



# **ETHNICITY, NATIONAL SECURITY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ethnic diversity in itself does not negatively affect national security. The it imposes to national security is a result of many factors combined with political opportunity that fundamental changes occurring in the political system exploited by ethnic and sectarian groups trying to change the political system to their advantage. Many factors such as political, historical, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and psychological factors may lead ethnic groups to rebel and impose threats to the national states of any country especially developing countries. Like in many developing countries that are highly fictionalized, ethnic crisis ranks among many security challenges Nigeria, making Nigeria loosely a country at war with itself. This situation magnifies Nigeria's political instability and the efforts of security agencies to address the range of insecurity issues which beyond fictionalization crisis encircle terrorism, banditry, ritual killings, armed robbery and kidnapping. Currently, the Nigerian military is deployed in 34 out of the 36 states plus the Federal Capital Territory in the country for one to understand the bandwidth of the national security challenges. Counselling emerge as a potential avenue for addressing the issues related to ethnicity and national security in Nigeria. The study explores the significance of counselling as a proactive and preventive measure to mitigate the negative impact of ethnicity on national security. It emphasizes the importance of promoting inter ethnic understanding, tolerance, and conflict resolution through counselling interventions. It emphasizes the importance of early identification through counselling to prevent the escalation of ethnic tensions.

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnic groups, National Security, Political Participation, Political legitimacy, Globalization.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The factors that may help ethnic groups become real threats to the national security of any state are political factors such as political participation,

political legitimacy, political integration, weak states, and failure of strong a centralized government, external factors, and globalization, Effiom, B.E.; Eme J.A.; Odo-simon; Kelechi & Riobito E. (2023) .

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Historical factors may also ignite ethnic conflict. Economic factors are one of the causes of ethnic violence and they include relative deprivation, economic inequality, modernization, and development. Social factors are also another reason that may cause the desire for ethnic groups to rebel as a result of social injustice, social inequality, and human needs.

Language and religion are the factors that make culture a threat to national security. Geography and the environment play significant roles in creating the desire for succession especially; if the state suffers from a scarcity of natural resources, or if the ethnic groups are concentrated in specific geographical areas. The last factor is the psychological factor and the impact of perception, prejudice, personal insecurity, frustration, and the aggressive nature of humankind. Since the beginning of humanity and ethnic diversity is part of the life of all human societies Effiom, B.E.; Cyril A. B. & Odey G.A. (2020). Pluralism and diversity were a phenomenon that existed everywhere without being a reason all the time for conflict and violence. In many societies, these groups lived together without recognizing sometimes that they are different. The eruption of violence in multi-ethnic societies is a result of the existence of some factors which may create the desire of these groups to rebel and challenge the political system.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War created an increased interest for scholars to study the relationship between ethnic groups and national security primarily because the world witnessed a plethora of violent ethnic conflicts after 1990 in many parts of the world. The question that scholars tried to answer was: how to protect the states from internal threats and how to create internal coherence. These questions led them to study ethnic groups and the factors that may create an ethnic threat to national security. This paper aims to explore the factors that make ethnic groups a threat to national security, especially in developing countries that are still unable to develop peaceful solutions to end ethnic violence. It will try to find an answer to the following question: What are the factors that when present or absent make ethnic groups a threat to national security? The main assumption for this study is that ethnic pluralism in itself does not pose a threat to national security, but there must be a set of factors that

make these groups a threat to the national security of any country. This assumption will be tested in this study by using the group approach. Arthur Bentley was the first to bring the group's approach to the scope of political analysis and the study of political systems at the beginning of the twentieth century when he published his book "Governmental Action" in which he focused on the role of groups in political life. However, the development of the approach as a theoretical analytical framework was achieved only with the behaviorist school, Undiyaundeye, F. A. & Basake J.A. (2022).

### GLOBALIZATION

Although globalization declared the end of the era of nationalism and the abolition of national borders, it led to the intensity of the feeling of belonging to ethnic groups. It made ethnic groups feel threatened because globalization tried to change their values and tried to weaken their ties with their groups. Globalization tried to create a new system of values that were not accepted by the ethnic groups because these values were western values without taking into consideration the local values of these groups (Huibregts 2010: 279). Ethnic groups realized that globalization is not neutral and is closely tied to the limited worldview and limited culture without accepting the other cultures or permitting them to be part of the globalization culture. On the contrary, it has led to violent conflict and has internationalized it which will threaten not only internal security but regional and international security as well (Noyella and Dorann 2015 ) & Undiyaundeye (2023) .

