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Centre‑Periphery Politics and The Underdevelopment of South‑Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract
Centre‑periphery politics describes power relations between the Federal Government ("the centre") and other constituent regions ("the periphery") of Nigeria. This paper analyses how centre‑periphery politics has historically disadvantaged the South‑East geo‑political zone and fuelled underdevelopment in the region. Using archival research, key informant interviews, and comparative analyses, this paper demonstrates how the impacts of colonialism, constitutional frameworks, resource control, political exclusion and infrastructure deficits create structural disadvantages for the South‑East geo‑political zone vis‑à‑vis other regions. Despite Nigeria's professed federal character and egalitarian ideals, the study finds that: (1) South‑Eastern Nigeria has historically borne the brunt of economic marginalization in terms of federally disbursed revenue and presence in nationally significant infrastructural projects; (2) federal power — from executive leadership to legislative representation to bureaucratic appointments — is weaker from this region than from its quota of the national population; (3) few channels exist for the political devolution of power from the centre to the periphery, and structural barriers limit the extent to which these channels operate; and (4) feelings of marginalization and perceptions of inequality drive civic unrest and agitation, community apathy, and brain drain from the region. The paper concludes that Nigeria will not resolve underdevelopment in South‑Eastern Nigeria until it remedies power asymmetries in resource control, ensures fair representation of the South‑East in political power structures, amends constitutional defects that hamper equitable federalism, and addresses infrastructure deficits in the region.

Keywords: *Centre-Periphery Politics, Underdevelopment, Political Marginalization, Federalism.*

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I. Introduction

Within Nigeria' Political Economy and ongoing conversations surrounding regional development, marginalization, and federal resource allocation, the Centre–Periphery paradigm plays a critical role. This framework, derived from dependency theory and political economy, positions the "centre" as the dominant force with access to power, resources, and decision-making authority while depicting the "periphery" as marginalized regions with limited influence over national affairs (Ake, 1981; Rodney, 1972). From Independence to present times, South-Eastern Nigeria and its majority Igbo inhabitants have historically occupied a peripheral position in Nigeria's federal structure. Although one of Nigeria' most populous and economically-active regions, the area faces political marginalization and developmental disparities relative to other regions. Several factors contribute to this systemic marginalization. First, the geopolitical configuration of the Nigerian state post-colonialism, combined with the Nigerians Civil War (1967-1970), positioned the South-East at a structural disadvantage in Nigeria' political landscape (Ibeanu, 2008). Second, power concentrated in Lagosand by extension ACPIC, heightened the marginalization of peripheral regions like the South- East during military regimes and post-military Nigeria through the democratic spread of political offices and federal patronage (Okonta, 2021).

Nigeria' Federal character principle, which shapes political appointments and resource distribution, often works against the people of South- Eastern Nigeria in practice due to the region's smaller population size. The perception of marginalization is further compounded by developmental indicators such as infrastructure

and access to social investment programs which lag behind other regions (Nworah & Onuigbo, 2022). While Nigeria' GDP would not exist with significant contributions from the enterprising Southeast – including remittances from the large Igbo diaspora, the region remains politically underrepresented in the federal scheme of things, particularly in terms of ministerial appointments and lacks relative share of capital projects and social investment funds (Ezeibe & Eze, 2017). Centre-periphery politics have also given rise to increasing agitation from South-Eastern Nigerians who feel marginalized – promoting regional solidarity movements and in some extreme cases, separatist rhetoric (Osimen, Daudu, & Chidozie, 2025). Consequently, this study explores how Nigeria' centralized federalism has influenced and exacerbated underdevelopment in South- Eastern Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

One of the main reasons for the continued marginalization of South- Eastern Nigeria is down the apparent imbalance of power that exists between the federal government/state and other subnational entities that dominate them. There are other factors like poor leadership at the subnational level, lack of cohesion among elites, corruption etc also play a part in the underdevelopment of the South- East Nigeria. However, these factors alongside the inability of Nigeria's current federation to accommodate its humongous human and natural resources have left the South- East geographically marginalized (a remnant of the colonial era and uneven constitution) and politically marginalized (through lack of federal presence/investment in terms of infrastructure and economic opportunities).

As if that is not enough the region also continues to lose its voice in the country' executive branch of government and other critical platforms where decisions are made thus hindering its ability to push through developmental programs that will better the lives of its people. Until there are major changes in the Nigerian federation that will address these concerns, the South-East will continue to be marginalized and may experience development setback that could threaten the country's fragile democracy as people continue to lose trust in the government and massive brain drain occurs.

Aim and Research Question

The study appraised the dynamics of center-periphery relations of underdevelopment issues plaguing South-Eastern Nigeria. This objective will be pursued through an exploration questions of: How have historical precedents and constitutional frameworks entrenched the South-East's peripheral role in Nigeria's federal structure? Are there elements within the present federal system, particularly in the distribution of revenue and infrastructural development that disproportionately marginalize the South-East? In what manner does the political alienation experienced by the South-East foster socio-political instability and the emigration of skilled individuals from the region? What reforms are required within the Nigerian federalist model to promote balanced development and authentic inclusivity for the South-Eastern region?

II. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative research approach. Qualitative data drawn mainly from primary and secondary sources forms the basis for analyses in this study. Primary sources of data include semi-structured interviews conducted among political elites, policy makers, community leaders, civil society organizations and stakeholders drawn from the six states that make up South- East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Secondary sources of data include government documents, policy reports, archives, journals, books and Newspapers, other magazines on federalism, marginalization, revenue allocation and development in Nigeria. Purposive sampling method will be used for this study. Respondents with in-depth knowledge about the research questions will be selected. We will conduct thematic content analysis of our qualitative data. Themes will be emergent from analysis and will allow us to interpret patterns and perspectives shared by respondents on the issues of centre-periphery relations. The theoretical lenses that will be used to interpret our findings include dependency theory, political economy and federalism theory.

III. Literature Review

World-System theory is a social science paradigm that has been used to understand global inequality, structural dependencies and various historical aspects of Capitalism. First developed in the 1970s by Immanuel Wallerstein building upon the dependency theory and centre–periphery models of scholars like Raúl Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin, World system theory conceptualizes the modern world as a global economic system characterized by a tiered division of labor between "core" and "peripheral" areas of production. Simply put, Wallerstein described the world-system as "a social system having boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence" (1974, p. 383).

The system's economic structure organizes trade and production on a global scale while its political structures influence states behaviour, affecting societies and cultures around the world (Wallerstein, 2004). Center-Periphery relationship is defined beyond the political structure of states. The centre (or core) refers to

the dominant developed countries that control capital, technology, labour and international markets while the periphery (or satellites) refers to the politically weak and underdeveloped parts of the world that provide raw materials, cheap labour forces and markets for core production. The Semi-periphery refers to those in-between countries that neither dominate nor are dominated in the world economy but act as a buffer zone (Chase- Dunn, 1998). The three different zones work together to create global inequality through trade, investments and political control.

