NIGERIAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS SINCE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE: CHANGES AND TREJECTORIES

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Resumo: Este artigo relata as mudanças estruturais em forma de alterações nos sistemas políticos e nas fontes econômicas da receita estatal na Nigéria pós-colonial. Como a Nigéria e outros países, inclusive Brasil, buscam mutuamente estender e intensificar suas relações externas, o artigo se faz jus pela necessidade de esclarecer melhor as mudanças estruturais ocorridas desde o fim da colonização. Após independência política em 1960, o sistema político Nigeriano tem alternado entre democracia e autoritarismo com aumentos significativos na receita governamental provindo de petrodólares. Porém, a sucessão da elite em cargos políticos executivos tem sido marcada por confusões em meio aos conflitos sociais intensos e recorrentes. Os resultados apontam para uma mudança incompleta de regime com a persistência de uma estrutura rígida do poder.

Palavras-chave: Nigeria; democracia; autoritarismo.

Abstract: This article accounts for the structural changes in the form of shifts in political systems and economic sources of state revenue in post-colonial Nigeria. As Nigeria and other countries such as Brazil seek mutually to extend and intensify external relations, the need to cast further light on the post-colonial structural changes underscores the article's relevance. Since political independence in 1960, the Nigerian political system has alternated between democratic and authoritarian types with significant increases in

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government revenue originating from petrodollars. However, elite succession in topmost political executive offices has been marked by confusions and attended by confusions amid intense and recurrent social conflicts. The findings point to incomplete regime change with the persistence of a rigid power structure.

1. Introduction

This article is an account of structural changes in the Nigerian polity through the historic shifts in the political system and economic resources since the colonial period. With a little over 140 million people, Nigeria is the most populous African country located in the Sub Saharan region. Formerly under British colonial rule, the country pacifically achieved political independence in 1960. The need to combat colonial legacy and syndromes (colonially inherited ruling structures believed or observed to setback social development) has been a major force behind myriad structural changes since political independence.

Despite the fact that the civilian regime has been uninterrupted since 1999, elite successions, particularly within the topmost executive government offices, have been marked by intrigues, violent dispositions and use of force spreading through general elections. The political regime and economic resource changes that implied historic influxes of revenue into government coffers have also been associated with puzzling changes at the topmost level of key political executive elite cadre. Intra party and inter party disputes have historically and currently been reported to be the outcome of manipulation and co-optation by powerful personalities mostly linked to the office of the chief political executive.

Three questions steer the article: (1) How have the rules and opportunities guiding the political game changed since colonial rule? (2) Have significant shifts in economic resources affected government style of political management? (3) Have changes in the rules of the political game and the available resources been meaningful for sustaining an open political system? The account in this article aims to identify the trajectories and transformations in constitutional and institutional rules for accessing and occupying

political offices and for managing the polity. The aim also includes an examination of the direct role played by the Nigerian political elite in shaping the changes.

The leading argument is that structural changes have not been expectedly effective in developing the political institutions and leadership agency capable of promoting social development. Put differently, instead of institutional strengthening that is supposed to accompany structural changes, Nigeria has been witnessing the proliferation of political institutions and socially inept governance regimes. The article is structured in five sections beginning with the introduction that exposes the questions and objectives, the context and relevant concepts of political system with the pluralist positions about structural changes. The second section entails the changes and trajectories of the Nigerian political systems; the third describes the continuities in institutional flaws, conflicts and personality politics; the fourth highlights the growth of oil sales as a robust source of government revenue, and the fifth contains the conclusion.

1.1. Context

One of the legacies of British colonial rule concerns the 1914 administratively decreed boundary adjustments that simply agglomerated different and relatively autonomous ethnic groups within the northern and southern boundaries. Actually, the Nigerian polity is understood by official and scholarly accounts to entail more than 250 ethnic groups with a majority and minority structures. Three regionally distributed majority ethnic groups - the Hausa-Fulani (North), Yoruba (Southwest) and Igbo (Southeast) share a little above two-thirds of the population. A sparsely intermediary group partakes with about 20% while a densely varied minority-labeled group composes the rest of the population.

Differences in religious structures feature in the Nigerian polity with 50% Muslim mainly in North and few southwestern converts, 40% Christians mainly in the south (southwest and southeast) with

a sparingly northern spread and 10 percent animists. Whether officially recognized or not, the use and abuse or profusion of ethnic and religious identities in political relations have so far not escaped the overt attention of structural reformers and reforms.

Amid the informally juxtaposing ethno-regional and religious structures (significantly congruent ethnic, regional and religious boundaries) is the formally interposing class structure linked to the expansive and intensive outgrowth of formal education. Illiteracy rate (based on the Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics) has been declining from its 87.7% (1970) to 31% (2005). Despite the statistical growth in literacy, the Nigerian population living below poverty line and those engaged in agriculture, mostly in the rural areas that survive through subsistence farming with poor social infrastructures, are both estimated at 70% (World Fact Book). There has also been a dismal drop in life expectancy from its previous 56 to 46.5 years. These contrasting conditions raise serious doubts about the value of structural changes since colonial rule.

1. 2. Concepts and Theoretical Arguments

1. 2. 1. Political Systems

Many social scientists have no predilection to confuse political systems with political regimes (Dahl 1995; Alvarez et al. 1996; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Kopstein and Lichbach, 2005). Also, the difficulty in distinguishing the multiplicity of political systems or political regimes derived from history and human imagination has prompted political theorists to settle for a continuum ranging from non-democracies (authoritarian and dictatorial regimes) to democracies.

