

Ethnic Segregation and Challenges of Development in Nigeria

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The article examines the relationship between ethnic segregation and development in Nigeria. It analyses the social, economic, and political implications. Nigeria's historical legacies and diverse ethnic backgrounds have formed distinct ethnocultural communities, resulting in violence, conflict, social fragmentation, and developmental setbacks. Understanding the dynamics of ethnic segregation and its impact on development is vital for effective policies and interventions. The article utilises a mixed approach to explore different dimensions of ethnic segregation in Nigeria. The theoretical framework incorporates concepts from ethnic deprivation theory. The study examines patterns and drivers of ethnic segregation, i.e., economic disparities, social exclusion and political marginalisation across ethnic groups. It also investigates historical, social, economic, and political factors perpetuating these segregation patterns. The findings highlight the social consequences of ethnic segregation, including decreased social cohesion, increased intergroup tensions, and limited interaction; negative effects on economic developments, such as reduced investments, favouritism, hindered trade relations, and uneven resource distribution; and political ramifications, including unequal representation, electoral manipulations, power struggles, political instability, and governance challenges. To address ethnic segregation and promote development in Nigeria, the article proposes several recommendations: promoting inter-ethnic dialogue, investing in inclusive education and cultural exchange programs for social cohesion, creating inclusive economic policies and job opportunities, ensuring equitable resource distribution, strengthening governance and the rule of law, supporting conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives, and enhancing data collection and monitoring of segregation dynamics. By understanding the relationship between ethnic segregation and development, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards creating inclusive and equitable societies in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Development, Segregation, Ethnic Group, Conflicts and Nigeria*

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Introduction

Ethnic segregation has been a persistent feature of human societies throughout history. It is the social separation of diverse ethnic groups. Massey and Denton (1998) defined it as the spatial separation of diverse ethnic groups within a society, resulting in distinct residential patterns, limited intergroup contact, and the formation of separate communities based on shared ethnic identities. Kaplan (2016) asserts, “as societies became more complex, states encompassed more territory, and merchants engaged in greater arts of trade, the opportunity for diverse peoples to come together also led to their spatial separation.” In ancient times, several factors influenced the practice of ethnic segregation. Territorial expansion played a major role as empires expanded their domains, leading to the relocation or establishment of distinct settlements for conquered populations. Furthermore, cultural disparities between ethnic groups also contributed to segregation. When societies fight to preserve their unique languages, customs, and religious practices, the development of separate communities based on shared cultural identities is fostered. Moreover, social hierarchies and power dynamics within ancient societies influenced ethnic segregation. This is seen when great empires seek to maintain dominance, resulting in social stratification (Cunliffe, 2001)

Ancient Egyptian society was highly stratified with distinct divisions based on social and ethnic criteria. The ancient Roman Empire also witnessed ethnic segregation within its vast territories. Through the establishment of colonies and assigning specific regions to different ethnic groups, the Romans demonstrated deliberate social separation. The ancient Greek city-states equally provide an example of how social hierarchy contributed to ethnic segregation as certain privileged groups segregated themselves from the broader population (Pomeroy et al., 2011; Szpakowska, 2007; Garnsey & Saller, 2014). While there is a positive impact of ethnic segregation, such as the formation and preservation of distinct cultural identities, allowing for the consolidation and transmission of unique traditions, languages, and belief systems within each ethnic group, the negative impacts outweigh this. The negative impacts extend beyond mere spatial and social divisions. It affects social cohesion within societies, creating physical and psychological barriers between communities, hindering interaction, cooperation and the formation of shared identity; limiting contact between different ethnic groups; and inhibiting opportunities for cultural exchange, intermarriage, and the development of shared social institutions, thus leading to social tension and conflict.

In Nigeria, ethnic segregation has caused more harm than good. With over 250 distinct ethnic groups (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025), Nigeria's vibrant social fabric also presents challenges. Hence, the relationship between ethnic segregation and development in Nigeria has significant implications for the country's political stability, economic growth, and social cohesion. Nigeria's colonial history significantly influenced the dynamics of ethnic segregation in the country. Under British colonial rule, the indirect rule policy aimed to preserve pre-existing traditional power structures was implemented. However, this approach reinforced ethnic boundaries, as power was delegated to specific ethnic groups and their traditional leaders (Afigbo, 1972).

The divide-and-rule policy strategy employed by the British colonial administration further deepened ethnic divisions by favouring certain ethnic groups over others and encouraged intergroup rivalries. This posed significant challenges to the nation's development and laid the foundation for future tensions and conflicts in Nigeria. Post-independence, political struggles for power and influence along ethnic lines became rampant in Nigeria. Ethnicity has shaped political dynamics as different ethnic groups struggle for political representation and access to resources. The unequal distribution of political power among ethnic groups has become a recurring challenge, leading to power imbalances and perceptions of marginalisation (Suberu, 1996). The competition for political control has often fueled ethnic tension, hindered effective governance, and impeded the implementation of development policies.

