

## THE NORTH–SOUTH DICHOTOMY IN NIGERIAN POLITICS: ITS HISTORY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

Nigeria is heavily divided along several lines, including religious, ethnic, and regional differences. These divisions have adversely affected national integration and development and have institutionalized disunity, distrust, and suspicion among citizens. The research adopted thematic, historical, and eclectic methods, relying on secondary sources for its analysis. It found that, although the North–South divide in Nigerian politics was deliberately created by the British colonial government to serve their imperial interests, the actions of the Northern political elite have largely sustained this divide. The North has consistently resisted efforts by the South to restructure the country politically and economically, thereby placing Nigeria in a state of arrested development. The study concluded that restructuring is a panacea for Nigeria's quest for national integration, as it will promote development.

**Keywords:** Development, Dichotomy, Elite, National Integration, Restructuring

### Introduction

Many nation-states have one form of dichotomy or the other. Some of these divides, especially in Africa, are a function of faulty foundations laid by European colonial rule. The North-South dichotomy in Nigerian politics is as old as the country, and was deliberately created by the British colonial government to serve their imperialist interest. According to Ben Nwabueze:

The effect of the 1914 amalgamation, indeed its purpose, is to dichotomise the country from its inception; to keep its northern and southern segments apart by an imaginary, artificially created boundary line, and consequently to disunite them in interest, attitude, outlook and vision.<sup>1</sup>

This is evident from the fact that despite the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria, the British colonialist regime continued to rule Nigeria as if it were two separate political entities. It was not until the Richard's constitution was introduced in 1947 (after a period of 33 years), that the North and the South sat together for the first time. This, it has been argued, was because, "it was not in the British interest that the North should be polluted by the educated South".<sup>2</sup> The British favoured the northern part of Nigeria because they believed that it was only the North that could protect its economic interest. The British, therefore, manipulated the system to achieve a transfer of power to the North at independence in 1960. This was done through two major ways:

First, they manipulated census figures to favor the North by ascribing numerical demographic superiority to it. British colonialists abrogated the principle of North–South parity in the allocation of seats in parliament and, in its stead, introduced a population weighted principle that allocated 52% of the seats in parliament to the North. Second, they tactically delayed Nigerian independence so that necessary human capital could be put in place in the North before granting independence.<sup>3</sup>

After sixty-one years of Nigeria independence, the North-South dichotomy rages on. How this dichotomy has continued to adversely affect national integration and development in Nigeria is the object of this paper.

### Definition of terms

It is necessary to begin this paper by defining some of the key terms used in it. Among others, 'development', is a term which has been defined variously by different people and has been a subject of many theories. In this paper, the concept is seen from the point of view of Dudley Seers, to mean when a country experiences a reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment. According to Seers, the questions to ask about a country's development are, therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt, there has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of this central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result "development" even if per capita income doubled.<sup>4</sup> Put differently, development has to do with incremental qualitative changes in the lives of the citizens of a given country and should not be measured in terms of such abstract concepts as GDP or GNP.

The other key term that needs to be defined is 'national integration'. The concept of national integration is widely used to cover a wide range of phenomena and it is opened to a number of interpretations. However, 'national integration' here is seen from the point of view of L. R. Tiamiyu, as the attempt at uniting or bringing together the hitherto multi-ethnic groups of peoples with diverse cultures, histories, languages, religions and belief systems into one which would remove primordial and subordinate loyalties and sentiments to ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup> In

other words, national integration is the sum total of all deliberate efforts and policies of the government aimed at uniting different peoples with diverse languages and cultures into a nation-state by creating a system in which all groups feel that there are sufficient rooms for self-expression.