Simply put, according to Simon, (2011), the centre-periphery model is primarily a framework or lens used by scholars in the fields of political economy and development studies to analyse uneven or incomplete development, as well as structural inequalities that exist within and between regions. The model originated from dependency theory and world-systems theory, describing economic and political relations in core (centre) and peripheral (periphery) territories. Unequal development occurs when the core exploits the periphery leading to persistent underdevelopment. Conceptual roots of world system theory can be traced back to the beginnings of dependency theory and what eventually became the Latin American structuralist school. Prebisch & Singer noted as early as 19the century that the terms of trade between the prices of primary goods and the prices of manufactured goods were declining in favour of the industrialized countries.

Dependency theorists soon followed this lead and argued that capitalism was built in such a way that it was structured to be biased against the economic interests of peripheral countries creating what Frank called development of underdevelopment". Building on these ideas Wallerstein first described the world-system as a historical-structural model beginning in the 16th century. He argued that since capitalism originated in Western Europe during the rise of the modern world economy, the world has been a single integrated economy based on a division of labor and on unequal exchange. Wallerstein points out that the modern world capitalist system came into being during the long 16th century with the rise of capitalist economies. The world was interconnected through trade and the emergence of European colonized settlements abroad and Europe eventually managed to split Africa and Asia into countries and politically manipulate people to do their bidding. This created an international division of labor.

The division of labor mentioned was not only economical but institutional and political. This created institutional exploitation and put some countries at a hierarchical advantage over others. Exploitation came in the form of core powers like Britain, France and the Netherlands taking advantage of the peripheries which were made up of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans by way of colonialism. They created a world-system where the core worked for the benefit of the western elite. In Africa, these western nations took their land and used them for slave trade. Unequal exchange continued after colonialism, aided by the control of finance, technology and manufacturing in the core. Semi-peripheral states fell in between these two acting as a buffer. The world system theory argues that once these countries were brought into the world system their position was never changed because they had already been exploited for their resources and used as a source of slave trade.

Components of the world-System

The world-system operates on a tier based hierarchical structure composed of three main zones which are;

i. **Core states:** States in the core region of the world-system are characterized as highly industrial, diverse, urbanized and technologically advanced. The core controls and dictates the conditions of trade and economic activity at the international level and has strong governments, bureaucracies, and social worth-protecting systems that allow capitalism to flourish. States that have historically been considered part of the core include those in Western Europe, North America and later Japan. Characteristics of the core include capital intensive production and high wages. (Wallerstein, 1980).

ii. Periphery states: These are states on the other hand are dependent on core countries for goods and have what is considered underdeveloped economies. Although similar to core countries in terms of having infrastructure and industry, Periphery states tend to have weak states that are vulnerable to corruption, external control, and/or chaos. An example of this is most of what is referred to as sub-Sahara Africa. They export raw material, food and low value commodities to core states and import manufactured goods. Production is labour intensive and wages are low, with workers tending to be unorganized. Examples of periphery states would include Latin America and parts of Asia (South Asia) (Rodney, 1972).

iii. Semi-periphery states: These are states that fall in between these two distinct zones and can include states that have been able to recently diversify their economies or states that have been able to industrialize but who source technology and/or raw materials from core countries. Semi-peripheral states tend to act as a buffer for the world system and prevent polarization of the core and periphery. Examples of these states include Brazil, china (depending on the century) and South Africa. (Chase- Dunn, 1998). Critically, the world-system is not static and states can move from one zone to another with shifts in production and innovation, though there is a tendency to reproduce unequal relations through processes of competition and monopolization.

Mechanism of Perpetuation

World systems are based on unequal exchange whereby the periphery provides resources to the core and in return, the core upkeeps the periphery by providing goods and services in what is termed an exploitation of resources. The main mechanism that perpetuates this relationship is as follows;

Exchange of resources: Core states produce high valued goods and sell them at a higher price on the world market. Periphery states provide raw materials and low valued resources whose prices on the world market are prone to fluctuations and long term declines. This forces periphery states to buy more from core states in what is an uneven trade relationship that favours the core at the expense of the periphery (Emmanuel, 1972).

Factors that help maintain this unequal exchange relationship include;

• **Different rate of Capital Investment and control:** Although core states may provide jobs for the people in periphery states via multinational corporations they take the profits that they earned and place them in their own countries. This results in very little capital remaining in periphery states.

• **Different access to technology:** peripheral states tend to have to buy expensive technology from core states and often need to import experts to man their equipment. This creates dependency on core states.

• **Different class of loans and financial control:** institutions like the IMF and World bank offer loans to peripheral states. The issues with these loans are the conditions that are often attached to them and how they demand repayments therefore promoting dependency. (Amin, 1976)

• **Different political power:** Core states use diplomacy, globalization, military might and political alliances to control the game.

World systems Theory has been used to analyze development and dependency not only between countries but within them. Many development states tend to have hierarchical arrangements that work to keep the elite class at the top.

Africa and the world system theory

Similar arrangements can be seen in Africa. Colonialism formed the foundation of this hierarchy by placing most of the political and economic activity in the regions that served as colonial administrative centres while rural and underdeveloped regions of the country were somewhat neglected. Upon independence, states were left with developing the country from the lens of these already established centres. In Nigeria for instance, the federal government serves as the centre. It controls all the countries oil revenues and disburses statutory allocations to the states. Using world systems theory, one could argue that the Niger delta who produces this resource and other marginalized regions are the periphery. (Onyeukwu, 2021; Wonah, 2019).

Critiques of the World-System Theory

World-system theory is not without criticism. World-System theory has been criticized on the basis of economic determinism (overemphasis on how the economy determines all social and cultural factors). Scholars have criticized Wallerstein' narrative for downplaying human agency, ideas, and local institutional structures that shape development trajectories (Skocpol, 1977). Others criticize world-system theory for discounting the possibility of development projects instigated from within the periphery itself whether by the state, through revolutionary technology, or regional trade and alliances (Evans, 1979).

Eurocentrism has also been used to criticize world-system theory. Although world-system theory attempts to decenter Western hegemony, European historical trajectory is considered the ideal prototype of capitalist development. Post-colonial theorists criticize world-system theory's dismissal of indigenous ways of knowing and organizing production that do not fall into traditional capitalist frameworks (Amin, 1989). Others critique world-System theory's static division of labor during modern globalization as it fails to account for emerging economies like China and India disrupting the current core–periphery system (Arrighi, 1994). However, many critiques of world-system theory recognize its utility in macro historical analysis of global inequality. World-system theory focuses on systemic factors of power and development that allow global inequity to continue.

