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## The Dilemma of Post-Colonial Nigeria: Restructuring as a Remedial Measure in the Quest for Good Governance

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### Abstract

*The question of whether Nigeria should be restructured amidst the myriad of issues confronting her as a state constituted a major debate in academic discourses. Since independence in 1960, post-colonial Nigeria is characterized by challenges that are not only irreconcilable but are begging for the right antidote. While many feel restructuring is the only panacea to Nigeria's post-colonial challenges, others disagree. This paper, therefore, aimed at interrogating Nigeria's post-colonial challenges while figuring restructuring as the rescue approach. The paper uses primary and secondary data to enhance the objective analysis of the phenomena in focus. It posits that though; restructuring as widely canvassed is imperative in reconciling the inherent contradictions in Nigeria's socio-economic and political architecture, it should not be viewed within the context of divisional or regional creations. The paper argues that restructuring should be done within the context of good governance, ensuring equity and accountability. The paper's conclusion is that restructuring in the context of good governance will mitigate corruption, nepotism, and ethnicity, among others leading to the development of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Restructuring; post-colonial Nigeria; challenges; Remedy

## Introduction

The second decade of the twenty-first century opened with vehement calls for the restructuring of Nigeria's geography, socio-economic and political architecture. The philosophical underpinnings of these calls are rooted in the numerous problems that are plaguing the Nigerian state and begging for the right antidote. Many, including politicians like Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, see restructuring as the only panacea to the country's post-colonial challenges, other like Nigeria's current vice president Professor Yemi Osinbajo does not see or ascribe to the notion of restructuring as the potent panacea to Nigeria's socio-economic and political conundrum.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, amidst this marathon debate, this rather cancerous issue are concomitantly existing, triumphing and excruciating the country's path towards national integration, industrial growth, and development. The history of these issues is traceable to the unholy political solemnization of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by the British imperialist to create Nigeria. Since the colonial marriage, the country has not seen peace. Going down memory lane, immediately after independence, the census crisis of 1961 proved to be a direct effect of the unholy political marriage of 1914. Next to the census crisis were the federal elections crisis, the western regional crisis, Tiv unrest, Igbo pogrom, and the Nigerian civil war. These issues resulted in the collapse of the first republic and questioned the rationality behind the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British.

As it stands, despite possessing significant natural and human resources, Nigeria is underdeveloped and this is partly because of her enormous post-colonial challenges. These challenges are multi-faceted and have placed the country on the verge of political disintegration. Every minute of the day, they manifest in form of sectionalism, nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and marginalization and struggle for the control of the levels of power. Nigeria lacks cohesion among the ethnic and federating units, and this is traced to the fertile seeds of divisiveness that were sowed by the colonialist. The politics of divisiveness, religiosity, and ethnicity, has characterized post-colonial Nigeria. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to historicize Nigeria's post-colonial challenges and examine the viability of restructuring as a potent panacea to this critical political dilemma.

## Conceptual Issues

The term restructuring is the most commonly used word in Nigeria's socio-economic and political lexicon. The word means different things to scholars, public affairs analysts, and even the political class. According to O. Mbanefo, the word restructuring can be understood only when the word structure is clarified. Thus, the simple understanding of structure throws up the notion of patterned arrangement. It brings to mind the idea of parts arranged in a particular way. The word represents and presents a picture of how parts are arranged and how they are connected to make a whole.<sup>2</sup> Restructuring, therefore, means reorganizing the

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<sup>1</sup>The calls for Restructuring have dominated Nigeria's political space. Elder Statesmen, members of the academia, public affairs analysts, and politicians have all joined the restructuring debate. Interestingly, all of them have divergent views as regards what restructuring and what it constitutes. Why do politicians like Alhaji Atiku Abubakar argue that restructuring should be within the context of regionalization, others like Prof Yemi Osinbajo believe it should be within the context of participatory governance. For details consult Kunle Sanni, "Restructuring: Atiku replies Osinbajo, Accuses VP of Revising History" accessed 15 September 2018, [www.premuntimesng.com](http://www.premuntimesng.com).

<sup>2</sup>One Mbanefo, "Restructuring for National Development: Overcoming the 'Dependent' Syndrome" in *South East Journal of Political Science*. No. 2. (July-December 2016): 60-66.

existing arrangements or structures that produce the line-up of political actors, the economic system, the policy-making bodies, and the constituent nature of the Nigerian polity.<sup>3</sup> His definition of the word brings to the intellectual consciousness of scholars about the way and manner the country was created and configured. To restructure, therefore, means to construct or form a new or to provide a new structure.

To others like W. Soyinka, the word restructuring means fiscal federalism.<sup>4</sup> Federalism as a concept connotes a system of government that encourages unity in diversity by allowing constituent units that constitute a state to fashion out ideas that will engender their development. However, in Nigeria, the word federalism only operates in theory. The country only appears to be a federal state but beyond the first four years of independence, the federal principle was simply thrown overboard and deliberate subversion of the rational relations of the states to the centre was embarked upon, setting the balance between federal authority, the state, and even the local government. Nigeria, he said, is the only country that has a massively centralized government.<sup>5</sup> Restructuring, therefore means, the decentralization of Nigeria's current federation.