### **Historical background to the North-South dichotomy in Nigeria politics**

The history of North-South dichotomy may be traced back to the unification of the former Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria, or even before the amalgamation of 1914, when there was a controversy over the exact point on the River Niger where the Baro-Kano and Lagos Northern Railways Extension schemes should meet. The situation became exacerbated by both access lines to the coast being developed as unmistakably rival schemes. According to Kirk-Greene:

The views of the High Commissioners on railway extension in the two protectorates had long differed, and their opposition crystallized in 1907 with the appointment of Sir Percy Girouard of the Royal Engineers as Governor of Northern Nigeria. He saw the waterway as the axis of economic development in the North and was intent on basing railway policy on this premise, whereas the Southern objective was simply the projection of the Lagos-Ibadan line.<sup>6</sup>

The disagreement was settled by the Secretary of State who noted that “as the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria has been decided upon and will probably be carried out within the next four years, the railways must be looked on as the property of Nigeria as a whole.”<sup>7</sup> Even when an extension of the Lagos and the Baro-Kano lines was approved, the North-South antagonism went so far in disagreement over control of the Northern portion of the Lagos line such that a full-scale conference of Northern and Southern officers had to be convened at Offa in 1911.<sup>8</sup> However, it was not the indigenous people that were directly involved in this crisis, but the officials representing them. They, however, bequeathed the legacy of hatred to the indigenous groups in the North and South.

When the Northern and the Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were eventually amalgamated in 1914, the Southern Nigerian newspapers, like the Times of Nigeria, alleged that the 1914 unification was synonymous with a sell-out of the South. According to the newspaper “The amalgamation of 1914 is, broadly speaking, the conquest and subjugation of Southern Nigeria by Northern Nigeria. Northern Nigerian system, Northern Nigerian laws, Northern Nigerian land laws, Northern Nigerian administration, must be made to supersede every system in Southern Nigeria.”<sup>9</sup> Between 1950 and 1953, two major disagreements between the North and South occurred. The first took place in 1950 during the conference held at Ibadan to review the Richards Constitution. It was at this conference that the issue of the North-South divide manifested visibly. The Northern delegates insisted on having 50 percent of the seats in the proposed central House of Representatives, and that the allocation of revenue derived from taxation should be on per capita basis. They threatened ‘separation from the rest of Nigeria on the arrangements existing before 1914’ if the Northern Provinces were not granted their wish. But the delegations from the Eastern and Western damned the threat of the North and strongly opposed the North’s insistence on having half the seats in the House of Representatives, since this would mean the North having a perpetual control of the Federal Government.<sup>10</sup>

The second occurred in March, 1953. It started when Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group moved a motion in the Federal House of Representatives, to the effect that the House should adopt 1956 as the date for the attainment of self-government by Nigeria. The Northern members of the House opposed the motion, and moved for an amendment to the motion whereby the phrase ‘as soon as practicable’ would be inserted, instead of 1956. The South, in protest, staged a walk-out in the House of Representatives. According to Trevor Clark, “The AG and NCNC rank and file followed Awolowo and Azikiwe out of the house in a noisy walk-out, hurling vituperations at the north ... (with) face and to face abusive demonstrations from the Lagos crowds who had been fed tendentious versions of the day’s proceedings.”<sup>11</sup> The next day, four members of the Action Group (AG) who were in the Federal cabinet, namely, Akintola, Thomas, Prest and the Ooni of Ife, resigned.

The northern members, on their way home, as earlier noted, were booed by Lagos bystanders who even threw missiles at them. This aggravated the situation and heightened the threatened separation by the North. Mallam Isa Kaita commented obliquely that if the south felt that only their case should be heard, “there need be no delay”<sup>12</sup>; emphasizing what the Sarduna said earlier that, “The mistake of 1914 has come to light and I should like to go no further.”<sup>13</sup> The Sarduna was seen waving an invisible weapon over his head, saying, “Next time I come, I’ll have a sword in my hand!”, and was heard later talking about union with French Niger.<sup>14</sup>

To add salt to injury, the Akintola led splinter group of the AG embarked on a tour of the North in order to, ostensibly, ‘educate’ and explain to the people the circumstances that led to the crisis over the self-government motion. But the delegation was met with hostility in Kano which led to rioting. In the riots, 36 people were recorded to have been killed, while 250 others were reportedly wounded.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, members of the Northern House of Assembly and Chiefs were summoned to Kaduna, to discuss the events that had happened. The meeting rejected commitment to 1956 or any other fixed date for self-government. They insisted that the North would have Self-government only when the Northernization of the regional civil service and efficient local government had been attained. The meeting ended up adopting an eight-point programme<sup>16</sup>, namely:

