

## **GEOPOLITICAL EQUITY IN NIGERIA IN PRESIDENT BUHARI'S GOVERNMENT**

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*Abstract: This study was conducted in response to perceived ethnic rivalries in Nigeria. The government of President Muhammadu Buhari is bedeviled with ethnic strife and disgruntled voices against federalism due to the perceived superiority of one ethnic group over another in a plural federal state like Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the study evaluates perceptions of equity among indigenous peoples in southern Nigeria. The peoples of the south-east and south-south dominated the call for restructuring due to the skewed arrangement of the nation. This paper's theoretical framework is based on the foundation of John Lock's social contract, especially his treatise on the extent and end of civil government. The sample size was 1352 using a quantitative and qualitative survey. Data were collected quantitatively and qualitatively. The instruments of data collection consisted of a structured questionnaire and an unstructured interview. The data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. It was found that 992 participants, which represented more than three-quarters of the sample, disagreed that ethnic groups are treated fairly; 735 also held that unfair treatment is a recipe for disunity. The Chi Square estimate,  $\chi^2$  81.5;  $p < 0.005$ , tested for ethnic treatment and national unity, was significant, and treatment determines national unity. The study also indicates that indigenous peoples expressed concerns about a failed state that undermined the current federal state. The study therefore recommends that the National Assembly's legislative role be strengthened in making federal appointments to strategic positions. This could possibly alleviate mistrust about treatment by the federal government.*

*Keywords: Ethnic Distrust, Federalism, Multi-Ethnic, Geopolitical Zones, National Unity, Federal Appointment*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a multiethnic country that was formed through amalgamation in 1914. Prior to this period, Nigeria was a bipolar entity that comprised southern and northern protectorates. The protectorate area operated as an autonomous entity with a government under independent self-rule. Historically, the entities of the protectorates were autonomous and comprised symmetrical ethnic groups and peoples of similar language and culture. This was the period of precolonial government, which placed the rule of the king as supreme and recognised divine rights of authority (Akinboye, 2015). Nearly all ethnic groups in Nigeria were organised and operated by a central government from the north, cutting through the west and east of the country (Ake, 2001; Anthony & Eyo, 2017). Interestingly, civilization and modernisation in Europe altered the political structure of traditional organisation in Nigeria. Colonialism forced African nations like Nigeria into slavery and

exploitation by colonial rulers. This arrangement was an ambush against the collective interests of native people in Nigeria. It was a foreign culture that imposed and impressed itself against all odds for the benefit of the colonial masters. Unfortunately, traditional Nigeria was overthrown to suit colonial tastes.

The once independent kingdoms and village governments across the north, west, and east were altered, and their structures collapsed under colonialism and imperialism (Ake, 1995). In spite of this, protectorates were created, covering the north and south. Indeed, ethnic groups in the east and west were merged with those in the south. Therefore, by 1914, the protectorates were merged and called “Nigeria”, a name coined by colonial Lord Lugard. Yet, it was the forced marriage of strange fellows brought together as a couple (Asolo, 2002). People of the ethnic groups were forced to accept a merger, which today is called Nigeria (Ake, 2001). Imperatively, colonial rule was governed by a constitution, which imposed universal government on the peoples of different ethnic groups. Formalisation was the creation of the Nigerian state by the Clifford Constitution, the Richard Constitution, the MacPherson Constitution, and the Littleton Constitution, which spanned the periods of 1922, 1946, 1951, and 1954, respectively (Suleiman, 2018). Nigeria has existed through the colonial era and post-colonial life. Notably, the Nigerian state is a fusion of groups bridled in suspicion of the social contract. This is reinforced by evidence of numerous conflicts and wars that bedeviled the state from colonial existence to the present (Ibrahim & Nurudeen, 2022).

The social contract in Nigeria is ambiguous and coated in distrust. Evidence of preexistence and postexistence identified a major gap that spuriously adduced the faults. Nigeria has witnessed several inter-ethnic conflicts and civil wars that challenge the veracity of unity and the fairness of the social contract upon which Nigerian states exist. Studies have shown that major conflicts in the Nigerian state were triggered by a lack of ethnic trust and an anxiety about ethnic superiority, which pitted one group against another (Fadakinte, 2013; Falaiye & Okeregbe, 2016). Scholars have observed that Nigeria is established on the weak foundation of colonial arrangements, which instantly trigger primordial sentiment and conflict (Ake, 2001; Fadakinte, 2013; Falaiye & Okeregbe, 2016). The argument for scholars pointed to skewed access to a central resource, which placed some groups at an advantage over others (Nweke, 2017a, 2019). Resultingly, according to this perception, Nigeria is a deliberate arrangement—to plunder some groups and increase opportunities for others.

