutionally enshrined, its misuse by political leaders often leads to erosion of democratic norms. He suggests that the unilateral declaration of a state of emergency without proper checks risks undermining the constitutional order and could be employed to suppress political opposition. Similarly, Oluduro (2021) points out that while the state of emergency is a legitimate tool in times of national crisis, its application must adhere strictly to constitutional provisions to avoid executive overreach and to preserve the principle of separation of powers. The literature emphasizes the importance of judicial oversight in ensuring that emergency powers are not abused (Oluduro, 2021).

2. Legality or illegality of the Suspension of Elected Officials: The crux of the issue is whether the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State is grounded in such constitutional justifications. If the situation in Rivers State did not involve a national security threat or insurrection, then the state of emergency declaration could be illegal. The constitution clearly outlines the procedure for the removal of state governors and elected officers, which involves impeachment by the state legislature or the recall process. Suspensions outside of these provisions would likely be illegal unless sanctioned by the courts or through legally established processes. If elected officers are removed or suspended without due process, the right of citizens to self-governance would be violated, breaching democratic principles enshrined in the constitution (Adebayo, 2019).

The suspension or removal of elected officials is another critical theme in understanding the Tinubu administration's actions in Rivers State. The Nigerian Constitution provides for the removal of governors or other elected officials through impeachment or recall, processes that are under the jurisdiction of the state legislature and, in some cases, the judiciary in Sections 188 and 69 of the Constitution. However, the suspension of elected officers by the federal government, particularly without following these constitutional processes, raises questions about the legality and constitutionality of such actions.

In a similar view, Ajayi (2022) discusses the implications of the federal suspension of elected officials, arguing that such actions undermine the democratic process and state autonomy, as they bypass the constitutionally established procedures for impeachment and recall. This, he asserts, weakens democratic institutions and reduces the accountability of elected officials to their electorate. Equally, Akinloye and Oladipo (2023) suggest that the suspension of elected officials by the central government without due process may set a dangerous precedent for the erosion of political freedoms in Nigeria, especially when done in the name of national security or emergency powers.

3. Nexus between Federalism and State Autonomy: According to Ayodele (2012), Nigeria's federal structure allows for significant autonomy at the state level. The federal government cannot arbitrarily suspend or remove state officials unless specific constitutional procedures are followed. Encroaching on this autonomy undermines democratic values and the separation of powers between the federal and state governments. The 1999 Constitution in its section 2, recognizes the federal structure of the state, granting significant autonomy to States. The federal government, through the president, has limited intervention powers in state affairs except under exceptional circumstances such as national security threats. The exercise of federal powers to suspend or interfere with state government operations could be seen as an encroachment on state autonomy. If the declaration of a state of emergency and suspension of officers was

politically motivated rather than a response to a genuine threat to national security, it could be viewed as a violation of the principle of federalism (Nigerian Bar Association, 2025).

Nigeria must ensure that the federal and state governments operate within their constitutional limits. A strong federal system is critical for democratic governance, as states must retain the power to manage their internal affairs without undue interference (Oluwasola, 2020). This would require clearly defined limits to executive powers in the Constitution and adherence to constitutional norms by the federal government.

The suspension of elected officials in Rivers could be interpreted as an overreach of executive power. For example, the unilateral suspension of governors or other elected officials may be seen as unconstitutional, as it bypasses the constitutional mechanisms for impeachment or recall. The Nigerian Constitution in its section 36 guarantees due process and fair hearing. If elected officers are suspended without proper hearings or due process, such actions could violate their constitutional rights. The failure to involve the judiciary or legislature in such decisions would render the act unconstitutional. If the state of emergency was declared without obtaining approval from the National Assembly, it would be deemed unconstitutional. The National Assembly plays a crucial role in overseeing the executive and ensuring that any declaration of a state of emergency is justified by law (Adeniran, 2020).

