

Oil and Territorial Decentralization in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Oil and the revenues derived from it fueled frequent territorial decentralization in Nigeria in the last three decades and continue to inspire demands for more decentralization. Decentralization is viewed in some quarters as a spatial strategy for ensuring an equitable distribution of the country's resources, while in others it is viewed as wasteful because of the duplication of overhead and other expenditures that accompany the setting up of new governments. Nigeria is a federal state with three tiers of government (central, state and local) and has been partitioned and repartitioned since its political independence in 1960, leading to the present situation in which there are now 36 states and 774 local government areas (LGAs). One interpretation of this structure is that it represents a spatial framework for the allocation of resources. Therefore the continual decentralization that the country has witnessed is in pursuit of equity and political stability.

This paper focuses on the second tier of government and is concerned with the creation of states in Nigeria, a phenomenon that loomed large in Nigeria's political economic agenda in the past decades, especially under military rule. Between 1960 and now, the number of states (or regions, as they were called prior to 1967) grew from three to thirty six. What are the main arguments for the creation of states in Nigeria? What are the factors or conditions that engender the demand for states? Do the principles of jurisdictional organization of space shed light on territorial decentralization in Nigeria? These are the central questions addressed in this paper. It is recognized that the agency of individuals and groups is important in the demand for and the eventual creation of states. However, there are some underlying factors that inspire these demands, some of which are very often not explicitly stated in the arguments for partitioning. In addressing its central concerns, this paper highlights some of the forces that have shaped Nigeria's jurisdictional structure.