Gap in the Literature

While world-system theory was originally intended as a way of thinking about capitalism on a global scale, many academics have used its concepts to analyze how these dynamics play out on a regional and national scale. This is because many of the economic and power dynamics that flow from centre–periphery relations on a global scale can just as easily be applied to regions within a given state. Since most states concentrate financial capital, administrative power, and economic development in certain urban centres at the expense of outlying regions, world-ism theory can explain patterns of uneven development that occur within states just as it does on a global scale. Core–periphery dynamics are often replicated within states, with the national centre extracting resources and power from outlying peripheries. This has created internal contradictions and dependencies that can reproduce the dynamics of external dependency; the theory thus "focuses on how elites, institutions and structures create inequality within a state" (Ake, 1981; Rodney, 1972).

In addition to becoming locked into an imperialist world economy, postcolonial states also replicate the centre–periphery dynamics that were created during colonialism.

Since most colonial powers ruled through only a handful of administrative or coastal centres, the rural and frontier areas of many African states were left largely excluded from national politics. Independent African states did not reverse this trend like some Northern leaders did after they left their respective colonies. To the contrary, African States increased centralization of fiscal extraction, state elites captured most development for themselves, and uneven public investment continued this trend. This created "internal dependency" through which the national state itself acts as a mediator between the cores and peripheries of the world system, squeezing out surplus from the peripheries and upholding the power of the national centre (Amin, 1976; Ake, 1981). Internal dependency is thus a useful way of analyzing why so many developing countries, Nigeria included, experience chronic regional inequalities, instability, and conflict. Nigeria's federal system is wracked with centre–periphery tensions that often manifest in political instability or violent conflict.

While most of the literature I have read concerns itself with the Niger Delta, Middle Belt, or other regions of Nigeria with prominent resource or minority questions, there were a select few that focused on the South‐East exclusively in regard to centre‐periphery development. What I found interesting was that many of the themes that show up in literatures about other regions of Nigeria showed up here as well. Whether it was the Niger Delta or other resource-rich regions like Rivers State, many of the same patterns of extraction without integral local development, environmental degradation, lack of infrastructure, political marginalization, and resultant socioeconomic deprivation (Empirical Assessment in Niger Delta, Faghawari et al., 20 22). While these similarities are valuable in analyzing underdevelopment in the South‐East as part of a nation-wide problem, they also highlight the unique histories and institutions that make marginalization in each region distinct.

Application of the Theory to Nigeria's Federal Structure

Nigeria's federal structure strongly resembles world-system theory and centre–periphery framework, where there is dominance, dependence and exploitation. Federalism promotes autonomy, balance, reciprocity and unity while in Nigeria federalism is centralized; federal (centre) government dominates and maintains political and fiscal control of government revenue. Nationally, federal government dictates policy thrust and agenda in a situation akin to world capitalist system where "core" regions have control over capital, decision-making and technology while the "peripheral" ones provide raw materials with little or no control over their means of production (Wallerstein, 2004; Ake, 1981). In Nigeria, power and politics is centralized at Abuja where Federal Government controls lucrative sources of revenue generation i.e. crude oil, customs and companies tax among others. This revenue generated at the centre are shared according to a quota formula based on political support of states to the Federal Government (Suberu, 2001). As such, federating states are completely at the mercy of federal monthly allocations.

If one state fares better than the other, then we have a situation where there is colonial mode of production at play. Center surcharges while states ("peripheral" subsystems) provide labour and resources through exportation. In the Nigerian world system, the Niger Delta which is the heart of crude oil production provides resources for the nation but remains a poor region. This is true exploitation of the periphery by the core (Amin, 1976; Ikelegbe, 2005). Other regions such as the South-East which have less hold on power also lacks federal presence, investment and infrastructural development. Project-layout and budgetary appropriations are often done along party lines based on which zones have greater control of the executive arm and legislative power of government. The police, armed forces and fiscal institutions are all centralized at the federal level. Resource control and smothering of regional economies are kept at check by the centre. It does what it wishes in terms of security and development of the states.

South-East Peripheral Position within Nigeria's Internal Political Economy

Examining Nigeria' regional zones through centre–periphery theory, the South- East can be considered a structural periphery within the Nigerian polity. In spite of being Nigeria' most enterprising demographic with the highest levels of educational attainment outside of oil wealth, the people of the south- East have had less access to central governance and infrastructure relative to their population size than other regions (Onyeukwu, 2021; Obalum et al., 2024). Aligned with their world-system placement, they form part of Nigeria' domestic economy but are systematically excluded from decision-making power at the federal level. Revenue is controlled by the federal government, and while each state derives income from the Federation Account, little fiscal capital is invested into the states themselves with weaker political voices receiving even less. Throughout multiple regimes, the south- East region has found itself out of cabinets and without appointments to federal boards or ministries (Salihu, 2023; Ajao, 2024). President Buhari' current and Tinubu' nascent administrations have seen particularly egregious omissions of the south- East from both federal positions and resource allocation. Fuelled by this lack of representation at the centre, many have felt politically marginalized.

Due to this marginalization, the region has not benefited from federally funded capital projects or investment to the extent that other regions have over the years. Nigeria' main power plants, oil refineries, federal roads, railways, and seaports are located in other regions. Political cores receive the majority of infrastructure development while southern peripheral states are left to developing infrastructure at home with local resources (Obalum et al., 2024; Wonah, 2019). When they are completed, these projects often do not run through the south. For example, major eastern seaports like the one in Port Harcourt are often congested and inaccessible compared to their Lagos and Calabar counterparts. This affects the South-East' ability to competitively join supply chains and import goods for local consumption. With few opportunities for externally financed investments, southeastern states rely heavily on self-funded development and imports. As a result, internally generated revenue from enterprise and diaspora remittances drives the region' economy, contrasting with state governments elsewhere who enjoy investment from national industrialization or federal capital projects.

Causes of South-Eastern Peripheral Position

i. Colonial Legacy and the Creation of Uneven Regional Development

The marginalization of the South-East within Nigeria's federal arrangements can be attributed to two main factors. The first lies with British colonial rule and how they set up Nigeria. The South- East did not have many railways or seaports built by the colonial government unlike other regions like South- West and North. Colonial administrators developed certain regions more than others during the period of indirect rule based on economic interests of the government. The colonial economy was based on production of raw materials for exports, and then used the proceeds to import foreign made goods. This explains why regions like the oil-rich Niger Delta with Calabar were prominent seaports during the colonial era. The idea of Nigeria as one entity was conceived in 1914 when the British colonial government merged their southern and northern possessions. Most of these territories did not have equal levels of administration nor development. However, with missionary activity being most prominent in the South-East region of Nigeria during colonial rule, there were significant differences in literacy rates as the South-East had an educated elite at independence while other regions were still developing their human capital. Schools were built by Christian Missionaries who were allowed to operate by the British colonial government. Secondly, the British deliberately set-up the Nigerian state to encourage competition and distrust among its constituent regions. Can you see how they set Nigeria up for marginalization?

