

**TOWARD THE DEMILITARIZATION OF NIGERIAN POLITICS:
A PREREQUISITE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE***

by
O. Igho Natufe
chairman@sspa-na.org

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Introduction

I thank the organizers and members of the Nigerian Awareness Group for inviting me to deliver this Keynote Address at this seminar. The theme of the seminar, **NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD**

underscores the never-ending unrest and disorder that characterize contemporary Nigerian politics. It encapsulates the problems of political development in Nigeria, as the country celebrates the 7th anniversary of the Fourth Republic. The absence of good governance, the erosion of federalism, the series of ethno-religious conflicts, the conflicts in the Niger Delta, unemployment and poverty, and the intrusion of political parties in the art of governance, have all come to epitomize the failure of politics in Nigeria under the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The theme also challenges us to construct a “way forward” on how best the polity can be governed. It refuses to accept the status quo as a preferred option. I intend to grapple with this fundamental question in this address.

But before doing that, I am persuaded to recognize the venue of this seminar, a country that has much to teach us in the art of good governance. Situated in the middle of Europe, Switzerland has for centuries represented the conscience of Europe. It is where three of the dominant ethnic nationalities of Europe - French, German, and Italian - have coexisted for centuries under a confederal political system. The Vienna Treaty of 1815 helped to define Switzerland, and its adoption of a federal system in 1833 modelled after the experience of the United States of America has significantly endured the test of time. It is important to note that, being a confederation has not engineered secession in the polity, unlike the fear generated by the mere mention of this concept in Nigerian political discourse. A review of the **Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation** reveals very instructive elements in our search for the way forward in Nigeria. While article 3 recognizes the sovereignty of the Cantons (or States in Nigeria), each Canton has its own “democratic constitution.” (Article 51). Furthermore, article 50 recognizes the jurisdiction of a Canton over a Municipality (read Local Government in Nigeria), by stating that the “autonomy of the Municipalities is guaranteed within the limits fixed by cantonal law.” In underlining the imperatives of federalism as articulated in the concept of independence and coordinate, article 44 describes the relationship between the Federation (read Federal Government in Nigeria) and the Cantons (States in Nigeria) as that of “consideration and support.” Even in the field of foreign policy, Cantons are free to conclude treaties with foreign countries and, where their respective interests are impacted, their inputs are sought by the Federation in the formulation of Swiss foreign policies. Thus, they (the Cantons) are active participants in the formulation of Swiss foreign policies. (See Articles 54-56). These are vital lessons for Nigeria.

When the retired General Olusegun Obasanjo was recruited in late 1998 to contest the presidency under the banner of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), as the country prepared for the Fourth Republic, there were mixed feelings in the population. As a former military dictator that decreed the land use act and the petroleum act, his candidacy was not welcomed in certain quarters of the country. On the other hand, his sponsors, mainly from the ranks of retired army generals, framed him as a "democrat" who had "voluntarily" handed over power to an elected civilian administration on October 01, 1979. That singular act had earned him an international recognition as a statesman. His subsequent membership in the Commonwealth Contact Group further enhanced his status as a "democrat" and a "statesman." Armed with these credentials, his sponsors argued that General Obasanjo was destined to be a good president in a civilian regime. Thus, he became the first former military dictator to head an elected civilian regime in Nigeria.

However, since his assumption of the presidency on May 29, 1999, the landscape of Nigerian politics has been transformed from a supposedly federal structure to a militarized polity. How did this occur? What instruments of power did he manipulate and exploit? Before discussing this phenomenon, let us review how Nigeria got to the present calamity.

Federalism

A federal system of government is judged to be most ideal for a heterogeneous polity. The founding fathers of Nigeria recognized this imperative when they crafted Nigeria's pre-independence federal constitutions of 1954 and 1960 consisting of, at that time, three federating units - Eastern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, and Western Nigeria. The 1963 Constitution was crafted to reflect the federal republican status of Nigeria. By 1963 Nigeria had four federating units - Eastern Nigeria, Midwestern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, and Western Nigeria - with each having its own constitution, flag, and emblem.