Another consequence of ethnic segregation in Nigeria is the uneven distribution of economic resources, particularly the oil and petroleum resources. Nigeria is gifted with abundant natural resources, particularly petroleum, which have the potential to drive economic development. However, the benefits of this wealth have not been equally shared among ethnic groups, contributing to economic disparities and perceptions of inequality. The control and allocation of resources have been a source of contention, intensifying ethnic tensions. The Niger Delta militancy and the agitation of some ethnic groups for a referendum (i.e., Oduduwa Group, Arewa Group, Indigenous People of Biafra, etc.) are the consequences. Corruption, mismanagement and embezzlement of funds, and limited economic opportunities have further widened the economic gap between ethnic communities, hindering inclusive development and fueling grievances.

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The Nigerian social life is largely connected to their cultural practices, religious beliefs, and historical grievances. These factors have contributed to forming distinct ethnic identities and a sense of solidarity within ethnic communities. Cultural differences, religious divisions, and historical animosities have hindered efforts to foster a shared national identity and have often perpetuated social segregation. The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of Nigeria and the Christian-Muslim divide rampant in Nigeria have discouraged development catalysts like social trust, cooperation, integration and collective action.

The implications of ethnic segregation on Nigeria's development are multifaceted. Political instability resulting from ethnic tensions has hindered effective governance and long-term development efforts. The power struggles driven by ethnic divisions have led to policy inefficiencies and governance challenges. Economic disparities and unequal distribution of resources have hampered economic growth, perpetuated poverty, and hindered the realisation of inclusive development. The socio-economic divisions have hindered social progress, making way for poor quality education, healthcare, and social services, particularly in marginalised communities.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates equitable policies, fair resource allocation, social integration, and efforts to foster a shared national identity. Understanding the relationship between ethnic segregation and development would help policymakers work towards inclusive development strategies that promote social cohesion, economic prosperity, and a harmonious society. This article would highlight strategies for fostering social integration, equitable resource allocation and a shared national identity by examining how ethnic segregation affects development.

Situating The Subject Matter

Ethnic segregation is a complex phenomenon with vital social and development implications. Nigeria is prominent for its remarkable cultural diversity and rich ethnic heritage; however, ethnic segregation remains a persistent social and economic challenge that impedes development efforts. Despite Nigeria's potential, ethnic segregation has continued to stagnate development efforts. The root of ethnic segregation in Nigeria could be traced to the historical legacy, including the impact of colonialism, which fragmented the nation along ethnic lines and fostered a culture of interethnic competition. These divisions were intensified by subsequent political and economic occurrences, such as the regionalisation of politics, unequal distribution of resources, and persistent ethnoreligious conflict.

This article delves into the various dimensions of ethnic segregation, including social exclusion, political struggles and socioeconomic disparities, while underlining how they affect development in Nigeria. It will also shed light on the mechanisms and dynamics that perpetuate these disparities. In tandem, this article seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What key factors have caused the persistence of ethnic segregation in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the key effects of ethnic segregation on development in Nigeria?
- iii. What are potential policy interventions and strategies to address ethnic segregation and promote inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria?

Conceptual Review

Ethnic Group

Cohen (1974) defines an ethnic group as an informal interest group whose members share kinship, religious, and linguistic ties, distinguishing them from other ethnic groups within society. Nnoli (1978) emphasises the communal character of ethnic group boundaries, with language being a crucial variable in ethnic identity. For instance, the identity of the Hausa ethnic group in Nigeria is strongly tied to the Hausa language. Gordon (1964) sees an ethnic group as any group set apart by race, religion, a defined origin or a combination of some of these categories. Sanda (1976) describes an ethnic group as interacting members belonging to a named or labelled social group with shared interests and a unique culture within a larger society. Van den Berghe (1987) defines an ethnic group as a social group that shares a cultural heritage, including language, religion, customs, and traditions. This heritage sets the group apart from other groups within a larger society. For Smith (1991), an ethnic group is a named human population with common ancestry, historical memories, a link with the homeland, elements of a common culture, and a sense of solidarity.

Horowitz (2001) emphasises the collective nature of ethnic groups within a larger population, highlighting common ancestry, a cultural focus on symbolic elements and a shared historical past. Glazer and Moynihan (1995) view an ethnic group as a collectivity that shares ancestral ties, a cultural focus on symbolic elements and memories of a shared historical past that define their peoplehood. In Nigeria, ethnic groups often maintain communal boundaries and exhibit distinct patterns of family life, language, religion, recreation, and customs, for instance, a unique cultural heritage, including traditional ceremonies, dances and a rich folklore tradition that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups.

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When comparing these scholarly definitions, it is evident that they generally agree on certain key elements of ethnic group definition, such as shared cultural heritage, common ancestry, language, and a sense of collective identity. However, variations exist regarding the emphasis placed on different factors, such as language, boundaries, historical memory, and cultural focus. These variations demonstrate the complex and multidimensional nature of ethnic groups.

