SEPARATIST MOVEMENT AND MILITARY MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE: A CASE STUDY ON YORUBA NATION AGITATION

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Abstract

This study investigates the Yoruba Nation agitation in Nigeria, a movement rooted in historical, political, and socio-economic grievances. The research explores why many Yoruba people, especially the youth, seek either greater autonomy or full independence from Nigeria. Drawing from both field data and existing literature, the study reveals that the movement is driven by factors such as political marginalization, economic inequality, insecurity, and dissatisfaction with governance. Over 75% of respondents were aged 16–25, indicating that the call for self-determination is strongest among younger populations. While the Yoruba agitation has remained largely non-violent, instances of conflict, such as arrests, protests, and confrontations with security forces, have occurred, especially in response to state actions. Findings show that most people involved see the movement not only as a political struggle but also as a way to preserve cultural identity and improve governance. Respondents believe that the government's current military approach is ineffective and instead favor solutions like constitutional reforms, dialogue, and inclusion of marginalized groups in governance. The study concludes that separatist movements like the Yoruba agitation cannot be solved through force alone. Instead, a combination of inclusive governance, fair resource distribution, and recognition of ethnic grievances is necessary to restore peace and unity. These insights are useful for policymakers and scholars interested in managing ethnic tensions in multi-ethnic nations like Nigeria.

Keywords: Yoruba Nation, separatist movement, marginalization, youth agitation, political restructuring, cultural identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there are more than 180 states in the world and only at least 20 are ethnically homogenous. In more than 40% of states there could be found five or more national minorities. In general, there are about 8 thousand people and each of them pretend for independence. In contemporary political discourse there is an opinion that such issues as separation, nationalism minorities groups problems are not actual any more that is why there is no necessity to analyze them thoroughly. But as we can see on the example of some separatism movements the issues of national minorities are getting harsh.

After the end of the WWII the world has been divided by the states- winners. In some cases, the new borders were set up by those countries without taking into consideration the peculiarities of the areas where national minorities lived. Besides inside some states (the USSR, Yugoslavia) the areas were taken from one republic and given to the other. As a result, a huge part of a particular people had to live in one republic with another people that sometimes even was hostile to this one. During the cold war, that existed in terms of bipolar system on international relations, the national minorities didn't have an opportunity to protect their rights in a military way or at least aggressively. So after the collapse of the USSR and when the cold war was over, we started to observe cruel ethnical fights for the independence.

According to the opinion of the experts the world has gone through three waves of ethnical conflicts during the twentieth century. The first wave took place after the WWI and collapse of colonial states, collapse of Austria and Hungary empire, Russian empire, Ottoman empire on the territory of which new states were formed. The second wave was initiated by the WWII and collapse of colonial states. The third wave started after the collapse of the USSR and is still going on. In the end of the cold war when the global architecture of international security started to ruin, the USSR was not as powerful as it used to be and its authorities cared only about internal problems because they were not interested in controlling the countries that were in the sphere of soviet interest and control, so the national minorities saw an opportunity to get the independence sometimes even using weaponry.

Secessionism, as the creation of a state using violence without the consent of the former sovereign state, has occurred for centuries. Secessionist movements arose in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars and during and after the Cold War. The cases of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Sudan and South Sudan are examples of such movements occurring when a territory splits from an existing state, even though the seceding entity has no legal basis upon which to do so. This is

because the legal grounds for statehood stem from the United Nations (UN) Charter, which entitles a colonized people, or people subject to foreign domination, to form a separate state. Nevertheless, secessionist movements have become a norm in some post-independence African states, leading to violent conflict and civil war.

One of the main problems of the Nigerian government is that it often overlooks the challenges that undermine social security until a serious problem presents itself. From a global and international perspective on separatist movement, Brian et al (1984) assert that 'nearly two dozen separatist movements are active worldwide, concentrated in Europe and Asia. At least seven are violent and reflect ethnic or religious differences with the mother country. This shows that separatist movements span the globe. Similarly, Bieri indicated that agitation towards self-determination through independence have been on the increase in the European union recently. A major issue fueling these agitations is the economic crisis and an interrelated crisis of confidence that is overwhelming the continent. According to Brian the number of countries with separatist movements peaked in 2008. It is therefore worth nothing that as of 15 November 2015, the separatist movement for Biafra has reemerged in Nigeria.

In Nigeria the political system and the democracy that the nation adopted for governance is not faulty but bedeviled by anomalies. Nigeria is yet to understand the tenets of democracy or how to govern the country properly. Brown Elaigwu pointed out that it was less than a century ago that the heterogenous peoples of what is now called Nigeria were geographically enclosed according to the grid of the colonial masters and administered as one territorial unit against their wish. In other words, Nigeria was born as a result of Britain policy of imperialist. As a result, dissatisfaction continues to emanate over the years, a trend which dates back as far as the colonial, military regime era and all the way up to present day civilian rule. The phenomenon of separatist movements presents a complex challenge for nation states globally. These movements often arise from ethnic, cultural, or political disenfranchisement and seek autonomy or independence from the central government. This project focuses on the Yoruba nation agitation in Nigeria, analyzing the factors that fuel the movement and the states military response to manage the resulting violence.

The Yoruba people, primarily located in southwestern Nigeria, have a rich history and cultural heritage. In recent years, there has been an increased call for the establishment of a Yoruba nation, driven by perceived marginalization and governance failures at the federal level. The agitation has led to clashes with state forces, raising

critical questions about the effectiveness and implications of military management of separatist movements. It is particularly so in realization of the ambiguity and controversies characterizing the 1900s and 2009. Specifically, Yoruba nationalism and politics changed not only in terms of its structure but also in its functions. Resting on historical consciousness of the people and the socio- political space I which the Yoruba people live in Nigeria – a number of precolonial independent kingdom (sub ethnic groups) that was colonized and formed into a British colonial territory with other ethnic groups around the River Niger area and since a member of about 270 ethnic groups forming a post-colonial state calls Nigeria – Yoruba nationalism is influenced by the changing nature of the Nigerian society as a whole.

Formation of group identity and socio-political movements among the Yoruba people in the colonial period was different both in form and functions compared with what is was at pre-colonial time. At the pre-colonial Yoruba society, mostly through the refugees and the Oyo migrants of the collapsed old Oyo kingdom, who invoked history to construct a political hegemony liking several Yoruba subgroups used their sense of common identity as a group to establish cultural influence and political power. Each of these different Yoruba sub-groups claimed its distinct sub-group identity at the precolonial period. During the colonial time, the early Yoruba elites

mainly Christian clergies created the idea of cultural nationalism in form of pan-Yoruba identity initially constructed as a cultural work (Peel, 1989), which was later turned into a political project in the post- colonial era by Yoruba colonial political elites -a transition that began shortly before the end of British colonialism in Nigeria. It was the emphasis on its political imports that led Yoruba politicians to develop the idea of political nationalism from the earlier cultural nationalism, which in turn embraced the use of violence directed against Nigeria as a state and the Hausa/Fulani political group – another major ethnic group in Nigeria – whom the Yoruba politicians always perceived as causing socio – political marginalization against the Yoruba.

Separatist movement has occurred throughout history and around the world each with its unique context and objectives. The agitation for self determination has been a reoccurring event in the annals of Nigeria since the amalgamation of the southern and the northern protectorate in 1914. From the agitation for constitutional amendments that informed the promulgation of various constitutions viz, Clifford constitution 1922, Richard constitution 1946, Macpherson constitution 1951, and Lyttleton constitution 1954, the agitation for self - government in 1956, the post-independence secessionist war(1967-1970), the Ogoni, Oodua People's Congress (OPC), and Niger Delta crisis

to the contemporary agitations led by movement for the actualization of sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Ilana Omo Oodua (IOO) among others.