1. Complete regional autonomy, except for defence, external affairs, customs and West African research institutions;
2. No central legislature or executive;
3. A central Agency, responsible for the exception in (1) and for any other matter delegated by a region;
4. This Agency to be at a neutral place, preferably Lagos;
5. The Agency to be non-political, with its composition, powers and responsibility defined by the constitutional order-in-council;
6. The railway, air services, electricity and coalmines to be run by independent statutory corporations, organized inter-regionally under experts, with minority representation of regional governments;
7. All revenues to be regional, except customs which would be collected at the port by the Central Agency and paid to the receiving region;
8. Each region to have a separate public service.

The birth of the 'northernization' policy, which was guided by the Sardauna's vision of 'One North, One Destiny' and aimed at unifying the Northern region, represented an 'official' divide between the North and the South. The 'northernization' policy gave priority for "permanent employment to northerners, and then to expatriates or other West Africans, only in the last and inescapable resort to Southern Nigerians, who must be on terminal contract."<sup>17</sup> Between 1954 and 1958, a total of two thousand, one hundred and forty-eight (2,148) Southerners lost their jobs in the Northern public service as a result of the implementation of the northernization policy.<sup>18</sup>

**'Esau I hate; Jacob I love': reflection on British role in North-South dichotomy.**

The British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Harcourt, from the beginning, spelt out the relationship between the North and the South thus:

We have released Northern Nigeria from the leading strings of the Treasury. The promising and well-conducted youth is now on an allowance on his own and is about to effect an alliance with a Southern lady of means. I have issued the special license and Sir Frederick Lugard will perform the ceremony. May the union be fruitful and the couple constant! The Nigerias are not designed to be a great "Trust" but a great "Federation".<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the relationship between the North and the South was meant as a marriage, with the North as the husband and the South as the wife. The alliance with a "Southern lady of means," as conceived by Lord Harcourt in the incorporation of Southern Territories into the unified Northern Territories by the British, was done to garner the economic wealth of the South to offset the money spent by the British to pacify the less endowed Northern territories. For instance, between 1900 and 1912, Britain paid approximately £315,500 per annum to the Northern Nigeria administration as subvention and subsidy for its day-to-day expenses. The deficits of the northern administration ran at an average of £229,000 per annum between 1908 and 1912, and United Kingdom grants had to be fixed at some £100,000 per annum for five years.<sup>20</sup> According to P.N.C. Okigbo, it was hoped that the resources of southern Nigeria, which enjoyed a flourishing trade in palm oil, kernels, and cocoa, would give the South the financial capacity to pay the North a special grant to reimburse it to the tune of £70,000 for customs duties collected on goods of northern Nigerian origin passing through southern parts. It followed that the proposed amalgamation would relieve the British-tax payer of at least the cost of the grant-in-aid to the North.<sup>21</sup> This presumption was confirmed when even in the first year after amalgamation, the protectorate of Southern Nigeria showed a revenue surplus of £80,000. This was in spite of the substantial loss of customs revenue arising from the First World War and a war bill of some £167,000 in 1914 alone.<sup>22</sup>

The amalgamation of Nigeria, as earlier noted, was done to suit Britain's economic interest, and the colonial regime believed that the Northerners will serve their imperialist interest. According to Richard Akinjide:

British colonial power was determined to see that the North must rule Nigeria. To them, education was irrelevant; population too was irrelevant. Where things did not suit the north, they created it artificially. They did all this to favour the economic interest of the British... The British believed that it is only the north that can protect its economic interest. But they left the north uneducated. In fact, Lugard's doctrine then was: educate the north and lose Nigeria.<sup>23</sup>

The British colonialists devised many means to perpetuate northern rule. According to Akinjide, "There are documents in the archive in London which showed that Lugard deliberately created things so that the north will be dominant and the south will be subservient".<sup>24</sup> For instance, they created a structure that gave Northern Nigeria 75 per cent of the land area and 60 percent of the population of the country. See table 1 below.

