Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Insecurity in Nigeria: A Study of Southeast Geopolitical Zone

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Abstract

Nigeria's heterogeneous composition, encompassing numerous ethnicities, cultures, and languages, has since independence in 1960 been characterized by centrifugal tensions stemming from claims of social inequality and the exclusion of various groups by different ethnic communities. Despite the volume of scholarly studies on ethnic nationalism, much has yet to be done on investigating the impact of ethnic nationalism on regional insecurity in the Southeast, Nigeria. This study therefore investigated the nexus between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity in southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria with a view of evaluating the driving forces of ethnic nationalism and their extent on regional security in the South-East, Nigeria. The study employed Relative Deprivation theory and adopted survey research design, utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data along with systematic random and purposive sampling techniques. The data collected were analysed with descriptive (mean as $\overline{X}$ and standard deviations as SD) and inferential statistics (Simple regression). The simple regression analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity (R = 0.85, R^2 = 0.72, p < 0.001), with ethnic nationalism explaining approximately 72% of the variation in regional insecurity, and the model being statistically significant. The study concluded that ethnic nationalism in Nigeria is inevitable; and is promoted by ethnic competition for resources, struggles for political power within the federal system, and perceptions of socioeconomic marginalization; and recommend that appropriate democratic institutions and structures, which will address all the driving forces of ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity, should be in place for political accommodation and management of social diversities and ethnic differences in Nigeria.

Key words: Ethnic nationalism; Ethnicity; Ethnic conflict; Regionalism; Marginalization; Insecurity

INTRODUCTION

Since Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, the country has been experiencing centrifugal tensions arising from allegations and counter-allegations of social inequality and minority exclusion by various ethnic groups within the polity. This development has informed incessant agitation for restructuring as a corrective measure for real or perceived marginalization and deprivation on the one hand, and on the other, to give more strength, power and resources to the regional groups in order to drive accelerated development. The geo-political complexities of Nigerian state have brought attention to the critical contemporary issues of regional insecurity and ethnic nationalism in Nigeria, as various regions of the federation clamour for political equity and socioeconomic justice. One of the earliest claims of political repression was in the 1940s by ethnic minorities across the nation. The consequence was their subsequent demand for states as a means of promoting ethnic autonomy and accessing national resources. In response to this the then colonial lords inaugurated the Willink's Commission in 1957 to investigate and ameliorate the

fears of the minorities. However, the commission failed to address the concerns of structural domination raised by the minorities, and it led to the deepening of ethnic tensions in the relationships of the minority with the majority in country. Nigeria's national unity has been challenging because the British colonial masters disintegrated ethnic groups who were traditionally bonded together, while those who were separate ethnic groups were forced together in new states, which have no common identities.

Regionalization of the country based on ethnicity into three regions by the Richard's constitution of 1946, though with the aim of promoting the unity of the nation and to adequately provide for the diverse ethnic cleavages imploded animosity among the people. Ebonine (2022) aver that ethnic nationalism was advanced by the British colonial masters, when they dissuaded the Northern elites from accepting the Portuguese-led missionary schools which brought the western education and which was embraced by other regions, so as to make the Northern region conservative. The amalgamation of the country of over 250 ethnic nationalities, with distinct cultural, religious, educational, social and political inclinations in 1914; and the introduction of indirect rule system by Lord Lugard did not help matters. The regionalization of Nigeria into three dominant ethnic groups did not go well with the minority ethnic groups, who felt suppressed and marginalized. They became agitated and it resulted into the first secessionist movement which was led by Isaac Boro of Niger Delta. This actually was the foundation for the clamour for self-determination in Nigeria.

Ifeanacho and Nwagwu (2009) lamented that the efforts to achieve nationalism in Nigeria have remained largely unrealized. Therefore, the challenge of integrating Nigeria as a nation is evidenced in the issue of minority exclusion/marginalization, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control and clamour for varying ethnic sovereignty; like the people of South East geopolitical zone. The inability of the different ethnic cleavages in Nigeria to achieve national identity prompted Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) to describe the situation as a political un-healthiness which according to them comprises major disintegrating factors of great dimension towards the peaceful and corporate existence of Nigeria. And in the researcher's opinion, drives ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity.

The nationalization of multifarious ethnic cleavages and regions that constitute Nigeria has been marred with a variety of mutual mistrust, suspicion, political acrimony, nepotism, and prejudices with various ethnic nationalities; a cry of socio-political and economic marginalization and injustices. The need for the evolution of a more inclusive and integrative structural framework that will recognize the heterogeneous composition and complexity of the nation called Nigeria, with a view of promoting unity in the people's diversity has become pertinent.

Balancing competing claims between minorities and majorities becomes crucial and challenging to building a heterogeneous society where multi-ethnic groups co-exist with a common citizenship.

Ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity in Nigeria convey a lack of political integration of the diverse ethnic groups of the most populous country in Africa (Aluko, 2003). The heterogeneous composition of Nigeria due to the amalgamation of multiethnic cleavages of different cultures, religions, and social entities marred the nation's political stability and social cohesion in the post-independence era. The researcher argues, that with certain statements made by the Nigeria founding fathers, Awolowo (1947) and Bello (1960) cited in Anderson (2016), who saw Nigeria state as a homogenous society instead of a heterogeneous society; there was no vision of integrating the ethnic groups in the pluralistic nation. This indeed laid a foundation for ethnic nationalism and introduced into the polity, ethnic rivalry and competition for power at the centre, access to resources, and political domination. The consequence has remained ethnic hegemony, socioeconomic and political marginalization, social injustice, inequality and ethic agitations.

Several ethnic groups in the nation, more especially Southeastern part of Nigeria have felt socio-politically marginalized and excluded in the nation. The Southeast geopolitical zone has perceived feelings of exclusion from the mainstream of the political system, and marginalization in social and economic infrastructural developments. This has been responsible for continual separatist agitation and nationalistic movements by certain elements from the zone.

Although Nigeria is bedevilled with ravaging security challenges which has continued to claim the lives of citizens and security officers in the Northeast and Northwest geopolitical zones of Nigeria, the most visible and outstanding region greatly prone to security challenges remains the southeast geopolitical zone. This region which was once regarded as a peaceful region, though with few cases of criminal activities such as armed robbery and kidnapping has been turned into a theatre of violent crisis which also paralyzed economic activities and peaceful development.

The renewed ethnic nationalistic movement by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) appears to have rebirthed various violent groups such as the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the security outfit of IPOB and the notorious unknown gunmen in the geopolitical zone. The gruesome activities of despoiling Fulani herdsmen who appear to have taken over the bushes in most communities (Adelana, 2022), in the geopolitical zone, killing, kidnapping and mutilating residents and travellers, and destroying farm lands, cannot be excluded. Their activities are mostly noticed in Abia, Imo, Enugu and Ebonyi States.

Many extant literatures on violent crisis in southeast geopolitical zone attribute the causes to perennial deprivation, injustice, inequality of socio-economic benefits, socio-political neglect, ethnicity, and political hegemony, the trauma of a lost war, militant herdsmen attack, distrust of government and politics of divide and rule (Babalola, 2019; Bird and Ottanelli, 2017; Ebonine, 2021; Ebonine & Akinyetun, 2021, Elumoye, 2021; Ezemenaka & Prouza, 2016; Ibeanu and Orji, 2016; Ojeleye, 2010; Oloyele, 2009). On the hand, the recurring security challenges in the region cannot be demystified from the opinions of the aforementioned scholars. It is being viewed from the prism of ethnic nationalistic movement as a response to perceived neglect, social inequality and deliberate state repression and economic retardation of the geopolitical zone by the federal government of Nigeria. It should be noted that the geopolitical zone survives through commerce, stampeding their sources of livelihood would be seen as the first strategy of weakening them, while massive killings will advance the second strategy of ethnic cleansing of the geopolitical zone. Against this backdrop, what is seen today as security challenges in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria could be termed the "survival of the fittest" of the people who are conscious of the pains of the civil war, the extent of their perceived socio-political marginalization and unjust treatments meted on them by the federal government of Nigeria. Despite the subsisting studies on ethnicity and regionalism in Nigeria, the persistent unresolved socioeconomic and political issues and the intricating implications for regional insecurity have not been empirically addressed. This study, therefore investigated the nexus between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity within Nigeria's heterogeneous composition, with specific focus on southeast geopolitical zone of the country. The overriding preoccupation of the study is that, the drivers of ethnic agitation in various segments of the country cannot be treated in isolation. Rather, the socioeconomic, constitutional, institutional and political problems instigating mutual distrusts in the country have to be addressed holistically by all stakeholders in the interest of national integration and articulated development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the driving forces of ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria?

2. To what extent does ethnic nationalism promote regional insecurity in the South-East, Nigeria?

3. What measures have successive national governments taken to address the factors instigating ethnic nationalism in the interest of regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria?

4. In what ways can ethnic nationalism influence and potentially enhance regional security in Southeast, Nigeria?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Investigate the driving forces of ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria.

2. Examine the extent ethnic Nationalism has promoted regional insecurity in the southeast.

3. Evaluate the measures of successive federal governments, has taken in addressing the factors instigating ethnic nationalism in the interest of regional insecurity in the southeast.

4. Interrogate the ways through which ethnic Nationalism can potentially enhance regional security in the southeast.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. Null Hypothesis (H_0):

There is no significant relationship between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria.

2. Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):

There is a significant relationship between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Ethnic Nationalism

The concept of ethnic nationalism has attracted recent discourses in the parlance of Nigeria's social sciences due to its implications on the peace, stability and national cohesion of the nation-state. Several scholars have offered various definitions to the concept. In political ideology, ethnic nationalism, also known as "ethnonationalism" is a form of nationalism wherein the nation and nationality are defined in terms of ethnicity (Smith, 1987), with emphasis on an ethnocentric approach to various political issues related to national identification of a particular ethnic group or people (Smith, 1981, p.18). According to Miller (2008), ethnic nationalism holds that nations are defined by common ancestry, language, and beliefs. Smith (1991) further explains that ethnic nationalism is an ideological movement aimed at attaining and maintaining the identity, unity (through social cohesion) and autonomy (through national self-determination) of a "nation", or a people united under a "national" banner. It is centred on the idea that ethnic groups have the right to self-determination. According to Safran (2008), ethnonationalism defines a collective of dispersed ethnic groups. In the mind of George (2015), the main aim of ethnic nationalism is that nations are defined by shared heritage, which usually include common language, common faith and common ethnic ancestry. Nwaoha, et.al (2022) defines ethnic nationalism as the allegiance of individual members of ethnic group to such group, having shared origins, tradition and having developed high level of consciousness on the factors that binds them

together in a given area. The study finds that there is always a fundamental consciousness of the ethnic group to think and belief that they are distinctive from others, and this ethnic consciousness and allegiance determine the level of co-operation and existence of these ethnic cleavages in a given period. Ethnic nationalism identifies a people of ethnic group of common descent bonded with common culture and distinctive ideology. Hence, ethnic nationalism believes that nations are defined by common ancestry, language and beliefs. It is based on the idea that ethnic groups have the right to self-determination, and this right can lead to a variety of different outcomes from a sovereign state to the establishment of self-governing bodies within the existing state. In the view of the researcher, ethnic nationalism is the promotion of ethnic identity and interest more than national identity. It is the definition of a nation-state in the light of people of ethnic descent, cultural bond, ancestral linkage, and distinctive ideology. Ethnic nationalism promotes ethnic competition for resources and power. It promotes heated politics and social tension among the various ethnic cleavages in the existing state. It is politicized ethnicity. The characteristic nature of ethnic nationalism borders on the fact that ethnic cleavages are entitled to self-determination. The right to self-determination varies from calls for self-regulated administrative bodies or right to autonomy within an existing nation-state, to autonomous entity separate from the existing state, to establishment of ethnic federalism with a plural society, to the institution of an independent sovereign state (Le Bosse, 2021).

Ethnic nationalism in Nigeria is dated to the colonial era, because before colonialism, the geopolitical entity called Nigeria was composed of various ethnic nationalities, villages and empires; and they existed as independent nations, different people, cultures, and traditions but were married together by the 1914 Amalgamation. Expatiating on the implications of this relationship, Ajayi (2013) contends that, this "marriage of strange communal bedfellows", led to the polarization of Nigerian society along ethnic divide, heightened by the threat of ethnic domination (hegemony) and has remained the challenge to national unity. Ethnic nationalism in Nigeria is traced back to the era of ethnic politics and violence evidenced in the first Republic, during the period of 1960 and 1970. The two bloody military coups of January 15 and July, 29 1966; and the Nigeria civil war between the defunct republic of Biafra and federal government of Nigeria created ethnic consciousness that stimulated inter-ethnic tensions, ethnic groupings and regional parties. The study finds that the reality of the pains of the civil war has resonated in the mind of every average South easterner, given birth to renewed ethnic agitations and regional insecurity. The unfortunate aspect of the war was that it wasn't on the issues of economic benefits, but ethnic nationality and religion. According to Heerten & Moses (2018), the war was casually adduced by religious clerics as a conflict between the minority Christian Biafra and majority Muslim-dominated Nigeria. To rightly put it, it was a fight against ethnic hegemony. Ethnic nationalism in this study therefore, means ethnic consciousness or struggles by perceived, dominated, marginalised, and oppressed ethnic group (s) for self-determination, political relevance, survival and or inclusiveness in the national spheres. Political exclusion of an ethnic group in the main stream politics leads to ethnic nationalism. This political exclusion provides a basis for the persistence of southeast geopolitical zone grievances and animosities, and the re-emergence of ethnic nationalistic movement, and consequent insecurity in the zone.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is more than just the composition of language, culture and history; it is about perception of identity by groups, family and community or attribution by outsiders (Agara & Ibebunjo, 2022). The feelings that one's social group or ethnic group has been marginalized due to preference given to an ethnic group against others simply defines ethnicity. Ethnicity is one of the keys to understanding Nigeria's pluralistic society. It distinguishes groupings of people who for historical reasons have come to be seen as distinctive by themselves and others-on the basis of locational origins and a series of other cultural markers. Ethnicity results from mere classification of people by others and it is assigned "according to the requirements of the classifiers" (Fowler, 1991; Staub, 1989 & Eriksen, 1996, p.8). Hence, "ethnic boundaries are between whoever people think they are between" (Fardon, 1987, p.176). Ethnicity therefore is the classification and promotion of social or ethnic group more than the other, or the exaltation of one's ethnic consciousness at the detriment of others, especially in a plural society. It marks groups of people who are historically connected disparate from others. It defines ethnic or racial affiliation. A cursory trace of the contours of ethnic tensions and conflicts in Nigeria as a postcolonial and heterogeneous state will reveal that it has many shared features with several other African states. About sixty years after gaining independence, Nigeria continues to grapple with numerous challenges that border on threats to the stability of the state, question its legitimacy, and reinforce loyalties to ethnic identities rather than the idea of a unified nation-state (Oluwaseyi, 2020, p.3). The study posits that ethnicity promotes tribal sentiment and divisive society in a political entity or nation-state. The instrumentalists' perspective to the study of

ethnicity is that it is the political elites' instrument of identity manipulation for their selfish interests. They (instrumentalists) see ethnicity as a vehicle for socio-political and economic competition, hence as political contingent, situational and circumstantial (Young, 1986).

