

NATIONALISM AND SEPARATIST AGITATIONS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA (IPOB)

Martin Ifeanyi OKEKE¹, Johnpaul Onyebuchi NDUBA² & Ekene Benjamin AKAM³

^{1,2}Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA

³Department of Political Science, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, NIGERIA

Abstract

This paper examines the crises of nationalism and separatist agitations in Nigeria, with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a case study. The rise of ethnic based separatist formations whose modus operandi challenges the status quo and often seen by authorities as constituting threats to the stability and survival of the Nigerian federation raises the question of reasons behind it. Adopting group theory and instrumentalism as its framework of analysis, the research employed both descriptive and scissor-and-sort technique in analysing data sourced from the questionnaire and focus group discussion. From the analysis of data, the study revealed that perception of marginalization, the consciousness to a nation cum ethnicity and aggressive response of government are significantly responsible for separatist agitations in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the study recommends that government should take necessary steps to curtail the perception of marginalization by ensuring that the principles of equity and justice are always considered in revenue allocation, appointments, infrastructures etc among the diverse nations that make up the federation of Nigeria. It also recommends the employment peaceful engagement or means in dealing with the agitations so as not to exacerbate the situation.

Key words: Ethnicity, IPOB, Marginalization, Nationalism, Separatist Agitations.

Introduction

The basic or fundamental essence of government is to do for the people what the people cannot effectively and efficiently do for themselves. This is supported by the theory of popular sovereignty (social contract theory of the origin of state), as men in particular point in history, freely agreed to establish a social compact under a government, and this required that each and every one must keep faithfully to the terms of the contract (Chikendu 2002, p.20). Critical to this is the protection of lives and properties of the people and equity and fairness in government's relations with the people(s).

Nationalism in contemporary Nigeria pre-dates colonialism. Nigeria is a conglomeration of various peoples scattered all over its territorial landscape, "with over

two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, the major groups being Hausa/Fulani; Yoruba and Igbo” (Chikendu 2003 p.20). Before the imperial expansion of Britain into what is now called Nigeria, the various ethnic groups that make up the country existed as mini states and autonomous political entities. These entities had their own political systems, religious and cultural values distinct from each another (Okafor 1997).

In line with the foregoing, Chikendu (2003) notes that before 1914, Northern Nigeria was administered differently from the Southern Nigeria and a great rivalry developed between the Southern and Northern administrators. In support of the above, Hatch (1971, p.15) posits that the “rivalry between the north and south became acute and was marked by contempt among northern administrators for the commercialism of the south and derision among the southerners for the ossified feudalism of the north.” Consequently, the aim of the colonialists in bringing these entities together in 1914 (amalgamation of the northern and southern Nigeria) was purely for exploitation of capital. To facilitate this, they employed divide and rule tactics so as to consolidate and preserve British foothold with little interest in the social, economic or political development of the country or its people (Chikendu 2003). Accordingly, British colonial policies, were not fashioned to promote unity among the different ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria, rather it was intended to exploit the varied differences, create distrusts, suspicions and cleavages among them (Uzoigwe 1996). The entrenchment of these differences and competition among the ethnic groups to control the soul of the Nigerian state led to several violent confrontations between them prior to the country’s independence (Okafor 1997).

Against this backdrop, independence did not alter this pattern, as successive administrations failed to initiate far-reaching policy measures to coalesce ethnic differences into positive ventures that could create a pan Nigerian identity. Instead, most of the policies undertaken were rather aimed at crushing ethnic consciousness in order to disparage the challenge it poses to the legitimacy of the state or the authority of the incumbent administration or regime. The result of this is the heightened hegemonic contest for power at the centre by the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria (Nnoli, 1978). This competition for ethnic domination has over the years, assumed varying forms in the politics of Nigeria. At one time or the other, the ethnic groups or nationalities that are disadvantaged in this game have either threatened to secede from the country or attempted secession. This is evident in many cases like the aftermath of the 1953 Kano riot that made the Northern leaders to put up an 8-point programme virtually demanding a confederation; the 1967 declaration of independence by Gen. Odumegwu Ojukwu for the peoples of Biafra, among others.