Though it was agreed that federalism was the best system for Nigeria, given its heterogeneity, the debate toward a consensus was intense. Each federating unit wanted to ensure that its core interests and sovereignty would not be compromised. The Northern leaders, for example, were vociferous on this issue as they did not wish to concede too much power to a central (federal) government. They also did not wish to be rushed into an independent Nigeria. They were not ready to proceed at the speed of the East and the West. Therefore, it was not accidental that Eastern and Western Nigeria attained self-government (independence) in March 1957, while Northern Nigeria attained this status in 1959. Thus, from all practical purposes, the federation of Nigeria prior to October 01, 1960, was a union of three separate independent entities, each of which was free to proceed unilaterally as an independent state in the international community, just as was the case with the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland that produced the three independent states of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. The leaders of Eastern and Western Nigeria opted against this option, and instead waited for the North whose proposals on jurisdictional matters were accommodated. What were these proposals?

Before we encounter the proposals of Northern Nigeria, let us set the stage by considering the reasons why nations federate. Simply put, nations decide to federate for one or a combination of the following reasons: -

- 1 Socioeconomic;
- 2 Political; and
- 3 Security.

A nation decides to federate for **socio-economic** reasons because it

- 4 possesses shared values with other independent federating units;
- 5 seeks an access to a larger domestic market;
- 6 desires a secured access to a seaport;
- 7 seeks a higher standard of living; and
- 8 wants to enhance its welfare programmes and policies.

Politically, a nation decides to federate in order to establish and/or strengthen existing relations with its co-federating partners, and to possess a stronger voice internationally.

Thirdly, a nation decides to enter into a federation in order to be able to protect itself from *real* or *imagined* threats to its **national security**.

The above determinants, in varying degrees, influenced the leaders of Nigeria's three regions to opt for federalism. But the form and content of the proposed federal system had to be negotiated and agreed to by the federating units. While Eastern and Western Nigeria appeared anxious to maintain the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria was not in any hurry to do so at any cost to its independence. The leaders of Northern Nigeria proposed a series of policy demands underlining the **independence** of the federating units and the **coordinating** relationship between them and the federal government. Based on these fundamental premises of federalism, the North proposed, *inter alia*, the following:-

1. "Each region shall have complete legislative and executive autonomy with regards to all matters except the following: defence, external affairs, customs and West African research institutions."
2. "That there shall be no central legislative body and no central executive or policy making body for the whole of Nigeria."
3. "There shall be a Central Agency for all Regions which will be responsible for the matters mentioned in paragraph one and other matters delegated to it by a Region."
4. "All revenue shall be levied and collected by the Regional government except customs revenue at the port of discharge by the Central Agency. The administration of the customs shall be so organized as to ensure that goods consigned to the Regions are separately cleared and charged to duty."

5. “Each Region shall have a separate public service.”¹

The Northern proposals accentuate two critical elements in assessing the rationale for an entity seeking to federate. First, a federating unit does not federate in order to lose its core powers and jurisdictions as exemplified by paragraph one above. Second, it is the prerogative of a federating unit to decide on which of its powers it wishes to delegate or concede to the central (federal) government, as succinctly articulated in paragraph three above. Thus, a federal government lacks the power to confiscate or usurp the jurisdiction of a federating unit, except as agreed to by the constitution, for example, in a state of a national emergency. Taken as a whole, these proposals define the asymmetrical construct inherent in most federal systems, including Canada, the United States of America, Switzerland, Australia, and Germany. One other vital aspect of the Northern proposals, which were later enshrined in Nigeria’s federal constitutions of 1960 and 1963, was the need for a *strong* region.