To others like Y. Osinbajo, the word restructuring does not necessarily mean the reconfiguration of Nigeria's geography or the decentralization of the current federation. It means the restructuring of the mental construct of Nigerians especially the elites to engender good governance.<sup>6</sup> The lack of mutual trust that exists in Nigeria between ethnic nationalities on the one hand and leaders and followers, on the other hand, is occasioned because of bad governance. Besides, the myriads of problems that exist in postcolonial Nigeria, according to him, are products of bad governance. To restructure means to be accountable, to be transparent in handling the affairs of the state which will ultimately result in development.<sup>7</sup> Although his conceptualization of the word has elicited widespread criticism, suffice to say, the virulence of bad governance that is occasioned by nebulous leadership to a larger extent, is responsible for the lack of cohesion that exists among ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Though the paper is not oblivious of the legacies of colonialism on the trajectory of postcolonial challenges, the inability of successive leaders to build a just, prosperous and united Nigeria has ultimately resulted and reincarnated the inherent contradictions that were sowed by the colonialists and are barricading Nigeria's prosperous journey. Given the above, the paper defines restructuring as that conscious attempt by Nigerian leaders of constructing a just society that will be devoid of sectionalism, corruption, religiosity, and ethnicity. This society will only be constructed if good governance is allowed to triumph over bad governance.

### **Post-colonial Challenges of Nigeria in Historical Perspectives**

It is a herculean task to determine with precision the historical origins of Nigeria's post-colonial challenges. However, in attempting to do this, two major factors are to be considered. One, before the arrival of the British, the autonomous communities that were fused to create Nigeria by British had some challenges as evidenced by the civil unrest among the Yoruba city-states and the Hausa-city states. Secondly, there exist some form of

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<sup>3</sup>One Mbanefo, "Restructuring...", 60.

<sup>4</sup>Wole Soyinka, "The Federal Quest" in Aaron T. Gana and Sam G. Egwu (eds), *Federalism in Africa: Framing the National Question*. (Abuja: African Centre for Democratic Governance, 2003), 5.

<sup>5</sup>Wole Soyinka, "The Federal", 7.

<sup>6</sup>Kunle Sanni, "Restructuring,

<sup>7</sup>Kunle Sanni, "Restructuring," accessed 15 September 2018, [www.premiumtimesng.com](http://www.premiumtimesng.com).

expansionist tendencies of pre-colonial states that often, placed one ethnic group against the other as was the case with the civil unrest that characterized the Northern and Lower Benue Valley during the Junkun (Kwararafa) wars of conquest and the Tiv wars against foreigners *Atoatiyve*.<sup>8</sup> Despite this difficulty, Afro-centric scholars have traced the origins of Nigeria's postcolonial challenges to the unlawful activities of the British that started with the British explorative activities that climaxed with the recommendations of the Lord Selborne Niger Committee of 1898 that prescribed the installment amalgamation process of the territories around the Niger area.<sup>9</sup> C. S. Orngu argues that the amalgamation took place in three phases. The first phase, took place in 1900, the second phase was in 1906 and the last and final phase took place on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1914. It was the last phase that brought major challenges in defining the political future of Nigeria in light of cultural diversity and ethnic pluralism.<sup>10</sup>

Again, the reasons why Afro-centric scholars linked Nigeria's postcolonial challenges to the British is premised on the fact that long before the conquest and colonization of Nigeria by the British, much of what constituted Nigeria was made of autonomous states and ethnic groups who can still be linked to modern ethnic groups that trace their historical origins to these states. These states or kingdoms include among others the Yoruba Kingdom, the Benin Kingdom, the Hausa City States; the Igbo decentralized states, and Nupe. In addition, other numerous small states to the West and South of Lake Chad and other states in the Middle Belt like the Tiv, and Idoma, had different languages, customs, traditions, and political institutions.<sup>11</sup>

The economic exigencies in Europe that were occasioned by the industrial revolution necessitated the conquest of Lagos in 1851, its annexation in 1861, and the amalgamation processes that reached Eldorado in 1914. The amalgamation witnessed the forceful fusion (without their consent) of ethnic nationalities that were hitherto autonomous and culturally different to create Nigeria by the British. Thus, the amalgamation of 1914, to many, proved to be the starting point of postcolonial challenges. Illuminating how the forceful creation of Nigeria has been the catalyst of postcolonial challenges, Max Siollun argues:

The country was artificially created by a colonial power without the consent of its citizens. Over 250 ethnic groups were arbitrarily herded together into and non-consensual union by the UK. Nigeria was so ethnically, religiously, and linguistically complex that even some of its leading politicians initially doubted it could constitute a real country. It was infamously referred to as the 'mistake of 1914'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Joe Iyo, "The Origin, Early Migrations and Settlement of the Tiv in the Lower Benue Valley of Nigeria, C. 1475-1900 A. D" in Yakubu A. Ochefu, Joe Iyo and Toryina A. Varvar (eds), *A History of the Peoples of Benue State*. (Makurdi: Aboki, 2007),48-52.

<sup>9</sup>Chris S. Orngu, "Conceptual Perspectives of Culture" in John E. Agaba and Chris S. Orngu (eds), *Perspectives on Nigerian Peoples and Culture*. (Makurdi: A Publication of the Department of History, Benue State University, 2016),1-2.

<sup>10</sup>Chris S. Orngu, "Conceptual," 2.

