

The Federal Character Commission as a Panacea for National Integration: An Assessment of its Mandate of Equitable Distribution of Socioeconomic Resources in Nigeria

James, KOR; Abdullahi, LIMAN & Usman, YUSUF

Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Received: 10.06.2025 | Accepted: 25.06.2025 | Published: 29.08.2025

*Corresponding Author: James, KOR

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.16996904](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16996904)

Abstract

Original Research Article

This study assessed the Federal Character Commission's mandate of equitable distribution of socioeconomic resources as a panacea for national integration in Nigeria, given that empirical inquiries incorporating the second mandate of the FCC are grossly inadequate. The consociational model of democracy was relied upon as the theoretical framework. Primary data was collected through questionnaires and interviews from 400 respondents determined through the Taro Yamane sampling formula across Anambra, Benue, and Lagos States. In addition, secondary data from extant literature, newspapers, and the bulletins of the FCC was used for this study. Regression analysis and thematic analysis were used as analytical techniques for the study. The study found that equitable distribution of RINF ($\beta = .124$) has an insignificant positive impact on national integration as well as a percentage increase in PDVT ($\beta = .079$) and RLWS ($\beta = .095$). This limited effectiveness aligns with expert opinions that despite the FCC's potential, its performance is hindered by financial dependence, corruption, elite interference, and the lack of implementation of the resource-sharing formula. This study concluded in line with the results that the FCC has not fully achieved its objective of equitable distribution of socioeconomic resources in Nigeria. It recommends urgent implementation of the sharing formula and adoption of a consociational democratic model to enhance inclusive governance, national unity, and sustainable peace in Nigeria.

Keywords: The FCC, Socioeconomic Resources, Consociational Model of Democracy, National Integration.

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria with about 400 ethnic groups is one of the most ethnic diverse nations on the earth (Mustapha, 2007). In addition, its population is somewhat symmetrically divided along Islamic and Christianity cleavages (Demarest, Langer & Ukiwo, 2020). To Onuh (2025), the dividing ethnic and religious lines have been the drivers of conflicts, majorly the Kafanchan riot of 1982, the Tafawa-Balewa crisis of 1991, Zangon-Kataf of 1996, and the Tiv-Jukwun crisis, among others. Concomitant, Mustapha (2007: 5) revealed that *the combination of a tripodal ethnic structure, deep cleavages, a systematic educational, economic, and social inequalities have led to a conflict-ridden political system with political and bureaucratic inequalities* in Nigeria. This however does not imply that conflict in Nigeria is exclusive to religious and ethnic identity lines as historical factors such as the activities of the colonial masters lend strong credence to the recurrent infractions in plural Nigerian societies. A more reinforcing view is that the inability of the Nigerian Government to propagate the culture of peace and beauty in diversity unlike nations such as Singapore, Switzerland, and

Namibia nosedived into the 30 months Civil War (1967-1970) with about 2 million deaths and US\$1 billion expenditure (Lawrence, 1970).

Although conflict is unavoidable occurrence in society, it is most occurring and particularly harmful in failed states due to reliance on ineffective conflict resolution strategies. Because of this harmful effect, measures such as the 3Rs (Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Reintegration) policy under Yakubu Gowon's leadership was initiated to avert recourse into future conflicts, while reintegrating Nigerian societies after the Civil War. Larab (2008) affirmed that the 3Rs contributed positively through infrastructural development in Nigeria. Conversely, *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* faulted the policy through a petition before the Oputa Panel, asserting that it failed to meet its objectives and was perceived rather as an attempt to marginalize the Igbos (Ukase, 2008). This marginalization was particularly evident during the presidencies of Murtala and Shagari between 1975 and 1983, where the Igbos were severely underrepresented in cabinet positions (zero percent) compared to other ethnic groups (25% and 38% by the Hausa-Fulani, 35% and 20.5% by Northern minorities,



35% and 14.7% by the Yorubas, with 5% and 17.6% by southern Minority, respectively) (Osaghae as cited in Mustapha, 2007).

