

The effect of spatial inequality on Nigeria's development

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Abstract

This article will examine the ways in which large scale inequality between northern and southern Nigeria impacts the developmental position of the nation. The article takes the approach of looking at how inequality has been obscured by conventional developmental measures and, consequentially, it is posited that there is a requirement for measures of development to include spatial inequality. In addition, it examines why some Nigerian regions develop whereas others do not. This is paradoxical to the current push for greater emphasis on inclusive development. The major outcomes of the exclusivity is damage to the political system and the promotion of conflict. The future is also examined with the conclusion that spatial inequality is expected to increase unless government action, which is increasingly unlikely, can occur.

Definitions

Spatial inequality (the unequal amounts of qualities or resources and services depending on the area or location, such as medical or welfare).

Horizontal inequality (is inequality among groups, in contrast to the more common understanding of inequality as inequality among individuals or vertical inequality).

Inclusive development (an approach which ensures that all people are included and can participate fully in and benefit from development efforts).

1. Introduction

The notion of spatial inequality is the result of different levels of development between two areas which results in different outcomes. Governor Kashim Shettima states that within Nigeria "poverty wears a northern cap"¹ and this divide between the north and the south has resulted in the northern regions of the country becoming synonymous with poverty. The south, in contrast, has the country's major industries and economic production centred there. This has allowed a higher level of development to be achieved within southern regions. This has unbalanced the development of the country.

The divide between areas is illustrated, shown as the twelve most northern states which include Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Bauchi, Jigawa, Yobe, Borno and Gombe. The inequality between the north and the south is evident in terms of poverty but also in education and government spending.

The north has a higher poverty rate, with a 20 percentage point difference in poverty rate between the north and the south. Even more strikingly, this difference in poverty rate has enlarged since 1980 when both the north and the south had the same poverty rate.



Figure 1. Northern and southern regions of Nigeria, by state².

