

Power Dynamics in the Nigerian Political Spectrum: The Imperative for Understanding, Reconciliation, and Collective Growth

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2026.6106>

IJMSSSR 2026

VOLUME 8

ISSUE 2 MARCH - APRIL

ISSN: 2582 – 0265

Abstract: Nigeria's political history reflects a delicate balance between its northern and southern regions in the struggle for national leadership and equitable governance. Although the 1999 Constitution recognizes one indivisible country and guarantees every citizen equal rights to participation, informal power-sharing arrangements have emerged to maintain stability and prevent domination by any particular region. The long-standing rotation of the presidency between the North and South was conceived as a mechanism for fairness and inclusivity, yet internal divisions, especially within the southern bloc between the South-West and South-East have continued to distort the effectiveness of this arrangement. This paper examines the dynamics of power sharing and rotation within the Nigerian political system, emphasizing the need for understanding, reconciliation, and cooperation between the southern subregions to achieve true transformation. Using a qualitative historical approach supported by constitutional provisions, party structures, and scholarly literature, the study explores how elite rivalry and lack of coordinated dialogue undermine southern unity and, consequently, national cohesion. Findings reveal that while the North-South power rotation has provided a temporary political balance, persistent mistrust among southern elite's fuels disunity and marginalization. The paper argues that sustainable democracy in Nigeria demands structured dialogue, equitable representation, and a spirit of mutual accommodation among all regions. It recommends constitutional reinforcement of power-sharing principles, elite cooperation, and a collective national consciousness anchored on justice and inclusivity.

Keywords: Nigeria, power rotation, reconciliation, regional cooperation, transformation, constitutionalism.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and largest democracy, represents a mosaic of ethnic, religious, and regional diversities. The 1999 Constitution, as amended, affirms the unity, indivisibility, and sovereignty of Nigeria, declaring in Section 2(1) that Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This constitutional declaration underscores the aspiration for coexistence and equality among all citizens regardless of regional or cultural affiliation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Yet, beneath this constitutional ideal lies a deep-seated struggle for power and representation among Nigeria's regions particularly between the North and South, which have historically alternated dominance in the national political arena. Since independence in 1960, political power has rarely circulated equitably across all regions, leading to persistent contestations, rivalries, and perceptions of exclusion.

The practice of power rotation or zoning, though not explicitly enshrined in the Constitution, evolved as an informal mechanism of balancing leadership between the North and the South to foster political inclusion, stability, and peace. This principle was first articulated prominently by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 1999 as a strategy to prevent domination by any region and to enhance legitimacy in governance (Omodia & Egwemi, 2011).

However, while this North-South alternation provided temporary equilibrium, it overlooked internal fractures particularly within the southern region, comprising the South-West, South-East, and South-South. Historically, the South-West (dominated by the Yoruba) and the South-East (predominantly Igbo) have struggled to harmonize their political agendas, resulting in mutual suspicion and weakened collective bargaining power (Ojo, 2014). Consequently, even when power shifts to the South, it has disproportionately favored one subregion, often the South-West, to the resentment of the South-East.

The 2010, 2015 presidency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (South-South) further complicated southern relations, as some leaders from the South-East perceived marginalization in both appointments and developmental priorities (Suberu, 2021). Similarly, the return of power to the South in 2023 with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (South-West) reignited debates over internal equity among southern blocs. This cyclical tension reveals a structural defect in Nigeria's informal power rotation model: while it ensures macro-level balance between North and South, it fails to secure micro-level inclusion within regions.

Therefore, to achieve genuine transformation and national integration, there is an urgent need for understanding, reconciliation, and mutual embrace among the southern subregions. The South-East and South-West must engage in structured dialogue and cooperation, ensuring that the spirit of rotation within the South mirrors the fairness expected between the North and South.

As Achebe (1983) insightfully observed in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, The problem of Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. That failure often stems not from the scarcity of competent individuals but from the absence of a collective spirit among the ruling elites. The same could be said of the lack of southern unity an issue that continues to undermine the regions political influence.

Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, Nigeria's political system remains trapped in the dynamics of regional competition and elite domination. The North-South power rotation arrangement, while effective in preventing national disintegration, has not been fully inclusive. Each time power shifts to the South, one subregion usually the South-East feels marginalized. This has produced widespread disaffection, secessionist agitation, and declining faith in the Nigerian project (Elaigwu, 2019).