Any action or declaration by the federal government can be challenged in court. If citizens or elected officials in Rivers State believe the declaration of a state of emergency or the suspension of their officers was unconstitutional, they can approach the courts for judicial review. The judiciary's role is to ensure that any executive action complies with constitutional principles and rights. Courts have the power to declare unconstitutional acts null and void, particularly if they violate provisions such as: Section 14(2)(b) of the Constitution, which guarantees that the participation of the people in government shall be ensured, implying that suspending elected officers without due process may contravene the rights of the electorate; and Section 36 of the Constitution, which guarantees fair hearing and due process. If elected officers are suspended without a fair trial or due process, the action may be deemed unconstitutional (Akinyemi, 2020; Ayodele, 2021; Oluduro, 2021; & Ibrahim, 2022).

The federal system of governance in Nigeria is founded on the principle of division of powers between the federal government and state governments. This system ensures that states retain a degree of autonomy over their affairs, subject to the Constitution (Wheare, 1963; Nwabueze, 1983; Ezeani, 2021; Ajayi, 2022; & Akintoye and Oladipo, 2023). The suspension of elected officials and the imposition of a state of emergency by the federal government must be understood in the context of the tensions inherent in federalism. In the work of Oluwasola (2020), he explores how the centralization of power in Nigeria has undermined the autonomy of states, particularly in cases where the federal government intervenes in state affairs without constitutional justification. He argues that such interventions can exacerbate political tensions between federal and state authorities, leading to a crisis of governance. Similarly, Ezeani (2021) analyzes the federal-state relationship in Nigeria and argues that the imposition of federal control over states in times of political unrest, if unchecked, threatens the principles of state sovereignty and self-determination.

4. Political Implications for Sustenance of Democratic Governance: Beyond the legal and constitutional analysis, the political implications of the federal government's action cannot be ignored. The legitimacy of the Tinubu administration could be called into question if the state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers is perceived as politically motivated or as an overreach of executive power. In a democratic society, public perception and the protection of political rights such as the right to elect leaders, are integral to the legitimacy of the government (Igbuzor, 2021).

The suspension of elected officers and the declaration of a state of emergency outside constitutional boundaries can severely undermine democratic governance. Democratic principles, such as accountability, transparency, and electoral legitimacy, are at risk if such actions are seen as politically motivated or as a form of executive overreach. The right of citizens to elect their leaders is fundamental to democracy. Any actions that seek to undermine the electoral process or suspend elected officers outside the constitutional framework threaten the integrity of elections (Mustapha, 2020). Political parties, civil society, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should therefore advocate for a strong electoral process to prevent manipulations of power by any branch of government.

The concept of executive overreach has been central to discussions about the use of emergency powers and federal interventions in state matters. Executive overreach occurs when the executive branch exceeds its constitutional authority and undermines the checks and balances that are meant to preserve democratic governance. Tunde (2025)

argues that executive overreach has been a recurring issue in Nigerian politics, particularly during times of political crisis. He highlights the Tinubu administration's actions in Rivers State as an example of federal overreach, which could undermine the separation of powers and constitutional integrity. Ibrahim (2022) further argues that the abuse of emergency powers by the executive branch can lead to the erosion of democratic institutions, as it consolidates power within the executive and bypasses the legislature and judiciary. According to Ibrahim, emergency powers should be narrowly interpreted to prevent them from being used to target political adversaries or to suppress dissent.

The rule of law is a cornerstone of democracy. If citizens are deprived of their right to choose their leaders through free and fair elections, the legitimacy of the political system is threatened (Yakubu, 2021). Arbitrary suspension of elected officials, without clear legal grounds, undermines the trust in democratic institutions and could lead to political instability. Any action that undermines the rule of law must be promptly addressed. The government must commit to strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring that actions like the declaration of a state of emergency or the suspension of elected officers are executed within the confines of the law. The National Assembly and the judiciary must be empowered to hold the executive accountable for unconstitutional actions.

A key safeguard in any democracy is the judiciary's ability to review government actions. Citizens, civil society organizations, or the affected elected officers have the constitutional right to challenge the state of emergency declaration and suspensions in the courts (Akinyemi, 2020; Oluduro, 2021 & Ikechi, 2025). The courts must uphold constitutional principles and ensure that any federal intervention in state affairs aligns with constitutional provisions. The judiciary's role in protecting democratic governance and ensuring that government actions do not infringe on fundamental rights cannot be overstated. If the actions of the Tinubu administration are challenged in court, the judiciary should ensure that all procedural and substantive constitutional requirements are met.

The sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria requires a careful balance between political stability and constitutional safeguards. The study of executive interventions, especially in cases of state of emergency declarations, must consider their long-term effects on democratic stability. Along this thought, Mustapha (2020) emphasizes that while states of emergency can be used to restore order in times of national crisis, they should never become tools for political control. He advocates for the strengthening of democratic institutions to prevent the abuse of power and to ensure that political power is exercised in accordance with democratic norms. Equally, Yakubu (2021) highlights the role of the judiciary, civil society, and political institutions in maintaining democratic governance and preventing executive overreach. He argues that strong checks and balances are necessary to ensure that emergency powers do not erode democratic freedoms.

The constitutional and legal framework in Nigeria provides the necessary protections to ensure democratic governance. However, the suspension of elected officers and the declaration of a state of emergency must be done in line with constitutional provisions. If the Tinubu administration's actions violate these provisions, they risk undermining democratic norms and the rule of law. The way forward involves strengthening institutions, ensuring judicial independence, promoting electoral integrity, and fostering a deep commitment to constitutionalism across all branches of government. Political accountability must be prioritized, and any deviations from constitutional norms must be addressed promptly to sustain democratic governance in Nigeria. For democracy to thrive, public awareness is essential. Citizens must be educated about their rights and the constitutional processes in place to protect them. Civil society organizations must play an active role in holding the government accountable for unconstitutional actions. In order to determine the constitutionality and legality of the declaration of a state of emergency and suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration, the study have carefully examined the grounds for the state of emergency, whether proper procedures were followed, and whether the suspension of elected officers adhered to constitutional provisions. If either action was carried out without following the constitutional framework, it could be deemed unconstitutional and illegal. Judicial review remains a critical mechanism for resolving these issues.

The literature on the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Nigeria reveals significant concerns about constitutional legality, federalism, and the risk of executive overreach. Scholars agree that while the state of emergency powers are a necessary tool for addressing national security threats, but their use is carefully constrained to prevent abuses of power. The suspension of elected officers without due process raises serious concerns about the erosion of democratic governance and state autonomy. Ultimately, the literature underscores the

importance of adhering to constitutional principles, strengthening democratic institutions, and ensuring judicial oversight to safeguard the democratic order in Nigeria.

Analysis, Findings and Discussion

This section is on the analysis, findings and discussion of the study on the constitutionality, legality, and impact of the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration in March 2025. The analysis is based on a combination of legal review, political theory, and empirical observations from the relevant political context in Nigeria. The findings address the central research questions, exploring whether these actions were constitutionally and legally justified, as well as their implications for democratic governance in Nigeria.

1. Constitutionality and Legality of the State of Emergency Declaration

According to Section 305 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), a state of emergency can only be declared when the National Assembly approves the declaration within 14 days. This approval must come after a declaration by the president, and any subsequent intervention must be justified based on clear and urgent security concerns. The Tinubu administration's declaration did not seem to adhere to this procedure, as there was no immediate evidence of a national crisis that warranted the suspension of democratic processes in Rivers State. Additionally, the National Assembly's approval which was delayed, is later determined by voice-vote, making two-third difficult to count, and the style constituted a flagrant violating constitutional protocols and rendering the emergency powers illegitimate. The fact that the National Assembly was not immediately convened to approve the emergency declaration is a critical violation of the constitutional process. The failure to seek approval from the legislature as required in Section 305 of the Constitution renders the emergency declaration constitutionally flawed. In the absence of National Assembly approval, the legality of the emergency powers invoked by the federal government becomes questionable. This undermines the balance of powers intended by Nigeria's federal system and points to a failure in institutional checks and balances (Ojo, 2019).

Furthermore, the justification for declaring a state of emergency in Rivers State was not clearly based on a national security threat or an imminent breakdown of law and order in the region. According to Section 305 of the Constitution, emergency powers are typically invoked in response to situations such as armed conflict, rebellion, or insurrection. Without clear evidence of such conditions, the emergency declaration appears to be based on political motives rather than constitutional necessity, thus raising concerns over the misuse of emergency powers by the executive (Babajide, 2021). The primary finding of this study is that the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration raises significant questions about its constitutionality and legality.