Dahl (1995) considers political systems to be the boundaries (governance rules) that limit opportunities for participation in government processes. The regimes that restrict participatory chances in political processes to relatively few adult members of society are authoritarian or dictatorial, and the ones that open

chances to a greater variety of authorized adult members are democracies.

However, political regimes do not simply regulate the scope for social participation in political processes; they also stipulate the rules and resources for the political game.[2] Political regimes determine not only access but also the "sources" and "resources that actors employ to acquire political positions" and the interactions between political power and non-political power holders (O'Donnel et al., 1986, 73; Fishman, 1990, p. 428). Political regimes thus imply the rules (formal and informal) that limit political power accessibility and modes of relationships (interactions) between actors and roles across the social spectrum (Munck 1996, Bratton and de Walle 1997).

The critique on the 'procedural' concept of participatory regimes such as democracy makes analytical sense, particularly, when formal processes are stressed against 'results' or 'outcomes' in conceiving and analyzing post-colonial or post-authoritarian democracies such as Nigeria. As one political regime analyst noted, 'procedural rules are contrasted, (...) not to informal ways in which political power is sometimes actually accessed and exercised' (Munck, 1996, 6). Instead, Munck emphasized, procedural rules 'are counter-posed to outcomes' (ibid.). O'Donnell´s (2004) argument that "contemporary democracy hardly is by the people; but it certainly is of the people and because of this, it should also be for the people" (O'Donnell, 2004: 38) underlines the importance of social ownership of both political institutions and their outcomes.

Another relevant analytical dimension is that while pure political systems are practically inexistent, nuance regime combinations known as 'blended regimes', 'hybrid regimes' or 'regime hybridity' are not impossible. Despite its imprecision, "hybrid regimes" are incomplete types in which "partial regimes within the political

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2 See Fishman, 1990; Hyden, 1995; Bratton and de Walle, 1997, *op cit.*

regime are democratic, while others are non-democratic, though not necessarily authoritarian" (Zinecker 2009: 302–331). The analytical point is the effects incomplete regime types have on government policies that directly affect the political system.

1. 2. 2. Liberal Pluralist Stances

The main argument of the liberal pluralists is that structural changes function to disperse political power and roles responsibly amongst important social groups. Power and roles are believed to be *socially shared by autonomous groups* who struggle to gain access and dominion over resource distribution. Hence, group differences and competition lead to a neutral state actor that benign to the political system. It is also argued that political and economic power is not evenly distributed but inequality is considered "non-cumulative", implying that "most people have some power resources and no single asset such as money confers excessive power" (Manley, 1983, p. 369). That is, no person or group consistently accumulates all power resources to the detriment of others.

However, the idea of a positive relationship between effective structural change and social power dispersal under a neutrally benign state may be misleading, particularly for understanding the differences that persist in certain context such as Nigeria. Structural changes can translate not just to governance reforms that reorder rules for elite renovation through open regime change (Dahl 1971, Bratton and de Walle 1997). Structural changes can also imply the discovery and application of new sources of productive resources for expanding social opportunities and elite renewal. The implication is that, despite structural differentiation, elite power and roles can endure by recurring through time and space without meaningful social change contributions to the political system.

Moreover, formal political institutions may be penetrated by informal power with outcomes different from pluralist expectations. Natural resource as a curse and bane of political elite responsibility is usually emphasized by State-centered analysts (*see* Ross 1997, Karl 2008). In particular, oil proceeds are said to produce a *rentier* state, corruption and patronage with power centralization that

reproduces a powerful elite indifferent to democratic change (Wantchekon and Lam 2004, Wantchekon 2004, Obi 2005). Despite lacking extensive application, corruption and patronage exchanges backed by rents derived from state power seem in Nigeria to limit the interplay between formal and informal institutions of political interactions. However, beyond state generated rents repose the social background and particular interests of the political elite.

2. Trajectories of Political Systems and Phases in Nigeria

2. 1. Brief Recapitulation from Colonial Rule (1914-1960)

Unlike the case of the currently more advanced Western (American and European) democratic countries and similar to the experiences of Latin American countries, the structuring of the modern state in Nigeria not only took a top-bottom form but also was the legacy of British colonial rule. Colonial rule fully established in 1914 when Britain amalgamated the northern and southern protectorates. The efficacy of colonial rule lasted until it was eroded by internal and external forces while ceding the way to a limited political opening.

A sequence of events triggered this historic movement: the two global conflicts (1914–1919 and 1939–1945), decolonization (1946–1960) and various political and social forces playing distinct though interlinked roles. Up to 1945, no significant efforts were made by British colonizers to free Nigeria from external domination. Despite that the open objectives of the subsequent constitutional changes were the transition to political independence based on the Westminster parliamentary democracy, the dynamics of the formative political structure reposed on the British colonizers and emergent Nigerian elite.