It is pertinent to note that the present Nigerian political system evolved from the British colonialist constitutions, particularly the Bourdillion constitution of 1939 created a platform for regional government. The colonial masters encouraged ethnicity in Nigeria, through their divide and rule policies. The 1946 Richard constitution divided the country into three regions, namely North, East and West without laying emphasis on the heterogeneous, multicultural and diversity of the nation. Political parties that were formed then were thus based on the various regions created by the colonial masters. Three competing schools of thought have dominated the interpretations of the link between ethnic solidarity and the proclivity of ethnic nationalism. First, the primordialists see ethnicity as historically rooted and embedded in people's way of life and culture, and enforced by social institutions, collective myths and memories-developed from early socialization, and hence likely to continue over time. Second, instrumentalists perceive ethnicity as a platform for the trailing, mobilization, exploitation and manipulation to achieve individuals and groups vested interests. Third, social constructionists portray ethnicity as an invention of the human imagination, an intellectual construct devoid of objective realities (Agara, & Ibebunjo, 2022). In whichever way, ethnicity has a bearing with regional insecurity.

This study posits that ethnicity has been responsible for tension and political instability in a heterogeneous state, like Nigeria because it ensues suspicion, ethnic mistrust and bitterness, which often weaken efforts of achieving national unity. It further, considers ethnicity as a demonstration of cleavage (s) that promote exclusion or create distinctiveness of an ethnic group from the other ethnic groups, in a socioeconomic and political entity, in order to procure satisfaction with available scarce resources. Ethnicity therefore, is the mobilisation of ethnic groups by elites, coordinated on sentimental basis and illusive emotional sympathy to gain the group's support against the perceived majority oppressors, and for socio-political and economic benefits. The study also argues that politicised ethnicity generates into extreme ethnic nationalism, which displays in Nigerian state. However, ethnic accommodation or compromise may be a political resource, which can be deployed as a survival strategy for Nigerian nationalism. The political elites of various ethnic groups should play a brokerage, bridge-building function across the ethnic divide.

ETHNIC CONFLICT

The concept of ethnic conflict provides further understanding of how communal action is mobilized through collective identity for political reasons. The exploration of the relationship between contextual factors and the mobilization of identity categories gives credence to this concept. Many scholars have raised arguments on the very issue of ethnicity and ethnic conflict; such arguments border on the existence and meaning of ethnic or communal identities, and their inter-relationship with conflict contexts. They are of the opinion that categories of collective identity can be chosen by individuals or ethnic groups, imposed by those in positions of authority, or constituted in social interactions. This suggests multiple paths and roles for identity in this type of conflict. Situational factors and inter-group dynamics affect the potential for violent inter-group conflicts because they aggravate identity pursuits (Cavanaugh, 2000). For instance, socio-political and economic inequalities may cause ethnic groups to question the legitimacy and credibility of prevailing social institutions (Frank, 1967). Kempin (2023) opines that "ethnic conflicts are not specifically hinged on ethnic differences but on political, economic, cultural, territorial and social matters". Ethnic conflict is a dispute about important political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities (2003, p.82). Ethnic conflict occurs when people perceive their identity to be targeted or/and when people view the repressive state as an obstacle to achieving their ends (McPhail & McCarth, 2005, p.1). Cultural variations or differences is one of the prominent causes of ethnic conflicts. The colonial administration gave room for Nigeria's disunity through the imposition of multiple cultures, norms, values and traditions (Ali and Yahaya, 2019). Consequently, the various ethnic groups considered themselves as rivals and competitors rather than people with common foundation (Olasupo, Oladeji & Ijeoma, 2017). This competition and rivalry often result in violent conflicts among ethnic groups. This is the quest for separatist movements in Nigeria. It may encourage ethnic groups to take steps to provide for their own security apparatus, for instance, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); although it has not tamed the insecurity in the South East. Again, when insecurity exists, particularly in conjunction with relative deprivation, parties often engage in collective action against those perceived to be the cause of the deprivation (Rubenstein, 2001). Ethnic groups with strong and enduring cultural ties (identities based on common ancestry, a shared language, and a common belief system) have a solid foundation for mobilizing the collective or ethnic clamour, as do communities that feel that their common interest is not protected. This study avers that in Nigeria, ethnic conflicts have undermined nationalism

and further promoted the agitations for self-determination, claims and counter-claims of marginalization and socio-political exclusion. It has led to extreme violence, intense suffering, ethnic hatred and wanton destruction of national assets and human lives. Ethnic conflict in this study therefore, is a disagreement or opposition between two or more ethnic groups as result of incompatible goals, attitudes, emotions, and struggle for power and scarce resources. It is a responsiveness of an ethnic group towards a perceived ethnic hegemony by other ethnic nationality or when its pursued goals and interests are considered blocked by another ethnic nationality.