In examining past instances of state of emergency declarations in Nigeria, it was found that declarations were often followed by controversial political motives. For instance, in 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo declared a state of emergency in Plateau State and suspended Governor Joshua Dariye. This was widely criticized as unconstitutional. In 2006, Obasanjo similarly suspended Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State, an action that was legally disputed. During his tenure, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency on two notable occasions to address the Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria. These declarations sparked legal and political debates, with courts ultimately affirming constitutional limits on emergency powers.

Also, on December 31, 2011, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in 15 local government areas (LGAs) across Borno, Yobe, Plateau, and Niger States due to Boko Haram attacks (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2012). The National Assembly approved the declaration in line with Section 305(6) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (1999, as amended). Unlike previous emergency declarations, Jonathan did not suspend elected officials but focused on security enforcement (Ojo, 2013). There was no significant legal challenge, as the declaration largely complied with constitutional requirements. That was unlike in the instant case (or the cases under Obasanjo) where the president has flagrantly jettisoned the constitution and our laws and arrogated on himself the power to disband democratically elected government. On May 14, 2013, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the entire Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States due to intensified Boko Haram insurgency. Security agencies were granted sweeping powers to combat insurgents. Unlike Obasanjo's and Tinubu's approach, elected governors and state assemblies were not suspended. The National Assembly approved the declaration, as required by the Constitution. Military operations intensified, but human rights concerns were raised over alleged extrajudicial killings and mass detentions. Former Borno State Governor Ali Modu Sheriff challenged the deployment of soldiers under emergency rule, arguing it violated federalism principles. The Federal High Court upheld the emergency measures, citing the President's constitutional duty to maintain national security. Some lawmakers in Adamawa State attempted to

challenge the constitutionality of military rule in the state. The Supreme Court dismissed the suit, emphasizing that Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution grants the President emergency powers as long as they are approved by the National Assembly.

It is evident from a peep at Jonathan's administration that there was a maximum compliance with the requirements of the constitution vis-à-vis declaration of State of Emergency. The Nigerian courts generally upheld the legality of Jonathan's state of emergency declarations, though cautioned against executive excesses. For instance, in *A.G. Federation v. A.G. Yobe & Ors* (2014) LPELR-23221(SC), the Supreme Court ruled that an emergency declaration does not automatically dissolve state governments. The Court emphasized that the President cannot unilaterally remove elected officials without following constitutional procedures (e.g., impeachment under Section 188). Again, in *Lakanmi v. A.G. Western Nigeria*, the Supreme Court ruled that even during emergencies, the President cannot arbitrarily remove elected officials.

Relying on the plethora of judicial and statutory authorities alluded to, it is the study's submission that the law empowers President Tinubu to declare state of emergency in Rivers State, following the political crisis currently persistent thereat, subject though to approval from the National Assembly within 2 or 10 days as the case may be. However, the study strongly opposed to the action of the President suspending elected officials. Such declaration is *ultra vires* the constitution and at best passes for executive rascality and impunity. This history underscores the need for stringent legal oversight to prevent the misuse of emergency powers. Therefore, the primary finding of this study is that the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration raises significant questions about its constitutionality and legality.

2. Suspension of Elected Officers and Constitutional Breach

The suspension of elected officers in Rivers State was found to be a clear violation of the constitutional framework governing the removal of state officials in Nigeria. According to Section 188 and Section 69 of the Nigerian Constitution, elected officers such as governors can only be impeached or recalled through constitutionally defined procedures involving the state legislature and the electorate. The suspension of Rivers State officials by the federal government without following these procedures undermines the democratic process and amounts to executive overreach. The suspension of elected officers in Rivers State, particularly the governor and other state officials, represents a severe breach of democratic principles and constitutional procedures. According to Sections 188 and 69 of the Nigerian Constitution, the removal or suspension of elected officers should follow a clear, established process involving impeachment or recall through the state legislature or by the electorate. However, the federal government's actions circumvented these processes. Therefore, the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State was found to be a clear violation of the constitutional framework governing the removal of state officials in Nigeria.

According to Eze (2020) and Faphohunda(2025), the suspension of elected officers by the federal government undermines the principle of accountability in a democratic system. Elected officials are accountable to their electorate, and any removal or suspension should follow a transparent process through which the electorate or the legislature can make informed decisions. The federal government's interference not only violates the autonomy of the state government but also diminishes the political rights of Rivers State citizens to choose their representatives.

