

## **Intergovernmental Relations and Coordination in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Intergovernmental relations have attracted scholarly attention in federal systems. A key aspect is how the intergovernmental structures and processes are coordinated in delivering public goods and services. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the Nigerian federation has witnessed both conflictual and cooperative relations among the tiers of government. Conflictual relations appear to be more predominant due to the constitutional provisions that create a superior-subordinate relationship between the federal and state governments. The activities of the state government also subjugate the local governments. Using Deil Wright's authority relations model, this paper conceptualises intergovernmental relationships and examines Nigeria's federal-state, interstate and state-local relations. Similarly, it evaluates the state of intergovernmental coordination in implementing national policies. The paper concludes that conflictual relations characterise intergovernmental relations between the tiers of government in Nigeria due to the federal government's dominance. Likewise, coordination has not been effective in delivering public goods and services.

**Keywords:** Intergovernmental relations, coordination, federalism, Conflict

### **Introduction**

The essence of any governmental system is to provide certain services outside the private sector sphere to its citizens. In the last few decades, providing these services to the citizens has become more complex, moving from a mono-provision structure to multiple organisations. Contemporary society's needs have necessitated the evolution of new techniques, structures and processes of providing these services. Service delivery is now done across different organisations at different levels of government. This raises vital issues, such as who is responsible for what? Moreover, how do you coordinate the activities of these organisations since they are from different levels of government? In this context, scholars came up with the term intergovernmental relations.

McGuire (2013:109), commenting on the nature of intergovernmental relations in the United States, observed that it is "a complicated and complex array of relationships between officials who represent their agency at their level of government". This observation describes the various issues that arise as each official navigates through the relationship using negotiation and persuasion. Each agency depends on other agencies' input to achieve a predetermined goal. However, getting the officials of other agencies to work with them is often a challenge, considering that each official is likely to guide his/her sphere of jurisdiction. This is because when relating with each other, conflict issues will likely arise over jurisdiction and financial commitment.

The sphere of Intergovernmental relations in Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 has been characterised more by conflict than cooperation. Some observers assume this is the hangover of military rule. Similarly, the 1999 constitution has not engendered a cordial

working relationship among the various tiers of government in the country. On the contrary, it has created avenues for conflict between the States and Federal government as specific provisions are vague and open-ended (Akinsanya, 2005). This was the same perspective Painter (1991) shared that the constitution, to a reasonable extent, determines the outcome of intergovernmental relations. Despite the conflictual nature of the relationship between the federal and state governments, the former enacted many national programmes that involved the latter's participation. Consequently, there is a need to understand the nature of intergovernmental relations in the country to offer suggestions on resolving conflict areas. How can the effective coordination of the activities of the various officials from each level of government be ensured?

This study of intergovernmental relations has moved beyond the observations of the actions and decisions of the political executive at the various levels to the activities of public managers (Permanent Secretaries and Directors of Ministries and Extra-Ministerial agencies) at the State and Federal government levels. Though influenced by their political executives, their activities determine to a reasonable extent the success or failure of national programmes (Adedeji, 2025).

### **Conceptualisation and Models of Intergovernmental Relations**

The term “intergovernmental relations” is commonly used to refer to relations between central, regional and local governments and governments between any one sphere (level) that facilitate the attainment of common goals through cooperation. According to Wright (1988), intergovernmental relations could be defined as an interacting network of national, provincial, and local institutions, created and refined to enable the various parts of government to cooperate according to their institutional arrangement. Krane and Wright (1998:1168) also define Intergovernmental Relations as “the various combinations of interdependencies and influence among public officials- elected and administrative- in all types and levels of governmental units, with particular emphasis on financial, policy and political issues”.

Obi (2004) opined that, intergovernmental relation involves interactions, collaborations, on mutual dependencies between the different levels of governments. These involve many formal and informal relationships and exchanges that emerge within a nation-state. In Nigeria, for instance, it refers to the interaction among the federal, state, and local governments, state and state interactions, and state and local interactions. All these put together refer to the pattern of intergovernmental relations. An intergovernmental relations system, therefore, consists of facilitative systems and relationships that enable the government units to participate effectively and carry out their mandates so that governmental goals are achieved. This includes executive mechanisms, coordinating mechanisms, cooperative agreements, judicial and legislative mechanisms that facilitate service delivery by government machinery.

As a process, intergovernmental relations are associated with specific characteristics. According to Wright (1988:66), the significant characteristics of intergovernmental relations could be summed up as follows:

1. Intergovernmental relations affect all levels and units of government within a given system. Nigeria includes the Federal, State, and Local governments, government agencies, public corporations, commissions, committees, and institutions. The nature and quality of

their interactions—and the frequency of these engagements—significantly influence policy formulation and implementation

2. Intergovernmental relations are intended to promote purposeful and constructive behaviour among the government officials involved. Their actions and attitudes should be positive and cooperative.

