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Intergovernmental Relations and Governance Outcomes in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis

Adeleke Adegbami[1] & Abolaji Solomon[2]
[1]Department of Public Administration, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.
[2]Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Adeleke University, Ede, Nigeria.
E-mail: adeleke.adegbami@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3582-1680

Abstract

The study examines intergovernmental relations in Nigeria; how they have influenced the management of interactions among different levels of government in the country; and how their structural features have either strengthened or undermined the country's governance. The study adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach, drawing data from secondary sources, including constitutional provisions, textbooks, scholarly journals, official reports, and judicial decisions. The data gathered were analysed using content analysis. The study reveals that Nigeria's intergovernmental relations are characterised by over-centralisation of powers, fiscal dependency of subnational governments, constitutional ambiguities, and weak local government systems, among others. These structural defects have fostered policy incoherence, fiscal imbalance, limited autonomy at subnational levels and conflicts, thereby inhibiting effective service delivery, national development and the country's governance. Furthermore, the imbalances and excessive federal dominance have weakened subnational autonomy and hindered participatory governance. The study, therefore, concludes that while Nigeria's federal structure is constitutionally planned to foster shared governance, coordination, and cooperation among the federating units of government, its practical operation reveals deep-seated challenges that undercut these ideals. As such, Nigeria's governance challenges were deeply linked to the dysfunctional nature of its intergovernmental relations. The study recommends that Nigeria must pursue federalism through constitutional restructuring, fiscal decentralisation, and institutional reforms that promote autonomy, cooperation and collaboration among all levels of government.

Keywords: Intergovernmental Relations, Governance, Federalism, Fiscal Centralisation, Nigeria, Local Government

1. Introduction

Intergovernmental relations can be viewed as both formal and informal interactions among different levels of government in decentralised and federal political systems, aimed at improving coordination and cooperation (Heinemann-Grüder et al., 2017). Coordination among various levels of government is essential due to the constant overlap of competences and different policy issues that require cooperation. Intergovernmental relations, therefore, constitute a vital feature of federal political systems, as they represent the framework within

which various levels of government interact and cooperate toward achieving governance objectives.

Given that no single level of government can effectively deliver essential services for the citizenry and national development, there is, therefore, a need for collaboration, coordination, and cooperation among different levels of government to be able to carry out the responsibilities of government. Thus, intergovernmental relations are essential for different levels of government to achieve the goals and objectives of government.

Nigeria adopted a federal system of government; as such, it is a federal state comprising thirty-six states, with 774 local governments. Thus, the success and accomplishment of governance activities largely depend on the ability of the component units of government, vis-à-vis federal, state, and local governments, to effectively relate and cooperate. Ordinarily, intergovernmental relations are expected to promote coordination, fiscal balance, and administrative efficiency, among others. The extant literature has shown that Nigeria's intergovernmental relations have been characterised by constitutional ambiguities, over-centralisation, fiscal dependency, and political contestation, among other challenges, all of which have continued to undermine governance outcomes (Ayoade, 1980; Suberu, 2001). In some other federal systems, similar challenges have equally been identified. These challenges appear in varying degrees in terms of intensity and institutional responses. Federations, including Canada, Australia, Germany, and India, for example, have developed institutional mechanisms, such as intergovernmental councils, fiscal equalisation arrangements, and cooperative decision-making frameworks, among others. These mechanisms help in enhancing coordination among different levels of government, reducing intergovernmental conflicts, and improving governance and public service delivery. Similarly, South Africa has adopted a cooperative governance system which emphasises consultation, mutual support, and coordinated implementation of public policies which cut across national, provincial, and local spheres of government. Their different approaches notwithstanding, these federations are not immune to intergovernmental tensions; they have adopted and applied stronger institutional frameworks for managing conflicts and promoting cooperative governance than what is obtainable in Nigeria.

Intergovernmental relations are germane to the effective functioning of decentralised countries' governance and administrative systems. They provide the institutional and administrative frameworks through which component units of government interact, cooperate, and coordinate governance affairs and activities. Existing studies have largely examined intergovernmental relations from constitutional, fiscal, or political perspectives, with little attention to how deficits in intergovernmental coordination could hamper governance effectiveness, service delivery, accountability, and national development. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between intergovernmental relations and governance outcomes in Nigeria.