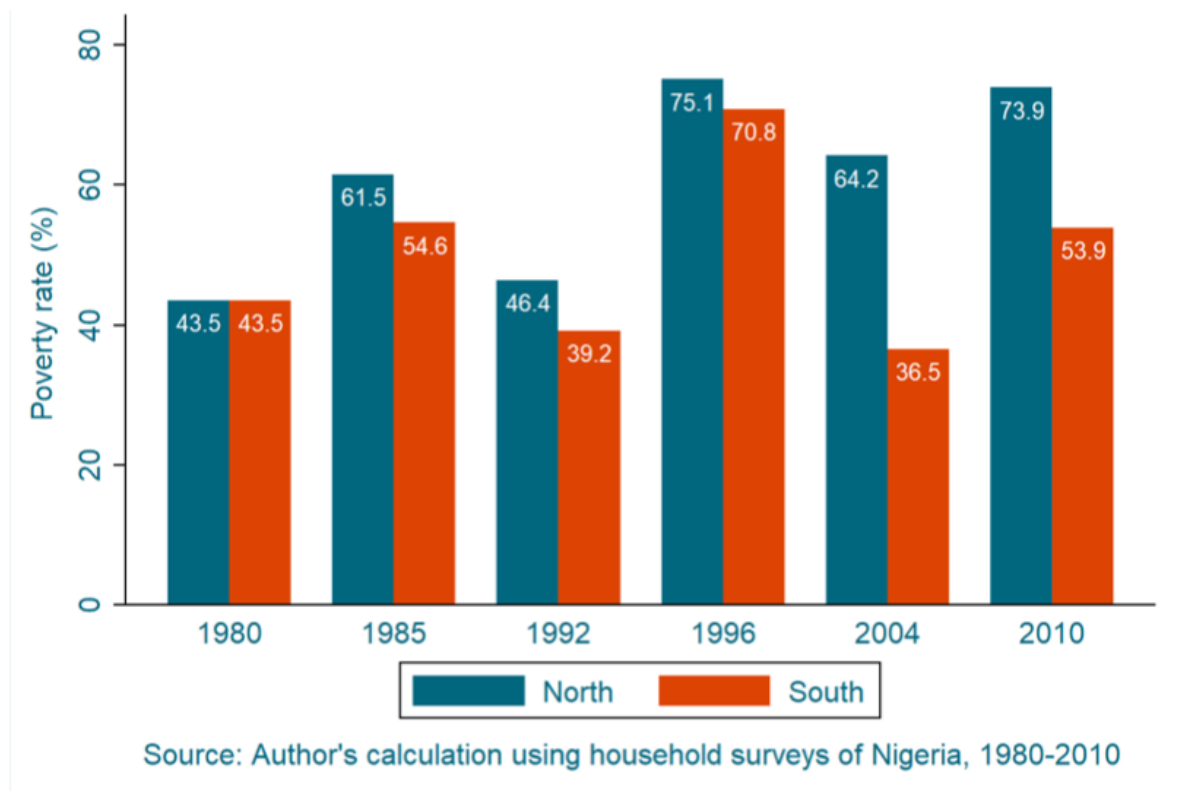


Figure 2. Poverty rates, northern and southern Nigeria, 1980–2010¹