The rise of separatist movements around the world presents significant challenges to national sovereignty, social cohesion, and political stability. In Nigeria, the Yoruba nation agitation exemplifies these challenges, as the call for an independent Yoruba state has gained momentum in recent years. This movement, driven by perceived marginalization and a quest for self - determination, has led tensions and confrontations with the federal government. The Nigerian government response to the Yoruba nation agitation has predominantly involved military intervention and other forms of coercive control. However, the effectiveness and consequences of such military management of violence remain contentious. There are concerns about the escalation of violence, human rights abuses, and the long-term implications for national unity. This case study seeks to explore the dynamics between the Yoruba nation agitation and the Nigerian government military management strategies. Specifically, it aims to investigate the causes and motivations behind the separatist movement, the government's response mechanisms, and the impact of these strategies on the conflict trajectory. By analyzing this interplay, the study intends to provide a

comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of military approaches in managing separatist violence and propose alternative strategies that could foster a more a peaceful resolution.

Separatist movement occurs mainly due to the agitation for restructuring, the idea of restructuring emanated as a response by different ethnic nationalities to the various unresolved problems challenging Nigeria's federalism. Prominent among these are the challenges of poverty, unemployment, regional underdevelopment, and the question of resource control, skewed allocation of these resources, regional dependency, and the prevailing and unbated security problems. Restructuring in the light of the agitators in Nigeria can be suggested to mean a reorganization of the existing federal structure to include devolution of all forms of powers to the sub regions to individually proffer solutions to the perennial problems confronting each nationality and end the regional dependency on the federal government. Falola (2021) expressed that restructuring is a reform that implies the redistribution of all powers and functions from the central government to the federating units, and prominent among these is the demand for state police to check the security challenges in the sub regions.

Each movement had its own distinct reasons for seeking separation, often rooted in ethnic, cultural, political,

economic, or historical grievances. After gaining separation, the common objectives typically included establishing self – governance, preserving cultural identity, achieving economic independence and gaining political autonomy. For example, The American Revolutionary War that occurred from 1775-178, this movement began in the 1760s with growing colonial resistance against British policies and their objective is to gain independence from British rule and establish a separate nation, which resulted in the formation of the united states.

Also from the perspective of the Biafra secessionist movement for example, this movement began in 1967 when the southeastern region of Nigeria declared independence as the Republic of Biafra and their objective was to establish an independent state due to ethnic, political, and economic tensions. The movement resulted in a brutal civil war, ending with Biafra's reintegration into Nigeria.

One of the motivations for creating new political unit is the desire to protect or acquire wealth in a situation where territorially based economic inequalities exist, while other scholars disagree with the significance attributed to economic inequality in separatist movements.

Long standing historical conflicts, colonial legacies, or perceived injustices can fuel desires for independence or greater autonomy. Distinct ethnic, linguistic, or cultural identities can drive groups to seek self-determination, especially if they feel their identity is threatened or not respected within the larger state. Economic inequalities between regions can lead to separatist sentiments, especially if a region feels it contributes more to the national economy than it receives in return or it perceives itself as economically exploited. Lack of political representation, centralization of power, or authoritarian governance can motivate regions or groups to seek autonomy or independence. A collective sense of identity and the human need for self-actualization and autonomy can drive groups to pursue self-determination, seeking to fulfill their potential independently of external control. Control of valuable resources, such as oil, minerals or water, can be a significant factor, especially if regions feel they are not receiving a fair share of the benefits of these resources. These factors often interact in complex ways, and the specific causes of any given separatist movement can vary widely based on the unique historical, cultural and political context.

The Yoruba nation agitation has caused a lot of violence during the period of its trends. The agitations gained public attention following insecurity in many parts of southern Nigeria, eventually leading to the ban an open cattle grazing. Aside from strengthening the debates around 'true federalism' and restructuring, the incidents of herder violence also led to the creation of a

regional security network called Amotekun corps.

In a bid to achieve the breakup, a Yoruba nation agitator, Sunday Igboho Adeyemi, illegally evicted Fulani people from Oyo villages and also threatened to disrupt the 2023 general elections in the south west. The agitation has often led to confrontations with Nigerian security forces. For example, in July 2021, the Nigerian government launched a raid on Sunday Igboho's residence, resulting in deaths and arrests. This raid was a part of a broader crackdown on separatist activities, which has sometimes led to violent clashes. Protests organized by Yoruba nation agitators have occasionally turned violent. For instance, during rallies, clashes with law enforcement have occurred, resulting in injuries and fatalities. The government's response to these protests has sometimes been heavy-handed, leading to further escalation. The agitation has also heightened ethnic tensions in Nigeria. In some cases, this has led to violence between Yoruba agitators and other ethnic groups. These inter-ethnic clashes, while not widespread, contribute to the overall climate of violence associated with the agitation.

The Nigerian government has taken a firm stance against separatist movements, including the Yoruba nation agitation. The use of security forces to suppress these movements has sometimes led to violent encounters. The government justifies its actions by citing the need to maintain national unity and prevent the breakdown of the state. The agitation has associated violence have had socio economic impacts on the region. This disruption caused by protests and clashes can affect local economies, create a climate of fear, and lead to displacement of people.

Managing the violence caused by separatist movements like the Yoruba nation agitation and ultimately putting an end to such movements require a multifaceted approach. To manage this violence the federal - structure have to be strengthened to grant more autonomy to regions, allowing them greater control over their resources and governance and ensure that all ethnic groups have adequate representation in government and decision-making process. Government should implement policies that ensure fair distribution of national resources to all regions, invest in infrastructure and development projects in marginalized areas to reduce economic disparities. They can also involve leaders of separatist movements in dialogue to address their concerns and find common ground. Use neutral third parties, such as international organizations or respected national figures, to facilitate dialogue.

The main aim of the research work is to examine causes, effect and solution to the political action and separatist movement in Nigeria. The study will focus on southwestern Nigeria, particularly in

regions where the Yoruba nation agitation is prominent. This will include an analysis of areas affected by separatist sentiments and military responses. The study will examine the origins and evolution of the Yoruba nation agitation, covering significant events from its inception to recent developments. It may also include historical precedents of separatist movement in Nigeria to provide context.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Separatist movement

Separatism refers to the advocacy for the political, cultural, ethnic, religious, racial, regional, or governmental separation of a specific group from a larger entity. Similar to secessionist movements, separatist groups seek greater self-governance, often arguing that they should have increased control over their political, economic, or cultural affairs rather than being governed by the larger state in which they reside. These movements typically emerge from communities that share common ethnic, religious, or territorial identities and believe that their interests are not adequately represented within the existing national framework.

While some separatist movements operate within the boundaries of their current states, advocating for regional autonomy or enhanced political representation, others seek full independence by challenging existing territorial structures. The latter often results in demands for the creation of entirely new states. Since World War II, the number of independent countries has risen significantly, fueled in part by the growth of separatist movements. This trend has contributed to the expansion of the United Nations from its original 51 member states to its current 193 members. At present, there are more than 70 active separatist movements worldwide, primarily concentrated in Europe, Africa and Asia. However, not all these movements are engaged in continuous or violent mobilization, though those that do resort to violence tend to provoke prolonged and intense conflicts.

Traditionally, separatism is associated with the pursuit of full political sovereignty, whereas groups that merely seek greater autonomy within an existing state are generally not classified as separatists. The Yoruba Nation agitation presents an interesting case within this spectrum, as it includes both factions advocating outright independence from Nigeria and those seeking stronger regional autonomy within the country's federal system.

The rise of separatist movements poses significant challenges to national stability, often prompting strong responses from the state. Governments typically employ various strategies to manage separatist demands, ranging from political negotiations and economic concessions to

military interventions and legal restrictions. In some cases, governments adopt repressive measures, using military force to suppress separatist uprisings, as seen in Biafra (Nigeria), Ambazonia (Cameroon), and other historical examples in Africa. Conversely, some states opt for dialogue and constitutional reforms to address grievances, as observed in cases like Scotland's independence referendum within the United Kingdom.