Although the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) establishes a federal system of government, however, the country's practice of federalism has more and more assumed quasi-unitary characteristics, in which the federal government exercises dominant control over fiscal resources, internal security, and key policy domains (Akinsanya & Akinsanya, 2015). Therefore, states and local governments in the country have continued to suffer limited autonomy, inadequate fiscal capacity, and institutional constraints, thereby weakening policy coordination, service delivery, and overall governance effectiveness. It is to this extent that this study examines intergovernmental relations in Nigeria, how they have

influenced the management of interactions among different levels of government in the country, and how their structural features have either strengthened or undermined the country's governance challenges while adopting a qualitative research design based on secondary data. Data were obtained from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), government publications, policy documents, reports of national and international organisations, and relevant scholarly literature. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis to examine the relationship between intergovernmental relations and governance outcomes in Nigeria.

2. Conceptual Review

2.1 Intergovernmental Relations

The term "intergovernmental relations," which was unique to the United States, could be said to have been invented in the 1930s. William Anderson coined the term in his book titled American Government Textbook, published in 1938. The term, to him, summarises the extensive relationships between and among the various local, state, and national governing entities, as well as the numerous officials occupying important policy-making posts (Wright, 2006).

In one of his works, Anderson defines intergovernmental relations as a body of activities or interactions occurring between governmental units of all types and levels (Anderson, 1960). For him, intergovernmental relations are seen as human beings adorned with office who are in charge of determining what the relations between units of government should be. In essence, the term has to be defined or formulated in relation to humans, vis-à-vis their relations and behaviour when confronted with dissenting views and interests from different units and different levels and functions of government.

Wright (1982) sees intergovernmental relations as the set of relations and interactions among governmental units, whether in a federal or decentralized system. For him, such relations or interactions could be cooperative or conflictual; this may largely depend on the political and institutional environment. He further stressed that the relations and interactions are multi-dimensional, which may cover fiscal transfers, administrative collaboration, political negotiations, and judicial arbitration.

Geldenhuys (2005) view intergovernmental relations from the fiscal and administrative perspective. According to him, intergovernmental relations refer to the fiscal and administrative processes of sharing revenues and other resources among levels of government. He further stresses that special conditions usually follow in the sharing of revenue and other resources; these conditions must be satisfied to receive assistance. In essence, revenue and resources sharing is not automatic; it often involves stated conditions and prerequisites that guarantee cooperation and proper resource allocation between and among the component units of government.

In their different studies, Li (2010) and Haque (2010) view intergovernmental relations as a phrase that describes the conflict and collaboration revolving around the struggle and competition among national and subnational governments for appropriate spheres of powers of governance and administration of a given national or subnational government.

Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (2018) states that intergovernmental relations signify one of the significant operational features of federal or devolved systems of

government. It is also the relations between and among governments within a non-centralized system of government. These relations involve the complex and interdependent interactions among various levels of government, including the coordination of public policies and affairs between and among national and sub-national governments through various devices. Such public policies and affairs include programme reporting requirements, grants-in-aid, the planning and budgetary processes, and informal communication among officials.

According to Lowatcharin et al. (2019), intergovernmental relations refer to interrelations and interactions taking place between and among all types and levels of governmental units in which there is a need for coordination of all governmental activities. Governmental activities may encompass important issues for federal nations or unitary nations; so far, decentralization has been favourably adopted.

Siddle (2022) sees intergovernmental relations as an interdependent relationship among the different levels of government in a notionally decentralised system and the coordination of public policies among the levels. In essence, intergovernmental relations encompass different components of governance, administrative and fiscal arrangements established between and among the component units of government. Intergovernmental relations also cover legislation and regulations, instruments for monitoring different governmental processes such as budgeting, capacity building, support and dispute resolution procedures.

Flowing from the above, intergovernmental relations could be defined as all formal and informal processes, along with institutional arrangements and structures for bilateral and multilateral relations and cooperation, either within or among different levels of government in a decentralised system.