<sup>11</sup>Ken E. Ina, "State Creation and Minority Agitations in Nigeria, 1954-1999" *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*. Vol. 6 No. 2. (June 2005): 11.

<sup>12</sup>Massillon, *Oil, Politics, and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)*. (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 11-12.

Corroborating the above view, C. S. Orngu observes that:

It is indisputable that Nigeria is an agglomeration of various ethnic groupings. These ethnic groupings significantly differ in their historical, social and cultural make-ups. This reality points to a complex problem of tangible socio-political proportions that constantly manifests in socio-cultural conflicts, ethno-religious intolerance, imagined or real political marginalization, and many others within the Nigerian milieu.<sup>13</sup>

Although most of the post-colonial challenges have their origins in the amalgamation of 1914, they persistently arise because of the improper appreciation of the cultural values, religious beliefs, and political inclinations of others.

Despite the forceful fusion of these ethnic nationalities, the British were not interested in unifying and governing the country as one administrative unit as exemplified in their policies, especially the divide and rule system that accompanied the various constitutions they developed for Nigeria as A. Onoja notes:

Nigeria was never governed as one administrative unit. In the first place, the colonial authorities representing the two halves of Nigeria resisted most attempts to bond the two communities as exemplified in their policies and pronouncements. This exclusivist tendency permeated the crops of 'Nigerians' they tutored towards statehood. In the second place, the colonial tendencies of excluding relations between the two halves chimed into the evolving ethnos of separation that modern politics represented. Nigerians, from both ends, adopted and refined these separatist tendencies preparatory to and following the attainment of flag independence.<sup>14</sup>

To further demonstrate how the British were not interested in uniting and administering Nigeria under one administrative construct, the indirect rule system was introduced. The system itself was greeted with opposition. The opposition, the system received, was because of the alien nature of the concept in some other parts of the country as C.Mgbada argues:

Nigeria's ethnic groups so valued their autonomy and independence that each group fought the British very fiercely to protect and preserve their freedom. At last, all were conquered and gradually brought under one political umbrella called Nigeria. But even at that, these groups never tolerated a uniform pattern of administration. Their socio-cultural differences continued to play out in their reaction to British policies of administration and patterns of governance. This is why the indirect rule system was successful in the North and part of the Western Region while in the Eastern Region, which comprised of South East and South-South Zones today, it was vehemently resisted and the British returned to direct administration.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Chris S. Orngu, "Conceptual," 3.

<sup>14</sup>Adoyi Onoja, "Groups' Resort to Arms in Negotiating Space in Nigeria: The Central Nigeria Exception?" in Chris S. Orngu, Terhemba Wuam & Elijah T. Ikpanor (eds), *Ethnic Minority Agitations and Political Development in Nigeria* 1. (Abuja: Donafrique Publishers, 2015),24-5.

<sup>15</sup>Clement O. Mgbada, "The Igbo Struggle for Political Accommodation in Nigeria since 1970: Issues, Problems and Prospect", in Uche U. Okonkwo, Johncliff Nwadike, Uchenna M. Nwankwo, Ademola Ajayi (eds.), *History, Africa and Development: Festschrift in Honour of Professor U. D. Anyanwu*. (Morrisville: Lulu Press, 2018), 606.

In the Northern region, the Indirect rule system recorded some levels of success and did not solve the issues of ethnic differentials that exist in the region. Rather, the system in an attempt to foist the Caliphate style of administration among the non-Hausa speaking states of the Middle Belt states aggravated the issue of ethnic and cultural divisions as M. Ochonu opines:

This colonial administrative project of politico-cultural uniformity sought to make the Middle Belt more like the Caliphate sector, which was deemed more suitable for the British administrative policy of Indirect Rule. It was not aimed at achieving cultural sameness for its own sake but as a vehicle for ultimately strengthening Indirect Rule in all of northern Nigeria. This was largely a pragmatic administrative project, although pre-existing British and Caliphate narratives about the sociology and politics of northern Nigeria contributed to its formulation as an ideology of colonial rule. But the accentuation of ethno-cultural differences was indispensable to Indirect Rule.<sup>16</sup>

The divide-and-rule ethos of Indirect Rule compartmentalized the “diverse elements” of the Nigerian area and subsequently made national unity difficult. M. Ochuno argued that indirect rule “reinforced ethnic divisions.”<sup>17</sup> This is particularly true when viewed against the backdrop of the fact that instead of addressing the inherent issues that were associated with the indirect rule system, the various British constitutions continued and broadened the scope of the policy of divide and rule that usurped the fear of ethnic domination and the fears of minority groups in Nigeria. For instance, before the Richards constitution of 1946, the British colonial governor of Nigeria, Sir Benard Bourdillion on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1939 divided Southern Nigeria into two halves—Western and Eastern Regions. The division has elicited a plethora of reasons because of the heterogeneous nature of Southern Nigeria. In corroboration, F. Ayokhai argues that:

The justification for dividing the southern region was in recognition of its heterogeneous composition. The division allowed the Yoruba and Igbo peoples in the south some control over their territories. The larger Northern region was retained as one administrative and political unit. The retention of the Northern region as a single political unit was informed by the fact that it was considered homogenous, easy to administer, and generally peaceful.<sup>18</sup>

The balkanization of the region prompted the emergence of some ethnic groups especially, in the Niger Delta as minority groups. This view is further echoed by Ayokhai who stated that: “These splits up, ostensibly for administrative convenience resulted in the balkanization of the territorially contiguous and culturally homogeneous peoples of the Niger Delta into two political and administrative units as minorities”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Moses Ochonu, “Colonialism within Colonialism: The Hausa-Caliphate Imaginary and the British Colonial Administration of the Nigerian Middle Belt” in *African Quarterly Studies*. Series 2 & 3 (June 2008): 96. Accessed 23 March 2020, [www.africa.ufl.edu](http://www.africa.ufl.edu).

