

# The Politics of Boundary Formations and Implications on Federal System of Government in Nigeria 1967 – 1996

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## Abstract

This article interrogates boundary formations in Nigeria 1967 – 1996. It argues that the exercise of boundary creations in the country was politicized by the military ruling elite in concert with local elite in the country just to satisfy selfish interest and for the purpose of rent seeking and promotion of clientele relations thus leading to the marginalization of different sections of the country. Our inquiry extends to ascertaining whether in fixing boundaries in Nigeria the state did so in consonance with the basic principles of federalism. The choice of 1967 as entry point lies in the fact that it marks the beginning of states creation in Nigeria while the 1996 exit date on its part marks the end of an era of state and local government creations in the country by the military regimes. In discussing the politics of how boundaries were fixed in Nigeria 1967 – 1996, the work adopts a combined or an eclectic theoretical scheme that borrows heavily from both John Locke and Thomas Hobbes' social contract theories to explain its phenomenon and the aftermath. The study builds on a body of existing literatures which although have tackled issues on the politics of boundary formations in Nigeria, they have not discussed the impact or implications of state and local government creations on Nigeria's federalism. The research utilized historical research design in a narrative form and achieved its objectives by taking a historical analysis of boundary formation politics in Nigeria 1967 – 1996 across regime periods. In addition to secondary sources, the study relied on primary data such as archival materials and oral interviews in its methodology in order to achieve its objectives. The study proposes that the exercise of boundary fixings in Nigeria was a direct outcome of the interest of the state. Thus, it has been established that Nigeria's processes of boundary formations have been guided by manipulations by the elite that held on to power stretching from the point of independence. The study's findings have implications on restructuring the Nigerian state so as to redress or dismantle the structural imbalances in the country in order to achieve fairness for all citizens.

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## Introduction

This essay interrogates the politics that propelled the fragmentation or balkanization of Nigeria under a process referred to as state and local government creations 1967 – 1996. It highlights the crisis in Nigeria with the dilemma to go federal, confederal and unitary arising from the distorted practice or application of a theoretical federalism but a practical unitary system thereby giving rise to the possibilities of collapsing the entire country into hundreds of independent entities. Thus, it examines whether in fixing boundaries in Nigeria the state did so in consonance with the basic principles of true federalism. It further examines how ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and political corruption and open nepotism were brought to bear in fixing boundaries in the country leading to the marginalization of different sections of the country especially the minority groups. In discussing boundary formations in the country, this work adopts an eclectic or combined theoretical scheme of both John Locke and Thomas Hobbes' social contract theories and interrogates whether in fixing boundaries in Nigeria the state did so within the confines, values and norms of John Locke or those of Thomas Hobbes. Thus, the work aligns with aspects of John Locke's social contract which says that power belongs to the people and so leaders should always seek consent from the people before taking any action such as fixing boundaries in Nigeria. It further identifies with Hobbes' thesis that says that the leader is the sovereign or dictator who does not need the consent or approval of the people on how they are governed or how the state undertakes certain actions including boundary fixing because the people have no rights.

The study builds on a body of existing literatures such as the works of (Ejobowah 2000, Dibua 2005, Omeje 2006, Ajiji 2011, Benjamin 2013, Mgbada 2013, Israel and Patrick 2017 and Onyekachi 2019). These authors are unanimous in their various submissions and postulate that the politics of boundary formations in Nigeria revolves around resource control. Dibua (2005) emphatically re-enforces this point and further states that resource control has been a major feature of the Nigerian state since colonial time. Israel and Patrick further concur with Ajiji (2011) that the politics of boundary formations that was adopted by the British Colonialists aimed at securing a divide-and-rule mechanism so as to create a new consciousness of ethnic differences. Benjamin (2013) and Mgbada (2013) on their part attribute the politics to socio-economic and political foundations. Onyekachi (2019) postulates that the politics behind the creation of blurred boundaries along ethno-religious lines revolves around infrastructural development as a political strategy aimed at conferring privileges to particular groups while excluding others. Although the foregoing literatures have tackled issues on the politics of boundary formations in Nigeria, they have not examined the implications of state and local government creations on Nigeria's federalism and how the total reliance of the constituent units on financial assistance and support from the federal government negates the principle of financial autonomy of the constituent units. Thus, this study proposes that boundary fixings in Nigeria is a direct outcome of the interest of the state. Consequently, Nigeria's restructuring politics is discussed here under five epochs across regimes spanning from 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991 and 1996. It opens up the discussion with a general background account of the pre-1967 boundary fixing politics in Nigeria paying special attention on its dynamics during the colonial era down to the period of regionalism. This serves as a foundation for the discussion of affairs from 1967 to 1996.

### **The Politics of Boundary Formations in the Pre 1967 Nigeria**

Nigeria emerged from a conglomeration of divergent and heterogeneous pre-colonial ethnic nationalities with their inherent uniqueness that hitherto had existed as autonomous, or independent societies under defined natural boundaries or alternatively, cultural boundaries or areas of spheres of influence until the British onslaught in the 1900s and the eventual Lugardian amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates in 1914 (Timothy, 2014: 64). The British political agenda for the amalgamation aimed at having effective resource control and economic exploitation. Thus, it is safe to say that the politics of restructuring in Nigeria (a brain child of the colonial state) is as old as the country itself.