The suspension of the state's elected officials, given the ongoing political rivalry between the federal government-supported Minister of Federal Capital Territory-Nyewson Wike, and Rivers State's leadership, suggests a politically motivated intervention rather than a genuine response to governance issues. This kind of executive overreach is a direct assault on the democratic process and creates an atmosphere of political instability. When the federal government uses its powers to control state governance, it not only undermines democratic principles but also risks suppressing opposition and free political competition, thereby weakening the overall democratic health of the nation.

The action of suspending elected officers creates a dangerous precedent, as it effectively disempowers the electorate, who have the constitutional right to choose their representatives (Iduozie,2020). Moreover, such interventions erode the principle of democracy in a federal system, where each state should maintain its autonomy over local governance. The political motivations behind the suspension cannot be ignored, as the decision appears to have been made in the context of ongoing political rivalries between the Minister of Federal Capital Territory and the state governor in Rivers-Sim Fubara.

3. Impact on Democratic Governance and Federalism

The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers have profound implications for democratic governance and federalism in Nigeria. The erosion of democratic principles is one of the most concerning outcomes of these actions. When the federal government bypasses constitutional procedures to suspend elected officials, it undermines the integrity of the electoral process, reducing the legitimacy of the political system. The distrust that such actions generate among the electorate can lead to a decline in political participation and an increase in political disillusionment. Democratic governance is about the accountability of elected officials to the people. The suspension of those officials represents a direct challenge to this principle, leading to de-legitimization of governance (Arowolo, 2020).

The actions also jeopardize the federal balance between the central government and the states. Nigeria's federal structure is intended to grant states autonomy over their internal affairs. The federal government's interference in Rivers State through the imposition of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers is perceived as an infringement on this autonomy. Such actions are often seen as attempts to centralize power and undermine federalism (Oluwasola, 2020). If unchecked, this could trigger a domino effect where other states may be subjected to similar interventions in the future, potentially leading to the consolidation of authoritarian rule.

One of the most significant aspects of the findings is the impact on Nigeria's federal system. The federal structure is designed to maintain a balance of power between the central government and the states (Anyu, 2022). However, the federal government's intervention in Rivers State without adherence to constitutional procedures directly challenges the autonomy of the state government and threatens the principle of federalism. The actions taken by the federal government point to a growing trend of centralized power, where states may increasingly find their autonomy compromised by federal interventions. The federal government's ability to suspend elected officials without due process is a direct challenge to the sovereignty of states within the federal system. If such actions become routine, states would be reduced to mere extensions of federal power, losing their political independence.

The suspension of elected officers and the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State could set a dangerous precedent for the future. If future administrations feel emboldened by this precedent, they might bypass state legislatures and use emergency powers or executive decisions to oust governors and elected officials in states that are politically or ideologically opposed to the federal government. This could lead to a pattern of political repression that undermines the federal structure and weakens Nigeria's democratic institutions.

4. Executive Overreach and Abuse of Power

The study also found evidence of executive overreach in the federal government's actions. The Tinubu administration's decision to suspend elected officers and declare a state of emergency represents an overstep of the executive's powers, and it could lead to further abuses of power if the checks and balances in the system are not reinforced. Scholars such as Akinyemi (2020); Anyu (2022); and Ibrahim (2022) warn that when the executive exceeds its powers, it undermines separation of powers and sets a dangerous precedent for future administrations. If emergency powers are used as a tool for political control, rather than for national security concerns, the democratic fabric of the nation is at risk. In this case, the federal government's intervention in Rivers State undermines the autonomy of the state and the separation of powers between the federal and state governments. If such actions are allowed to persist without constitutional review or judicial oversight, Nigeria faces the risk of executive dominance over the political system, leading to a gradual erosion of democratic freedoms. As Oluduro (2021) and Ojo & Ekpo (2021) argues, unchecked executive power can institutionalize authoritarianism, which undermines the rule of law and democratic norms.

