



Ethnicity, religion, politics and the challenges of national development in Nigeria

Okpala Mathias Onyinye¹, Onodugo Ifeanyi Chris²

¹ Professor, Department of Religion, Charisma University, Turks and Caicos Islands

² Professor, Department of Business Education, Enugu State College of Education Technical Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract

Even at the intellectual level, the categories of politics, religion, and ethnicity pose difficulties. The interconnectedness of politics, religion, and ethnicity as social dynamics in promoting the growth of a nation, however, has become crucial everywhere in the world. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with cultural diversity among its ethnic groupings. Political upheaval, ethnic chauvinism, young restlessness, corruption, religious prejudice and extremism, as well as other social vices that impede national progress, have plagued the country. In light of the foregoing, this study explores how politics, religion, and ethnicity have an impact on Nigeria's national growth. Cross-sectional data were gathered using a structured questionnaire across the twenty-five local government areas of Delta State using a descriptive methodology. 400 respondents were polled using a questionnaire using non-probabilistic sample strategies, including convenient and purposeful methods. Correlation and regression analyses were performed on the data that were collected. The study's conclusions demonstrated that politics, religion, and ethnicity had a detrimental and considerable impact on Nigeria's national growth. Based on these findings, the study makes several recommendations, including that the country needs a focused leadership that has a vision for how to put its citizens at the center of the political project without resorting to ethnic chauvinism and sees obtaining political power as a means of promoting the welfare of its people as a whole, regardless of their ethnic origin.

Keywords: ethnicity, religion, politics, national development, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is still looking for a new political system at the age of 58. Due to the dominance of ethnicity, religion, and politics, which have a negative impact on Nigeria's progress as a nation and the survival of democratic rule, it is hard to fully realize this goal. In a diverse country like Nigeria, federalism is likely the best structure for addressing ethnic, cultural, and religious heterogeneity. In such a system, each state or territory is free to manage its resources and advance at its own rate of development. Nigeria, on the other hand, acts in opposition to what it claims to be a federal system of government and does not take into account the identities, interests, or needs of its citizens, particularly its minorities. The constitution of the country does not represent the desires of the populace, and the majority of government actions are anti-citizen and do not promote national unification and cohesiveness (Ilesanmi, 2014) ^[17]. The Nigerian government continues to be disengaged from acting in its citizens' best interests. The powerful people who developed enormous patronage networks during the military era and who now utilize political position to grow these networks and their personal wealth control politics at the federal, state, and municipal levels of the Nigerian federation. Furthermore, many of these so-called "godfathers" have been cultivating, sparking a local arms race in some areas despite the fact that several governors are being investigated domestically and abroad for money laundering. The bonanza continues at the public coffers for these power brokers, while the country's basic infrastructure is still in many areas as bad shape as it was during military rule (Kew, 2006 cited in Fagbadebo, 2007) ^[34, 11].

In Nigeria today, politics is a "do or die" situation. The national politics has become overheated due to the struggle for political power and control at the national level. This

unnecessary tension has led to intolerance across and among regions. These same politicians recruit and arm political thugs, who ultimately lose control of the thugs and turn their weapons against helpless citizens (Ilesanmi, 2014) ^[17]. Since its start, the contemporary democratic system has been plagued by unheard-of vice disturbances and social unrest that have caused extensive property damage and fatalities. These upheavals pose a severe threat to national security because of their religious and ethnic components. National progress and the democratic process are not supported by the tension and uncertainty currently present in the nation. Nigeria has recently experienced frequent outbreaks of violence and widespread insecurity in almost all of the federation's states. The most notable of these is Boko Haram, which has been linked to the north and south of Nigeria's political competition for control of the country's political power. It is important to understand that the sudden and seeming appearance of the Boko Haram group at this time in the nation's history is an attempt to undermine both the Jonathan Administration and the equilibrium that the government has brought about in the nation (Ogoloma, 2012) ^[28]. Militia organizations also occur in all geopolitical zones, along with kidnapping and all kinds of diseases. This has led to numerous bloodbaths, senseless killings, property devastation, social upheaval, and the accompanying poverty, insecurity, and unemployment (Ilesanmi, 2014) ^[17].