Militarization of Nigerian Politics

Nigeria’s First Republic (October 01, 1963 - January 15, 1966) was terminated on January 15, 1966. In an attempt to overthrow the federal government, a group of young army officers led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu assassinated the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of the North, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the West, Chief Samuel Akintola, and the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh. It was an abortive coup that led to Nigeria’s first military regime headed by General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi, the GOC of the Nigerian Army. General Ironsi, an ethnic Igbo, caused the arrest of the coup plotters. Since the coup was aborted and the plotters arrested, the federal government was secured. However, as there were no civilian successors from the federal cabinet willing to take over power, General Ironsi was therefore compelled to fill the void as head of Nigeria’s first military government. That the coup plotters were ethnic Igbo, and there were no Igbo politicians among those assassinated, the coup attempt was perceived as an Igbo-inspired plot. In a series of coups and counter coups, the military subsequently ruled Nigeria from 1966 to 1979, and from 1983 - 1999, for a total of 29 years since independence on October 01, 1960.

The intrusion of the military in governance in January 1966 set in motion a process of dismantling the federal structure of Nigeria, in favour of a military-command system. Even in the post military eras (the Second Republic, 1979-1983, and the Fourth Republic, 1999 - present) the constitutions bequeathed to the nation were based on military dictates. Thus, by militarization of Nigerian politics we mean the erosion of federal principles and the enthronement of unitarism of the military-command system in the governance of Nigeria as well as in all federal political institutions, including the political parties.

General Ironsi began this process in May 1966 when he abrogated the federal system and decreed a unitary government system befitting the structure of the military. For him, it was

¹See, Daily Times, Lagos, Friday, May 22, 1953.

incongruous for the military to preside over a *federal* polity when it is a unitary command system. On the other hand, when Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the military head of state, following the military counter coup that assassinated General Ironsi on July 27, 1966, he abrogated Ironsi's unitary system and reinstated federalism. But this reinstatement of federalism under a military dictatorship helped to accelerate the destruction of federalism in Nigeria. First, it is inconsistent with reason and logic to have a military regime function as a federal system, given its unitary command system. Second, General Irons recognized this imperative, while Lt. Col Gowon hid under the cover of "federalism" as a way of mollifying the population. While Gowon presided over a unitary command system, he styled his military dictatorship the "Federal Military Government of Nigeria." Unfortunately, several Nigerian scholars gave credence to this infraction by acknowledging the various military dictatorships as "federal military government." This type of "military federalism," whereby the central government controls the governments of the "federating units" became a norm in the articulation of federalism in Nigeria. Though it is clear and obvious that a military regime cannot operate a federal system, it is unfortunate that several leading proponents of federalism in Nigeria fail to understand the fallacy of federalism that is anchored on a military command system. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, coupled with the abortive 116 amendment clauses proposed by the leadership of the PDP in May 2006, exemplifies this fallacy. Irrespective of the name "federal" the constitution is in essence a unitary constitution. For example, in a federal system, the national parliament has no jurisdiction to determine the salary of state governors and state legislators. Similarly, the national parliament has no jurisdiction to create local government councils and determine the capital of a federating unit. A state government is not subordinate to a central government under federalism. And also a national electoral commission has no jurisdiction to conduct elections to state and local government offices - governorship, state legislature, and local government councils. More importantly, the federating units exercise exclusive jurisdiction over their natural resources, including the exploitation, exploration, management, and marketing of those resources. These are some of the infractions in the 1999 Constitution.

The Fourth Republic, which inherited the 1999 military constitution, is anchored on the precepts of militarized politics. By electing a former military dictator, General Obasanjo in 1999 as its President in the post military era, Nigeria further solidified the military command system of government inimical to good governance and federalism. Following the declaration of General Obasanjo to contest the presidency under the banner of the PDP in November 1998, Chief Richard Akinjide, (Senior Advocate of Nigeria) perceptively stated that "Nigerians are tired of the military indirect approach to perpetuate itself in power."² Under Obasanjo's presidency, the PDP has acquired the status of a parallel government. Consider the following headline publications: "PDP Wades Into Budget Probe,"³ "PDP House of Assembly speakers meet Ali, plead for Lalong,"⁴ "D-G's impeachment: Ekiti House writes PDP leadership,"⁵ "PDP orders

²See, The Guardian, Lagos, Thursday, November 03, 1998.