Although the colonial state under Sir Arthur Richard had in 1945 split the South into Western and Eastern regions basing its argument on cultural and communication hick-ups (David, et al, 1999), it was alternatively a decision purely anchored on the political economy with a focus on cocoa in the West and the palm oil in the East. The North which had similar if not same characteristic problems was not split. Generally viewed as a single entity with abundance of hides and skin, cotton, groundnuts, assorted food crops and above all, a widespread of mineral deposits across the region were basically all that informed why the north was not Balkanized (Momoh, 2012: 31-32). This gave birth to regionalism and the lopsided regional structural arrangement that gave the north an edge (Terzungwe, 2012, Timothy: 64).

The balkanization of the country into East, West and Northern regions respectively brought all the ethnic minorities across the regions under the dominant and larger ones which exposed them to domination and subordination (Adeyemi, 2013:157). Agitations by the minorities for the creation of states for them which had by 1953 gathered significant strength warranting the setting of the Minority Commission (Sir Henry Willink's Commission) in 1957 did not see the light of day as the commission only made recommendations that guaranteed their rights in the independent constitution (David et al).

Meanwhile, up to 1953, the British operated a unitary system of government in Nigeria. But by 1954, Nigeria adopted federalism with a centre and constituent units known as regions. More economic and political powers were granted to the regions in 1958. The federal system shared the power of law making where the federal government got an exclusive list leaving the regions with the residual. The component entities were also recognized as equal and coordinate units. More power was given to the regions and less to the national in terms of fiscal (distribution of resources) and political (distribution of offices) (Femi & Abe: 66, Majekodumi, 2015: 111). A true spirit of devolution of power that favoured decentralization was evolved so as to cater for the multi ethnic, socio-cultural, regional and religious society as well as preserving the different social identities cherished by its component parts in the country. This was geared towards forging national unity out from a plural set up inherent in the country. Each region operated its own regional constitution and enjoyed an outstanding level of self-determination, independence and relative autonomy with regards to its internal affairs such as the judiciary, civil service and the police force. The principle of resource management, distribution and control was applied strictly and no region depended on the centre for its financial needs. The 1960 – 1963 constitution gave so much power to the regions (Majekodumi, 2015:111) and that remained the situation at least up to 1966.

The point should be made here that the rationale behind the creation of the mid-western region in 1963 ranged from economic to political. Arguing from the economic realm, Momoh (2012) contends that the exercise was done first, to remove the oil rich Delta area from the Action Group controlled western region. Second, it was

to pave way for the National Council of Nigerian Citizens to control the Eastern region so as to enjoy the benefits of her rice and tuber crops economy. It was also to allow the Northern People's Congress (NPC) to control the Northern region to equally benefit from the dominant grain and vast mineral deposits of the middle belt respectively. This is a valid argument and speaks to a federal system or arrangement given the fact that Nigeria had by 1954 become a federal state (Femi & Abe, 2014:66) where fiscal federalism or authority over revenue generation and resource control was generally vested on the regions for their development. Thus, it follows that even though the people were into a social contract with the national government for the protection of their lives and property, power over the control of resources or the economy lied in the hands of the regions. Consequently, the implication of carving out mid-western region away from the western region meant that western region lost its territory as well as the control and management of resources thereby occasioning a decline in revenue.

From the political lens, it was meant to rain havoc as a means of vendetta to upset the Action Group (AG) as a party and its leadership sequel to developments prior to and during the 1959 elections. This is so because the western region Action Group (AG) Yoruba party had while wrestling for power entered into alliance with the minority ethnic nationalities of the northern region as a strategy to infiltrate the region and win the 1959 election and form the government.

To be sure, the AG had aligned closely with the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), a party that had remained adamant and determined in its agitation for the creation of a Middle Belt region. In this respect, the AG had demonstrated strong support, solidarity and identified herself with the course of the middle belt minorities in their quest for self-determination. Unfortunately, this singular act by the AG was treated as sin and attracted bad blood and feelings from the Hausa-Fulani ruling elite against the AG for supporting the split of the north (Aliyu, 2004:404, Yongo, 2015:75).

The Northern Hausa-Fulani NPC controlled region and Eastern region Igbo dominated NCNC were at the end of the 1959 elections able to produce a coalition government at the national level. This post-independence coalition leadership proceeded ahead and carved out a mid-western region from the western region but refused to do same for the minorities of the eastern region treating it as a plot or conspiracy against Igbo interest while the request by the northern minorities for a middle belt state was suppressed just to impose northern hegemony on them (Yongo: 75, Adeyemi, 2013:162). Clearly, the refusal by the NPC/NCNC coalition regime to create regions for the eastern and northern minority groups speaks to a Hobbesian regime that used force and refused to act in consonance with the will of the people. That was the nature of boundary formation politics in pre 1967 Nigeria. The next section discusses General Gowon's reforms.

### **The General Yakubu Gowon Regime 1966 – 1975**

Identity formations, agitations for more regions and the thirst or desire for self-determination were basically the emerging trends that cropped up after the military dethronement of Tafawa Balewa and Azikiwe's regime in 1966 and the counter coup that brought in Gen Yakubu Gowon as head of state in July, 1966. These were the precursors that influenced Gowon's states creation exercise. The counter coup had consumed General. J. T. Aguyi Ironsi the head of state then followed by wanton and regional killings of Igbo across northern cities thus, warranting Lt. Col. Odumegu Ojukwu governor of the then eastern region to embark on a home-call of Igbo back to the east.

