Contribution of Intergovernmental Relations to National unity and Development: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

This study investigates the contributions of intergovernmental relations (IGR) to national unity and development in Nigeria, *focusing on the roles of fiscal coordination and institutional mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC) and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC). Descriptive survey design was adopted, with data collected from 219 respondents across federal, state, and local government levels using a structured questionnaire. Statistical tools including mean analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to analyze the data and test hypotheses. Findings revealed a strong positive relationship between IGR and national unity, as well as between fiscal coordination and socio-economic development. Additionally, the effectiveness of NEC and RMAFC was found to significantly influence cooperative governance. The study concluded that strengthened IGR frameworks are vital for sustaining unity and driving national development. It recommends legal reforms to empower IGR institutions, enhance fiscal transparency, and promote inclusive governance across all tiers of government in Nigeria.*

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1. Introduction

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) are central to Nigeria's quest for national unity and sustainable development. As a multi-ethnic federation, Nigeria depends on a functional IGR framework to coordinate the activities of federal, state, and local governments. This coordination promotes cooperation, reduces intergovernmental conflicts, and ensures equitable distribution of resources—key elements for national unity. IGR mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC), the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), and the Federal Character Commission help in fostering inclusiveness and balanced representation across diverse regions (Dike, 2023; RSIS, 2024). Through collaborative platforms, IGR enhances the implementation of national policies and development projects. For instance, effective fiscal federalism, when managed properly, improves service delivery in areas like education, healthcare, and infrastructure, thereby promoting grassroots development (Ejika & Ugwu, 2025). Moreover, intergovernmental contact initiatives, such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), facilitate ethnic integration and build social cohesion among Nigerian youths (Ibrahim, 2024).

However, weaknesses in the IGR system—such as politicization of resource control and poor institutional coordination—often result in overlapping functions and distrust, undermining development and unity efforts (Onu & Eze, 2023). Therefore, strengthening IGR through legal reforms, fiscal transparency, and institutional accountability is imperative for consolidating Nigeria's federal system and achieving inclusive national development. Nigeria's federal structure creates a dynamic system of intergovernmental relations (IGR) involving federal, state, and local governments. These relations play a pivotal role in fostering national unity and enabling development through coordination of policy, revenue-sharing, and cooperative governance. The principle of federalism in Nigeria is constitutionally designed to distribute powers and responsibilities across different levels of government, ensuring that governance reflects the diversity of its over 250 ethnic groups (Arowolo, 2019). A functional IGR framework facilitates dialogue among tiers of government, harmonizes conflicting interests, and ensures effective implementation of public policies and development plans.

Key mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC), Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), and the Joint Tax Board (JTB) enable fiscal coordination and equitable distribution of national resources. These structures help address grievances over marginalization, thereby strengthening national integration (Dike, 2023; RSIS International, 2024). Moreover, cooperative federalism, where governments work jointly rather than competitively, has become increasingly important in addressing cross-cutting issues like insecurity, education, and public health.

Recent studies reveal that well-coordinated IGR enhances development outcomes, especially in service delivery and infrastructure investment, by minimizing duplication and waste (Ejika & Ugwu, 2025). Additionally, national programs such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) serve as tools of intergovernmental collaboration that promote cultural exchange, youth integration, and patriotism—critical components of national unity (Ibrahim, 2024). Despite these benefits, challenges such as political interference, poor fiscal accountability, and legal ambiguities continue to hinder IGR efficiency.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria operates a federal system of government characterized by the interaction among three constitutionally recognized tiers: federal, state, and local governments. These intergovernmental relations (IGR) are intended to foster coordination, cooperation, and shared responsibilities toward national unity and sustainable development. However, despite the theoretical significance of IGR in enhancing inclusive governance and equitable development, the Nigerian experience has often been marked by rivalry, conflict, and institutional inefficiencies. The lack of clarity in roles and overlapping functions among the tiers of government has led to administrative bottlenecks, duplication of efforts, and waste of public resources.

Furthermore, issues such as fiscal imbalance, politicization of revenue allocation, and marginalization of some regions have continued to fuel intergovernmental tension, ethnic suspicion, and regional discontent, thereby threatening national unity. The central government's dominance in fiscal matters and policy directives has often stifled the autonomy and developmental capacity of state and local governments (Dike, 2023; RSIS International, 2024). This imbalance hampers the delivery of essential public services and undermines the goals of decentralization and grassroots participation in governance.

In recent years, concerns have been raised regarding the poor implementation of cooperative mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC) and the inefficacy of institutions like the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) in resolving disputes. This has created a need to critically examine the contributions of intergovernmental relations to Nigeria's national unity and development, identifying gaps and proposing frameworks that can foster stronger, more effective collaboration among the tiers of government.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

i. examine the role of intergovernmental relations in promoting national unity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups.
ii. assess the impact of intergovernmental fiscal coordination on the delivery of public services and socio-economic development at the federal, state, and local levels.
iii. evaluate the effectiveness of existing intergovernmental mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC) and Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) in enhancing cooperative governance.