This perceived marginalization and structural inequality in Nigeria has deepened ethnic divisions and fueled renewed calls for autonomy and restructuring, particularly among the Igbos and Ijaws, who feel exploited despite contributing significantly to national revenue while suffering environmental degradation and poverty. Similarly, the Hausa-Fulani in the Northeast and Northwest have laid claim of exclusion, particularly in education and professional representation. For instance, in 2003, despite constituting over half of Nigeria's population, the North had a disproportionately low share of professionals such as engineers (10%), professors (15%), and lawyers (25%), highlighting regional disparities in development and opportunity (Ademu as cited Mustapha, 2007).

Against this background, the regime of Sani Abachi in 1996 implemented the Federal Character Commission (FCC) to ensure equity in public bureaucracies (the first mandate) and equitable distribution of socioeconomic resources (the second mandate) across the six geopolitical zones in the country. Since its inception, Mustapha (2007) argued that when viewed from the intended and unintended effects, the FCC has contributed positively in addressing ethnic inequality in the Nigerian public sector. This argument is challenged by the fact that the Federal Character Commission (FCC) is mandated not only with ensuring equitable employment in the public service but also with promoting fair distribution of economic resources—such as revenue and infrastructure—and political appointments among Nigeria's geopolitical zones. Its inability to effectively carry out these responsibilities has contributed to rising calls for self-determination. Nnamani, Tochuckwu, Ugwuanyi and Okeke (n.d.) highlight that the FCC's shortcomings in promoting national unity and resource equity stem from financial dependence and elite interference. Although constitutionally recognized as one of 14 independent federal executive bodies (1999 Constitution, Third Schedule Part I, Section 153.1), the FCC remains largely under executive control. Mustapha (2007) also notes that in practice, the FCC operates more like a presidential commission, subject to oversight by the Senate and House committees, which often replicate the FCC's roles—further weakening its capacity to fulfill its two mandates. While the first mandate of the FCC—relating to federal bureaucracy—has been extensively examined (Chinanuife, Jooji & Momoh, 2023), the second mandate, which concerns the equitable distribution of infrastructure, has received significantly less scholarly attention. This gap forms the rationale for evaluating infrastructure allocation in Nigeria 29 years after the establishment of the FCC, with the aim of offering policy recommendations that can guide decision-makers in promoting national integration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Demcast et al. (2020), the FCC which is enshrined in provisions 14.3 and 14.4 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) is a body that ensures that there

is 'no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups' in the federal government and its agencies. What gave rise to the FCC is the ethnic cleavages and nepotism initiated by the colonial masters that divided, sub-summed, and pitted the heterogeneous Nigerian societies against each other. This was exacerbated in the post-colonial era as Nigeria nationalist opted for the colonial style of governance with entrenched ethnic cleavages. Mustapha (2007) advance that Nigerian nationalists kept one eye on the British colonialists and the other on their ethnic and regional competitors from other parts of the divided country, leading to entrenched and chaotic political landscape as evidenced by the civil war. Even after the war with measures such as the 3Rs, ethnic cleavages persisted in the country with a surge in self-determination, thus, the need for an inclusive approach to address socio-political and economic inequalities in the country.

In response, the FCC was birthed. It however went through reforms such as the 1967 dismantling of the regional governance in favor of states to impede ethnic mobilization and the 1979 introduction of majoritarian presidency, with national majority of vote cast and the 25% threshold votes cast in at least two-thirds of all states (Mustapha, 2007). It is within this premise the Federal Character Principle came to the fore through the 1979 Constitution, with section 14, sub-section 3 stating that;

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies

In furtherance, section 150 of the 1989 Constitution, brought many new institutions (the governing bodies of state-owned companies and the governing councils of the universities) under the purview of the Federal Character principle. It was not until 1994 that the National Constitutional Conference convened by Abacha in June 1994 concluded on the establishment of the Federal Character Commission to ensure the enforcement of the Federal Character Principle and proportional representation (Mustapha, 2007). Through Decree No. 34 of 1996, the FCC was established in 1996 with its scope broadened by Section 4, Subsection 1c, 1di, and 1dii to prosecute defaulters of the principles and ensure structural equality at the level of state bureaucracies, senatorial districts, local government areas, and wards as functional units.