REGIONALISM

The emergence of regionalism and regional arrangements in international affairs is a significant and fascinating phenomenon in the post-World War II era. Regionalism within international relations can be characterized as the manifestation of collective identity and shared interests. It involves the establishment and execution of institutions that reflect regional identity and influence actions within that specific geographical area (Bloor, 2022). Regionalism emerged as a distinct post-World War II phenomenon, initially based on geographical proximity, socio-cultural homogeneity, economic transactions, and security concerns. Its early formations were largely influenced by political and ideological contexts during the Cold War, as noted by Barbieri (2019, p.45). In spite of a global interest in regionalism there is no consensus conceptual definition of regionalism, this is because of lack of agreement on what constitutes a region. Regions are mostly defined in terms of ethnic groups located in the same geographic space; but where one region ends and the next begins is sometimes unclear. According to Russett (1967), a region is defined based on geographic proximity, social and cultural homogeneity, shared political attitudes and political institutions, and economic interdependence. Thompson (1973) asserts that regions include states that are geographically proximate, interact extensively, and have shared perceptions of various phenomena. The behavioural definition of region has gone beyond the context of geography to assert that political practice and interaction can alter region's composition. According to Katzenstein (2005, p.9), "regions are politically made". Regionalism is institutionalized practice and regionalisation is "a process that engages actors" (Katzenstein, 2006, p.1). In the view of Munakata (2006) regionalism involves institutions established by governments to provide regional economic integration but emphasizes the varying degrees of commitment by members; for example, African regional communities.

Regionalism is a political ideology that seeks to increase the political power, influence, and self-determination of people of one or more subnational or ethnic regions. It focuses on the "development of a political or social system based on one or more" regions (Hudson, 1991) and/or the national, normative, or economic interests of a specific region, group of regions, or another subnational entity gaining strength from or aiming to strengthen the "consciousness of and loyalty to a distinct region with homogeneous population" (Hudson, 1991), similarly to nationalism. For the purpose of this study, regionalism can simply mean the struggle of a part of the nation to impose its interest on the rest of the nation or the supremacy of regional interests. It is the consciousness and loyalty of a people to a distinct geographic space with a homogeneous population. It is the development of a political or racial system based on one or more region. Regionalism, as a political ideology prioritizes the interests and development of a specific region, often within a larger nation-state, such as Niger Delta region, Southeast region, and others in Nigeria. In Nigeria, regionalism is often driven by a strong sense of regional identity, where people have sense of ethnic and cultural affiliations. The researcher argues that regionalists advocate greater political autonomy, ranging from a call for devolution of central powers to outright independence or secession, which has been paramount in the ethnic separatists' movements in Nigeria. However, regionalism can also focus on promotion of regional economic development, for the purpose of improving the living standards and opportunities of the people resident in the region. It is important to recall that the regional regime, which was introduced in Nigeria, the colonial masters was to promote economic development in the then, three regions (North, West and East) of Nigeria. Scholars have given varying reasons for regionalism, ranging from geographical proximity, to historical factors, socio-cultural factors, economic factors and political factors. In some contexts, regionalism is intertwined with sectionalism. As a doctrine or political tendency, regionalism defends that the state government must consider the well-being and the aspirations of each region or/and ethnic group.

This study argues that regionalism has become a way of organising ethnic groups within geographically and cultural proximate areas. According to Adelana (2022), regionalism as political opportunity structures, affect domestic politics by redistributing resources between actors, and thereby strengthens executive capacity of political elites to advance their selfish interests. In the view of Ebonine (2021), regionalism gives capacity to domestic or regional groups to exploit opportunities for resource control and access to regional natural endowments, without constraint. This presupposes the regional agitation for control of resources in Nigeria. This study further advances that regionalism as a collective set of ideas, values, concepts, and goals that

are used to shape, sustain, or modify a specific region or a certain geographical proximate ethnic cleavage(s). Regionalism especially in Nigerian context, emphasizes the idea that people living in a particular geographic proximity share a common identity based on their distinct characteristics, which include language, culture history and socio-political heritage. This shared identity creates a sense of togetherness among the people of ethnic descent.

SECURITY

The concept of security is modern in academics. Security is defined as protection from, or resilience against potential harm (or other unwanted coercion) caused by others by restraining the freedom of others to act. Referents of security may be persons and social groups, objects and institutions, ecosystems, or any other entity or phenomenon, vulnerable to unwanted change. Security is seen as a situation in which citizens of any country is at liberty to go about their normal daily activities without threat to their lives and means of livelihood; safety from bodily harm, disease and human rights violations wherever they may find themselves (Adeleke, 2013).

