

REGIONAL AGITATION AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIO-POLITICAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined regional agitation and its impact on sociopolitical stability in Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study: the factors responsible for regional agitations among Igbo and Yoruba nations, the Yoruba's and Igbo's level of awareness of regional agitations, IPOB and the Yoruba nation's agitations for regional autonomy have an influence on political stability in Nigeria and the different strategies adopted by the Igbo and Yoruba agitators.

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population covered all Yoruba and Igbo residents in the Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State. A sample of two hundred (200) respondents was randomly selected for the study through the use of a simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. The data collected were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages. The findings revealed that inequitable injustice in the administrative, political, social, and economic configurations in the existing federal structure is the major factor responsible for regional agitations among the Igbo and Yoruba nations. Second, they revealed that, due to a weak institutional system and corruption in the current system, political stability in Nigeria has been affected. Thirdly, revealed that the issue of resource control and equity in the distribution of national wealth is the greatest medium through which the Yoruba and Igbo are aware of regional agitations. Finally, the study revealed that one major strategy adopted by the Igbo and Yoruba agitators is the establishment of electronic media and other social media platforms to make their agitation known.

Based on the study's findings, it was recommended that, to end this agitation and achieve stable political stability, there should be equality, justice, and fairness in the administrative, political, social, and economic configurations within the existing federal structure. In addition, the issue of resource control and equal distribution of national wealth should be addressed, and there should be a balance in the distribution of national resources and political appointments across all regions and tribes. Government institutions must be more responsive to their tasks and functions, and their level of corruption in the current system should be minimised, if not eradicated.

Keywords: Political Stability, Regional Agitation, Biafra, Oduduwa.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Nigerian federalism is one of separatist agitations. This may not be surprising to keen observers of Nigeria's political development, given the diversity of its people and the disparities in demography, land mass, natural resource endowment, and educational, social, and economic development. Arguably, these disparities have created and continue to sustain mutual mistrust, acrimony, and fear of ethnic domination not only among Nigeria's 250 ethnic groups but also among the majority groups and between them and the ethnic minorities. The centrifugal forces generated by Nigeria's ethno-cultural diversity have continued to ignite separatism in the federation, with each disadvantaged ethnic group agitating for greater space for self-expression. The military junta, which ruled Nigeria for the longest period since post-independence, effectively suppressed these tendencies through force without necessarily exterminating them (Adangor, 2017). However, the return to democratic rule since May 29, 1999, has witnessed a resurgence of separatist agitations, which have polarised the federation along ethnic, regional, and religious lines, thus supporting Emerson's view that the introduction of democratic institutions may sometimes accentuate existing ethnic divisions in ethnically divided polities (Abony, 2011).

The negative fallout from the situation has not only promoted disunity and mistrust among Nigerians but has also manifested in a resentful disposition towards the Nigerian state among nationalities that feel disadvantaged and aggrieved, remaining in Nigeria. To this end, regional agitations, which have been a regular feature of Nigerian politics, remain a veritable tool for expressing discontent with the Nigerian state and a platform for demanding adequate political accommodation. With the aid of hindsight, these regional agitations, which date back to the era of British colonial administration, cannot be adequately explained without reference to poor leadership and the absence of an ideology with mass appeal (Ekpo, 2018). The interplay of power and forces between different ethnic nationalities that resort to separatist agitations constantly threatens the continued existence of the Nigerian state. Unfortunately, the dominant political elite have not found any practical solutions to this challenge.

The 1999 constitution, which is grounded in the rule of law, raised hopes that the enormous challenges besetting the Nigerian state, including separatist agitations, would be addressed concretely. It was expected that democratic practice, with its ideals of fairness, freedom, justice, equity, and participation, could provide a platform for accommodation that could address the issue. However, events since then have shown that the challenge, rather than being solved, has been exacerbated. By 1999, the Odua People's Congress was the main group making separatist demands because of the annulment of the June 12, 1993, election, which was believed to have been won by the late MKO Abiola, a Yoruba from the Southwest. Today, a plethora of separatist groups and social movements with diverse aims and targets

exist across the country's six geopolitical zones. Alumona and Azom (2012) opined that the division of the country into six geopolitical zones (although not constitutionally recognised, but which has become a platform for political accommodation by the government) seems to have aggravated the proliferation of separatist groups since it has made ethnic mobilisation a bit easier for the specific ethnic groups occupying the different geopolitical zones.