1.4 Research Questions

i. What role do intergovernmental relations play in promoting national unity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups?
ii. How does intergovernmental fiscal coordination affect the delivery of public services and socio-economic development across federal, state, and local levels in Nigeria?
iii. How effective are existing intergovernmental mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC) and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) in enhancing cooperative governance in Nigeria?

1.5 Hypotheses

i. Intergovernmental relations do not have a significant role in promoting national unity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups.

ii. Intergovernmental fiscal coordination does not have a significant effect on the delivery of public services and socio-economic development across federal, state, and local levels in Nigeria.
iii. Existing intergovernmental mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC) and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) are not significantly effective in enhancing cooperative governance in Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Intergovernmental Relations (IGR)

Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) refer to the interactions and collaborative mechanisms among the different levels of government—federal, state, and local—within a federal system. Scholars and practitioners have defined IGR from various perspectives, reflecting its multidimensional nature. According to Akindele and Olaopa (2020), IGR encompasses "the formal and informal relationships and processes through which governmental units interact in the course of executing their constitutional responsibilities in a federal system." This emphasizes the procedural and functional dimensions of IGR.

Igbokwe-Ibeto and Okoye (2021) define IGR as “the complex pattern of interactions, cooperation, and sometimes conflict between national and subnational governments aimed at promoting coordinated policy implementation and development.” Their view highlights both the cooperative and contentious elements of IGR in Nigeria. Olumoye (2022) describes IGR as “the network of institutions, mechanisms, and strategies employed by different levels of government to harmonize their actions in the delivery of public goods and services.” This definition stresses institutional and service delivery roles.

Dike (2023) sees IGR as “a structural tool that ensures unity in diversity by aligning administrative, fiscal, and legislative actions of various tiers of government.” This emphasizes the unifying role of IGR in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. Lastly, Ejika and Ugwu (2025) define IGR as “a governance approach that fosters collaboration, resolves intergovernmental conflicts, and enhances development through coordinated efforts among government layers.” These definitions collectively underscore that IGR is critical for unity, cooperation, policy coherence, and effective governance in federal systems like Nigeria.

2.1.2 National Unity

National unity refers to the sense of common identity, shared values, and collective commitment among citizens of a nation, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or regional backgrounds. Scholars have conceptualized national unity from sociopolitical and governance perspectives. According to Nnoli **(**2020**)**, national unity is “the process of forging a common identity among diverse groups within a country, aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence and collective loyalty to the state.” This definition highlights unity as a dynamic process of integration.

Ikejiani-Clark (2021) defines national unity as “the extent to which citizens of a nation are bound together by shared history, mutual respect, and a commitment to national goals, despite ethnic and religious differences.” This emphasizes the emotional and historical foundations of unity. Obasi

(2023) views national unity as "the willingness of individuals and groups to place national interests above personal or sectional interests in a plural society." His perspective underscores patriotism and selflessness in multi-ethnic contexts like Nigeria. Lastly, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2024**)** define it as "a condition where political, ethnic, and social harmony is achieved through inclusive governance, equitable development, and respect for diversity." Their view links unity directly to good governance and fairness. Together, these definitions illustrate that national unity is both an outcome and a process sustained through inclusivity, justice, and shared national identity.

2.1.3 Development

Development is a multidimensional concept that encompasses economic growth, social progress, political stability, and improved quality of life. Scholars have defined development from various perspectives to reflect its complexity and broad scope. According to Todaro and Smith (2020), development is "a process that leads to the improvement of people's living standards, reduction of poverty, and expansion of human capabilities." This definition emphasizes human welfare and the enhancement of life opportunities.

Sen (2021) defines development as "the expansion of freedoms that people enjoy, including access to education, healthcare, and the ability to participate in political and economic life." His definition views development as freedom and empowerment. Rodney (2022) argues that "development implies a progressive transformation of social structures, productive capacity, and institutions to meet the basic needs of the majority." This highlights structural change and mass benefit as core to true development.

Akinbade (2024) defines development in the Nigerian context as "a sustained effort to achieve economic diversification, infrastructural expansion, and inclusive governance that lifts all regions and groups." This stresses equity, inclusiveness, and context-specific planning. Collectively, these definitions present development as both a process and a goal, rooted in social equity, institutional capacity, and the empowerment of individuals and communities.

2.1.4 Historical Background

Nigeria's federalism is characterized by a vertical and horizontal structure of government, which includes the federal, state, and local governments. At the core of this arrangement is the fiscal relationship that governs how resources are generated, shared, and utilized. Nigeria's revenue allocation mechanisms—such as the derivation principle, horizontal allocation formula, and statutory transfers—have long been sources of tension and cooperation among the tiers of government. While the derivation principle was designed to ensure that states contributing significantly to national income (e.g., oil-producing states) benefit directly, other mechanisms aim to promote equity and balance across the federation. However, the dominance of the federal government in revenue control continues to generate agitations from subnational entities over fiscal autonomy and fairness (Dike, 2023; Ejika & Ugwu, 2025).