Security is regarded as protection from hostile forces and it includes the absence of harm; freedom from want or availability of essential good (food security); resilience against potential damages or risks, and as a state of mind (emotional security). The term also refers to acts and systems whose purpose may be to provide security for instance, security companies and agencies, and security apparatus. Security can be physical or virtual in the modern world. Insecurity therefore, imply situations when citizens are not free to walk, work peacefully or harmoniously without fear of intimidation, molestation, infliction of bodily injuries wherever they find themselves (Iwundu & ThomOtuya, 2013, Ebonine & Akinyetun, 2021). In other words, they constitute conditions that create or cause anxiety, fears, intimidation, threat, harm etc to lives and property. Security challenges have continued to show an upward trend as they have taken different forms and dimensions ranging from acts of militancy and vandalism of oil installations in South-South, massive robbery in Southwest, kidnapping in the South-East and terrorist acts, herdsmen attacks on farmers as well as cattle rustling especially in Northern Nigeria (Adebakin, 2012, Babalola, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relative Deprivation Theory is adopted as the theoretical framework of this research. Relative deprivation postulates a subjective state that shapes emotions, cognitions and social behaviour. RD challenges the conventional wisdom about the importance of absolute deprivation for collective action and individual deviance. As defined by social theorists and political scientists, relative deprivation theory suggests that people who feel they are being deprived of something considered essential in their society (e.g. money, rights, political voice, status) will organize or join social movements dedicated to obtaining the things of which they feel deprived. In some cases, relative deprivation has been cited as a factor driving incidents of social disorder like rioting, looting, terrorism, and civil wars. In this nature, social movements and their associated disorderly acts can often be attributed to the grievances of people who feel they are being denied resources to which they are entitled. Another viewpoint on relative deprivation was developed by American author and professor of political science Ted Robert Gurr. In his 1970 book Why Men Rebel, Gurr explains the link between relative deprivation and political violence. Gurr examines the probability that the frustration-aggression mechanism, triggered by feelings of relative deprivation, is the primary source of the human capacity for violence. While such frustration does not always result in violence, Gurr contends that the longer individuals or groups are subjected to relative deprivation the more likely it is that their frustration will lead to anger and ultimately violence. Gurr contends that people are more likely to revolt when they lose hope of attaining their societal values, and the intensity of discontent/frustration '[varies] with the severity of depression and inflation' (1971, p.87). Ethnicity, Gurr asserts 'is the obvious basis for mobilizing oppositions' against the state. He states that the higher the degree of frustration, the greater the political instability. The failure of the state to meet people's value expectation leads to disorientation amongst the citizenry and discontentment on the part of the people towards the state (Saleh, 2011, p.236). Hence, the re-emergence of ethnic agitation, and consequent regional insecurity in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The theory of relative deprivation states that when an individual or group compares themselves to another salient individuals or groups and in this comparison find themselves lacking, discriminated, this leads to feelings of angry frustration (Power, 2018). Regional insecurity occurs when people within an ethnic group perceived that their identity is threatened. This perceived threat always trigger a collective feeling of relative deprivation, either socially, economically, politically or culturally. Gurr further suggests that, the existence frustration leads to some form of violence (Gurr, 1971, p.33), and 'the greater the intensity of deprivation, the greater the magnitude of violence (1971, p.9). Relative Deprivation Theory could be used to link the consistent agitations of the people of South East (Igbo ethnic group) against their marginalization and exclusion by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This research which is a qualitative research approach used a Survey and a cross-sectional design to collect data. The Survey design conducted the large sampled population from the five states in Southeast geopolitical zone as the study area. The population is 21,854,126, according to the 2019 projected population census of Southeastern states, published by the National Bureau of Statistics, Demographic Statistics Bulletin, 2020. The survey research design utilized both primary and secondary sources with systematic random and purposive sampling techniques for one thousand, five hundred and forty (1540) copies of questionnaire distributed out of which one thousand, two hundred and sixty (1260) copies were retrieved.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question 1 What are the driving forces of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria?

This question is considered on the basis of the first objective the study which is to identify the drivers of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria.

Table 1
The driving forces of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria?