The major reasons for this agitation are a loss of confidence in the nation's political and economic exclusion from the Commonwealth of Nigeria. These same feelings of exclusion are also noted in the South West of the Nation, with calls and clamours for restructuring stemming from perceived marginalisation and exclusion from the Nation's political, social, and economic wealth. It is the negation of the overall and collective interest of the people that has fuelled agitation by Southeastern and Southwestern people for a nation of their own (Ojiako, 2019). The inability of the Nigerian state as a whole to address poverty and underdevelopment across virtually all parts of the country, particularly in the Southeast, where the major source of national wealth is extracted, has created tension, insecurity, and instability in the polity. As noted by various scholars, the high level of poverty, economic degradation, and lack of basic social amenities stem from the bad governance structure and leadership failure across many African societies, particularly the Nigerian society, which remains a source of conflict and tension in most African societies. This resulted in tension, frustration, and political agitation in most parts of the nation, particularly in the Biafra agitation and, more recently, the Yoruba Nation agitation, mostly by the Igbos and Yoruba, as well as several other agitations across the nation (Olomojobi, 2019). Another reason for IPOB's agitation is the region's marginalisation from occupying the top seat of the nation (the presidency) since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999.

It is within this context that we can locate separatist agitations among the Igbos ethnic group in the Southeast and the Yoruba Nation in the Southeast, Nigeria. The existence of separatist movements such as the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) all point to the perceived feelings of marginalisation and discrimination of the Igbos. These ill feelings, which are part of the issues that led to the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War between 1967 and 1970, have persisted to date. The post-war character of Nigerian politics, in which the Igbos' ethnic group appears to have been permanently denied the apex political position, has not helped matters. Ironically, despite the cries of marginalisation among the Igbos, the ideology and modus operandi of these separatist movements have always conflicted with that of the mainstream Igbos political elite and leadership. Hence, they often appear to speak in discordant tunes (Sottilita, 2013).

Meanwhile, in recent times, IPOB and the Yoruba Nation agitators have stepped up their struggle for the actualisation of the sovereign state of Biafra and Oduduwa Nation through protests and other forms of

social mobilisation. The protests triggered tension and heightened security, with security agencies applying excessive force to quell the protests. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a secessionist movement based in South East Nigeria to restore the defunct Biafra, albeit through peaceful means, and the Oduduwa Nation as well. The groups are an offshoot of a similar group, the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), with the same objectives as the IPOB but in a less radical manner. In fact, it was the ‘weakness’ in the modus operandi of MASSOB in pursuing its objectives that paved the way for the hysteria of the more radical IPOB as “an undisputable champion, fronting the Igbos secessionist cause” (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018). The objective of the group, inter alia, is to push for, facilitate, and advocate for the Igbos’ right to self-determination, while advocating for the rights and fundamental freedoms of the remnants of the Biafrans who are scattered across the world as refugees and people in self-exile. Generally, the agitation for the restoration of Biafra is a product of the Nigerian government’s failure to create a sustainable transitional justice system after the 30 months Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970).

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Oduduwa Republic agitators are separatist groups that agitate for the self-determination of their people. Studies have shown that agitation by various groups worldwide affects the political stability of those countries (Shehu, Othman, & Osman, 2017). There is evidence of the unfair treatment of the Igbos in the present political dispensation. Analysts have noted indicators such as a lack of economic opportunities, a palpable degree of political exclusion, unequal development, and a lack of federal government presence. The Igbos feel relatively deprived at the economic, political, cultural, and social levels (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018). The victim age of horizontal inequality meted against the Igbos by other groups in Nigeria (and in the case of IPOB, Hausa-Fulani) is the force behind the emergence of groups such as IPOB to agitate and aggravate a favourable recognition and redistribution of national resources or a breakaway of the Igbos from the Nigerian state to form the ideal and utopian state of Biafra (Ekpo & Agorye, 2019). It is against this background that this study shall examine the impact of sub-national agitations on socio-political stability in Nigeria, with a focus on the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a case study, given their ongoing agitation from the Southeastern part of the country.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The increasing drums of separatism are being beaten by several ethnocultural and militant groups, including the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), the Niger Delta Avengers, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, and the Oduduwa Nation led by Mr Sunday Adeyemo, popularly known as Sunday Igboho. The major issues of concern raised by the IPOB from the South East are issues of the