#### ii. Historical Factor

Many scholars believe that the reasons for internal conflicts are clear and direct, they trace it back to decades of hatred and hostility between ethnic groups. What happened in the past and the persecutions that occurred leave lasting traces in the memories of the members of the ethnic groups. Memories of the past could be used by ethnic leaders to strengthen their ethnic identity and aggravate the group's desire to take revenge on their old enemies. Some researchers believe that ethnic groups who have ancient hatred for other ethnic groups will start to ask themselves how their grandfathers had acted in similar situations. They will try to repeat history and deal with other ethnic groups in the same way their ancestors did; if they behaved

aggressively then this may be the ethnic group member's behavior in the present.

Old antagonisms in this case may be used as an explanation for the outbreak of ethnic violence especially in the conflict about the primacy of existence in the region. Here the ethnic groups will see the other groups as intruders who came to inhabit their lands. This explanation may be accurate in explaining the eruption of violent conflict in some cases but it cannot be applicable in all cases (Lipschutz R. 2017)

#### **Geographical and Environmental Factors**

Environment means the framework in which people live and obtain the necessities of their lives such as food, clothing, medication, and clothing. It also means the place where people contact each other and establish their positive and negative relations.

The link between the environment and certain patterns of behavior and have proved that the climate plays a role in shaping cultural models. Greek philosophers were the first to try and explain how the environment affects people's behavior. For example, Hippocrates (2015) explained the relationship between the place where people live and their behavior. He pointed out the differences between the inhabitants of the mountainous regions who are distinguished by their courage and people who live in the dry plains who are characterized by their love for sovereignty. Aristotle clarified the relation between climate and people's nature, he said that the climate of a specific geographical area affects the behavior of the residents and that was why he called for considering geographical factors during the lawmaking process (Mathewson K. 2006). The aforementioned geographical factors are all the natural conditions that prevail in a specific geographical area such as weather conditions, amount of rain, temperatures, the nature of the land, and the number of the population. There are a lot of geographical and environmental factors that may cause ethnic groups to endanger the national security of the states they inhabitant such as:

1) **Resource Scarcity:** This field see that water scarcity, land erosion, deforestation, fisheries declining, desertification, and depletion of renewable resources are environmental problems that may lead to the eruption of ethnic conflict especially when they are associated with a weak economy, an unjust social system and an oppressive ethnic political system that tries

2) through legislation and force to deprive other groups of these resources. Scarcity affects the state's resources and, in some cases, where the state is not able to find alternative resources, it deepens the division within society. Scarcity will also lead to the emigration of ethnic groups to other places that have better conditions of life. This may create conflict between the emigrant groups and the groups that inhabitant these areas over controlling the resources needed for their survival ( HomerDixon 2017 ).

**2) Geographical Concentration:** When ethnic group members are spread across the country as a whole, the chances of ethnic violence will decrease, whereas when there is a concentration of one ethnic group in a particular region the possibilities of ethnic violence will increase because there is a correlation between the degree of ethnic distribution and the potential for escalation or decrease of ethnic violence. Usually, ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in certain regions which they call the national region.

#### **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS**

1) **Relative Deprivation Theory:** In their attempts to explain the causes of black violence in the United States in 1940, Hovland and Sears argued that the declining economy was the main reason that made them frustrated which led to the increase in their aggressive behaviors. The individuals' aggression may not in their opinion be directed to the real reason, which was the declining economy but to the more accessible targets such as the other ethnic groups in their community; Relative deprivation means a person's notion that the quantity of the desired resource (such as money or social standing) they possess falls short of a benchmark. This benchmark could be the amount that was anticipated or the amount that the person compares their possessions to (American Psychological Association). It arises because of the perceived decrease between the values people expected to obtain and the values that can obtain. This gap means that there are differences between the standards of living they currently enjoy and the standards of living they believe they deserve to have which leads to the feeling of dissatisfaction (Smith H. and Hue Y. 2017). The individual's sense of deprivation will lead to the strengthening of their ties with the group they belong to, and their bias towards it.