Ogbulafor (2000) ^[27] asserted that approximately 70% of Nigerians are affected by poverty because of this. Only in Nigeria do you find political and military leaders who lack the knowledge, vision, and skills needed to create a favorable socioeconomic and political climate. Some of them and their allies have sponsored most crises and conflicts rather than seeing themselves as champions of world peace and national advancement. Even worse,

ethnicity is a factor in all political activity in Nigeria. It stands out in areas like voting, the distribution of political posts, employment, and overall public favoritism of the government (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Additionally, ignoring the contributions of religious believers like Christians, Muslims, African Traditionalists, and other secular ideologists when discussing national development is suicide (Awoniyi, 2015). Today's political leaders and, sadly, the so-called clergy of Christianity and Islam have used religion so extensively that it has continued to spark conflicts around the globe. Nigeria is one of several nations that have experienced the brutal murder and mutilation of innocent people by Islamic fanatics (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016) ^[13]. Therefore, it is highly desirable to explore how politics, religion, and ethnicity have affected Nigeria's national growth. Given the difficulties created by the indices of pluralism, it even becomes necessary given that we still discuss underdeveloped Nigeria today (ethnicity, religion and politics).

Conceptual framework

For the sake of clarity, it is crucial to comprehend and have a conceptual understanding of these operational terms: ethnicity, religion, politics, and national development.

Ethnicity

The term "ethnicism" does not lend itself to simple definition, like any other term used by social scientists (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). However, there is widespread agreement on a few issues that are important to comprehending the phenomenon. Although ethnicity is a derivative of ethnic group, it is generally acknowledged that ethnicity only manifests itself when more than one ethnic group or identity is present. As such, ethnic group must be defined in order to completely comprehend the meaning of ethnicity. The systematic variations in how ethnicity is defined among nations make this issue particularly crucial. According to Osaghae (1994) ^[32], ethnicity is a troubling phenomenon that has a conflictual rather than a consensual nature. After listing the aspects of ethnicity that experts agreed upon. According to Cohen (1974), an ethnic group is an unofficial affinity group whose members are distinguished from those of other ethnic groups within a wider community by their shared ancestry, religion, and linguistics. Thompson (2004) ^[35] describes an ethnic group as a group of individuals who consider themselves to share a common identity based on shared ancestry, kinship relationships, historical experiences, traditions, and cultures, as well as maybe speaking a similar language. Ethnic groupings are hence social formations that may be identified by the communal nature of their boundaries (Nnoli, 1978). Because of their tendencies toward certain ethnic groups and their territorial mindsets, Nigerian leaders may be impacted by these social formations, which have an impact on how well they execute and operate. Additionally, nepotism and its associated negative effects, most notably antagonism in the form of interethnic violence, are a natural byproduct of the interethnic battle for social and economic domination (Ogoloma, 2012) ^[28].

According to Osaghae (1994) ^[32], ethnicity is a social formation based on practices and symbols that are specific to a particular culture. This indicates that ethnicity refers to a circumstance in which members of a certain ethnic group

believe they share a trait that sets them apart from other social groupings, or that this belief is shared by others. All groups can be distinguished by their respective religions, politics, occupations, or languages, as well as by the distinctive cultural behaviors that are typically created (Ilesanmi, 2014) ^[17]. In politics, ethnicity refers to ethnic-identity-based behavior that aims to seize state authority at the macro level and political power at the local level in a competitive environment (Osimen, Balogun & Adenegan, 2013) ^[33]. According to Achebe (1981) ^[1], ethnicity is a form of birthplace discrimination against a citizen. As it is frequently regarded as a significant role in the administration and development processes of many countries, ethnicity has today become a population subject of intellectual investigation to scholars in numerous fields both in established and developing countries, particularly of Africa. It would be difficult to find a nation that is unaffected by ethnic difficulties, according to Ajayi and Owumi (2013) ^[4], however some nations' conditions stand out due to the lessons they provide about the influence of ethnicity on national development. Jiboku and Jiboku (2022) ^[20] also note that ethnic chauvinism, which took the form of ethnic nationalism, has been a major contributing factor to the conflict in Nigeria's inter-ethnic relations. There is no question that this has repercussions for Nigeria's national growth and continued democracy.

Religion

The hardest phrase or word to define is "religion," which is the oldest discipline in human society. Theologians and social scientists do not agree on how religion is best understood. This is largely due to the intrinsic difficulty in comprehending the "deep essences" of religion, not just because academics struggle with the element of subjectivity (Egwu, 2001). Depending on their disciplines, different people have different viewpoints on religion or have different understandings of it. For instance, sociologists believe that religion has more of a social than a political relevance, whereas anthropologists see religion as a part of culture (Barrett, 2003). Theologians believe that religion is the cornerstone of civilization, the supreme aesthetic expression at the core of all decisions and deeds, and the final justification for civilization, including all of its inventions, artifacts, social, political, and economic institutions, as well as its past, present, and future prophecies and history (Muazam, 2006 cited in Cinjel & Chujor, 2017) ^[8]. According to Durkheim (1965) ^[9], religion is a group representation that holds things sacred. Religion can be defined in terms of the degree of purity and impurity (Shabi & Awe, 2001). According to Yesufu (2016) ^[39], religion is the act of serving and honoring a god or gods. Religion is a significant component of traditional backgrounds and has the largest impact on the thinking and emotions of the people involved, according to Mbatu (1999), referenced in Ilesanmi (2014) ^[17]. According to Obilor (1998), religion gives man the ability to follow the laws of his nature, the natural law, and/or the divine law. According to Durrant (1920), religion serves as a roadblock to human self-actualization. Without a sure, religion can be viewed in this way when it has been transformed into an ideological tool; otherwise, Karl Marx wouldn't have referred to it as the "opium of the people." a remedy employed by the authorities to keep the people under control. Religion can be a tool for development, ego massage, and dehumanization in