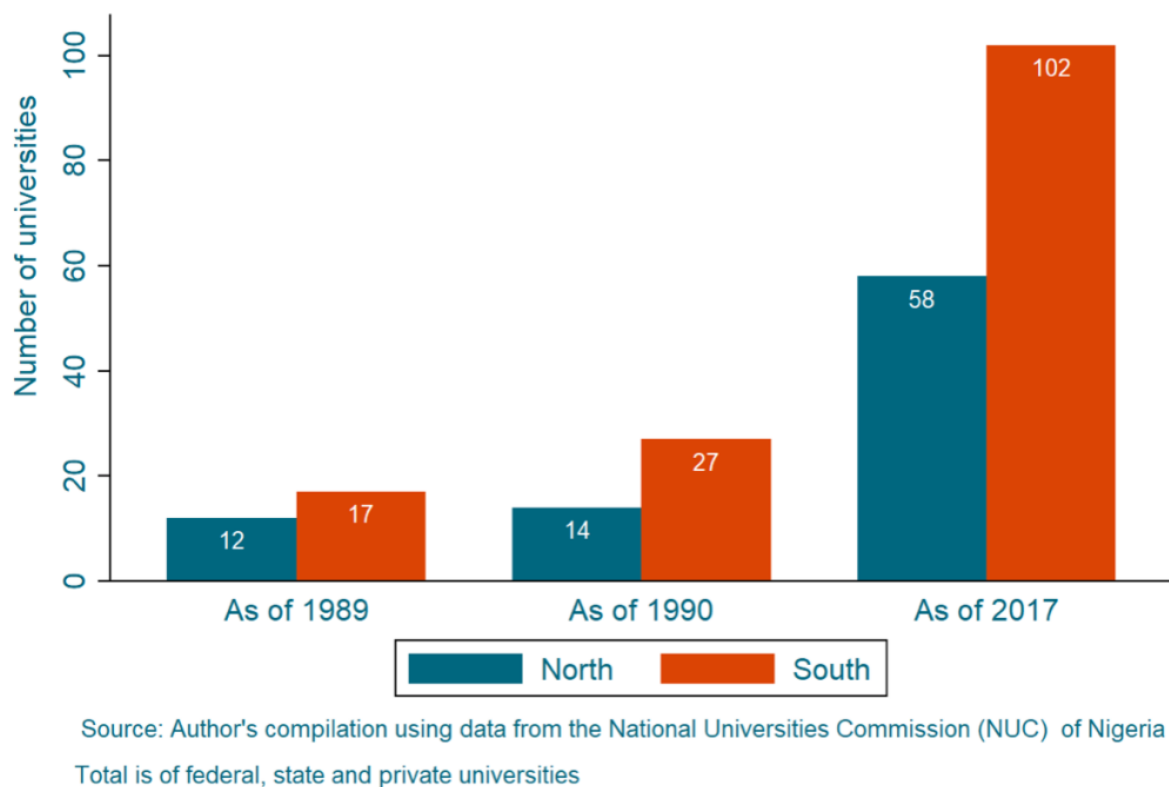
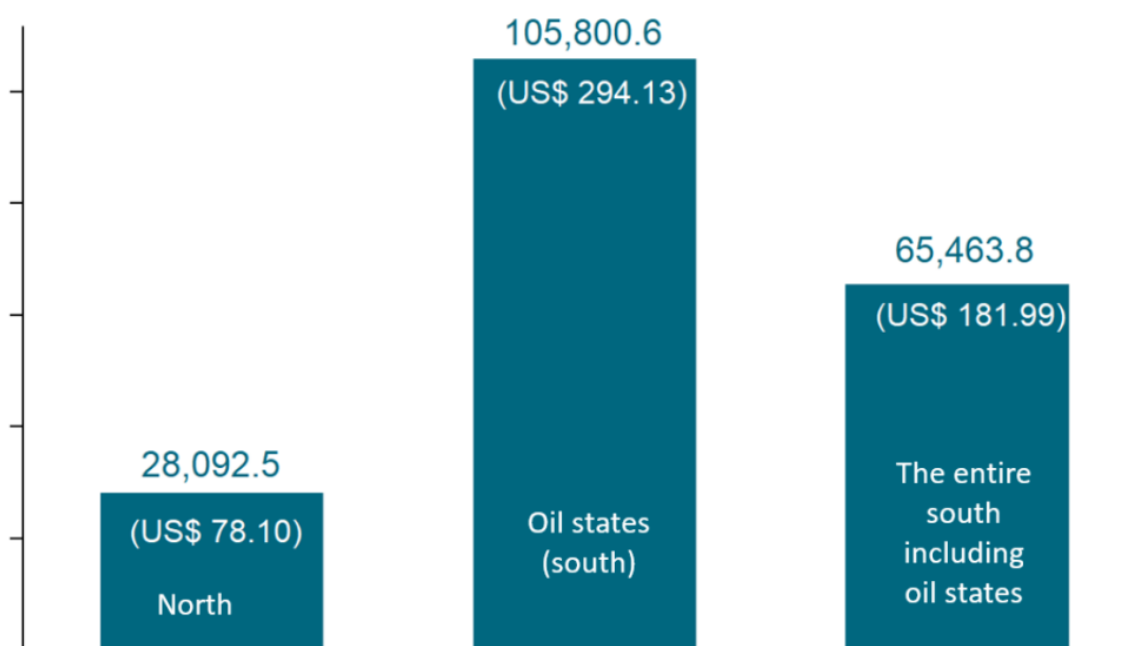