Sub-Questions & Indicators	SA	A	NS	SD	D	Total	Mean	SD
Exclusion of any integral part of the nation causes ethnic nationalism	1000 79.4%	200 15.9%	20 1.6%	5 0.4%	35 2.7%	1260 100%	4.69	0.78
Unequal distribution of social amenities, social injustice and unfair treatment provoke ethnic agitation for self-determination	1100 87.3%	150 11.9%	2 0.2%		8 0.6%	1260 100%	4.85	0.45
Ethnic politics, nepotism, corruption, lack of good leadership on the part of leaders influence ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity	600 47.6%	500 39.7%	50 4.0%	40 3.2%	70 5.5%	1260 100%	4.21	1.05
Ethnic domination breeds ethnic nationalism and disunity in Nigeria	1050 83.3%	200 15.9%	2 0.2%	4 0.3%	4 0.3%	1260 100%	4.82	0.46
Socio-political marginalization and minority question promote ethnic nationalism and regional security.	800 63.5%	450 35.7%	6 0.4%	2 0.2%	2 0.2%	1260 100%	4.62	0.52
Display of unfair treatment of Federal Character Commission instigates regional disaffection in Nigeria	400 31.7%	800 63.5%	40 3.2%	10 0.8%	10 0.8%	1260 100%	4.25	0.63

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results indicate that respondents perceive social inequality, ethnic domination, and exclusion of integral national parts as the most significant factors contributing to ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity. The high means and low SDs for these sub-questions signify a strong and consistent consensus among the respondents. However, issues related to leadership failures and ethnic politics exhibit slightly more diverse opinions, as indicated by a lower mean and higher SD. This variability suggests that while these factors are important, they may not be universally seen as the primary causes. The findings imply that to mitigate ethnic nationalism and promote unity, policy interventions should prioritise addressing social inequality, socio-political marginalisation, and ensuring inclusive governance. Additionally, enhancing the fairness of federal character policies could reduce regional disaffection.

Research Question 2: To what extent ethnic nationalism has promoted regional insecurity in the South-East Nigeria?

This section is based on the second objective of the study which investigated how ethnic nationalism has promoted regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria.

Table 2
How Ethnic Nationalism Promoted Regional Insecurity in Southeast zone

Sub-Questions & Frequency	SA	A	NS	SD	D	Total	Mean	SD
Ethnic nationalism contributed to regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria	800 63.5%	300 23.8%	50 4.0%	40 3.2%	70 5.5%	1260 100%	4.37	1.08
The resurgence of IPOB is contributing to insecurity in Southeast	400 3.7%	700 55.5%	40 3.2%	50 4.0%	70 5.6%	1260 100%	4.04	1.00
The unresolved Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's case has contributed to the insecurity in Southeast	1000 79.4%	150 11.9%	30 2.3%	40 3.2%	40 3.2%	1260 100%	4.61	0.93
External forces are contributing to the regional insecurity in Southeast	400 31.7%	600 47.6%	100 7.9%	80 6.4%	80 6.4%	1260 100%	3.92	1.10
Inability of Southeast region to produce neither President nor Vice President of Nigeria since the Fourth Republic has influenced Security in the region	1100 87.3%	100 7.9%	20 1.6%	10 0.8%	30 2.4%	1260 100%	4.77	0.74

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results highlight that political marginalisation and the unresolved Nnamdi Kanu case are perceived as the most significant factors contributing to regional insecurity in Southeast Nigeria. The consistent agreement on these points indicates that policies promoting political inclusivity and resolving high-profile legal cases are essential for restoring peace and stability.

Additionally, the relatively high variability in opinions on IPOB's resurgence and external influences suggests a need for comprehensive dialogue to understand the diverse perspectives on these issues. Engaging with community leaders and stakeholders to address perceived external interferences and concerns related to IPOB could help build consensus and reduce tensions.

Hypothesis 1

The null hypothesis—There is no relationship between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity in South-East Nigeria.

In other to test the hypothesis, a simple regression was used in testing the relationship between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity in South-East Nigeria.

Table 3
Simple Regression Result

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Df1	Df2	Significance (p-value)	Durbin-Watson
	0.85	0.72	0.70	0.30	1	1258	0.001*	1.95

Predictor: Ethnic Nationalism
Dependent: Regional Security
    * P < 0.05

The simple regression analysis shows that the correlation coefficient R = 0.85, which suggests a strong positive relationship between ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity. This means that as ethnic nationalism increases, regional insecurity tends to improve (or vice versa). The R Square value of 0.72 indicates that approximately 72% of the variation in regional insecurity can be explained by ethnic nationalism.

Research Question 3: What measures have successive national governments in Southeast Nigeria taken to address the factors instigating ethnic nationalism in the interest of regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria?

Table 4
The measures Successive Federal governments have taken in addressing factors that instigated ethnic nationalism in the interest of regional insecurity in Southeast.

