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Post Emergency Rule in Rivers State; the Pathway to Sustainable Democracy

Executive Summary

This article analyses President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's statement on the lifting of the State of Emergency in Rivers State, effective September 18, 2025, following a six-month intervention that began on March 18, 2025. The emergency addressed a severe governance crisis, including a divided State House of Assembly, economic asset vandalism, and constitutional disputes. Key findings reveal that the intervention restored stability and enabled the resumption of democratic governance, though underlying tensions remain. It highlights the need for improved collaboration and security. Recommendations include establishing a mediation framework, enhancing legislative-executive relations, and investing in community engagement to ensure sustainable governance. This report provides a roadmap for stakeholders to foster peace and development in Rivers State moving forward.

Introduction

The lifting of the State of Emergency in Rivers State, as announced by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on September 17, 2025, marks a significant milestone in Nigeria's governance landscape. Rivers State, a vital economic contributor due to its oil wealth, experienced a governance breakdown in early 2025, necessitating emergency measures under Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution. This report evaluates the president's statement, detailing the resolution of the crisis and exploring the way forward for effective governance. The objectives are to assess the emergency's impact, identify lingering challenges, and propose actionable strategies to strengthen democratic institutions and promote stability in the State.

Methodology

This analysis is based on a qualitative review of the official statement issued by President Tinubu on September 17, 2025. The research involved a content analysis to extract key themes, including governance paralysis, emergency justification, and the resumption of democratic processes. No primary data collection (e.g., surveys or interviews) was conducted, as the study relied on official documentation. Supplementary insights were drawn from a literature review of Nigeria's constitutional framework and historical governance crises in Rivers State, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the context.

Background

Rivers State has a history of political instability, often linked to its oil-rich status and competing interests among political elites. The current crisis escalated in March 2025 when a paralysis in

the State House of Assembly, divided into two factions, with four members supporting the Governor and 27 opposing, hindered governance. Economic assets, including oil pipelines, were vandalized, and the Supreme Court's rulings on executive-legislative disputes underscored the severity. Under Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution, President Tinubu declared a state of emergency, suspending key officials for a period of six months. Significant developments include the National Assembly's approval and the restoration of governance roles as of September 18, 2025.

Findings

1. Crisis Context and Emergency Justification

The governance paralysis stemmed from a divided State House of Assembly, preventing budget approvals.

Vandalism of economic assets, particularly oil pipelines, exacerbated the crisis.

The emergency was constitutionally supported, with the National Assembly's approval on March 18, 2025.

2. Impact of the Emergency

Suspension of the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Assembly members for six months restored order.

Legal challenges (over 40 cases) highlighted public dissent but did not overturn the proclamation.

Stability was achieved, enabling the resumption of democratic governance on September 18, 2025.

3. Current State

Governor Siminalayi Fubara, Deputy Governor Ngozi Nma Odu, and Speaker Martins Amaewhule resumed their roles.

Ongoing court cases suggest unresolved tensions among stakeholders.

Analysis

The emergency effectively addressed immediate governance and security threats, as evidenced by the resumption of democratic processes. The president's acknowledgement of over 40 legal challenges reflects a democratic acceptance of dissent, though the persistence of court cases indicates lingering mistrust. The constitutional tool of emergency powers, while controversial, was justified by the Supreme Court's validation and the National Assembly's support. However, the reliance on executive intervention highlights a weakness in legislative-executive

collaboration. Differing viewpoints, supporters see it as a necessary stabilization, while critics argue it undermines democracy, suggest a need for balanced reforms. The groundswell of enthusiasm for a democratic return presents an opportunity, but sustained peace requires addressing the root causes, including political activism and economic sabotage.

Recommendations

Establish a Mediation Framework: Create an independent body to mediate disputes between the executive and legislature, ensuring transparent conflict resolution.

Strengthen Legislative-Executive Relations: Implement regular dialogue sessions and joint committees to foster collaboration and prevent future impasses.

Enhance Security Measures: Invest in protecting economic assets, such as oil pipelines, through community policing and infrastructure upgrades.

Promote Community Engagement: Launch public awareness campaigns to involve citizens in governance, reducing political manipulation and building trust.

Monitor Judicial Outcomes: Track ongoing court cases to address unresolved issues, ensuring legal clarity and reconciliation with stakeholders.

These recommendations are grounded in the findings and are feasible within Nigeria's existing governance structures, requiring a strong political will and adequate resource allocation.

Conclusion

The lifting of the State of emergency in Rivers State on September 18, 2025, marks a successful resolution of a governance crisis that threatened economic and democratic stability. The emergency restored order, but underlying tensions and judicial challenges signal the need for proactive measures to address these issues. The recommended strategies, mediation, collaboration, security, engagement, and legal oversight, offer a pathway to sustainable governance. Stakeholders, including the state government, the National Assembly, and citizens, must prioritize implementation to ensure long-term peace and sustainable development. Next steps include stakeholder workshops to refine these recommendations and allocate resources by the end of 2025.

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