the hands of a villain, but it can also be a tool for humanization in the hands of a saint (Ogugua & Ogugua, 2015)^[29].

It has been asserted that one's religion is what completes one as a whole, yet this claim may not be true since not all individuals who practice a religion would concur that their religion is what completes them as a whole. Basically, Islam and Christianity are the two most prevalent religions in Nigeria. We have African traditional religion even if Christians and Muslims both believe in one God. The religious conflict we are seeing around the world is a result of these different worldviews (Ilesanmi, 2014)^[17]. Today, one would be inclined to argue that religion is irrelevant to society progress and should therefore be removed from human social life in light of the emergence of religious bigots and extremists (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi- Adejolu, 2016)^[13]. Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism are frequent names for religious extremism in Nigeria. Fanaticism, according to Hornby (2000)^[15], is the holding or display of strong opinions, especially in relation to politics or religion. Balogun (1988)^[7] characterized religious fanaticism as the incapacity of religious devotees to reconcile their theories with the practical realities of their faith, as well as violent and irrational religious enthusiasm.

Politics

The word "politics" comes from the Greek word "polis," which means "city state." The word "polis" carries the sense of government implicitly. Diverse authors have given different definitions of politics, and these definitions are a reflection of the authors' political, social, and philosophical backgrounds. Consequently, there is no agreed definition of politics in existence. Politics, according to Ejizu (1988), is a dynamic process in which human and other resources are managed and directed after proper mobilization to secure the implementation of public decisions and policies in an effort to maintain social order. Politics, according to Hornby (2000)^[15], is both the art and science of governance. It is the branch of science that deals with the definitions, structuring, and management of a state or a portion of one as well as the regulation of its interactions with other states. Politics, according to Onyekpe (2003), referenced by Ogugua and Ogugua (2015)^[29], is about the exercise and control of power. Another way to think of politics is as the process of determining who gets what, when, and how. According to Dyke (1960), politics is a struggle between individuals who have divergent goals on societal issues. According to Marxian theory, politics is a fight between opposing social classes for power over the state because the latter is a "instrument of class rule" (Oluwatusin & Daisi, 2022)^[30]. Politics is a domain of deliberate behavior through which we aim to live better than we do now, according to Leshe (1970), referenced in Ngele (2008). It is well known that Ake (1995)^[5] believed that politics was primarily about the control of power. The degree to which the nature of the state, including its authority, determines politics is less well known. Ikelegbe (2005) defined politics as a recurring pattern of interpersonal interactions including a sizable amount of authority, control, or influence.

Despite having different views on politics, the importance of the state and of power in the political process is a point of agreement. Thus, politics is primarily focused on the state, its institutions, operations, and overall impact on society. It also includes an analysis of government and its duties

(Appadorai, 2003). It is interesting to observe that the Nigerian polity's leadership issue was a manifestation of the dysfunctional pattern that existed during the years of the military interregnum (Omo-Bare, 1996; Omodia, 2009; Ighodalo, 2012; Ijere, 2015). The Nigerian leadership style lacks the required emphasis to foster political stability and national progress. Instead, according to Ake (1995)^[5] and Sklar, Onwudiwe, and Kew (2006)^[34], Nigerian elites are focused with their goals to appropriate and privatize the Nigerian state. For example, the systemic corruption and the accompanying political violence that followed electoral rigging in an effort to maintain power led to the fall of the First and Second Republics (Ayeni, 1988)^[6]. Because attention was diverted to fend off the oncoming forces of insecurity and internal regime instability, development performance lagged and political instability persisted in the polity. The democratic process in the Nigerian state today is undoubtedly plagued by poor party politics as a result of a lack of internal democracy, party indiscipline, a lack of distinct party ideologies, ethnicization of party politics, subpar political leadership, an overly Westernized conception of "democracy," the politicization of the military profession, and other factors (Ntalaja, 2000)^[24]. These elements undoubtedly contributed to the demise of democratic republics in Nigeria and have continuously posed a threat to the survival of the Fourth Republic of Nigeria.