As the Igbo moved back home, Ojukwu had started mobilizing forces threatening secession of the eastern region from Nigeria and a show down against the federal government (Adejugbe, 2002:3). Meanwhile, as continuous agitations by various sections of Nigeria for states creation gathered momentum, General Gowon on May 27, 1967 through a state broadcast to the nation restructured the then existing four regions by creating twelve states, namely: North-western, North-eastern, Kano, North-central, Benue-plateau, Kwara, Lagos, Western, Mid-western, East-central, Rivers and South-eastern states respectively (Gowon, 1967; New Nigerian, 29/5/1967, Ejitu, et al 2020: 2). Gowon's non-consultative spirit and arbitrary decision in creating twelve states without inputs from the citizenry pointed to a dictator using Hobbesian policies in controlling the state and thus, felt that the consent of the people in the exercise was not required.

It is important to note that the July 1966 counter coup successfully transferred the control of power at the centre from the ethnic majority ruling elite in the military to a dominant minority ethnic inclined ruling coalition. Gowon's philosophical expression had always been "Go on with one Nigeria because we are better together". However, the questions that beg for answers here is: why did Gowon embark on the creation of states and what implication did it have on the Nigerian federal system? It is obvious that Gowon's political agenda for the creation of states was first and foremost, a desire to weaken support, terminate and deal decisively with the overwhelming threats that the four violent secession attempts between the January coup and the counter coup of July 1966 had posed to the state (Elaigwu, 1986:102, Ojo and Adebayo, 2008:340, Adeyemi: 163).

Prior to the 1967 states creations, there have been threats of secession from the Igbo dominant Eastern region which was not unconnected to the July 1966 counter coup leading to the assassination of Ironsi. This

produced serious grievances from the Igbo. To be sure, the eastern region before then had been an Igbo monolithic structured region but consequent upon the creation of Rivers and Cross River states for the eastern minorities, the core Igbo nationality were now not only lumped in a single state but landlocked as well and disadvantaged in trade, industry and development. Gowon's action spoke to the voice of Hobbes telling the Igbo that the tyrant has done it and that - they either take it or leave it. Worst still, they lost the usual sympathy and support of the eastern region minorities that were once knitted together in a unified eastern region thereby weakening the strength and size of the region (Ojo and Adebayo: 340).

In the same vein, in order to break the dominant power, forces, pressure and threats of secession from the centre at the instance of the Yoruba predominant western region while leaving the mid-western region untempered with, Gowon in a Hobbesian style excised Lagos from the western region rendering the region landlocked. This downsized the viability and financial strength of the region, making it less pleasant and enviable as a potential Yoruba republic. Just like the south, the north was balkanized into six states to redress the structural imbalance and guarantee the interests of minority groups who now had three states leaving the Hausa-Fulani majority with three as well (Momoh: 2012, Ojo and Adebayo).

Although the majority groups interpreted the exercise as a display of bias by Gowon in favour of minority groups and an attempt to putting them on equal footing with them (Vende:40), it is hereby submitted that Gowon's 1967 exercise clearly terminated the lopsided northern structural controversy and created a scenario that broke the genes of majority domination while guaranteeing the rights of the minorities in whose areas the mineral and economic resources of the federation was concentrated for self-determination. Above all, it demonstrated the will power of the state in offering effective control of the centre and curbing heterogeneous divisions rooted in Nigeria's polity (Suberu, 1998:281-282, Ojo and Adebayo: 341, Momoh, 2012). Obviously, Gowon's restructuring reforms received mixed feelings namely: sadness and joy. While the majority groups viewed state action as being Hobbesian and dictatorial in nature, the feelings of the minority groups spoke to John Locke. Their joy was that in spite of being a military officer who was expected to be a totalitarian, he was conscious and understood that they have suffered from domination by the majority groups and thus, needed to be liberated. Indeed, it was an action that needed to be applied as a means of handling diversity in the country.

In an attempt to answer the second part of our question which seeks to establish whether the creation of 12 states by the Gowon regime had implications or consequences on the federal system in Nigeria, it is apt to say yes. To date, the consequences still rear its ugly head on the nature of Nigeria federalism. We have noted that Nigeria adopted federalism with a centre and constituent units known as regions in 1954. Each region enjoyed a significant level of self-determination, independence and relative autonomy whose Executive and legislative powers were highly entrenched while both fiscal and political autonomies were given to them resulting in the various regions becoming powerful entities (Majekodumi, 2015:111). This was sustained at least up to 1966 with the central government holding on to minimal power under the exclusive list. However, Gowon's creation of twelve states built on the already altered and dismantled nature and form of Nigeria's federalism sequel to Ironsi's centrist Decree of the same year. Thus, the regime abolished regional fiscal autonomy and ushered in 12 states a situation where Nigeria's federalism became top heavy with exclusive power now transferred and concentrated to the centre. This situation gave birth to a very strong and powerful federal government where the twelve states succeeded the regions but became mere appendages of the national or federal government and dragged the country back to a unitary state (Ibid, 111).