Amongst the constitutional changes, the most notable ones were those of 1946, 1951, 1954 and 1960 ones. The 1946 Richardson Constitution provided for a guided legislative representation for

Nigerians (under British tutorship) through the tripartite (East, North and West) regional structures created under the same constitution. The 1951 Macpherson Constitution established a Central Legislative Council with an Executive Council and the 1954 Lyttleton one instituted a Federal Executive Council.[3]

Other important structural changes between 1946 and 1960 were the creation *inter alia* of three officially recognized political parties formed along the three major ethnic lines. At the same time, an independent bureaucratic institution was created to support the three major political institutions (executive, legislature and judiciary)[4]. The cumulative point is that pro-independence constitutional changes lacked sufficient *de fato* social forces of integration into a feasible nation-state. *De jure* institutional power appeared to have been politically prioritized at the expense of social integration into a nation-state, which, observed Chabal (1992/1994), remained thorny as postt-colonial rule took shape from 1960 onwards.

2. 2. Parliamentary Democracy, Republic and Mixed Presidency (1CR: 1960–66)

Between 1960 when Nigeria achieved political independence and 1966 that witnessed the fall of the first civilian regime, three important structural changes occurred that affected the political regime. The 1960 Constitution consolidated all the previous ones since 1946. Apart from ushering in independence, it contained provisions for a fully Nigerian executive, legislative and judicial composition endowed with autonomies that guaranteed power balance between them. The pro-independence general elections of

3 *see* Blitz, 1965 for a detailed account of the pre-independence constitutional changes.

4 *see* Ademolokun, L (1986/2000), *op cit*

1959 produced the first indigenous Prime Minister (PM) under the
Westminster parliamentary democratic system.

However, the first Nigerian Governor-General (G-G) not only was
appointed by the Queen of England based on the independence
constitution but also represented her majesty, that is, remarked
Okeke (2001), "the British government still have reasonable
influence" in Nigeria (p. 36). A constitutional reform, enacted on 1
October 1963, proscribed certain portions of the independence one
while replacing them with republican tenets. This change was
specifically intended to eliminate the inconsistent and undesired
aspects of the British legacy and bring government nearer to the
people (Dudley 1982). The reform eliminated the G-G office and the
Privy Council, headed by the British Queen, and instituted a
presidential office, thereby, inaugurating a presidential
parliamentary system.[5]

The constitutional reform of 1963 also eradicated the Judicial
Service Commission and conferred the president power to appoint
Supreme Court judges but not without the advice of the prime
minister. Other revisions included the following: empowerment of
the Supreme Court to declare any law unconstitutional if it was
found to be inconsistent with constitutional precepts; procedures for
creating new states, adjusting boundaries and amending the
constitution; institution of revenue allocation formula based on
need, national interest and balanced development. One of the
instant effects of the reform was the creation of a fourth region,
known as Midwest, out of the western region.

Even before the 1959 elections that finally led to political
independence in 1960, voting patterns had revealed a particular
penchant for political parties founded along ethno-regional

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[5] The reform and its regime outcomes in terms of power and
role sharing are comparable to the French system which
accommodates both a president and prime minister with relative
autonomies and interdependencies.

boundaries. The 1959 elections merely consolidated such pattern that persistently manifested in the subsequent 1964 general election which was to usher in the second civilian mandate. Instead of policy issues, politicians used ethnic symbols (common identities of origin, language and habits) to appeal for votes amongst their respective ethno-regional groups.

Amid the ethnic appeals for votes, informal institutions based on corruption, nepotism and patronage exchanges marked political relations, particularly those interactions leading to public distribution of resources, electoral campaigns and elections for occupying key public offices. By this time, the attitude and behavior of the political elite occupants of public offices, especially at the executive and legislative power echelon, have started revealing a detour pattern from constitutional norms and social preferences. The intense struggle for control of state resources at the centre had taken a centrifugal turn. That is, politicians were more interested in tapping national resources for their respective regions than in strengthening the nation-state. Also, the relative regional autonomies over revenue generation mostly derived from regionally sourced and managed cash crops further downplayed the incentive for national development.

Linz had argued that, under presidential parliamentary system, conflict between the President and the PM is inherently predictable. While the latter usually holds effective executive power, the power of the former is uncomfortably symbolic and weak (1990). This argument was sadly validated in the Nigeria case; serious power tensions actually arose between the President and PM. The intense power tussle at the political executive level operated with electoral malpractices, corruption, socially harmful patronage exchanges and ethnic oriented politics to setback institutional dynamics during the first civilian regime that collapsed under military coup in 1966.

2. 3. The First Military Rule (1MR: 1966–1979)

Three different military governments initially marked the changed structure of military rule that lasted 13 years (1966–1979). The first under Maj Gen Ironsi lasted roughly six months, the

second by Gen G. Gowon extended up to nine years while the third by Gen Muritala and Lt Col Obasanjo lasted five years.

Through various authoritarian acts the first military government, headed by the eastern born Maj Gen A. Ironsi, abolished political parties, interest groups and the institution of parliament. These civilian institutions were perceived able to easily mobilize opposition against the military regime (Dudley 1982). In their place, a military political hierarchy was established under the control of a military junta codenamed the Supreme Military Council (SMC). This appellation was either repeated or varied according to the choice and contextual necessities of subsequent military regimes.

The junta in all the military governments was responsible for every major decision related to agenda control and policy initiatives. It combined the role of the executive and legislative powers and subordinated the bureaucracy and judiciary to the regime´s control, by itself driven by different decrees, coercion and manipulations. Another structural characteristic of the military regimes, starting from the earliest one, was the blend of military and civilian personnel. In the case of the first military government, both military and civilian advisers were integrated into the highest echelon of government.