<sup>17</sup>Moses Ochonu, “Colonialism, 96.

<sup>18</sup>Fred E. F. Ayokhai, “National Integration and Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Historical Reflections on the Niger Delta Question, 1999-2009” in John Mangut and Dawood O. Egbefo (eds), *The Fourth Republic and National Integration in Nigeria, 1999-2009*. (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2010),29-43.

<sup>19</sup>Fred Ayokhai, “National,” 29.

Sir Arthur Richard who succeeded Bernard Henry Bourdillon and drafted the Richards Constitution regrettably, created the three elephant regions of North, South, and West for Nigeria. It further dichotomized Nigeria along ethno-religious lines. Apart from the Richards Constitution with its trademark of ethno-religious divisions, the McPherson Constitution of 1951 reinforced regionalism. The Constitution, as Achebe argued, divided the country into the Northern, Eastern, and Western Regions with their own respective Houses of Assembly.<sup>20</sup> The provisions of the constitution, further, granted greater autonomy to the regions. The resultant effect of such constitutional provisions was that Nigerians were to see themselves first from the regions they came from rather than seeing themselves as Nigerians.

As such, the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 that followed witnessed extreme regionalism. The three regions of North, West, and East were autonomous and to be headed by premiers. The creation of the office of premier by the constitution was another issue of serious concern. Going by the provisions of the constitution, premiers were to emerge from the political party with the majority of members in the regional assembly. Thus, the victory of the National Council for Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) in the Eastern Regional Assembly made Nnamdi Azikiwe the Premier of the Eastern region, and the victory of the Northern People Congress (NPC) in the North made Ahmadu Bello the Premier of Northern region and the Action Group victory in the western regional assembly made Chief Obafemi Awolowo the Premier of Western Region.<sup>21</sup> This kind of development led to the agitations of the minority groups in these regions regarding their positions—since political parties were formed along ethnic lines. This development, again, led to the scramble for minority groups by the “big three” ethnic groups and the alignment of minority groups to either of the big three for their political survival as Achebe argues:

The minorities of the Niger Delta, Mid-West, and the Middle Belt regions of Nigeria were always uncomfortable with the notion that they had to fit into the tripod of the largest ethnic groups that was Nigeria—Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Many of them—Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Itsekiri, Isang, Urhobo, Anang, and Efik—were from ancient nation-states in their own right. Their leaders, however, often had to subsume their ethnic ambitions within alliances with one of the big three groups to attain greater political results.<sup>22</sup>

The Willink Commission was therefore inaugurated in 1958 to look at the fears of minorities. However, despite its recommendations, minority groups were still alienated and their political survival depended largely on alliance with any of the bigger ethnic groups. The inconsistency in British policies for Nigeria continued to breed conflicts among ethnic nationalities till the country was granted independence in 1960.

### **Historicising the Post-colonial Challenges of Nigeria**

The failure of the British to address the inherent issues in Nigeria’s socio-economic and political architecture meant the continuation of these issues. Thus, when the Union Jack was eventually lowered and the green and white flag hoisted in 1960, the issues began to manifest in form of fears of ethno-religious dominance, nepotism, corruption, and sectionalism have continued to aggravate in size and dimension. The first manifestation of these issues in post-colonial Nigeria occurred in 1962 when the leaders of the Hausa-dominated North rejected the

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<sup>20</sup>Chinua Achebe, *There was a country: A Personal History of Biafra*. (London: Penguin Group, 2012),47.

<sup>21</sup>Baba Aye, “Nigeria: A New Beginning towards the Same end,” accessed 20 June 2019, [www.solidarityandstruggle.blogspot.com](http://www.solidarityandstruggle.blogspot.com).

<sup>22</sup>Chinua Achebe, *There was a country*, 47.

1962 National Population Census and called for the cancellation of the exercise.<sup>23</sup> The reasons for the upright rejection of the figures of the census were rooted in the fear of ethno-religious dominance and the struggle for political control that had its origins in the 1952/53 National Census as L. Diamond notes:

The 1962 national census was not the first in Nigeria to become embroiled in suspicion and controversy. Previous attempts to count the Nigerian population had met with popular distrust and resistance, accusations of regional bias and favouritism, and widespread suspicion of the results. These had all been sharply reflected in the most recent and professional census to date. Widely suspected of a plot to increase the tax burden or to spy on families and their property, the 1952-53 census was avoided by many Nigerians and became engulfed in political controversy when the results, showed a majority of Nigerians in the Northern Region, were used to justify the assignment of half the seats in the Federal legislature to the North. Southern politicians alleged that the British administrators had inflated the Northern population figures to ensure that political power in the country remained with the northern politicians.<sup>24</sup>