**Table 1**Demographic Variables

Region	Population	Land size Km Sq.	Pop. Density
North	92,713,543	719,435.00	129
South	80,266,572	190,455.00	421
National	172,980,115	909,890	

Source: NBS (2015)

In the words of Ben Nwabueze:

As one entity (Northern Nigeria), the extent of its territorial area was less than what it is today. It was in 1918... that Fredrick Lugard, as Governor-General of the unified entity, extended its (North) territorial area south-eastwards to include a good part of the territory that previously lay in the eastern province of Southern Nigeria. But he rejected demands for a similar revision of the boundary between the North and the South-West, although the people of Ilorin and Kabba divisions in the North belong to the same tribal stock – Yoruba – as those in the South-West. The only concession by the British colonial government of Nigeria was the transfer of the tiny community of Otun from the North to the South-West in 1936.<sup>25</sup>

Again, at the January 1950, Ibadan General Conference on Review of the Nigerian Constitution, the Northerner leader, demanded 50 percent representation in the Federal House of Representatives, and got it, with the British backing their obnoxious manoeuvring behind the scenes. This is worrisome when it is recalled that the delegations from the Eastern and Western regions of Nigeria as early mentioned, strongly opposed it. Furthermore, after the national unity government was formed, Governor James Robertson appointed Tafawa Balewa, a northerner, the Prime Minister of the Federation of Nigeria over the political leaders in the NCNC and in the AG, both from the South. To show the British favoritism of the Northern over Southern leaders, he, in addition to the position as the Federal Prime Minister, named Alhaji Balewa as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, the key ministerial positions were given to the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the unity government of 1957 that preceded the country's independence in 1960.

In furtherance of the British colonial policy of ensuring the North's control of Nigeria, Governor James Robertson did not even wait to hear the complete results of the federal elections of 1959, before inviting Alhaji Balewa to form a government. In his own statement, he said:

Before all the counting had finished, rumors began to circulate that the NCNC and the Action Group were getting together, and might form a coalition; there was no doubt that Dr. Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo were in close touch through various go betweens. It seems clear that although there were a number of seats still to be declared, the state of the parties would finally be approximately NPC 140, NCNC 90, and AG 75, and if the AG and NCNC formed a coalition they would have majority in the House of Representatives. I believed that this could be very dangerous for Nigeria's future as, from all I had learned of the Sardauna, and the Northerners, they might well decide to leave the Federation for they would not readily accept a national government of the Southern Parties. Even if this did not happen, there was bound to be a serious political situation.<sup>26</sup>

It was, therefore, a deliberate British plan to entrench Northern control of Nigeria and sabotage the efforts to form a coalition government of the Igbo-led NCNC and the Yoruba-led AG political parties.

The British design for Nigeria in 1914 was reenacted in the July 1966 counter-coup, which led to the appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as Head-of-State over Southern senior military officers. It should be noted that after the counter-coup of July 1966, the northern military officers were in disarray, and wanted to secede from Nigeria, because it appeared impossible for the permanent rule by Northerners to be accepted by the southerners. The British persuaded them to change their mind. According to Major-General James Oluleye:

The immediate problem facing the Northern military officers was one of the rightful successors, the hero of the coup or the senior officer from the North whose role was one of passivity in the struggle. Somehow the matter was resolved by the Northern Civil Servants in Lagos with the British intervention who also emboldened them that the numerical strength of Northern troops in the Army could sustain a Northern-led government.<sup>27</sup>

The involvement of Britain in continued Northern domination of Nigeria, was confirmed by John Stremlau, when he said "The Ambassadors of the United States and Britain, Elbert Matthews, and Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce told Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon that not another dime in foreign assistance would come if Nigeria was allowed to dissolve."<sup>28</sup>