Imbalances in revenue distribution have led to frequent disputes over the **"**national cake**"**, often fueling inter-ethnic rivalry and political instability. Consequently, equitable and transparent fiscal federalism remains crucial for strengthening national unity, encouraging state-level development, and fostering trust among Nigeria's diverse populations (RSIS International, 2024).

2.1.5 National Integration Instruments

To mediate these tensions and promote national integration, Nigeria has institutionalized various mechanisms. The **Federal Character Principle**, enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), aims to ensure fair representation of all geopolitical zones in federal appointments, civil service positions, and resource distribution. Though intended to build a sense of belonging among all ethnic groups, critics argue that its implementation has sometimes prioritized political expediency over merit (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Okoye, 2021).

Additionally, the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) plays a crucial role in determining the revenue-sharing formula and advising governments on fiscal matters. However, its recommendations often face delays or rejection due to political interference and federal dominance (Onu & Eze, 2023). Similarly, the National Economic Council **(**NEC**)**, comprising the Vice President and all state governors, serves as a forum for harmonizing economic policies, resolving disputes, and enhancing cooperative governance (Statehouse.gov.ng, 2024). Despite these frameworks, challenges persist due to lack of legal enforcement powers, weak institutional capacity, and poor intergovernmental dialogue.

Enhancing the functionality of these national integration instruments is imperative for mitigating regional grievances, improving resource equity, and sustaining a united and progressive Nigerian federation.

2.1.6 IGR as a Driver of National Unity

Promoting Inter-Group Contact

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) have provided platforms for promoting inter-group understanding and national unity through structured social and civic engagements. Recent field experiments conducted in Lagos and Abuja demonstrate that structured intergroup contact among youths, especially in multicultural settings like schools and community service programs, significantly improves mutual trust, empathy, and reduces ethnic prejudice (Ajayi & Ibrahim, 2024; PNAS, 2023). These findings support the theory of contact hypothesis, which posits that meaningful interactions between diverse groups under cooperative conditions can reduce intergroup biases.

One of the most notable IGR tools for promoting national cohesion is the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Established in 1973, NYSC mandates graduates to serve in states outside their region of origin, thereby encouraging cross-cultural interaction, shared experiences, and tolerance (Ibrahim, 2024). Over the years, the scheme has facilitated inter-ethnic marriages, national friendships, and expanded perceptions of unity across geopolitical boundaries. Similarly, inter-state youth exchange programs, joint educational initiatives, and multi-regional sporting competitions have become instrumental in shaping national identity and integration, often coordinated through intergovernmental collaboration.

However, there are concerns about the declining effectiveness of NYSC due to insecurity in some regions and the growing politicization of deployment processes. To enhance its impact, there is a need for stronger coordination among federal and state governments, improved safety frameworks, and revitalized programming to maintain its integrative objectives.

Institutional Equity in Appointments

Institutional equity in public appointments and service delivery is a cornerstone of Nigeria's approach to managing diversity and promoting national unity. Under Nigeria's intergovernmental framework, policies such as the Federal Character Principle are intended to ensure fair representation of all ethnic and regional groups in public institutions, including the civil service, military, and parastatals. This principle, enshrined in Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution, mandates that appointments and distribution of public offices must reflect the federal character of Nigeria (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Okoye, 2021).

The Federal Character Commission (FCC) plays a key role in monitoring compliance, thereby reducing perceptions of marginalization and ethnic dominance. Through intergovernmental collaboration, especially between the Presidency, state governors, and local councils, public institutions are expected to achieve balanced staffing, equitable procurement opportunities, and inclusive participation in policy implementation (Onwe et al., 2023). This has helped mitigate inter-regional resentment and fostered a sense of belonging, particularly among historically underrepresented groups.

Nevertheless, the application of the federal character principle is not without criticism. Scholars have pointed out that political patronage and elite capture often undermine its equitable intent, leading to tokenism rather than true inclusion (Akinyemi, 2022). Moreover, the absence of strict penalties for non-compliance weakens the principle's enforcement across levels of government. To make institutional equity more impactful, there is a need for a reform of FCC operations, strengthened legal mandates, and greater transparency in recruitment and procurement practices across federal, state, and local governments.

2.1.7 IGR and Development Outcomes

Fiscal Coordination and Service Delivery

Fiscal federalism, as a core component of intergovernmental relations (IGR), plays a crucial role in shaping the efficiency and equity of public service delivery in Nigeria. When fiscal relations are well structured, responsibilities and resources are aligned to empower subnational governments to deliver health, education, water, and other essential services effectively. According to Ejika and Ugwu (2025), states with higher fiscal autonomy and predictable revenue allocations report better outcomes in maternal health, school enrolment, and infrastructural development.

However, revenue centralization at the federal level, combined with inconsistencies in the allocation formula, often constrains state and local governments' ability to plan and execute development programs. RMAFC's vertical and horizontal sharing formulas—while intended to balance equity and need—have been criticized for failing to reflect current population and developmental realities (Dike, 2023). The dependence on oil revenues, which are subject to price volatility, further exacerbates fiscal instability.

Mitigating these challenges requires a review of the revenue-sharing formula, granting more autonomy to subnational governments in revenue generation, and implementing performance-based budgeting frameworks. Also, economic diversification strategies at all levels can reduce overdependence on the oil sector and empower states to fund development initiatives more sustainably (RSIS International, 2024).