3. Governance Challenges in Nigeria: An Intergovernmental Relations Perspective

Governance in Nigeria is directly connected to the nature and quality of intergovernmental relations among the component units of the federation. As such, the Constitution provided for cooperation and shared responsibilities among these component units. This provision notwithstanding, the Nigerian federal system continues to face governance challenges arising from overcentralisation of power, jurisdictional allocation of powers, fiscal decentralisation and dependency, revenue allocation issues, and the weak local government system, among others. This section, therefore, discusses some of the weaknesses inherent in Nigeria's intergovernmental relations that are affecting the overall governance system of Nigeria, which include:

3.1 Over-Centralisation of Power

Nigeria's federal system has long experienced numerous tensions in its political history, particularly between the central government and its component units. The tensions, which centred around the power struggle, have continually influenced the country's political and governance activities. The frequent tensions are not unconnected to the flawed foundation of the country's federal structure. It is important to remember that in 1914, when the British combined the Northern and Southern protectorates to form a single entity, they did so without consulting the diverse ethnic groups involved. According to Adegbami and Uche (2015), although the British initially conceived the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates for administrative convenience, it has, however, led to persistent conflict among

different peoples who were compelled to live together without regard for their differences in language, culture, belief, and tradition.

At independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted a federal system to manage diversity and power devolution. Since then, Nigeria's federalism has undergone different structural changes. For instance, it has developed from an initial three-region structure at independence in 1960 to four regions in 1963. By 1967, the four regions were further divided, and the nomenclature changed from region to state; hence, the four regions metamorphosed into twelve states. The twelve states were further divided into nineteen and twenty-one in 1976 and 1987, respectively. An additional nine states were created in 1991, making thirty states, and in 1996, six more states were created, making thirty-six. These steps by successive administrations in Nigeria were to devolve powers to the component units. The federal arrangement and structure of the Nigerian nation notwithstanding, centralization of powers persists. This is to say that the operational system of Nigeria's federalism contravenes Wheare's stance on federalism (Adegbami, 2015), especially his stance on the division of powers of governments, such that each unit of government within a sphere is coordinated and independent (Wheare, 1963).

It is not surprising, therefore, that till now, agitation and contentions are still ongoing regarding the excessive powers wielded by the federal government. According to Segun (2021), as the country continues to create more component units of the federation, so also the imbalances continue with their attendant consequences. While the creation of more states and local governments could be lauded, the continued agitations and dissatisfaction being expressed by some minority groups and their secessionist threats are indications that the creation of states and local governments has not completely resolved the issue of the concentration of powers at the centre.

3.2 Issue of Jurisdictional Allocation of Powers

Given that Nigeria operates a federal system of government, its constitution delineates powers among three tiers: the federal, state, and local governments. This delineation aims to promote administrative efficiency, political inclusion, and developmental balance across the federating units. However, the practical operation of Nigeria's federalism has been fraught with conflicts centred on the jurisdictional allocation of powers, which continues to influence the nature and effectiveness of intergovernmental relations. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) provides for a formal division of powers through three legislative lists: the exclusive, concurrent, and residual. The exclusive legislative list contains 68 items, where only the federal government has the authority to legislate. The concurrent legislative list, comprising 30 items, permits both the federal and state governments to legislate, with federal laws prevailing in cases of inconsistency. That is, where there is conflict in some areas under the concurrent list, the state government's power to legislate is automatically subdued to the power of the federal government; as such, any legislation made by the state without the support of the federal government will be null and void. Concerning the local government, the powers allotted to it in the 4th Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) are minor or residual.

While the Nigerian federal structure reflects the classic federal principle of sharing authority and sovereignty to ensure unity in diversity, however, the concentration of key legislative items in the exclusive legislative list, where only the federal government holds exclusive power, has resulted in a form of quasi-federalism or unitary federalism. For this reason, the states and local governments have continued to operate as appendages of the federal government (Ayoade, 1988; Elaigwu, 2007). Even though intergovernmental relations are designed to foster cooperation, coordination, and communication among the various levels of government, their

practice is often characterised by conflict and competition rather than collaboration, arising from overlapping constitutional provisions. The overlapping constitutional provisions thus create jurisdictional ambiguities, particularly in areas such as education, health, agriculture, and environmental management. In essence, interference by one level of government in the jurisdictional domain of another frequently results in serious conflicts that adversely affect intergovernmental relations and Nigeria's governance system.