The Southern elites believed the population figures in the North were inflated by the British to ensure the continued dominance of the North in the federal project. Thus, as preparations for a national census began in postcolonial Nigeria, the implications for the balance of power shaped the meaning of the census. L. Diamond, further argued that since the 1952 census, people had come to understand the degree to which recorded human numbers determined the political weight of towns, districts, provinces, and regions—and the proportion of government amenities distributed to them. This thinking informed the census campaigns that characterized Southern Nigeria as he notes:

The 1962 census had become the focus of intense anticipation for Southern Nigerian politicians. They hoped, and apparently, many of them sincerely expected, that it would show a population majority for the South and thus end the North's majority in the Federal House of Representatives. This had become an especially urgent priority with the NPC's sweeping victory in the 1961 Northern elections and its achievement of a unilateral majority in the Federal House...literate people became over-zealous about the value of a census and they were prepared to do anything, not only to enumerate all their people but also, if possible, to engage in double or triple counts. The political leaders also became even more enthusiastic than others about the census returns, because they regarded them as an instrument of political power.<sup>25</sup>

The horse-trading that characterized the exercise saw the emergence, in numbers, for the first time of people in the West and Eastern regions over the Northern region. Leaders from the North, therefore, rejected the results that it was inflated. It was in their thinking that if allowed to be gazetted, the South will have the majority of the seats in the National Parliament as enshrined

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<sup>23</sup>Peter M. Kertyo, "National Security Quagmire in Nigeria: Implications on Nigeria's Fourth Democratic Experience," in Shuaibu Ibrahim, Odong E. Tangban, Adam O. Ahmed, Chukwuma C. Osakwe (eds), *Defence, Security, Economy and Development in Nigeria 2*. (London: Aboki Publishers, 2017), 429.

<sup>24</sup>Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic*. (London: Palgrave, 1988),131.

<sup>25</sup>Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity*. 131.



in the Independence Constitution. The 1963 census figures were equally rejected by the leaders of the three regions and contested at the Supreme Court.

After the census debacle, postcolonial Nigeria was suck and has continued to be embroiled in election crises that are rooted in fears of ethno-religious dominance and the struggle for the control of the levers of power. The first such crisis occurred in 1964-5 when the political elites of the West and Eastern regions rejected the election results of the 1964 federal elections. The crisis was occasioned by feelings of marginalization, mutual suspicion, fear of ethnic domination and the struggle for power between the North and the South and the short-changed feelings the southerners had over the results of the elections in Northern Nigeria.<sup>26</sup> The results of the elections showed the dominance of the north over the south in the number of seats in the federal parliament. A breakdown of the number of seats in the parliament showed—the Northern People's Congress (NPC) a Hausa/Fulani-dominated party had 162 seats, the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) an Igbo-dominated party had 84 seats, the Action Group (AG) a Yoruba dominated party had 21 seats and Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) a political party that emerged out of the Yoruba/Hausa-Fulani alliance had 38 seats.<sup>27</sup> The Crisis and the Western Regional elections conundrum which saw the emergence of Chief Akintola as the country's "High priest of election rigging"<sup>28</sup> subsequently led to the collapse of the first republic in 1966 as T. Edoh postulates:

The elections were so violent and the aftermath so inhibitive to political stability that Nigerians believed that the military was the only institution in the country that could stop the political chaos and restore political order and stability as well as public confidence. As such, the coup of 1966 witnessed some prominent Nigerian political leaders as well as some high-ranking military officers assassinated.<sup>29</sup>

The way and manner the January 15 1966 coup was planned, which led to the execution of some high-ranking military and political leaders in the country usurped ethnic hatred in the army. The events that followed the coup were the Igbo pogrom and other state issues that climaxed with the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.

After nine years of military rule, the second republic (1979-1983) that followed was not devoid of electoral crisis. The 2/3 and 12 states majority controversy that was resolved by Professor Chike Obi's electoral arithmetic almost truncated the transition programme of 1979 and the landslide mentality of the 1983 general elections<sup>30</sup> aggravated the Hausa/Yoruba political animosity that had its origins in the ethnic politics of the First Republic that saw the conviction and imprisonment of the AG leader Chief Obafemi Awolowo for treason. The country witnessed another electoral crisis in 1993. The crisis was occasioned by the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential elections by General Ibrahim Babangida's military junta. The annulment of the free and fairest election in the political history of Nigeria elicited widespread criticism and ethnic tension that threatened the corporeality of Nigeria. Reasons for the annulment of the elections have remained in secrecy. However, scholars, like O. Omoruyi have argued that the elections

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<sup>26</sup>Peter M. Kertyo, "National, 429.

<sup>27</sup>Peter M. Kertyo, "National, 429-430.

<sup>28</sup>Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics*. 19.

<sup>29</sup>Tony Edoh, "Corruption: Political Parties and the Electoral Process in Nigeria," in Mvendaga Jibo and Anthonia T. Simbine (eds), *Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Politics*.(Ibadan: Jodad Publishers, 2003),72.

<sup>30</sup>FestusIyayi, "Elections, INEC and the Problem of Election Mindsets in Nigeria" in *Electoral Journal*. Vol. 1, no. 1, (July 2007): 5-10.

were annulled because of the fear of the military for a possible shift of power from the North to the South and from the geo-ethno-military-ruling clique to Nigerian voters.<sup>31</sup> With the annulment, calls for restructuring of Nigeria's political construct dominated the public space.