Using the example of ports and railway. The British wanted to export crops like cocoa and groundnuts from the south-west and north. As such, they built major railway lines from these regions to the nearest seaports. The Lagos–Kano railway line was completed between 1898 and 1911 which connected Kano in the north to Lagos where goods could be shipped to Britain. Similar rail lines were built from the north and south-west to the ports. The eastern region had no seaport at the time of independence even though palm produce was the primary export from that region. The nearest seaports to Igboland were Opobo and Bonny. These were bustling seaports pre-colonialism but the British never developed them.

ii. Post-Independence Politics and the Impact of the Nigerian Civil War

Regional rivalry intensified after Nigeria gained independence in 1960. The political elites tried to control more power based on ethnic and regional sentiment. In the First Republic, South-East played lead roles in Nigeria's modernization efforts, being responsible for emergent Nigeria's development plans. This area produced Nigeria's first indigenous doctor of philosophy and Nigeria's first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Relations between Nigeria' regions became tense, however as the country faced issues over who would control its resources. This eventually led to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970 after the 1966 coups. The war which happened mostly in the South-East region led to major setbacks: Economically, socially and psychologically. This experience has partly shaped Nigeria' perception of neglect and exclusion from the federation which dates back to (Madiebo, 1980; Achebe, 2012).

Many of post-war policies that were meant to rebuild the region such as ("No Victor, No Vanquished"), were betrayed by actions such as the policy to pay £20 to Igbo individuals who returned from the war thereby rendering those who could have actually saved more during the war, broke. The area was also neglected in most of the country's developmental projects at the time such as trans-Kalahari Highway, Lagos-Kano Highway which gave little or no advantage to states in the south-east. Nigeria thus began to regard the south-east as the corner stone in its quest to continuously weaken them politically. The federal government during the post-war resettlement plans sited the country's oil refineries far from the south-east – an area where crude oil was first discovered in Nigeria (in what used to be known as Eastern Region, and mostly the states of Imo and Rivers). The largest and most active refineries such as Port Harcourt Refining and the Warri Refining were strategically placed along the border lines that separated the Eastern Region at the end of the war (the old Eastern- Igbo States and the new Eastern States with no Igbo dominating the councils). Nigeria also designed and built many of her federal projects like the Ajaokuta Steel Complex to pass through states in the south-south

and south-west, further alienating the people of south-east from partaking in them. The Niger Delta Development Commission was another federal project strategically organized to leave out the south-eastern states.

iii. Structural Marginalization Through Fiscal and Political Centralization Since 1970

The civil war had ended, but federal government policies since its end further worsened the marginalization as they centralized fiscal powers and autonomy further away from the states towards the federal government. One of such policies was dismantling of the regional system of fiscal autonomy to a federally formulated revenue allocation formula where Abuja now controls the nations purse. Oil income was discovered majorly in the Niger Delta region thus crude became Nigeria's major source of revenue as oil commerce overtook other sectors (Suberu, 2001). Oil became another avenue for political patronage as the federating units had become weaker against the federal government. Control over who gets what through revenue allocation formula was institutionalized thus regions like the south-east with no oil became further marginalized due to lack of influence at the federal level coupled with its minimal revenue from crude sales (Ekekwe, 1986). Militarism also further centralized power from the state governments back to federal since the 1970s military governments used federal creation to subjugate the states. States governments became weaker leaving nothing but 'a fiscal handout from the centre'. The centre was solely in charge of who gets what through infant atrophy channeling funds into the regions that support the seat of power thus every power seat change led to its politicking (kickbacks) cementing over-centralization of Nigeria.

Infrastructure like roads were also no-go areas as the south-east major connection to trade with other regions of Nigeria through the famous Enugu–Onitsha Expressway popularly known as 'laughter expressway' and the Enugu–Port Harcourt Road which connects the region to Nigeria's major oil repositories have been left decaying and impassable for decades with little to no effort from federal governments towards maintenance or reconstruction of these important arteries (Suberu, 2001; Ekekwe, 1986). It should be known that these roads were built by the Nigerian government in the early post-independent era. Today, despite several years of neglect and thus decay, they remain dilapidated and pretty much impassable for long distances. In other regions which belong to the dominant political class such as Lagos–Ibadan Expressway which goes through Lagos and Oyo States in the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, have seen continuous funds going into it's maintenance and is motorable as they are regularly Rehabilitated by successive governments. Nigeria's fiscal policies allow the federal government to amass all federally earned revenue in a centralized repository called the " federation account". It then distributes funds to the regions at will where it can favor who it wants to or politicize the needs of the regions depending on who is in power at the federal level. This centralization of power over important federally earned revenue and execution of federally inspired projects allows the federal government to allocate funds to regions it deems fit while withholding vital funds from others thus creating a dependency of the states on the federal government in such a way that can be compared to centre–periphery model.

iv. Persistence of Ethnic and Regional Inequalities

Regional and ethnic inequities within Nigeria' federal system have proved difficult to overcome regardless of the country' constitutional amendments or efforts towards democratic rule. Citizens from the South-East remain marginalized in their opportunities for federal appointments and fairly distributed federal resources compared to other regions within the country. Similarly, some regions receive more federal infrastructure projects than others, giving them better access to facilities funded by the federal government (Oonyekwu, 2021; Obalum et al., 2024). Nigeria' principle of federal character which attempts to promote inclusivity amongst its diverse communities has been described by critics as tokenistic and largely ineffective, given its ability to be exploited by politicians in power to favor certain groups over others. The Buhari administration (2015–2023) and current Tinubu administration (2023-present) have both failed to allow citizens of the South-East to hold major political positions or appointment within the security sector of Nigeria' government. There are significant regional disparities in development that span across basic factors such as poverty rates, quality of life, and access to public services as well as political representation (Wonah, 2019).

Until the government of Nigeria addresses centralization measures and takes steps to increase equity throughout the federation, regional and ethnic inequality will continue to marginalize peoples of the South-East and promote feelings of alienation that have fueled secessionist movements like IPOB. From 2015 to 2023, Nigerian citizens from the South-East have been left out of political conversations and security-related appointments which has led some to believe that the southeast is not treated equally as a member of Nigeria. One prominent example of how the people of southeast Nigeria have been excluded from power under Nigeria' current system of federalism was demonstrated by President Muhammadu Buhari' appointments to his cabinet. At one point, the Chief of Defense Staff, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Air Staff, Inspector General of Police, D.G of the Department of State Service (DSS), and National Security Adviser were all from the northern region of Nigeria. During this time, there were no representatives from the southeast serving in any of the positions mentioned above (Onyeukwu, 2021; Wonah, 2019). Not only did this breach Nigeria' federal character

principle, but it gave citizens of the southeast region reason to believe that they were being ignored when it came to federal matters. Similarly, prominent economic positions such as those in the NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited) and the Central Bank of Nigeria have also seen minimal to no representation from the South-East under both the Buhari administration and the current Tinubu administration. This is despite the fact that the southeast is known to house some of Nigeria' best human resources and was a founding member of the country.