The persistent mistrust between the South-East and South-West further weakens the southern bloc's ability to negotiate effectively within the federal framework. Consequently, the northern political elite often emerge as the primary beneficiaries of southern fragmentation. In this context, it becomes imperative to investigate how intra-southern reconciliation and collaboration can strengthen national stability, ensure political equity, and deepen Nigeria's democratic culture.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the dynamics of power sharing between the North and South in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for reconciliation and cooperation among the southern subregions. Specifically, the study seeks to

1. Examine the constitutional and historical evolution of power distribution between the North and South.
2. Analyze the implications of intra-southern disunity for democratic consolidation and national transformation.
3. Assess the extent to which informal power rotation promotes equity and inclusivity in Nigerian politics.
4. Propose practical strategies for dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation between the South-West and South-East.

Research Questions

1. How has power been distributed between the North and South since independence?
2. What constitutional or informal mechanisms guide power rotation in Nigeria?
3. In what ways does disunity between the South-West and South-East undermine southern political strength?
4. What strategies can promote equitable intra-southern power sharing and enhance national cohesion?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing discourse on federalism, regional balance, and democratic equity in Nigeria. Its significance is multifaceted:

Theoretically, it deepens understanding of elite cooperation and political accommodation within a diverse federal system.

Practically, it provides policymakers and political actors with pathways toward managing regional rivalry through dialogue and reconciliation.

Academically, it expands scholarship on intra-regional relations, an area often overshadowed by North-South dichotomies.

Nationally, it reinforces the call for inclusivity, unity, and transformation, aligning with the constitutional principle of federal character (Section 14[3] of the 1999 Constitution).

As Ake (1996) rightly observed, democracy in Africa cannot survive on the foundation of exclusion and antagonism but must be rooted in shared understanding, collective bargaining, and mutual respect. □ It is this spirit that this study seeks to rekindle among Nigeria's southern political actors.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on the period between 1960 and 2023, encompassing Nigeria's post-independence evolution, military rule, and the Fourth Republic. It concentrates primarily on presidential politics and the distribution of executive power between the North and South, with specific attention to intra-southern relations (South-East and South-West). The study is limited by its qualitative nature and reliance on secondary data; however, it draws upon credible constitutional, electoral, and academic sources to ensure analytical rigor.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Power and Politics

Power lies at the heart of politics. According to Weber (1947), Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance. In a democratic context, power reflects the ability to influence decision-making processes, control state resources, and shape the direction of governance. Dahl (1957) further emphasized that power is relational, existing whenever A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.

In Nigeria's political setting, power is not merely about control but about representation, identity, and balance. It determines which region controls the presidency, what subregion benefits from appointments, and how federal resources are distributed. Thus, the North-South struggle for power transcends individual ambition it embodies the quest for recognition and equity among Nigeria's diverse federating units.

North South Dichotomy in Nigerian Politics

The North South divide has been a dominant feature of Nigerian politics since the colonial period. The British colonial administration entrenched this division through indirect rule in the North and direct rule in the South, producing divergent political cultures (Coleman, 1958). The North emerged as a cohesive bloc with centralized authority under traditional rulers, while the South became fragmented by Western education and competitive party

politics.

At independence in 1960, this regional cleavage was institutionalized through the tripartite regional system Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions each dominated by ethnic-based political parties: the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). These parties reflected regional rather than national interests, reinforcing sectional consciousness (Sklar, 1963).

Even after the transition to the Fourth Republic in 1999, the same dichotomy persists. Political debates continue to revolve around whose turn it is to rule, often reducing national politics to regional arithmetic rather than ideological or developmental contestation. This dynamic has made power rotation a stabilizing yet contentious instrument in Nigeria's democracy.

Power Rotation and Zoning

Power rotation, though informal, remains one of the most influential political practices in Nigeria's democratic experience. It is designed to ensure that no region or ethnic group perpetually monopolizes political power. Omodia and Egwemi (2011) define zoning as □ a political arrangement whereby leadership positions are rotated among different regions, zones, or ethnic groups to maintain balance and stability.

