Original Researcher Article

Impact of Secessionists Agitation on Political Security in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Secessionist agitation has increasingly become a critical threat to political security in Nigeria, undermining the country's unity, sovereignty, and institutional legitimacy. The emergence of these movements, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast and the Yoruba Nation Movement in the Southwest, stems from deep-seated grievances linked to political exclusion, economic marginalization, ethnic discrimination, and cultural suppression. This paper explores the impact of these separatist movements on Nigeria's political security, highlighting their role in eroding national cohesion, escalating violence, destabilizing democratic processes, and disrupting economic stability. The government's response, often characterized by militarized crackdowns, has led to heightened tensions and has deepened distrust between ethnic communities and the state, often aggravating the very grievances that fuel secessionist calls. The paper also examines how these internal challenges have broader regional and international implications, potentially influencing separatist dynamics across West Africa and challenging the African Union's principles of territorial integrity. In response to these challenges, this paper advocates for a multidimensional approach to mitigate secessionist agitation and strengthen Nigeria's political security. Recommendations include promoting inclusive governance to address political exclusion, implementing targeted economic initiatives in marginalized regions, supporting cultural autonomy to foster regional pride, and prioritizing dialogue over militarized responses to reduce radicalization. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of safeguarding democratic institutions by enhancing security during electoral processes in conflict-prone areas and fostering regional cooperation to address cross-border impacts. By addressing the root causes of secessionist agitation through these strategies, Nigeria can work toward a more stable and unified state, ensuring the long-term security and resilience of its political landscape. This study underscores the urgency of adopting comprehensive, inclusive policies to tackle secessionist pressures in Nigeria effectively.

Keywords: Secessionists Agitation, Security, Political Security, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Secessionist agitations in Nigeria have emerged as a significant challenge to political security, a concept that encompasses the stability of the state, the integrity of its political institutions, and the protection of its sovereignty. Over the past few decades, various ethno-nationalist movements have advocated for the separation of regions from the Nigerian federation, citing grievances such as marginalization, neglect, and cultural oppression by the central government. The resurgence of secessionist movements, particularly the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Yoruba Nation Movement, has raised concerns about the future of Nigeria's political unity and the legitimacy of its government. These movements, while often framed as efforts for self-determination, present a direct threat to political security, as they challenge the authority of the Nigerian state and risk the fragmentation of its territorial integrity (Akinyemi, 2016).

The roots of secessionist agitations in Nigeria can be traced to the country's colonial history and the subsequent tensions that arose during and after the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The forced amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups by the British colonial administration created a heterogeneous state where ethnic identities often clashed, particularly in terms of political representation and resource

allocation (Suberu, 2001). The Nigerian Civil War, which was precipitated by the secession of the Eastern Region to form the Republic of Biafra, remains one of the most traumatic events in the nation's history. While the war ended in 1970, the unresolved issues of ethnic exclusion, resource control, and political representation continue to fuel secessionist sentiments in regions such as the Southeast and Southwest (Achebe, 2012). The resurgence of these movements in recent years, led by groups like IPOB and the Yoruba Nation, is a reflection of the failure of successive Nigerian governments to address these deep-rooted grievances.

The impact of secessionist agitation on political security in Nigeria is multifaceted. Politically, these movements challenge the legitimacy of the Nigerian government, undermining national cohesion and the authority of the state. The advocacy for self-determination, while supported by a segment of the population, often leads to heightened political instability as it is perceived by the central government as a threat to national unity and sovereignty (Okoro, 2018). The Nigerian government's response to these movements has ranged from diplomatic engagement to heavy-handed military crackdowns. The use of force, often accompanied by widespread human rights abuses, has only deepened political divisions and eroded trust in state institutions (Amnesty International, 2017). This dynamic not only affects the political security of the state but also impacts governance at the local and national levels, as political leaders and institutions are often seen as either complicit in or powerless to address the demands of secessionist groups.