³See, ThisDay, Lagos, Thursday, August 04, 2005.

⁴See, Daily Independent, Lagos, Thursday, August 18, 2005.

reinstatement of suspended Igueben LG chief,”⁶ “PDP orders Fayose’s deputy to quit or be sacked,”⁷ “Matters of due process, legality and constitutionality,”⁸ and “PDP probes Akwa Ibom impeachment.”⁹ It is either the legislators (elected under the banner of the PDP) are unaware of their constitutional responsibilities as representatives of their respective constituencies under the Constitution of Nigeria, or they are compelled by party doctrine to subsume the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under that of the PDP. Otherwise, how else can we explain their plea to the chairman of the PDP to “wade into the recall process against the Speaker of the Plateau State House of Assembly, Simon Lalong?” Or, how can we explain the directives of the PDP to PDP controlled state governments and state houses of assembly?

In our attempt to explain the above incongruities of **party** intrusion in **state** legislative jurisdictions, we are persuaded to recall the military regime of General Obasanjo in the late 1970s, as was the practice of other Nigerian military dictatorships. The authority of the PDP national executive committee replicates that of the supreme military council under the military regime that Obasanjo was familiar with. Unable to extricate himself from the military concept of governance, he accords semi state jurisdictional powers to the PDP in assisting him to handle PDP state governors and PDP elected legislators, just as the supreme military council had over state military governors.

It is instructive to note the influence of militarized politics in the conduct of state relations in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. Perceived as a representative of the President, a state Governor, particularly one of the same political party as the president, is routinely summoned to the Presidency for instructions and guidance. The governors of PDP controlled states have subjugated themselves to the control of both the national executive committee of the PDP and the Presidency, from where they believe they derive their legitimacy to govern. Just as the federating units have been stripped of their relevance in a supposedly federal polity, whereby the President perceives state governors as his representatives in the respective states, so too have the local government chairmen been converted to mere bureaucratic messengers of the respective state governors. A local government chairman, who is in fact a creation of his state governor, owes his allegiance to the state governor and not to the constituents of his particular local government council. The constant visits to the state capital to answer to queries and summons of either the State Governor or the State House of Assembly defines the main functions of a typical local government chairman.

⁵See, The Punch, Lagos, Thursday, August 18, 2005.

⁶See, Vanguard, Lagos, Thursday, August 25, 2006.

⁷See, Vanguard, Lagos, Thursday, November 01, 2005.

⁸See, The Guardian, Lagos, Monday, June 27, 2005.

⁹See, Vanguard, Lagos, Tuesday, June 28, 2005.

In the views of the apparatchiks of the PDP, the party constitution is supreme to that of the country in federal-state relations where the party controls both levels of government. This has been aptly demonstrated in a series of cases, from Anambra to Akwa Ibom to Delta to Edo to Ekiti and to Oyo states, etc. In the Anambra case where a so-called “godfather” of the PDP conspired with senior officials of the Nigeria Police to adopt and detain Governor Chris Ngige and falsified his letter of resignation, no criminal charges were instituted against the perpetrators, as the PDP leadership arrogantly declared the assault on the nation’s constitution as an internal family affair. That the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Mr. Raphael Ige, who was in charge of Zone 9 in Umuahia led a team of armed mobile policemen that invaded the Government House in Akwa and abducted Governor Ngige,¹⁰ was never brought to trials but retired with full benefits, underlined the subjugation of Nigeria’s constitution vis-a-vis the political expediency of the PDP. It was clear to all observers that Mr. Ige got his instructions from Abuja to abduct Governor Ngige. Since the PDP has no constitutional authority to issue such instructions, it is safe to postulate that the instructions came from the Presidency acting in collusion with the PDP to victimize Governor Ngige, an act which clearly breached the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The monolithic structure of the PDP, like that of other political parties in Nigeria, vitiates the tenets of federalism. In confluence with the flawed construct of Nigerian federalism, the national executive committee of the PDP imposes its authority on the state executives, a practice which erodes the independence of the federating units in a supposedly federal polity. President Obasanjo utilizes this dual power of political machinations to full effect in his relationships with state governors of all political stripes.