Despite the serious critiques levied against it until its demise, the first military government actually laid the autocratic structure of rule for the succeeding governments. The first chief executive military leader unilaterally announced, on 24 May 1966, through Unification Decree No 34 of 1966, the creation of a unitary system of government. The unitary design was aimed to transform the 'four regions into mere political units' to be tagged "provinces" and establish "a unified Civil Service Commission" under the ban placed on 'political and tribal organizations' (Graf, 1988, 42).

Although, the unification decree was denounced and invalidated by the second military government, the centralized structure of government administration continued in practice. Based on the civil war exigencies that attended the second military government, the four regional divisions (North, East, West and Mid-West) were

elevated to twelve (12) states in 1967. A political analyst noted that such structural change occurred more out of war exigencies than long-standing popular yearning for local autonomy through boundary adjustments (Nwaolise, 1995).

Another relative modification in the military political structure concerned the reinstatement of the Federal Executive Council (FEC). Under the so-called 'diarchy' or fusion (*see* Akinola, 2003), various civilian and military personnel were appointed to the topmost federal executive portfolios. These commissioners, later designated ministers, were the only aspect that distanced the particular regime's structure from that of Ironsi's, which was purely a military outfit. A superstructure of permanent secretaries and political advisers was also created and infused into the political system. The structural role of this mixed pattern of government was effectively to limit the undesired influence of military rule or simply to mask its authoritarian nature and render it less unacceptable to the people.

Gowon's second military government functioned for about nine months without the FEC and was only backed if not led by the super structure of permanent secretaries that advised on practically all political and even military matters (*see* Dudley, 1982; Osaghae, 1999). While the contributions of the secretaries structured the regime, they also rendered it monotonous and adverse to change through their incessant and unproductive debates about the nature of the political system.

The same superstructure of bureaucrats, mostly made up of southern intellectual elite, was reported to have cost the government northern support, especially that of the region's core cultural groups who believed the influence of the former to be "antithetical" to northern interests (Dudley, 1982, 98). Again, the unfounded fear of ethno-regional dominance re-emerged with negative effects on the solidity of the political system.

The third military government adopted the previous structure of the SMC and FEC, though with certain alterations. Except on invitation, the structure excluded bureaucrats from the decision-making hierarchy, and all military governors were withdrawn from the SMC and integrated into the new Council of States, thereby creating an intermediary power structure between the SMC and FEC. The move was to free the decision-making process of

unnecessary interventions by the bureaucrats, while ostensibly depoliticizing it. The intermediary role of the Council of States sought to reduce the heavy dependence of the SMC on the bureaucracy, which had grown very powerful during the previous administration.

Corrective institutional patterns were also fused into the system to discipline errant public servants, especially those that had been involved in corrupt practices during the past regime. However, the most important step was taken through measures to return Nigeria to civilian rule. A constitution drafting committee was established and charged to prepare a legal framework to return Nigeria to civil rule and promote its consolidation as a united and peaceful nation. Local governments were reorganized and the number of federated states was increased from 12 (twelve) to 19 (nineteen) in a bid to ensure grassroots participation in politics.

The Mohammed government moved so swiftly that in the roughly seven months from the end of July 1975 to 13 February 1976, when he was assassinated in an attempted coup, he achieved what his immediate predecessor was unable to accomplish under 9 (nine) years of military rule. However, the ultimate task of effective power transfer to civilian government was left to Muritala's deputy, Colonel (later Major) O. Obasanjo. The latter actually implemented the transition to civilian rule by first setting up a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) that suggested a presidential system of government instead of the initial Westminster system, despite the trivial change to a presidential parliamentary system.

The first military regime left important and lasting lessons to the Nigerian political and financial structures. Firstly, a power sharing device called diarchy was introduced between the military and civilian personnel and persists in different forms till date. Secondly, the centralized power structure developed at the national state level implied the considerable erosion of regional and later state financial autonomies. The causal military decrees have been readapted under civilian regime. For example, major mineral exploration, particularly, petroleum oil, remains under state control. Thirdly, corruption,

patronage and ethnic politics not only remerged in military politics but continued unabated. Indeed, socially inept conducts within the political leadership echelon remerged as the bane of both civilian and military government decadence.

2. 4. Emergence of the Presidential System (2CR: 1979–1983)

The perceived weaknesses of the 1963 republican constitution coupled with the subsequent breakdown of the democratically elected government in 1966 gave rise to a series of military governments. These ended in 1979 with the introduction of a presidential constitution and government system. It was believed within the elite ranks, noted Ademolokun (1985), that a parliamentary system was not appropriate for the African, Nigerian context. Traditional patterns of leadership amid the country's complex social structures were said to require the powers of an "executive president" to harness the diverse groups and interests of Nigerians (Agi, 1986, 13–22; Adebayo, 1986/2004, pp. 63–72, Dumoye, 2003, pp. 41–55).[6]

Consequently, the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) was set up on 18 October 1975. The CDC eventually submitted its publicly debated report to the successor military government on 29 August 1979. The constitution that came into effect on 1 October 1979 instituted major changes. It merged the offices of the Head of State, Head of Government and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces into the presidency. In principle, this meant that the president's authority and that of the subordinate vice president and ministers would stem from direct and popular election by the people.

Upon the intent of assuring "equity" and "national integration" (Utume 1998/2003, pp. 201–210), the Constitution incorporated

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6   Many political analysts and practitioners in the country identified different reasons and produced or portrayed variegated justifications for the inadequacies of parliamentary system and choice of an alternative one.

the Federal Character Principle in processes of ministerial appointments. Other provisions included: the prior scrutiny and confirmation of ministers by the senate and the empowerment of the president to appoint the chief justice of the federation and supreme court judges, subject to senate confirmation.