But the Nigerian state always has been a violent organization right from its beginning because it has always sought to maintain control and hegemony through violent means as exemplified by the pattern of administration of the colonial, civil and military regimes that dominated governance for the most part of the country’s history (Uzoigwe 1996, Obi 2004,

Duruji 2010). Nationalist tendencies were therefore suppressed because peaceful agitation and popular movements were visited with official violence and repression (Uzoigwe 1996).

In line with the foregoing, Madunagu (2017), observes that the widespread resort to violence-oriented strategies by ethnically based formations in Nigeria as a means to achieve their ends, stem from the character and nature of politics which obliges every political organization at a certain stage of its evolution to acquire a youth cum armed wing. According to Duruji (2010, p.2) “some ethnic groups take advantage of their entrenched position in the government, to deploy the national army, the police and other security operatives as armed wings to further exclusive group interests.” So whether it is called youth wing of a political party or cultural association, thugs, intelligence officers or bodyguards, these militarized forms have been used directly to push for power and political objectives (Duruji, 2010).

As noted earlier, suppression has formed the response of government to the nagging issues been raised by these ethnically based formations, and thus does not permit the expression of grievances on discussion table. Therefore, ethnic consciousness has escalated from simple agitation of loose ethnic associations to the level where these groups employ strategies that are violent in character in asking questions and demanding answers, thus directly challenging the legitimacy of the state. This development is noted in the rise of the Oodua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), which was formed against the backdrop of the annulment of the 1993 presidential election that a Yoruba purportedly won; the rise of Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South-Eastern (Igbo dominated) region as against the backdrop of gross marginalization of the Igbos in the polity; the Arewa Peoples’ Congress (APC), which emerged to counter the OPC in the Northern part of the country; the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), that called attention to the despoliation of the environment of the delta due to oil exploration and demand that a good proportion of the resources exploited from their region be retained there, so as to right the wrongs of years of deprivation; the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which is an attempt to resurrect the struggle for self-determination waged by the Igbo of South East Nigeria and the perceived inefficiency of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) among others (Duruji, 2010; Ebegbulem, 2016; Okafor, 2017; Andoni, 2017; Okeke, 2018).

Problem Statement

There is little need to over emphasize the fact that the phenomenon of ethnic agitations in contemporary Nigeria and groups whose *modus operandi* is not in tandem with the wishes, aspirations and policies of government, is a worrisome circumstance. The proliferation of these groups poses a threat to law and order in Nigeria, and also threatens the stability and survival of the state, and thus, raises the question of factors responsible for this development. The reasons canvassed by these various groups making differing demands on the Nigerian state as the rationale for their activities relate to perception of

marginalization and injustice against their ethnic groups within the context of the Nigerian state. This has compelled the government to come out with policies aimed at addressing the problem. The approach employed by different administrations more or less aggravated group consciousness and created the condition for its transformation into forms championed by emboldened ethnic organizations using violence-oriented activities as a means to accomplish their objectives. Included is the IPOB movement which purport to promote the interests of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria (Nnoli 1978, Adejumobi 2002, Jason 2006, Ebegbulem, 2016; Madunagu 2017; Okeke, 2018).

In line with the foregoing, Anugwom (2001) argued that ethnic agitations are logical outcome of the increased militarization of the state, especially during those many years of military dominance of politics in the country. He further stressed that the Nigerian state was a product of coercion and that this character of violence has stuck with the state because subsequent rulers in the country have always sought to maintain control and hegemony through the mechanism of violence. This culture of violence suppresses debate and open challenge to the ruling elite, thus leaving those disadvantaged by the power equation to put up countervailing ethnic resistance as the only option of response (Adeoye 2005). And given the difficulty in creating a strong civil society devoid of ethnic colorations, the easy way to match state repression is to relapse into ethnic cocoons not only for protection but also as a force to defend perceived rights within the Nigerian state.