3. Intergovernmental relations seek to foster regular interactions among officials. Through consistent engagement grounded in objective data and analysis, officials at various levels can collaboratively work toward achieving the goals set for their respective governance units.

Furthermore, Wright developed three models of intergovernmental relations. These models are based on the federal, state, and local government authority relationship. Authority here connotes the legal/constitutional right to perform a function. The three models are: the overlapping authority model, the inclusive authority model, and the coordinate authority model. Each model represents a different relationship pattern within the political system.

The second model of inclusive authority relationship is where the federal government aggregates more powers to itself to the detriment of the state and local governments. The federal government could aggregate more powers to itself by either:

(1). Reducing the various powers of either state or local governments, or

(2) Enlarge the federal government's jurisdiction with or without enlarging the state and/ or local circles. Under this authority relationship, the federal government is the dominant entity with most constitutional responsibilities and financial capability. This was the situation during the military era in Nigeria. The federal military government took over most of the functions of the State governments and made them financially dependent on the federal government (Akinsanya, 2005).

The final authority model of intergovernmental relations is the overlapping authority model. This model exhibits specific characteristics, namely;

1. Substantial areas of governmental operations involve national, state and local units (or officials) simultaneously;

2. The areas of autonomy or single-jurisdiction independence and complete discretion are comparatively small;

3. The power and influence available to anyone in a jurisdiction (or official) are substantially limited. The limits produce an authority pattern best described as bargaining.

From the above description, each tier of government is connected with the others without any clear-cut demarcation of responsibilities or functions. This kind of authority relationship could be seen under the present democratic dispensation when the Federal, State and Local governments have to work together to implement a national policy or deliver public service to the people. Examples of this could be seen in implementing basic education and primary healthcare services, such as immunisation policy in the country (Adedeji, 2021 & 2025b).

### **Nature of Intergovernmental Relations in Nigeria:**

#### **Federal–State Relations**

The pattern of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria is characterised by conflict over jurisdiction. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, the federal and state governments have had numerous disagreements over each other's constitutional jurisdiction. The state governments have often accused the federal government of encroaching on their jurisdiction. This is bound to happen considering the constitutional provisions of the 1999 constitution, which is vague and open-ended with specific clauses, thereby allowing the federal government unfettered access to state government jurisdiction.

Painter (1991:269) states that “the constitutional framework not only shapes the process of intergovernmental relations but also the output”. Consequently, the 1999 constitution did not create a platform for a cooperative relationship between the federal and state governments. On the contrary, their relationship is prone to conflict (Adedeji, 2021b). Akinsanya (2005:286), in his analysis of the 1999 constitution, observed that the federal government has more power than the state government. The exclusive list has 68 items reserved for the federal government, while 30 items are on the concurrent list for the federal and state governments to legislate upon. According to Akinsanya, this creates a de jure federalism and de facto unitarism.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal government initiated a response policy to contain the spread of the virus and assigned implementation responsibilities to the states. Abdulrauf (2022) observed that the relationship between the federal and state governments during pandemic management was largely imbalanced. Armed with extensive authority under the Quarantine Act and the Disaster Management Act, the federal government exercised dominant control, leaving most states with little choice but to comply. Additionally, the federal government’s control over public finances was another means of limiting state autonomy.

The author concluded that while it is challenging to measure the precise impact of the pandemic on intergovernmental relations, it is reasonable to conclude that the pre-existing dynamics were not improved and may have worsened. Ihonvbere (2022) in a study on the COVID-19 pandemic and federalism in Nigeria, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly strengthened the federal government’s capacity to assert control, formulate policies, establish institutions, and extend its influence over the states, particularly in the sectors of health, education, social investment, security, and public messaging. A primary coercive instrument at the Federal government’s disposal is its fiscal capacity, which creates a power/resource imbalance between it and the State governments (Adedeji, 2021).

### **State-State Relations in Nigeria**

The observed trend in the literature on intergovernmental relations in Nigeria shows that state-state relations have received less attention than federal-state relations. This could be attributed to the country’s dominant nature of the federal government. In other words, the federal government is the fulcrum of most analyses in explaining the nature of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria.

Osaghae (1994:84) conducted an extensive study on inter-state relations and identified the three primary forms it can take: competition, cooperation and conflict. Out of these, competitive relations are more frequent due to the tendency for each government to attempt to win some scarce beneficial resource or to avoid a particular cost. According to him, interstate competition comes in two forms: horizontal and centre-inspired competition. In horizontal competition, states compete with one another based on their co-equal capacities. This manifests in the discrimination against indigenes of other States in the provision of services or rivalrous replication of institutions.