Furthermore, secessionist agitation has far-reaching consequences for Nigeria's political landscape. It fosters an environment of political polarization, wherein ethnic and regional identities become more pronounced, and political alliances are often built around ethnic solidarity rather than national unity. This polarization weakens the cohesion necessary for effective governance and undermines the country's democratic processes. Political violence, electoral malpractices, and civil disobedience, which often accompany secessionist agitations, further destabilize the political environment, making it difficult for the state to enforce the rule of law or maintain control over its territory (Suleiman, 2019).

The Nigerian state's inability to resolve the underlying issues driving secessionist movements, such as economic underdevelopment, political exclusion, and ethnic marginalization, perpetuates a cycle of discontent and rebellion. As secessionist groups continue to gain traction, particularly among youth and disenfranchised populations, the political security of the state remains threatened, raising the specter of further violence and potential disintegration. Given these complexities, this paper seeks to examine the impact of secessionist agitation on Nigeria's political security, analyzing the factors contributing to the rise of such movements, the political consequences of these agitations, and the responses of the Nigerian government. The paper will also explore the long-term implications of unresolved secessionist demands on the future political stability and unity of the Nigerian state.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Secessionist Agitation
The term "secession" is derived from the Latin word secessio, meaning "withdrawal." As defined by scholars, secession refers to the attempt of a group within a state to create a new and independent state by breaking away from the larger political unit (Lehning, 1998). Secessionist agitation, therefore, includes the methods and actions through which groups advocate for this goal. Such agitation can range from peaceful demonstrations, political lobbying, and legal appeals to violent resistance, armed conflict, and terrorism, depending on the nature of the grievances and the response from the central government (Eghosa, 2007). Secessionist agitation refers to the organized efforts by a group, often based on ethnic, religious, or regional identity, to withdraw or separate from an existing state or political union. This concept is generally rooted in grievances against the central government, which are often related to perceived marginalization, lack of representation, or economic inequities. Secessionist movements are a significant challenge to political unity, as they can destabilize states, erode national cohesion, and lead to conflict. Scholars generally define secessionist agitation as a sociopolitical phenomenon that expresses dissatisfaction with the current state framework and asserts a demand for autonomy, independence, or outright secession (Horrowitz, 2003).

Political Security
Political security is a multifaceted concept that focuses on the protection of a state's political institutions, sovereignty, and stability against threats that may undermine its governance, order, and authority. It involves safeguarding the integrity of the state, the functioning of government institutions, and the rights and freedoms of citizens. Scholars and international organizations have defined political security in various ways, emphasizing different dimensions based on their specific focus areas.

According to Buzan (1991), Political Security involves the "stability of the organizational structure of the state, its system of government, and the ideologies that give it legitimacy." Buzan views political security as closely tied to the state's capacity to maintain internal cohesion and the legitimacy of its governing system. In his work People, States, and Fear, he explains that political security encompasses both internal and external dimensions, with threats potentially arising from both domestic and foreign sources. This definition highlights the need to protect the state from both ideological subversion and destabilizing internal conflicts, as well as from external pressure that may undermine state sovereignty.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) adopts a perspective on political security that emphasizes the need for states to protect citizens from violence and coercion, both of which can disrupt social and political stability. According to ICRC, political security is integral to protecting individuals in conflict zones and fragile states, where political instability and violence pose direct threats to human rights and the functioning of the government. In this view, political security is essential not only for state survival but also for maintaining the social contract between the state and its citizens, particularly in volatile environments (ICRC, 2016).

The United Nations Development Programme (1994) defined political security as the protection of basic human rights, which include protecting individuals from political repression, systematic abuse, and unfair treatment by governments. According to UNDP, political security is a vital component of human security, underscoring the necessity for people to live without fear of persecution due to their political beliefs, affiliations, or identity. UNDP's approach places individual safety and rights at the center of political security, emphasizing that people should be free from state oppression, which threatens not only individuals but also the legitimacy of the state itself (UNDP, 1994).

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY

Relative Deprivation Theory, developed by Ted Gurr (1970), explains how perceptions of inequality and unmet expectations within a group can fuel discontent and lead to conflict. This theory posits that when groups feel deprived of political, economic, or social rights compared to other groups, they may mobilize in pursuit of self-determination or even secession. In Nigeria, secessionist groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) argue that they are marginalized politically and economically, which drives their demands for independence.