Consequently, true federalism which protects fundamental human rights and offer an ideal model of government for a plural society got distorted and became ineffective. This remained the situation until Gowon's regime was overthrown in 1975. Throughout the series of subsequent boundary reforms that were carried out by the military in 1976, 1987, 1989, 1990 and 1996, the operation of federalism in Nigeria only appears to be in theory as the country is much more tilted to a unitary arrangement especially with regards to the distribution of power and resources. As it stands now, the central government usurps the powers hitherto enjoyed by the regions. Power distribution has now become very volatile. The principle of federalism has not been forthrightly applied leading to ethnic tension, mutual mistrust amongst groups while minority issues keep on clamouring for an answer to the national question (Uhunmwangho & Ekpu, 2011:113). In addition to concentrating power to the central government, the federal government controls fiscal distribution of resources as well as the distribution of offices. So far, a new revenue sharing formula was adopted for the entire country where the central government received the highest proportion (Michael: 601) while states are left like appendages. Indeed, a situation where states or constituent units have come to rely on financial assistance and support from the federal government negates the principle of financial autonomy of the constituent units. We will now turn our attention to General Mohammed/Obasanjo's regime.

#### **The Gen. Murtala Ramat Mohammed/Gen. Olusegun Mathew Aremu Obasanjo Regime 1975 – 1979**

Shortly after the civil war, widespread calls for the creation of additional states from existing ones became highly politicized but the Gowon regime was not favourably disposed to creating any new states. However,

Gowon's regime came to an end on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1975 consequent upon a military coup thus ushering in the regime of Murtala/Obasanjo. The regime is referred to as that of Murtala/Obasanjo because when Murtala became the head of state, Obasanjo was made chief of staff, supreme headquarters. However, just barely one year into office, Murtala was assassinated where Obasanjo consequently took over the affairs of the state. On assumption of power in July 1975, the Murtala Mohammed regime swung into action by inaugurating the Justice Ayo Irikife five man panel on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1975 to among other things, collect and examine memoranda from individuals or groups who may express opinions or views on the need for such states or otherwise (Vande: 43, Ojo and Adebayo: 342 - 43). They were equally mandated to advise government on the territorial coverage, economic resources or viability and location of state capitals. Gen. Mohammed's engagement of the five man panel to collect and examine memoranda from groups and individuals speaks to a Lockean social contract ideology because in spite of the regime being that of military officers who as usual were expected to be totalitarians, yet, they understood that to rule people, you need their consent.

Committed to its terms of reference, the panel collected memoranda from interest groups, toured the country to assess the situation and finally submitted its report to government. Unfortunately, the assignment appeared to have been an exercise in futility as government's response was that the Justice Irikife panel's report compounded problems for government than solved them (Mulami, O.I. Abuja, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2021). It will be reasonable to state here that Justice Irikife's panel had been able to address the minority question by recognizing their right for self-determination. However, the panel's report and recommendations appeared to have threatened the survival of the rulers particularly from the ethnic majority groups. Government's rejection of the report clearly demonstrated that the state was Hobbesian and thus, suggested that the sovereign had his own agenda.

Government's rejection of Justice Irikife's panel report necessitated the reconstitution of the Justice Mamman Nasir Commission to review the report (Ibid, Mulami). Again, Government's reconstitution of the Mamman Nasir commission spoke to the consultative initiative of a Lockean regime. Consequently, on the recommendations of the Mamman Nasir's report, Mohammed in a state broadcast to the nation on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1976, created 19 states with Abuja as the new federal capital of Nigeria. Murtala's further reforms of 1976 sequel to the constitution of the Dasuki led panel on Local government reforms whose recommendations saw the creation of 229 local government areas for the first time in Nigeria spoke to the consultative involvement style of John Locke. This indeed marked the end of the era of provinces, divisions and native authorities that had been a legacy of the colonial state (Ojo and Adebayo: 343).

General Murtala Mohammed argued that the creation of new states had been informed by the desire to ensure level, fair and equitable development with a federal system bringing government closer to the people and above all, to lessen the clamour for new states creation subsequently (Murtala, 1976, Omotosho, 2004:106). It remains to add that the state behaved like Locke in as much as the Justice Nasir's committee went round the country and listened to the views of the people on the subject matter thus, signifying that their voice spoke. It needs to be stressed here that Murtala's creation of 229 Local government areas for the first time in Nigeria introduced a third tier of government in the federal structure. However, it is hereby submitted that it added up to the delicate system of intergovernmental fiscal arrangement of the country. This is so because even though the local governments have their sources of revenue in addition to their statutory allocations, in practice, the various state authorities have continued to exert high influence on the budgetary decisions of local governments. This negates the true spirit of the autonomy of the tiers of government in a federal system.

Rather than uphold Murtala's submission that the sole reason for the exercise was that it was done in the interest of justice and fair play, it is reasonable to rather state here that the whole idea alternatively boiled down to its political economy in view of the rise in revenue from the petro-dollar revenue that institutionalized or established equality of states as basis for statutory devolution of resources to the federating units (Ojo and Adebayo, Adeyemi: 164). It need to be added that Murtala's 1976 reforms' agenda re-introduced ethnic sentiments of majority domination of minority groups accompanied by religious under-tones just like it had been during the era of regionalism of the first republic (Solomon, 2012:98). Moreover, the ideal requirement of economic sustainability or viability was compromised (Timothy, 2014:65).