The Way Forward: A Prerequisite for Good Governance

What are the prescriptions for a successful way forward for Nigeria? What are the premises of good governance in a *federal democratic* Nigeria? Let us attempt to provide answers to these vital questions.

While the demand for restructuring Nigeria along the lines of a genuine federal polity remains a legitimate element of political protest, we recognize that federalism by itself does not guarantee good governance or economic prosperity. What it does, however, is to define the structure of a federal polity in a way that underlines the independence of the federating units vis-a-vis the central government in key areas of national economy and politics. We are not suggesting that federalism is synonymous with good governance, but since we are discussing Nigeria’s federal system it is imperative that we consider the properties of good governance *under* a federal political system. A genuine federal polity provides a vital conceptual base for good governance as it emphasises the two fundamental premises of federalism. First, both levels of government - the central government and the states (federating units) - are independent and coordinates, but never subordinate to one another. Second, the relationship between the central government and

¹⁰See, New Nigerian, Kaduna, Wednesday, July 16, 2003.

the federating units is horizontal and not vertical. These premises recognize the fact that there is a federation because federating units agree to federate. When any of these elements are vitiated, federalism is compromised and the basis of good governance under federalism is eroded. However, both in theory (the 1999 Constitution) and practice, Nigerian federalism fails to meet these key tests. Thus, the flawed structure of Nigerian federalism can be said to be responsible for most of the causes of instability in the polity.

Nigerian federalism was constructed by architects imbued with unitary mind sets. First, the British colonial administration that established a federal political structure in Nigeria operated from the prism of a unitary government. For example, the Minerals Act of 1946 was enacted to protect British colonial ownership and control of all mines, minerals, including oil fields, geological surveys and gas in any part of Nigeria. The British colonial governors in each of the (then) three regions - Eastern, Northern, and Western Nigeria - were subordinate to the governor general in Lagos, a fact which seems to also influence President Obasanjo's attitude towards state governors in the Fourth Republic. Second, perceiving themselves as successors to British colonialism in Nigeria, the three major ethnic groups that dominated the respective regions - Igbos in the East, Hausas in the North, and Yoruba in the West - considered the ethnic minorities as their colonial possessions in the respective regions.

For instance, none of the three dominant ethnic groups wanted to "grant independence" to the minority ethnic groups under their respective regional jurisdictions. The fact that the Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba tripod conspiracy determined the form and content of Nigerian federalism is reflected in the way the political leaders of these three ethnic groups viewed the minority areas within "their" regions as being under their jurisdictions, just as European colonial powers had regarded their African colonies. It was a scramble for Nigeria's minority ethnic groups by the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba to maintain their imperial spheres of influence over the minority areas located in the regions that they controlled. The table below vividly illustrates this phenomenon vis-a-vis the demand for state creation.

TABLE 1: VIEWS OF THE GOVERNING PARTIES TOWARD STATE CREATION

REGION	PARTY IN POWER	STATE CREATION IN THE REGIONS		
		EAST	NORTH	WEST
East	NCNC	Oppose	Support	Support
North	NPC	Support	Oppose	Support
West	AG	Support	Support	Oppose

As shown in the above table, the demand for state creation in any particular region enjoyed the support of the opposing political parties in that region. For example, while the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC: read Igbo) opposed the agitation for a COR State (Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers) in the East, they strongly supported the agitation for a Midwest State in the West and a

Middle Belt state in the North. Thus, for the Midwesterners, the Action Group (AG: (read Yoruba) was the “enemy” party on the issue of a Midwest State, just as the Igbo were perceived by the minorities of the COR State, and the Hausa/Fulani (Northern Peoples’ Congress: NPC) by the minorities in the Middle Belt state.