This theory can be used to analyze the underlying grievances that motivate secessionist movements and explore how perceived deprivation undermines political security by weakening loyalty to the Nigerian state and increasing support for separatist ideologies.

CAUSES OF SECESSIONIST AGITATION IN NIGERIA

The emergence of secessionist movements is typically linked to issues such as political exclusion, economic deprivation, ethnic discrimination, and cultural suppression. In multi-ethnic states, the diverse composition of populations can lead to group-specific grievances if one group perceives that it is disadvantaged compared to others within the state. According to Horowitz (2003), ethnic groups that feel marginalized are more likely to push for autonomy or secession, especially when they believe that the central government does not adequately represent their interests. The concept of "relative deprivation" also plays a crucial role in secessionist agitation, as groups

that perceive themselves as economically disadvantaged relative to others may seek to establish an independent state to gain control over resources (Gurr, 1993).

For instance, in Nigeria, groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast region and the Yoruba Nation Movement in the Southwest have advocated for separation from the Nigerian state, citing perceived marginalization and economic underdevelopment as primary drivers (Nwagwu, 2021). IPOB's demand for an independent Biafra, for example, has roots in the historical experience of the Igbo ethnic group, which attempted to secede during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) following widespread ethnic violence and a sense of political and economic exclusion. Contemporary IPOB agitates for secession through both non-violent protests and confrontations with the Nigerian state, often resulting in violent clashes and government crackdowns (Nwankwo, 2020).

Secessionist agitation may also be driven by issues of cultural or linguistic distinctiveness. In some cases, groups within a state may seek secession to preserve their language, religion, or cultural practices, especially if they feel that these aspects of their identity are under threat from the majority culture. Lehning (1998) notes that when the central government promotes policies perceived as cultural assimilation, minority groups may turn to secessionist agitation as a means to protect their identity. This has been observed in the cases of Quebec in Canada and Catalonia in Spain, where cultural distinctiveness has been a major factor driving secessionist demands.

Secessionists agitation can predicated by the poverty level of the people within the geographical location in question. Studies have established a dialectical relationship between poverty and violence. This was summarized by Suleiman and Ibrahim (2020) thus:

Violence is a product of social organization of Nigeria in which majority of the people are excluded from the socio-economic and political processes of the state. It reflects marginalization and injustice. Violence becomes a means employed in inter and intra class struggle for hegemony. The political economy of the country has nurtured an army of unemployed illiterates, marginalized and alienated majority that could be purchased and manipulated into some ethnic, religious and electoral violence. Conversely, there is a bourgeois class that has held the country hostage, whose major interest is to preserve their interest and maintain the status-quo. They have refused to educate the people, provide enabling environment for productivity and invest in the development of the country (p.6-7).

Impact of Secessionist Agitation on Political Security in Nigeria

Secessionist agitation in Nigeria has posed a significant threat to the country's political security,

defined as the protection of the state's political stability, sovereignty, and institutional legitimacy. This agitation, driven by deep-rooted ethnic, political, and economic grievances, has led to increasing tensions within the Nigerian polity, challenging the unity and stability of the state. Political security in Nigeria is further jeopardized by the government's response to these movements, which often involves militarized crackdowns that deepen political divisions and fuel cycles of unrest.

a. Undermining National Unity and State Legitimacy

Secessionist movements undermine national unity by promoting alternative identities that often compete with, or even reject, Nigerian identity. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), for example, seeks the creation of an independent state for the Igbo people in the Southeast region, arguing that Nigeria has failed to address the needs and rights of the Igbo population since the end of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). IPOB's demands have sparked renewed ethnic consciousness, leading to divisions that affect national cohesion and the government's authority in the region. The popularity of IPOB and similar movements has led to protests, confrontations with security forces, and calls for a referendum on independence, all of which create a sense of instability within the region (Nwankwo, 2020).