With the return of democratic government in 1999, the electoral crisis continued. The reasons for the continuation of the crisis are still rooted in the fear of ethno-religious dominance. While 1999, 2003, and 2007 general elections were only characterized by manipulations, the virulent nature of the 2011 and 2015 elections, further, exposed the fragility of Nigeria and threatened the country's peace and stability. For instance, the 2011 elections were said to be successful and accorded free and fair status by international monitoring groups,<sup>32</sup> the widely acclaimed success of the elections was dented by post-election violence that broke out following the announcement of the results of the presidential elections in five Northern states of Adamawa, Kaduna, Kano, Gombe, and Bauchi resulting in the death of some National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members. Although, the 2015 general elections were peaceful and accorded free and status,<sup>33</sup> the fierce political battle between the North and South was at full glare during the preparation, conduct, and collation of results.

Apart from the fear of ethno-religious domination that always precipitates an electoral crisis, the structural imbalance between the North and South and the minority question has remained a serious postcolonial challenge. The structural imbalance, according to Senator Ike Ekweremadu, is responsible for the increased levels of insecurity in the country and the Igbo are at the receiving end of the structural defect occasioned by Nigeria's 'awkward' federalism that is evidenced by the alienation and exclusion of the Igbo as he puts it:

The cross of *Ndi'gbo* in the Nigerian state is heavy; Igbo marginalization is real, and now borders on deliberate exclusion. But the worst disadvantages suffered by *Ndi'gbo* are not just imposed by structural imbalances such as fewer states and local governments or the lesser revenue accruals, political representation, federal appointments arising from the imbalances, and wilful injustice.<sup>34</sup>

E. Okafor aligns his thoughts with the above submissions when he opines that:

After the civil war of 1970, the Igbo are the most marginalized ethnic group in Nigeria. politically, the Igbo are the only ethnic group among the three major ethnic groups that is yet to produce a president. The south Eastern region has the lowest number of senators and House of Representatives seats in Nigeria. The Igbo have fewer federal appointments. There is no federal presence in the southeast as evidenced by the nature of horrible roads that you visibly see in the region. The marginalization of the Igbo will only cease if they are allowed to leave Nigeria for the Hausa-Fulani North.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Omo Omoruyi, "The Secret Behind the Annulment of June 12 and what Abiola Died for" accessed 28 October 2020, [www.nigerianvoice.com](http://www.nigerianvoice.com).

<sup>32</sup>"Nigeria: Final Report-General Elections April 2011," accessed 25 April 2020, [www.reliefwebint](http://www.reliefwebint).

<sup>33</sup>Egodi Uchendu, "Preface," in Egodi Uchendu (ed), *Nigeria's Resource Wars*. (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2020), xxvi.

<sup>34</sup>Leke Baiyewu, "Nigeria's 'awkward' Federalism cause of Igbo Exclusion—Ekweremadu" accessed 28 August 2018, [www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com).

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Emeka Okafor, born 1961, Public Servant, Odili Hall, Nsukka, 28 August 2018.

Although, it is a truism that the McPherson Constitution gave impetus to the structural imbalance and the fears of minority groups in Nigeria, the existence of these two perennial issues can be linked to the penchant for dominance and (have all) of the national cake that has since dominated the consciousness of the political elites. This ugly development, as earlier alluded to, has caused and exacerbated sectional violence.

The structural imbalance, no doubt, aggravated sectional violence in Nigeria. The violent protests and militancy in the Niger-Delta region over perceived injustice in resource distribution, the Itsekiri-Ijaw violence in the Delta, the reincarnation of the Ife-Modakeke communal violence, the salient Tiv-Idoma political feud, the menace of Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign of Biafra (MASSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) virulent attempt to resuscitate Biafra, the *Sharia* crisis, the South-South demand for the control of its resources, Boko Haram, Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and all the numerous inter-ethnic/religious conflicts in various states across the country are all part of postcolonial challenges that are based on the historical structures of mutual fears and suspicions among Nigerian groups in a competitive process. These issues have elicited calls for a Sovereign National Conference, clamour for the rotational presidency, state creation, regionalization, and restructuring as possible panaceas to the inherent lacunas in Nigeria's socio-economic and political architecture that are impeding the nation's national integration journey.

### **The Potency of Restructuring as a Panacea to Post-colonial Challenges in Nigeria**

Restructuring means different things to different people. For others, the term entails regionalization, to others, it means resource control. Others see restructuring as state creation. One thing that is fundamental about the word is the fact that the word means the engineering process of plausible and practical approaches to addressing post-colonial challenges. These approaches are misconstrued by successive leadership. For instance, most Nigerians consider the word restructuring to mean the creation of regions, states, and divisions. Their understanding of the word to mean divisional creations has its origin during the colonial period when the British thought the only plausible approach to addressing colonial challenges was to divide the people into regions. The first was the Richards Constitution of 1946 which divided Nigeria into three regions and the consolidation of regionalization by the Lyttleton and the Independence Constitutions of 1954 and 1958 respectively. Thus, immediately after independence, the Alhaji Tafawa Balewa NPC-led government believed the immediate and plausible panacea for the minority question in Southern Nigeria was the creation of the mid-western region in 1963.<sup>36</sup> Even with the creation of the region, the years between 1963-1966 were turbulent—minority issues and the general state of insecurity that was occasioned as a result of bad governance, eventually, resulted at the end of the first republic in 1966.