Political Representation and Power Distribution in Nigeria

In terms of representation and power-sharing, Nigeria operates under a federal system that reserves key positions and resources for each federating unit. Since independence, Nigeria has seen political power rotate among the elites in the North and South-West, while the South- East remained largely marginalized. For instance, the people of South-East have never had the opportunity of producing the President of Nigeria since independence. Despite having rotational presidency which gives every region a shot at the highest office in the country Nigeria has continually denied the Igbo the chance to produce the president. Presidential powers at the federal level have been shared by Nigeria' major ethnic groups mostly dominated by those from Northern and South-Western Nigeria in a way that marginalizes other geopolitical zones. Power has been distributed through federalism and power sharing also known as "federal character", which was initially meant to promote inclusion but has over time promotedelite domination and access to resources (Nnoli, 2003; Suberu, 2001). Nigeria' political structure theoretically allows for equal representation but the minorities still remain marginalized. Positions in the federal government such as in the National Assembly, the federal executive branch, and political appointments have not been equitably distributed to reflect Nigeria' diverse population, with people from the South- East being one of the ethnic groups that have consistently been shortchanged.

To further emphasize the political marginalization of South-East, Nigeria' 2023 Presidential election resulted in the election of retired General Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the President. This was despite calls from groups within the South-East and other parts of Nigeria for the presidency to be rotated to the South-East as the three previous occupants of Nigeria' highest political office was all from either the North or South-West Nigeria. Sadly, none of the political parties gave the presidency to any of their South-Eastern Nigerians that contested for the party' presidential ticket. The political parties that dominated the election, the APC and the PDP, chose presidential candidates that came from the Northern and South-West geopolitical zones of Nigeria. During his term in office from 2015 to 2023, President Muhammadu Buhari also picked five ministers out of the thirty-six ministers that made up his cabinet from the South-East and gave them non-influential ministerial positions. South-East Nigerians have never had access to ministers of vital departments such as Defense, Petroleum Minister, Finance Minister, etc. In addition, South-Eastern Nigeria has been denied key leadership positions in the National Assembly. Since 1999, the five positions of Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Deputy Speaker, President of the Senate and their respective deputies have never been occupied by anyone from the South-East geopolitical zone. Each of these positions has been heavily dominated by persons from other geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Research has shown that when people feel excluded from important organs of power and decision making, they feel marginalized (Wonah, 2019). This further suggests that South-East Nigeria is marginalized from the mainstream political space in Nigeria. This lack of representation from people of South-East in power sharing conversations has been one of the leading causes of the fight for Biafra by the IPOB. Until there are constitutional provisions that guarantee power-sharing among Nigeria' various ethnic groups, the agitation will continue.

Impact of Political Exclusion on Regional Development and Public Trust

Political exclusion continues to leave a major toll in areas of development in the South-East and lack of trust in government institutions by its people. Inadequate representation of the South-East in seats of federal power has resulted in decreased federal presence in terms of investments in infrastructure, poor industrialisation drives, and lack of access to federal government programs meant for development. Okolie (20 22) argues that this political imbalance repeats the trend of economic marginalization of the southeast region, hinders private investments and pushes the region further into infrastructural collapse. The lack of fair participation delegitimizes the government and heightens feelings of alienation among citizens, especially youths who feel the Nigerian state is biased and oppressive towards them. Political alienation caused by lack of trust in government also promotes radicalisation into movements such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), making political participation a breeding ground for instability and weak social contracts between the Nigerian government and the people of South-East Nigeria (Ezeani, 2018). Therefore, creating inclusive governance will not only meet constitutional requirements but promote national unity.

Examples from Buhari and Tinubu Administrations

This imbalance in the sharing of power has been especially apparent during Muhammadu Buhari's presidency (2015–2023). After assuming office, Buhari initially appointed only Northerners and Muslims to his

most powerful positions related to security, intelligence, and finance ministries—eliciting accusations that he practiced nepotism (Suberu, 2021). Southerners from the marginalised region of South-East were only appointed to two Ministerial positions none of which were from the "Big Four" ministries that consisted of defense, petroleum, finance, and justice. Most notably however, was Buhari's appointment of 14 service chiefs in 2019—all of whom were not from the South-East region. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's presidency (2023–present) has not corrected the structural disproportions of Nigeria's federal character. Tinubu appointed prominent politicians from each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones to serve in his cabinet. Despite this seemingly inclusive gesture, positions that regulate Nigeria's economy and control its security apparatus are predominantly occupied by people from the ruling Southwest and Northern regions. For example, while the Tinubu-appointed South-East became involved in politics by being appointed the Minister of Works and Minister of Science and Technology, they were kept out of the center of executive power. The current concentration of power in the presidency more specifically the offices that handle Nigeria's economic planning and national security illustrates how Nigeria practices an asymmetrical federalism.

Revenue Allocation Formulas and Central Control of Natural Resources

One of the major ways resource controls plays out has been by the centre dictating to state how resources are allocated in the country. Fiscal federalism is arranged around a vertical and horizontal revenue allocation formula skewed in favour of the federal centre and disadvantageous to its subnational counterparties. With the suspension of the 1960 and 1963 regional constitutions (allowing regions to keep up to 50% of revenue accruing from resources produced in the region), the federal government claimed and maintained almost exclusive rights over the country's natural resources, especially oil and gas (Suberu, 2021). Since Nigeria operates under the 1999 Constitution which stated that "the ownership of mineral and natural resources belongs to the Federal Government", allocation of revenue from resources produced are derived from revenues disbursed monthly by the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC).

The current revenue allocation formula of about 52.68% to the federal government, 26.72% to state government and 20.60% local government continue to see agitations from resource-producing areas that demand an end to what they call 'resource exploitation'. Critics of derivation principle believe that its current allocation of 13% pales in comparison to what their states produce and the toll it takes on the environment.Hence the Centre continues to enjoy overwhelming fiscal superiority over constituent units thus enjoying superior financial and political power in deciding where Nigeria develops (or underdevelops) politically and economically. States where oil and gas are produced such as Niger Delta and South- East depends heavily on the centre for monthly allocations and can easily be exploited for political gains.

Economic Marginalization in Nigeria

Perhaps no other area has economic marginalization been more clearly visible than lack of access to public investments. Infrastructure such as federal roads, power installations and industrial clusters are mostly located around Abuja and the major centres in the Northern Nigeria especially North- West zone. The South-East zone and parts of the Niger Delta region have been neglected over the years. According to Okolie (20|22) budget has been allocated over the decades to repair federal roads that connect big cities in south east such as Enugu–Port Harcourt, Onitsha–Owerri, Aba–Ikot Ekpene Expressway but nothing has been done about it. Even project such as rail lines and airports were neglected for years when they need to be fixed and states like southeast were skipped when it came to reaching rail lines to major cities.