This erosion of national unity undermines the legitimacy of the Nigerian state, as groups like IPOB present the government as oppressive and unable to deliver on the promises of development and security. A state's political legitimacy is critical for maintaining order and ensuring compliance with laws, and when significant segments of the population view the government as illegitimate, political security is compromised. As Horowitz (2003) explains, in ethnically diverse states, political stability hinges on the inclusion and fair treatment of all groups, and when such groups feel excluded or marginalized, they are more likely to support separatist movements that challenge the existing political structure.

b. Escalation of Violence and Political Instability

Secessionist agitation often escalates into violence, which threatens political security by disrupting governance and leading to cycles of retaliation between state forces and separatist groups. IPOB's activities, including demonstrations, political mobilization, and in some cases, armed confrontations with the Nigerian military, have resulted in violent clashes that further destabilize the Southeast region. The Nigerian government's militarized response has been criticized for human rights abuses, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial killings, which exacerbate the conflict and foster resentment among local populations (Amnesty International, 2017). This escalation of violence undermines political security by creating an environment where the rule of law is routinely violated, making it difficult for the state to maintain control over its territories.

Furthermore, the militarized approach to secessionist agitation has led to a securitization of the political landscape, where issues of political expression are treated as security threats. This response has a chilling effect on political dissent and has led to a broader climate of repression in Nigeria. The government's crackdown on IPOB has made it challenging for moderate voices to engage in peaceful dialogue, pushing many supporters towards radicalization and potentially violent resistance. As Suberu (2001) notes, the use of force in dealing with secessionist demands can deepen grievances and delegitimize the state, as it is often perceived as indiscriminately oppressive.

c. Impact on Electoral Processes and Democratic Governance

Secessionist agitation can also disrupt electoral processes, weakening political security by undermining the democratic legitimacy of the state. The activities of secessionist groups can make it difficult to hold elections in affected regions, as the heightened tensions lead to voter intimidation, low voter turnout, and challenges to political candidates. During elections, the presence of IPOB and similar groups has led to calls for election boycotts, creating a climate where political candidates may fear for their safety and that of their supporters (Nwagwu, 2021). This environment undermines the democratic process, as it limits citizen participation and erodes the perceived legitimacy of elected officials.

Moreover, secessionist agitation fuels a cycle of distrust between the government and certain ethnic groups, leading to accusations of electoral malpractices and alienation from mainstream political institutions. For instance, the persistent exclusion felt by the Igbo people in the Southeast, compounded by IPOB's activities, has contributed to a perception that their votes and political voices are undervalued within the national political system (Burgess, 2006). This alienation encourages further support for separatist movements, which in turn disrupts the effectiveness and legitimacy of political institutions.

d. Threats to Economic Stability and Development

Political security is also tied to the economic stability of a state, as secessionist agitation can deter investments, disrupt economic activities, and reduce opportunities for development. Regions affected by secessionist movements often experience economic downturns due to the insecurity and instability associated with these movements. For example, the Southeast has seen reduced business confidence due to frequent protests, strikes, and violent encounters with security forces. This economic disruption impacts political security by reducing the government's ability to deliver services and maintain social welfare, which can heighten grievances and push more people towards supporting separatist causes (Nnoli, 2008).

Additionally, the government's focus on managing secessionist threats diverts resources away from essential development projects, particularly in

education, health, and infrastructure. This focus on security rather than development further exacerbates the grievances that fuel secessionist agitation. As Gurr (1993) points out, states that are unable to address the economic needs of their population are more susceptible to political instability, as people turn to alternative movements, such as secessionist groups, which promise solutions to their hardships.

e. Regional and International Ramifications
Secessionist agitation in Nigeria also poses regional and international concerns, which affect the broader geopolitical landscape of West Africa. The presence of armed separatist movements can lead to cross-border instability, as Nigeria's neighbors might experience an influx of refugees or may be implicated in the conflict if armed groups seek support across borders. Additionally, if secessionist movements were to succeed, it could set a precedent for similar groups within other West African states, challenging the principle of territorial integrity that is central to the African Union's (AU) policies. This potential for broader destabilization highlights the need for a balanced approach that addresses the root causes of secessionist demands rather than solely focusing on military solutions (Akinyemi, 2016).