marginalization of their region in the political affairs of the country and the allocation of resources, while the Yoruba agitator for the Oduduwa Nation based their agitation majorly on the issue of insecurity within the Southwestern States, Apart from the issues pointed out, other reasons for the agitation in both the South West and South East are the issues of imbalance in political appointment, allocation of national resources, favouritism and nepotism, as well as the poor growth of the country's development in some key sectors of the country, such as education and health sectors. Another problem of concern is fiscal federalism and the weak institutions of government.

Although these analyses are rich and revealing, they suffer from disjointed empiricism and are thus unable to adequately illuminate the renewed Biafra and Oduduwa Nation agitations. Thus, addressing this knowledge gap is needed to further enrich the extant literature.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the factors responsible for regional agitations among the Igbos and Yoruba nations.
2. to examine the Yoruba's and Igbos' level of awareness for regional agitations
3. To examine how IPOB and the Yoruba nations' agitations for regional influence threaten Nigeria's political stability.
4. to examine the different strategies adopted by the Igbo and Yoruba agitators.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors responsible for regional agitations among the Igbo and Yoruba nations?
2. What is the level of awareness of regional agitations among the Yoruba and Igbo?
3. Do IPOB and the Yoruba nation's agitations for regional influence threaten Nigeria's political stability?
4. Are there any differences in the strategies adopted by the Igbos and Yoruba agitators?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it contributes to efforts to find a lasting solution to regional agitation in Nigeria.

This is because many previous studies have glossed over the role regional agitation played in Nigeria's socio-political stability. This research will also assist the government in understanding the main causes of IPOB agitation and its effects on Nigeria's national unity. It will also be of immense benefit to the government to gear up its response to regional imbalances and the strategies to be adopted for different agitations and demands across Nigeria, as this will help foster national unity and political stability. This

makes the research significant because it seeks to examine the causes and impact of regional agitation on socio-political stability in Nigeria. This study is significant because it contributes to the existing body of knowledge and provides a tool for students, scholars, and other researchers interested in this or related subject matter.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The design is appropriate, as the study is descriptive and an investigation in which data are collected from respondents to describe the population on the same variable using a questionnaire. The study population includes all Yoruba and Igbo residents in the Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State. Simple random techniques were used to select two hundred (200) respondents, consisting of one hundred (100) Yoruba and one hundred (100) Igbos within the Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo State.

The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections. Section "A" of the questionnaire was used to gather information about the respondents, while section "B" was designed to collect information from the respondents regarding the provided items. Section "A" consists of 4 total items, and Section "B" consists of five (5) items for each of the research questions. The instrument underwent face validation testing. The research was adequately checked and validated by the researcher's senior professors of the specialised area, and contributions and corrections were incorporated into the final draft. Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results after repeated trials. The test-retest method was used to assess data reliability. Responses from the two tests were correlated using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, with a coefficient of 0.75 expected to make it reliable. For data analysis, the responses were coded. The collected data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using frequency counts and simple percentages. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographic data, while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse items related to each research question.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the factors responsible for regional agitations among the Igbos and the Yoruba nations?