Literature revealed that the amalgamation of the protectorates was an obliteration of equity and balanced growth, which had been witnessed by ethnic groups in the pre-era (Nweke, 2019; Onanuga, 2014). Some prominent writers, the pro-western modernization contingent, contend that colonialism was a precursor for African growth and that modernization of African development was necessary to facilitate the pace of economic growth and social transformation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2009; Rawls, 1996). The foregoing scholars, however, submitted that African problems and conflicts were associated with the continent's multiethnic nature and a lack of ethnic assimilation and robust, equitable distribution of resources, which oftentimes push the ethnic minority to an absolute disadvantage. Evidently, competition for resources triggers ethnic conflict and the survival of the fittest, which pit one group against another. In this vein, Nigeria could be considered the epitome of ethnic survival. Here, the post-colonial era and post-independence life are marked by a resurgence of

ethical competition, which significantly threatened the unity of the Nigerian state. The post-independence era is bedeviled by the civil war of 1967, which is labeled ethnic rivalry and ethnic genocide (Onanuga, 2014). The post-civil war did not abate ethnic suspicion despite a declaration of peace that embraced multiethnic relations and peaceful coexistence. The aftermath of the war was several inter-ethnic clashes across the north and south, the maiming of lives, the destruction of properties, religious wars, kidnapping, agitation for resource control, and coups d'état. All these conflicts and social pathologies occurred in the face of ethnic suspicion and the subsisting social contract of a united Nigeria.

The 1999 Constitution, as amended, offered some leeway for peaceful coexistence. The document provided a redistribution of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones for rapid development and distinctly ensured the classification of resources for each zone (Eze, Okpala & Ogbodo, 2014). It also made provision for subjective resource control, which grants local states certain percentage derivative gains from resources in their domain locations. Unfortunately, the suspicion around ethnic competition strangled the good intentions, and Nigeria is consistently strained by forces of ethnic suspicion and Armageddon, which threaten its very survival. The scenario smacks of the postulation of John Lock in his treatise on civil government.

Evidence in the government of President Muhammadu Buhari exacerbates tensions of ethnic suspicion due to the skewed distribution of federal resources (Falana, 2018). The government triggers a resurgence of ethnic uprisings across the south-east and south-south geopolitical zones. The south-west is not left out in the agitation over restructuring and the Yoruba nation. The fundamental demand by southern ethnic groups, however, hinged on resource control and restructuring for devolution of power, which grants equitable access and fairness for ethnic groups. The agitation for the southern peoples of Nigeria is a reflection of renegotiated civil government, and it is profound in John Lock's thesis. This paper is designed to evaluate Lock's proposition about the extent and end of civil government using the case of Nigeria. Lock offered his Social Contract Theory as a prerequisite for government and the redistribution of benefits to the governed. The governor is mandated by law to govern people who gave up their freedom and resources to the government for protection and equitable gains. The governor is also predicated on the principle of good governance for the people; however, he is bound by tyranny and restrained from conspiratorial acts and/or being complicit in any activity that may hamper the existence of the governed. The drift to tyranny triggers the legitimate doctrine of necessity to renegotiate the contract of government, or otherwise, left unabated, may lead to the decline and death of the state (Freeman, 2007a). Against this backdrop, the paper specifically.

### **Explore the perception of equity in Nigerian federalism using a case study of southern geopolitical zones.**

*Appraise equality in Nigerian federalism.*

The objectives above contrast with John Lock's social contract. The original thesis of Lock holds that the social contract is the evolution of government founded on the needs of man in the state of nature. This ideology, according to Lock, is peaceful and progressive; it requires a supreme law that governs men in the distribution of public goods and imposes

checks and balances (Gaba, 2007). Government is a tool of control, and at the same time, it is a safe haven upon which the state assumes the power of distribution and redistribution to accommodate the needs of men. The state of nature requires the subjugation of individual pride, self-esteem, and group or collective interest to state supremacy. The state in turn assumes overriding status to govern, protect, punish, and impose restraints of measurable standards on the civil men (Gaus, 2016). However, the disposition of tyranny by the state marks the deliberate extent and end of the civil government (Hosein, 2013). This is the foundational knowledge offered by Lock that justifies the abolition of a tyrannical government. In Lock's view, "tyranny" is any government that constrains and imposes unbearable hardship on a partnership's consent to the contract. The agitation of southern Nigeria and the people thereof resonates with the theoretical precepts of John Lock. On the one hand, there is palpable tension hinged around ethnic exploitation and the disproportionate underrepresentation of some ethnic groups in Buhari's government. Similarly, there is a conspicuous overrepresentation of northern ethnic groups in the government, which opens space for suspicion and the deliberate exclusion of ethnic groups from the south.