Country development

Different people have different definitions of development. A process of economic and social transformation based on intricate connections between culture and environment might be referred to as development (Ajaebu, 2012). Additionally, development is connected with advancement and civilization (Willis, 2005)^[38]. Development, according to Walter Rodney as stated in Ajaegbu (2012)^[3], is the process that includes: physical development, including technologically created man-made things; cultural development, including societal ideals; and personal development, including psychological directions of persons. Martinussen (1997)^[23] lists a number of different notions of development, including capacity building, dialectical change, greater welfare and human development, modernization, and dependency removal. The reduction of poverty, inequality, and unemployment is the goal of societal progress, according to Seers (1979). According to Sen (1999), development entails lessening inequality or increasing choice. Deprivation is a broad concept that encompasses many aspects of poverty, such as hunger, illiteracy, disease and bad health, voicelessness, insecurity, humiliation, and lack of access to essential infrastructure.

The level of a country's national development can be determined by the growth rate of its per capita income relative to those of other nations (Lucas, 1988)^[22]. To be acceptable in terms of poverty level, employment, creativity, efficiency, production, and equality, the society must undergo a previously unheard-of transformation in tandem with this growth in per capita income. National development is the capacity of a country or countries to enhance the social welfare of the populace by providing safety and social amenities, such as high-quality healthcare, employment opportunities, portable water, and transportation infrastructure (Ajaegbu, 2012)^[3]. Faulty development strategies implemented in Nigeria since

independence have left the population destitute and pauperized. These are exhibited by rising levels of poverty, diseases, unemployment, inadequate housing, a shortage of portable water, an epileptic power supply, the exclusion of minorities from accessing power and resources, and poor health care and medical services (Ighodalo, 2012). Intolerance, false beliefs, a lack of understanding of religious concepts, fanaticism, extremism, violence, bloodshed, suicide, insecurity, injustice, corruption, immoral behavior, ignorance, and poor leadership and governance are all obstacles to national development in Nigeria. All of these factors are detrimental to the advancement of a nation. The issues of national development in Nigeria assume such a terrible size that seems to defy any kind of remedy when these are combined with numerous instances of young misinformation, misorientation, and other types of erroneous exposures and experiences (Oladosu, 2015).

The problem of ethnicity in Nigeria's national development

The concept of ethnicity is politically neutral and does not endanger democracy or national development; on the contrary, it may help to foster healthy inter- and intra-ethnic contacts and relationships. Problematic is the exploitation and politicization of ethnicity (Adetiba & Rahim, 2012) ^[2]. Additionally, Iyanga (2022) ^[19] asserts that multi-ethnic nations frequently have antagonistic and competitive interactions as various communities compete for control of the state's political authority and other economic resources, which hinders both political and socioeconomic development. As a result, ethnicity offers the framework through which various people come together, primarily to realize economic goals. This justification is pertinent to the African environment, particularly Nigeria, where many groups complain about marginalization in relation to the distribution of national resources (Ebegbulem, 2011) ^[10]. The Nigerian state has struggled to preserve the rights of its diverse population as equal citizens, ensure that national resources are distributed fairly, foster national integration and unity, and realize national development objectives. The many ethnic groups and their organizations fill the gap left by its incapacity to act as an autonomous force above society, mediating between conflicting social interests, and mobilizing for the fair allocation of economic resources (Iyanga, 2022) ^[19].

Since the country's independence, Nigeria has faced a number of issues, including those relating to state formation, revenue distribution, lack of trust among constituent units, election rigging, restiveness/militancy, the Boko Haram insurgency, ethno-religious violence, inter-ethnic violence, the inability of some ethnic groups to hold certain political offices, and political instability (Jiboku & Jiboku, 2022) ^[20]. These issues obstruct the country's development. Furthermore, multi-party democracy, which Nigeria has embraced at various points in its history, has exacerbated the state's political difficulties rather than resolving its ethnic issues. The country's democratic experiments have so far had little impact on its political development or the citizens' standard of living (Vande, 2012) ^[37]. The strongest factor influencing Nigeria's political and social interactions has been discovered to be ethnicity. It causes tension and mistrust between Nigeria's three major ethnic groups—Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, and Igbo—and has caused them to

view the country as a national cake that must be divided among them (Iyanga, 2022) ^[19]. Ethnicity has had several detrimental effects on the country's progress towards democratization, to the point where it continues to pose a threat to the establishment of democracy and national development in Nigeria. The waste of significant human and material resources in ethnically motivated violence, encounters, clashes, and even battles, as noted by Babangida in 2002 and cited by Salawu and Hassan in 2011, as well as the threat to the security of lives and property, the disinvestment of local and foreign components with ongoing capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy, as well as widening gaps are just a few of its negative effects.