Several years after the FCC was established, there are growing claims of nepotism and marginalization due to ethnic, religious, and political affiliations. A critical area that resonates this feeling of marginalization is inequitable distribution of infrastructures across the regions in Nigeria. In spite of the disparity, extant literature taking a cursory

look at the FCC and equitable distribution of infrastructures in Nigeria are grossly inadequate. Specifically, Chinanuife et al. (2023) critically assessed the effectiveness of the Federal Character Principle in Enugu, Kogi State and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Public Service, relying on representative bureaucracy theory as the framework and primary data collected from 155 respondents through questionnaires across the three states. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square were used as analytical techniques to show that despite the mandate of the FCC, the problems of regional domination and fear of marginalization by minorities in the federal public service have not been largely tackled by the federal character principle in the areas of coverage. In addition, it revealed that the Federal Character Principle is fraught with challenges bordering emphasis on regional representation than merit, an avenue for elites to deepen nepotism, and importantly the Federal Character Principle is skewed towards difference rather than integration. It recommended in line with the finding the need for independence of the FCC like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) both in principle and in practice to minimize influences and control from those in power. The study is however skewed towards the federal character principle at the Federal Public Service and as a result neglected the internal dynamics within the state and local government civil service.

Similarly, Demarest et al. (2020) appraised the Nigeria's Federal Character Commission using interviews conducted with different FCC policymakers and commissioners with secondary data collected spanning from 2013 to 2016. It assessed the first and second mandates of the FCC and revealed that FCC has not succeeded in addressing the historical imbalances that led to the civil war. This is because the FCC is fraught with legal and administrative constraints, chronic underfunding, and lack of independence. As a result, it recommended that the FCC should brush up its image with regard to how the institution itself respects federal character, while addressing corrupt practices within the system to ensure equitable distribution of resources and national integration in Nigeria.

The study of Nnamani et al. (ND) was limited to the federal civil service recruitment as it examined whether the federal character principle has effectively enhanced national integration in Nigeria. It used descriptive statistics as method of analysis to show that issues revolving ethnocentrism, mutual suspicion, elitism, and mediocrity have militated the FCC in achieving national integration in Nigeria. It recommended the need for value orientation, meritocracy, patriotism, honesty, and fairness among Nigerians and the FCC to enhance peaceful coexistence among the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Mustapha in 2007 through a CRISE working paper investigated the effectiveness of the FCC in achieving ethnic representation in Nigeria. It relied on interviews with secondary data sourced from extant literature and argued that amidst its drawbacks, the FCC has succeeded in creating new norms and procedure for the non-violent resolution of conflicts over ethnic and regional access and also provided an impartial and professional platform,

trusted by all, through which the complaints could be addressed. It recommends an urgent need by the FCC and the national assembly to review the simple arithmetic quota utilized by the FCC to enhance proportional integration in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The consociational model of democracy advocated by Arend Lijphart (1968) was relied upon as the theoretical framework for this study. It is a leading conflict resolution model relevant in plural states to address cleavages. More precise, it centers on a power-sharing model of equitable representation among segmented groups to enhance proportionality and decision-making in the political sphere among competing sub-groups in a plural state (Perekpo, 2023). The model hinges on four characteristics of a grand coalition, mutual veto or concurrent majority rule, proportionality in political representation, and autonomy for each group (Modica, 2015). The model is instrumental in addressing cleavages or differences that often translate into a political and ethnic crisis that subject states to civil disorder and conflict, as evident in the post-Apartheid regime reconciliation in South Africa and the post-Rwandan genocide peacebuilding.