*John Locke's social contract: A recalibration of ethnic debate in Nigeria*

Locke wrote his influential political ideology in his "Two Treatises on Government". One of his ideological treatises focuses on reconstructing the hypothesis of Robert Filmer and his patriarchy, which assumed that political power was a product of religious power. This is also known as the "Divine Right of Kings," a term popular in 17th-century England. Locke's second treatise is described as an "essay concerning the true original extent and end of civil government". Locke posited that for mankind to be in their natural condition, they must be in a state of being free to conduct their lives as they deem fit without any form of external interference (Lefkowitz, 2003). This statement does not give room for lawlessness; it connotes a state of high moral standards where people are not forced to behave in a functional stupidity based on the dictate of the government. In addition, Locke opines that the state of nature is both pre-moral and pre-political. For civil government, Locke argues that property has a significant role to play. A functional state of nature is associated with a united society and a mix of property and labour where the moral upbringing of children is voluntary and collectively cared for by every member of the society (Lister, 2011).

A political society occurs in a situation where individuals, each of whom is a representative of their respective homes, come together in the State of Nature in unison by providing the executive arm of government with the authority to chastise violators of the "Law of Nature". By making a compact to leave the state of nature and form society, they make "one body politics under one government" (Lister, 2011), thereby leading to being submissive to the desires of government. The state of nature therefore is a transition in society that gives up man's power of privacy to the government. With explicit consent, individuals join such a transition, whether it is just beginning or has already been created by others. Laws, judges to interpret those laws, and the executive power required to put those laws into effect are the three things that individuals get when transitioning to a political society or governance by consent that they lacked in the State of Nature. Mankind gives over their ability to defend themselves and punish those who violate the Law of Nature to the government they willingly establish. Locke posited the circumstances in

which the agreement with government is destroyed and men are justified in resisting the authority, based on the idea that the goal of men coming together to form a commonwealth is the preservation of wealth and general well-being, liberty, and the preservation of their lives (Vallier, 2016).

John Locke's conception of the social contract was fundamentally different from Hobbes', but it was nonetheless predicated on the assumption that people in a state of nature would voluntarily band together to form a state. Locke's opinion indicates that individuals in a state of nature are morally bound by the Law of Nature to avert harming the possessions or lives of each other. Locke felt that without a government to protect individuals from those attempting to harm or oppress others, the citizens would not feel secure in their rights and would be paranoid (Gaus & Courtland, 2011). According to Locke, people would only consent to establishing a state if it would, in part, operate as a "neutral judge" and defend the property, lives, and liberties of its citizens (Gaus & Courtland, 2011). In contrast to Locke, who in his *Second Treatise of Government* fought for unalienable liberty within the law, Hobbes merely advocated for nearly absolute control (Gaus, 2016). According to Locke, the government's moral authority stems from the citizens' delegation of their absolute right of violence to the government, reserving the inalienable right of self-defense or "self-preservation," and property will be taxed to meet the needs of society. Instead of every individual serving as his own juror, judge, and executioner, as a principle of the state of nature, government at times uses force to implement laws and to accomplish its goals (Celeste, 2019).