With the incursion of the military into Nigeria's political space in 1966, it was thought, that the military government of General Aguiyi Ironsi will engineer concerted efforts of addressing the country's turbulent challenges that motivated the January 15, 1966 coup. These efforts, it was thought will be centred on equity, fairness, and giving all the ethnic nationalities a sense of belonging especially amidst the controversies that surrendered the January coup and his subsequent ascension. However, the decisions of his military government to collapse the regional structure and introduce a unitary system of government via decree No 34 worsen inter-ethnic relations. Decree No. 34 was viewed with suspicion and received "inner" condemnation from northern military officers. The reasons for the

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<sup>36</sup>Igho O. Natufe, "Midwest State and the Future of Nigerian Federalism: An Essay in Honour of Midwest History Month 1999" accessed 3 March 2021, [www.dawodu.net](http://www.dawodu.net).

condemnation were located in the events of the January 15 1966 coup that eliminated Northern military and political officers. The coup eliminated senior military officers from the north as captured by C. Mgbada:

The only senior military officer of the rank of a Lieutenant Colonel from the entire North who was not killed was Yakubu Gowon. This was because about the time of the coup, he was supposed to be on a course in the U.K. but, unknown to the coup plotters, he had returned to Nigeria on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> January completely unaware of the serious plot the Igbo officers had hatched (SIC).<sup>37</sup>

With the vehement belief of the Northern elites that the coup was an attempt by the Igbo to dominate the country's political space, the appeared lopsided nature of appointments in the short-lived General Aguiyi Ironsi-led government sparked ethnic tension. For instance, the decision of his government to constitute a three-man advisory council that was made up of three highly respected Igbo personalities—Chief Francis Nwokedi, Dr. Pius Charles Nwabafor Okigbo, and Col. Patrick Anwunah and the replacement of the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Dr. Taslim Olawale Elias with Chief Gabriel Chike Michael Onyiuke (SAN) received wide spread condemnation.<sup>38</sup> The appointments rekindled the earlier belief by Northern military officers that the January 1966 coup was an attempt by the Igbo to take over Nigeria. This thinking generated crises within the military that led to the brutal murder of General Aguiyi Ironsi via the July 29 1966 military coup.

The ascension of General Yakubu Gowon witnessed the continuation of restructuring within the context of divisional creations or state creation as a panacea to postcolonial challenges. Decree NO 14 of 1967 that created twelve states with the sole objective of dismantling the regional system that was thought to be responsible for the myriads of problems that confronted the first republic was greeted with opposition. The state creation exercise of 1967 did not solve the inherent and prevalent issues of nation building as Achebe notes:

The official position of the federal government was that the creation of new states was an important move to foster unity and stability in Nigeria. Many suspect a more Machiavellian scheme at work. Gowon, understanding inter-ethnic rivalry, suspected that dividing the East into four states, land locking the Igbos into East Central State, and isolating the oil-producing areas of Nigeria outside Igbo land, would weaken secessionist sentiments in the region and empower minority groups that lived in oil-producing regions to stand up to what they had already dreaded for years—the prospects of Igbo domination. On May 30, 1967, Ojukwu citing a variety of malevolent acts directed at the mainly Igbo Easterners—such as the pogrom that claimed over thirty thousand lives...the organized genocide ... proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria.<sup>39</sup>

The state creation exercise of General Gowon, as seen above did not foster unity in Nigeria. Rather, it deepened the gulf in Hausa-Fulani and Igbo relations that assumed catastrophic dimensions in January 1966. The exercise by General Gowon and other military leaders according to O. Mbanefo:

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<sup>37</sup>Clement O. Mgbada, "The Igbo, 608.

<sup>38</sup>Eric Teniola, "The Past and Present Wahala of Decree 34 of 1966 (I)" accessed 24 July 2020, [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com).

<sup>39</sup>Chinua Achebe, *There was a country*, 91-2.

were driven by ethnic/sectional considerations. The main aim was to manipulate the system for parochial interest. Because all the state creation exercises undertaken in the country took place under the incumbency of Northerners as Prime Minister/Military Heads of State, it remains clear that the Southern part was granted more regions at a point when having one region favoured the North, but the trend was reversed when having more states offers a greater advantage.<sup>40</sup>

The logic behind his assertion can be traced to the structural imbalance that exists in the country. This imbalance was created by the British, expanded by the military, and sustained by the ruling political class. As it stands, the state creation exercise from 1976-1996 has not adequately provided the needed bastion for postcolonial challenges. Rather, it has continued to breed issues that are centred on marginalization, alienation, and exclusion. Take for instance, at the state level, before the creation of the Benue-Plateau state in 1967, the Tiv and other minority groups in the Middle Belt region complained of their alienation and marginalization by the Hausa-Fulani-led NPC government in Northern Nigeria. Their persistent complaints and fears of Hausa-Fulani dominance were the reasons for the Tiv unrest of 1963-65.<sup>41</sup> With the creation of the Benue-Plateau state in 1967 for the minority groups of Central Nigeria, partly because of their persistent cries of marginalization, the Tiv and other groups complained of marginalization in the Joseph Gomwalk government.<sup>42</sup> When Benue state was eventually created as a panacea for the alleged and perceived marginalization of the Igala, Tiv, Idoma, the Igala and Idoma complained of Tiv marginalization. Again, when the Kogi state was created in 1991 to give the Igala sense of belonging, the Idoma complains of the Tiv marginalization in Benue and are agitating for the creation of the Apa state. The Igbira and Kabba on the other hand, persistently express their perceived marginalization the Igala.