Gowon's structural arrangement had struck a balance in terms of equality in the number of states for both the majority and minority groups in the country, but Murtala overturned the trend where only seven out of his newly created nineteen states could be said to belong to the ethnic minorities (Osaghe, 1986:158-160, Ojo and Adebayo: 342). Furthermore, in terms of national spread and balancing, Murtala re-invented northern hegemony when he overturned Gowon's 1967 structural equality of number of states along north and south divides and gave the north an edge with ten states leaving the south with nine. This continued to be a subject of contention and controversy in Nigeria's federal structure (Adeyemi, 2013: 165). This tyrannical arrangement points to Hobbes' ethics where the sovereign is seen imposing his arbitrary decision on citizens. But again, it speaks to the loose or malfunctioned nature of the Nigerian federal system that was imposed on the citizens by the military through the abolition of regional arrangement where federating units are not allowed to control and manage resources obtainable in their respective territories to enhance their economic growth.

The Igbo and minorities condemned the exercise calling it nothing but an act of conspiracy by Murtala against them in favour of Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba groups who got five states each as against the Igbo with two leaving the minorities with seven (Vende, 2012: 40, Omotosho, 2004:106, Adeyemi, 2013:165). By implication, state creation became an administrative instrument or weapon focused on the distribution of federal revenue accruable mainly from the southern minority oil rich region to the extremely ethnic majority. Suffice to say that with its more number of states than the south, the north had more access to revenue largesse than the south and the middle belt minority groups' area (Suberu, 1998, Adeyemi: 165). In the absence of any structural reforms carried out by the Alh. Shehu Shagari led civilian regime (1979 - 1983) nor the military one of General Mohammadu Buhari (1983 – 1985), we will now proceed and evaluate General Babangida's reforms.

### **The General Ibrahim Babangida Regime 1985 – 1993**

On ascension to power in 1985, further agitations for the creation of more states were so overwhelming compelling General Ibrahim Babangida to set up a political bureau under the leadership of Dr. S. J. Cookery charged with the responsibility of coordinating formal discussions on the way forward with regards to the political future of Nigeria. The bureau collected submissions, requests and demands for new states. There were also diverse proposals on the modalities for the creation of new states in the country. The bureau finally recommended the creation of six new states. However, in his wisdom, Babangida through a state broadcast to the nation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1987, officially announced the creation of two new states – Akwa Ibom and Katsina– bringing the total number of states to twenty-one (Babangida, 1987, Adeyemi:165, Ojo and Adebayo:345, New Nigerian Newspaper, 24/9/87). Babangida's decision in constituting a political bureau to coordinate formal discussions on the possibility of creating new states speaks to John Locke's philosophy that power belongs to the people. This is so because even as a military officer who was expected to be dictatorial, yet, he was conscious that in administering people, their consent was vital.

The 1987 restructuring exercise was adjudged in some quarters to have been a genuine exercise aimed at redressing the inadequacies of the 1976 Murtala reforms in line with the recommendations of the Justice Irikife panel at the first instance. Second, it was also seen as a strategy aimed at resolving the complicated political situation between Zaria and Katsina that had become unpleasant even before the commencement of the second republic in 1979 (Ojo and Adebayo, Adeyemi: 166). It also intended to render the number of states in the country divisible by three so as to bail the country out of the constitutional and electoral requirement controversy of 2/3 of 19 states witnessed in the 1979 presidential election (Dudley, 1982: 165-178, Ojo and Adebayo: 345). The 1987 reforms reflected a true spirit of fairness to the yearnings and aspirations of citizens which speaks to the consultative approach of Locke. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the creation of these units were merely for the purpose of benefiting or sharing the resources of the Nigerian state under the control and supervision of the central government and not for any developmental reasons.

Some scholars attributed the creation of only Akwa Ibom and Katsina states out of multiple requests from various sections of Nigeria in 1987 to nothing but a product of direct influence from key political power brokers and gladiators from the states in question. On the part of others, it was an extension of Murtala's political and economic corruption agenda accentuated on protecting the interests of the dominant Hausa Fulani group whose number of states increased by one following the reform (Timothy: 66). However, it is hereby submitted that even as a military dictator, Babangida had in a Lockean spirit subjected the exercise to public scrutiny having constituted his political bureau panel and properly guided by their recommendations to the state.

Babangida's regime continued to receive pressure and popular demand for the creation of new states particularly staunch and persuasive agitations from a cream of Igbo intellectuals who argued that stretching from 1967, they have been unfairly treated and ostensibly shortchanged economically and politically throughout the course of restructuring in Nigeria (Adeyemi: 166). Their emotional requests appealed to General Babangida who responded when on the 27 of August, 1991 in a nationwide radio and television state broadcast announced the creation of nine additional states thus moving the number of states from 21 to 30. 140 new local government areas were also created (Babangida, 1991, New Nigerian Newspaper, 28/8/91). Babangida's response to the emotional requests by citizens for the creation of new states shows that in spite of his military background as a dictator, he was more Lockean than Hobbesian in action even if the people's consent was not enough. From the states created, two were Igbo states – Abia and Anambra– while Delta had its headquarters located in Asaba an Igbo city. Pressure from the north and Yoruba sub-groups saw the creation of Jigawa, Kebbi, Yobe, Taraba, Kogi and Osun states.

