

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIA: CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATES, FEDERALISM, AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Peter P. Ekeh
State University of New York at Buffalo

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The Rise and Misfortunes of Nigerian Federalism

The foundations of modern Nigerian politics were laid in the nineteen-fifties. That decade began with the Ibadan Constitutional Conference of 1950 in which leaders of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria met for the first time in a common political forum since the amalgamation of these two separate British colonies in 1914. It ended with the attainment of Independence in 1960. In the course of that fateful decade, Nigerians got to know themselves a lot. They also worked together to produce a blueprint for the country's political future. In essence, Nigerian leaders forged a consensus, namely, that federalism was the appropriate vehicle for resolving political problems created by the nation's deep-seated circumstances of diversity. The choice of federalism as a mode of governing Nigeria's political affairs was significant for several reasons. First, federalism is rare in Africa. Second, federalism was entirely derived from domestic considerations. Third, federalism was adopted from the exercise of common sense of compromise and accommodation by Nigeria's political leaders from debates involving vast segments of Nigerians.

The intensity of Nigerian federalism of the 1950s could be imagined from the fact that it was driven from below, from the Regions. Nigeria's 1960/63 Constitution illustrates very well the depth of its federalism. It was made up of four constitutional laws (or five, after the creation of Midwest Region in 1964), one for the entire federation and one each for the constituent Regions. The Federal Constitution was negotiated among the constituent political units of the Federation.

Nigerian Federalism Under Civil War and the Balance of Yakubu Gowon's Military Reign

The putsch that ushered Nigeria into military regimes arose from a brutal power struggle in the raw politics of the post-independence years among the three majority ethnic conglomerations (Yoruba, Ibo, and the Hausa-Fulani) for expansion of power outside their regions. In the confusing outcomes of internal