Segregation

Segregation is a multi-faceted social phenomenon characterised by an enforced or voluntary separation of individuals or groups based on various social characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, language, or other markers of identity (Massey & Denton, 1993; Rothstein, 2017; Sugrue, 2005). It manifests in different forms and across various domains, including residential neighbourhoods, educational institutions, workplaces, public spaces, and social interactions.

At its core, segregation involves the creation of physical, social, or institutional barriers that isolate and exclude certain groups from broader society. These barriers can take the form of discriminatory laws, policies, actions, or practices that restrict or limit access to resources, opportunities, and services, perpetuating unequal power dynamics and reinforcing existing inequalities. Etymologically, segregation is derived from the Latin word *segregatus*, which means to separate, set apart, lay aside, isolate, or divide. Originally, it was used in religious contexts to refer to separating the godly from sinners. In modern social contexts, it relates to racial/ethnic separation and exclusion (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2022). The European Commission (2023) defined segregation as the act of separating individuals based on religion, nationality, race, language, colour, tribe, or ethnic origin without reasonable and objective justification.

Segregation affects individuals and communities significantly. It results in limited interaction and unequal access to resources and opportunities. Segregated communities often face restricted access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and essential services, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Moreover, segregation contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes, prejudice, and social divisions, hindering social cohesion and fostering a sense of alienation among different groups. Examples of segregationist policies include the apartheid era in South Africa, which denied civil and political rights to non-whites and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States before 1967 that prohibited interracial marriage and sexual relations, leading to social and economic disparities (Bills of Rights

Institute, 2023; Jude, 2022). Scholars seek to inform policies and practices that promote equality, social justice, and inclusivity by comprehensively examining segregation dynamics.

Development

Development is a multidimensional and complex process encompassing various aspects of human, historical, societal, and economic progress. It involves positive and sustainable changes in the well-being, capabilities, and conditions of individuals, communities, and nations to achieve higher levels of human potential and collective welfare (Rodney, 1973). The term *development* was first used in 1756 and had its roots in the French word *développement*, which conveys the idea of unfolding, explaining, and revealing (Etymonline, 2023).

Development goes beyond economic growth and includes social, political, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Its goal is to improve quality of life, promote social justice, eradicate poverty, ensure equal opportunities, protect human rights, and preserve the environment while balancing individual aspirations with the common good. In human society, development is a holistic and inclusive concept encompassing personal and social group development and recognising the interconnectedness of various factors and stakeholders. Personal development involves an individual's growth in skills, abilities, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being.

In contrast, social group development focuses on the interactions and interdependencies within a group as they work towards common goals, improving their ability to manage internal and external relationships (Rodney, 1973). It emphasises active participation, empowerment, and decision-making processes that impact individuals and communities, aiming to reduce inequalities, address discrimination, and promote inclusivity. It prioritises equity, fairness, and social cohesion to foster sustainable progress, striving for a balanced and thriving society where everyone can flourish (Rodney, 1973). Sen and Drèze defined development as a journey that involves the enlargement of the essential liberties individuals experience, the removal of significant constraints on those freedoms, and the establishment of a favourable environment that fosters the growth of people's capacities (Sen & Drèze, 2002). Their approach emphasises social policies and public action to reduce inequalities and enhance well-being. Sen and Nussbaum describe development as the process of broadening individuals' genuine freedoms, enabling them to live personally meaningful lives in line with their values and aspirations (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). They emphasised the importance of enhancing individuals'

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capabilities, such as education, health, and political participation, to enable them to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

While it is justifiable to use development interchangeably with economic development, considering that the economy serves as an indicator of other social aspects (Rodney, 1973), it encompasses more than just economic aspects. Economic development refers to the transformation of an economy through technological advancements, industrial upgrades, and improvements in infrastructure and institutions, aiming to enhance labour productivity and reduce transaction costs (Radosevic et al., 2017). Ha-Joon Chang emphasises the role of economic institutions in development and defines it as the progression in which the general population's overall living conditions, well-being and capabilities undergo positive advancements over time (Chang, 2002). Chang highlights the significance of industrial policy and strategic state intervention for sustainable development.

Walter Rodney further emphasises that economic development is closely tied to the collective ability of society members to interact effectively with their environment, influenced by their understanding of natural laws (science), the application of that understanding to create tools (technology) and the organisation of work (Rodney, 1973). Scholars such as Karl Marx and Walt Rostow have extensively explored the historical dimension of development. Karl Marx identified five stages of societal development: communalism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism (Mohit, 2017; Felluga, 2011; Rodney, 1973). Walt Rostow proposes a linear theory of development. According to Rostow, development is a process that involves five stages: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity, and high mass consumption. Development, in this context, refers to the shift or transition of a society from an agrarian economy to an industrialised and consumption-oriented one (Rostow, 1960).