Moreover, the 1979 Constitution entrusted the fiscal and monetary policy on the presidency; measures to de-tribalize and de-regionalize political ideas and practices by expanding political parties range of action over the national territory and the creation of Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to organize and communicate elections. In the first presidential election (1979), a northerner won the presidency under the National Party of Nigeria; a political party that overtly sought a cross regional outreach both of memberships and votes.

However, both ruling party and presidency outstretched formal and informal boundaries of the presidential system modeled after the United States of America's (USA) liberal constitution. Informal networks were developed to compensate for the lack of party majority at the National Assembly. The president´s extensive patronage power was used beyond reasonable limits through political appointments, nepotism and government contracts.

In all, the first experiment with presidential system of government turned out to be an antithesis of the constitutional treatise to guarantee a less personalized form of government, or rather, a more democratic form of accessing and exercising political power and roles. The military seized the opportunity of the recurrent government excesses to intervene and reassume state rule.

2. 5. Second Military Dictatorship (2MR: 1984–1999)

The unilateral interruption of the 1979 Second Republic constitution (by military fiat) opened the way for another succession of military rulers that lasted up to July 1999. With a similar pattern but differing styles of authoritarian rule, various military regimes

either promised or engaged in constitutional reforms to re-establish democratic rule. Notable was the short-lived but harsh authoritarian regime of the famous duo of Major General Muhammed Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon (1983–1984) that assumed government affairs after the coup.

On perceiving that social attitudes towards political authority were being permeated by lawlessness that operated to undermine social stability, the government initiated and implemented the War Against Indiscipline (WAI). This latter consisted of measures to correct perceived deficiencies in the political culture of the Nigerian society. On 26 August 1985, Buhari's government was overthrown by none other than his own Chief of Army.

The suppression of freedom of speech through, e.g. the jailing of foremost members of the Nigerian media alongside other human rights violations, led the public to distrust the real intentions of the government, which broke down in its first year of existence. Despite its shortcomings and from a historical perspective, most Nigerians recognize the short-lived Buhari-Idiagbon government as the one which, after that of Murtala Mohammed (1975), made the most significant and positive impact on the public mood and perception of the timely necessity of military rule.

Major General Ibrahim Babaginda, who took on the title of president of the government, introduced the IMF loan conditions even after they were rejected through a 'stage managed' opinion poll (see Ihonvbere 1998). The Babangida's government played into IMF policy exigencies and implemented the notorious structural adjustment programme (SAP). The government´s leadership also demonstrated ambiguities towards political power and policymaking. Some analysts fault his leadership for mishandling the state fiscal crisis which originated from the early 1980s, thus pre-existing his government (Biersteker and Lewis 1997).

However, it was through political and bureaucratic institutional changes that the government completely dashed public hopes for true democratic transition under open participation. In aspects related to political and office power restructuring, he was more consistent in planning and organizing the transition process. A political bureau was set up and individuals from a wide spectrum of society, whom he described as "men and women of ideas and

experience", were appointed (*cf* Olagunju et al., 1999). His thrust was seemingly to clear the transition pathways of diversionary pebbles. He created two political parties and personally named them the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Congress (NRC).

Meanwhile, the government embarked on bureaucratic reforms whose outcomes ran counter to the expected transition to democracy. There was a politicization of bureaucrats with their transformation into opportunistic and dependent entities rather than engines for consistent change towards democracy. 'Career permanent secretaries' were replaced with the unstable offices of "directors general" similar to the ministerial pattern, as these officials could easily be manipulated through politically oriented admissions and dismissals (Ademolokun, 1997, pp. 364–372).

The military ruler wrote the political parties' manifestoes and personally directed politicians to enlist in specific parties. However, he gravely flouted human rights principles. So-called political dissidents were thrown into jail and alleged coup plotters were detained without trial, given a summary judgment of life imprisonment or coldly executed.[7] On 23 June 1993, the self-acclaimed military president annulled a widely acclaimed but now worthless presidential election and appointed a personal friend and business tycoon, E. A. Shonekan, to manage state affairs while he resigned. The so called Interim National Government (ING) was declared illegal by a Lagos High Court in November 1993. Consequently, the opportunity emerged for General Sanni Abacha, the most senior after Babangida, to take over the helm of government affairs.

Abacha's regime was marked by cumulative and concentrated regional revolts, human rights violations and brutalization. Press freedom was contained to the effect that many newspaper houses

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[7] Human rights publications at detailed the abuses committed during Babangida's eight-year rule.

were closed down and journalists were either jailed. State machinery was extensively and intensively used to perpetuate personal interests in office. As the tussle over revenue allocation escalated under the sweeping top-down political repression, state power was used to silence claimants. A renowned civil rights activist and group leader of the oil rich Ogoni land in the Niger Delta – Ken Saro Wiwa – was executed despite global protest. The Niger Delta crisis remains to this day a symbol of the dysfunctional government system based on the political scramble for resources achieved through lucky accident (Edylyne, 2001, Douglas et al., 2003).[8]

Abacha set up a constitutional conference whose major outcome, announced on 25 April 1995, was unclear about tenure – indeed, it conferred the dictator the sole right to determine his government's longevity. But eventually, the issue of tenure would depend not on his will but on the course of nature. The most tyrannical and human rights flouting regime of post-colonial Nigeria came to an abrupt end on 8 June 1998, upon the death of its mentor. On 9 June 1998, General Abdulsalam Abubakar ascended to the highest seat of government as Nigeria's new head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces.