Some scholars have also argued that the rise of ethnic agitations in Nigeria results from a logical outcome of the frustrations brought about by the material deprivation of the people. For example, the economic woes of the country that followed the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the inability of the central government that has become much stronger as a result of military rule to deliver economic dividends to the citizens spurred demands for devolution of powers and more autonomy to the regions as was the case prior to military era in Nigeria (Jega 2003).

Furthermore, accounting for violent agitations with ethnic undertone, Nnoli (1978) argued that conflict is an important aspect of ethnicity and is inevitable under conditions of interethnic competition for scarce resources, particularly in societies where inequality is accepted as natural, and wealth is greatly esteemed. Demonstrations, rioting, and various forms of violent agitations therefore become instruments in interethnic relations.

Against the following backdrop, Okeke (2018) argued that there is always a strong tendency for ethnic groups to fight for recognition of their own identity or national independence. This tendency according to Okeke (2018 p.85) has “persistently been on the increase rather than decreasing in the latter part of the 20th century”. Following the foregoing analysis Nigeria’s experience in pronounced ethnic nationalism is really a strange phenomenon, and thus helps to explain the rise of ethnic agitations in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Nationalism, Ethnicity and Separatist Agitations

Nationalism is a socially constructed belief, creed or political ideology that involves a strong identification of a group of individuals with a nation (Chikendu, 2004). According

to Okeke (2018), there are two major perspectives on the origins and basis of nationalism; one is the primordialist perspective that describes nationalism as a reflection of the ancient and perceived evolutionary tendency of humans to organize into distinct groupings based on an affinity of birth. The second perspective is Modernist perspective that describes nationalism as a recent phenomenon that requires the structural conditions of modern society in order to exist.

There are various definitions of what constitutes a nation, however, which leads to several different strands of nationalism. It can be a belief that citizenship in a state should be limited to one ethnic, cultural, religious or identity group, or that multi-nationality in a single state should necessarily comprise the right to express and exercise national identity even by minorities. Chikendu (2004: 47) asserts that "in English Language, the word nation has two different connotations. One, it denotes a political unit coterminous with a state. Two, it also means an ethnological unit coterminous with a tribe or a race. A state may consist of one national group, for example, the present state of Israel; or many national groups, for example, the United State of America". Furthermore, nation may refer to a community of people who share a common language, culture, ethnicity, descent, or history (Nwankwo, 2002). However, it can also refer to people who share a common territory and government irrespective of their ethnic make-up; that is, a nation state. A nation is generally regarded as a body of people recognized as an entity by virtue of their historical linguistic or ethnic links ... a body of people united under a particular political organization, and usually occupying a definite territory (Watson 1976).

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1983) argues that the word nation is an imagined political community. He stressed that it is imagined, because, the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, yet, in their minds of each lives the image of their communion. Furthermore, it is a community because regardless of the actual inequality or exploitation that may exist in it, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Coleman (1986) defines it as "a consciousness of belonging to a nation (existent or in the realm of aspiration) or a nationality, and a desire, as manifest in sentiment band activity, to secure or maintain its welfare, prosperity, and integrity, and to maximize its political autonomy". Chikendu (2003) stated that the spirit of belonging together and seeking to preserve the groups' identity is the core nature of nationalism. This spirit or desire is intensified by common racial linguistic, historical and religious ties.

Some scholars like Chikendu (2004) & Okeke (2018) have argued that there is more than one type of nationalism. Nationalism may manifest itself as part of official state ideology or as a popular (non-state) movement expressed along civic, ethnic, cultural, religious or ideological lines. Integrative nationalism refers to nationalist activities targeted towards the integration of petty kindred states into one strong nation-state as was the case of Italy and Germany. On the other hand, disintegrative nationalism involves the

dismemberment of the huge polyglot empires of the Eastern Europe- the Russian, Austrian and Turkish empires, and creating new nation-states based on socio-cultural factors.