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation theory holds that individuals or groups evaluate their well-being and satisfaction based on the levels of resources or conditions and, in comparison to others or their expectations. Hence, individuals or groups may experience relative deprivation when they perceive a significant discrepancy between what they believe they deserve or are entitled to and what they possess or achieve compared to others. To a greater extent, factors like socioeconomic status, education, employment opportunities, or access to resources and privileges influence relative deprivation (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984; Runciman, 1966; Smith

et al., 2012). It is worth underscoring that the comparative process, where individuals evaluate their situation relative to others in their reference group or the larger society, is highly subjective.

Relative deprivation can lead to psychological and social effects. For instance, individuals or groups who feel relatively deprived may experience frustration, discontent, or a sense of injustice. This can motivate them to improve their situation, seek redress or challenge the existing social order. Actions intended to seek redress can be in the form of social movements, political behaviour or intergroup conflicts. Migdal (2001) asserts that “the state’s centrality in people’s lives, its relationship to ongoing conflicts in society, people’s expressive relationship to it, all depend on its cohesion” (p. 150).

Concerning ethnic segregation, relative deprivation theory believes that inequalities and disparities between different ethnic groups can give rise to feelings of relative disadvantage and subsequently lead to collective action, identity conflicts, and ethnic mobilisation. Disparities in resource allocation, unequal access to political power, social status hierarchies, cultural recognition, or historical grievances can evoke frustration, resentment, and a desire for change. This perception of relative deprivation can motivate collective action, such as the formation of ethnic movements, nationalist movements, or social movements seeking redress for perceived injustices or inequalities (Crosby, 1976; Runciman, 1966; Smith et al., 2012; Gurr, 2011). Hence, when people feel deprived of something considered essential in their society (e.g., money, rights, political voice, economic and social status), they will organise or join social movements dedicated to obtaining the things they feel deprived of.

Ethnic mobilisation and identity conflicts usually arise due to perceived relative deprivation. In an attempt to demand equal rights, advocate for greater representation, or challenge existing power structures that perpetuate inequalities, different ethnic groups may resort to protests, social movements, political activism, or even armed and violent conflicts. Gurr (2011) writes that “The intensity of relative deprivation varies strongly in terms of the average degree of perceived discrepancy between value expectation and valued capabilities. Hence, people are more likely to revolt when they lose hope of attaining societal values. The intensity of discontent-frustration varies with the severity of depression and inflation” (p. 87). Supporting the above, Saleh writes, “the failure of the state to meet people’s value expectations which they believe they are rightfully entitled to, can eventually lead to disorientation amongst the

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citizenry and discontentment on the part of the people towards the state or nation” (Saleh, 2011, p. 236).

Relative deprivation theory, despite its strengths, has several weaknesses. It has been criticised for oversimplification of complex ethnic relations, inadequate consideration of broader social contexts and structural inequalities, its narrow focus on material comparisons, its failure to acknowledge individual and collective agency, and an inadequate explanation of the causes of ethnic inequalities. Beyond these criticisms, relative deprivation theory is relevant to this article because it helps understand the motivations behind collective action, subjective experiences of inequality, intergroup dynamics, and other social phenomena.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a deeper understanding of ethnic segregation and its impact on development in Nigeria. The aim is to combine the strengths of quantitative data with in-depth contextual insights from documentary sources and journal articles. The research was conducted across Nigeria, with data collected from six selected states representing each of the six geopolitical zones: North Central (Abuja city), North East (Adamawa state), North West (Kano state), South East (Anambra state), South-South (Rivers state) and South West (Lagos state). The target population comprised individuals working in governmental institutions (ministries, parastatals, and local government offices) and educational institutions (universities, polytechnics and colleges) within urban centres of the selected states. This focus was chosen to gain insights from stakeholders directly involved in policy implementation, public service, and civic education.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted (stratified sampling and purposive sampling). Each of the six geopolitical zones formed a stratum, from which one representative state was selected. Within each state, major urban centres were targeted to reflect diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Within each selected state, participants were purposively selected from key governmental and educational institutions based on their roles, knowledge, and experience with development policy and ethnic integration. A total of 2,400 respondents participated in the survey (i.e., approximately 400 respondents per geopolitical zone). The sample was designed to reflect Nigeria’s demographic diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and profession.

Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed to the selected participants. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions to allow for quantitative measurement and qualitative commentary. Secondary data was obtained from relevant literature, policy documents, government reports, and academic studies on ethnic segregation, development, and institutional frameworks in Nigeria. Data collection was carried out using both online and in-person administration of questionnaires by trained research assistants in the major cities of the selected states. Ethical protocols were followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any point.

The data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical tools. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise and describe the characteristics of the data using measures such as frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores. The mixed-methods design and multi-stage sampling were considered appropriate for the multi-dimensional nature of ethnic segregation in Nigeria. Stratified and purposive sampling ensured broad representation and access to specialised knowledge, while structured questionnaires enhanced consistency and comparability across regions.