For Nigeria, the military's management of separatist movements has been a key aspect of national security policy. The Yoruba Nation agitation, like other separatist movements, has experienced varying state responses, including arrests of key activists, government crackdowns on protests, and efforts to delegitimize the movement. Understanding how the Nigerian government handles this agitation whether through military suppression, legal actions, or potential political negotiations is central to analyzing the broader themes of separatism and state stability in West Africa.

Military Management of Violence

The military manages violence through a combination of policies, resources, and support services. These efforts aim to address abuse, help victims, and improve the functioning of military communities. Conflicts and crises do not signify peace; rather, they represent its direct opposition, serving as indicators of deeper societal problems. Historically, Nigeria has recorded some of the highest incidents of violent conflicts in Africa, spanning issues such as land disputes, struggles over resource control, ethnic divisions, and armed movements for self-determination. However, Nigeria's primary challenge today is not merely the persistence of these conflicts but the difficulty in resolving them effectively. The real concern lies in preventing past conflicts from resurfacing while simultaneously containing current tensions to avoid their escalation into full-scale war.

In the context of Nigeria's separatist movements, the Yoruba Nation agitation exemplifies these ongoing challenges. Like other separatist struggles in the country's history such as the Biafran War and the Niger Delta militancy the agitation for Yoruba self-determination is rooted in political, economic, and ethnic grievances. The Nigerian government's response to separatist demands has historically relied on a mix of military action, political repression, and selective negotiation. However, the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving long-term stability remains questionable.

The military management of separatist movements, including the Yoruba Nation agitation, highlights the tension between state security interests and the right to self-determination. Heavy-handed crackdowns may suppress movements

temporarily, but without addressing the underlying grievances, they risk fueling deeper resistance and prolonged instability. Therefore, a sustainable approach to managing separatist movements must balance military enforcement with political dialogue, addressing the root causes of agitation while ensuring national unity.

Political marginalization, economic inequality, and historical injustices often fuel separatist sentiments. Ethnic consciousness strengthens group cohesion and can escalate demands for independence, the government marginalizing ethnic groups, cultures and tribes is one of the major reasons for separatist movement, unequal allocation of resources is also a reason that cannot be ignored, allocation of resources is not done by matter of urgency or shared equally but the leaders in government often fight for their own region to be seen, ignoring regions with little or less representatives in government and this is been occurring in Nigeria since the era of colonialism, the colonial leaders often pamper the south over the north leaving the north provoked. During the regime of General Muhammadu Buhari, there was an extent of unbridled nepotism, he positioned the Fulani in the commanding height of the economy of the country and security architecture of the country, and how he turned this country from a federation of nationalities to the estate of the Fulani. This was what made other ethnic nationalities to begin to think that if they did not do something, they would soon become slaves to the Fulani. They reasoned they would soon be slaves to the Fulani. (Bolanle Bowale, 2023). Ethnic Consciousness is that awareness of an individual of his membership to an ethnic group. It transcends a mere awareness of an individual to concrete action manifesting deliberate affiliations and affinities (Kasfir, 1979; McCall, 1955).In Nigeria of over 250 ethnic groups with the three major ones namely (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa) and being aware of the nature and mode of the increasing growth of modern societies in the country, the occurrence of ethnic consciousness cannot be over imagined and emphasized.

A weak or unstable government creates the conditions that allow separatist movements to emerge and gain momentum. When a government is unable to effectively govern its territory, enforce laws fairly, or provide essential services, it fosters widespread dissatisfaction among its citizens. Political instability, corruption, and poor governance erode trust in state institutions, making marginalized groups feel alienated from the central authority. In such an environment, ethnic, religious, or regional groups may begin to see self-determination as a viable alternative to remaining under an ineffective state.

One of the keyways in which weak governance fuels separatism is through political marginalization. When certain ethnic or regional groups feel excluded

from decision-making processes, they may perceive the government as an oppressive force rather than a unifying entity. If a group consistently finds itself underrepresented in government or denied access to political power, its leaders may push for greater autonomy or even outright independence. The inability of a fragile state to mediate disputes or create inclusive policies further deepens divisions, making separatist agitation more attractive.

Economic deprivation is another significant factor. A government that cannot provide economic opportunities, infrastructure, or fair distribution of resources creates resentment, particularly in resource-rich but neglected regions. If a particular ethnic or regional group believes that their wealth whether from natural resources, taxation, or trade is being unfairly exploited by the central government without benefiting them, separatist movements often gain traction. Many separatist movements around the world, including the Yoruba Nation agitation, have economic grievances at their core, with calls for self-governance tied to the belief that local control over resources would lead to better development.

Security failures and an inability to maintain law and order also contribute to separatist movements. If a government is unable to protect its citizens from violence, crime, or external threats, people may lose confidence in the state's ability to provide stability. In cases where the government itself is seen as a source of repression, using military force against certain ethnic or political groups, the affected populations may see separation as the only way to ensure their survival. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where past conflicts such as the Biafran War were rooted in both economic and security concerns, as well as ethnic identity, a weak or unstable government creates the conditions for separatist movements by failing to address political, economic, and security grievances. When a state lacks the capacity or willingness to govern inclusively and fairly, discontented groups may begin to see independence as the only path to justice and stability. This is evident in the Yoruba Nation agitation, where historical grievances, economic marginalization, and political exclusion have fueled calls for self-determination.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF YORUBA NATIONALISM

The historical consciousness of the Yoruba people has played a significant role in shaping their ethno-nationalist movements. The construction of a pan-Yoruba identity was facilitated by mythology, traditions, and cultural pride, which were leveraged by political elites to assert their place in Nigeria's socio-political landscape (Ajala, 2009). Pre-colonial Yoruba society consisted of multiple independent kingdoms, each with distinct sub-group identities, yet

linked by common ancestry myths and political aspirations (Doortmont, 1989; Falola & Genova, 2006). Yoruba nationalism, as a political movement, was initially expressed through cultural nationalism in the late 19th century. The colonial period saw the emergence of Yoruba elites, particularly Christian clergies, who constructed a common Yoruba identity as a means of fostering unity among various Yoruba sub-groups (Peel, 1989). By the 1940s, Yoruba nationalism transitioned from a cultural project to a political one, as Yoruba elites sought greater political representation in colonial governance (Ajala, 2009). Yoruba nationalism has been closely linked with ethnic politics and, at times, violent resistance against state structures. The annulment of the 1993 presidential elections, which was widely believed to have been won by a Yoruba candidate, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, reignited Yoruba nationalist movements. The O'odua People's Congress (OPC), founded in 1994, became a militant arm of Yoruba nationalism, advocating for Yoruba self-determination through sometimes violent means (Ajala, 2009).

Yoruba nationalism has evolved through several phases, from cultural identity formation in the pre-colonial era to political and sometimes violent agitation in the post-colonial period. The Yoruba people, primarily located in southwestern Nigeria, historically identified as distinct sub-groups such as the Oyo, Ife, Ijebu, Egba, and others, rather than a single ethnic entity. The idea of a pan-Yoruba identity was consolidated in the 19th and early 20th centuries through historical narratives, myths of common ancestry, and political activism (Peel, 1989). The foundation of Yoruba nationalism is deeply rooted in historical mythology, particularly the legacy of Oduduwa, who is regarded as the progenitor of the Yoruba people. Some narratives trace Oduduwa's origins to Mecca, which appealed to Yoruba Muslims, while others emphasize an indigenous Yoruba creation story centered in Ile-Ife (Falola and Genova, 2006). These competing narratives reflect the dual influences of indigenous traditions and external religious and political forces on Yoruba identity formation.