Ethnic groups may feel deprived as a result of comparison whether they compare their situations over different periods, or when they compare themselves to other ethnic groups in the period (Gurr T. 2015).

**2) Economic Inequality and Discrimination:** Scientists use these concepts to explain why ethnic groups rebel. Social and economic inequality and discrimination between different ethnic groups are a result of the distribution crises and economic deprivation which makes the deprived ethnic group feel that they need to change the current situation. Effiom, B.E. ; Ebuara, M.O. ; Ekwok, M.L.; Sarah I.U. ; Julia N.O.; Undie , A.; Elizabeth G.A. (2022). The absence of fair distribution of resources between the different ethnic groups means that there is a gap between these groups' demands and the regime's ability to respond to them. This defect in distributing the resources is a result of two reasons: Firstly, it happens because of the shortage of the resources the system owns such as (wealth, goods, power, and services). In other words, the resources that all ethnic groups want to acquire and compete with each other because of increasing their share of these resources which creates conflict inside the state (Srisandarajah D. 2005).

The second reason is the inequity in the distribution of wealth and things of value among different ethnic groups. Many researchers believe that the ethnic conflict is a result of the struggle over the access and control of economic resources. They argue that the ethnic group that will be in power will always seek to monopolize these economic resources and keep them for itself and its supporters (Gurr T. 2018). These researchers believe that the essence of the ethnic conflict is the struggle over the economic resources as these resources are scarce which will intensify the conflict over the access to these resources between the ethnic groups which have always felt that they were excluded from enjoying their fair share of these resources and development projects in their areas.

## CONCLUSION

Any state that wants to avoid ethnic conflict needs to create a national identity and convince people that this identity represents all of the ethnic groups within the state regardless of the differences between them. All ethnic and sectarian groups must be nationally integrated

into one nation without attempting to eradicate their identities. On the contrary, their identities must be respected. Belonging to the state must be stronger than belonging to the ethnic group which will only happen when people feel that the state adopts an inclusion policy and that there is no discrimination against any ethnic group. Encouraging these groups to participate in the political process will help the state to gain its loyalties.

## RECOMMENDATION

Accomplishing the comprehensive and well-planned process of development is important for ending ethnic violence because successful development means that all the ethnic groups will have their fair share of the state's resources which will increase their well-being and prosperity. The development will enable the state to distribute wealth fairly and equitably among its different regions. It also will decrease the unemployment and poverty rates because of the job opportunities it will provide the members of ethnic groups through the establishment of projects in areas with a high concentration of ethnic groups. States should take into consideration the importance of providing their citizens with all means of welfare. They should be able to provide their citizens with all the social, economic, and political conditions that lead to their satisfaction. The state must provide its citizens with material and spiritual needs and it should protect the personal security of all the citizens without any exception.

The state should be a neutral mediator between the different ethnic groups and work to reconcile them and not take sides at the expense of the other. It needs to create cooperation between these groups and ease the possibility of the eruption of violent conflict between them.

Every ethnic group should feel that it has an interest in the existence of a strong state that can impose its control over all of its land. The state should be the only authority that monopolizes the legal right to use physical violence and the only authority that provides citizens with security and services. The state should be the only party that owns weapons and all the ethnic militias should be disarmed and banned without exception for any group or sect. The police force and army should be the only institutions that are responsible for protecting the state's national

security and they should not be established on an ethnic or sectarian base.

Counselling as the application of mental health , psychological or human development principle through cognitive, affective , behavioural or systematic intervention strategies , that address wellness personal growth or career development as well as pathology . it can therefore be concluded that counselling is a profession of different strategies that ensure peoples wellness, rounded development and make them to cope with various life situation ( like when in crises and conflict ) in order to achieve peace, harmony and unity in the human society. Counselling would help the youth in cultivating cooperation, loyalty and respect for the leaders ; help in handling issues that concern the nation without prejudice; and make youth to be law abiding citizen in Nigeria. This made the authors to recommend a regular counselling programme for the youth in other to learn effective fellowship qualities. Also it is suggested an urgent National Dialogue Agenda for Nigeria at all levels ( Community, Local State and Federal Government) however, the agenda should be counselling oriented and national security focused.

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