Table 1:

S/N	STATEMENTS.	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		$\bar{x}$	SD
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
1	Inequitable injustices in the administrative, political, social and economic configurations in the existing federal structure	83	41.5	93	46.5	20	10.0	4	2.0	3.49	.89
2	Disrespect for the federal character principle	74	37.0	60	30.0	46	23.0	20	10.0	3.28	.71
3	Incessant cases of religious and ethnic crises in the present system	42	21.0	31	15.5	51	25.5	76	38.0	2.55	1.16
4	Political exclusion and marginalisation of certain groups	55	27.5	66	33.0	40	20.0	39	19.5	2.53	1.21
5	Insecurity of the lives and property of people across the entire country	62	31.0	88	44.0	25	12.5	25	12.5	2.57	1.18

Weighted mean score = **2.92**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results in Table 2 reveal the respondents' responses toward the factors responsible for regional agitations among the Igbos and Yoruba nations, with a weighted mean score of 2.92, which is higher than the standard mean score of 2.50. All of the items from 1-8 depict higher mean scores of 3.49, 3.28, 2.55, 2.53, 2.57, 3.22, 3.16, and 2.57, respectively, indicating that all items are the factors responsible for regional agitations among the Igbos and Yoruba nations. Meanwhile, item 1, which has the highest mean score of 3.49, shows that inequitable injustices in the administrative, political, social, and economic configurations in the existing federal structure are the major factors responsible for regional agitations among the Igbos and Yoruba nations.

Research Question Two: Showing the Yoruba's and Igbos' level of awareness for regional agitations

Table 2:

S/N	STATEMENTS.	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		$\bar{x}$	SD
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
9	Incessant abuse of the principal federal character	51	25.5	76	38.0	42	21.0	31	15.5	2.55	1.16
10	Intra and inter-party squabbles of party politics since independence	55	27.5	81	40.5	52	26.0	22	11.0	2.74	1.11
11	Pre and post-election violence in various parts of the nation	44	22.0	78	39.0	40	20.0	38	19.0	2.71	1.13
12	The issue of resource control and equity in the distribution of the national wealth	83	41.5	93	46.5	20	10.0	4	2.0	3.23	.89
13	Low literacy levels of the generality of Nigerians and the absence of adequate security	62	31.0	88	44.0	25	12.5	25	12.5	2.57	1.18

Weighted mean score = **2.75**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The result in Table 3 revealed the respondents' responses toward the Yoruba's and Igbos' level of awareness for regional agitations with a weighted mean score of 2.75, which is higher than the standard mean score of 2.50. All of the items from 9-13 depict higher means scores of 2.55, 2.74, 2.71, 3.23 and 2.57, respectively, indicating that all items show the Yoruba's and Igbos' level of awareness for regional agitations. Item 12, which has the highest mean score of 3.23, indicated that the issue of resource control and equity in the distribution of the national wealth is the greatest medium through which the Yoruba and Igbos are aware of regional agitations.

Research Question Three: Showing the Igbos' and Yorubas' nation's agitations for regional influence and political stability in Nigeria

Table 3:

S/N	STATEMENTS.	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		$\bar{x}$	SD
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
14	Nepotism and favouritism in their region for national benefits	51	25.5	89	44.5	45	22.5	15	7.5	2.78	.96
15	Marginalisation and neglect of their region for the positions of political power	69	34.5	79	39.5	30	15.0	22	11.0	2.58	.94
16	Underdevelopment and poor governance	56	28.0	80	40.0	54	27.0	20	10.0	2.65	.84
17	Imbalance in the revenue-sharing formula	77	38.5	87	43.5	20	10.0	15	7.5	2.67	.73
18	Weak institutional system and corruption	82	41.0	94	47.0	20	10.0	4	2.0	2.83	.79

Weighted mean score = **2.70**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The result in Table 4 revealed that the respondents' responses toward the Igbos' and Yoruba nation's agitations for the region influence political stability in Nigeria, with a weighted mean score of 2.70, which is higher than the standard mean score of 2.50. All of the items from 14-18 depict higher means scores of 2.78, 2.58, 2.65, 2.67 and 2.83, respectively, indicating that all items are Igbos' and Yoruba's nation's agitations for regional influence on political stability in Nigeria. However, Item 18, which has the highest mean score of 2.83, indicated that as a result of a weak institutional system and corruption in the current system, has affected the political stability in Nigeria.