The formula used for descriptive statistics was:

$$P = (A / T) * 100$$

Where:

P = Percentage of Respondents

A = Number of Respondents per Variable

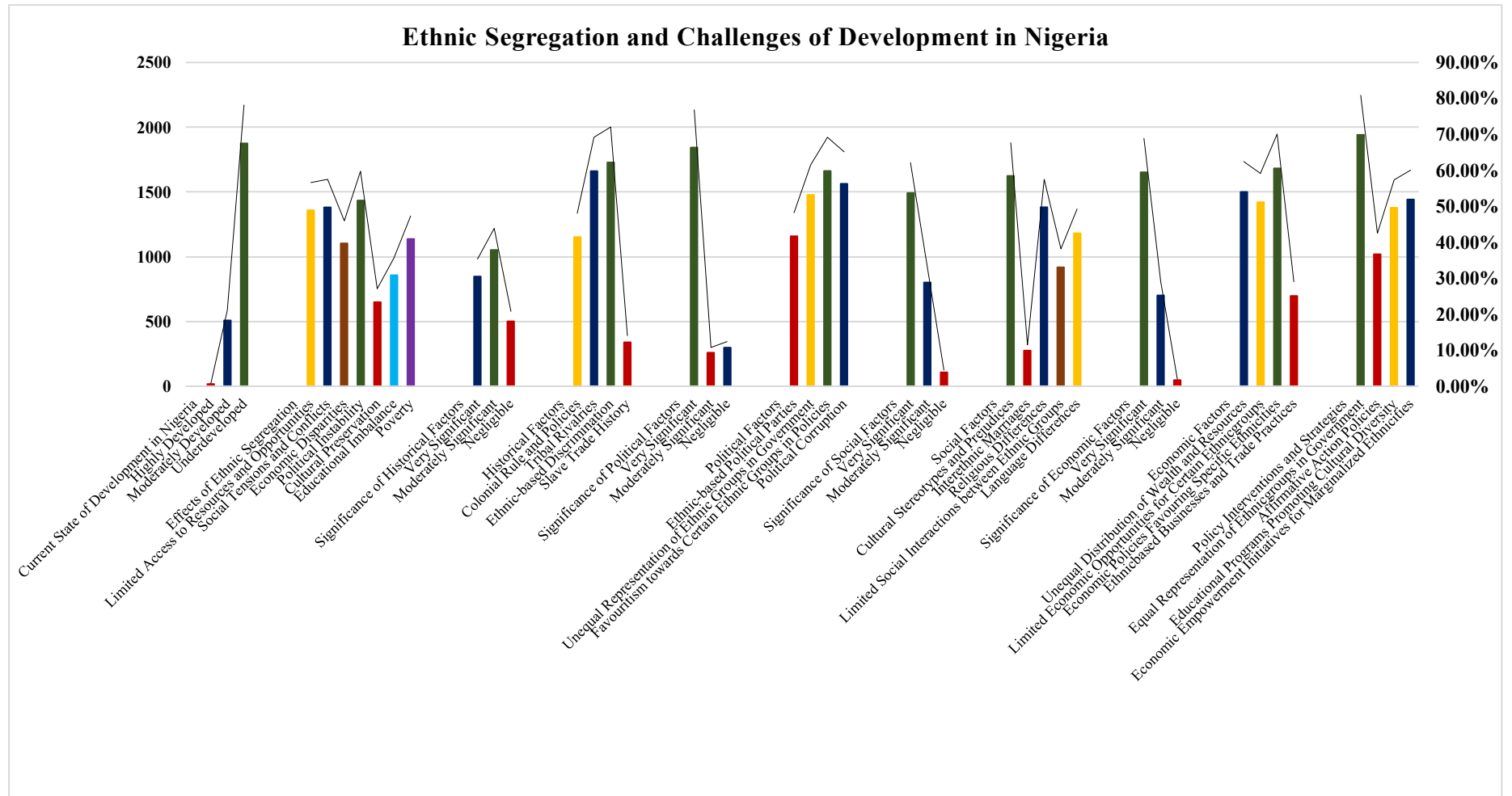
T = Total number of Respondents

Limitations

While the study aimed for national representativeness, several limitations stand acknowledged: the exclusion of rural populations may limit generalizability to non-urban contexts, the focus on governmental and educational institutions may not fully capture experiences of ethnic segregation at the grassroots or informal sectors, response bias and non-response may affect the internal validity of results and the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating more rural respondents, expanding institutional coverage, and applying triangulation with additional qualitative interviews or focus groups.