Ethnic separatist agitations are heightened form of ethnic struggle for self-determination. It occurs when an ethnic group assumes semi-militant posture and gradually metamorphoses into militia purporting to act as the machinery through which the desire of its people are sought and realized (Badmus, 2006). They are exclusively peopled by individuals with common cultural traits. Its manifestation is borne out of past repression usually in a heterogeneous society when an out-group ethnically dominated incumbent government is controlling the levers of power (Guichaoua 2005).

In line with the foregoing, Adejumobi (2002, p.2), characterized them as “youth based groups formed with the purpose of promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their ethnic groups and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence”. He argued further alongside Agbese (2001) that the prevalence of the phenomenon within the geographical space of Nigeria pre-dates the country’s independence. In agreement with the above, Nnoli (1978) and Ndikumma (1998) stressed that the colonial policy of divide and rule employed to strengthen European control and dominance was significant and affected politics and ethnic relations, characterized by discord and unhealthy competition among the ethnic groups in Nigeria.

These ethnic relations were at times expressed in violent forms as the example of the 1953 Kano riots clearly showed. The riot was a result of some value judgement stemming from perceived mistreatment of northern delegates by the southern crowd in Lagos for opposing the 1953 motion moved at the Federal House of Representatives for independence in 1956. That kind of outbursts, the first of its kind was a selective violence targeted at an out-group emanating from the colonial administration’s invention of tradition and the mutiny of an “us versus them” syndrome in Nigeria (Agbese 2001). This means that ethnic related violence is situated in the public policies of the Nigerian state.

This character of the Nigerian state has not fundamentally changed in spite of the transition from colonial to post-colonial dispensation (Agbese 2001). Apart from the 1953 violent eruption that occurred in Kano, there has been an avalanche of violent ethnic eruptions in Nigeria. They include the census crisis of 1962 and 1963, the 1967 civil war, the 1981 bloodshed in Numan, the 1987 mass killing in Kafanchan and other parts of southern Zaria, the 1990 clashes in Wukari and Takun, the 1991 massacre in Tafawa Belewa and the mass killing in Kano city, the 1992 Zango–Kataf bloodshed, the 1993 Andoni and Ogoni bloodbath, the intermittent Warri crises between the Ijaws, Itsekiri and Urhobo, the arrests, arraignment and killing of MASSOB members by security operatives in 2005, the 2016 and 2017 crackdown on IPOB members, the unending conflicts between armed Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Benue state and Kogi State, among many others.

The frequent re-occurrence of these ethnic eruptions stems from the character of the Nigerian state which was designed to breed inter-ethnic rivalries that promote the interests of the colonialists. As noted by Nnoli (1978), colonialism was the cradle of ethnicity in

Nigeria and a key factor in the crystallization of contemporary identities. The forced union of the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria through the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates was purely for the economic convenience of the colonialist. Independence was unable to alter this character of the Nigerian state but merely re-inforced it, because the texture of post-colonial politics has been characterized by domination and hegemonic context by the ethnic groups. Commenting further, Nnoli (1978, p.8) noted that "the fear of being confined to the bottom of the interethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socioeconomic competition which has antisocial effects." As such, the structure and form of the Nigerian state has been sustaining this relationship of inter-ethnic distrusts and rivalry.

These inter-ethnic rivalries have transformed into dimensions where violence is used; creating the conditions for the emergence of groups making claims and competing with the state for legitimacy (Badmus 2006). The fact of the matter is that the group that controls the state uses its power and economic resources to protect the material interests of some members of their folks. The result is the institutionalization of the relationship, perpetually re-inforced by economic and political hierarchies and exacerbated by deliberate policies of the ruling class that promotes ethnic exclusion and encourages alienation which ultimately results into resistance expressed in form of ethnic movements activities (Okafor 1997; Ojo 2014; Ebegbulem 2016; Okeke 2018).

Duruji (2010, p.7) in his study, found out that these groups such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) were "manifestations of sub-nationalism that emanated from the unattended issues surrounding Nigeria's national question. These issues include citizenship, representation, resource control and allocation as well as to and use of power in Nigeria."