The new head was serene and committed to the transition process. If not thoroughly, he earnestly accomplished in roughly one year the task of democratic transformation that his immediate predecessor had selfishly ignored. Initially, he opened all entry points of participation needed to enhance a wider political contest. He granted amnesty to practically all the political detainees and those who voluntarily or involuntarily fled the country to avoid political persecution under the fury of the previous military leaders. Also, the old lingering political parties were dissolved and new ones were formed.

However, like the previous militarily arranged transitions, the 'content' rather than 'process' of transition appeared more salient on the agenda. Crucial civil society inputs or advice were not

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8   Various accounts about the Niger Delta crisis portray the extent of government and international participation in its sustenance with specific impacts on the polity including volatilities of democratic processes and consolidation.

adequately considered in the constitutional negotiations and approval.[9] In the national elections that followed those of the local government and federated states, Rtd Major Gen O. Obasanjo won the presidential contest on the People's Democratic Party platform, and was sworn-in on 29 May 1999 as the second executive president of a democratically elected government in Nigeria.

Despite that post-colonial Nigeria had witnessed important structural changes, the second period of military rule (2MR: 1984–1999) initiated the most extensive structural changes to date, such as the structural adjustment programme that combined economic and political reforms during the most prolonged government of the period, that of Babangida (1985–1993).

Before the Babangida government, the military government of Buhari-Idiagbon (1984–1985) sought to deepen the economic austerity measures weakly initiated during Shagari's (1979–1983) government. The duo also tried to introduce radical changes in social structure, especially value patterns, through the 'War Against Indiscipline' (WAI), which was supposedly aimed at moving society towards democratic rule. On the whole, the second period of military rule in Nigeria was an anathema to the expected changes in governance regime. Loathsome tyranny, sarcasm and selfishness were styles of rule that Nigerians least expected after the preceding changes and experiences of bad governance.

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2   *2. 6.* Third Democratic Rule (3CR: 1999 – Present)

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9   The comments and viewpoints on the Nigerian Constitution submitted by *The Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue* to the Constitution Debate Coordinating Committee contained advice such as the formation of a transition committee and popular ratification to condition its final product and content.

The 1999 constitution contains the current maximum rules of Nigeria. Despite its manifest pluralist tone, it remains the inheritance of another military regime. Like the constitution of 1979, the relevant provisions of the 1999 document included the separation of powers, federalism, a bill of rights, a multiparty system and a secular state. Under the principle of the separation of powers, Part II, Article 4, Section 1 of the constitution vested legislative powers in the bicameral National Assembly composed of the House of Representatives and Senate. While the latter had 475 elected members based on each state's population, the former had 108 elected members founded on a multiple of three members from each of the 36 states of the federation outside the federal capital of Abuja.

Section 4, sub-section 2 of the constitution limited the powers and roles of the National Congress to making laws "for the peace, order and good government of the Federation or any part thereof with respect to any matter included in the Exclusive Legislative List set out in Part I of the Second Schedule of this Constitution" (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). The constitution readopted the presidential system of government. The Federal Executive Council (or cabinet) was to be headed by an executive president and assisted by a vice president with an appointed body of ministers.

According to Section 5, sub-section 1a and 1b of the constitution, the executive powers of the federation "shall be vested in the President and may, subject to the provisions of any law made by the National Assembly, be exercised by him [sic] either directly or through the Vice-President and Ministers of the Government of the Federation or Officers in the Public Service of the Federation". The roles expressed in the powers of the executive, as clearly stated by the constitution, "shall extend to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution, all laws made by the National Assembly and to all matters with respect to which the National Assembly has, for the time being, power to make laws" (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria).

Judicial powers were entrusted to federal high courts and supreme courts. Judges therein were endowed with autonomous powers to review both executive and legislative acts. The

appointment of judges by the president was subject to confirmation of the legislatures, which were charged to ensure that any such appointment be in keeping with constitutional provisions. The federal principle remained in the constitutional framework with the three-tier system of government (federal, state and local).

The 36 states with 768 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) made up the federation. Although the powers of each lower tier are clearly outlined in the constitution, none of the federated states had its own constitution as usually found in federal systems. However, the constitution did allow for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) charged to register political parties under a multiparty system. It also provided for a bill of rights which would guarantee a set of civil and political liberties such as the right to life and dignity of the human person; personal liberty; fair hearing; private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of expression and the press; peaceful assembly and association; freedom of movement; freedom from discrimination; and property rights.

Certain fundamental objectives and directives were also established, to ensure a set of social, cultural and economic liberties such as the right to education. However, these were not made enforceable like the bill of rights. Ultimately, the constitution expressly disallowed the adoption of any religion as state religion; the formal constitutional position is for a secular state as opposed to a theocratic one.

3. Institutional Flaws, Conflicts and Politics of Personality

Since the 1999 elections, four general elections have been held. However, the one year transition program and its conduct by the presiding military government, that is, under the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), were not without serious flaws. The initial 1999 elections was a crucial test on the preceding constitution and the adaptability of the Nigerian elite after some 40 years of political independence and various trials of democratic

elections had ended in fiasco. However, there were widespread electoral rigging and the active presence of political thugs featured in the unexpected outcomes that were nonetheless officially sanctioned.