No where is the power of the Hausa-Igbo-Yoruba triumvirate more glaring than in the area of *revenue allocation*. The table below demonstrates how the triumvirate has used its votes to victimize the ethnic minorities, especially in the Niger Delta.

TABLE 2: EVOLUTION OF REVENUE ALLOCATION FORMULA IN NIGERIA

YEAR	FORMULA PERCENTAGE		
	DERIVATION	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	FEDERATION ACCOUNT
1953	100	nil	nil
1954	50	20	30
1964	50	15	35
1970	45	25	30
1975	20	nil	80
1979	nil	nil	100
1982-89	1.5	nil	98.5
1999-	13	nil	87

It is instructive to note that, the decline in the derivation percentage due each state coincided with the growing significance of oil as the main stimulant of the Nigerian economy. The current revenue allocation formula as defined in section 162 (2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria discriminates against the minority ethnic groups whose oil fields account for more than 90% of Nigeria’s revenue. We recall that both the 1960 Independence Constitution and the 1963 Republican Constitution provided for a 50% derivation for each state, and recognized that “the continental shelf of a Region shall be deemed to be part of that Region,” in section 134 subsection 134 (6), and in section 140 and subsection 140 (6) respectively. Why was the rule of the game changed? This provokes a follow-up question: If the oil fields were located in, say, Sokoto State, Oyo State, or Enugu State, would the rule have been changed from the provisions in the 1963 constitution?

The premises of good governance in a *federal democratic* Nigeria, must include *inter alia*, the following:

- § The Nigerian polity must be genuinely federal and democratic.
- § Elected officials must possess and demonstrate excellent leadership qualities and credentials for the offices they occupy.
- § The government must be transparent, incorruptible and accountable to the population.

To facilitate the demilitarization of Nigerian politics, it is essential that all tendencies of military command system are eradicated from the polity. These would include, *inter alia*, the following:

The institution of a 20-year post retirement waiting period before a retired military officer can hold an elective or an appointive position in government or in a political party. The intrusion of the military in Nigerian politics has severely damaged the fabric of federalism and democratic institutions in the country. This is reflected in the caricature nature of federalism and the unitary command system that has come to characterize political discourse in Nigeria. Thus, a restriction on the involvement of retired military officials in government and political parties will help to gradually cleanse the polity of these undemocratic tendencies. Furthermore, Nigerians must take appropriate measures to de-legitimize military dictatorships by excluding military heads of state from the Council of State in the Constitution. It is ironic and contradictory that while Nigerians perceive military rule as an aberration and undemocratic, they find it necessary to legitimize those responsible for these infractions by assigning them constitutional responsibilities via the Council of State in a democratic polity. If we are resolute in our condemnation of military rule as undemocratic, it remains a bafflement that certain political leaders take this abnormality into consideration in their calculation of the number of years that military dictators from some “geopolitical” zones have occupied the presidency (head of state) in Nigeria as they argue for a power shift or rotational presidency in favour of their “turn” to produce the next president. Such an argument, in my view, lends credence to a military coup as a legitimate and democratic regime.

Just as a federating unit (the state) is independent of and not subordinate to the central government, state chapters of political parties must be independent of the national parties that they are affiliated with. The national unitary structure of political parties vis-a-vis the federating units is at variance with the tenets of federalism. If we argue in favour of federating units (state) maintaining their independence from the central government, and postulate that they are coordinate with and not subordinate to the central government, then it is incongruous for us to permit a national unitary command structure in political parties that govern these federating units. Irrespective of the fact that a state chapter of a political party shares some philosophical positions with a particular national political party with which it is affiliated, the state party concerned must be governed by the core interests of the given state whose interests may conflict with those of the national executive committee of the party. Similarly, the state executive committee of the party is not obliged to endorse the presidential candidate of the party if, in its judgement, such a candidate espouses policies inimical to the core interests of the given state. Thus, the national executive committee of the party has no jurisdiction over the state executive committee. This is a core aspect of federalism. It also dictates that political parties do not need to satisfy any geographical spread as a criterion for contesting elections for any office in the polity

Each state must have its own electoral commission whose responsibility it is to conduct and supervise elections for the offices of governor, deputy governor, state house of assembly, and local government council on a schedule different from national elections for the presidency and national assembly. As an independent entity in a federal system, federating units must possess

the jurisdiction over the institution that is responsible for conducting and supervising elections for political offices in their respective territories. To accord this function to a national electoral commission is to vitiate the independence of the federating units and to compromise federalism. If, on the other hand, a given state lacks the capability to do so, then it is free to delegate that jurisdiction to the federal electoral commission.