Employing the model in the persistently divided Nigerian societies along ethnic, religious, and political cleavages is instrumental in addressing the historical grievances of ethnic and religious dominance exacerbating conflict and insecurity in the country. This will follow the idea of a grand coalition to create an avenue for representatives from all ethnic groups (majority and minority), and the mutual veto rule that guarantees the security of minority group from undue repression and abuse by the majority group, proportionality that fosters equity, while sub-group autonomy will allow each group to exercise their rights and represent the group identity within the ambit of the law without fear or favor (Modica, 2015). This underscores the relevance of the model to this study as it is best suited to foster national integration among the diverse ethnic groups through equitable representation in the socioeconomic and political spheres in the country.

METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was used for this study due to its applicability in a mixed research. Questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII) were used as instruments for primary data collection for this study. Interviews were conducted with experts and members of the public, while questionnaires were administered across Anambra, Benue, and Lagos States to elicit responses from the general public on the effectiveness of the FCC in addressing marginalization and inequitable distribution of resources in the country. These states were selected purposively due to the growing agitation for marginalization in the Southeast (Anambra State), intra-state cleavage in Benue State, and the concentration of infrastructures in the Southwest (Lagos State). This will enable generalization as the states cut across the Southern and Northern Nigeria, implying a representative

From Table 1.2, RINF ($\beta = .124$, $t = 0.995$, $p = .090$) is a positive predictor of national integration. The result means that the pursuant of FCC's second mandate of equitably distribution road infrastructures will contribute positively to national integration by 12.4%. Although the positive impact is insignificant (because the p-value [.090] is greater than 0.05), the result indicates that there will be a minimal increase in national integration through equitable distribution of road infrastructures in Nigeria. This result was echoed by an interviewee in Akwa, Anambra State on 21.05.2025 that;

Nigeria belongs to us all and no one is happy with the current spate of disunity, seclusion, and insecurity in the country. Once the government prioritizes nationalism above ethnicity, insecurity and the growing quest for external self-determination will become a history. The Southeast is famously known for trading, yet roads across the regions are decrepit. Meanwhile, the situation is different in other regions with less need for roads like the Southeast. This feeling of marginalization has been the driving force behind the persistent quest for secession from Nigeria, calling for the FCC as an independent body to ensure that resources are equitably distributed in Nigeria.

In response, an FCC employee alluded that;

The FCC in practice lacks independence, making it challenging to enforce the core mandates necessary to foster unity in the country. Precisely, the formula guiding the second principle still awaits approval, while lack of financial autonomy with lack of commitment by state government add up as impediments to the FCC. This calls for expediency by the presidency to implement the formula for equitable distribution of socioeconomic resources in Nigeria, which to a large extent will foster unity and sustainable development of Nigeria.

This result aligns with the finding of Demarest et al. (2020) that despite the potentials of the FCC in ensuring equitable distribution of resources, inadequate support from state governments with legal and administrative constraints, chronic underfunding, and lack of independence impede the efficacy of the FCC in ensuring equitable distribution of socioeconomic resources in the country.

PDVT in Table 1.2 ($\beta = .079$, $t = 1.713$, $p = .102$) is a positive predictor of national integration. The result means that national integration will improve with a rise in equitable distribution of ports in Nigeria. Specifically, a percentage increase in the enforcement of the second mandate of the FCC to equitably enhance port development in Nigeria will improve national integration by 7.9%. This result is consistent with the view of Msur in

Makurdi, Benue State on 03.02.2025 that;

The North-central region has River Niger and River Benue running through several states in the region. The region is principally agrarian but lacks a functional port to adequately connect it to other regions in the country. Accordingly, the Benue Cargo port with a huge economic potential in the state has not seen the light of day, as well as the failure to dredge the Benue River. All of these create the feeling of seclusion and marginalization, being that government's emphasis is on Lagos State to the detriment of other coastal areas in the country.