During the colonial period, early Yoruba nationalists such as Samuel Johnson and Obafemi Awolowo helped construct a political ideology that framed Yoruba as a distinct and autonomous group within Nigeria. Initially, this nationalism was cultural, but by the 1940s, it had transitioned into political nationalism. This shift was particularly evident in the formation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a socio-political group that later evolved into the Action Group (AG), a dominant political party in southwestern Nigeria. The post-independence political landscape saw Yoruba nationalism transform into an oppositional force against perceived political marginalization by the Nigerian state, particularly against the dominance of

northern Nigerian elites. The annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which was widely believed to have been won by a Yoruba candidate, Moshood Abiola, reignited Yoruba nationalist agitation. This led to the formation of militant groups such as the O'odua People's Congress (OPC), which adopted violent tactics in response to state repression (Adebanwi, 2021).

The Yoruba nationalist struggle provides an essential case study for examining the intersection between separatist movements and the military's role in managing violence. The agitation for Yoruba self-determination, though not always explicitly secessionist, has at times mirrored separatist tendencies, particularly in response to political exclusion and electoral fraud.

One of the driving forces behind Yoruba nationalism has been the perception of political and economic marginalization. Throughout Nigeria's history, the Yoruba political elite has sought greater representation in national governance, often through political opposition and activism. The military's response to Yoruba agitation has historically involved repression, as seen in the violent suppression of protests following the annulment of the 1993 elections and military crackdowns on OPC activities. Violence has been a recurrent feature of Yoruba nationalism, often triggered by electoral fraud, political exclusion, and military rule. The phenomenon of

Operation Weti E in 1964, the 1983 political violence in southwestern Nigeria, and the 1993 post-election crisis are examples of instances where Yoruba nationalists resorted to violence to express their grievances. The OPC, engaged in violent confrontations with security forces, leading to significant military interventions in the region.

The Nigerian military has historically played a central role in managing Yoruba nationalist agitation. During periods of political instability, military interventions have included arrests of political activists, suppression of protests, and in some cases, extrajudicial killings. The 1993-1999 period, which saw the transition from military to civilian rule, witnessed intense military repression of Yoruba nationalist movements, further fueling calls for self-determination. Despite past tensions, the integration of Yoruba political elites into national governance has occasionally led to a decline in nationalist agitation. The election of a Yoruba president, Olusegun Obasanjo, in 1999 helped pacify some nationalist demands, although underlying grievances remain. Contemporary Yoruba nationalism continues to manifest in calls for restructuring Nigeria's federal system rather than outright secession.

Yoruba nationalist agitation has historically been driven by perceived political exclusion. The annulment of the 1993 election and the subsequent suppression of protests in southwestern

Nigeria intensified Yoruba demands for self-determination. The military's response to these protests, which included mass arrests, killings, and the suppression of civil liberties, only deepened Yoruba resentment towards the Nigerian state (Afolayan, 2006). The militarization of Yoruba nationalism, particularly through groups like the OPC, illustrates the shift from peaceful agitation to armed resistance in response to state repression. The OPC, originally formed to promote Yoruba identity and self-determination, later became involved in violent clashes with security forces. The Nigerian military and police responded with brutal force, conducting raids, arresting key leaders, and implementing curfews in southwestern Nigeria (Nolte, 2007). One of the major challenges to Yoruba nationalism has been internal divisions among its elite. The struggle for political leadership among Yoruba elites has often led to fragmentation, reducing the effectiveness of the movement. The rivalry between Obafemi Awolowo and S.L. Akintola in the First Republic, as well as the factionalism within Afenifere and OPC in the 2000s, weakened Yoruba nationalist aspirations. These internal divisions have often been exploited by the Nigerian state to suppress Yoruba nationalism by co-opting certain Yoruba leaders into the government (Adesoji, 2016). Rather than outright repression, the Nigerian state has sometimes sought to integrate Yoruba political elites into the national structure as a means of reducing

separatist tensions. The election of Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria's president in 1999 was seen as a strategic move to pacify Yoruba nationalist agitation. While Obasanjo's presidency did not completely eliminate Yoruba grievances, it reduced calls for secession and redirected Yoruba nationalism towards demands for political restructuring rather than outright separation (Adebanwi, 2021).

Yoruba nationalism is an evolving phenomenon, deeply rooted in historical consciousness, socio-political struggles, and resistance against perceived marginalization. It has transitioned from a cultural movement in the colonial era to a politically charged force in post-colonial Nigeria. Understanding these historical contexts is essential to analyzing contemporary Yoruba nationalist movements and their implications for Nigeria's stability and governance.

Yoruba nationalism has evolved from cultural identity preservation to political activism and, at times, violent confrontation with the Nigerian state. The movement has been shaped by historical grievances, political marginalization, and elite competition. The military's approach to managing Yoruba nationalist agitation has varied from repression to political integration, reflecting broader patterns in Nigeria's handling of separatist movements.

Understanding the history of Yoruba nationalism is crucial for analyzing the

dynamics of separatist movements and the military's role in managing ethnic-based violence. The lessons from the Yoruba nationalist struggle highlight the importance of political inclusion, economic empowerment, and dialogue in addressing ethnic-based grievances and reducing the likelihood of violent conflicts.

CAUSES OF SEPARATIST MOVEMENT

The roots of separatist movements in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial era when the country was amalgamated by British colonialists in 1914. The diverse ethnic groups that comprised the federation retained distinct identities, creating a fragile national unity. The British colonial administration acknowledged these deep divisions, as reflected in the statement by Oliver Lyttelton, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, who remarked that "the only cement which kept the rickety structure of Nigeria together was the British left to themselves they would clearly fall apart in a few months" (Lyttelton, 1962).

During Nigeria's formative years, ethnic rivalry, suspicion, and competition for dominance defined the country's political landscape. This led to constitutional conferences almost being derailed by separatist sentiments. For instance, during the 1950 General Conference on the Review of the 1946 Constitution, the Northern delegation insisted on receiving 50% of seats in the proposed House of Representatives. Failure to meet this demand would result in the North seeking separation from Nigeria, reverting to the pre-1914 arrangement (Ezera, 1964). In the same vein, the Yoruba threatened to withdraw from the federation if Lagos was designated the Federal Capital Territory (Tamuno, 1970). Similarly, the Igbo responded to the 1966 pogrom by demanding a restructuring of the federation. When this demand failed, the Igbo declared the Republic of Biafra in July 1967, resulting in the Nigerian Civil War (Ezera, 1964).

Separatist movements are driven by multiple interrelated factors, including historical grievances, economic marginalization, ethnic divisions, and political exclusion. Scholars have identified three primary explanations for separatist agitation: ethnic competition, economic frustration, and state-society relations (Ibeanu, Orji & Iwuamadi, 2016). Historically, many separatist movements have been fueled by the arbitarary division of territories by colonial powers or post war settlements, the colonial administration's 'divide and rule' strategy played a critical role in nurturing separatist ideologies. British colonial policies emphasized the preservation of regional distinctions and ethnic divisions to consolidate power. This approach created regional loyalties that often-overshadowed national identity (Osuntokun, 1979; Ballard, 1971).

Consequently, these colonial practices entrenched ethnic boundaries, fostering separatist demands in post-independence Nigeria.

After the World War II, the world was divided by the victorious states, often without considering the ethnic and cultural identities of the populations involved. For instance, national minorities were sometimes forced to coexist with historically hostile groups due to redrawn borders, creating a long-term source of separatist tension (Ryabinin, 2017). The collapse of a large multi-ethnic states, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Soviet Union, also triggered waves of separatist conflicts as different ethnic groups sought self-determination.

Political grievances play a key role in separatist movements. Many minority groups feel politically marginalized and underrepresented in national governance structures. Political elites from these groups often act as catalysts by mobilizing support for separatism as a means of gaining autonomy or full independence (Boyle & Englebert, 2006). Nigeria's rich ethnocultural diversity, comprising over 250 ethnic groups, has fostered mutual suspicion and competition for power. Tamuno (1970) identified Nigeria's "heterogeneous ethnic composition, cultural diversity, vast size, varied administrative practices, and controversial political and constitutional arrangements" as key factors that promote separatist tendencies. The resulting divisions have heightened the potential for groups to advocate for self-determination.