### **The effects of the North-South divide on national integration and development**

Central to the North-South divide is the issue of power-sharing and resource distribution. While the South advocates for power-sharing between the North and South, the North believes that it is their divine right to rule. As Maitama Sule puts it "Everyone has a gift from God. The Northerners are endowed by God with leadership qualities."<sup>29</sup> The meaning of the Northerners' were born to rule mentality dawned on the South when, in 1982, M.K.O. Abiola wanted to seek the presidential nomination of his party, the National Party of Nigeria, in accordance with the original understanding within the leadership of the party that the presidential position should rotate between the three zones of the country—north, southwest, and southeast—for a term of four years. President Shagari told Abiola "Well Chief, you know, it is all in the natural order of things. A country is just like a farm where everyone has his functions. Allah has willed it that someone must hold the cow by the horns while another does the milking."<sup>30</sup> It became obvious to the South that, as Wole Soyinka put it, "the northern leader's interpretation was that zoning did not imply rotation."<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the North believes that Nigeria is ‘an estate’ of their great grandfather, Uthman Dan Fodio, and that they ‘must ruthlessly prevent a change of power.’<sup>32</sup> This is evident from the July 1966 counter coup in Nigeria. The North believed that the January coup was executed to install a southern leadership, hence the counter-coup aimed at restoring the northern leadership of the country. In the 1970s, the North established the Kaduna Mafia which was committed to an undisputed, permanent Northern rulership of Nigeria. For instance, to ensure that power did not return to South in 1987, the military arm of the mafia overthrew the government of President Shehu Shagari on December 31, 1983. This revelation was given by Umaru Dikko, a leader of the group. According to Alex Ekwueme:

But I can tell you that one of our colleagues, the Minister of Transport, Alhaji Umaru Dikko, when he arrived London, said during the press conference he gave, that all the talk the military was giving about corruption and all that, was a smokescreen, that the main reason for the coup d’état was to prevent me from becoming President in 1987. That they reached the decision, during the first week of December when, at the Ibadan convention of the NPN, President Shehu Shagari, emphasized that the Presidency would move to the south in 1987, was irreversible, in the interest of Nigeria unity. They felt that they wouldn’t want that to happen and that it was better to interrupt the process quite early rather than wait nearer 1987, when it would be obvious what the reasons were...<sup>32</sup>

Also, the northern military and political establishment ensured that President Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election which was widely believed to have been won by M. K. O. Abiola, a Southerner. While the Southerners and international community’s called for the restoration of Abiola’s electoral victory, some Northern elites rejected the call. For instance, one of the northern leaders in the First Republic, Alhaji Maitama Sule, has gone on record as saying that, “Nigerians should allow the will of Allah to stand, for after all, if Allah wanted all Nigerians to be the same stock, language and talent, Allah would have done it. Election cannot change Allah’s plan for the people of Nigeria.”<sup>33</sup> Adekunle Ajasin, quoting Yakubo Abdulazeez, revealed that the annulment was the handiwork of “the blue blood oligarchy (that is, the Waziri, the Galadinma, and the Emir), who were and are still benefiting (from the system) and stand to lose much as a result of change of power from the North to the South.”<sup>34</sup>

More recently, former President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua left Nigeria for medical treatment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After two months’ absence, the nation was engulfed in a serious controversy over the inability of the President to transmit a letter to the National Assembly and empower the Vice-President to perform the functions of the President in an acting capacity. Even when many concerned Nigerians, including the Save Nigerian Group made up of eminent Nigerians, socio-cultural organizations like Afenifere and Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the Academic Staff Union of the Universities, the Nigerian Bar Association, and numerous others, called for the constitutional transfer of power, some members of the northern elite in the then government, especially the former Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Michael Aondoakaa, worked very hard to resist the transfer of power. According to Itsay Sagay:

The Attorney-General has been insulting the intelligence of Nigerians. The man is just so full of himself, how can he remain Attorney-General. President Yar’Adua has been out of the country for sixty three days and the constitution is very clear that when he is going on vacation or is unable to perform his duty he should transmit to the National Assembly a letter, but Aondoakaa never encouraged or advise him to do that.<sup>35</sup>