The problems with religion in Nigeria's national development

Human existence and living, thinking patterns, attitudes, and relationships are all fundamentally influenced by religion. Any meaningful, comprehensive, and lasting national development in any human culture is thought to be dependent on religion (Obiefuna & Uzoigwe, 2012). More specifically, Kant (1960) argues that the only social force that can provide a support framework for morality—the moral code, which is the essential to achieving the highest good—is religious community. There is no doubt that a climate of good morals will foster political stability, peace, and unity, all of which will favorably influence the development of the country. If religion is the foundation of morality, it must combat our culture's materialism and the unfair distribution of the nation's riches and services, which are controlled by the society's corrupt elements (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016) ^[13]. However, religion in Nigeria serves as a catalyst for the commission of violence, fostering ethnic consciences and solidarity, the appropriation of power, the pursuit of socio-economic advantage, mass killings, the willful destruction of lives, and the vandalizing of property belonging to those who are deemed heretics or who support other religions. This can be linked to the animosity between Islam and Christianity, the two major religions, which frequently led to a quest for dominance, a sour rivalry, and the willful destruction of lives and property (Ngele, 2008).

In Nigeria, some religious activities have impeded political and societal advancement. This backs up Ajaegbu's (2012) ^[3] claim that religious terrorism in Nigeria poses a serious threat to national development because it is visible in Northern Nigeria, where social and economic activities in some of the most volatile states (Yobe and Borno) have nearly come to a halt due to a steady stream of killings, the destruction of people's basic sources of livelihood, and the termination of foreign and local investments, becoming a cog in the development wheel. The rise of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria has had a significant impact on the region's political, economic, social, and environmental circumstances as well as the economy of Nigeria as a whole. Since 2011, there have been numerous instances of terrorist attacks, including the bombing of the UN office in Abuja, the Edet House of Force Headquarters in Abuja, the Madala attacks, the bombing of Gwagwalada Park, the kidnapping of the Chibok girls, among many other attacks, particularly in the north-eastern region of Nigeria (Iwuoha, 2014). Therefore, religion is a source of not only intolerance, breaches of human rights, and violent extremism, but also of non-violent dispute resolution, the defense of human rights,

honesty in governance, and reconciliations and stability in societies that are split (Appleby, 1996).

Nigeria's political challenges to national development

No matter how effective it is, politics cannot provide better and more improved public goods, a political system with weak institutions, client-patron politics, neo-patrimonial networks, and no political will (Ijere, 2015). This backs up Achebe's (1981) ^[1] claim that Nigeria lacked solid institutions that might help the political system deal with the challenges of governance in a methodical manner. The success of a nation's democratic experiment can be linked to a political party with a sizable majority of supporters and leaders who prioritize the welfare of the country. Political parties in Nigeria were founded by gullible and self-centered religious figures and leaders. The client-patron system, referred to as "godfather politics" in Nigeria, has taken precedence over the formal elements of politics, such as the rule of law, effectively run political parties, and an honest electoral process (Oluwatusin & Daisi, 2022) ^[30]. Nigerian party politics obstruct national progress and foster political instability. The Nigerian government continues to be disengaged from acting in its citizens' best interests. It is interesting to observe that the Nigerian polity's leadership issue was a manifestation of the dysfunctional pattern that existed during the years of the military interregnum. From the post-independence era to the modern new democratic experience, which started with president Obasanjo's administration and continued through the current administration of Muhammadu Buhari, election violence has been a culture par excellence. In addition to utilizing violence, there is a lack of an impartial electoral system. All of the electoral umpires appointed by this country's leadership had failed to hold a free and fair election. This incompetence could be attributed to two reasons. First off, the president had the authority to nominate the head of the electoral commission. Due to the fact that the president, who is also the one who pays the piper (NEC/FEDECO/NECON/INEC chairman), can hear the music, this lends validity to the charade Nigeria has been engaged in for years. Second, the ethnicity element contributes to the nation's progress toward holding free and fair elections in which voters use their constitutional rights by casting a ballot (Ngele, 2008). These arguments are persuasive in Nigerian politics today.

The return of multi-party democracy gave rise to hope that Nigeria's governance problems—good governance, the rule of law, freedom, as well as institutional, infrastructural, and national development—would soon be resolved. However, the rule of law has been in jeopardy since 1999, institutional weakness is still a concern, effective governance is still out of reach, and a sizable portion of Nigerians continue to live below the poverty line. Obasanjo's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Yaradua's Seven Point Agenda, Jonathan's Transformation Agenda, and Buhari's Fight Against Corruption, Insecurity, and Poverty Agenda were the successive democratic regimes' main policy initiatives. However, they did little to advance infrastructure development, combat poverty and unemployment, or increase Nigeria's capacity for economic growth (Ijere, 2015). Without "politics of the belly," Nigeria's vast human and material resources would have produced more benefits for the nation and its citizens during the past 20 years in an atmosphere where democratic