The polity must be genuinely federal and democratic. While there is a global consensus for federalism as a system of government in Nigeria, debate over the restructuring of the federal polity has polarized the country into three camps. In the first camp are those who argue for a retention of the status quo as contained in the 1999 Constitution. This camp is populated mainly by leaders from northern Nigeria. The second camp comprises of politicians and public policy analysts who advocate for a restructured federalism in the political sphere but with exclusive federal jurisdiction in natural resources. This camp draws its proponents mainly from southwestern and southeastern Nigeria. The third camp, which comprises of the six Niger Delta states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers, advocates for a genuine federal system that recognizes the independence of the federating units with exclusive state jurisdiction over key sectors of the economy, including the ownership and control of natural resources - the management, exploitation, exploration, and marketing of mining, minerals, oil and gas resources. While the position of the first school of thought is explicit, that of the second lends tacit support to the first by opposing the critical element in the position of the third school of thought. For example, a basic argument of the second school of thought is that, the recognition of states' exclusive jurisdiction over their natural resources would mean a drastic reduction in the federal allocation due to them, under the current regime of an oil based economy.

Concluding Remarks

The above represents some of the key levels of analysis in any discussion on the ingredients for good governance in Nigeria's federal democratic polity. Compared to a unitary system, it is very expensive to maintain a federal political system given its levels of government and multiplicity of ministries and government agencies. The persistent clamour for state creation suggests that rationale thought be given to the number of federating units that the system, as a whole, can adequately support. The fact that the four federating units as of 1963 have been balkanized into 36 states underlines a fundamental problem with the approach Nigerians have adopted on this issue. Besides the Midwest State which was constitutionally created in 1963 under a civilian government, most of the subsequent 32 states created by successive military dictatorships lack the capacity to survive as independent entities.

We note that the thirteen founding units of American federalism have not been divided, just as the four founding provinces of Canadian federalism have remained intact. Other states and provinces have been admitted into the American and Canadian federations respectively, without any of them agitating to be split into further states or provinces in order to balance the power of its "geopolitical" zone vis-a-vis other regions, as has become the pattern in Nigeria. For

example, the population of the State of California (36,132,147; - 2005 estimate) is larger than that of Canada (33,098,936; - 2006 estimate), while the Canadian Province of Ontario (1 million sq. km) is larger than that of Nigeria (923,768 sq. km). In the United States, the states of North Dakota and Maine have populations of 636,677 and 1,321,505 respectively, and yet neither New York (population: 19,254,630) nor California are agitating for their states to be split into smaller population units as is the case in Nigeria. What is unique in the Nigerian case?

It is significant to note that, like the US and Canadian variants where the founding states and provinces negotiated their federations, the Nigerian federation was negotiated by the three founding provinces of Eastern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, and Western Nigeria. However, unlike its North American counterparts whose federating units negotiated as equal partners, components (ethnic nationalities) of the respective three Nigerian provinces were incorporated into the said regions without their consent. The agitation for state creation, especially for the minority ethnic groups had its origin in this phenomenon, as several proponents argue that ethnic nationalities should be the federating units of Nigerian federalism. .