The winning party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), had earlier adopted a zoning system that allotted the presidential ticket to a south-westerner and vice presidential candidacy to a northerner (Dan-Musa, 2004, pp. 67–72). In the end, a retired military officer from the south-west and former head of state during the 1975 to 1979 military regime, Gen O. Obsanjo, was elected as the second civilian executive president. In the end, two mandates (1999-2003 and 2003-2007) marked Obasanjo and Abubakar government.

However, social insecurity spun out of control, threatening the economy and polity as Obasanjo handed over power to Shehu Musa Yar'Adua. Again, this change in government leadership put the current political system of Nigeria to an elastic test. Like the past elections, the result of the 2007 elections was fervently disputed in court, but once more it was systematically legitimated by the state. Yar'Adua's election was just one in a historic succession of elections subjected to judicial dispute due to open allegations of electoral fraud and violence. Such tension kept the fate of the third mandate of the Third Republic hanging precariously in a court for a long and stressful period of judicial processes.

Apart from the electoral imbroglio, Yar'Adua faced a range of allegations about the character of his election, which most believed was owed to the political personality of his immediate predecessor. Much of the mass media and observers tagged his election as premature and void of any particular political agenda. However, many, including the new president, held the view that the Nigerian constitution, especially the electoral system, needed reform.[10] It was in this climate of speculative constitutional changes and Yar'Adua's rapidly developing physical debility that Jonathan stepped in the

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10 By the time, newspaper reports were marked by such comments and demands for constitutional review and change.

presidential office from the vice presidential position. Sequel events led to Jonathan's full assumption of presidential power and roles after later died from acute sickness early in 2010.

As was to be expected after the long oppressive and stressful years of authoritarian regimes (1984–1999), the 1999 democratic change exacerbated popular clamour for participation in government processes and outcomes (Ukiwo, 2003). Yet, the expectation that democratic principles would prevail as an option to conflict resolution transmuted into violent outbreaks of group protests and responses by government agents. In some cases, the so-called democratically elected leadership reacted with unmatched force against popular agitators.

The initial crisis of participation that attended the Obasanjo regime was not limited to state-society spheres but also to intra-institutional relationships at the state level. The conflicts between the executive and legislature appeared to take a historic turn. Sectional interests re-emerged as politics were construed to be a matter of resource struggle. The use of ethnic, religious and regional differences for political ends recurred in the post-1999 context.

The centrality of the state's role linked to resource allocation has been subject to a long list of formula since colonial rule. Wealth accumulation gained new force while corruption continued unabated. Accountability has since colonial rule relapsed and a skewed social distribution of resources propelled organized groups to exert pressure against marginalization. The sources of conflict between the executive and legislative branch were traced mainly to resource allocation tussles (Dunmoye, 2003, 47–52).[11] However, the larger expectation is that democracy actually prevails more from the bottom than from the top where the political elite is more

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11 The analyst pointed specifically to the acrimony over the termination of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), the allowances for members of the legislature, the alleged interferences of the executive in legislative affairs, the re-enactment or not of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission Act of 2000, and budget allocation.

accustomed to outright violations of human rights through the deployment of state machinery.

Institutional conflicts were pitched so high that the president was constantly threatened with impeachment by the legislature. Ironically, the former wittingly turned the scenario against the legislative body, which ended up with its speaker impeached over corrupt practices. In all, Obasanjo's government seems to have chosen combating corruption as the main plank of government policy. An early act included the adoption in June 2000 of a bill authorizing an anti-corruption agency to investigate corruption charges against any Nigerian, including the president, the federated state governors and their deputies. The act legalized the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission.

The second mandate of the Third Republic began on 29 October 2003 when Obasanjo was returned to office as executive president, head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces of Nigeria. Nonetheless, the 2003 elections were not spared malpractices. Internal and external observers were unanimous on the unfairness of the competition and the selective nature of inclusion in the political process.

Like the 1999 elections and despite the multiparty system adopted, the PDP seemed practically alone in the struggle. Inclusion in political processes at the federal level, and for the presidency in particular, appeared decided at the party primaries. Exclusive political resources, like wealth, media, ethnic numbers and frequently force, were deployed in a fierce struggle to elect candidates whose victory at the polls would be secured more by physical coercion than by open competition and persuasion.

The incumbent's power and use of state machinery reinforced other political resources to guarantee electoral results while boosting party and personal interests. Obasanjo's second mandate was a continuity of the previous. He grappled with political consolidation through economic reforms and intensification of the fight against corruption. Meanwhile, the problem of marginalization continued to plague economic activities in the Niger Delta area[12]

12 The Niger Delta area is made up of those federated states from where crude oil as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy and main

through protests and armed movements for the fair distribution of oil resources. The Niger Delta crisis exacerbated as its impacts spilled through the national economy, largely dependent on oil production and sales in external markets.

In short, the crisis further weakened government stability through incessant hostilities coupled with destruction and disruption of oil production and sales. Laws were enacted to redistribute resources through establishment of development agencies and percentage increases in statutory allocations to the federated states in the area. Nonetheless, corruption and mismanagement of funds worsened social discontent and aggravated depredatory actions against oil pipelines alongside forceful disruptions and kidnappings of foreign oil workers. However, the larger expectation is that democracy actually prevails more from the bottom than from the top where the political elite is more accustomed to outright violations of human rights through the deployment of state machinery.