Hobbes' description of the "natural state" as a situation where the rights to life and property were recognized and safeguarded by natural law, with the drawbacks of the position resulting from uncertainty in the execution of those rights, did not faze Locke. Hence, he argued that the social contract's requirement to submit to civil authority was dependent upon the safeguarding of both privately owned property and individuals (Celeste, 2019). In sovereign states, those in executive positions who disregarded these rules might be rightfully removed from office (Hosein, 2013). This position aligns with John Locke's fundamental notion, which justifies changing civil government. In situations where the sovereign's authority indicates common interest, becomes despotic, and there is suspicion of skewing benefits in access to scarce resources, Locke's central claim is that parties to social contracts retain an unalienable right to safeguard their own interests. Nigeria is made up of several ethnic groups that are divided into geopolitical zones. A reconfiguration of John Locke's civil government postulate and the inalienable right to constitutional restructuring, however, have been steadfastly maintained by innuendo throughout the length and breadth of the southern geopolitical zones. Having established the root of agitation among southern Nigerian ethnic groups, the researchers were propelled to draw upon empirical studies of the main problem. In this case, the researcher designed a methodological approach for data collection.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted using a survey design. The survey was classified into descriptive, quantitative, and qualitative methods. In the quantitative survey, a large sample was applied, and in the qualitative survey, the sample size was small and captured via oral conversations (which were audio recorded). The population studied consisted of residents who were indigenes and permanent residents in some states in the south-south and south-

east geopolitical zones. These zones are peculiarly rampant in the agitation for restructuring, which canvasses for resource control and the devolution of federal power. The sample size was 1320, and the size was purposefully determined using survey techniques. The method was the application of accidental sampling, which built up samples for participants who consented to the study. This method was applied in the geopolitical zones that cut across Anambra state, Abia state, and Imo state in the case of the south-east, and Rivers state, Bayelsa state, and Delta state in the case of the south-south. Similarly, 642 and 678 participants were from the south-east and south-south, respectively. On the qualitative level, 32 key informant discussants participated. The sampling procedure consisted of a purposeful and accidental method. A purposeful technique was applied to designate the major states of the southern geopolitical zones, which vehemently engaged in the campaign for the devolution of federal power and resource control. Accidental sampling was applied to derive the sample size, which targeted consenting participants. The method of data collection was quantitatively and qualitatively determined. In the quantitative method, quantitative data were derived using numerical codes to label the identities of responses. Using qualitative methods, the text of the conversation was generated from face-to-face interviews. Instruments for data collection consisted of structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews. A questionnaire was targeted at the residents as a unit of analysis, while interviews were conducted among organised groups, which consisted of the OHANESE socio political organisation, MASSOP/IPOB revolutionary group, the PANDEF socio-political organisation, House of Assembly members, and judges in state high courts. The data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The former applied descriptive and inferential statistics, while the latter applied thematic analysis using ethnographic techniques. The reliability of the instrument was determined using a pilot survey in a test-retest study, otherwise known as a test of consistency. Validity was determined using the content validity of the instrument. Ethical consideration sought the consent of participants and applied anonymity to respondents.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Contract of Equity and Equality*

The view of the respondents based on the contract of equity and equality is discussed for the justification of the provisions of the Nigerian constitution in this chapter. Chapter One of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, mandates that Nigeria acknowledge all people and ethnic groups as equal and without discrimination when it comes to accessing the country's natural resources, including land and minerals. This constitutional clause ensures that all citizens have a sense of justice and equality regardless of their race, ethnicity, or language. The course of events in Nigeria has shown the contrary. There is now growing concern about the suitability of ethnic equity and rivalry.

**Table 1: Contract of Federal Equity and Equality**

Question items	South-East		South- South		Total	
	Freq=	Percent=	Freq=	Percent=	Freq=	Percent=
	642	100%	678	100%	1320	100%
Nigeria is a heritage that belongs to all citizens						
Agreed	259	40.3	279	41.2	538	40.8

Partially agreed	86	13.4	89	13.1	175	13.3
Disagreed	297	46.3	310	45.7	607	46.0
Nigeria benefits of all ethnic groups						
Disagreed	264	41.1	279	41.2	543	41.1
Partially agreed	86	13.4	86	12.7	172	13.0
Strongly agreed	292	45.5	313	46.2	605	45.8
Ethnic in Nigeria is fairly treated						
Disagreed	484	75.4	508	74.9	992	75.2
Partially agreed	104	16.2	107	15.8	211	16.0
Disagreed	54	8.4	63	9.3	117	8.9
Ethnic group has fair share and representation in federal government						
Disagreed	509	79.3	534	78.8	1043	79.0
Partially agreed	41	6.4	39	5.8	80	6.1
Agreed	92	14.3	105	15.5	197	14.9
Ethnic group has fair representation in the military hierarchy						
Disagreed	416	64.8	440	64.9	856	64.8
Partially agreed	152	23.7	154	22.7	306	23.2
Agreed	74	11.5	84	12.4	158	12.0
Ethnic group has fair representation in top federal civil service						
Disagreed	422	65.7	440	64.9	862	65.3
Partially agreed	130	20.2	133	19.6	263	19.9
Agreed	90	14.0	105	15.5	195	14.8
Representation of your ethnic in federal police is fair						
Disagreed	395	61.5	425	62.7	820	62.1
Partially agreed	229	35.7	232	34.2	461	34.9
Agreed	19	2.8	21	3.1	39	3.0
There is fair representation of your ethnic group in paramilitary hierarchy						
Disagreed	366	57.0	388	57.2	754	57.1
Partially agreed	240	37.4	248	36.6	488	37.0
Agreed	36	5.6	42	6.2	78	5.9
There is fair share of your ethnic in government since 1999						
Disagreed	334	52.0	353	52.1	687	52.0
Partially agreed	254	39.6	262	38.6	516	39.1
Agreed	54	8.9	63	9.3	117	8.9
The 1999 constitution promotes equality among ethnic groups						
Disagreed	410	63.9	416	61.4	826	62.6
Partially agreed	214	33.3	241	35.5	455	34.5
Agreed	18	2.8	21	3.1	39	3.0