It took the Nigerian Senate 78 days to apply the extra-judicial “Doctrine of Necessity” which empowered the Vice-President, Goodluck Jonathan, to assume the presidency, and this averted a crisis. As Senate President, David Mark remarks, “The last 78 days have been challenging to us as a nation. We have come under intense pressure, stress and pain. However, we have examined all the options available to us and today rightly concluded that it is necessary to take this stand and allow the country to move forward.”<sup>36</sup> This phenomenon of not transferring power to the Vice-President has continued even in the current President Buhari’s administration.

The exclusive dominance of the presidency by Northerners since Nigeria’s independence has also ensured the manipulation of power to favour the geographic North in the appointment of justices to Nigeria’s apex Court, the Supreme Court. According to Solomon Asemota (SAN):

The long rule of Northern military Heads-of-State, Murtala Mohammed, Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, and Abdulsalami Abubakar was used to fashion a constitution tilted in favour of Muslims. The Islamic Judicial system was elevated to the advantage of Islamic jurists who are not so learned in Western education not to talk of the inherited English common law. Today, we have courts and a judicial system where a Muslim cleric can rise to the Supreme Court from the lower tiers of sharia courts created for them, a feat which a Christian cleric cannot attain because no special court is established for them as was done for the Muslim clerics. Muslim clerics became special specie of Nigerian Judges.<sup>37</sup>

One major effect of this manipulation is an unbroken succession of 29 years of eight Chief Justices of Nigeria from the North, seven of whom are Moslems, namely Mohammed Bello (1987-1995); Lawal Uwais (1995-2006); Alfa Belgore (2006-2007); Legbo Kutigi (2007-2009); Aloysius Katsina-Alu (2009-2011); Dahiru Musdapher

(2011-2012); Mariam Mukhter (2012-2014); and Mahmud Mohammed (2014-2016), and Ibrahim Tanko (2019-2022).

It was in 2016 that a Southerner, Justice Walter Onnoghen, stepped in as acting Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN). Justice Onnoghen was due to step in as the substantive CJN, when his predecessor, Justice Mahmud Mohammed, retired on attaining the mandatory age of 70 years on November 10, 2016. However, his appointment in a substantive capacity was delayed by President Muhammadu Buhari, for reasons not officially disclosed to the public. Hence, he was appointed as the Acting CJN, and remained on that capacity until Buhari embarked on a medical vacation to London, where he remained for some time, thus paving the way for then Acting President, Vice-President, Yemi Osinbajo, to send Onnoghen's name to the Senate for confirmation as the substantive CJN. He was sworn in as the substantive CJN on March 7, following his confirmation by the Senate on March 1, 2017. Justice Onnoghen was meant to remain in office till December 22, 2020 but was disgraced out of office before the 2019 elections. Consequently, this move paved the way for another Northerner, Justice Tanko Muhammad to be appointed the Chief Justice of Nigeria. In addition, Ben Nwabueze, quoting Solomon Asemota, further affirms that, "The Council of States was established under the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions with the biased intention that it should be dominated more or less permanently by members from the True North. Six months as Chief Justice of Nigeria earns a Northerner, after retirement, a place as member of the Council of State, thus making the Council of State a "Northern" Council of State."<sup>38</sup>

The North-South divide also poses yet another danger to national integration and development, viz putting control of the strategic function of security and juicy ministerial, legislative, and bureaucratic position in the hands of the ruling geographic zone. The geographic North that have been in power for over 45 years of the country 61 years of independence. For instance, General Sani Abacha, during his regime, appointed only northern Muslims to head the national security apparatuses. According to Mathew Kukah, "The first was the appointment of Major Hamza Al-Mustapha, as the Chief Security Officer to the Head-of-State; Alhaji Ismaila Gwarzo, as National Security Adviser; Brigadier-General Sabo, as Director of Military Intelligence; AVM Idi Musa, as Chief of Defence Intelligence; Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie, as the Inspector General of Police; and Alhaji Zakari Bui, as the head of the newly created Counter Terrorism Agency."<sup>39</sup> A similar situation occurred under the civilian rule of President Buhari, where all service chiefs and all paramilitary organizations, except two, are occupied by Northern Nigeria Muslims.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, it is important to note that this act of nepotism is not peculiar to Northern Nigeria. During the President Olusegun Obasanjo era (1999-2007), the North accused the presidency of favouring the South, particularly the Yoruba ethnic group. According to Asaph Zadok, an official of the Arewa People's Congress (APC):