The findings reveal significant concerns about executive overreach, a phenomenon in which the executive branch of government exceeds its constitutional authority, undermining the separation of powers and checks and balances that are vital to maintaining democratic governance. The suspension of elected officers and the state of emergency declaration are manifestations of executive overreach. In a well-functioning democracy, the executive should act within the boundaries set by the Constitution and should not be allowed to undermine or bypass the processes that ensure accountability and transparency. The failure to involve the National Assembly and the state legislature in the decision-making process represents a clear abuse of executive powers and a violation of the democratic principle of separation of powers.

The use of state of emergency powers and the suspension of elected officials risks the erosion of democratic governance in Nigeria. If the executive can unilaterally suspend elected officials and declare a state of emergency

without adhering to legal and constitutional procedures, it could lead to the concentration of power in the hands of the executive and the gradual erosion of democratic freedoms. As seen in other countries with fragile democracies, such executive actions can lead to the institutionalization of authoritarian rule, diminishing the political freedoms and rights of citizens.

5. Implications for the Future of Democratic Governance

The findings also point to the long-term consequences of such actions on Nigeria's democratic trajectory. If executive overreach and federal intervention in state matters are not checked, Nigeria risks undermining the stability of its democracy. To prevent the recurrence of similar actions, it is essential for the judiciary, legislature, and civil society to act as effective checks on executive power. The judiciary, in particular, has a critical role to play in ensuring that executive actions are subject to constitutional review. Furthermore, the National Assembly should play a more active role in scrutinizing emergency declarations and ensuring that they comply with the provisions of the Constitution.

The federal government must prioritize transparency and accountability in its actions, particularly when dealing with state governments. Citizens must be assured that any intervention in state matters, especially the suspension of elected officials, is based on genuine national security concerns and follows constitutional procedures. This would help preserve democratic legitimacy and prevent political manipulation.

Conclusion

The findings and analysis of this study reveal that the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration are deeply problematic from both constitutional and democratic standpoints. These actions undermine the principles of constitutional legality, democratic governance, and state autonomy. Moreover, they risk consolidating executive power and eroding the checks and balances that are crucial for the sustenance of democracy. Moving forward, it is essential for constitutional safeguards to be reinforced and for democratic institutions to be protected to ensure that similar actions do not occur in the future.

Way Forward and Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight significant concerns regarding the constitutional legality, democratic principles, and federalism in Nigeria, as they relate to the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration. To safeguard Nigeria's democracy, it is crucial to address these concerns through targeted reforms and the strengthening of key democratic institutions. The way forward should involve both institutional reforms and political action aimed at ensuring that such executive actions do not undermine democratic principles, rule of law, and federalism. Based on the foregoing findings, analysis and discussion, the study hereby recommended the following measures:

1. Strengthening Constitutional Oversight and Legal Frameworks through;
 - i. Reaffirming the Role of the National Assembly: The National Assembly must be empowered to play a more active role in overseeing executive actions, particularly state of emergency declarations. The Nigerian Constitution explicitly requires that the National Assembly approve any emergency powers declared by the president, and this process must be rigorously adhered to. Parliamentary review mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure that such decisions are made with proper consultation and legal justification. This would prevent the arbitrary use of emergency powers by the executive branch;
 - ii. Judicial Review and Accountability: The judiciary must serve as a robust safeguard against executive overreach. It is essential for the courts to exercise their role as impartial arbitrators by reviewing the constitutionality of any executive action, particularly in cases involving the suspension of elected officials or the imposition of emergency powers. The judiciary should remain independent and assert its authority to protect constitutional rights, such as elected officials' immunity from arbitrary removal and citizens' right to participate in democracy;
 - iii. Legislative and Executive Collaboration: The relationship between the executive and legislative branches should be characterized by better collaboration and dialogue, especially when decisions with broad political and constitutional implications are made. This would help foster accountability, transparency, and legitimacy in the execution of executive decisions. A consultative process should be established between the executive and the National Assembly before actions like the suspension of elected officials are taken;
2. Safeguarding Federalism and State Autonomy through;
 - i. Restoring State Autonomy: One of the most alarming consequences of the federal government's actions in Rivers State is the undermining of state autonomy. A strong, federal system requires that states maintain the