3.3 Fiscal Centralisation and Dependency

Fiscal federalism relates to the financial aspects of the federal system, involving the distribution of public sector resources and responsibilities between national and subnational governments. It includes the taxing, spending, and regulatory powers of various levels of government in a federal system and how they interact to fulfil economic and political objectives (Fiveable, 2024). In essence, fiscal federalism can be viewed as an economic framework for understanding the relationship between federal, state, and local governments, focusing on the division of taxing and spending powers among these entities.

Fiscal centralisation, however, refers to a financial system where the main revenue-raising powers, expenditure responsibilities, and fiscal decision-making are concentrated in the hands of the central or federal government, rather than being shared among the individual units of a federal state. Unlike fiscal decentralisation, which disperses fiscal authority across multiple levels of government, fiscal centralisation entails the concentration of fiscal power, where the management of a country's resources rests with the federal government (Musgrave & Musgrave, 1989; Oates, 1999). Therefore, fiscal relations are vital to the functioning of federal systems as they determine the allocation of financial resources and responsibilities among different levels of government. Although Nigeria's fiscal relations are embedded in its federal structure, they, in practice, show a high level of centralisation and dependence. Consequently, Nigeria's fiscal federalism has been a source of ongoing debate since the country's independence (Suberu, 2001).

Some issues with Nigeria's fiscal relations continue to challenge its governance, notably the overcentralisation of the country's revenue. This means that Nigeria's fiscal federalism is overly concentrated in the hands of the federal government. In essence, most of the nation's financial resources are managed by the federal government. For example, the Nigerian Constitution assigns control over major revenue sources, including petroleum resources, Company Income Tax, Customs and Excise Duties, and Value Added Tax, among others, to the federal government. As a result, state and local governments in Nigeria have little choice but to depend heavily on allocations from the Federation Account controlled by the federal government. This has subsequently led to a vertical fiscal imbalance, weakened subnational autonomy, and discouraged innovative revenue generation.

Another issue linked to the overcentralisation of revenue is the controversies surrounding the sharing formula of the revenues accruing to the Federation Account. Although the revenue allocation formula has undergone several changes, disagreements about it persist, particularly regarding some allocation principles, including derivation, equality of states, population, and need (Suberu, 2001). The overcentralisation of revenue has also led to demands for resource control, especially by oil-producing states. To address this, the 13% derivation principle was introduced; however, the percentage allocated for derivation is seen as insufficient to tackle the damages caused by crude oil extraction in the region, as well as the developmental needs of

the oil-producing states. These issues continue to fuel demands for greater fiscal decentralisation. Such situations reveal structural inconsistencies within the country's federalism that have persistently hampered national development and cohesion.

3.4 Revenue Allocation Issue

Revenue allocation is a systematic distribution of financial resources among the component units of government, including the federal, state, and local governments. The allocation is typically based on constitutionally defined principles and formulae. The framework for revenue allocation is outlined in the Second Schedule and Section 162 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended), with the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) responsible for reviewing and recommending allocation formulas. Therefore, fiscal arrangements in Nigeria are a key aspect of intergovernmental relations.

Fiscal relations have, however, remained one of the most contentious governance issues in the country. The challenge in this area is attributable to the inequitable sharing of resources, fiscal centralisation, and the political scheming and manipulation of the revenue allocation system. The inequitable sharing of revenue has continued to affect governance; for instance, it is limiting the fiscal independence of states and local governments, as well as their development. This has led to recurrent agitations for the restructuring of the country by large sections of the country that are dissatisfied with the current revenue allocation formula.

The bone of contention about revenue allocation has to do with what should form the basis for revenue sharing among the component units of the federation. Although the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria saddled the Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission (RMFC) with the responsibilities of establishing a durable revenue allocation formula for the federating units and the constitution recognizes the principles of the population; equality of states, internal revenue generation, landmass terrain, as well as population density, among others upon which allocation to state and local units should be made. However, the principles are benefiting some parts of the country more than others, and as such, generating controversies and conflicts that have been affecting the peace, tranquillity and development of the country, and by extension the governance and administrative activities of the country.