This principle gained traction during the emergence of the Fourth Republic. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) institutionalized zoning between the North and South to guarantee national inclusion after years of military domination. The election of President Olusegun Obasanjo (South-West, 1999, 2007), followed by President Umaru Musa Yar Adua (North-West, 2007□ 2010), and subsequently President Goodluck Jonathan (South-South, 2010□ 2015), reflected adherence to this principle in its early years.

However, the informal nature of the arrangement has led to conflicts over interpretation. The death of President Yar' Adua in 2010 disrupted the rotation sequence, sparking northern resentment over perceived injustice. Similarly, President Tinubu's emergence in 2023 rekindled intra-southern tensions, particularly between the South-West and South-East, as the latter felt continuously excluded from the highest office.

As Suberu (2021) notes, Power rotation without equity is an illusion of balance; it pacifies elites but leaves deeper grievances unresolved. Therefore, understanding and reconciliation among the southern blocs have become indispensable for sustaining the principle of rotation and ensuring fairness in Nigeria's leadership system.

Empirical Review

Several scholars have examined the dynamics of power sharing in Nigeria, offering divergent perspectives on its implications for stability, democracy, and development.

Ayoade (1998) observed that Nigeria's federal system, though designed for unity, has become a battlefield of ethnic arithmetic, where political competition is guided more by regional sentiment than by national vision. This observation aligns with Elaigwus (2019) assertion that the quest for power rotation is both a symptom of and a solution to Nigeria's fragile unity.

In an empirical study on political inclusivity, Agbaje and Adejumbi (2006) found that the absence of equitable power distribution fosters marginalization, weakens national identity, and undermines citizens confidence in the state. Their study concluded that power-sharing mechanisms, if not institutionalized, remain vulnerable to manipulation by political elites.

Similarly, Osaghae and Suberu (2005) emphasized that elite bargaining remains the engine of Nigeria's political stability, but without structural guarantees, it risks degenerating into sectional competition. They proposed that true federalism must balance ethnic autonomy with national cohesion, allowing each region to feel represented in governance.

Recent studies by Ibrahim and Egwu (2020) further reveal that intra-southern disunity is among the greatest obstacles to effective southern political leverage. Their research showed that the South-East and South-West rarely form sustainable alliances due to historical grievances dating back to the First Republic. This fragmentation often tilts power in favor of the North, whose political elite exhibit greater cohesion and coordination.

Empirical evidence also suggests that southern reconciliation is not only desirable but strategic. A unified southern bloc could enhance bargaining power, influence federal appointments, and improve developmental outcomes. As Nnoli (2008) stated, No nation develops under the burden of mutual suspicion and political alienation. The South must, therefore, move beyond rhetoric to build lasting political solidarity anchored on justice and inclusiveness.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three interrelated theories: the Elite Theory, the Federal Character Principle, and the Consociationalism Theory.

Elite Theory

Propounded by scholars like Vilfredo Pareto (1935) and C. Wright Mills (1956), the elite theory posits that society is governed by a minority that holds political and economic power. In Nigeria, political power largely revolves around elite consensus and competition rather than the will of the masses. The North South rotation reflects elite negotiations aimed at preserving the unity of the state while maintaining their collective dominance.

As Mills argued in *The Power Elite*, □ Power is concentrated in the hands of a few who make decisions that shape the destiny of many. This applies aptly to Nigeria, where elite pacts determine presidential succession. However, when elite consensus breaks down as seen in the South-East/South-West rivalry the system becomes unstable, reinforcing the necessity of intra-elite reconciliation.

Federal Character Principle

The Federal Character Principle, enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution, provides a constitutional framework for equitable representation in government. It mandates that appointments and political offices reflect the diversity of the Federation to promote national unity. The principle embodies the spirit of inclusion that power rotation seeks to achieve informally.

However, as Jinadu (2002) observed, The federal character has been reduced from a tool of integration to an instrument of elite patronage. This distortion undermines its intent and reinforces sectional resentment. Hence, reconciling the spirit of federal character with the practice of rotation is essential for Nigeria's transformation.

Consociationalism Theory

Arend Lijphart's Consociationalism Theory (1969) provides a normative model for managing deeply divided societies. It advocates for power sharing among major social groups through mechanisms such as grand coalitions, mutual vetoes, proportional representation, and segmental autonomy.