At the national level, the creation of six geo-political zones of North East, North West, North Central, South East, South West, and South-South during the Constitutional Drafting Conference of 1995 for purposes of administrative governance have not forged national unity and averted the fears of ethno-religious dominance that has characterized postcolonial Nigeria. Even with the creation of geo-political zones, some zones are short-changed in the national scheme of things. For instance, the South East has five states. Again, since the creation of the six geo-political zones, the South East Zone is yet to produce a democratically elected president in Nigeria. This development is emphasised by C. O. Mgbada who insists that:

the Igbo people cannot become president of Nigeria over 52 years after the Nigeria Biafra War makes it obvious that they do have not full citizenship and a sense of equal accommodation in the country. From 1966 to date (2018), we have had General Yakubu Gowon, 1966-1975, General Murtala Mohammed, 1975-1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo, 1976-1979; Alhaji Shehu Shagari, 1979-1983, General Muhammadu Buhari, 1983-1985; General Ibrahim Babangida, 1985-1993; Chief Ernest Shonekon...General Sani Abacha, 1993-1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, 1998-1999; Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, 1999-2007; Alhaji Musa Yar'adua, 2007-2010, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, 2010-2015 and President Muhammadu Buhari, 2015 till date.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ogene Mbanefo, "Restructuring," 67.

<sup>41</sup>Mvendaga Jibo, *Tiv Politics Since 1959*. (Kastina-Ala: Mandate International Limited, 1993), 5-8.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Emmanuel Ada, born 1949, Farmer, High-Level, Makurdi, 23 September 2018.

<sup>43</sup>Clement. O Mgbada, "The Igbo, 611.

From the above, it's crystal clear that the South East zone has not produced a military or civilian leader after the civil war and the creation of geo-political zones. The same is with the North Central zone which has continued to seek recognition and extricate itself from the York of Hausa-Fulani domination. Leaders of these zones have continued to agitate for fairness and often, complain of marginalization in the Nigerian project. The point, therefore is, that postcolonial Nigeria has attempted to give its nationalities some sense of belonging along the lines of divisional creations. It has restructured the country several times through state and local government creation exercises, federal character principle, quota system, and rotational principles in the distribution of political appointments into the federal cabinet. However, all of these mechanisms have failed the concerns raised by the fears and facts of marginalization, neglect, oppression, and exploitation. This is because of bad governance that successive leaders have enthroned in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Issues of nepotism and favouritism have continued despite the restructuring processes that have characterized Nigeria.

### **Conclusion: Towards Restructuring within the Context of Good Governance**

The forgoing discourse attested that post-colonial Nigeria is confronted with a lot of challenges that are unhealthy to its development. These challenges, no doubts, have their origins in the recommendations of the Lord Selborne Niger Committee of 1898 that prescribed the instalment amalgamation process of the territories around the Niger area that climaxed with the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates that created Nigeria. With the amalgamation, the struggle for the control of the socio-economic and political architecture of Nigeria among the various ethnic groups that were amalgamated began. The race was characterized by animosity, fear of ethno-religious dominance, and mutual distrust. The failure of the British to consciously induce good governance but resorted to the restructuring of Nigeria within the context of regional creations as evidenced by the Richards, McPherson, and Lyttleton Constitutions did not solve colonial challenges but rather, exacerbated political animosity among ethnic nationalities. Thus, when independence was granted in 1960 with ethnic leaders as nationalists and national leaders, the struggle for political control and dominance continued. Regrettably, just as the British colonialist, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's led government followed the British path of divisional creation as a panacea to postcolonial challenges, especially in the wake of the continued cry by ethnic minorities in the South with the creation of Midwestern Nigeria in 1963. The creation exercise did not in any way avert the issue of minority agitations. The General Aguiyi Ironsi Unification Decree that collapsed regionalism and the various state creation exercises that characterized the military region, as earlier noted, failed to ca the long-elusive unity that has characterized postcolonial Nigeria. The reasons behind the failure of such exercises can be explained within the context of parochial thinking of successive leadership. As calls for restructuring in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria have continued to dominate the political space, restructuring within the context of divisional creations, reverse to regionalization and state creations, the paper argued, cannot solve the issues of corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, herdsmen/farmers problematic, marginalization, alienation, exclusion, exploitation, minority question and oppression. What is needed now is for Nigeria and Nigerians to develop strong institutions and evolve an ideology that will enhance good governance. Good governance will guarantee participatory democracy, unite Nigerians and launch the country on the path of harmonious existence and industrial growth and development. Regional creations or state creations as earlier alluded to have not reconciled the inherent contradictions in Nigeria's socio-economic and political make-up. Again, there is an urgent need for constitutional amendments that will review downwards, the salaries and allowance of political office officer holders to make politics less attractive, cost politicians to vacate their elective positions in an event of party defection, regulate religious activities and dissolve the current federal structure. The paper argued that if good governance is achieved there will be a constitution amendment to address the

aforementioned issues. The conclusion is that issues of corruption, nepotism, and marginalization will to a larger extent die a natural death. Nigeria will be a better place for human habitation and development will be achieved in all sectors of the society.