The consensus in the literature is that ethnic agitations are rooted in ethnicity and has been with Nigeria prior to independence. There is also general agreement in the literature that in Nigeria, these groups are youth based. Also drawing from the existing literature on the subject; we can assert that the generic term of ethnic agitation as used in common Nigerian parlance, refers to the arousal of public concern by organized groups with potential for violent tendencies based in any of Nigeria's geographical region and usually claims to be fighting for and defending some common ethnic or geo-political interest whether broad or narrow.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the group theory and Instrumentalism as its theoretical framework. The group theory is a very useful framework for explaining, understanding and analysing politics. Since the ground breaking work of Bentley (1908), the group approach has been developed and applied almost exclusively by political scientists in the study of politics

(Isaak 1985, p.265). Group theory contends that group behaviour is at the centre of politics. Bentley (1908) sees politics as actions through groups aimed at the realization of interests; that is to say, that group activity is interest activity. He contends that the raw materials we study in politics is never found in one man by himself nor by adding men to men, but must be taken as it comes in many men together. Truman argues further that groups constitute the basis of politics and the political process can be understood and analysed in terms of the role of groups. The fundamental unit of analysis in this approach is the human groups. In the words of Bentley, a group means a certain pattern of the men of a society taken, however, not as a physical mass cut off from other masses of men but as a mass of activity which does not preclude the men who participate in it from participating likewise in many other groups activities.

Apart from interaction and patterned process, another important aspect of the group is 'interest'; this refers to "a shared attitude concerning a claim or claims to be made by one group upon certain other groups in a social system" (Ezeani 2002, p.81). One can identify the interest of any group by looking into its policies and stated objective and goals, hence all groups have one type of interest or another. By definition, no group can act in a way that is incompatible with its own interests. In group theory, the entire social system is made up of several groups. In fact, Bentley states that "the society itself is nothing other than a complex of groups that compose it. Each group endeavours to maximize its own interest. Groups actually gain their full meaning in relation to the other groups. The resources of money, skill, power, influence and organization available to the various groups vary from one group to another. These differences in skill of resources help to determine the extent a group is able to achieve its goals and interests.

To Glazer and Moynihan (1975), who are among the pioneers of this school, ethnicity is not simply a mix of affective sentiments, but like class, it is also a means of political mobilization for advancing group interests. Instrumentalists hold that ethnicity has very little or no independent ranking outside the political process and is in its character comparable to other political affiliations such as ideological beliefs or party membership. According to instrumentalists, ethnicity is a result of personal choice and mostly independent from the situational context or the presence of cultural and biological traits. (Dodeye, 2015; Hammond and Axelrod, 2016).

Within instrumentalist thought, ethnic conflict does not emerge directly from differences in ethnic identity. Rather, ethnic conflicts arise only when ethnic identities are politicized and/or manipulated to generate political and socio-economic advantages for an ethnic group at the cost of depriving or neglecting other groups (Chandra 2004). Instrumentalism also explains that groups compete for the same goal-power, access to resources, or territory. The interests of a society's elite class play an important role in mobilizing ethnic groups to engage in ethnic agitations.

Situated within the present study, ethnic agitations are usually carried out by groups whose actions and inactions are aimed at the realization of their group's interests. The

group theory is quite apt for this study when we consider that our unit of analysis is the group (IPOB). Instrumentalism addresses the core of the subject matter of this study which is nationalism and ethnic agitations. It addresses the issue of why ethnic agitations are on the increase in Nigeria as it views the mobilization of ethnicity to the accomplishment of a political goal and the important role of leadership of such organization.

Methodology and Analysis of Data

The study utilized mixed method as it adopted both the quantitative and qualitative research design (survey and focus group discussion respectively). The population for this study consists of the inhabitants of the states in the South East geo-political zone of the country. From the 2006 Nigeria Population census, the entire population is 16,395,555 and the target population is 8,472,162. Data was sourced from the target population utilizing William Cochran sample size determination formula with three hundred and eighty-four as the sample size (Anambra and Imo State as the sampled states using the multi stage sampling technique) and a focus group discussion was organized with ten participants.