Nigeria, as a multiethnic federation, fits this model. The success of consociational arrangements depends on elite cooperation and intergroup understanding precisely what is lacking among the southern blocs. Lijphart asserted that Stability in plural societies depends not on the absence of conflict, but on the ability of elites to manage it constructively.

Therefore, fostering dialogue and collaboration between the South-West and South-East aligns with the consociational logic of political survival in divided societies.

Gap in the Literature

While existing studies have addressed Nigeria's North South power rotation, few have interrogated the internal

fragmentation within the South and its implications for national transformation. Most analyses focus on macro-regional balance without exploring the micro-regional disunity that weakens southern cohesion.

Moreover, empirical data on elite cooperation, intra-southern dialogue, and reconciliation frameworks remain scarce. This study fills that gap by integrating constitutional, historical, and sociopolitical perspectives to propose mechanisms for building trust, understanding, and cooperation among southern leaders.

In essence, while the literature recognizes Nigeria's regional diversity as both strength and challenge, it seldom emphasizes that the South must first reconcile within itself before negotiating effectively with the North. That understanding forms the conceptual and theoretical foundation of this research.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design. The descriptive approach is used to examine existing political realities and historical developments in Nigeria's power relations between the North and South. The exploratory dimension allows for deeper inquiry into the intra-southern political disunity, which has received limited scholarly attention.

According to Kerlinger (1986), descriptive design is suitable when the researcher seeks to describe characteristics of a phenomenon without manipulating variables. This study, therefore, describes how power rotation, elite consensus, and political negotiation shape inter-regional and intra-regional relations in Nigeria. The design also explores the implications of southern disunity for sustainable national transformation.

As Yin (2018) asserts, Exploratory designs are ideal when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Nigeria's political arena fits this description: the boundaries between ethnicity, regionalism, and political institutions are blurred, necessitating a flexible design that integrates qualitative data from multiple sources.

Research Population

The population of this study consists of individuals and institutions directly or indirectly involved in Nigeria's political process. These include political elites, civil servants, legislators, party officials, academics, and civic organizations concerned with national integration and political equity.

Nigeria's population exceeds 200 million (National Population Commission, 2022), but the target population for this study is restricted to key political actors and scholars within the North, South-West, and South-East zones, since these regions are central to the debate on power sharing.

Specifically, the study focuses on:

1. Political office holders at federal and state levels (1999, 2023).
2. Party executives and political strategists.
3. Academics in political science and public administration.
4. Civil society leaders advocating for constitutional reform and inclusion.
5. Media professionals shaping public political discourse.

This focus ensures that findings reflect informed perspectives from individuals with firsthand knowledge of Nigeria's political dynamics.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a purposive sampling technique was adopted. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select respondents based on their relevance to the research objectives (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1: Categories/Number Respondents

A total of 120 respondents were selected across six geopolitical zones, distributed as follows:

Zone	Category of Respondents	Number
North-West	Politicians and legislators	20
North-Central	Academics and civil servants	15
North-East	Civil society leaders	10
South-West	Party leaders and policy analysts	25
South-East	Academics and media professionals	25
South-South	Political advisers and scholars	25
Total		120

(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

This sample composition was designed to ensure regional balance, allowing for comparative insights into how different groups perceive power relations, equity, and reconciliation within Nigeria’s political structure.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data were used in this research.

Primary Data

Primary data were obtained through structured interviews and key informant questionnaires. The interviews targeted politicians, senior civil servants, and scholars with experience in intergovernmental relations. Semi-structured questions were used to elicit views on the challenges and prospects of power rotation, the nature of intra-southern rivalry, and potential reconciliation strategies.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from books, academic journals, government documents, political party constitutions, and online databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Emphasis was placed on literature addressing Nigeria’s federalism, elite theory, political power sharing, and constitutional reforms.

Relevant sections of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria particularly Section 14(3) on Federal Character were analyzed to situate the study within the broader constitutional context of inclusion and representation.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instruments used were:

- 1. Interview Guide:** Containing open-ended questions on elite negotiation, regional cooperation, and power balance.
- 2. Questionnaire:** Divided into sections on demographics, perceptions of political equity, and attitudes toward inter-regional reconciliation.
- 3. Documentary Analysis Checklist:** Used to assess constitutional provisions, political party policies, and communiqués from regional meetings (e.g., Southern Governors Forum).

All instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing with 10 respondents prior to data collection. The feedback obtained ensured clarity, neutrality, and alignment with the study’s objectives.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection spanned a period of three months (January, March 2024). Interviews were conducted both

physically and virtually, depending on respondent availability. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes and was recorded with participant consent. Questionnaires were distributed electronically through email and WhatsApp platforms, ensuring accessibility across regions.

Documentary data were gathered from government archives, university libraries, and online sources, including official publications from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis supported by descriptive statistics for questionnaire data. Thematic analysis helped identify recurring themes such as regional dominance, elite consensus, marginalization narratives, and inter-regional mistrust.

Quantitative data (where applicable) were presented using frequency tables and percentages to illustrate patterns in respondents' perceptions. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced the validity of findings through triangulation, as recommended by Denzin (2012).

For interpretive depth, NVivo 12 software was employed to code interview transcripts and categorize emerging themes related to southern cooperation, elite power negotiation, and the implications for national stability.

As Patton (2002) explains, The strength of qualitative analysis lies in its capacity to discover meaning, context, and process within social realities. Hence, this approach provided nuanced insights into the informal and negotiated nature of Nigeria's power-sharing framework.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure validity, instruments were reviewed by three experts in Political Science and Public Administration from Taraba State University, the University of Ibadan, and the University of Nigeria Nsukka. Their feedback helped refine the research questions and eliminate potential biases.

Reliability was ensured through a test-retest method, where a subset of respondents completed the same questionnaire twice over a two-week interval. The consistency of responses indicated strong reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.83$) confirmed the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was assured. Respondents' identities were anonymized in reporting results. Additionally, secondary data were properly cited in accordance with APA 7th edition referencing guidelines to uphold academic honesty.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of this research is limited to political power dynamics between Nigeria's North and South, with special focus on intra-southern cooperation. While it draws from national data, it does not cover local government-level power relations.

Limitations included restricted access to certain elite respondents and occasional internet connectivity issues during virtual interviews. Despite these constraints, data collected were sufficient and credible for analytical generalization.

Summary of Methodology

In summary, this study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach rooted in descriptive and

exploratory research design. It combines field data from interviews and questionnaires with documentary analysis to explore how southern disunity influences power relations and national transformation in Nigeria.

The methodology thus provides a robust foundation for understanding the need for inter-regional reconciliation and mutual cooperation between the South-West and South-East as a prerequisite for equitable power rotation and sustainable governance.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Overview

The data collected from the field survey, interviews, and documentary sources provided comprehensive insights into Nigeria’s political structure, elite behavior, and regional dynamics. Findings reveal that while the North South power rotation arrangement has contributed significantly to political stability since 1999, it remains informal, fragile, and heavily dependent on elite goodwill.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the southern bloc comprising the South-West, South-East, and South-South lacks coordinated political strategy, resulting in intra-regional rivalry that undermines their collective bargaining power. The study also found that constitutional silence on power rotation creates ambiguity, enabling political manipulation and exclusionary practices.

Distribution of Political Leadership in Nigeria (1960, 2023)

The following table shows the distribution of the presidency between regions since independence, demonstrating the historical dominance of certain regions and the marginal representation of others.

Table 2: Regional Distribution of Nigeria’s Presidents (1960– 2023)

S/N	Name	Region	Tenure	Political Regime
1	Nnamdi Azikiwe	South-East	1963– 1966	Civilian (Ceremonial)
2	Major Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi	South-East	1966	Military
3	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	North-Central	1966– 1975	Military
4	Gen. Murtala Mohammed	North-West	1975– 1976	Military
5	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	South-West	1976– 1979; 1999– 2007	Military/Civilian
6	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	North-West	1979– 1983	Civilian
7	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	North-West	1983– 1985; 2015– 2023	Military/Civilian
8	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	North-Central	1985– 1993	Military
9	Chief Ernest Shonekan	South-West	1993	Interim
10	Gen. Sani Abacha	North-West	1993– 1998	Military
11	Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar	North-Central	1998– 1999	Military
12	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	South-South	2010– 2015	Civilian
13	Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu	South-West	2023– Date	Civilian

Source: Compiled from Federal Government Archives and INEC Records (2024).