Federal Projects and Budgetary Distribution: Case Studies from Selected Ministries

Infrastructure project allocation has been used by previous federal governments in Nigeria to show preference to certain states or geopolitical regions over others. From 2015 to 2021 specifically, capital allocations and project releases were staggered in favour of the North- West geopolitical zone and South- West while Nigeria's South-East suffered consistent starvation of federal government projects. In 20 21, marginalization was already felt in Nigeria's South-East geopolitical zone because statistically, they have always been underrepresented in important appointments both elective and appointive since Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960. Statistically, since independence, the appointments into federal government ministries and agencies have always favoured some states more than others despite Nigeria being constitutionally declared a Federation in 19 99 by the country's 1999 Constitution. Sadly, some of these appointees use their offices to perpetuate the marginalization of the people that voted for them.

Reviewing budgetary allocations from the Federal Ministry of Works and Power and the Federal Ministry of Transportation from 2015 to 2021, it will be observed that the former President Muhammadu Buhari-led federal government budgeted more for capital projects that were located in either the North- West or South- West geopolitical zones. One of such projects is the Lagos – Ibadan Expressway which traverses Lagos State and Oyo State. This project was always included in the ministry's annual budget from 2016 to 2021. Also, looking at another project, the Abuja – Kaduna – Kano Expressway which traverses Nigeria's Federal Capital

Territory, Kaduna State and Kano State. It will be noted that just like the Lagos – Ibadan Expressway, this project was also budgeted for from 2016 to 2021. These projects were not only budgeted for from 2016 to 2021 but were also released funds usually running into trillions of Naira. They were given priority by the former president while he was in office. In addition to this, both projects were expanded to multi-year projects. With Lagos – Ibadan Expressway now being billed as Lagos – Ibadan – Ituso Standard-Gauge Rail Line, it can be said that it was given total attention by the former president. On 3rd November 20 20, he commissioned the Lagos – Ibadan Standard-Gauge Rail Line. Similarly, work started in full force on the Abuja – Kaduna – Kano Expressway after it was tagged a National Priority project by the former president. Loans were raised by the Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority to aid in the rapid construction of this highway and it also got support from the World Bank.

On the other hand, a project that was very much needed by Nigerians in Nigeria's South-East region was abandoned for years till 20 20 when it was₦34 billion. The project I am referring to is the Second Niger Bridge which links Asaba in Delta State to Onitsha in Anambra State. This project was always included in the ministry's annual budget from 2016 to 20 21 as well but compared to the Lagos – Ibadan Expressway and Abuja – Kaduna – Kano Expressway, the fundsWere not released as at when due and when they were released, they were far less than what was approved. As a result, this project suffered different sets of delays. It was not until after the 2023 General Elections that work began, kicking many Nigerians who live in the South-East part of Nigeria especially. This observation can be backed up with a publication by the Budget Office of the Federation (2019) which showed that less than 40% of what was approved for the Second Niger Bridge project was released in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Nigeria's electricity grid needs expansion and more communities in Nigeria need to be reached by the grid. In the ministry of power (now referred to as ministry of electricity), more budgetary allocations were given to Northern States than Southern States. This publication by Adewuyi (20 20) highlighted how from 2016 to 20 20, majority of the transmission line projects and the construction of electrical substations were sited in Northern Nigeria. States such as Kano State, Katsina State, Kaduna State, and Niger State had at least two projects each where these facilities were to be sited. States in the South-East geopolitical zone such as Ebonyi, Abia, and Imo had less than 3 new electrical substation projects. Due to this, many communities in the South- East lack stable electricity. Take for instance, Enugu Transmission Substation which provides electricity to parts of Enugu State and Ebonyi State. As of 20 19, it was operating at only 40% capacity due to federal government negligence.

Similarly, the Ministry of Transportation budgeted more for projects that were located in either the North or South- West. One such project was the reconstruction and completion of the Lagos – Ibadan Standard – Gauge Rail Line. It is safe to say this project got more funds than any other rail line. Loans were obtained from China Exim Bank and were also paired with counterpart funding from the Federal Government of Nigeria. Another project is the Abuja – Kaduna Rail Line which also got a whooping sum of money. Just like the Lagos – Ibadan Standard – Gauge Rail Line, this rail line also got a loan from China Exim Bank which was also paired with counterpart funding from the Federal Government. The Kano – Maradi Rail Line which links Nigeria to Niger Republic was also given more funds. This rail line was also funded by the Chinese through a loan which was also counter-headed by the federal government. Another rail line that was supposed to pass through Nigeria's southern region was the Eastern Rail Line. This rail line would have linked Port Harcourt to Maiduguri but through Aba, Enugu, Makurdi, and Bauchi. Work on this rail line did not start until 2021 when President Buhari decided to flag it off. This also did not come with any loan as little was done about it.

The political appointments that are made by the President tend to favour some states more than others. There have been more ministers and directors – general of government parastatals that are from either the North- East or North- West geopolitical zone. According to Adewuyi (20 20), from 2016 to 20 20, the ministry of power had more directors that were from Northern Nigeria than Southern Nigeria. Since there isṣm ore ministers and directors – general from some states than others, it can be said that projects around those states that those ministers or directors – generals come from will receive more attention and more funds when it is time for budget allocation. When ministers and directors general that are from southern Nigeria see projects budgeted for states that their counterparts are from receiving more funds than projects in their own states, they feel left out. As a result of this, there is a high rate of emigration of Igbo youth to other parts of Nigeria in search of greener pastures. Given the fact that the Igbo ethnic group are mostly located in Nigeria's South- East geopolitical zone, there is a high rate of feeling marginalized by the Nigerian state. This constant feeling of being marginalized is what is causing lots of these youth to secede from the country. IPOB was born out of this constant agitation.

Since 2015 to date, capital allocations to Nigeria's southeast has always been less than ₦150 billion annually. Compared to other allocations such as North- West which saw an annual average of over ₦400 billion yearly, southeast felt marginalized. From our previous observation on the Lagos – Ibadan Expressway, it was seen that in 2019, the ministry released ₦137.5 billion as at the third quarter of that year. Even at this, the project saw changes in contractors which caused delay. Another example is the Enugu – Port Harcourt Expressway. This project which serves as one of Nigeria's trade arteries saw changes in contractors almost

every year it was budgeted for. This move by the Federal Government caused a major setback to the project. There were occasions where the contractors had to be defaulted after they walked off the job due to non-payment of funds. Compare this to the second Niger Bridge which saw an average of ₦34 billion from 2015 to date. Can we really say the federal government has been fair with the South-East?

Since the issue of budgeting more projects to Northern Nigeria than Southern Nigeria, Nigeria has experienced an increased rate of secession. Many Youths from the south- East started a movement called IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra). This movement has caused a lot of trouble for the Nigerian government. They have been held responsible for the increased number of ambushes on Police Stations and Nigerians Army check points. If the Nigerian government can change their ways and start seeing us as one, then we can start experiencing change. Nigeria will experience a great amount of growth if there is unity.