While equitable distribution of ports will foster a sense of belonging and national integration, it is noteworthy that beside airport or cargo airport, seaport/river ports are location specific. This makes it challenging to distribute seaports evenly across Nigeria, thus, the need for equity in the distribution of sea ports/river ports. Be that as it may, coastal areas such as the north-central and the Southeast regions remain without a functional seaport. According to a report by Ofurum (2024), the Onitsha River Port which has been commissioned three times since 1983 remains moribund and requires about ₦16bn for dredging to make it suitable to receive cargo. Moreso, the Baro Inland River Port (Niger State), the Oguta River Port (Imo State), and the Lokoja River Port (Kogi State) all remain in comatose and require about ₦9.4bn to facilitate cargo delivery (Ibiyemi, 2025). Amidst this neglect, there is undue attention by the Nigerian government on the development of the Lekki Deep Sea Port in Lagos State. The consequence is an increase in transportation cost in the Southeast region with roads largely in a state of disrepair. This situation reinforces perceptions of marginalization and economic neglect, further fueling demands for autonomy, secession, and the rising sense of disunity within Nigeria

In congruence, RLWS ($\beta = .095$, $t = 1.097$, $p = .091$) is a positive predictor of national integration. This implies that there will be an increase in unity and integration among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria if the FCC intensifies effort to ensure that rail infrastructures are equitably distributed in Nigeria. An assessment of rail development under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Nigeria depicts a functional standard rail gauge connecting the North-central to the South-south through the Itakpe–Ajaokuta–Warri Railway, the Federal Capital Territory to the Northwest through the Abuja–Kaduna Mass Transit Light Rail, the Southwest through the Lagos–Ibadan Railway (Ajah & Onuoh, 2023). However, the Southeast remains without a functional railways, a feeling that has exacerbated resentment and the quest for external self-determination. This underscores the need for expediency in the implementation of the sharing formula guiding the second mandate and the need for independence of the FCC to ensure equity in Nigeria. In lieu, interview responses availed that;

The increasing concentration of

infrastructure in Lagos State has sparked resentment and feelings of marginalization among other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This perceived bias dates back to the post-civil war reconstruction era of the 3Rs, during which infrastructure development was focused on Lagos rather than the war-affected former Eastern Region. Today, Lagos boasts a functional standard gauge railway and the Lekki Deep Sea Port, while the Southeast lacks an operational rail system. Additionally, the Anambra port, which holds significant economic potential for the region, remains overlooked. If the FCC strengthens its efforts to promote equitable distribution of infrastructures nationwide, it could foster a stronger sense of inclusion and national unity, rather than the current disparities that are deepening ethnic divisions, secessionist movements, and insecurity.

Nnamdi, Okoli; academia in Lagos on 03.05.2025.

In support of a paradigm towards an independent FCC, an FCC personnel in Lagos deduced that;

Despite the FCC's positive role in promoting structural equality in Nigeria's socio-economic and political sectors, it faces challenges such as lack of independence, weak enforcement capacity, and inability to prosecute violators. Its limited effectiveness in ensuring fair distribution of socio-economic resources is partly due to the absence of a defined infrastructure-sharing formula. Implementing this formula would enhance the FCC's ability to foster national integration through equitable resource distribution.