institutions and the rule of law prevail. It is instructive to note that politics is fundamental to the design and upkeep of institutions, and that the existence of strong institutions essentially explains state formation and state capacity, which are significant factors in determining development and the reduction of poverty in developing states (Leftwich, 1996). Due to poor institutions, leadership issues within the Nigerian polity, widespread corruption, and the political violence that followed electoral rigging in an effort to maintain power, Nigeria still lacks the focus essential to foster national progress and political stability. Additionally, Omodia (2010), Igbodalo (2012), Ogugua and Ogugua (2015) ^[29] make reference to a lack of political will, hesitant international pressure and assistance, corruption, political unrest and a wave of insecurity, cross-politicking by politicians, electoral rigging, politics of intolerance, mobilization of religious sentiments, political assassinations and youth restiveness, failure to follow the rules of the game of party politics, impunity, and ineffective measures against these issues

Theoretical framework

The classical model theory and the deprivation theory provide us with a heuristic tool for examining the key topics of this study, while there are other theories that would be suitable for a discourse of this kind. The classical model theory, put forth by Clifford Geertz in 1975, offers an explanation for the challenges faced in nation-building in the new states as well as solutions to the issue. Following Geertz, there are "Civil ties," which are affinities based on socio-economic grouping, and "Primordial connections," which are affinities based on biological ties that seem to flow more strongly than natural or rational choice (Class, status, part, professional group). Primordial relationships are typically quite resistant to civil order because of their very nature (and particularly since they are territorially defined and can be used as a foundation for establishing the right to national self-determination). Contrarily, civic ties frequently involve crises-crossing memberships and cross-cutting cleavages, making them more conducive to civil order. If the nation-state is to exist, a solution or a procedure by which ancestral ties will be replaced by civil ties and ultimately subjugated to civil order must be found (Osimen *et al.*, 2013) ^[33]. When applied to Nigeria, the predominance of primal emotions helps to explain the national identity and ethnicity conflicts. Contrary to what proponents of the detribalization thesis might have expected, more civilization has increased the significance of these sentiments. This is the paradox of African progress that makes national identity crises worse. According to Crawford Young, 1979, cited in Osimen *et al.* (2013) ^[33], the creation, strengthening, or diversification of social and political representations of cultural plurality has occurred in dialectic symbiosis with the apparent triumph of the nation-state model (group identities founded upon affinities of ethnicity, religion, language, race and region).

Additionally, the deprivation theory, which Ted Gurr first proposed in 1969, and many analysts of the relationship between religion and violent conflicts in Nigeria have argued that religion has also evolved into a tool for protesting various forms of deprivation, exclusion, alienation, poverty and marginalization, failed development, and public corruption, as well as being used by the wealthy elites for a variety of purposes to advance interests that are

inevitably religious. Muslims in Nigeria consider it their right to follow the Islamic sharia in its entirety in order to fully and properly perform their religion. On the other side, Christians argue that the campaign for a secular constitution amounts to a breach of their right to practice their religion and that the incorporation of sharia law into any legal framework also violates their rights as non-Muslims (Usman, 1987) [36]. Forx (2004) uses the latter position to appropriately represent how the government's active involvement in religious matters serves to exacerbate the problem. Thus, it violates the constitution of Nigeria. The state is trapped in the center of the conflict between the secular and religious options, which breeds so much animosity that it can both cause and encourage violence. One of the few areas where Nigerian Christians and Muslims truly feel like they have a point to resolve is the relationship between state and religion and the management of that relationship (Cinjel & Chujor, 2017) [8]. Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not just a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between chosen religious leaders if there is to be development in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular. This is because if Muslims and Christians are not at peace, as we are currently witnessing, there cannot be any real development. Therefore, if these two main world religions refuse to work together, development in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular are at risk. The aforementioned theories are meant to make it easier to comprehend how politics, religion, and ethnicity affect a country's ability to flourish.

The following goals and hypotheses were developed for the study in accordance with the literature review:

- To investigate the impact of ethnicity on national development in Nigeria.
- To assess how Nigeria's national development has been impacted by religion.
- To investigate the impact of politics on Nigeria's national development. The study's hypotheses are:
- H1: In Nigeria, ethnicity does not significantly affect national progress.
- H2: In Nigeria, religions have little impact on societal advancement.
- H3: Nigeria's national growth is not significantly impacted by politics.