Since there is a feeling of marginalization, the government should see to it that the budget is looked into. There should be proper consultations with all the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria on what they want to be budgeted for. The budget should be made known to the public so we can know where our taxes are actually going to. There should be set rules that stipulate the number of ministers to be picked from a state. The rule should be followed to the later just so we can experience change. Nigerians love change and if we can start experiencing that, we will embrace the government we have.

Comparative Analysis of Poverty, Education, Health, and Employment Indices between the South-East and Other Regions

The records below summarizes socioeconomic metrics by geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The data depict wide variations across regions in indices such as poverty levels, access to education, healthcare outcomes, employment, and some social development indicators. Although some socioeconomic metrics in the past few decades have placed the South-East at a comparative advantage with other zones (hardworking people, high rate of entrepreneurship, high literacy rate, presence of historical and contemporary business leaders and industrial hubs etc.), the region remains relatively poor compared to other zones, especially the South-West and some Northern States. There are many explanations for the pervasive inequalities and systematic exclusion of South-East Nigeria from resource control, fiscal investments, or developmental projects by the Federal Government. Structural reasons stemming from skewed Federal allocations, discriminatory funding, poor governance at the subnational level, among others. To gain some perspective on how these inequalities manifest and maintain Nigeria's structural paradox, this article examines some key sectors and contexts.

Poverty: NBS (2022) reported multidimensional poverty index in the lowest in South-West Nigeria (27.5%), followed by South-East Nigeria (42.4%) which has the third highest poverty rate that is increasing compared to the North-West Nigeria (78.0%) which had the highest poverty rate. Despite having one of the largest proportions of industrious people and highly populated cities in Nigeria, the quality of life for citizens in South-East Nigeria remains low compared to Southern Nigeria and some Northern States. Rapid population increase, inadequate public infrastructure, years of neglect by federal government, among other factors have continually kept many people in poverty.

Industry: Southeast Nigeria is home to many small and medium-scale industries scattered across its cities and states. Nnewi is known for its rapid industrial growth (factories), Aba is known for garment and Delta state for knitting and Toyota Nigeria (cars); cities like Afikpo, Okigwe, Orlu and Obosi are known for production of high-quality motor spare parts and lately, software developers. But, since the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program in the 1980s, growing federal government neglect, lack of public infrastructure and inconsistent government policies have reduced the South-East to the lowest industrial activity compared to when the region was Nigeria's foremost industrial hub. Okolie (2022) explained that one of the reasons Nigeria's southeastern regions has suffered serious industrial decline is because the federal government has not repaired or maintained any of the industries located within its industrial parks nor has it fixed major roads that link South-Eastern markets open to seaports and other commercial centers in Nigeria. As a result, the Aba industrial cluster suffers from inconsistent electricity, lack of modern warehouses, and poor road networks that link Aba to other major cities in Nigeria. Furthermore, the Nigerian Industrial Revolution Plan (launched by the Federal Government in 2014, and pursued by subsequent governments) prioritized investment in Lagos and Ogun States in the South-West geopolitical zone, leaving out Nigeria's south-eastern region in its industrial revolution plan (Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI), 2021). Similarly, Nigeria's Enugu Coal Basin has been left in a state of disrepair by the Federal Government. Due to lack of funding from the federal government and inability to privatize the coal industry by state governments, many positive impacts that can improve energy generation and create employment opportunities have been missed.

Education: Nigeria's south-eastern region has one of the highest literacy rates in Nigeria standing at about 80% compared to Nigeria's national literacy rate of 62% (UNDP, 2021). Although Southeast Nigeria had better educational outcomes than other regions in Nigeria, capital investment from federal government in universities and polytechnics from 2016 to 2021 has been historically lower than other regions in Nigeria. NBS (2021). For instance, total capital releases to University of Lagos was about ₦37.8 billion while₦29.4 was given to Ahmadu

Bello University Zaria. In comparison, total releases for University of Nigeria, Nsukka was ₦20.4 billion while Federal Polytechnic, Nekede got ₦2.3 billion. (TETFund, 2020). The south-east also has no federally funded research university or institutes of innovation.

Quality healthcare: Even though the quality of health care and health outcomes in Southeast Nigeria is better than the northern region of Nigeria, it still falls below world health standards and Nigeria's sustainable development goals. WHO (2022) showed that while the maternal mortality rate in Nigeria's southeastern region is 512 deaths per 100,000 live births, Nigeria as a whole has a target of 300 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. Nigeria's northwestern region records 1,200 deaths per 100,000 live births as compared to the southeast. While most primary and secondary healthcare centres in the southeast are owned by state governments, most federal government owned hospitals such as the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Umuahia lacks basic facilities, equipment and personnel as it shares the centre with four other states. Proposed teaching hospitals in Ebonyi and Imo States have faced years of abandonment from Federal Government intervention. (Federal Ministry of Health, 2022). Furthermore, during Nigeria's COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–20), little to no funding was appropriated by the federal government to south-eastern states in contrast to Lagos and AbujaStates. State governments and donations from well-meaning citizens were relied on by southeastern states to supplement funds for health care.

Employment: Nigeria's youth unemployment rate in the south-eastern region in 2023 was estimated at over 30%, highest in the country compared to the south-west's 25% and north-central's 18%. NBS (2023). One reason for this is because many citizens of southeast Nigeria are dominated by artisans and small-scale entrepreneurs. Despite its massive population and relatively large number of universities graduates each year, lack of industrialization and little access to federal public service jobs has created high unemployment rates and brain drain as many southern-east Nigerians seek opportunities in South-West Nigeria or other countries. Experts say lack of social infrastructure such special economic zones, energy farms, technology hubs, seaports or free trade zones has stunted the creation of more jobs in the region. Lagos Nigeria is home to Lekki free trade zone and Dangote Refinery which will provide thousands of jobs when completed while the South-East has Enyimba Economic City Project which is lagging due to lack of funds from the federal government. (Onyeukwu, 2021).

Buhari's N-Power Programme and Tinubu's Subsidy Removal Policy Effects

When considering Nigeria's South-East geopolitical zone, there seems to be significant frustrations emerging from economic exclusion, unemployment rates, and lack of policy inclusion at the federal level. This marginalization translates to several problems within the region: an acute scarcity of federal allocations, dearth of major developmental projects and social investments, and glaring underrepresentation in prominent federal agencies like the National Economic Council, Budget Office, and Federal Executive Council [FEC] (Ezeani, 2018). These forms of systematic marginalization against Nigeria's South-East have bred a common sentiment amongst its populace; many young people feel their region is being shortchanged economically by the Nigerian state. This widespread belief has further solidified their feelings of being marginalized by propagating the narrative that Nigerian politicians strategically place developmental projects and economic opportunities in their regions of origin. Given these regional disparities, it should come to no surprise that Nigeria' South- East have struggled to attain development commensurate with its human capital endowment; the region is well-known for being hardworking and business-like.