Moreover, the process of democratization can paradoxically intensify separatism, as emerging political freedoms allow ethnic minorities to organize and voice their grievances more effectively. Economic disparities between regions also fuel separatist movement. Wealthier regions may seek independence to avoid subsidizing poorer areas, while economically disadvantaged regions may feel neglected by the central government and believe that independence would allow them to develop more effectively (Boyle & Englebert, 2006), economic inequality, particularly regarding the distribution of resources, has heightened separatist tensions. Oil-producing states in Nigeria's Niger Delta region have historically felt marginalized despite contributing significantly to national revenue. The perceived exploitation of their resources without corresponding development has driven persistent agitation for resource control and greater regional autonomy (Watts, 2009)

In some cases, separatist regions are rich in natural resources, making economic self sufficiency a strong motivation for seeking independence. Ethnic tensions and competition for political power often fuel separatist movements. The perceived exclusion of certain ethnic groups from

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federal governance can lead to movements seeking greater autonomy or secession (Owen, 2016). In Nigeria, the feeling of political marginalization by groups like the Igbo and Yoruba has historically contributed to separatist sentiments. Economic inequality and lack of opportunities are significant factors in separatist movements. High unemployment rates, poverty, and regional economic neglect have been cited as major drivers of separatist agitations, particularly among youth populations (Ibeanu et al., 2016). In the case of the Biafran movement, many young people view separatism as a response to their deteriorating economic conditions.

The nature of interactions between the state and ethnic groups also influences separatist movements. Excessive state violence, perceived oppression, and historical injustices create conditions where separatist sentiments thrive. The Nigerian government's handling of pro-Biafra protests, including allegations of human rights violations, has further entrenched separatist attitudes (Ukiwo, 2009; Onuoha, 2011). A key driver of separatist movements is the feeling of collective victimization. Groups that perceive themselves as historically oppressed often frame their struggles in terms of survival and justice. This sense of communal suffering has been a crucial factor in the Biafran separatist movement, reinforced by narratives of past conflicts and economic disenfranchisement

(Achebe, 1983; Ibeanu et al., 2016). Critical historical moments, such as contested elections and violent conflicts, can trigger separatist movements. For example, the annulment of the 1993 Nigerian presidential elections and the Biafran War of 1967-1970 are seen as turning points that fueled separatist aspirations (Walter, 2004). Separatist movements are not solely driven by internal dynamics; external influences play a major role. Neighboring states or global powers often intervene to support separatist regions for strategic reasons. This can take the form of military aid, economic assistance, or diplomatic recognition. For example, Russia's support for separatists in Crimea and Donbass contrasts with Western backing for Kosovo's independence.

The concentration of political power in the hands of certain ethnic groups has fueled discontent among marginalized groups. The dominance of the Hausa/Fulani in federal politics, combined with unequal state creation and local government structures favoring Northern Nigeria, has heightened fears of internal colonization and prompted separatist agitations (Fani-Kayode, 2017). Perceived exclusion from mainstream political processes has also triggered separatist movements. As Osinbajo (2017) observed, Nigeria's failure to foster an inclusive society has driven some groups to turn to their ethnic affiliations for security and identity. This sense of exclusion has been particularly

prominent in the South-East and Niger Delta regions.

Political marginalization involves the systematic exclusion of certain groups from political power and meaningful participation in governance, often based on ethnic, regional, or social lines. It entails the use of political power to deprive groups of resources, rights, or influence they would ordinarily posses. According to Iris Marion Young, marginalization is maybe the most perilous form of injustice. An entire group of people is deprived of useful participation in social life and accordingly possibly condemned to severe material deprivation. She presents the list, broadly, as including the youth, people not employed for a long time, single mothers, people living with disabilities, indigenous people, the elderly. In addition to the following elucidations, Jenson maintains that "Marginalization is a phenomenon of material resources and for Iris Marion Young, lack of capacity to participate politically and culturally, in markets and in other institutions. Lines of Social difference and discrimination often overlay, indeed sometimes promote, patterns of marginalization. A school of thought says: "Marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use. Being marginalized entails more than earning low income. It encompasses the inability to participate or earn full respect in society. To instantiate this, the community of people with disabilities dread isolation, marginalization and devaluation in a milieu in which their physical difference not danger of poverty alone-- is a barrier to complete inclusion into society. For Jenson as well, marginalization emerges as a result of being unemployed (absence of jobs), being poor (absence of material resources) and being isolated (absence of social ties).

Nigeria's political conflicts are often attributed to marginalization, particularly with the northern Hausa/Fulani dominating key federal government positions while excluding other ethnic groups.William O. Idowu asserts that Nigeria's persistent conflicts are primarily political in nature. He identifies several key causes: a lack of genuine democracy, the structure of Nigeria's federal system, which encourages ethnic and regional loyalties rather than fostering a sense of national unity or shared citizenship and the dominance of the Federal Government by the northern Hausa/Fulani, which has marginalized other ethnic groups and regions. Idowu emphasizes that the refusal of the Northern elites to share power is a significant factor driving ethnic resurgence and the rise of ethno-national consciousness, which now overshadows Nigerian nationalism. Due to the absence of true citizenship, Nigeria has experienced numerous contradictions political instability, power struggles marked by hostility and conflict, as well as exclusionary and divisive politics. This

has been accompanied by the rise of micro-nationalism and pseudo-nationalism, creating challenges in establishing a stable and effective democratic system.

Since Nigeria's formation, political marginalization has remained a common experience. The northern Hausa/Fulani have long maintained a belief that ruling Nigeria is their entitlement. A period of relative balance emerged during Olusegun Obasanjo's presidency, which began in 1999. Obasanjo made efforts to include other ethnic groups, particularly from the southeastern region, which contributed to some progress, stability, and achievements, including the cancellation of Nigeria's foreign debt. However, this period of calm was disrupted by Hausa/Fulani resistance, notably through destabilizing actions like the introduction of Sharia law in parts of the North (notably Zamfara state), which contradicted the Nigerian Constitution, these actions escalated during subsequent administrations.

Political marginalization in Africa is often rooted in colonial-era structures, where colonial powers established centralized systems favoring certain groups. This trend continued post-independence, perpetuating inequalities and tensions. Abdalla Bujra offers a compelling illustration of political marginalization in Africa. He notes that rebellions typically initiated by groups outside a country's military seeking to overthrow the

government are common forms of political conflict across the continent. These uprisings are often driven by urban elites dissatisfied with how the government has treated them, their region, or their ethnic group. Such elites typically rally a group of loyalists from their ethnic or regional background, acquire weapons covertly (often with assistance from a neighboring country or occasionally a non-African power), and organize their rebellion. The motivations for these uprisings vary, including exclusion from political power, underrepresentation in government, deliberate neglect in the distribution of development funds, restrictions on private sector involvement, and even the transfer of their land to members of the dominant ethnic group. Bujra further explains that these grievances may extend to other ethnic groups, leading the rebel faction to build alliances and expand its influence. The success and endurance of such movements often depend on the support and resources provided by neighboring states, which offer safe zones and supplies for continued operations.

Marginalization has led to social unrest, with groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and South-South militants resorting to violence as a means of expressing their grievances. The perceived exclusion from political influence fuels separatist agitations and weakens national unity. Political marginalization is not unique to Nigeria, similar patterns are seen across Africa,

with Kenya and Sudan serving as notable examples.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS

Nigeria's history is marked by various secessionist movements, each challenging the nation's unity and prompting distinct governmental responses. From the Biafran War (1967-1970) to contemporary agitations by groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Yoruba Nation movement, the Nigerian government's strategies have evolved, encompassing military interventions, legal actions, and dialogue initiatives. Understanding these responses is crucial to grasp the dynamics of national integration and the state's approach to maintaining sovereignty.