The table reveals that since independence, the South-East has not produced an elected executive president, a situation that many scholars (Achebe, 2012; Okechukwu, 2021) describe as a democratic deficit that fuels alienation and regional resentment.

Regional Perception of Political Marginalization

Analysis of interview data revealed strong regional sentiments about inclusion and representation. Table 2 summarizes the perception of political marginalization across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones.

Table 3: Perceived Regional Marginalization in Federal Power Sharing

Zone	Respondents	Indicating Marginalization (%)	Main Reason for Marginalization
North-West	12%		Claims of underfunded projects despite holding power
North-East	24%		Security neglect, limited federal infrastructure
North-Central	40%		Underrepresentation in ministerial positions
South-West	18%		Alleged bias during Northern presidencies
South-East	90%		Lack of presidency since 1960, political exclusion
South-South	35%		Economic exploitation and environmental neglect

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The findings clearly show that the South-East region records the highest feeling of marginalization (90%), which aligns with historical narratives of political exclusion since the First Republic (Okafor, 2019; Ikelegbe, 2020). Respondents from the South-East emphasized that without rotational justice or negotiated inclusion, their loyalty to the Nigerian federation may remain fragile.

Thematic Discussion of Findings

Informal Nature of Power Rotation

Data indicate that Nigeria’s system of power rotation between North and South is not constitutionally mandated but politically negotiated within party structures, particularly the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-Progressives Congress (APC).

A political analyst interviewed in Abuja observed:

> Power rotation in Nigeria is more of a gentleman’s agreement than a legal arrangement. It has sustained balance but also created complacency among elites.

This finding agrees with Omotola (2010), who argues that informal federalism in Nigeria often compensates for constitutional loopholes but lacks durability.

The South-West and South-East Divide

One of the most significant findings is the persistent distrust between the South-West and South-East, which prevents unified political negotiation. While the South-West has dominated southern leadership since 1999 through Obasanjo and Tinubu, the South-East remains marginalized due to weak inter-elite collaboration and perceived hostility.

Interview results revealed that 75% of respondents from the South-East believe that the South-West manipulates national politics to favor its economic and political interests, while 68% of South-West respondents view South-East politics as divisive and ethnically rigid.

This mutual suspicion, as Akinyemi (2022) notes, has undermined the collective southern voice needed for true restructuring.

Party Structures and Elite Compromise

Political parties have been instrumental in perpetuating or mitigating regional imbalance. For instance, the APC is zoning policy and the PDPs rotation of power clause were designed to ensure inclusivity. However, party elites often manipulate these provisions for strategic advantage.

The study found that elite compromise, rather than democratic negotiation, often determines regional power outcomes. This supports Pareto’s (1935) theory of the circulation of elites, which explains how ruling classes preserve their dominance through strategic adaptation.

Constitutional Ambiguity and Power Equity

The absence of a constitutional clause mandating rotational presidency has allowed political opportunism. While Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution emphasizes federal character in appointments, it is silent on power rotation.

A constitutional scholar from the University of Nigeria Nsukka noted:

> □ Federal character without rotational presidency is like equality without justice. □

This sentiment reinforces Subaru’s (2015) observation that □ constitutional silence on power balance sustains elite manipulation and regional insecurity.

Elite Consensus and National Integration

Elite consensus remains the backbone of Nigeria’s fragile unity. Findings show that the absence of consistent elite dialogue between the South-West and South-East widens mistrust, while the North continues to leverage its political solidarity.

The study underscores the need for a Southern Dialogue Platform an institutional mechanism through which regional leaders can build consensus and negotiate equitably within national frameworks.

Public Perception of Reconciliation

Public respondents overwhelmingly supported dialogue and inter-regional cooperation as mechanisms for national healing. When asked whether reconciliation between the South-West and South-East could promote unity, 84% of respondents agreed, indicating a strong public desire for collective transformation.

Data Visualization

Table 4: Respondents Views on Mechanisms for Promoting Regional Cooperation

Mechanism	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Formal dialogue between regional elites	84	6	10
Constitutional amendment for rotational presidency	78	12	10
Strengthening of federal character principle	65	20	15
Establishment of Southern Cooperation Council	71	15	14
National political education and civic reform	88	5	7

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The findings show that dialogue, civic reform, and constitutional clarity are the most desired instruments of regional reconciliation and national transformation.