We are not the least surprised that the Inspector-General of Police, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Police Affairs, the Director of Defence Intelligence Service, the Director of Military Intelligence and the Director-General of State Security Service all come from Yoruba-speaking tribes, thereby forming a 'concentric ethnic ring'....A similar nomination of a Yoruba Auditor-General of the Federation was vetoed by the Senate because the Governor of the Central Bank and the Accountant-General are both Yoruba.<sup>41</sup>

Another disquieting instance of the adverse impact of the North-South divide on national integration and development is the polarization of the membership of the National Assembly into North and South caucuses, making it impossible for the legislative arm to perform its statutory duties. A good example is the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). The Bill (PIB) was introduced in the 6th National Assembly in 2008, and passed through several delays and rejections till 2021 when it was finally passed and assented to by the President, and it thus became the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA). However, there are several clauses and aspects of the PIB which arouse suspicion and heighten calls and on allegations that the bill has been designed to give the North an upper hand in the control of the nation's oil and gas sector. The unfavorable imbalance in the PIB is one of the significant reasons why Southern federal lawmakers of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) staged a walkout during one of the plenary sessions to show their lack of satisfaction and disapproval of several clauses in the amended version of the PIB. One of the clauses that prompted the strike was reducing the percentage share of oil revenue allocated for the host communities from a paltry 5% to a much meager 3%. On the other hand, 30% of the income of the NNPC would be dedicated to oil and gas exploration in the Benue and Chad basins located in the North of Nigeria. This provision in the PIB shows a grand political scheme mapped out to continuously use a more significant percentage of crude oil revenues for the development of the North, ahead of the Niger Delta areas where most of the country's crude oil can be found.<sup>42</sup>

Even the Nigerian youths have been polarized by the North-South divide. For instance, in the first week of October 2020, Nigerian youths took to streets in protest against police brutality with a simple demand: the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). However, on 10 October, the Arewa Youth Consultative Council, a group aimed at unifying the peoples of Northern Nigeria, wrote an open letter to Buhari affirming their support for SARS. In the letter, the Council labelled the demand for the dissolution of SARS as unpatriotic, reckless, and callous. Shortly after, pro-SARS protests began to spring up and Northern youths took to the street

to express their support for the discredited police unit. On 15 October, 2020, 19 northern governors gathered for an emergency meeting and spoke against the #EndSARS protests in the South.<sup>43</sup>

Also, maybe noted, one more instance of the adverse impact of the North-South divide on national integration and development, viz the siting of most industries and development projects in Nigeria, are motivated and embarked upon for ethnic reason rather than impacting the lives of the citizens positively. Location advantages and other rational bases for establishing industries are often ignored for these primordial sentiments. The result is the high failure rates of federal government owned industrial concerns. For instance, the siting of a crude oil refinery in the Northern part of the country during the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1988 can be seen as a political move intended to strengthen the domination of the oil and gas industry by Northern political forces. The refinery, which is the Kaduna Refining and Petrochemical Company (KRPC) located in Kaduna State, is managed by the NNPC. Over the years, KRPC has been recording financial losses even with the colossal investment outlay poured into the infrastructure of its refining and petrochemical facilities.<sup>44</sup> More recently, President Buhari signed a memorandum of understanding with the government of Niger for the building of a refinery that has a capacity of producing about 150,000 barrel of oil daily, a set of power plants, and established a Federal University of Transportation and a Federal Polytechnic all sited in Katsina state. The standard economic design of industries considers its proximity to a source of raw material, which was not considered when siting the Kaduna refinery and the refinery in far-away Niger Republic. In a nutshell, the refinery project is seen as a political move to ensure that although petroleum is explored and produced in locations within the South, the political control of crude oil revenues would still be determined by Northern elite.