Babangida's 1991 restructuring had its multi-dimensional politics as well. The contentious 1990 Gideon Okar failed coup which sought to redress the marginalization of the middle belt and southern minorities is alleged to have propelled the campaign or at least added impetus to the creation of new states (Vande, 2012: 41). Of course throughout the history of the creation of new states and local governments by the military 1967 – 1990 with the exception of Gowon's reforms, both the northern and southern minority groups were not comfortable with the nature and pattern of the exercises because they were marginalized. The creation of Jigawa state with

headquarters in Dutse is attributed to Babangida's proximity to instrumental and outstanding power brokers and gladiators of Dutse such as Gen. Lawal Gwadabe (Dankofa & Auwalu, OI, Dutse, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Abubakar, Hadeja, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

The creation of the Delta state and the siting of its capital in Asaba arose from the overbearing influence of Babangida's wife and first lady, Maryam Babangida, who hailed from there. In addition, it was also an attempt to deliberately extend some economic power or distribution of oil revenue to culturally different or incompatible areas such as Kogi, Taraba and Yobe (Ojo and Adebayo, Adeyemi).

However, the mere fact that five of the nine states created were in the north demonstrated a clear case of bias which as well occasioned a geopolitical imbalance in relation to the distribution of states with sixteen states in the north as against fourteen in the south. Clearly, Babangida's 1991 structural reforms were done basically to exploit these agitations to promote his personal desire or ambition to perpetuate him in power. Moreover, Babangida sought to complete the 1976 Murtala's political agenda in favour of the Hausa-Fulani by shortchanging the ethnic minorities who earlier on in 1967 had had six states that were overturned by Murtala. It is quite a fact that unlike a military leader, he listened to the people's request and implemented their will but the people's voice was not heard enough because the implementation tended to have been lopsided in favour of the core north (north west) at the expense of the north central and south southern zones.

Consequently, his restructuring exercise of 1991 left the minorities with just twelve of the thirty states. It is reasonable to conclude that the creation of nine new states and the re-arrangement of the localities were highly influenced by prejudice as reflected in the scenes of violent condemnations and protests, mass anti-government demonstrations and riots involving deaths (Johnson, 1991, Adeyemi). It is also reasonable to re-echo that the harm meted on federalism by Ironsi through the instrumentality of abolishing regional fiscal autonomy of the federating units in favour of centralization of both fiscal and political devolution of power still reared its ugly head in the course of Babangida's 1987 and 1991 reforms. This takes us to our next topic which handles General Abacha's reforms.

### **General Sani Abacha Regime 1993 – 1996**

Through a palace coup staged in November 1993 when the country was passing through crisis, General Abacha ascended the throne as Head of state of Nigeria. Crisis had erupted in the country following Babangida's annulment of the June 12 presidential elections, an election adjudged to have been very credible and one of the best and most transparent elections ever had in Nigeria. This culminated into the nomination of Chief Ernest Shonikan as head of Nigeria's interim government. Arising from military pressure, he was dislodged barely six months into office and replaced by General Abacha through a military action. On assumption of office, Abacha had in an attempt to resolve the political impasse in the country set up the National Constitution Conference (NCC) where discussions on state creation dominated the debate sessions.

Sequel to conflicting interests, the NCC could not resolve this burning issue more so that agitators redoubled their clamour and call for states creation (Ojo and Adebayo: 346). Abacha was left with no option but to inaugurate the Chief Arthur Mbanefo committee in December 1995 to handle the issue of states and local government creations. With February 15, 1996 as its deadline, the committee received 2,369 requests for local governments, 280 for boundary adjustments and 72 for states creation (OI, Obadiah, 24/05/2021, Adeyemi: 167).

Upon receipt of the report and recommendations of the committee, Gen Abacha on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1996, in a nationwide state broadcast, announced the creation of six new states; Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Gombe, Nasarawa, and Zamfara bringing the total number of states in the country to thirty-six (Abacha, 1996, New Nigerian Newspaper, 02/10/96 also see table 1). Abacha's inauguration of a committee to handle issues relating to states and local government creation even as a military dictator aligns with the consultative style and values of John Locke's social contract than Hobbes's which goes to say that to administer people, their consent is important even if it is not enough.

**Table 1: Showing State Creations in Nigeria 1967 - 1996**

Gowon 1967	Murtala Mohammed 1976	Babangida 1987	Babangida 1991	Abacha 1996
Benue-Plateau	Anambra	Akwa-Ibom	Abia	Bayelsa
East-central	Bauchi	Katsina	Enugu	Ekiti
Kano state	Benue		Delta	Gombe
Kwara state	Borno		Jigawa	Nasarawa
Lagos state	Gongola		Kebbi	Zamfara
Mid-western	Imo		Osun	
North-eastern	Niger		Taraba	
North Central	Ogun		Yobe	
North-western	Ondo			
Rivers state	Oyo			
South-eastern	Plateau			
Western state	Sokoto			

**Source:** Compilations from the National Boundary Commission of Nigeria, 2021.

It has been argued that the 1996 Abacha reforms did not imbibe the ideal requirements (economic viability and sustainability) for states creation but was borne out of a desire to conquer the centre and achieve political gain on the one hand, and a means to safeguard, please or satisfy class and ethnic interests on the other (Timothy, Onimisi, 2014:65). It has further been argued that grievances, injustice, marginalization and unfairness especially in relation to the minorities in the country were used in the creation exercise (Solomon, 2012: 96-112). But again, it needs to be stressed here that, the mere fact that citizens were given the opportunity to ask for whatever that they wanted suggests that Abacha was Lockean in his consultative approach irrespective of whether everyone got what he wanted or not. In leadership, no one in any circumstances can satisfy the total needs or wants of the people.