Methodology

This study evaluated how politics, religion, and ethnicity affected Nigeria's national growth. Since the study used a cross-sectional research methodology, data from all twenty-five (25) Local Government Areas in the state were collected. In order to contact respondents, convenience and deliberate non-probabilistic sampling strategies were used. The electorates in the state were the target demographic. According to the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC), Delta State had 2470264 registered voters as of the third quarter of 2022 (INEC, 2022). Using the formula developed by Taro Yamane, the 425-person sample was chosen from the 2360153-person population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where N = The population size,

n= Sample size

e = Sampling error

$$n = \frac{2360153}{1 + 2360153 (0.05)^2}$$

n = 224.93

n = 425 Appr.

425 people were chosen as the sample size as a result. To guarantee fair representation from each Local Government Area that makes up the sample size, electorates in each of the Local Government Areas were randomly chosen. Correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze the collected data.

Presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data

This study looked at how politics, religion, and ethnicity affected Nigeria's national growth. In order to accomplish this, 250 questionnaires were dispersed around Delta State's 25 local government areas. We received 347 of the 400 copies of the questionnaire given, giving us an 86.75% response rate, as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire and Response Rate

S/N	Local Government Areas	Questionnaire Distribution	Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage (%)
1	Aniocha North	17	15	4.6
2	Aniocha South	17	15	4.6
3	Bomadi	17	14	4.3
4	Burutu	17	15	4.6
5	Ethiope East	17	15	4.6
6	Ethiope West	17	13	4.0
7	Ika North East	17	13	4.0
8	Ika South	17	15	4.6
9	Isoko North	17	13	4.0
10	Isoko South	17	13	4.0
11	Ndokwa East	17	13	4.0
12	Ndokwa West	17	13	4.0
13	Okpe	17	14	4.3
14	Oshimili North	17	13	4.0
15	Oshimili South	17	13	4.0
16	Patani	17	12	3.6
17	Sapele	17	13	4.0
18	Udu	17	13	4.0
19	Ughelli North	17	14	4.3

20	Ughelli South	17	12	3.6
21	Ukwuani	17	14	4.3
22	Uvwie	17	13	4.0
23	Warri North	17	13	4.0
24	Warri South	17	14	4.3
25	Warri South-West	17	13	4.0
	Total	425	325	91.64

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2022.

Table 2: Moderated Regression Analysis Showing the Effects of the Independent Variables on the Dependent Variable

Dependent Variable	Independent variables	F	R	R ²	Adj- R ²	Beta	T-Value
National Development	Ethnicity	143.344	.469	.218	.087	-.203	-3.554
National Development	Religion	172.053	.625	.099	.093	-.206	-3.421
National Development	Politics	185.026	.452	.034	.028	-.272	-2.874

Source: Field Survey, 2022

According to the findings, contrary to the first hypothesis that ethnicity in Nigeria has little bearing on national development, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the predictor (ethnicity) and the response variable, as indicated by the correlation coefficient of (0.358). (National development). According to the fitted model's explanation of the R-squared statistic, ethnic differences account for 10.9% of the overall variation in the measure of national progress. With an F-value of 154.233 and a p-value of 0.000, the ANOVA results for ethnicity as a predictor of national development are statistically significant. When the coefficient of determination was corrected for the degree of freedom, .098 or roughly 9.8% was obtained. This revealed that, after adjusting for degree of freedom, ethnicity accounted for about 9.8% of systematic (change) in national development in Nigeria. The Nigerian nation's development decreased by 31.4(%) % for every one percent increase in ethnicity, according to the beta coefficient of -.314. The ethnicity model's t-statistics of -.4.663 at a p-value (sig) of 0.000, less than 5% level of significance, likewise showed a significant link between ethnicity and national development in Nigeria. The null hypothesis is therefore disproved.

According to the findings, there is a positive and statistically significant association between religion and national development in Nigeria, contrary to the second hypothesis, which holds that religion has no discernible impact on national development in Nigeria. According to the fitted model's explanation of the R-squared data, religious diversity in Nigeria accounts for around 8.8% of the overall variation in the measure of national development. With an F-value of 183.064 and a p-value of 0.000, the ANOVA results for religion as a predictor of national development in Nigeria are statistically significant. When the coefficient of determination was corrected for the degree of freedom, .082, or roughly 8.2%, was obtained. This showed that after adjusting for degree of freedom, religion in Nigeria contributed for about 8.2% of systemic (change) in national development. The Nigerian nation's development decreased by 30.7(%) % for every one percent increase in religion, according to the beta coefficient of -.307. The model for religion produced t-statistics of -.4.310 at p-value (sig) of 0.000, which is less than 5% level of significant, and this further demonstrated that there is a significant association between religion and national development in Nigeria. The null hypothesis is therefore disproved.