### **The North-South divide and the politicization of the national question: The 2014 national conference.**

Calls for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) to address the national question have been met with resistance and politicization, particularly from Northern leaders who perceive such moves as threats to their historical political advantages. The concept of restructuring, advocating for a more decentralized federal system to address socio-economic disparities and ethnic grievances, has gained traction among Southern and Middle Belt regions. These regions argue that Nigeria's current governance structure favors the North disproportionately, perpetuating economic inequalities and political exclusion. However, Northern elites, through groups like the Arewa Consultative Forum, vehemently oppose restructuring, viewing it as a challenge to their entrenched political and economic privileges.

The 2014 National Conference (CONFAB), convened by President Goodluck Jonathan and chaired by former Chief Justice Idris Kutigi, stands out as one of Nigeria's most comprehensive efforts to address the country's lingering national issues. The conference focused on topics like political restructuring, devolution of power, national security, and fiscal federation, with 19 committees set up to tackle these subjects. Four distinct regional positions emerged, reflecting varying interests: while the South-West and South-East advocated for power devolution and the adoption of six geopolitical zones, the North preferred to maintain the existing structure. The South-South pushed for state-level resource control, and the North-Central sought protection against marginalization. Notably, the conference concluded with over 600 resolutions, all adopted by consensus, without any voting.

Among the key resolutions were recommendations for devolution of powers, allowing the federal government to focus on national policy and defense, and reducing its overwhelming control. It also proposed a rotational presidency between Nigeria's regions, and the scrapping of the 774 local government areas to curb corruption and save costs. Additionally, the conference emphasized socio-economic rights, along with measures for fiscal federalism, such as changes to revenue allocation to benefit the states, and significant reforms to reduce the cost of governance, including reducing political appointees and streamlining government agencies.

However, despite its broad appeal and consensus-driven resolutions, the 2014 Conference Report faced outright rejection by Muhammadu Buhari, who, upon assuming the presidency in 2015, vowed not to implement it. This stance was supported by Northern elites, including the Arewa Consultative Forum, who feared the loss of the North's political and economic dominance. These groups questioned the legality of the conference, arguing that restructuring should follow the bounds of the 1999 Constitution, which they found more favorable. Buhari's rejection was viewed as part of a broader strategy to maintain the North's hold on power, highlighting the entrenched regional divides that continue to adversely impact on Nigeria's development.

### **Conclusion**

This paper set out to examine the North-South dichotomy in Nigerian politics and its implications for national integration and development. Looking at Nigeria political history, it was found that the North-South dichotomy has adversely impacted on national integration and development, and placed Nigeria in 'a state of arrested development'. It has institutionalized disunity, distrust and suspicion among the citizens. It has greatly affected the siting of state institutions that are meant to provide the general good to all and sundry.

Also examined were the causes of this divides, and although it was found that the dichotomy was deliberately created by the British colonial government to serve their imperialist interest, the actions of the Northern political elites has been largely responsible for sustaining the divide. They have continued to display a huge hunger for

power at the federal level. Each time there was a threat of their losing power in any elections, they would sponsored a coup d'état, as was the case in 1983 and 1993 respectively, when Shagari was toppled and Abiola presidential electoral victory annulled. Thus, since 1960, except for the interregna of January–July 1966; 1976–1979, and August–November 1993, the North had held on to power until 1999. Also, the North has resisted all efforts by the South to restructure the country both political and economically. A major reason for this is the fear of the North losing out in the event that states begin to control their economic resources.

Perhaps, one may conclude that the British, as has been asserted, knew that those they handed power over to would be so preoccupied with the quest for survival and domination of Nigeria that they would not have the time to pull the country out from the dreg of neo-imperialism.<sup>45</sup>

## Endnotes

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