Nigeria's colonial past and the amalgamation of its diverse ethnic groups into one nation trace back to British imperial rule. Before colonial intervention, the region now known as Nigeria comprised distinct ethnic entities, including the Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, and various minority groups, each with their own political and social systems. The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria by the British in 1914 was driven largely by administrative convenience and economic motives rather than the interest of the indigenous people. Scholars like (Akinola,2012) and (Paul, 2016) have criticized this merger, highlighting that the British overlooked the ethno-religious and cultural differences that defined these groups. Consequently, this "forced marriage" created lasting political tension and socio-economic challenges for Nigeria. The colonial policy of divide and rule, which followed the amalgamation, further deepened ethnic divisions and heightened distrust between groups. This legacy persists today, influencing Nigeria's contemporary political landscape, including ethnic rivalries, agitations for resource control, and regional discontent. This forced merger fostered ongoing political tension and socio-economic disparities. Critics like Akinjide (2001) and Abubakar (2003) argue that the amalgamation intensified ethnic rivalries, dominance fears, and marginalization, which persist in Nigeria's political landscape. Additionally, British colonial policies such as the introduction of indirect rule altered indigenous governance structures, placing traditional rulers in powerful positions under colonial oversight, thus weakening traditional institutions.

The amalgamation's long-term effects include increased inter-group distrust, persistent calls for restructuring, and ethnic-based political rivalries. Modern agitations for resource control, security reforms, and true federalism are often linked to the consequences of this colonial decision. The unification of culturally distinct regions without consensus created a fragile national identity, which continues to influence

Nigerian politics and ethnic relations. In summary, the British amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, executed without the consent of the indigenous people, established a fragile foundation for the country's unity, fostering ethnic tensions and instability that continue to challenge national cohesion.

The rise of groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Yoruba Nation movement advocating for self-determination can be attributed to various factors, including perceived marginalization, political exclusion, and economic disenfranchisement within the Nigerian state. These groups have emerged as a response to longstanding grievances and the failure of the Nigerian federal system to address the needs and aspirations of certain ethnic and regional groups. The persistent and loud calls for political restructuring, from almost all segments of Nigeria, pinpoint to the fact of dissatisfaction on the current state of the country by different groups that make up the country. As a federation of multiplicity of ethnic groups, diverse languages, variegated cultures and religions, Nigeria is undergoing a lot of difficulties in transforming her diversities into development. A combination of diversities coupled with decades of mis-governance is engendering systemic stress, culminating into outcries for political restructuring. Political restructuring, as being called for, is however amorphous. Apart from the fact that the country had, since amalgamation in 1914, being undergoing restructuring in one form or the other, there is patent lack of consensus on what to be restructured.

In the South-eastern part of the country, there are Biafra resurgent groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Biafra Zionist Federation (BZF) and the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) agitating for the sovereign Republic of Biafra. In the South-south, militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) have also agitated for the Niger Delta Republic. In the South-west, O'odua Nationalist Coalition, in September 2020, called on Yoruba people to prepare for sovereign nation i.e. O'odua Republic (Olumide, 2020). In furthering the agitation, Yoruba One Voice, Diaspora group, carried out rallies in 176 countries across six continents in September 2020 (Olumide, 2020). The movement is rooted in the historical context of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), where the southeastern region attempted to secede as the Republic of Biafra. IPOB's activities, including protests, sit-at-home orders, and international advocacy, reflect the group's desire for self-determination and independence from Nigeria (Ugwueze, 2021).

Similarly, the Yoruba Nation movement advocates for Yoruba self-determination and the creation of an independent Yoruba state. This movement has gained traction in the southwestern part of Nigeria, where the Yoruba ethnic group is predominant. The agitation is driven by perceived political and economic marginalization, as well as the desire for greater autonomy and control over resources. The movement has organized rallies, protests, and international campaigns to push for the recognition of Yoruba self-determination (Adedimeji, 2021). Both IPOB and the Yoruba Nation movement highlight the deep-seated issues within the Nigerian federal system, including structural imbalances, asymmetric power relations, and centralization of resources and authority. These groups argue that the current federal arrangement does not adequately represent or address the interests of their respective regions, leading to calls for restructuring or outright secession (Abada, Okafor & Omeh, 2020). In conclusion, the rise of IPOB and the Yoruba Nation movement underscores the need for a comprehensive review and restructuring of the Nigerian federal system to ensure equitable distribution of power and resources, and to address the grievances of marginalized groups. Without such reforms, the agitation for self-determination and independence is likely to persist, posing significant challenges to national unity and stability.

Human Rights and State Violence in the Yoruba Nation Agitation

The Yoruba Nation agitation reveals critical concerns about human rights and state violence. While agitators like Sunday Igboho claimed to be defending their people's rights and safety, their actions, such as the forced eviction of Fulani residents, raised questions about the violation of others' rights, including the right to free movement and residence.

On the other hand, the Nigerian government's handling of the agitation has also sparked debates about excessive use of force and potential human rights abuses. For instance, the raid on Igboho's home was criticized by some as an example of state violence, reflecting concerns about the government's tendency to use aggressive tactics in managing dissent. Similarly, the arrest of Yoruba Nation agitators who hijacked the radio station raised concerns about freedom of expression and political repression. This complex interplay between the agitators' actions and the government's response underscores the delicate balance between ensuring national security and upholding citizens' fundamental rights. The Yoruba Nation movement highlights how unresolved grievances, security challenges, and perceived marginalization can fuel separatist movements, often resulting in tensions between human rights advocacy and state control.

The Yoruba are one of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups, and they are predominant in the southwest region, which includes Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun Ondo, Osun, and Oyo states. For years now, agitators for a so-called Yoruba Nation have been calling for a break-up from Nigeria and demanding that a separate country called 'Oduduwa Republic', or 'Democratic Republic of the Yoruba' should be carved out.

The agitations gained public attention following insecurity in many parts of Southern Nigeria, eventually leading to the ban on open cattle grazing. Aside from strengthening the debates around 'true federalism' and restructuring, the incidents of herder violence also led to the creation of a regional security network called Amotekun Corps. In a bid to achieve the break-up, a Yoruba Nation agitator, Sunday Igboho Adeyemo, illegally evicted Fulani people from Oyo villages and also threatened to disrupt the 2023 general elections in the Southwest.

Though authorities frowned at his action and maintained that citizens had the right to reside wherever they chose, many argued at the time that he was filling a vacuum the government failed to fix. When agents of Nigeria's secret police raided Adeyemo's home in July 2021, he escaped to the neighboring Benin Republic. On the eve of the swearing-in of Nigeria's newly elected leaders in May 2023, some Yoruba Nation agitators hijacked the airwaves of Amuludun FM 99.1 in Ibadan for more than an hour before security agents arrested them.

The Yoruba Nation is fractured like many separatist groups. There is a faction led by Dupe Onitiri-Abiola, a widow of the late M.K.O. Abiola (renowned politician and businessman), who made the declaration for a new country called "Democratic Republic of Yoruba (DRY)" in a viral video on Friday, April 12. According to her, DRY has been a sovereign nation since 2022. Hours after she made the declaration, gunmen who were said to be Yoruba Nation soldiers invaded the Oyo State government secretariat in Ibadan in military camouflage, attempting to take over the facility. They removed the Nigerian national flag from the secretariat and replaced it with their "Oodua nation flag". They were, however, overpowered and arrested by soldiers and police officers.

On Monday, April 15, the police paraded 21 suspects in connection with Saturday's invasion. They were paraded alongside seized guns, ammunition, plaques with the Yoruba nation insignia, cutlasses, walkie-talkies, and other communication gadgets. They are expected to be charged with treasonable felony and terrorism.