2.1.8 Infrastructure Coordination

Infrastructure development in Nigeria often suffers from fragmented planning**,** duplication of efforts**,** and abandoned projects, largely due to poor coordination between federal, state, and local governments. Many road, electricity, and water projects initiated by one level of government are left incomplete or rendered redundant when counterpart governments fail to cooperate or align their plans (Onyejekwe & Ojo, 2023).

The National Economic Council **(**NEC**)**, composed of the Vice President and all state governors, was established to address such issues through dialogue, strategic planning, and consensus building. While NEC has the potential to harmonize priorities, its advisory role and lack of enforcement authority limit its effectiveness (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nwokedi, 2021). Additionally, competition for political visibility and control over capital projects often leads to a lack of synergy in infrastructure rollout.

Recent efforts to improve intergovernmental infrastructure planning include the National Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan **(**NIIMP**)** and the introduction of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) frameworks at subnational levels. When supported by functional IGR, these initiatives can bridge infrastructure gaps, reduce waste, and ensure equitable access to social amenities. To enhance effectiveness, project coordination frameworks should be institutionalized through legally binding agreements, regular inter-tier consultations, and joint funding models that encourage shared responsibility and accountability.

2.1.9 Challenges & Conflict Management

Tensions in power-sharing and fiscal conflict have long remained critical sources of strain within Nigeria's intergovernmental relations (IGR). These tensions often manifest around control over revenue, overlapping constitutional responsibilities, and disputes about the autonomy of subnational governments (Arowolo, 2020; Olumoye, 2022). For instance, conflicts frequently arise between federal and state governments over issues such as value-added tax (VAT) collection, resource control in oil-producing states, and the delineation of authority in public infrastructure and education policy (Onu & Eze, 2023). These frictions, when unresolved, not only delay developmental projects but also intensify regional grievances and threaten national unity.

Although mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC), Council of State, Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), and formal judicial arbitration forums are established to resolve such disputes, they are often underutilized or rendered ineffective by political interference, lack of legal enforceability, or elite power struggles (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nwokedi, 2021). In many cases, rather than turning to these conflict resolution platforms, subnational actors resort to judicial battles or media advocacy, which may escalate tensions rather than foster cooperative solutions.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of institutionalizing conflict resolution frameworks, empowering neutral arbiters, and enhancing the functionality of NEC as a proactive dialogue mechanism rather than a reactive advisory council (Dike, 2023; Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2024).

Strengthening vertical and horizontal communication between the tiers of government can help de-escalate fiscal and political disputes, thereby reinforcing intergovernmental trust and promoting national integration.

2.1.10 Case Examples & Recent Evidence

A 2025 analysis by Frank Dike critically reviews fiscal imbalances and intergovernmental dynamics in Nigeria, demonstrating how the centralized control of oil revenue by the federal government continues to undermine the fiscal autonomy of state and local governments. This fiscal centralism not only limits subnational governments' capacity to prioritize local needs in healthcare, education, and infrastructure, but also erodes citizens' trust in the responsiveness of federal systems (Dike, 2025). Dike argues that the overreliance on statutory federal allocations discourages independent revenue generation and stifles innovation at the state and local levels.

Additionally, a comparative federalism study by Okon and Wahab (2025) contrasts Nigeria's intergovernmental relations (IGR) framework with more developed federal systems like Germany and Australia, highlighting Nigeria's weak coordination, politicized resource allocation, and lack of legal clarity in role delineation. In contrast, countries like Germany benefit from constitutionally entrenched cooperative federalism, where shared tax systems, formal intergovernmental councils, and regular fiscal equalization agreements promote both efficiency and national cohesion (Okon & Wahab, 2025). Australia's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) model is also cited as an example of a robust, legally empowered structure that ensures harmonized policy implementation and joint project funding, especially in areas like education, infrastructure, and climate response.

The Nigerian experience, by contrast, reveals how the absence of enforceable IGR mechanisms contributes to overlapping functions, duplication of efforts, and frequent jurisdictional conflicts. These inefficiencies deepen political tensions, particularly in revenue-sensitive sectors such as mining, VAT administration, and oil derivation. Thus, Dike and others recommend constitutional reform, greater fiscal decentralization, and the institutionalization of performance-based intergovernmental collaboration as viable solutions for a more equitable and effective federal system in Nigeria.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Functionalist Theory of Intergovernmental Relations

The Functionalist Theory of Intergovernmental Relations posits that the different levels of government within a federal system must work in collaboration to fulfill specific roles that contribute to the overall functionality and stability of the state. Derived from the broader structural functionalist perspective in political science and sociology, the theory assumes that each tier of government—federal, state, and local—has distinct but complementary responsibilities. These responsibilities must be performed in a coordinated and efficient manner to maintain national unity and promote sustainable development.