Table 1: GENDER / SEX OF RESPONDENTS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	252	70.2	71.2	71.2
	Female	102	28.4	28.8	100.0
	Total	354	98.6	100.0	
Missing	999.00	5	1.4		
Total		359	100.0		

Field Survey, 2019

Out of the three hundred and eighty-four distributed copies of questionnaire, one can aptly deduce from the above table that the total number of respondents (those that filled and returned the questionnaire) is three hundred and fifty-nine (359), out of which two hundred and fifty-two (representing 70.2%) were males and one hundred and two (representing 28.4%) were females, while five respondents (representing 1.4%) didn't indicate their sex.

Table 2: THE RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COUNTRY ARE NOT EQUALLY AND EQUITABLY SHARED AMONG THE ETHNIC GROUPS. [Item1]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	169	47.1	47.5	47.5
	Agree	132	36.8	37.1	84.6
	Undecided	38	10.6	10.7	95.2
	Disagree	12	3.3	3.4	98.6
	Strongly Disagree	5	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Total	356	99.2	100.0	
Missing	999.00	3	.8		
Total		359	100.0		

Field Survey, 2019

Table 2 shows that three hundred and one respondents (representing 83.9%) believe that the resources and opportunities in the country are not equally and equitably shared among the ethnic groups that make up the country, seventeen (representing 4.7%) disagrees, twelve (representing 3.3%) didn't agree nor disagree while three (representing .8%) withheld their choice. It is therefore obvious from data generated that, the resources and opportunities in the country are not equally and equitably shared among the ethnic groups that make up the country.

Table 3: THERE ARE STATE POLICIES AND/OR PROGRAMMES THAT ARE IN FAVOUR OF A PARTICULAR REGION OR ETHNIC GROUP. (Item2)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	203	56.5	57.7	57.7
	Agree	115	32.0	32.7	90.3
	Undecided	17	4.7	4.8	95.2
	Disagree	11	3.1	3.1	98.3
	Strongly Disagree	6	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	352	98.1	100.0	
Missing	999.00	7	1.9		
Total		359	100.0		

Field Survey, 2019

Table 3 shows that three hundred and eighteen respondents (representing 88.5%) concede that there are state policies and/or programmes that are in favour of a particular region or ethnic group, seventeen (representing 4.8) disputes that, seventeen (representing 4.7) are undecided while seven (representing 1.9%) withheld their answers to the question. From

the data generated from the field, it is evident that there are state policies and/or programmes that are in favour of a particular region or ethnic group.

Table 4: GOVERNMENTS RESPONSE TO ETHNIC AGITATIONS IN THE STATE HAS BEEN THROUGH THE USE OF FORCE. **(Item4)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	58	16.2	16.6	16.6
	Agree	220	61.3	62.9	79.4
	Undecided	36	10.0	10.3	89.7
	Disagree	24	6.7	6.9	96.6
	Strongly Disagree	12	3.3	3.4	100.0
	Total	350	97.5	100.0	
Missing	999.00	9	2.5		
Total		359	100.0		

Field Survey, 2019

Table 4 shows that two hundred and seventy-eight respondents (representing 77.5%) acknowledge that governments response to ethnic agitations in the state have been through the use of force, thirty-six (representing 10%) repudiate it, and thirty-six (representing 10%) are undecided while nine (representing 2.5%) withheld their answer to the question. The implication of this is that government's response to ethnic agitations in the state has been through the use of force.

Table 5: GOVERNMENT IS PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ETHNIC BASED AGITATIONS. **(Item3)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	141	39.3	39.6	39.6
	Agree	78	21.7	21.9	61.5
	Undecided	75	20.9	21.1	82.6
	Disagree	53	14.8	14.9	97.5
	Strongly Disagree	9	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	356	99.2	100.0	
Missing	999.00	3	.8		
Total		359	100.0		

Field Survey, 2019

Table 5 shows that two hundred and nineteen respondents (representing 61%) affirms that government is partly responsible for ethnic based agitations, while sixty-two (representing

17.3%) disapproves that, and seventy-five (representing 20.9%) are uncertain while three (representing .8%) withheld their answer to the question. From the field survey, it clear that government is partly responsible for ethnic based agitations.