- autonomy to govern themselves without undue interference from the central government. To safeguard the federal system and ensure that the spirit of federalism is preserved, future interventions by the federal government should be narrowly defined and should follow strict constitutional provisions that protect state rights(Olofintoye,2022);
- ii. Clarification of Emergency Powers: Nigeria's constitutional provisions on emergency powers should be revised and clarified to prevent the misuse of such powers. While emergency powers are critical in times of national crisis, they must be clearly defined to ensure they cannot be used to suppress political opposition or disrupt state governance. A reform of Section 305 of the Constitution may be necessary to explicitly limit the conditions under which a state of emergency can be declared and to ensure that such declarations cannot be used for political repression;
 - iii. Promotion of State Rights and Local Governance: Decentralization of power and local autonomy are essential to a vibrant democracy. Efforts should be made to promote state rights, improve the capacity of state governments, and ensure that states have the ability to govern themselves without undue federal interference. This can be achieved through constitutional amendments that empower states while ensuring their accountability to the people;
3. Strengthening Democratic Governance through;
- i. Promoting Political Transparency: For Nigerian democracy to thrive, political actions, especially those that affect the governance structure, must be carried out with full transparency. The federal government should provide clear justifications for any decision to suspend elected officials or declare a state of emergency, ensuring that the public is informed about the legal and constitutional grounds for such actions. Public accountability mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that federal actions align with the public interest and democratic principles;
 - ii. Ensuring Electoral Integrity: The independence of the Electoral Commission (INEC) should be further safeguarded to maintain the legitimacy of elections and prevent any form of undue manipulation of the electoral process. The strengthening of electoral laws and the promotion of a free, fair, and transparent electoral system would help to ensure that elected officials are chosen by the will of the people and can only be removed through constitutional processes(Sulaiman,2022);
 - iii. Public Education on Democracy: Public understanding of constitutional rights, democratic principles, and the limits of executive power should be enhanced through civic education programs. A better-informed public is more likely to resist authoritarian overreach and demand accountability from both the federal and state governments. Educational campaigns focusing on the importance of democracy, rule of law, and constitutional governance should be prioritized at both the national and local levels;
4. Promoting Checks and Balances in Governance through;
- i. Reinforcing the Separation of Powers: It is essential for Nigeria to reinforce the separation of powers between the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The principle of separation of powers is vital in preventing any one branch of government from accumulating excessive power. All branches must have clearly defined roles, and each must be capable of checking the actions of the others to preserve the integrity of the democratic system. The independence of the judiciary is particularly important in ensuring that executive actions are not beyond constitutional limits (Okunola,2013);
 - ii. Strengthening the Role of Civil Society: Civil society organizations (CSOs) and political activists must be allowed to function freely and serve as watchdogs of government actions. These groups play an important role in ensuring government accountability and providing independent assessments of executive decisions, particularly in cases where emergency powers are invoked or elected officials are suspended(Salawu,2021). Freedom of expression and freedom of association must be protected to enable these organizations to perform their duties without fear of retribution; and
5. International Support for Democracy through;
- i. International Monitoring and Advocacy: International organizations, such as the United Nations, African Union, and ECOWAS, should be encouraged to monitor political developments in Nigeria closely. When democratic principles are at risk, these organizations should provide diplomatic support to the Nigerian people and advocate for peaceful, democratic governance. They can also offer technical assistance in areas such as electoral reform, constitutional law, and good governance to help strengthen Nigeria's democracy;
 - ii. Global Pressure on Human Rights: International human rights groups can also play a role in exerting pressure on the Nigerian government to uphold fundamental rights such as the right to political participation and

freedom from arbitrary removal from office. The global community can raise awareness about democratic setbacks in Nigeria and demand respect for international human rights standards.

The declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of elected officers in Rivers State by the Tinubu administration presents significant challenges to the legitimacy of the democratic process and the rule of law in Nigeria. To mitigate the risks posed by such actions and ensure the continued stability of Nigeria's democracy, there must be concerted efforts to strengthen constitutional checks and balances, protect state autonomy, and reinforce democratic governance. By implementing the recommended reforms, Nigeria can ensure that executive power is not misused, that states retain their autonomy, and that the democratic rights of citizens are upheld. With these measures in place, Nigeria can move towards a more resilient and accountable democratic system.

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