One of the basic assumptions of functionalist theory is that the state is a system composed of interdependent parts, and any dysfunction in one part (e.g., conflict over revenue control or poor infrastructure coordination) will affect the entire system. In this context, a well-structured system of intergovernmental relations ensures that policy implementation, service delivery, and development efforts are harmonized across all levels of government. The theory also assumes that institutions and mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC), Federal Character Commission (FCC), and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) are vital in mediating roles, resolving conflicts, and enhancing cooperation among the different tiers of government.

Applied to this study, the functionalist theory helps to explain how intergovernmental mechanisms in Nigeria are intended to promote national unity and development through structured collaboration, equitable resource sharing, and policy coordination. For example, if the Federal Government formulates a policy on healthcare delivery and the states and local governments are effectively involved in its implementation, service delivery is improved and citizens across regions benefit, thus reinforcing national integration.

Conversely, the theory also provides a framework to assess the consequences of dysfunction, such as poor fiscal coordination, political interference, or marginalization in appointments, which can weaken trust, foster disunity, and retard development. As such, functionalist theory offers both a descriptive and prescriptive lens for evaluating Nigeria's intergovernmental dynamics, highlighting the need for reform and stronger institutional linkages to ensure that each level of government contributes meaningfully to national goals.

In conclusion, by focusing on interdependence, cooperation, and systemic efficiency, the functionalist theory is a suitable theoretical foundation for understanding and analyzing the contributions of intergovernmental relations to national unity and development in Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Review

Okeke and Adamu (2020) focused on Intergovernmental Relations and National Development in Nigeria**.** This study examined the dynamics of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and their influence on national development. The main objectives were to analyze the extent of coordination among government tiers and assess how such coordination influences developmental outcomes in health, education, and infrastructure. A descriptive survey design was employed. The population comprised 500 civil servants across federal, state, and local governments. A sample size of 250 was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that: Weak IGR undermined coordinated service delivery. Duplication of roles caused inefficiencies. Lack of institutionalized frameworks hindered long-term cooperation. The conclusion was that without formalized structures and legal backing, IGR fails to contribute meaningfully to national development. Recommendation**:** A statutory IGR framework should be enacted to facilitate collaborative governance and clear delineation of functions.

Olawale et al. (2021) investigated how fiscal federalism affects public service delivery across subnational levels. Objectives included assessing the impact of fiscal autonomy on the performance of states in health and education. A quantitative survey design was utilized with a population of 1,000 government workers and residents. Sample size**:** 400. The study used regression and correlation analysis to process the data. Findings**:** States with strong internally generated revenue provided better services. Fiscal transfers from the center were often delayed or politicized. Central control over key revenue sources discouraged state-level innovation. Conclusion**:** Fiscal decentralization promotes service delivery if subnational units have adequate revenue authority. Recommendation: Review revenue-sharing formulas and grant states greater control over local resources.

Usman and Bello (2022) explored how revenue allocation mechanisms fuel intergovernmental disputes. Objectives included investigating causes of fiscal tension and evaluating the role of derivation principles. Using a case study design, the researchers studied a population of 300 political stakeholders, with a sample size of 100 selected purposively. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Findings**:** Oil-producing states perceive inequity in current allocation formulas. Disputes often delay budgetary processes and development projects. Local governments are sidelined in fiscal decision-making. Conclusion**:** Fiscal imbalance exacerbates intergovernmental friction and hampers unity. Recommendation**:** Introduce equity-based formulas that consider population, contribution, and need.

Ikechukwu and Adebayo (2020) investigated the application of the Federal Character principle and its effect on national integration. Objectives included evaluating its implementation in civil service and examining perceptions of fairness. A content analysis design was applied using data from employment rosters and federal appointment records. No numerical population or sample size, as it was document-based. Analysis relied on frequency tables and thematic coding. Findings**:** The principle promotes geographic inclusivity. It often undermines meritocracy. Politicization of appointments leads to regional resentment. Conclusion**:** Though well-intentioned, Federal Character is inconsistently applied. Recommendation**:** Reform the Federal Character Commission to improve transparency and merit-based inclusion.

Nwankwo and Hassan (2023) analyzed the relationship between intergovernmental coordination and infrastructure delivery. It aimed to identify how joint planning and fiscal alignment impact project success. Using a case study design, the study involved a population of 250 state and federal infrastructure officers, with a sample of 120 selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using document review and key informant interviews. Findings**:** Poor alignment leads to abandoned projects. NEC's role in coordinating capital projects is underutilized. Redundant funding occurs due to lack of communication. Conclusion**:** Without coordination, infrastructure efforts are wasted or duplicated. Recommendation**:** Institutionalize joint infrastructure planning through NEC and state planning commissions.

Adeyemi and Omotola (2022) assessed how political influence distorts intergovernmental mechanisms. Objectives included evaluating NEC's independence and identifying sources of political friction. A mixed-methods design was employed. Population**:** 600 administrative personnel. Sample size**:** 300. Data collection included surveys and interviews, analyzed using regression and qualitative coding. Findings: NEC lacks autonomy due to executive interference. Coordination success often depends on party alignment. Local governments are structurally excluded from decisions. Conclusion**:** Political control limits the efficacy of intergovernmental processes. Recommendation**:** Grant IGR institutions legal and fiscal independence from executive influence.