Qualitative Data (Focus Group Discussion)

The data generated from the questionnaire is in agreement with the answers given by the discussants in the two separate focus group discussion. One of the discussants (male 31, Anambra state, Civil Servant) expressed his thoughts as “the reasons for ethnic agitations are usually multifactorial, but is traceable to David Easton’s idea of struggle over authoritative allocation of values. Whereupon certain ethnic extractions feel cheated over the authoritative allocation of values, the agitations become unavoidable.”

In line with the foregoing, another discussant (female 28, Imo state, Banker) expressed her views *inter alia* that “when it comes to federal appointment some ethnic groups are not represented and if they are, the appointment does not reflect the approved quota system.” Building off from the opinion canvassed above, another discussant (male 49, Imo state, self-employed) interjected, “out of the three hundred and sixty House of Reps members, the entire South has one hundred and sixty-nine while the North has one hundred and ninety-one; that in itself is gross marginalization when you factor in the attendant consequences and enough for ethnic agitation.” Yet according to another discussant (female 36, Anambra state, Hair dresser) when someone or an ethnic group say that they are marginalized in Nigeria “hmmm... I feel no be today, e don tey kind of feeling ... you know ... like join the bandwagon because everyone is complaining and yet nothing is happening ... and more complain will rise with no sustainable solutions.”

Against this background, a discussant (female 55, Anambra state, teacher) maintained that “everybody in this country seems to be marginalized or is crying of marginalization by the government both at the centre and at the local or state level. Even the North will tell you that they are. All these are quest for particular ethnic interests, though some are more marginalized than others.”

Discussion of Findings

The data generated and analysed have shown that ethnic agitations in Nigeria results from a logical outcome of the frustrations brought about by the material deprivation of the people, the consciousness to a nation as well as the response of government (suppression) to nagging issues in the state, thereby allowing ethnic consciousness to escalate from simple agitation of loose ethnic associations to the level where these groups employ strategies that are both violent and non-violent in character in asking questions and demanding answers, thus directly challenging the legitimacy of the state. This agrees with the claims of the leader of IPOB Nnamdi Kanu that, they are marginalized by the government in Abuja through lack of resource distribution, poor investment, and an unfair heavily militarized presence in their region (Conor, 2015). This in tandem with the

postulations of both the group theory and instrumentalism which see politics as interest activity and ethnicity as a device used by individuals and groups to unify, organize, and mobilize postulations to achieve larger goals. This also validates the findings of Duruji (2010, p.237), when he concluded that ethnic militias were “manifestations of sub-nationalism that emanated from the unattended issues surrounding Nigeria’s national question. These issues include citizenship, representation, resource control and allocation as well as to the use of power in Nigeria.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The fundamental essence of government is to do for the people what the people cannot effectively and efficiently do themselves as supported by the theory of popular sovereignty. Critical to this is the protection of lives and properties of the people, equity and fairness in government’s relations with the people(s). Against this backdrop, it is clear that when the government fails in its responsibility to the contract, it may likely lead to situations that question the legitimacy of the state and threatens its existence and survival.

Sequel to the findings of the study, the paper recommends that, government should take necessary steps to curtail this perception of marginalization by ensuring that the principles of equity and justice are always considered in revenue allocation, appointments, infrastructures etc. among the diverse nations that make up the state. Also, government should also employ peaceful means in dealing with or handling ethnic agitations so as not to exacerbate the situation. Instead of using repression to contain the ethnic agitations, government should engage them in open and positive dialogue.

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Biographical Notes

Martin Ifeanyi OKEKE, *PhD*, is a Reader in the Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA

Johnpaul Onyebuchi NDUBA is a post graduate student in the Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, NIGERIA

Ekene Benjamin AKAM is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, NIGERIA