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2021

**Table 2: Perception of Equity and Equality**

Variables	South-East		South- South		Total	
	Freq= 642	Percent =100%	Freq= 678	Percent =100%	Fre=1320	Percent =100%

Fourth republic enhance balanced growth in geopolitical zones						
Disagreed	437	68.1	461	68.0	898	68.0
Partially agreed	169	26.3	175	25.8	344	26.1
Agreed	36	5.6	42	6.2	78	5.9
National government beneficial to ethnic groups						
Disagreed	410	63.9	435	64.2	845	64.0
Partially agreed	139	21.7	149	22.0	288	21.8
Agreed	93	14.5	94	13.9	187	14.2
Your geopolitical zone experienced economic growth in the last 20 years						
Disagreed	377	58.7	401	59.1	778	58.9
Partially agreed	221	34.4	230	33.9	451	34.2
Agreed	44	6.9	47	6.9	91	6.9
Your ethnic group is marginalized						
Disagreed	182	28.3	197	29.1	379	28.7
Partially agreed	117	18.3	123	18.1	240	18.2
Agreed	343	53.4	358	52.8	701	53.1
Marginalization triggered conflict						
Agreed	276	43.0	282	41.6	558	42.3
Partially agreed	172	26.8	183	27.0	355	26.9
Disagreed	194	30.2	213	31.4	407	30.8
There is self attachment to unity of Nigeria						
Disagreed	354	55.1	381	56.2	735	55.7
Partially agreed	205	31.9	209	30.8	414	31.4
Agreed	83	12.9	88	13.0	171	13.0

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2021

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were of Nigerian descent. When asked this, 46.0%, 40.8%, and 13.3% responded that they agreed, disagreed, and partially agreed, respectively. According to the respondents, Nigeria's tradition is all-encompassing and should benefit everyone without exclusion or prejudice. Respondents expressed this belief in part; some thought that their cultural heritage was hampered. Moreover, respondents from the south-south and south-east, respectively, stated that Nigerian heritage is for everyone, with 45.7% and 46.3% agreeing. From the south-south and south-east, 41.2% and 40.3%, respectively, voiced conflicting opinions about how such a heritage had diminished allegiance. When asked whether Nigeria is constitutionally intended to benefit all residents, 45.8% responded that it is. The remaining 41.1% and 13.0% disagreed and somewhat agreed, respectively. 46 and 45.5%, respectively, of those from the south-south and south-east concurred. In two instances, 41% of respondents disagreed. Concurrent perception and voicing of feelings revealed a pattern of discontent. This was developed in response to critical opinion surveys regarding a legacy that satisfies expectations and provides equal benefits for all. Moreover, 75.2% of respondents believed that ethnic groups were not treated equally. 8.9% and 16.0% of respondents agreed or partially agreed that all ethnic groups receive equitable treatment from the federal government. Evidently, 74.9%



and 75.4% of respondents from the south-south and south-east, respectively, expressed concern about how ethnic communities were treated.