Regarding the third hypothesis, which claims that politics in Nigeria has no discernible impact on national development, the findings revealed that a positive and statistically significant correlation exists between the predictor (politics) and the response variable, as indicated by the correlation coefficient (0.563). (National development). According to the fitted model's explanation of the R-squared statistics, differences in politics account for around 4.3% of the overall variation in the measure of national development in Nigeria. With an F-value of 196.137 and a p-value of 0.000, the ANOVA results for politics as a predictor of national development in Nigeria are statistically significant. When the degree of freedom was taken into account, the coefficient of determination produced a result of .037, or around 3.7%. This revealed that, after adjusting for degree of freedom, politics account for about 3.7% of systematic (change) in national development in Nigeria. The Nigerian nation's development was shown to be negatively impacted by politics by 28.3%, according to the beta coefficient of -.283. The model for politics produced a t-statistic of -.2.985 at a p-value (sig) of 0.000, which is less than 5% level of significant. This result also revealed a significant association between politics and national development in Nigeria. The null hypothesis is therefore disproved.

Discussion of the results

According to the study's primary goal, ethnicity has a considerable and unfavorable impact on Nigeria's national development. The results support the assertions made by Ebegbulem (2011) ^[10], Salawu and Hassan (2011), Vande (2012) ^[37], Iyanga's (2022) ^[19], and Jiboku and Jiboku (2022) ^[20] that ethnicity in Nigeria has a significant detrimental impact on national development. This is due to the fact that multi-ethnic states are frequently predisposed to antagonistic and competitive interactions as various communities compete for control of the state's political authority and other economic resources.

Second, the findings demonstrated that Nigeria's national development is significantly and negatively impacted by religion. This backs up Ngele (2008) and Ajaegbu (2012) ^[3] 's contention that religion in Nigeria serves as a vehicle for the commission of violence, fostering ethnic consciousness and solidarity, the appropriation of political authority and socioeconomic gains, mass killings and the wanton destruction of lives and property of those deemed heretics or

who pledge allegiance to other religions. Additionally, religious terrorism in Nigeria poses a serious threat to national development as is demonstrated in Northern Nigeria, where economic and social activities in some of the most volatile states (Yobe and Borno) have nearly come to a halt due to the constant killings, destruction of the citizens' basic means of subsistence, and stifling of foreign and domestic investment.

Thirdly, the findings indicated that Nigeria's national development is indeed significantly and unfavorably impacted by politics. This research supports previous findings by Ngele (2008), Omodia (2010), Ighodolo (2012)^[16], and Ijere (2015) that politics in Nigeria has a major detrimental impact on national development.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study advanced the argument that ethnicity, religion, and politics, as practiced in Nigeria, have slowed down national integration and have continued to obstruct efforts to achieve national unity and development, as centrifugal tensions, resource control conflicts, ethnic identity politics, and religious divisions have engulfed the process of national development in Nigeria. The growth of the institutions required for nation-building has been weakened and hampered by these social processes. According to the study's conclusions, politics, religion, and ethnicity all negatively impact Nigeria's national growth. In Nigeria, there has been an increase in ethnic chauvinism, ethnic politics, political confusion, ethnic consciousness, ethnic sentiment, and religious prejudice and fanaticism. As a result, if our nation is to experience national growth, Nigeria must foster a supranational consciousness and Nigerians must abandon their allegiance to their respective ethnic and regional as well as religious groupings in favor of a new Nigerian nation. This in no way suggests a strategy that downplays the sociocultural or ethnic origins of Nigerians, but rather that we should all work together to forge a single nation that all nationalities—majorities, minorities, and sub-minorities alike—can connect with. Obasanjo, 2006)^[25, 34]. The following suggestions were given in light of the study's theoretical and empirical findings:

The plurality of our ethnic nationalities must be respected if we are to continue to exist as a nation, in which case true federalist ideas must be followed. The component ethno-cultural communities' political clout must be fairly dispersed, and resources for development must be allocated equally. The country needs a focused leadership that understands how to put its citizens at the center of political projects without resorting to ethnic chauvinism and sees gaining political power as a tool for serving the welfare of its people regardless of their ethnic origin, rather than as an end in itself.

In addition to embracing their religion's precepts, which encourage peaceful coexistence, love, and the brotherhood of all people, the leaders of the many religious groups and the followers of those groups are exhorted to engage in conversation, practice tolerance, and uphold mutual respect. The provisions of the Nigerian Constitution should be scrupulously followed, put into practice, and used as they are. This will significantly enhance and increase the power of the government in Nigeria's governance.

Because the country belongs to all of us, Nigerians should learn how to put the national interest before their own local, regional, ethnic, or religious interests. By implementing

electoral reforms that would allow Nigerians to enjoy the free and fair elections that have eluded the nation for decades, the Nigerian government, led by President Muhammadu Buhari, should, in the interest of justice, keep their word regarding the upcoming election.

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