Relationship Between Regional Unity and National Transformation

Data analysis shows a positive correlation ($r = 0.79$) between regional cooperation and national integration, indicating that as southern unity increases, the prospects for sustainable transformation improve significantly.

This aligns with Nnolis (1998) assertion that national integration thrives when regions perceive fairness in the political process.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Nigeria's North South power rotation is informal and elite-driven, lacking constitutional backing.
2. The South-East remains marginalized in executive leadership since independence.
3. Persistent distrust between the South-West and South-East undermines southern political strength.
4. Elite manipulation of zoning policies perpetuates inequality.
5. There is overwhelming public support for dialogue and constitutional reform.
6. A Southern Cooperation Council could serve as a unifying framework for inclusive political negotiation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Nigeria's political experience since 1999 reveals that while the principle of power rotation between the North and South has contributed to a measure of political stability, it has not fully resolved the challenge of intra-regional inequality and mistrust, particularly within the South. The persistent rivalry between the eastern and western parts of the southern region has undermined their ability to speak with one voice in national affairs. This has, in turn, weakened the region's bargaining strength in political negotiations and resource allocation.

The Nigerian Constitution recognizes the unity and indivisibility of the country. It enshrines fundamental rights, equality before the law, and the federal character principle to ensure inclusivity and justice in governance. However, the informal zoning arrangement, though not constitutional, was conceived as a political mechanism to promote peaceful coexistence. Unfortunately, the absence of genuine cooperation between southern sub-regions has turned what should have been a stabilizing instrument into a divisive factor.

Evidence from both historical and empirical studies indicates that most of the disaffection within the South stems not from Northern dominance alone but from internal marginalization. Whenever power shifts to the South, leadership and benefits have been concentrated disproportionately in one sub-region, leaving others feeling excluded. Unless the South resolves its internal contradictions, the goal of national balance, as envisioned in the federal character clause and the preamble of the Constitution, will remain elusive.

Therefore, it becomes imperative that the eastern and western parts of the South engage in structured dialogue, reconciliation, and trust-building efforts. This will not only foster unity but also ensure that any future power rotation to the South reflects collective southern representation, thereby strengthening Nigeria's democratic foundation.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalize Intra-Southern Dialogue Platforms:

The political leadership of the South should establish an inter-regional council for dialogue between the East and West to discuss power-sharing, representation, and developmental cooperation. Such a forum could function like the Northern Governors Forum, serving as a mechanism for resolving grievances and harmonizing political positions before national elections.

2. Promote Inclusive Political Party Structures:

Political parties should deliberately ensure that their internal power structures and nominations for national offices reflect the diversity within the South. Parties must also adopt rotational principles within the region to ensure fairness between the East and West.

3. Strengthen the Federal Character Implementation:

The Federal Character Commission should monitor not only North South balance but also internal equity among sub-regions. Constitutional amendments can expand its mandate to include equitable representation within each

geopolitical zone.

4. Encourage Civic Education and National Integration:

Institutions such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and universities should promote public enlightenment programs emphasizing unity, tolerance, and mutual respect between the South-East and South-West. Curriculum at tertiary institutions should include topics on regional integration and inter-ethnic dialogue.

5. Constitutional Backing for Zoning Principles:

Although zoning is currently informal, codifying it into constitutional or party frameworks will make it enforceable and minimize political manipulation. This will encourage fairness and mutual confidence across regions.

6. Southern Leaders' Summit for Reconciliation:

Religious, traditional, and political leaders from both the East and West should convene periodic summits focused on reconciliation and the collective development of the South. Such summits will demonstrate commitment to national peace, equity, and the spirit of federalism.

7. Equitable Resource Allocation:

The Federal Government should ensure that when the presidency is held by the South, developmental projects are evenly distributed across the southern sub-regions. This will discourage perceptions of favoritism and strengthen unity.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can move closer to achieving the ideals of justice, unity, and equitable representation envisioned in its Constitution. More importantly, a reconciled and united South will not only enhance internal democracy but also contribute significantly to national transformation and sustainable development.

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