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Intergovernmental relations in federal and unitary nations: A framework for analysis

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Abstract
This paper applies the value-neutral empirical study approach to examine intergovernmental relations (IGR) in two federal states (the US and Nigeria) and two unitary states (UK and South Africa) using a framework for comparative analysis developed by the authors. The paper presents country studies examining the formal institutional arrangements and their operation in practice, to enable the IGR systems and frameworks in these countries to be sufficiently understood. The four triangulated case studies reflect on convergent and divergent views of the state of IGR in the different nations, the lines of differences and the prevailing views. Each multilayered state has its own system of intergovernmental relations. This system reflects on each case a specific constitutional set up and a specific political history. This paper therefore relates the different constitutional and political regimes and attempts to define generalisable similar trends. The comparative exploration of IGR in the four countries is therefore placed within the larger social and political context of the relationships, both conflictual and consensual, that shape the underlying dynamics of political issues. Hence country studies presented here will not merely describe IGR, but articulate the constitutional/legalistic, institutional, political, socio-economic, and cultural sources of each of the studied nation's patterns of IGR. The thrust is to reflect on the ethno-cultural cleavages and the influence of regional units in shaping IGR and explain the nature of IGR across different policy fields.
Keywords: Intergovernmental relations, cooperative governance, federalism, unitarism, comparative study

Introduction

Extensive studies of IGR from a comparative perspective; especially involving federal and unitary nations have rarely been conducted. It is on the basis of this position that the paper sets itself to analyse IGR in two unitary nations in juxtaposition to two federal nations as stated above. Key comparative factors as stated in the analytical framework (Fig 1) used are the political system, constitutional and legislative arrangements for IGR, spheres/ tiers of government, historical contexts and development perspectives and the institutional arrangements for IGR. The paper also examined the problems and challenges of IGR in the four nations and the ways of improving IGR. To cap the analysis, the paper looked at the expected outcomes of an intergovernmental system using what the authors termed IGR balance of power and cooperative governance indicators. The indicators include among others, a higher degree of autonomy of the different levels of government, co-dependence and co-existence of different levels of government, integrated planning and development across different levels of government, limited jurisdictional overlapping and clearly established and mandated institutions of IGR.

Conceptualising intergovernmental relations

Over the years, classical scholars have largely associated the concept of IGR with federal nations. Particular examples are Anderson (1960) and Elazar (1982). They held two fundamental positions that biased the study of IGR to nations with federal political systems. The first is that IGR is strongly rooted in the philosophical traces of federalism. The second is that IGR structures are only found in nations with a federal system of government. Bello (2014) argued that while the concept is usually associated federal political systems, this should not be construed to mean that IGR do not take place in a unitary system. De Villiers (2012, 677) aptly summed up that the need for IGR transcends 'beyond the dogmatic debate about "federal" and "unitary" forms of state so as to focus on practical challenges of cooperative government' as intergovernmental relations is a 'neutral" word in constitutional debates, whereas "federal" and "unitary" were stigmatised by historic experiences'

McEwen (2015, 5) defined IGR simply as 'relations between governments' and to Sunday (2014) IGR concern the links between different levels of government in a decentralized system that is, the centre, province and district. In other words, it refers to the interactions, relationships and the conduct of officials in the execution of governmental activities. It seeks the achievement of common goals through mutual relationships between and across vertical and horizontal governmental arrangements, alignment and cohesion across all levels of government. The aim of intergovernmental relations therefore, is to enable governmental activities through