Undoubtedly, religion would appear to have been brought to bear in the 1996 Abacha reforms especially in relation to the carving out of Nasarawa state from the defunct Plateau state. The point has been made that given the nature of the composition of the defunct Plateau state with a dominant Christian population, it was going to be an uphill task for a Muslim to ever rule the state as governor. A resident of Lafia town, Zakary Allumaga, OI, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2021, submits that the rationale behind the carving out of Nasarawa state from defunct Plateau emerged from a desire to create an enclave for the Muslims to rule. This has practically been proven to be true as stretching from the return to democracy following the commencement of the Fourth Republic in 1999 to date, no Christian has had the opportunity of being governor in Nasarawa state. The seat appears to be an exclusive preserve for the Muslims (Ibid, Allumaga). But the point should also be made here that religion forms an important shadow over the Nigerian polity. Although intra and inter religious frictions have also occurred under civilian administrations in the country, the shadow of religion on the federal system or arrangement of Nigeria appears to be much more larger and darker under military than with the civilian. The inability of citizens to accommodate other human beings or have respect for other people's beliefs as well as willingness to share the sweet and better experiences of political community cannot be provided by any system of government. Citizens need to cultivate such values over time. There has to be a compromise for managing Nigeria's complexity and pluralism (Elaigwu: 28).

Finally, it should also be stated here that Abacha's creation of additional states and local government areas in 1996 just like the case with his earlier military rulers, further aided and abated the distortion of the practice of federalism in the Nigerian federal system. They created units that continued to rely on the central government for support thereby tilting the country into a unitary arrangement especially with regards to the distribution of power and resources. Local governments on their part remained subservient and subject to the whim and caprices of state governors who continued to mount influence on budgetary affairs of local governments. The next section highlights the underlying politics of state and local government creations in Nigeria.

### **An analysis of the underlying Politics behind State and Local Government Creations in Nigeria 1967 – 1996**

The politics of restructuring in Nigeria has first and foremost been hinged on the political economy. The deliberate and dishonest exercise of power to change or damage Nigeria's political landscape was not restricted to state creations alone but extended to local government creations and the distorted choice of local government headquarters and state capitals. Thus, the reality about administrative restructuring in Nigeria is that it has been marred by political sentiments guided by the elite as a means of having access to political power and control of state resources (Vande: 43, Solomon, 2012: 100). Thus, it is argued that the military created such structures and institutions for rent seeking as well as avenues for their cronies, family and friends to be patronized as appointees or administrators charged with the responsibility of managing such institutions so that they can benefit from the political economy (Ibid, Larab, Simon Madaki).



The over-bearing influence orchestrated by ethnic majority military ruling elite that have all through governed the country and presided over series of states and local government creation exercises have been largely guided by the principle of discrimination, religious biases, corruption, nepotism, ethnic and regional sentiments (Larab, Obadiah, Ejitu:3, Adeyemi: 168) in relation to the political economy among composite ethnic and regional groups in the country much to their benefit and patronage than the masses (Nigeria: Irifife Report, Dele, 2016: 37). The general impression amongst Nigerians is that stretching from 1975, the country has been ruled by military regimes headed almost largely by Hausa-Fulani military elite and Muslims of the defunct northern region. Thus, it is contended that since the series of states creation exercises were all carried out by those northern Muslim ruling elite in the military, they have utilized that opportunity to create more states and local government areas in the core North over and above the South just to reinforce northern supremacy (Olasupo, 2006: 314). This claim is valid given the number of states and local government areas in the region.

Gen Murtala re-established northern hegemony when he departed from Gowon's structural balance of 6:6 equal number of states along north- south and majority-minority divides when he created 10 states in the north and 9 in the south (Adeyemi: 157). Gen Babangida built on this and created 16 states in the north and 14 in the south. Gen Abacha further consolidated on the northern supremacy when he moved the north from 16 to 19 states leaving the south with 17 (Adeyemi: 157). The politics of this arrangement has serious implications on the political economy because the sharing of resources in the country is carried out based on the number of local government areas that a state has. Consequently, since the north has more states and local governments, it collects about 60 percent of revenue derivable from the national treasury monthly even when the bulk of the revenue derivable comes from the south.

A statistic of the states across the six geopolitical zones of the country as seen in table 2 below shows that the North West (predominantly Hausa-Fulani-Muslims) has seven states constituting 19.4 percent of the states, the North Central, North East, South West and South-South all have six each (16.7%) leaving the South East (predominantly Igbo) with just five states constituting 13.8% (Dele: 2016, 37-40, Ejitu et al: 4).