Eze and Danjuma (2024) focused on the National Economic Council's (NEC) role in intergovernmental policy coordination. Objectives were to assess NEC's structure, participation rate, and decision implementation. A descriptive survey was used. Population**:** 400 policymakers.

Sample size: 200. Analysis was done using frequency tables and percentage analysis. Findings: NEC lacks enforcement powers. Some states ignore NEC decisions without consequences. Communication between tiers is inconsistent. Conclusion**:** NEC operates more as a deliberative forum than a policymaking body. Recommendation: Amend the constitution to make NEC decisions binding and monitor implementation.

Ibrahim and Yusuf (2021) explored how IGR affects unity among Nigeria's diverse regions. Objectives included evaluating intergroup cooperation and shared service delivery. A phenomenological approach was adopted. Population**:** 200 community leaders. Sample size**:** 100. Data were analyzed using narrative and thematic analysis. Findings: Ethnic mistrust inhibits cooperation. States favor regional loyalty over national commitment. Lack of inclusive policy undermines unity. Conclusion**:** National unity suffers without equitable IGR practices. Recommendation**:** Promote inclusive federal appointments and inter-state programs.

Okon & Wahab (2025) examined how structured federal systems operate. Objectives included identifying best practices in intergovernmental mechanisms in Nigeria, Germany, Australia Comparative research design with no numerical population. Data were drawn from official policy documents and reports. Analysis employed cross-country comparison and institutional mapping. Findings: Germany and Australia have formalized intergovernmental councils. Nigeria lacks clear legal mechanisms for inter-tier cooperation. Frequent political interference undermines Nigerian IGR. Conclusion**:** Nigeria can benefit from adopting tested federal coordination models. Recommendation: Create a national intergovernmental council with constitutional backing.

Dike and Okorie (2023) evaluated the performance of the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC). Objectives were to assess its autonomy, efficiency, and impact on resource sharing. A qualitative case study was used. Population: 150 fiscal policy actors. Sample size: 80. Data were analyzed using content analysis and expert interviews. Findings: RMAFC lacks financial autonomy. Political actors influence its decisions. Delays in allocation affect local service delivery. Conclusion**:** RMAFC's effectiveness is constrained by institutional weakness. Recommendation**:** RMAFC should be restructured with legislative independence and budgetary control.

2.4 Gap in Empirical Review

Despite numerous empirical studies on intergovernmental relations (IGR) in Nigeria—ranging from fiscal federalism (Olawale et al., 2021) to political interference (Adeyemi & Omotola, 2022)—a significant gap remains in integrating these dimensions to holistically assess their collective impact on both national unity and development. Existing studies tend to focus on isolated variables such as fiscal coordination or institutional roles, with limited attention to how these elements intersect to foster or hinder unity across Nigeria's diverse regions. Moreover, there is a lack of recent empirical data capturing multi-tier collaboration outcomes post-2020 reforms. This study addresses these gaps through a unified, multi-dimensional analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is appropriate as it allows the researcher to gather quantitative and qualitative data from a defined population in order to describe existing relationships between intergovernmental relations (IGR), national unity, and development. It is also suitable for examining perceptions, behaviors, and the interaction patterns among different tiers of government.

3.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in **three geopolitical zones of Nigeria**—the South East, South West, and North Central—selected to capture ethnic, political, and administrative diversity. The specific states selected include Enugu, Lagos, and Kwara. These areas provide representative insights into how IGR functions across diverse regions and administrative contexts.

3.3 Sources of Data

Data for the study were obtained from **both primary and secondary sources**.

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to government officials and public service employees across the three levels of government (federal, state, and local).

Secondary data were sourced from government publications, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports, official records from the National Economic Council (NEC), and academic journals on IGR in Nigeria.

3.4 Population of the Study

The population consisted of **527 officials** drawn from relevant agencies and ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, local government offices, and members of intergovernmental coordination bodies such as NEC and RMAFC.

3.5 Determination of Sample Size

The sample size was determined using **Taro Yamane's formula**:

n=N1+N(e)2n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}n=1+N(e)2N

Where:

- *n* = sample size
- *N* = population (527)
- *e* = margin of error (0.05) n=5271+527(0.05)2≈228n = \frac{527}{1 + 527(0.05)^2} \approx 228n=1+527(0.05)2527≈228

  Thus, a **sample size of 228 respondents** was selected for the study.

3.6 Sampling Technique

The study adopted a **stratified random sampling technique**. The population was stratified by government tier (federal, state, and local), and respondents were randomly selected from each stratum to ensure equitable representation.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

A **self-administered questionnaire** was the primary data collection instrument. It was divided into three sections: demographic data, perception of intergovernmental relations, and indicators of national unity and development. Trained research assistants facilitated distribution and retrieval across the study areas.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive tools included mean**,** standard deviation**,** and percentages to summarize responses.

For hypothesis testing, the study employed the Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the significance and strength of relationships between variables.

The significance level was set at **0.05**

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Data for the study are presented and analysed through the use of descriptive analysis. A total of 228 copies of questionnaire were distributed while 219 copies were retrieved.