3.5 Security Issue

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) theoretically provides for a federal structure that divides powers and responsibilities among different levels of government. In a practical sense, however, Nigeria's government structure is centralised. The centralisation has implications for national security. The effective relations or otherwise of component units of government via intergovernmental relations go a long way in shaping the country's ability to manage security. Thus, the poor coordination among federal, state, and local institutions could result in an inefficient response to the multifaceted security challenges confronting Nigeria. The unclear methods for security coordination among the levels of government have been inhibiting collective responses. For example, at the time the Boko Haram insurgents' activities were mounting in the North-East, Nigeria, there were always tensions between federal security agencies and state governments, especially over intelligence sharing and resource control (Okoli and Agada, 2014), which always hindered coherent responses.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Police is solely under the control of the federal government, a practice that limits its flexibility and responsiveness to security needs at the local level. In other words, this arrangement hinders rapid responses to local security challenges. The situation explains why Suberu (2010) argues that the centralisation of the Nigerian Police in a federal

system creates a mismatch between authority and responsibility. The centralisation of the Nigerian Police has consistently caused conflict between federal and state governments. For instance, in an emergency, whenever orders are given to the state Commissioners of Police by the Governors at the state level in their capacity as chief security officers of the state, these orders are normally ignored. Instead, the state Commissioner of Police will act on orders issued by the Inspector-General of Police at the federal level. This has led to a situation where the state governors have been calling for and advocating the review of the Nigerian Constitution to enable the establishment of State Police, or for the Nigerian Police to be decentralised to better respond to local security challenges. Therefore, the effectiveness of Nigeria's security system largely depends on the quality of its intergovernmental relations. Such that coordination and collaboration will be enhanced to tackle insecurity.

3.6 Issues with the Constitution

The provisions of the Constitution usually shape intergovernmental relations. In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution (as amended) defines the powers, functions, and responsibilities of the federal, state, and local governments. Several ambiguities and structural imbalances inherent in the Nigerian Constitution have, however, created persistent challenges in the practice of intergovernmental relations in the Nigerian federal system. As such, there are distortions in the practice of Nigerian federalism; therefore, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution needs to be overhauled, due to some of its sections that give rise to conflicts. Major constitutional issues in the 1999 Constitution include:

The Federal Character Principle (FCP): while the principle is lauded, it was, however, lorded over other levels of government by the federal government. It encourages discrimination against Nigerians in employment, educational admission, and political activities. The Federal Character Principle was introduced as an instrument of national integration and equity to correct imbalances, especially in political representation and resource distribution among diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. While the principle seeks to promote inclusivity and fairness, it has continued to generate tensions that complicate intergovernmental relations in the country. For instance, the application of the Federal Character Principle in appointments and political representation in the country has affected federal-state relations, particularly in the allotment of executive and bureaucratic positions. The allotment of positions often leads to political scheming, bargaining, and competition between the state and the federal government, and many times results in resentment and mistrust among the units of federation, thus weakening cooperation in the intergovernmental relations (Elaigwu, 2007). The appointments based on a quota system do affect the efficiency of intergovernmental agencies and sometimes promote mediocrity instead of meritocracy.

Fiscal Federalism or Resource Control: The Constitution authorises the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), which is under the control of the federal government, to determine and regulate revenue-sharing formulas among the tiers of government. The constitution's silence on definite percentages for revenue allocation always leads to political disputes. The current allocation formula is 52.68%, 26.72% and 20.60% for the federal government, state and local governments, respectively. The formula is highly favourable to the federal government and detrimental to other levels of government. The fiscal

relations, as stated, contradict the spirit of cooperativeness and thus constantly trigger agitation for restructuring and true federalism.

Labour Laws: Labour relations and employment regulation are germane to the effective functioning of any federal system. Labour relations and employment regulation touch upon the rights, welfare, and workers' productivity at different levels of government. In Nigeria, the constitutional allocation of powers with regard to labour matters has continued to generate intergovernmental relations challenges. For instance, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, as amended, under the Second Schedule, Part I, Item 34, places Labour, issues or matters on the exclusive legislative list. Suffice it to say that only the National Assembly can legislate on labour matters or issues; by this constitutional provision, the State Houses of Assembly are excluded from either enacting labour laws or regulating employment conditions in their jurisdiction. Put differently, the federal government does legislate on labour matters on behalf of states and local governments. The imposition of a uniform national minimum wage by the federal government across all the states and local governments, regardless of the peculiarity of local economic conditions or fiscal capacities, has been a source of conflict in intergovernmental relations and indirectly affects governance systems. The exclusive control of labour laws by the federal government destabilises the cooperation and coordination required in a multi-tiered system.