Figure 3. Number of universities in northern and southern Nigeria, 1989–2017¹

This shows that inequality also exists in terms of the future prospects of the regions.

The south, owing to the higher levels of university education, can expect to access higher wages in the future, earning a higher income and equally also being more able to escape poverty.



Sources: Budget announcements on National Dailies (e.g. Punch, Vanguard online news, etc) obtained via Google news tab. Population figures from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Nigeria. The NBS uses 3% uniform growth rate per annum to project pop across the states. I used this to calculate the 2018 population size for each state before finally arriving at regional averages. The oil states include, A/Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers

Figure 4. Regional differences in government expenditure per citizen¹

The south has 2.3 times the level of spending on its citizens when compared to the north. However, much of the rift in spending is caused by the oil states in the south who spend 3.7 times more on their citizens when compared to the northern regions. This is down to oil and its importance to the Nigerian economy. This rift in spending shows the difference in ability to support those on the lowest incomes but also to provide infrastructure and facilities to aid future development.

Conventional indicators of inequality and development miss key areas which have the greatest impact on Nigeria. The GINI coefficient 'measures the extent

to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution'³. Only using GINI misses out horizontal inequality, which can be viewed as a cause of conflict. Thus, it ignores fundamental parts of Nigeria's spatial problem.

Equally, GDP remains ineffective in giving an accurate picture of what is happening within the country. Between 1980 and 2010, though GDP rose by 19%, the number of people in poverty rose from 39.2 million to 112.47 million¹, clearly showing GDP's ineffectiveness. Rather for Nigeria, where GDP comes from and the cause of the rises are more important, as oil can facilitate corruption and generate an elite within the country. Thus, a more detailed and less generalised view of a nation is required.