For example, there is a dispute between Oyo and Osun State governments over Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho. Disagreement between Oyo and Osun States arose when the former requested that the latter stay off the institution’s management as it could not fulfil its financial obligation to the university (The Nation, June

2009). This created a serious rift between the two State governments, which coincidentally were controlled by the same political party at the time. However, the root of the conflict could be traced to the establishment of Osun State University (UNIOSUN), which tilted the balance of opportunities for tertiary education in favour of its indigenes, leaving those from Oyo State at a supposed disadvantage. The Osun state government eventually opted out of the joint ownership and ceded complete control to Oyo state (Punch, 2021).

In centre-inspired competition, efforts are made by the State government to affect how the central government determines who gets what, when and how. This kind of competition happens when there is sharing or distribution of pooled resources controlled by the central government, such as determining where a federal institution is to be built or allocating State quotas. For example, the ceding of the oil wells located in Cross River State to Akwa-Ibom State by the National Boundary Commission and Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMFAC) in 2012 (Premium Times, 2012).

Another form of interstate relations is co-operation. This is based on formal and informal state partnerships to solve everyday problems, operate joint ventures or establish linkages. These forms of co-operation are often established to address present conditions and may not last beyond the circumstances that necessitated them. An example of this is the coming together of the governments of Kastina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara and Niger States to check cattle-rustling in the North (Nigerian Pilot, 2015). A similar example is when the Lagos and Kebbi state governments partnered to produce rice for sale in Lagos during Christmas in 2016 (Daily Trust, 2016).

The final form of interstate relations is conflictual. Under this kind of relationship, there is a dispute between two or more states over the action(s) of one of the States. An example was when the Anambra State government accused its Lagos State counterpart of illegal 'deportation' of Igbos from Lagos (Premium Times, 2013). The issue created so much tension between the states as there was an exchange of 'tense' correspondence between them. The above examples show that the pattern of interstate relations in Nigeria depends on the issues involved and the dispositions of the actors.

### **State–Local Relations in Nigeria**

The observed pattern of relations between the state and local governments in Nigeria can be described as inclusive, using Deil Wright's (1988) authority relationship. The State governments have dominated the relationship, leading to the local governments being seen as administrative appendages of state governments. A careful examination of the distribution of powers among the three tiers of government in the 1999 Constitution clearly shows the total subordination of the local government councils to the other two tiers of government. Based on the provisions of the 1999 Constitution, the state governments often coerce local governments within their territories. For instance, Section 7, sub-section 1 of the 1999 Constitution states, "the system of Local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed". This provision clearly defines the status of local governments. However, the Constitution stated, "accordingly, the government of every State shall... ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils". By this provision, the local government councils are at the mercy of state governments.

One area where the state governments have dominated the affairs of the local government is in the election of the chairpersons and council members. Since the return to civil rule in 1999, most state governments have failed to conduct subsequent elections of local government chairpersons and councillors. The prevailing situation is for the state government to dissolve existing local councils and appoint caretaker committees or caretaker chairpersons to administer the affairs of the councils. By this arrangement, the caretaker committee owes total allegiance to the state government rather than the people in the local area. This action by the state government shows the subordination of the local government council to them. Some council members have, on certain occasions, challenged the legality of the state governments in Court. For instance, on assumption of office as the Governor of Ondo State in 2017, Rotimi Akeredolu filed a suit at the Court of Appeal challenging the judgment of an Ondo State High Court restraining the State government from dissolving the local government councils in the state (The Vanguard, 2017). This shows that most State governments prefer to have council chairpersons and councillors under their control rather than outside, as these council chairmen in Ondo State belong to the opposition political party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Finance is another area where there is evidence of domination of the local government councils by the State government. The state and local governments maintain a joint account where allocations from the federation account are paid into, and 10% of the state's internally generated revenue is also paid into. However, the control of this account is in the hands of the state government, which has often used it to weaken the operations of the local government councils. The state government either misappropriates the local governments' funds or reduces them to perform other functions meant for the state government.

For example, Akaeze (2012) stated that in November 2009, NGN1.7 billion was allocated to 20 local government councils in Ogun state. However, only NGN700 million was released to them by the state government and the amount was less than half of their financial requirement. This example could be seen across most states of the federation. However, the Supreme Court judgment on local government autonomy in 2024 has, to an extent, limited the dominance of the State government over Local government finance (Punch, 2024). The deduction from these observations is that the pattern of state-local relations in Nigeria is hierarchical and dominated by state governments over local government councils.