HumAngle learnt that the incident panicked residents and road users along Bodija, Ikolaba, and Awolowo as business owners quickly locked their

shops. In fact, those who were about to open for the day's business turned back.

"I was on my way to visit my grandmother at the University College Hospital (UCH) when I observed masked men and women at different locations within the area. After a while, we heard gunshots, which made me change my route after I left the hospital," narrated Titilayo Akinyemi who resides in the Adegbayi area of Ibadan.

The Yoruba Nation agitation underscores the delicate balance between the protection of human rights and the exercise of state authority. While the actions of agitators like Sunday Igboho were seen by some as necessary for community defense, they also infringed on the rights of other citizens, particularly in cases of forced eviction. Conversely, the Nigerian government's response, marked by aggressive crackdowns and controversial arrests, raised concerns about excessive use of force and the suppression of dissent. This interplay highlights the complexities of managing separatist movements in a democratic society. Effective conflict resolution requires a balanced approach one that addresses the root causes of agitation, upholds citizens' rights, and avoids excessive state violence. Moving forward, fostering dialogue, promoting inclusive governance, and strengthening regional security structures could help mitigate tensions while preserving the dignity and rights of all citizens.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Relative Deprivation Theory

The relative deprivation psychology definition is the belief that a person will feel deprived or entitled to something based on the comparison to someone else. Relative deprivation theory is based on the notion that people will often feel that they have less than some comparative standard. People can feel relatively deprived of tangible items, such as money or cars, or intangible items, such as social status or respect. Ted Gur is the propounded this theory, Gurr asserts that, there are several factors of 'political violence' and 'political movement', but dominant causal factor seems to be the subjective sense of 'Relative Deprivation' of the collectivities or the mass of people. It is almost a universal assumption that an inequitable distribution of resources and wealth will provoke violent rebellion. Relative Deprivation Theory posits that individuals or groups experience discontent when they perceive a gap between their expectations and their actual circumstances (Runciman, 1966). This perceived discrepancy, rather than absolute deprivation, drives feelings of injustice and frustration, leading to collective action (Gurr, 1970). The theory emphasizes the importance of subjective perceptions and comparisons with reference groups in shaping social unrest. Gurr (1970) identifies several types of relative deprivation, including:

1. Decremental deprivation: Occurs when a group's actual conditions decline while their expectations remain constant.

2. Aspirational deprivation: Arises when expectations increase while actual conditions remain static.

3. Progressive deprivation: A brief period of improvement is followed by a period where conditions worsen.

   These different types of deprivation can fuel different intensities of discontent, which in turn affect the likelihood and nature of collective action.

The Yoruba Nation movement often articulates grievances related to perceived political marginalization within the Nigerian federal structure. This includes feelings of underrepresentation in key federal institutions and decision-making bodies, limited access to political power and a belief that the political system does not adequately address their concerns (Falola & Genova, 2005). The structure of the Nigerian state, with its history of military rule and ethnic-based power-sharing, has often been cited as a source of political deprivation for various groups, including the Yoruba (Subeu 2001). Changes in political administration, particularly those perceived to favor other ethnic groups or regions, can exacerbate these feelings of deprivation, leading to increased demands for self-determination (Albert, 2001).

Economic disparities and the unequal distribution of resources are significant factors contributing to the Yoruba Nation agitation. The movement often highlights the perceived economic exploitation of the Yoruba region, arguing that its resources are disproportionately used to benefit other parts of the country (Akinola, 2012). Limited access to economic opportunities, high unemployment rates, and inadequate infrastructure in Yoruba-speaking areas, when compared to other regions, can fuel feelings of relative deprivation and resentment towards the federal government (Oluwale, 2011).

The Yoruba people possess a rich and distinct cultural heritage, and the preservation of this identity is a central concern for the separatist movement. Perceived threats to Yoruba language, traditions, and cultural expression, often stemming from federal policies or the dominance of other cultures, can generate feelings of cultural deprivation (Adepegba, 2004). The movement may argue that the Nigerian state does not adequately recognize or respect Yoruba culture, leading to a sense of alienation and a desire for greater autonomy to protect their cultural heritage. Feelings of social injustice, discrimination, and marginalization can also contribute to the Yoruba Nation movement (Okpu,1982)

Perceptions of being treated as second-class citizens, or of facing systemic discrimination in access to social services and opportunities, can fuel a sense of relative deprivation and a desire to break away from the existing social order.

METHODOLOGY

The primary method of data collection for this study is the use of questionnaire and Interview. The questionnaire will be designed to examine key variables such as relationship between political actions, separatist movement and nation building and other key variables and I would also be interviewing at least 3 people with deep insights on Yoruba Nation Agitation.

Data collated from the shared questionnaires will be analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. SPSS is a software used for managing and analyzing social science data. The analysis will be conducted based on feedback received from the respondents, the findings will be presented using table, charts, and graphs for clarity and better interpretation.

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, analyzes and interprets the data collected during the field survey. One hundred and sixty six (166) questionnaires were shared, all filled and retrieved.

Age Group Distribution

The age distribution shows that the largest group of respondents falls within the 16–20 years category, comprising 48.8% (81 respondents). This is followed by 27.1% (45 respondents) aged 21–25 years, while 7.2% (12 respondents) are within the 26–30 years group. Additionally, 6.0% (10 respondents) are aged 31–35 years, and 10.9% (18 respondents) are aged 36 years and above. The data reflects that more than three-quarters of the participants (approximately 76%) are youth aged 16–25 years, highlighting a predominantly young respondent population that may significantly shape the attitudes towards political agitation and self-determination.

Awareness of the Yoruba Nation Separatist Movement

The data indicates that 51.8% (157 respondents) became aware of the Yoruba nation movement between 2015 and 2020, making this the most common period of first exposure. 33% (100 respondents) reported awareness before 2015, suggesting that the movement had traction even before recent political developments. Only 7.1% (22 respondents) indicated awareness after 2020, reflecting that most respondents were already familiar with the movement prior to its more recent resurgence. This implies that the Yoruba nation agitation has had a consistent presence in the sociopolitical landscape for at least a decade.

Primary Goals of the Yoruba Nation Agitators

In this multiple-response item, the most frequently identified goal was cultural preservation, selected by 56.7% (172 responses). This was followed by total independence from Nigeria at 25.5% (77 responses), and political autonomy with 12.8% (39 responses). Economic development was noted by 5% (15 responses). Notably, self-governance was listed as a standalone goal by 100% (166 responses). These findings suggest that while cultural and political motives are dominant, the movement is also viewed through a lens of governance restructuring, indicating a blend of ideological and practical motivations for seeking separation.

Expected Actions if Granted Separation

When asked what the Yoruba nation would likely do if granted separation, nearly half of the respondents (48.9%, or 148 individuals) believe that the region would form a new independent government. 29.8% (90 respondents) expect a focus on improving local governance and economy, while 12.8% (39 respondents) anticipate an emphasis on strengthening Yoruba culture and identity. A smaller group (8.5%, or 26 respondents) indicated they were not so sure. This spread of responses reflects that a significant number of respondents view the movement not just as symbolic

or cultural, but as a practical step toward political and economic restructuring.

Causes of the agitation

Major Causes of Separatist Agitation in the Yoruba Region

The most commonly cited cause of separatist agitation is ethnic discrimination, identified by 26.1% (56 respondents). This is closely followed by those who selected "others", including insecurity and sociopolitical reasons, which account for 24.2% (52 respondents). Economic inequality is also a significant factor, mentioned by 16.7% (36 respondents), while marginalization by the federal government was noted by 10.7% (23 respondents).

Lesser-reported causes include influence from other separatist movements like IPOB (9.3%), historical grievances (7.4%), and political exclusion (5.6%). These results suggest that a combination of ethnic, economic, and governance-related grievances drive the Yoruba agitation, with a noticeable influence from perceived injustices and instability within the Nigerian state.