3.7 Weak Local Government System

Local government is undoubtedly the closest level of governance to the people, serving as a vital instrument for grassroots participation, service delivery, and local development. However, Nigeria's local government system is characterised by weakness, dependence, and institutional fragility, which undermines effective governance. In other words, the fragile state of local governments continues to pose significant challenges to democratic consolidation, fiscal federalism, and sustainable development. This situation is closely tied to Nigeria’s constitutional and political framework, which has rendered local governments heavily reliant on higher levels of government, particularly the federal government, for finance. The ambiguities within Nigeria’s Constitution and state interference have been major issues.

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) recognises 774 local government areas; however, it also places them under the control of state governments, especially on financial matters, through the State-Local Government Joint Account system. Although the use of the State Joint Local Government Account has constitutional backing (see Section 162 (6) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution), the account system has not been beneficial to local governments in Nigeria. As such, most state Governors, through the account system, have usurped the fiscal powers of local governments. Consequently, local governments are being operated as extensions of the state government, as they cannot manage their finances independently without permission from the state government. In some cases, the salaries and allowances of local government staff are calculated and paid directly by the state government. The local governments are thus not well-informed of how their funds are being spent, and as such, many local governments in Nigeria are being operated like a duty post.

This arrangement has made local governments financially subordinate to state governors, who appropriate local government funds and decide how they are spent. Likewise, the dependency of local governments on federal allocations has undermined their capacity to generate revenue internally. This has consequently led to the erosion of grassroots democracy, poor service delivery, diminished legitimacy and public trust, and hindered rural development.

3.8 Dispute Surrounding the Establishment of a New Local Government Council

The creation of additional local government councils has been a recurring political and administrative issue in Nigeria's federal system. The Nigerian Constitution recognises local governments as a tier of government; however, their creation has constantly caused friction. This has continued to expose the inadequacies in Nigeria's federal structure and the complications of its intergovernmental relations. Section 7(1) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) provides the legal basis for establishing, structuring, and administering local governments in Nigeria. Section 8(5) – (6) of the Constitution, however, sets out a constitutional process for creating new local governments, which requires approval from both state and federal governments, as well as constitutional amendment through the National Assembly. This constitutional process, where local government creations are initiated by the state government, for ratification by the National Assembly, appears cumbersome and, as a result, generates tension between the state and federal levels of government (Suberu, 2001). One notable case where the creation of new local governments caused tension is that of Lagos State. It is recalled that between 2003 and 2004, the Lagos State Government, under Governor Bola Tinubu, created 37 new Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs), in addition to 20 existing Local Councils, increasing the number of Local Councils from 20 to 57. The federal government, under then-President Olusegun Obasanjo, however, declared the additional Local Councils unconstitutional. Therefore, the federal government withheld all statutory allocations to all local governments in Lagos State. This led to a legal dispute between the Lagos State Government and the Federal Government. The legal battle was ultimately resolved in the Supreme Court judgment in Attorney-General of Lagos State v. Attorney-General of the Federation (2003) 12 NWLR (Pt. 833) 1. The Court held that, although state governments have the power to create local government areas, any newly created local governments must be ratified by the National Assembly through a constitutional amendment and listed in the First Schedule of the Constitution before they can receive their statutory allocations. This case highlights the inherent conflict within Nigeria's intergovernmental relations framework. Therefore, the creation of new local governments by state governments without constitutional harmonisation poses a threat to the stability of Nigeria's federal system and fosters intergovernmental hostility.