Results

Survey Results in Clustered Chart



Survey Results in Tabular Form

Age Range of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Group A (18-25)	323	13.45%
Group B (26-35)	787	32.79%
Group C (36-45)	360	15.00%
Group D (46-55)	504	21.00%
Group E (55 and above)	426	17.75%
Gender of Respondents		
Male	1467	61.13%
Female	933	38.87%
Others	0	0.00%
Current State of Development in Nigeria		
Highly Developed	17	0.70%
Moderately Developed	508	21.17%
Underdeveloped	1875	78.13%
Effects of Ethnic Segregation		
Limited Access to Resources and Opportunities	1359	56.63%
Social Tensions and Conflicts	1381	57.54%
Economic Disparities	1103	45.96%
Political Instability	1434	59.75%
Cultural Preservation	649	27.04%
Educational Imbalance	857	35.71%
Poverty	1137	47.38%
Significance of Historical Factors		
Very Significant	847	35.29%
Moderately Significant	1052	43.83%
Negligible	501	20.88%
Historical Factors		
Colonial Rule and Policies	1152	48.00%
Tribal Rivalries	1661	69.21%
Ethnic-based Discrimination	1728	72.00%
Slave Trade History	339	14.13%
Significance of Political Factors		
Very Significant	1843	76.79%
Moderately Significant	259	10.79%
Negligible	298	12.42%
Political Factors		
Ethnic-based Political Parties	1158	48.25%

Unequal Representation of Ethnic Groups in Government	1477	61.54%
Favouritism towards Certain Ethnic Groups in Policies	1662	69.25%
Political Corruption	1563	65.13%
Significance of Social Factors		
Very Significant	1492	62.17%
Moderately Significant	801	33.38%
Negligible	107	4.46%
Social Factors		
Cultural Stereotypes and Prejudices	1624	67.67%
Interethnic Marriages	275	11.46%
Religious Differences	1382	57.58%
Limited Social Interactions between Ethnic Groups	918	38.25%
Language Differences	1181	49.21%
Significance of Economic Factors		
Very Significant	1652	68.83%
Moderately Significant	701	29.21%
Negligible	47	1.96%
Economic Factors		
Unequal Distribution of Wealth and Resources	1500	62.50%
Limited Economic Opportunities for Certain Ethnic-groups	1421	59.21%
Economic Policies Favouring Specific Ethnicities	1682	70.08%
Ethnic-based Businesses and Trade Practices	697	29.04%
Policy Interventions and Strategies		
Equal Representation of Ethnic-groups in Government	1941	80.88%
Affirmative Action Policies	1019	42.46%
Educational Programs Promoting Cultural Diversity	1378	57.42%
Economic Empowerment Initiatives for Marginalised Ethnicities	1442	60.08%

Discussions

Historical Factors Perpetuating Ethnic Segregation in Nigeria

The survey result on historical factors causing ethnic segregation in Nigeria shows that the highest percentage of respondents (72%) identified ethnic-based discrimination as a major contributing factor to the persistence of ethnic segregation. This finding highlights the prevalence of discrimination against individuals from specific ethnic backgrounds in various aspects of life, such as education, employment, access to services, and political representation. Such discrimination reinforces divisions and prevents the development of a cohesive and inclusive society. Falola and Heaton (2008) write that the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which allocated various parts of Africa among European powers, created colonial borders that did not align with ethnic boundaries. This led to the inclusion of diverse ethnic groups within single administrative units, contributing significantly to tensions and conflicts. Suberu (1996) asserts that the arbitrary drawing and allocation of colonial boundaries led to the co-existence of various ethnic groups with varied historical, territorial, and cultural affinities within a single territory without due consideration. Amuwo et al. (1998) write that the North-South and East-West divide, which ensures ethnic segregation in Nigeria today, is a colonial initiative for administrative convenience and cost reduction rather than a deliberate federal or confederal design. Furthermore, the data reveal that 35.29% of respondents consider historical factors to be very significant in perpetuating ethnic segregation, while 43.83% see them as moderately significant, and only 20.88% regard them as negligible. This demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of respondents acknowledge the importance of historical legacies in shaping current ethnic dynamics in Nigeria.

A significant majority (69.21%) of respondents also believe that tribal rivalries are crucial in perpetuating ethnic segregation in Nigeria. Nigeria has over two hundred and fifty (250) distinct ethnic groups, over 500 languages, and cultures. The presence of these diverse ethnicities has often led to competition for resources, political power, and socioeconomic opportunities. The result is deep-rooted rivalries and mistrust among different ethnic communities. Osaghae (2007) observed that mutual suspicion and fear of domination among ethnic groups have led to a competition for power. The formation of political parties reflects a strong influence of ethnicism. Additionally, the

fact that nearly half of the respondents (48%) attributed the persistence of ethnic segregation to colonial rule and policies highlights the impact of colonial history on present-day Nigeria.

The colonial period saw Nigeria being subjected to foreign rule. Policies implemented by colonial powers intensified ethnic divisions and favoured certain ethnic groups over others. This led to unequal power dynamics and social hierarchies that continue to influence interactions between ethnic communities today. The objective was to curb Pan-Nigerian nationalism and maintain its grip on power. The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 and the division of Southern Nigeria into East and West with the constitutional backing of Richard's constitution in 1939 created a complex web of ethnic and regional conflicts. Adebajo & Olawunmi (2022) and International IDEA (2000) note that ethnic politics was a grandmaster plan designed to cause discord among the different ethnic nationals to avoid challenging the inordinate exploitation of Nigeria by the British government.