There is merit in restructuring Nigerian federalism on the basis of ethnic nationalities. However, it would be inconceivable to have about 250 federating units in Nigeria. Thus, as a framework for a renewed federalism in Nigeria, we propose the construction of homogeneous federating units (states) for the top 10 most populous ethnic nationalities that have *contiguous* territories, and a maximum of 15 multi-ethnic federating units (states) for the other ethnic groups. Thus, there will be homogeneous ethnic-based states for the Hausa, Igbo, Ijaw, Kanuri, and Yoruba, etc., while the others will constitute a maximum of 15 multi-ethnic states (federating units). Each ethnic nationality in a heterogeneous state will constitute an *autonomous region* with due constitutional jurisdictions. Each ethnic based state and an autonomous region in a heterogeneous state will exercise exclusive jurisdictions over the natural resources in their respective territories. A Charter of Rights and Freedoms protecting minority rights will anchor this renewed federalism.

We cannot discuss the rudiments of good governance without the issue of leadership. The quality of leadership determines the incorruptibility, accountability and transparency of the government. Compared to the calibre of leaders that had presided over state affairs in Nigeria's previous republics, the collection of leaders in the Fourth Republic (1999 - present) is the most corrupt, the least accountable, and the least qualified. In early 2003 President Obasanjo questioned where were the roads that his government had spent over 300 billion naira constructing. His confidant, Anthony Anenih was the minister responsible for that portfolio. Neither Obasanjo nor Anenih answered the question, but the public knew in whose pockets the money was diverted to. In rendering his assessment on the quality of state governors in the Fourth Republic, the secretary general of the Arewa Consultative Forum, Col. Hamid Ibrahim Ali (rtd) declared that "Ninety percent of them are corrupt, absolutely corrupt."¹¹ Reports in several Nigerian newspapers are replete with cases supporting this assessment. While Nigeria boasts a legion of millionaires and

¹¹See, [ThisDayonline](#), Lagos, Monday, June 12, 2006.

billionaires, there are no corresponding industrial plants to justify the rise of *le club des riches*. It is not a secret that *petrodollars* is the source of this personal wealth, and that the means of acquiring it is by corrupt practices. Thus, while oil has intensified the rate of corruption in Nigeria, the polity has become less democratic and ridden with poverty.

It is public knowledge that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established by President Obasanjo to combat corrupt practices in the polity is in fact a political instrument used by him to fight his real and imagined opponents. That the chairman of the EFCC is a member of President Obasanjo's "kitchen cabinet" underlines his personal control of the EFCC. The EFCC is thus perceived as an ineffective agency to cleanse the polity of corruption, given its reluctance or inability to reach into the centre of power in Nigeria that has made corruption a protected industry/

Besides the vexing issue of corruption, which has damaged Nigeria's image in the international community, the quality of leadership, especially at the third tier of government, has contributed significantly to the poor governance in the polity. Most of the chairmen and councillors across the 774 local government councils in Nigeria do not seem to possess the prerequisite knowledge required to manage a government institution. This factor accounts for the increasing absence of government at the local government councils.

Local government council is the bedrock of governance in a federal democratic system. As the government closest to the population, the measurement of the success of governance begins at this level. For this level of government to play its constitutional role in governance, it is vital that it enjoys a degree of independence from the undue interference of a state government. The idea of a state governor determining the choice of chairmen and councillors of local government councils is injurious to the basic construct of free and fair elections that underline a democratic polity. Because of the characterization of local government chairmen as errand boys of their state governors, qualified people with the knowledge, experience and integrity to manage government institutions are dissuaded from vying for offices at this level. That Mr. Andrew Young, a former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Organization would later become the mayor of Atlanta (that is, local government council chairman in Nigeria) underlines the calibre of leadership and experience that is required mostly at the local government council level. When Nigeria's counterparts of Andrew Young vacant this crucial level of government, then it is inevitable that the least qualified and those more susceptible to corruption would fill the void to serve as militant brigade for their respective state governors. The nature of Nigerian politics dissuades many qualified and principled persons from seeking elective positions at all levels of government in Nigeria. For as long as "Ghana-must-go-bags" continue to determine the qualifications for such offices, corruption, mediocrity and ineptitude will remain supreme in Nigerian politics. Only the Nigerian electorates can alter this path.