Impact and Extent of Violence

Has the Yoruba nation movement led to any form of violence in your area or any other area you know of? The majority of respondents (47% or 78 individuals) indicated that the Yoruba nation movement has never led to violence in their area or any known area. A

significant proportion (22.3% or 37 respondents) reported that violence occurred sometimes, while 20.5% (34 respondents) said it occurred rarely. Only 10.2% (17 respondents) experienced such violence often. This distribution suggests that while instances of violence exist, they are not widespread or frequent for most of the respondents. The movement is largely perceived as non-violent in most locations, though pockets of unrest are acknowledged.

To what extent would you say the movement has affected peace and security in Nigeria? Most respondents believe the impact on national peace and security is limited or moderate. Specifically, 32.5% (54 respondents) feel the movement has affected peace and security only slightly, while 27.7% (46 respondents) consider the effect moderate. Only 18.7% (31 respondents) perceive the impact as very significant, whereas 21.1% (35 respondents) think it has had no impact at all. These responses suggest that although there is some recognition of potential disruption, the overall perception is that the Yoruba nation movement has not posed a major threat to Nigeria's peace and security so far.

How do you think violence related to separatist agitation can be managed? The majority of respondents (35.5%) believe that improved governance and inclusion is the most effective way to manage violence stemming from separatist agitation. This is closely followed by dialogue and negotiation with agitators, supported by 31.3% of respondents. Constitutional reforms were recommended by 19.9%, while 12.7% prefer military intervention as a strategy. A minimal 0.6% suggested that meeting the agitators' demands directly would be the best solution. These responses highlight a strong preference for non-violent, political, and inclusive approaches, as opposed to forceful responses.

Do you think the current government is handling the agitation effectively? A plurality of respondents (37.4%) believe that the government is not effective in handling the agitation. Another 26.5% feel it is only slightly effective, while 25.3% are not sure about the government's efforts. Only 10.8% of respondents think the government's handling has been very effective. This suggests a generally negative perception of the government's approach, with nearly two-thirds of the respondents either doubting its effectiveness or being uncertain.

What long-term strategies do you recommend for ending separatist agitations in Nigeria? The most favored long-term solution is restructuring Nigeria into true federalism, with 38.0% of the respondents in support. This is followed by recognizing and addressing ethnic grievances at 35.5%, indicating strong public support for structural and

inclusive reforms. Promoting national unity campaigns was suggested by 15.1%, and decentralizing power and resources by 10.2%. A small percentage (1.2%) recommended regionalism or eventual separation. Overall, the data reflects a clear preference for systemic reforms and acknowledgment of ethnic concerns as the most sustainable way to end separatist agitations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that many participants linked the emergence of the Yoruba separatist movement to historical political marginalization, particularly events such as the annulment of the 1993 presidential election. The respondents believe the intention of the movement is to establish an autonomous Yoruba nation capable of self-governance, security, and cultural preservation.

This aligns with Ajala (2009) who noted that the modern expression of Yoruba nationalism gained momentum in the 1990s following the annulment of Chief M.K.O. Abiola's electoral victory, a Yoruba candidate. This event was perceived by many as a deliberate act of political exclusion, reinforcing a sense of Yoruba marginalization.

Similarly, Peel (1989) traced the evolution of Yoruba nationalism from cultural to political expressions, asserting that the Yoruba elite constructed a common identity not only for unity but also as a platform for political autonomy.

Both sources confirm that Yoruba nationalism has deep historical roots and contemporary political objectives aimed at self-determination and restoring Yoruba political relevance.

The study further revealed that causes of Yoruba separatism include political marginalization, economic disenfranchisement, security failures, and the historical injustice of forced colonial amalgamation. Respondents view these issues as longstanding and systemic.

These findings are supported by Ibeanu, Orji, and Iwuamadi (2016), who identified ethnic competition, economic frustration, and state-society disconnection as core drivers of separatist movements. According to them, the Nigerian state's failure to integrate its diverse groups equitably has heightened the desire for self-determination among ethnic minorities.

Ryabinin (2017) also emphasized the role of colonial legacies, particularly the imposition of artificial borders and ethnic mergers post-World War II, in igniting separatist tendencies. The colonial 'divide and rule' system entrenched regional loyalties and divisions, which persist today. These scholarly views echo the sentiments of respondents who consider the Nigerian state an artificial creation incapable of ensuring equity for the Yoruba people.

Respondents agreed that while the Yoruba agitation has not primarily been violent,

clashes between agitators and state security forces have occasionally led to unrest. Most believe the movement aims to avoid violence but faces provocation from the state's repressive responses.

This position corresponds with Ajala (2009) who highlighted the role of the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) as a militant wing of Yoruba nationalism, occasionally involved in clashes with state authorities, especially in response to political oppression. However, Ajala also noted that the group's objectives are largely political and not inherently violent.

In line with this, Tamuno (1970) identified Nigeria's heterogeneous and ethnically polarized structure as a source of recurring conflicts. He argued that government attempts to suppress ethnic nationalism without addressing its root causes have led to periodic violent eruptions. Both works support the view that government actions, more than agitators themselves, have sometimes triggered violence.

The findings emphasized the need for political restructuring, inclusive governance, respect for ethnic identity, and peaceful dialogue as means to resolve separatist agitations. Respondents discouraged the use of military force or political repression. Osuntokun (1979) similarly advocated for the restructuring of Nigeria's political framework to ensure equitable representation and address ethnic grievances. He argued that the failure to accommodate ethnic diversity within a just system fosters discontent and drives separatist movements.

Boyle and Englebert (2006) highlighted the role of political elites in mobilizing ethnic support when national institutions fail to accommodate minority interests. They emphasized that long-term peace depends on addressing structural injustices rather than merely suppressing agitations. This supports respondents' calls for constitutional reforms, power devolution, and sincere national dialogue to sustainably manage separatist pressures.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study demonstrates that the Yoruba separatist movement is not a spontaneous or irrational development, but rather the outcome of a complex interplay of historical injustices, political exclusion, and regional grievances. Its resurgence in recent years reflects the growing frustrations of a people who feel disconnected from the Nigerian project. The demand for self-determination among the Yoruba should not be interpreted solely as a threat to national unity, but as a symptom of deeper systemic issues within the federation. Unless these structural issues are addressed through reforms that promote justice and fairness, similar movements are likely to persist. Sustainable peace

and unity in Nigeria can only be achieved through inclusive governance, fair distribution of resources, and genuine efforts to listen to and address the concerns of all ethnic groups. While the road to national integration is complex, a deliberate commitment to equity and dialogue can pave the way for a stronger and more cohesive Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the insights gained from the research, the following actions are recommended to mitigate separatist agitations and promote national unity: Reform Nigeria's Federal Structure: There is a need to revisit the current federal arrangement to grant more autonomy to regional governments. This would allow local authorities to manage internal affairs in ways that align with their socio-cultural values and developmental priorities.

Ensure Political Inclusion: National policies and appointments must reflect Nigeria's ethnic plurality. Ensuring that all groups feel fairly represented in key political institutions will reduce the sense of exclusion that fuels separatist sentiments. Promote Dialogue Over Suppression: Peaceful engagement with separatist leaders and civil society groups can yield better results than militarized responses. Encouraging open communication and listening to grievances will help de-escalate tensions. Public Education on National Unity:

Civic education initiatives should be strengthened to promote understanding, tolerance, and unity across ethnic lines. These efforts must especially target young people, who are often the most active participants in agitations.

Redress Historical and Structural Injustices: Acknowledging and addressing past injustices—including the controversial merger of Northern and Southern Nigeria—will demonstrate the government's commitment to fairness. Corrective policies and transparent governance can help rebuild trust among the citizenry. Improve Government Responsiveness: Public institutions must be made more accountable and transparent. Grievances often fester when the government appears unresponsive to the needs and demands of its people.

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