The British government successfully imposed different types of administration, laws, and practices after the 1914 amalgamation. For instance, the British education system was accepted in the South, while Emirs and Islamic clerics embraced their administrative system in the North. Hence, the South has a higher literacy rate over time than the North. The non-uniformities in policies, laws, and practices resulted in disparity and uneven socioeconomic development in Northern and Southern Nigeria, leading to perceptions of favouritism, marginalisation and resentment among other ethnic groups and regions, and this continues to affect Nigeria's stability and cohesiveness even after independence (Fawole, 2018).

Although a smaller percentage of respondents (14.13%) attributed ethnic segregation to the historical legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, it is still a significant factor to consider. The slave trade forcibly displaced millions of Africans from various ethnic groups. This has continued to influence the dynamics of social and ethnic interactions in Nigeria.

Political Factors Perpetuating Ethnic Segregation in Nigeria

From the survey results on political factors causing ethnic segregation in Nigeria, 69.25% of the respondents indicated favouritism towards certain ethnic groups in policies as a highly influential political factor in ethnic segregation. Ethnic favouritism involves policies that unduly benefit specific ethnic groups, leading to divisions and inequalities. For instance, the federal character

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system introduced in Nigeria to ensure that all ethnic groups are represented in government and civil service has been criticised for favouring the few dominant ethnic groups to the detriment of other ethnic groups. Political corruption was identified by 65.13% of respondents as a major political factor contributing to ethnic segregation. Nigerian government officials, law enforcement, and military personnel have been involved in several cases of bribery and extortion, money laundering, nepotism, embezzlement, cronyism, vote buying, and political patronage. Political corruption exacerbates societal inequalities, undermines trust in public institutions, and perpetuates a culture of patronage. Edewor et al. (2013) assert that ethnic sentiments have continued to feature in the Nigerian military forces' promotions, public and civil service employment, federal appointments, admission into educational and non-educational institutions, revenue allocation within states, infrastructural and development projects, and voting patterns.

In terms of the significance of the political factors, 76.79% of respondents rated it as very significant, with only 10.79% considering them moderately significant and 12.42% regarding them as negligible. This consensus underscores the pivotal role politics plays in entrenching ethnic divisions and shaping national identity. 61.54% of respondents highlighted unequal representation of ethnic groups in government as a major political factor. This indication underscores the importance of inclusive governance. When certain ethnic groups are under-represented in political leadership and decision-making processes, it can lead to feelings of marginalisation and reinforce ethnic divisions. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (48.25%) identified ethnic-based political parties as a significant political factor contributing to ethnic segregation in Nigeria. This suggests that political parties in Nigeria often align themselves with specific ethnic groups. This leads to polarisation along ethnic lines. Such partisan divisions can deepen mistrust between different ethnic communities and hinder the development of a unified national identity. The political parties formed before Nigeria's independence, to take over power from the colonial government, were ethnically motivated as they were evidence of organisation along ethnic lines. Kalu (2016) writes that the struggle for power and political representation in Nigeria before independence gave birth to ethnic identity and ethnic nationalism between different ethnic groups. Ekeh (1975) argues that ethnocentric politics emerged due to the absence of feasible political parties that could effectively represent national interests. The formation of political parties in Nigeria before and after independence echoes struggles among ethnic groups for national resources

and political representation. The first political party formed in Nigeria, the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), backed by the Clifford constitution, came into being in 1923 but lacked a national outlook as it was restricted to Lagos and Calabar districts. By 1934, a new political party-the Nigerian Youth Movement, was established to challenge and contest the domination of NNDP in Lagos politics (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). The search for a political party with a national outlook led to the formation of the National Convention of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) in 1945. While the party initially had a national outlook, it was later dominated by people of the Igbo ethnic group. In reaction to the Igbo domination of NCNC, the Yoruba socio-cultural association called Egbe Omo Oduduwa formed the Action Group (AG) in 1951. AG's success, especially in winning the majority in the Western region and the emergence of Chief Obafemi Awolowo as the head of the Western regional government, triggered the formation of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in 1951. NPC was formed from two northern associations- Jam'iyyar Nutanen Arewa A Yau and Jamiyyar Jumaar Arewa as a result of fear of domination from other ethnic groups, especially the Igbos and Yorubas (Sklar & Whitetaker, 1991).

Political activities and party formation were ethnically based from the First to the Fourth Republic. In the First Republic, ethnic sentiments, tussling for power and dominance, and resources were very active between the major ethnic groups represented by their political parties. This led to a series of inter- and intra-party conflicts and military coups. Osadolor (1998) writes that the national integration challenges that led to political restructuring do not provide a strong foundation for a true federal system. The creation of states further deepened the disparities between the North and the South, as well as between the West and the East. The emphasis of the 1979 constitution on civic nationalism does not deter ethnonationalism, as political parties formed in the Second Republic represent the interests and ideologies of their offshoots in the First Republic. For instance, the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which represents the Northern and Hausa/Fulani interests was an offshoot of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC); the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) which represents the Western and Yoruba interest was the extraction of Action Group (AG) and the Western Elites; Nigeria's Peoples Party (NPP) retained the ideologies of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Igbo ethnic group of South-Eastern Nigeria (Oladiran, 2013).