This means that spatial inequality and its effects within Nigeria have been obscured by the conventional and traditional measures of development and inequality. There needs to be a greater impetus placed on finding a less generalised and more accurate view of nations.

2. Inclusive development

Inclusive development is that which includes 'marginalized people, sectors and countries in social, political and economic processes for increased human well-being, social and environmental sustainability, and empowerment' (Gupta *et al.*, 2015: 546). The main area for marginalisation is the north and its inhabitants, where there are the most marked differences in income (shown in Figure 5). But Lagos, a city of 14 million, provides 'more than 50% of non-oil GDP'⁴, and thus there could be economic marginalisation of areas beyond the city as it provides such a nucleus for the economy. Therefore, there is a spatial inequality due to the lack of inclusive development with Lagos at the core of the economy.

Money

Average annual income per person in \$

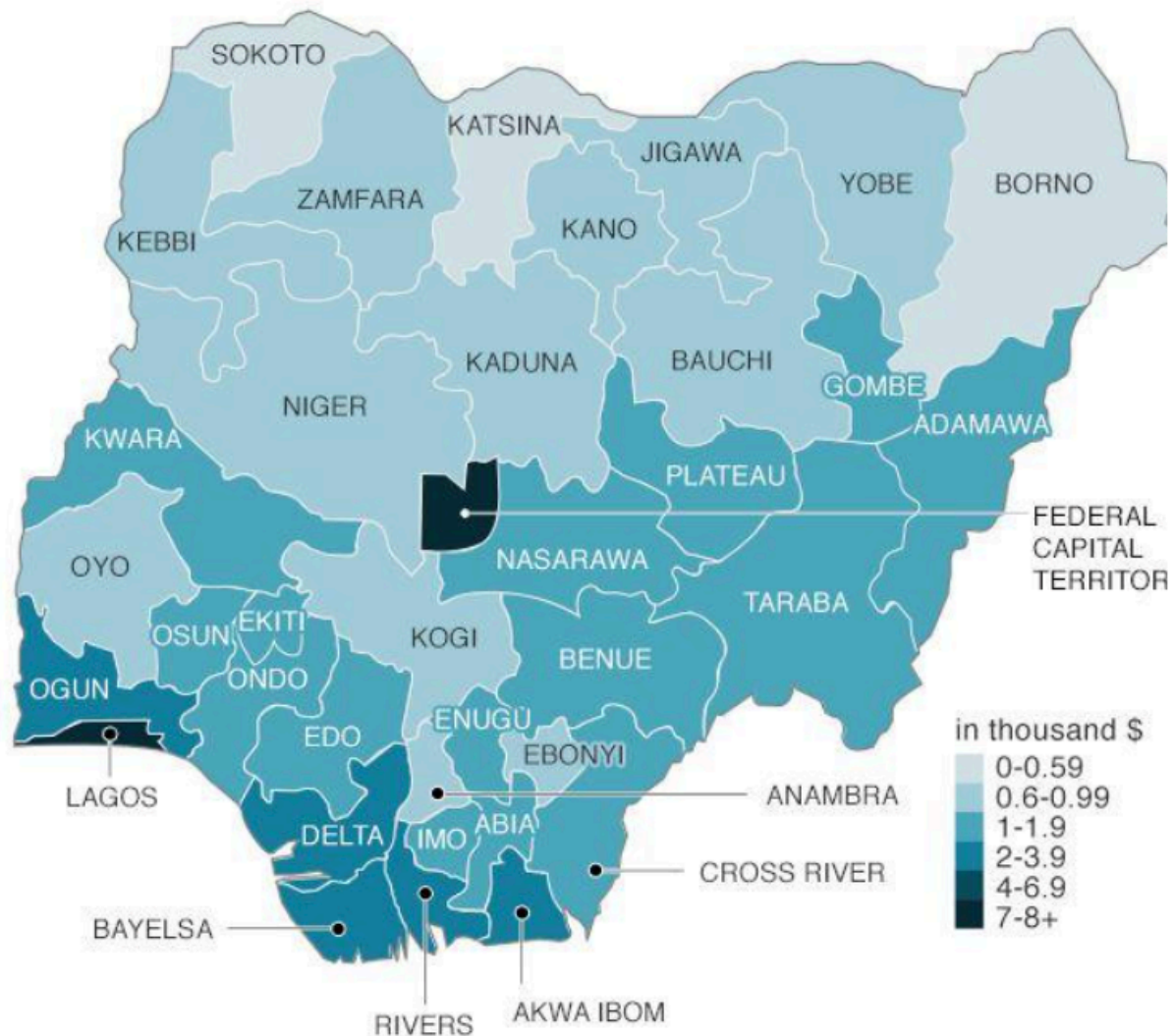


Figure 5. Different income levels within Nigeria by province.

The above map illustrates that the northern area of the country has the lowest incomes on average when compared to the south – although some southern areas do also have low income.

Nigeria's federalised system provides greater funding to areas of greatest economic importance and 'consequently, governments direct more resources to relatively better-off and politically dominant regions, reinforcing spatial inequalities' (Abdulai, 2017: 356). These regions have used the influence that they have with the government to gain more revenue. The Government is willing to do this as noted – 'Spatial inequality that results from regional

comparative advantage and returns to scale is desirable and can increase productivity which, in turn, can enhance growth' (Mveyange, 2018:2). This means that spatial inequality is traded off for economic growth, illustrating the continued hegemony of economic growth ideas in the mindset of development.

Furthermore, the enhanced growth in these regions allows them, in the future, to demand more revenue due to their raised economic importance. This can lead to an expanding future spatial inequality.

3. The results of exclusivity

3.1. Politics

The concept of 'political settlement' has been defined as 'the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and classes, on which any state is based' (Di John and Putzel, 2009: 13). Unequal development has damaged the country's political settlement as power between different regions is no longer balanced. This has damaged the political system.

This breaking of balance led to low voter turnout in the 2019 Presidential election with only a 34% voter turnout. As 'a typical form of protest by the opposition parties in non-democratic regimes is to call for an election boycott, with the aim of delegitimizing the outcome of a process that is deemed unfair' (Buttorff and Dion, 2017: 100). Decreasing faith in the Government as the mandate for governance was reduced, partially leads to an increase in anti-government sentiment and resentment from society. This is even though 'we find that primary and secondary schooling increases fundamental forms of political participation such as voting, interest in politics and community participation' (Larreguy *et al.*, 2015: 400) which has occurred within Nigeria, showing that it is a direct action to reduce mandate. Equally, a recent Afro-Barometer study showed that there could be 'anti-politics of electricity' reducing voter participation⁶. However, the overall effect is a reduction in political participation.

3.1.1 Greater corruption

With reduced voter turnout caused by inequality, the Government has turned to the nation's elite to receive their mandate, with the result of greater focus on the elite's concerns. Oil again comes into play, both by creating the elite class within the country but also providing the Government two thirds of its revenue with which to conduct corruption. Income inequality has developed as 'the wealthy have both greater motivation and opportunity to engage in corruption, while the poor are more vulnerable to extortion and less able to

monitor and hold the rich and powerful accountable as inequality increases' (You, 2004: 135). With the 'resource scarcity in developing societies, various ethno-regional groups seek access to influential positions in government primarily as a means of presenting group interests in the decision-making process' (Abdulai, 2017). This shows that elites have an incentive to promote their own interests to make decisions. Collier (2009) argues that this is further magnified by oil, which is revenue gained from no one, which the elite can use unaccountably.

3.1.2. Declining voter turnout

The voter turnout in 2015 for the Presidential election was 43% – almost 10% more than the most recent voter turnout. This further consolidates the power in the hands of the elite. 'If powerful groups are not getting an acceptable distribution of benefits from an institutional structure, they will strive to change it' (Khan, 2010: 4). The Government fear that if they cannot give benefits to the elite then they will be ousted. This has led to the Government having a mindset which helps promote the elites which comes in the form of favouring them to the detriment of the rest of society.

3.1.3. Poor governance

Limited accountability and poor voter turnouts lead to poor governance as beneficial development policies are not implemented.