Examining how ethnic groups from the southeast and south-south are treated in the items given. Here, 79.0% of respondents said that ethnic groups' representation in the federal government was unfair. This inquiry confirmed that everyone was satisfied with their positions and benefits. On the other hand, just 78.8% of respondents from the south-south and 79.3% from the southeast said Nigeria was fairly represented. Moreover, 64.8% disagreed that ethnic minorities received fair representation in military hierarchy; this opinion was shared by 64.9% of people in the south and 64.8% of people in the east. The federal police hierarchy (62.1%), the federal civil service (65.3%), and the federal paramilitary service (57.1%) were all evaluated as having ethnically skewed quotas. Concern was voiced about federal appointments, including the civil service, police, and paramilitary, by 64.9% and 65.7%, 62.7% and 61.5%, 57.2% and 57.0%, and accordingly from the south-south and southeast.

The advantages of ethnic groupings, particularly the fourth republic, were brought up with the respondents. In light of this, 39.1% fairly agreed and 52.0% disagreed that benefits were distributed equally and fairly for ethnic groups. Throughout the last twenty years of democratic administration, advantages were not equitably divided, according to 52% of those in the south-south and south-east. Ethnic equity was a theme that emerged in the interview notes. In line with this, a participant held: .... To be frank, Nigeria is not equal for all. There are differences. There is a high level of ethnic inequality in Nigeria. Minorities are suppressed, intimidated, and marginalized. The inequality is a carryover from the pre-independence period to present-day Nigeria. It is getting worse in present-day Nigeria (IDIs/member of House of Rep/south-south/2021).

This construct was further commented on: Nigeria is built for ethnics in the north. Appointments in the military, police, and national oil company are dominated by northerners, especially the major ethnic groups from the north. Equity has been compromised. This inequity is constitutionally supported. The constitution is a contradiction. Chapter 2 of the constitution gave much power to the center, where revenue accrues. It has a suspicious constitution (IDIs/member of House of Rep/south-east/2021). Discussants were unanimous and attributed inequity in the Nigeria state. However, a scanty case of interviewee expressed otherwise: To be frank, Nigeria is not equal... there are differences, but there is only one Nigeria. Ministerial appointments are constitutional and the right of every state. Apart from ministerial appointments, other appointments are based on trust. It won't be right to appoint someone you cannot trust. The positions are properly shared.... except that appointees are greedy and seek personal interest (IDIs/member of House of Rep/south-east/2021).

The main point of the quote above was the emphasis on trust, which may be why the federal government distributes federal appointments to key sectors. The goal and predominance of trust that should result in a unified Nigeria are governed by the Nigerian constitution. Yet, when these are lost or absent, the federating units quickly develop a dissatisfaction instinct. This violates both the letter and the spirit of Nigeria's constitution.

The 1999 constitution as modified and the ability to advance equity among ethnic groups were questions that were put to the respondents. 63 percent of respondents disagreed that the current constitution should be applied to create equality for geopolitical zones, particularly in the case of southern Nigeria. Similarly, 64 and 61.4% of respondents from

the south-east and south-south disagreed that the 1999 constitution could advance equality, respectively. In Table 2, 68.0% of respondents disagreed that the constitution of the fourth republic promoted balanced growth among geopolitical zones. In this situation, 64.0% and 58.9% of the respondents were discouraged that the Nigerian state had restricted advantages for specific ethnic groups in certain geographical zones, which had a negative impact on economic growth over the previous 20 years. In this instance, balanced growth was covered by respondents' opinions in the south-south and south-east, respectively.

As a result, 55.7% of respondents explicitly lacked faith in Nigeria's unity; 42.3% believed that the current state of Nigeria is a formula for violence; and 53.1% expressed suspicion of marginalization. In the south-south and south-east, respectively, 52 and 53.4% of respondents expressed concerns about marginalization; 41.6% and 43.0% thought that their geopolitical zone's marginalization could lead to major conflict; and 56.2% and 55.1% of respondents in those regions expressed doubt about Nigeria's ability to remain united. Participants in this survey were openly dissatisfied with the way their geopolitical zones were currently distributing profits and benefits in an equitable and equal manner. This significantly sparked intense emotions and a strong desire to destroy the unity of the Nigerian government. An interviewee who had served in the High Court of Nigeria for more than 38 years made the following observation regarding the topic of the discussion surrounding the equality of the Nigerian state: There is no equity in Nigeria. The Nigerian government is tilted to favour the north. This is the truth about the apparatus of the state in Nigeria. There is no equity. The pre-independence system was founded on regional equity. Amenities were fairly distributed before independence and the Civil War. After the war, people in the eastern zone were marginalized and the thought of victory was prominent in the minds of other zones, especially the north, which believed that the east had been conquered. (IDIs/High Court Judge/South-East/2021).