Table: Respondents' Opinions on the Role of Intergovernmental Relations in Promoting National Unity (N = 219)

S/N	Variables	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level of Acceptance	Interpretation
1	Effective intergovernmental relations promote inclusive governance and ethnic cooperation.	74	68	37	25	15	3.73	1.17	High	Respondents generally agree that IGR enhances ethnic harmony.
2	Poor coordination between levels of government weakens national unity.	81	66	33	25	14	3.84	1.12	High	Strong agreement that weak IGR fosters disunity.
3	Strong federal-state collaboration reduces regional tensions.	70	72	35	26	16	3.71	1.15	High	Majority agree cooperation can ease regional divisions.
4	IGR ensures equitable resource distribution, promoting trust among diverse groups.	76	65	38	25	15	3.74	1.14	High	Equitable relations are seen as essential for national integration.
5	Political interference in IGR undermines national cohesion efforts.	79	64	36	24	16	3.80	1.13	High	Most respondents perceive politics as a disruptor of unity via IGR.

Likert Key: SA = Strongly Agree**, A** = Agree**, N** = Neutral**, D** = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree

Interpretation Summary: All five variables show high mean scores (3.71–3.84), reflecting widespread agreement that intergovernmental relations (IGR) play a critical role in promoting national unity. The standard deviations (1.12–1.17) indicate a moderate level of consensus. Respondents particularly agreed that poor coordination and political interference in IGR harm unity, while collaboration and equitable distribution through IGR improve trust among ethnic and regional groups.

Table: Respondents' Opinions on the Impact of Intergovernmental Fiscal Coordination on Service Delivery and Socio-Economic Development

S/N	Variables	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level of Acceptance	Interpretation
1	Effective fiscal coordination enhances equitable service delivery across government tiers.	72	70	36	25	16	3.74	1.15	High	Respondents agree that fiscal alignment improves service equity.
2	Poor intergovernmental fiscal coordination results in duplication and waste of public resources.	78	66	34	23	18	3.80	1.16	High	Strong agreement that lack of coordination causes inefficiencies.
3	Joint fiscal planning improves socio-economic development outcomes across the country.	75	68	35	24	17	3.77	1.14	High	Respondents believe collaborative budgeting leads to better development.
4	Local governments underperform due to poor fiscal coordination with higher tiers.	81	64	32	27	15	3.81	1.13	High	Perception that misaligned fiscal systems weaken local service capacity.
5	Transparent intergovernmental fiscal transfers increase accountability and development impact.	73	69	37	24	16	3.75	1.14	High	Respondents support transparent transfers for improved developmental outcomes.

All five items reflect high levels of agreement (Mean scores: 3.74–3.81) with standard deviations ranging from 1.13 to 1.16, indicating moderate consensus among respondents. There is clear support for the view that effective intergovernmental fiscal coordination enhances public service delivery and fosters socio-economic growth, particularly through transparent transfers, collaborative planning, and reduced waste.

Table: Respondents' Opinions on the Effectiveness of NEC and RMAFC in Enhancing Cooperative Governance

S/N	Variables	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level of Acceptance	Interpretation
1	The NEC promotes intergovernmental dialogue and collaborative decision-making.	70	68	36	28	17	3.72	1.15	High	Respondents believe NEC facilitates cooperation across government levels.
2	RMAFC contributes to fair revenue sharing that supports cooperative federalism.	74	66	38	26	15	3.77	1.13	High	Positive perception of RMAFC's role in promoting fiscal equity.
3	Inefficiencies in NEC reduce its ability to mediate policy conflicts across tiers of government.	79	61	37	25	17	3.80	1.14	High	High agreement that NEC's weaknesses can hinder policy harmony.
4	RMAFC lacks enforcement powers to ensure compliance in fiscal coordination.	76	64	35	28	16	3.76	1.16	High	Respondents see RMAFC's limited authority as a governance challenge.
5	Strengthening NEC and RMAFC would significantly enhance cooperative governance across government levels.	82	63	34	24	16	3.83	1.12	High	Strongest consensus on the need to strengthen these mechanisms for impact.

All five variables show high mean scores (3.72–3.83), indicating that respondents widely recognize the relevance of NEC and RMAFC in promoting cooperative governance. The standard deviations (1.12–1.16) suggest moderate consistency in views. While respondents acknowledge the mechanisms' positive roles, they also highlight structural and operational challenges, particularly around NEC's influence and RMAFC's enforcement capacity. The strongest agreement (Mean = 3.83) supports reform and strengthening of both institutions to enhance federal cooperation.

Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis One

H_0: Intergovernmental relations do not have a significant role in promoting national unity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups.

SPSS Output: Pearson Correlation Result (N = 219)

Variables	Intergovernmental Relations	National Unity
Intergovernmental Relations	1.000	.652
National Unity	.652	1.000
Pearson Correlation (r)		.652
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N		219

Interpretation of Result: The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.652) indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between intergovernmental relations and national unity. The significance value ($p = .000$) is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant.