3.2. The impact of politics

Governance and political structures is fundamental with Kahn (2013: 117) stating 'The importance of the good governance perspective in informing contemporary development policy and discourse cannot be overemphasized'. However, as pointed out by Collier (2008), it forms part of wider traps such as the resource curse, conflict and being land locked with bad neighbours. Thus, a nations developmental position is not solely determined by governance. However, initiatives to counteract the 'resource curse theory' such as the extractive industries transparency initiative, that can reduce corruption facilitated by oil, are dependent on governance decisions. This places governance as being more a determinant of future development policy and position.

3.3. Conflict

The spatial nature of inequalities with the north being poorer and the south being richer, coupled with the religious and ethnic divide between the two regions, has led to horizontal inequalities. Cramer (2003) states that it is these

inequalities between groups which cause conflict, rather than the vertical inequality captured by the GINI coefficient.



Figure 6. Communities by faith, Nigeria⁷.

Furthermore, Østby (2007) surveyed 55 countries to investigate inequalities between groups between 1986–2003, and concluded that regional inequality in particular is associated with higher risks of conflict outbreak.

The regional inequality in Nigeria has led to conflict which has further fuelled the religious and ethnic tensions of the country. This anti-government sentiment has manifested within the north in the form of the Boko Haram insurgency. The group which is a splinter from the Islamic State's Western Africa operations has provided an alternative form of governance in its strongholds in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa.

3.4. The impact of conflict

One conflict increases the risk of another as 'civil war typically doubles the risk of further war: about half of all post-conflict countries relapse into conflict within a decade' (Collier, 2007: 27). This leads to a conflict trap where

a nation is stuck in conflict. Thus, the most pressing issue of conflict is how to stop it occurring again.

More specifically, the Boko Haram conflict has led to a situation where 'foreign direct investment dropped 23 percent from 2011 to 2012' and 'the National Emergency Management Agency of Nigeria estimated that 4 million people were in some way affected by the conflict and that 250,000 people have been displaced by insurgency in the northeast' (Kimeyi *et al.*, 2014: 17).

This shows a greater amount of displacement which comes at an immense human cost, which can damage social cohesion within the areas that people move to. Equally, resources within these areas can become stretched reducing the resource per person. Migrants themselves can become marginalised, further reducing inclusive development. According to Keung Wong *et al.* (2007) there are three major areas of marginalisation for migrants: firstly, involuntary exclusion; secondly, a state of relative deprivation to the rest of the area; and, thirdly, the exclusion of migrants and migrant societies from full participation in society. This means that within the country deprivation and inequality increase, while social cohesion reduces. In regard to spatial inequality, the movement of people from the northern regions where conflict is centred, moves the spatial inequality from regions to a more localised area where migrants are centred. This could be due to migrant enclaves forming.

Within the economic component, the GDP growth due to a lack of investment will reduce, lowering employment and the economic development of the nation.

4. Conclusion and further research

The effect of spatial inequality on Nigeria has been a lack of inclusive development leading to the marginalisation of people, conflict and an uneven political system with corruption and elitist sentiment. This has led to Nigeria having poorer development prospects, which has damaged the country. Furthermore, the 'conflict trap' and the difficulty of imposing new policy has damaged development. This can be seen as Nigeria is ranked 161 on the Human Development Index⁸, illustrating the poor state of development.

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Areas of research required to fully explore the trends would be the development of a quantitative measure of horizontal inequality similar to the GINI coefficient. This would allow further investigation into the causes of conflict, such as how much inequality between how many groups, and in what income or HDI setting, causes conflict. This would allow a greater understanding of the conflict trap, although a study of the most important factors in development, such as income, governance or resources, would be beneficial. The closely intertwined nature of all factors will lead to difficulty in untangling them. Furthermore, promoting one factor as most important could lead to a sole focus in policy terms on that area – reducing the inclusivity and effectiveness of development.

From a personal perspective the next linked area of research could be to look at the concept of the ‘resource curse’ within Nigeria, as the impact of oil has been noticed within conflict and politics.

5. Endnotes

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