One major consequence of this poor political and economic inclusion has been widespread agitation emigrating from the country, otherwise known as the "Japa" phenomenon. While this issue plagues Nigeria as a whole, studies show that a significant percentage of Nigerians travelling abroad to continue their education, find jobs, and seek better economic opportunities hail from Nigeria' South- East region (Okolie, 2022). Albeit mental brain gain, if these individuals were able to access these opportunities in Nigeria, they could stimulate productivity and spearhead new industries within the region. This includes university graduates of all disciplines, doctors, engineers, graphic designers/artists, animators, medical technicians, and skilled craftsmen.

Another detrimental effect of brain drain on human capital development is that many young people now see migrating from Nigeria as a necessity. Growing frustration from the federal government's inability to create jobs and tackle insecurity has convinced many Nigerian youths that there will be no hopeful future in Nigeria. Some Nigerians in the diaspora now support their families back home through skill acquisition or remittances and are considered the primary source of income. While supporting their families with little or no income at all back home may seem heartwarming, it furthers the dependency on foreign countries and hinders youths back at home to act toward changing the system.

Effects of youth unemployment and frustration can also be seen domestically. Over the years, there has been a significant rise in insecurity, cybercrime, and separatist agitation in parts of Nigeria, especially in the south-eastern region (cities like Onitsha, Aba, Enugu, and Owerri). Many of these frustrations can be linked to unemployment as a lot of these young boys and girls are involved in nefarious activities to make ends meet or simply because they have nothing to do. Cybercrime, drug sales, and traffic violate are common-day activities

for these guys. Another alarming issue is the increase in separatist groups or youth boys going into the forest with nothing to do. There have been a significant increase in groups such as the "Ezidekon" in Afara-Usanga, and the "East Stick" in Ngwa claiming to be fighting for the liberation of the south-east. This act of frustration could be linked to unemployment and idleness. According to Ezeibe and Nwagwu (2021), most youths have joined this self-proclaimed fight for liberation because they don't see a better future for themselves in Nigeria. Unemployment and idleness have made these youth's easy targets to be manipulated into holding arms against the state.

Many southeast citizens feel the federal government doesn't care about their well-being because you can see the lack of development across major cities in the south east. Poor road networks, lack of electricity, falling buildings, and poorly funded tertiary institutions are some of the many reasons why people from this region feel Nigeria does not care about the south-east. Onyema & Chukwuemeka (2020) revealed that one major reason why the call for a separate state became vocal is that the people from this region feel left out. Thus, causing them to shift their values from seeing themselves as Nigerians to Igbos. But can the problems of Nigeria be solved by creating more separate states?

Economic inclusion through skill acquisition and employment is key to unlocking the regions human capacity. The South-East region is known for being businesslike, so promoting and supporting TECH/VOC education will help with the region's youth unemployment rate. The majority of businesses in Nigeria' south-east are small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs], so they should be given federal funding and incentives by the government. Tax reliefs should be given to SMEs, and the federal and state government should make loan facilities accessable to these small business owners. Promoting businesses like "Aba-made" products will help uplift individuals who contribute to making these products and will help Nigeria reduce how much we import. Other areas like "Nnewi automobile" can also be looked into to help with creating employment and skill acquisition.

A lot of developmental projects should go to the south east, focusing on reviving their road networks and electricity, which will help them start thinking of Nigeria as their home again. Creating a south east development commission [SEDC] will help include them in the economic council so that they can be heard. If these problems are not fixed, the youths of this region will continue to run the country down by seeking means of survival outside the country. Nigeria as a whole will lose its best skills that can help build this nation.

IV. Conclusion

The paper found that structural imbalance existed between the centre and the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. It also found that the over-centralization of political power and economic control at the federal level has led to uneven development and feelings of marginalization among Nigeria's diverse ethnic nationalities, particularly those in the South-East geo-political zone. This imbalance of power has contributed to demands for restructuring and greater autonomy by states and regions. The paper also discovered that Nigeria's federal character principle has not been fully implemented, leading to domination of political offices by a few ethnic groups and regions. This domination has contributed to feelings of alienation and led to agitations for secession. In addition, the paper found that there is no fiscal federalism in Nigeria as states are wholly dependent on the federal government for their allocation. This lack of fiscal autonomy has limited the ability of states to address their own unique needs and contributed to feelings of marginalization. To promote national integration and stability in Nigeria, the federal government should ensure a balanced distribution of political power and economic resources among the six geo-political zones. The implementation of the federal character principle should be strengthened to ensure equitable representation of all ethnic groups and regions in political offices. Furthermore, fiscal federalism should be established to allow states greater control over their finances and resources. This would enable them to address their specific needs and contribute to national development.

V. Recommendations

First is restructuring the Nigerian Constitution to deepen fiscal federalism allowing state and local governments more access and control over their resources. Nigeria operates a revenue allocation formula which accords too much power to the central government at the expense of the federating states. If you control little or nothing of your resources, you have less reason to be productive with it. States will be more productive if they see that what they produce will benefit their people. States and regions will be more accountable to their people if they are responsible for their own welfare. Nothing else will stop the current embarrassing rag race to Abuja by state governors and their allies for monthly allocations from the Central pool account. States and regions should be allowed to keep at least 80 percent of revenues from any natural resources found in their regions. This will be achieved by amending sections 162 and 44 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Fiscal federalism will allow states and regions to specialize and take full advantages of their resources endowments thus promoting competition and sustainable regional development. With true fiscal federalism fewer people will feel

marginalized or shortchanged since they will see firsthand how their resources are being spent and will no longer feel exploited by the central government.

Secondly, the federal character commission should be made independent with powers to enforce the following: Nigeria should maintain the federal character principle but take it to the next level. Beyond tokenism, there should be clearly defined percentages for representation of the various Groups in public appointments and recruitment into the country's civil service. An Independent Federal Character and Equal opportunity Commission should be created with powers to ensure compliance with this provision. The commission should publish quarterly compliance data of MDAs and sanctions should be imposed on any agency that defaults. Federal character should also be applied in making appointments into sensitive positions such as the Armed Forces, the Nigerian Police Force, the DSS, and other sensitive positions. Ministries like Education, Health, Finance, Agriculture and Infrastructure should have representatives from each region based on equity and merit. If people from different regions feel that they are equitably represented in Nigeria's armed forces and key government agencies, the major problem of distrust among ethnic-nationalities will be addressed.

Third is investing in regions based on their competitive advantage. The federal government should work with state governments to come up with a regional human capital and industrial development plan. The federal government should invest in building skills acquisition centers, industrial parks, and business incubators in each geopolitical zone. This will help create jobs and reduce #EndSARS and other forms of youth restiveness. Investing in skills acquisition and education will also increase productivity. The federal government should also invest more in education and health care which plays a major role in human capital development.

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