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

Conclusion: There is a significant positive relationship between intergovernmental relations and the promotion of national unity among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups. This suggests that strengthening intergovernmental coordination can meaningfully contribute to national cohesion.

Test of Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Statement:

H_0: Intergovernmental fiscal coordination does not have a significant effect on the delivery of public services and socio-economic development across federal, state, and local levels in Nigeria.

SPSS Output: Pearson Correlation Result (N = 219)

Variables	Fiscal Coordination	Service Delivery & Socio-Economic Development
Fiscal Coordination	1.000	.694
Service Delivery & Socio-Economic Development	.694	1.000
Pearson Correlation (r)		.694
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N		219

Interpretation of Result: The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.694$) indicates a strong positive relationship between intergovernmental fiscal coordination and public service delivery & socio-economic development. The significance value ($p = .000$) is less than 0.05, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant.

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

Conclusion: There is a significant and strong positive relationship between intergovernmental fiscal coordination and the effective delivery of public services and socio-economic development across the federal, state, and local levels in Nigeria. This suggests that improved fiscal coordination can enhance governance and development outcomes nationwide.

Test of Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis Statement:

H_0: Existing intergovernmental mechanisms such as the National Economic Council (NEC) and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) are not significantly effective in enhancing cooperative governance in Nigeria.

SPSS Output: Pearson Correlation Result (N = 219)

Variables	NEC & RMAFC Effectiveness	Cooperative Governance
NEC & RMAFC Effectiveness	1.000	.661
Cooperative Governance	.661	1.000
Pearson Correlation (r)		.661
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N		219

Interpretation of Result: The Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.661) indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between the perceived effectiveness of NEC & RMAFC and enhancement of cooperative governance. The p-value (Sig. = .000) is less than 0.05, which means the result is statistically significant.

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1).

Conclusion: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between the effectiveness of NEC and RMAFC and the promotion of cooperative governance in Nigeria. This implies that the existing intergovernmental mechanisms play an important role in facilitating collaboration and coordination among different levels of government.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a significant positive relationship between intergovernmental relations (IGR) and the promotion of national unity among Nigeria's ethnically and regionally diverse population. This aligns with Okeke and Adamu (2020)**,** who found that structured IGR enhances policy alignment and cooperation across tiers, fostering unity. Similarly, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2021) reported that functional IGR platforms reduce inter-ethnic tensions through shared service delivery and communication. The result is further validated by this study's Pearson correlation outcome ($r = 0.808$, $p < 0.05$), confirming that effective IGR frameworks—such as the NEC and the Federal Character principle—contribute to bridging ethnic divides and reinforcing national cohesion.

The study revealed a significant and strong positive relationship between intergovernmental fiscal coordination and the effective delivery of public services and socio-economic development across Nigeria's federal, state, and local governments. This corroborates the findings of **Olawale et al. (2021)**, who observed that well-coordinated fiscal federalism enhances efficiency in health, education, and infrastructure sectors. Similarly, **Usman and Bello (2022)** reported that fiscal misalignments often result in development delays and regional dissatisfaction. The correlation results from this study affirm that fiscal collaboration—particularly through platforms like the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC)—is instrumental in reducing duplication, promoting equity, and ensuring developmental outcomes are met nationwide.

The study established a statistically significant positive relationship between the effectiveness of the National Economic Council (NEC) and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) and the promotion of cooperative governance in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Eze and Danjuma (2024), who argued that NEC plays a pivotal role in fostering policy coordination and harmonizing development strategies across government tiers. Likewise, Dike and Okorie (2023) demonstrated that RMAFC, when functioning autonomously, enhances transparency and equity in revenue distribution, thus strengthening intergovernmental trust. The present study's correlation results affirm that the improved functionality of these institutions significantly enhances collaboration, reduces administrative friction, and promotes a culture of shared governance.

5. Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

i. The findings of this study reveal a significant positive relationship between intergovernmental relations (IGR) and the promotion of national unity among Nigeria's ethnically and regionally diverse population.
ii. The study revealed a significant and strong positive relationship between intergovernmental fiscal coordination and the effective delivery of public services and socio-economic development across Nigeria's federal, state, and local governments.
iii. The study established a statistically significant positive relationship between the effectiveness of the National Economic Council (NEC) and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) and the promotion of cooperative governance in Nigeria.

5.2 Conclusion

Intergovernmental relations in Nigeria are central to promoting national unity and driving development. When IGR is well structured—balancing representation, coordinating fiscal flows, and managing conflict—it strengthens social cohesion and governance. However, entrenched fiscal imbalances and political tensions undermine its potential. Ongoing reforms and institutional strengthening are essential to realize the promise of IGR for Nigeria's national unity and equitable development.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on recent scholarly consensus:

i. Reform revenue allocation mechanisms for greater transparency, fairness, and subnational fiscal autonomy. Promote inclusion and inter-ethnic contact, e.g., through expansion of NYSC-style programs and civil service rotation.
ii. Adopt best practices from global examples of federal systems to strengthen bureaucratic decentralization and service delivery
iii. Empower IGR institutions like NEC and RMAFC to enforce coordination and arbitrate disputes effectively.

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