Sub-questions & Frequency	SA	A	NS	SD	D	Total	Mean	SD
Increase of insecurity and social unrest in Nigeria could be attributed to socio-political marginalization	500 39.7%	600 47.6%	50 4.0%	70 5.5%	40 3.2%	1260 100%	4.15	0.96
Kinetic approach to conflict resolution is a challenge for the stakeholders in mitigating regional insecurity in Southeast, Nigeria	600 47.6%	400 31.7%	100 7.9%	80 6.4%	80 6.4%	1260 100%	4.08	1.17
Lack of dialectic response is a challenge of the successive federal government in mitigating regional insecurity in Southeast	800 63.5%	300 23.8%	50 4.0%	40 3.2%	70 5.5%	1260 100%	4.37	1.08
Prejudice of Biafra War is a challenge for Stakeholders in mitigating regional insecurity in Southeast	560 44.4%	400 31.7%	150 11.9%	70 5.6%	80 6.4%	1260 100%	4.02	1.16
Inability of the stakeholders to deal with unemployment, and social vices is a challenge in mitigating regional insecurity in Southeast	1000 79.4%	150 11.9%	30 2.3%	40 3.2%	40 3.2%	1260 100%	4.61	0.93

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The findings suggest that respondents generally perceive socio-political marginalization, inadequate dialogue, and unresolved socio-economic challenges as significant contributors to insecurity. Furthermore, the contentious perception of using force-based conflict resolution methods points to the necessity of adopting more balanced and dialogue-driven approaches. Addressing unemployment and tackling social vices appear to be the most urgent, as highlighted by the highest mean score, indicating that socioeconomic empowerment could significantly reduce regional insecurity.

Research Question 4: In what ways can ethnic nationalism influence and potentially enhance regional security in Southeast Nigeria?

This section is centred on the fourth objective of the study, which interrogated the modalities through which ethnic nationalism can enhance regional security in the Southeast. The analysis therefore, reveals how ethnic nationalism can accelerate regional security in the region.

Table 5
How Ethnic Nationalism Can Enhance Regional Security

Sub-questions & Frequency	SA	A	NS	SD	D	Total	Mean	SD
Empowering regional security networks will enhance regional security in Southeast, Nigeria	300 23.8%	700 55.6%	100 7.9%	110 8.7%	50 4.0%	1260 100%	3.87	1.00
Employing non-kinetic approach to conflict resolution by Stakeholders will enhance regional security in Southeast	800 63.5%	300 23.8%	70 5.5%	50 4.0%	40 3.2%	1260 100%	4.40	0.99
Developing a federal Constitution which promotes democratic tenets and regional autonomy will solve the marginalization question and reduce ethnic nationalism	1000 79.4%	100 7.9%	50 4.0%	40 3.2%	70 5.5%	1260 100%	4.52	1.09
Overhauling the federal security agencies will enhance regional security in Southeast	700 55.6%	400 31.7%	50 4.0%	80 6.4%	30 2.3%	1260 100%	4.32	0.98
Ethnicization of resource control will eliminate the socio-political marginalization and enhance regional security in Southeast, Nigeria	600 47.6%	500 39.7%	10 0.8%	100 7.9%	50 4.0%	1260 100%	4.19	1.06
Unity of the people of Southeast Nigeria will enhance the security of the region	560 44.4%	100 7.9%	300 23.8%	200 15.9%	100 7.9%	1260 100%	3.65	1.38

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The findings highlight the importance of non-kinetic approaches and constitutional reform in addressing regional insecurity. Empowering local security networks and enhancing unity among the people of the Southeast are also seen as crucial, though responses show some variability, indicating diverse perspectives within the region. To improve security in the Southeast, policymakers should consider adopting non-violent conflict resolution methods, restructuring federal systems to address marginalization, and fostering greater community cohesion.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

The study reveals that ethnic nationalism in a pluralistic society as Nigeria is inevitable due to ethnic competition for resources and struggle for power control in federalism system of government. The drivers of ethnic nationalism can be summarized as **primordial sentiments, group solidarity and social movements, cultural affinity, economic and socio-political deprivation.** These are manifest in unequal distribution of social amenities, social injustice and unfairness; exclusion of any integral ethnic region of the nation, ethnic domination, socio-political marginalization, and minority question; ethnic politics, nepotism, corruption, lack of good governance and political will on the part of national leaders which negatively influenced regional security in the southeast geopolitical zone. The research found that ethnic nationalism and regional insecurity have negative consequences on the unity of Nigeria. The emergence of IPOB as a neo-Biafra movement in the southeast geopolitical zone and activities of Eastern Security Network exacerbated ethnic tensions and security challenges in the zone.

This study, therefore, advances the thesis that holistic socioeconomic, constitutional, institutional, and political responses to ethnic agitations by the custodians of state power are the antidotes to regional security threats and ethnic nationalism in Nigeria. Thus: recommending that:

1. Appropriate democratic institutions which will address all the driving forces of ethnic nationalism and regional security should be in place for political accommodation and management of social diversities and ethnic differences.

2. Southeast ethnic nationality should employ the use of dialogue to express their perceived feelings of exclusion, deprivation and alienation instead of the violent agitation or extremism, while various stakeholders should lend hearing ears to the grievances that led to the resurgence of ethnonationalist movements like the (IPOB), which promoted insecurity in the region.

3. Government should employ non-kinetic approach to conflict resolution for effective result.

4. The regional security outfits should be institutionalized to network with the existing federal security agencies to obtain a maximum security at the regional or zonal levels. Moving forward, power devolution at the centre; legalization of regional security outfits, and elimination of ethnic primordial sentiments will be productive for self-sufficiency; this of course will reduce dependency on the central government.

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