3.9 Interference with Local Government Functions

Local government, a third tier of governance, is constitutionally structured to bring governance closer to the people to promote grassroots development. Therefore, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) assigns local governments functions, such as maintaining roads, markets, providing primary education, primary health care, and other basic social services (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). However, in practice, the authority of local governments to fulfil many of their responsibilities has been drastically limited by ongoing infringements from higher levels of government, particularly the state governments. These infringements have serious consequences for effective administration and governance at the grassroots level. Areas of infringement on local government affairs include finance, where state governments control local government funds via the State Joint Local Government Account; administration, where some state governors dissolve elected local councils and replace them with caretaker committees, contrary to Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). This subverts democratic local governance and subjects local administration to state political control. Additionally, there is legislative encroachment, where state governors, through state legislatures, influence laws that redefine local government powers, structures, and constitutional duties. Political encroachment is also prevalent, with state executives exerting

significant influence over local government political activities, especially during elections through the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs). This often results in elections favouring the ruling party and its candidates. Such encroachment affects governance by eroding local autonomy and weakening service delivery, among other issues. It renders governance ineffective by preventing local governments from functioning independently, thereby disrupting the governance chain. In essence, the persistent encroachment on local government functions continues to distort the federal structure, undermine local democracy, and impede grassroots development. Without a functional and autonomous local government system, Nigeria's governance framework remains incomplete.

4. The Practice of Intergovernmental Relations in Nigeria: Implications for Governance

Nigeria's governance faces persistent challenges such as policy inconsistency, administrative inefficiency, corruption, weak institutions, and uneven development. In a federal system, intergovernmental relations should foster collaboration and cooperative governance, evident in policy-making, policy implementation, effective service delivery, national integration, and national development. This is why scholars, including Wright (1982), view intergovernmental relations as a system of interactions linking all government units in the policy process. In a well-structured federal system, these relations should: promote joint decision-making and policy coordination across government levels; encourage cooperative federalism, maintaining unity while respecting diversity; enhance accountability and participation through decentralisation; and avoid duplication of functions and resource wastage. When these principles are upheld, intergovernmental relations can effectively address governance challenges.

However, in Nigeria, intergovernmental relations are fraught with conflicts and disputes across various levels of government, significantly impacting governance. The nature of relationships among the tiers of government affects the quality of policymaking and implementation, national integration, and national development. The pattern of relations among federating units hampers service delivery, particularly at the grassroots, where local governments are often incapacitated. Most federation components rely heavily on federal transfers, fostering a system where corruption and inefficiency thrive, as fiscal dependency discourages accountability. Consequently, over-centralisation, fiscal imbalance, and political interference have worsened governance issues. It is, therefore, not surprising that inequalities and imbalances in intergovernmental relations feed into growing agitations and secessionist threats, especially from oil-producing states demanding greater resource control or independence.

Although intergovernmental relations can help resolve some governance issues, they are limited in scope. Nigeria's governance challenges are multi-dimensional, deeply rooted in political culture, leadership, ethics, and institutional decay. Intergovernmental relations often involve individuals in office whose roles determine how units interact. Therefore, those managing these relations must be vigilant to ensure effective cooperation among federal units. Particularly since Nigeria's federalism operates more as a negotiated rather than a naturally formed system, addressing systemic flaws in the federal structure is essential. Only then can intergovernmental relations make a meaningful contribution to Nigeria's governance.

5. Concluding Remarks

This study has examined intergovernmental relations and the challenges of governance in Nigeria, putting the discussion within the larger context of federal-state-local interrelations and interactions. Nigeria's intergovernmental relations, although constitutionally planned to promote coordination, collaboration and cooperation, have instead produced continued tensions, contentions, imbalances and inequalities. The concentration of powers and fiscal control in the federal government, the ambiguities in the 1999 Constitution, and the systemic weakening of the local government system have collectively hindered the prospects of effective governance. These structural and operational deficits have also generated jurisdictional conflicts, policy inconsistencies, and poor service delivery, particularly at the grassroots level.

The study, therefore, concludes that while Nigeria's federal structure is constitutionally planned to foster shared governance, coordination, and cooperation among the federating units of government, its practical operation reveals deep-seated challenges that undercut these ideals. As such, Nigeria's governance challenges are deeply linked to the dysfunctional nature of its intergovernmental relations. The study recommends that Nigeria must pursue true federalism through constitutional restructuring, fiscal decentralisation, and institutional reforms that promote autonomy, cooperation and collaboration among all levels of government.

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