### **Intergovernmental Coordination in Nigeria**

Akume (2014) observed that intergovernmental relations encompass the coming together of officials from the three government tiers to achieve national policy programmes. These national programmes require input and resources from each level of government and must operate within a mechanism. This mechanism is necessary as each official comes to the negotiation table with diverse interests, which may give rise to challenges that hinder attaining programme goals. Therefore, it is important to put in place a mechanism that would coordinate the relationship among these officials. This mechanism is called intergovernmental coordination, which is subsumed under Intergovernmental relations.

According to Schnabel and Hegele (2021), coordination involves interactions among actors that produce a coordination output, which can lead to a coordinated outcome and ultimately result in an impact. Wright (2007) views it as the study of government interactions, focusing on public officials responsible for translating policy decisions into tangible goods and services. Intergovernmental coordination is crucial to policy implementation in a system

of shared governance, as Catherine (1999:27) observed that “By far the most difficult implementation problems emerge in cases of shared governance, in which the federal government has significant management responsibilities but sub-national government entities assume the greatest role for operations”. Therefore, emphasis has been placed on ensuring effective coordination of officials' activities at the government level towards the attainment of policy goals.

The management of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria has been plagued with conflict as each tier of government attempts to perpetuate its interests to the detriment of attaining policy goals. Oftentimes, the administrative mechanism put in place to manage the relations among these officials creates a hierarchical relationship between the Federal and State government officials. This may result in the stymying of the implementation of the national policy. Evidence of this could be seen in implementing national policies in health, education, and the environment. This informed the observation by Lev (2007) that the system of intergovernmental relations is weak and uncoordinated in delivering public services. For instance,

Adamolekun (2013) while commenting on the implementation of the Universal Basic Education programme in the country observed that unclear political responsibility for the UBE has been a significant constraint, while centralised implementation, such as awarding contracts for student textbooks in all 36 states from Abuja, has undermined the Federal-State collaboration crucial for effective implementation. This observation by Adamolekun is the observable trend in the area of intergovernmental coordination in Nigeria.

BudgIT (2024), in analysing the autonomy granted to local government councils, observed that granting financial autonomy to local governments could enable them to manage educational resources, such as primary education funding, more directly. However, this raises the challenge of ensuring coordination between different levels of government to maintain consistent standards and delivery. Without clear guidelines, financial autonomy may empower local educational institutions or lead to fragmented services, especially in areas with limited local capacity.

Abdulrauf (2022) observed that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government established the Presidential Task Force (PTF) as the central body for coordinating the multilevel governmental response. Comprising members from various ministries and parastatals, the PTF aimed to ensure a coordinated and effective national and sub-national response, strengthening intergovernmental relations. In addition to coordinating, the PTF reported directly to the President and provided daily public briefings. However, its effectiveness in fostering genuine intergovernmental relations remains debatable. This is mainly because state governments or their task forces were not represented within the PTF and were relegated to merely implementing federal directives. This often leads to unwillingness on the part of state governments to implement federal policies (Adedeji, 2025 & 2025b).

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria's intergovernmental relations system is characterised by hierarchical relationships and a lack of coordination in implementing national policies. While the 1999 Nigerian constitution played an important role in shaping the pattern of intergovernmental relations to a large extent, the actors at the federal and state levels were also major

determinants. The federal government was seen, for the most part, as encroaching on the domain of the state government. The state government, for the most part, did not accept this interference by the federal government. Evidence of this could be seen in the various legal proceedings instituted by the state governments against the federal government. This relationship pattern may continue as the framework within which the mechanism for intergovernmental relations operates keeps evolving. However, there is a tendency for a more collaborative relationship when the federal government moves away from a 'command and instruct' style to one which builds trust among the officials of the federal and state governments (Adedeji, 2025).

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) in Nigeria remain a vital component of the country's federal system, playing a critical role in ensuring cooperation, coordination, and efficiency among the three tiers of government: federal, state, and local. Despite the constitutional framework that provides a foundation for intergovernmental collaboration, challenges such as political rivalry, resource control disputes, fiscal imbalance, and administrative inefficiencies continue to hamper effective coordination. Nonetheless, fostering strong and functional IGR cannot be overstated. Enhanced collaboration promotes national unity, equitable development, and improved service delivery to citizens. For Nigeria to harness the full potential of its federal structure, there is a need for reforms that promote transparency, strengthen institutional frameworks, and encourage inclusive dialogue among all levels of government. Nigeria can achieve sustainable development and political stability within its federal framework through consistent and sincere efforts at coordination and cooperation.

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