4. Significant Shifts in Economic Sources and Resources

Apart from structural changes in the patterns of political regimes, the Nigerian polity had experienced very significant shifts in its economic sources and resources. These resulted in exponential increases in the size of government revenue. The growth of oil and gas receipts away from cash crop proceeds since the 1970s was described by Iladare and Suberu in the following terms:

Over the years, the Nigerian oil and gas sector has dominated merchandise exports. Oil revenue from exports grew from [US] $718 million to $9.4 billion from 1970 to 1978 but declined source of government revenue is extracted on a daily basis. Certain groups from these states are engaged in fights for their share of oil revenue. However, the issue is more one of social inclusiveness or simply voice than a specific demand for revenue.

dramatically from a high of $25 billion in 1980 to $4.7 billion in 1986 as a result of the crude oil price collapse. (…). In 2008 total oil export receipts for Nigeria were about $75 billion, which represents about 98.8 percent of total exports for the year (Ildare and Suberu, 2010, p. 3).

Table 4.1: Share (%) of Oil Revenue in Total Revenue (billions Nigerian   naira),
2007–2013

	2007	2008
Total Revenue	2,311	3,029
Oil Revenue	1,767	2,539
Oil Revenue/Total Revenue (%)	75.5	83.8

Source: International Monetary Fund (2011), available at www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/ Scr/2011/cr1157.pdf

Oil and gas sales provided enormous increases in government revenue and continue to do so up to the present. Moreover, projections of future revenues from oil in Nigeria are huge in absolute and relative terms. Table 4.1 presents data from the Nigerian Authorities and IMF estimates on recent (2007–2009) and projected (2010–2013) growth in revenue from oil exports as a proportion of total revenue.

The paradox of the significant changes in the economic fortunes and sources of government revenue is that instead of socio-economic development, poverty has worsened in the country. Incidence of poverty in Nigeria has been on the rise, from 43% in 1985, to 49% in 2002, and 54% in 2006.[13] Ironically this increase in the proportion of the poor in the total population occurred amid the oil sale bonanza and accruing government revenue.

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13 From Apata (2010) based on 2009 surveys conducted by the Federal Office of Statistics (now the National Bureau of Statistics) on poverty and welfare in Nigeria. Note that the 1992 figures show an intermittent drop in poverty to 34%.

The pertinent point is that structural changes (significant reforms in the political regime and shifts in economic resources) are generally thought to promote the development of the political system, principally through support to the social groups that make up the polity. Such strengthening of the political system is said to occur when the political system is open to social contestation and participation in decision-making processes and outcomes. However, structural changes, as observed through time, have been more associated with centralization of political power than its decentralization in post-colonial Nigeria. Moreover, the epic influx of oil revenue into state coffers is not being effectively managed for the development of the political system. State capture and rent seeking by powerful special interest groups dominate the political scenario.

2   5. Conclusion

This article accounted for the Nigerian political system's various regime and economic resource shifts and trajectories in the post-colonial era. Formally, the Nigerian political system has ranged from British parliamentary democracy and presidential democracy to authoritarianism under a constitutionally prescribed federal structure. In practice, the polity has been characterized by the creation and recreation by the political elite of typical forms of governance systems, political institutions and agencies – such as political parties, presidency, ministries, the 'Federal Character' principle, electoral commissions and others. The expected, following pluralists, is that power becomes functionally dispersed among social class and social groups.

However, informal power, including socially constructed ethnicity, and the politicization of autonomous state agencies, especially the bureaucracy, was shown as having permeated formal constitutional setup since decolonization. The problem is not the presence of informal power or institutions but rather their conversion to

personal advantages and the unexpected outcomes of informal activities on the political system. Informal power is dysfunctional when it is deployed merely to serve special interests at the expense of good governance. More important is not the quantity of institutions and agencies (which actually proliferate in the Nigerian polity) but the social quality of interest representation.

While political praxis is observed to have varied significantly, regime instability has remained the outcome of the polity since colonial rule. Frequent constitutional changes and institutional proliferation have been associated with the political elite's maneuvers for political power-holding since political independence. Military rule unexpectedly lasted longer, and was more painful and pernicious than expected and originally promised. It legated a culture of power centralization and concentration to the detriment of a truly open political structure anchored on bottom-up access facilities.

Political development adepts consider structural changes to be a primary step toward social development. In the Nigerian context, enormous efforts have been expended in making structural changes since the colonial period. Not only does the sequence of uninterrupted elections deserve credit but also the expanded (or expansionary) federated state and local government structures for supposedly realizing state presence in the society. Yet, the observed outcome of regime volatility with central power rigidity amid growing economic resources and increased government revenue transcends mere concern over the political regime's physical durability. It portends incomplete regime changes with a curtailed social support needed for the political system's development.

In order to be socially meaningful, open changes in the rule of the political game and positive shifts in economic resources that replenish state coffers require institutional building or strengthening. Institutional building implies innovation not just by creating new or recreating old institutions but principally by injecting synergic leadership incentives into them. The cyclic, renewable and productive nature of democratic elections open to opposition and the victory of opposition parties need internalization for the sake of democratic survival and development. That is, political participation needs to move beyond recurrent elections to

inculcate the effective political management of demands based on competence, responsibility, responsiveness and transparency.

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