Research Question Four: Showing strategies adopted by the Igbos and Yoruba agitators

Table 4:

S/N	STATEMENTS.	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		$\bar{x}$	SD
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
19	Both the IPOB and Yoruba agitators disrespect human rights through the sit-at-home order.	51	25.5	69	34.5	33	16.5	47	23.5	2.59	.21
20	They both created awareness through social media, print and electronic media	79	39.5	88	44.0	21	10.5	12	6.0	3.04	.80
21	They both adopted the strategy of closure of major roads to raise their voices and express their reasons for the agitation	57	28.5	68	34.0	39	19.5	36	18.0	3.09	.59
22	IPOB established an electronic media called Biafra Radio as a way to make their agitation known	55	27.5	64	32.0	49	24.5	32	16.0	3.11	.71
23	Destroying government properties such as the INEC office in the Eastern part of the country	45	22.5	51	25.5	66	33.0	38	19.0	3.10	.85

Weighted mean score = **2.99**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The result in Table 5 revealed different strategies adopted by the Igbos and Yoruba agitators. The weighted mean score of 2.99 is higher than the standard mean score of 2.50, indicating that items 19-23 in Table 5 have mean scores of 2.59, 3.04, 3.09, and 3.10, respectively, reflecting the different strategies adopted by the Igbos and Yoruba agitators. Item 19 in Table 5, with the highest mean score of 3.11, indicated that the different strategies adopted by the Igbos and Yoruba agitators include the establishment of electronic and other social media platforms to make their agitation known.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This finding in result one is in line with the findings of Ndukwe, Nnaji, Ede & Ejem, (2019) who opined that secessionist movements in pursuing their course, have articulated sheer intimidations with a consequential perception of low representation in national administration; discriminatory access to justice; victimisations; discriminatory share of natural resources benefits; degradation of cultural and language rights; and regular assault on religious rights among others.

This finding of result two is in line with the findings of Etim & Ukpere (2013), who opined that it has maintained the marginalisation and dominance of others in their region, and that the distribution of resources and opportunities has been at the epicentre of incessant secessionist movements in Nigeria.

It was revealed that a weak institutional system and corruption in the current system have affected Nigeria's political stability. The results of three are similar to Lanre's (2018) findings, which opined that if true federalism is adopted, no part of the country will feel trampled upon, thereby strengthening the country's unity.

The study revealed that one major strategy adopted by Igbos and Yoruba agitators is the establishment of electronic and social media platforms to make their agitation known. This finding in four agrees with Etim & Ukpere (2013), who opined that regional agitators have been adopting social media as a tool to canvass and mobilise support for their agitations.

CONCLUSION

The renewed separatist agitations among the Igbo in the Southeast and the Yoruba in the Southwest geopolitical zones of Nigeria, which currently constitute significant threats to the corporate existence and political stability of the Nigerian state, this study examined the relationship between political governance, deteriorating socio-economic conditions, and the rising wave of regional agitations. The study found that perceived marginalisation, political exclusion, inequitable resource distribution, and weak governance have contributed to feelings of collective victimhood among affected groups, particularly among the Igbo in the Southeast. These grievances are often exploited by separatist movements to mobilise support for regional agitation. The study further argues that failures of governance at various levels have widened the gap between the people and the state, thereby deepening mistrust and weakening national unity. It therefore concludes that the use of force alone cannot resolve regional agitations; rather, inclusive governance, justice, equity, dialogue, and responsive institutions are necessary for promoting socio-political stability in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this work, the following recommendations are offered;

1. Strict adherence to the principle of federal character. Strict adherence to the principle of federal character as it applies to development and investment allocation, employment, education, and political appointments, among others.
2. In order to put an end to this agitation for stable political stability, there should be equality, justice and fairness in the administrative, political, social and economic configurations of the existing federal structure.
3. The issue of resource control and equal distribution of the national wealth should be addressed, and there should be a balance in the distribution of national resources and political appointments across all regions and tribes.
4. The agitators, both Igbos and Yoruba, should be more proactive in their agitations. They should also adopt different strategies to showcase their agitation rather than violence and disrespect for national peace.

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