**Table 2: Shows the distribution of States and Local Government Areas by geo-political zones**

Zones	Number of States	Percentage of States	Number of LGAs	Percentage of LGAs	Percentage In Nation's Population
North-central including Abuja	6	16.7	120	15.5	14
North-east	6	16.7	111	14.3	13.4
North-west	7	19.4	186	24	25.8
South-east	5	13.8	95	12.2	12.1
South-south	6	16.7	123	16	15.1
South-west	6	16.7	139	18	19.6
Total	36	100	774	100	100

**Source:** (1). Compiled from the National Boundary Commission of Nigeria, Abuja, 2021. (2). Adeyemi: 169

It is also an established fact that the military regimes particularly those of Babangida and Abacha used local government creations as a political tool to promote their personal ambition to perpetuate themselves in office as well as build clienteles in favour of the north without recourse to their demography, resources or economic potentials and viability. Suffice to say that the practice of local government creation just like that of states has been an arbitrary exercise in the country. This is so because up to the end of the first republic, Lagos had six divisions while defunct Kano state had just two divisions. However, the irony of the whole situation to date is that Lagos has just 20 LGAs while Jigawa which was carved out of old Kano has 27 LGAs and the new Kano is left with 44. Thus, Lagos that doubled old Kano now has just 20 LGAs recognized in the constitution while old Kano has 71 local government areas (Adeyemi: 169). A distribution of local government areas according to the geopolitical zones of Nigeria shows that the north-west has 24% of the LGAs while the other zones have just between 12 and 18 percent respectively (see table 2).

Importantly, the arbitrary delineation of local governments during Babangida's rule which was made basis for elections into the National Assembly in 1992 conferred more representative seats to the north over the south. For instance, Lagos in spite of its over 5,685,781 voter population at that time had only fifteen members while Niger (the home state of Babangida) with just a population of 2,482,367 people had 19 members in the house. Comparatively, defunct Kano with a similar but lower voter population of 5,632,040 had 32 members and Sokoto with just 4,392,391 people had 29 seats. The questions begging for answers here are: What are the requirements for the creation of representative units under the Nigerian constitution? If population and economic potentials of the area are the basic prerequisites for the creation of local government areas, does it then follows that Lagos as the commercial capital of Nigeria given its huge population and economic viability did not meet up with the criteria?

Surely, the driving force or politics behind state and local government creations has largely been anchored on the political economy which is the commonwealth of the nation. The allocation of resources in the Nigerian

federal system is tied down to the number of states and local governments where the state exercises very great control over the monetary or financial resources of the country being oil. Meanwhile, the overwhelming financial resource of the country being oil is generated from the defunct eastern region. Unfortunately, the northern region has more states and local governments than the eastern and western regions put together. Thus, the North gets more resources amounting to about 60% from the total federation allocation far higher than the revenue generating federating units or states. Clearly, the northern ruling elite have used states creation exercises to achieve their northern hegemonic political agenda to rule and dominate the entire country (Dele: 2016, 37-40, Ejitu *et al*: 4). This is the extent to which boundary formation politics forged by the military regimes have influenced the practice of true federalism in Nigeria by forcefully concentrating power on both fiscal and political devolution of power and resources to the central government and denying the constituent units their right to natural endowment in their domains.

## Conclusion

This essay has interrogated the politics that propelled the fragmentation of Nigeria through a process referred to as state and local government creations. In analyzing data from both primary and secondary sources (which have been duly acknowledged in our references), they were all put under a process of filtration and scrutiny so as to sieve the important and relevant facts that have been corroborated and had genuine historic meaning while observing strict ethical consideration and insuring the confidentiality of the respondents. Thus, it was noted that in fixing boundaries in Nigeria, there were times that rulers behaved like Locke by being democratic in approach but at other times they were Hobbesian in outlook applying force in the exercises and yet, at some other times they were both Lockean and Hobbesian. It was further noted that in creating boundaries, the military regimes implored ethnic, regional, religious sentiments and socio-economic and political biases in their various exercises. True federalism was dismantled and supplanted with a unitary system thereby denying the constituent units their rights over resource control. This study earlier on proposed that boundary fixing in Nigeria was a direct outcome of the interest of the state. Throughout the essay, we have demonstrated how the state interfered with the boundary fixings. State officials colluded with the local elite, worked hard to move boundaries to create states without the consent of the people. Because this is the pillar for our essay, we have proved our case. It is hereby suggested that there is need for restructuring in Nigeria so as to give every component unit a sense of fairness and belonging.

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### **Oral Interviews**

- Larab Tangshak Ayuba, Male, 49 years old, Jos, Academician, 15/03/2021
- Bar Zakary Allumaga; Male, 58 years old, Lafia, Community leader/Public servant, 25/03/2021
- Mohammed Mulami, Male, 58 years old, Abuja, Director, Internal boundaries, National boundary commission, Abuja, 30/03/2021
- Benjamin Dadu; Male, 60 years old, Lafia, Community leader/public servant, 05/04/2021
- Prof. Obadiah Mailafia, male, 63 years old, Kuru, Research fellow, NIPPS, Jos, 24/05/2021
- Simon Madaki Itse; Male, 70 years old, Rukuba Road Jos, former legislator/ frontline Politician, 05/06/2021
- Ali Dankofa Limawa; Male, 58 years old, Dutse, Civil servant, Ministry of Education, Jigawa state, 25/06/2021
- Auwalu Mohammed Bello; Male, 57 years old, civil servant, Ministry of Budget and planning, Jigawa state, 25/06/2021
- Mallam Musa Abubakar, Male, 54 years old, Malamidori, Hadeja, Jigawa state, business man, 10/08/202