This outcome aligns with Mustapha's (2007) findings, which acknowledge that the FCC has created a conducive and peaceful platform for managing bureaucratic conflicts in Nigeria. However, challenges such as limited financial autonomy, interference from the elite, and overlapping oversight responsibilities continue to hinder the Commission's effectiveness in promoting lasting national unity through fair resource distribution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The regression findings suggest that the Federal Character Commission (FCC) has the potential to promote national integration through the effective execution of its second mandate. Increases in RINF, PDVT, and RLWS variables showed a positive, though statistically insignificant, contribution to national integration. This supports expert opinions that despite the FCC's potential, its performance is hindered by financial dependence, corruption, elite interference, and the lack of

implementation of the resource-sharing formula. As such, the study concludes that the FCC has not fully achieved its goal of equitable distribution of socioeconomic resources in Nigeria. To address this, the study recommends that the Nigerian government urgently implement the proposed sharing formula to strengthen enforcement of equitable distribution of resources to foster national unity. Furthermore, achieving lasting peace and unity requires an inclusive approach, prompting a shift toward a consociational democratic model to enhance inclusive governance, social cohesion, and national development.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association [APA] "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and code of conduct" (2010)
- Chinanuife, E., Jooji, I. & Momoh, M. (2023). The Effectiveness of the Federal Character Principle in Enugu, Kogi State and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Public Service. *Intern. Journal of Profess. Bus. Review. Volume 8* (9). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i9.3360>
- City population (2025). Nigeria: States and Cities. Available Online. <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/nigeria/cities/> Retrieved 14.05.2025
- Demarest, L., Langer, A. & Ukiwo, U. (2020). Nigeria's Federal Character Commission (FCC): a critical appraisal. *Oxford Development Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13600818.2020.1727427
- Ibiyemi, S. (2025, March 5). NIWA Raises Alarm over N9.4bn River Ports risking abandonment. Nigerian News Direct. Available Online. <https://nigeriannewsdirect.com/niwa-raises-alarm-over-n9-4bn-river-ports-risking-abandonment/> Retrieved 05.05.2025
- Kothari, C. R. (2011). Research methodology, methods and techniques. New Delhi: New Age International Publishers
- Larab, T. A. (2008). Disempowerment and Marginalization of the Igbo after the Civil War: an Assessment of the 3Rs'. Adejo, A. M. (eds): The Nigerian Civil War: Forty Years after, what Lessons Learnt? Aboki Publishers, Makurdi. ISBN: 978-8098-90-8
- Lawrence (1970, 30 January). Nigeria Absorbs Financial Cost of War. The New York Times. Retrieved 23/09/2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/01/30/archives/nigeria-absorbs-financial-cost-of-war.html>
- Modica, K. L. (2015). A Path to Peace: Reconciling the Sunni-Shia Conflict in Iraq. Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects. 841. https://surface.syr.edu/honor_capstone/841.
- Mustapha, A. R. (2007, June). Institutionalizing ethnic representation: How effective is the Federal Character



Commission in Nigeria? CRISE Working Paper. No. 43.

Nnamani, D., Tochuckwu, N., Ugwuanyi, C. and Okeke, E. K. (2020). Federal Character Principle and National Integration in Nigeria: Focus on Federal Civil Service Recruitment. *Nigerian Journal of Administrative and Political Studies*. Volume 5(1).

Ofurum, G. (2024, June 23). Onitsha River Port: Three-Time Commissioned, yet Mired in Politics. Business Day Media. Available Online.

<https://businessday.ng/life/article/onitsha-river-port-three-time-commissioned-yet-mired-in-politics/>

Retrieved 04.05.2025

Onuh, S. S. (2025). Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Issues and Solutions. A Conference Paper at Christ the King Major Seminary, Kagoma, Kafanchan.

Perekpo, D. A. (2023). Assessment of the Factors Influencing Islamic Movement in Nigeria's Protest and Peace in Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria. *IRE Journals*. Volume 7 (4).

Ukase, P. I. (2008). Nigeria's Post-Civil War Reconciliation Efforts and its Implication for the Stability of the Nigerian State in the 21st Century. Adejo, A. M. (eds): *The Nigerian Civil War: Forty Years after, what Lessons Learnt?* Aboki Publishers, Makurdi. ISBN: 978-8098-90-8