Similarly, a member of the Federal House of Representatives who represented a seat in one of the south-south states during the interview added: It is overwhelmingly clear that the North is suppressing all other ethnic nationalities. It is evident in political appointments, infrastructural development, and the revenue sharing formula. Before independence, there was a regional government that controlled resources in their domain and made remittances to the center by way of taxation. My zone is oil-producing, but the federal government only gives a small amount to the oil-producing states. There is noticeable inequality in all sectors of Nigeria. (IDIs/High Court Judge/South-East/2021).

Participants in this study clearly lacked faith in Nigeria's current political structure, particularly with regard to the declaration of equality and equity for all made in the 1999 constitution. Respondents' prevailing beliefs and normative values are that Nigeria's unity only exists on paper (the constitution), with little apparent action to support it.

### Cross tabulation of Variables

The following bivariate tables illustrate the results of a test for the prediction of equity and equality on secession. When  $p < 0.05$  or  $p > 0.5\%$ , the null hypothesis was either rejected or accepted. According to statistics, the error margin must be less than 5% for  $H_0$  to be rejected and predictions to be accurate.

**Table 3: Treatment of Ethnic group\* loyalty intention to unity of Nigeria?**

	I believe in the unity of Nigeria?	Total
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		Disagreed	Moderately agreed	Strongly agreed	
Every ethnic group in Nigeria is fairly treated?	Disagreed	566	294	132	992
	Moderately agreed	130	81	0	211
	Strongly agreed	39	39	39	117
Total		735	414	171	1320

Two variables—the treatment of ethnicity and loyalty—were used to create the cross-tabulation analysis in Table 2. More than half (992) of the respondents did not think that ethnic groups were treated equitably, and more than half (735) did not feel that the treatment had sustained loyalty with the aim of unifying Nigeria as a whole.

**Table 4: Chi Square Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	81.508 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	98.889	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.560	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1320		

The effect of ethnic group treatment on loyalty intention was investigated in Table 4. According to Pearson's chi square, .000 or  $\chi^2$  81.5;  $p < 0.005$ , the null hypothesis was disproved. The two-tail error value shows a strong correlation. It is said that treating ethnic groups unfairly causes a tendency toward division.

**Table 5: Correlation Symmetric Measures**

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.101	.031	3.700	.000 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.060	.028	2.171	.030 <sup>c</sup>
Number of Valid Cases		1320			

Table 5 cross-checked the validity of the assumptions in the chi square. The correlation values,  $r = 0.1$  and  $p < .000$ , indicated a relationship between variables. In addition to being substantial, the association also has a positive linear effect. Even though the correlation's value is small, it is still significant at  $p < .000$ .

**Conclusion: Deconstruction of lock's postulation in the Nigeria federalism**

The central idea of Lock is the derivation of government that justifies equity for all and the contract of consent. The ideology portends that a government of tyranny is antithetical to collective agreement to give up the state of nature to the sovereign power of the state. Therefore, any such civil government should be terminated by revolution to be replaced by another that soothes universal equanimity (Hosein, 2013). Evidence from the above study shows that there is disjointed governance, which hampers the social contract upon which the people of southern Nigeria place a premium. There is an agitated disposition against the federal government, which conspicuously displays discrimination in the eyes of the people. Yet the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates equity and the spirit of an indissoluble entity that binds citizens together. The constitution places the social contract of the state above personal or ethnic interests. But state sovereignty in the current arrangement is suspicious in the eyes of southern geopolitical zones. The government of

President Muhammadu Buhari is largely labeled nepotistic and ethnocentric, which places one ethnic group above the others. The tide strengthens the call for restructuring and devolution of power. The call gravitates toward impregnable agitations, protests, arm struggles, and boycotts (Falan, 2018). The evidence in the current study is significant enough for a rethink. This study indicates that the Nigerian federal system lacks equity and equality among ethnic groups. The study also indicates that the federalism practiced by President Muhammadu Buhari's government paints a picture of ethnocentrism in its federal appointments, which seriously affects the people from the southern and eastern geopolitical zones. In light of this, the study suggests that the National Assembly, being an independent arm of government, has a legislative role in federal appointments to critical positions. Consequently, the president's authority should be curtailed so that the National Assembly can choose who is to be appointed to positions in the national energy industries, paramilitary, military, and police. This could be potential strategy for advancing equitable and just practices within the federal system of Nigeria.

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