The impact of secessionist agitation on political security in Nigeria is profound. These movements challenge the stability of the Nigerian state by eroding national unity, contributing to political instability, disrupting democratic processes, and creating economic challenges. The government's militarized response has thus far been ineffective at quelling these movements and, instead, often exacerbates underlying grievances. Addressing the impact of secessionist agitation on political security requires a multifaceted approach that includes political, economic, and social solutions aimed at integrating marginalized groups and addressing the root causes of separatist demands.

CONCLUSION
Secessionist agitation in Nigeria, driven by factors such as political exclusion, economic deprivation, ethnic discrimination, and cultural suppression, poses a significant threat to the nation's political security. This agitation has manifested in the activities of groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Yoruba Nation Movement, whose demands for autonomy reflect long-standing grievances over marginalization and economic underdevelopment. The impact of these movements extends to undermining national unity, escalating violence, destabilizing democratic governance, and disrupting economic development, which together weaken the political security framework of the Nigerian state. The government's predominantly militarized response, while intended to maintain order, has often exacerbated the situation, reinforcing the cycle of unrest and fueling further discontent. Additionally, the repercussions of secessionist movements extend beyond Nigeria's borders, with potential implications for regional stability and the African Union's stance on territorial integrity.

Addressing the political security challenges posed by secessionist agitation in Nigeria demands a shift from military-centered strategies to more inclusive approaches that address the root causes of grievances. Such an approach is crucial to fostering a sense of unity and legitimacy within the Nigerian state and ensuring long-term political stability.

Recommendations
Promote Inclusive Governance and Fair Representation: To mitigate feelings of marginalization, the Nigerian government should implement policies that promote fair representation across all ethnic groups. This includes ensuring equitable political appointments and fostering inclusivity in the distribution of government resources. By enhancing representation and addressing political exclusion, the government can reduce grievances that fuel secessionist movements. Scholars such as Horowitz (2003) emphasize that ethnically diverse states must embrace inclusive governance to maintain stability.

Invest in Economic Development in Marginalized Regions: Economic deprivation is a primary driver of secessionist agitation, particularly in regions like the Southeast. The government should prioritize targeted economic development initiatives that address infrastructure deficits, create job opportunities, and improve social services. As Gurr (1993) suggests, reducing economic inequality can mitigate the sense of relative deprivation that often leads to agitation.

Strengthen Cultural and Ethnic Autonomy: Cultural suppression and assimilation policies often exacerbate secessionist demands. The government should adopt a more accommodating stance toward Nigeria's diverse cultural identities by promoting cultural rights and preserving linguistic and religious freedoms. For instance, promoting Igbo cultural heritage in the Southeast and Yoruba heritage in the Southwest could foster greater regional pride and reduce separatist sentiments. Lehning (1998) argues that respecting cultural autonomy can enhance unity in multi-ethnic societies.

Encourage Dialogue and Non-Military Solutions: Instead of relying on militarized responses, the government should foster dialogue with secessionist groups and stakeholders. Establishing platforms for communication, such as peace conferences or regional councils, can provide a constructive space for addressing grievances. This approach would reduce the appeal of radicalization among secessionist supporters and enable a more peaceful resolution of conflicts. Suberu (2001) notes that dialogue-based approaches are more effective in addressing the root causes of secessionist agitation.

Strengthen Democratic Institutions and Electoral Processes: Secessionist movements often disrupt electoral processes, undermining democratic governance. To address this, the government should work on creating a secure environment for elections in conflict-prone regions. Measures such as deploying impartial observers and ensuring voter safety can foster public confidence in the electoral process, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of elected officials and reducing political exclusion.

Foster Regional Cooperation and Address Cross-Border Impacts: Given the regional implications of Nigeria's secessionist movements, the government should collaborate with neighboring countries to address cross-border concerns, such as refugee flows and arms trafficking. Furthermore, Nigeria should engage with regional bodies, like the African Union (AU), to ensure a united front on territorial integrity and gain support for diplomatic solutions to secessionist challenges.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can create a more stable political environment that addresses the underlying grievances fueling secessionist movements. This approach would promote a more cohesive national identity, reduce the threat of political instability, and enhance Nigeria's overall political security.

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