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The same trend continued in the Third and Fourth Republics as political parties were also formed based on ethnic groups. The controversial 2023 presidential election saw the three major ethnic groups compete for power under the three dominant political parties (i.e., Labour Party, All Progress Congress, and People's Democratic Party) in Nigeria. The Nigerian political system does not adequately represent the country's diverse ethnic groups. Hence, from Nigeria's pre-independence to post-independence, political activities and party formations mirror ethnic cleavages and have been influenced by personal and ethnic interests. This has affected and continues to affect national integration, growth and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Social Factors Perpetuating Ethnic Segregation in Nigeria

Social factors such as sociocultural norms, intergroup relationships, and societal attitudes contribute to ethnic segregation in Nigeria. Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and ethnic identities are deeply entangled with religion, social and cultural practices, behaviours, languages, and traditions. These strong connections to ethnic identity often breed ethnocentrism, where individuals and groups view their ethnic group as superior and greater than others. The survey results on the social factors causing ethnic segregation show that cultural stereotypes and prejudices appear to be the most influential in perpetuating ethnic segregation in Nigeria, with a significant majority of respondents (67.67%) acknowledging its impact. Cultural stereotypes and prejudices are people's beliefs and attitudes about other ethnic groups, often based on misconceptions or historical biases.

In Nigerian society, the prevalence of ethnic stereotypes, prejudices and biases has perpetuated and continues to perpetuate negative perceptions and attitudes towards other ethnic groups, causing hatred, exclusion and disunity among different ethnic groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) write that individuals seek a positive social identity by identifying with their ethnic group, which may lead to intergroup bias and prejudice. Ebijuwa (2015) writes that the Nationalists who advocated and fought for Nigerian independence were not only concerned with taking over control of power from the Europeans but also with creating opportunities for plundering the economy to ensure that existing benefits went to them, their allies and ethnic groups. It is worth noting that 62.17% of respondents rated social factors as very significant in perpetuating ethnic segregation, with 33.38% considering them moderately significant and only 4.46% viewing them as negligible. This recognition reaffirms the substantial role that social dynamics and attitudes play in reinforcing ethnic divisions in Nigeria.

Religious differences were also highlighted by almost half of the respondents (57.58%) as one of the factors causing ethnic segregation. Nigeria is home to a diverse range of religious beliefs. These differences create divisions between ethnic groups, particularly when religion becomes a defining identity factor. The colonial policies and practise of regionalisation segmented and polarised the adherence of major religions (i.e. Christians and Muslims) such that a greater percentage of Christians are concentrated in the southern part of the country. At the same time, Muslims abound in the northern half. More notably, many Christians and Muslims reside in many states and large urban areas. This posed a serious problem because of the struggle for space, diverse religious practices and activities and the tendency to influence the government. For instance, the adoption of Sharia law in the Northern states of Nigeria, despite having many Christians and the constitution declaring Nigeria a secular state (Ifeyinwa, 2002). Because many respondents highlighted religious differences as a primary factor, it is evident that addressing religious tensions and promoting religious tolerance is critical and essential in fostering greater social cohesion and reducing ethnic segregation.

The survey results also show that language differences (49.21%) significantly affect ethnic segregation. Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country, with hundreds of languages spoken. Language barriers can hinder effective communication and create divisions between ethnic groups. Okonkwo (1978) writes that the colonial rule merged about 400 West African ethnic groups with diverse languages to form modern-day Nigeria. Hence, out of these diverse ethnic groups, only the three languages of the major ethnic groups were constitutionally recognised in Nigeria. Since language expresses and transmits culture, promoting three languages out of numerous languages in Nigeria indicates cultural assimilation and ethnocultural domination. Promoting multilingualism and encouraging language understanding and exchange can increase social integration. Limited social interactions between ethnic groups (38.25%) from the survey indicate that many people in Nigeria may not interact frequently with individuals from other ethnic groups. Limited social interactions can lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes and reinforce ethnic segregation.

The old colonial urban centres like Lagos and Calabar, etc., which witnessed enormous rural migration during the colonial era, are the breeding ground for contemporary ethnic segregation, as it was in these urban centres that ethnic groups acquired that common consciousness and perceived themselves as separate and autonomous groups. Before independence, explicit ethnic terms like

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Igboland, Hausaland, Yorubaland, etc., were non-existent as different ethnic groups saw the need to be united in the struggle for independence. For instance, the Ibibio Union formed in 1928, the Igbo State Union of 1934, the Pan Yoruba Organisation “Egbe Omo Oduduwa” of 1945, the “Yam Lyar Mulamen Arewa”-Northern People’s Congress of 1949 and the Birom Progressive Union for the Middle Belt in 1950 were all combined efforts in the fight for independence (Udoh, 1998). While interethnic marriages (11.46%) received a lower percentage of responses, it is worth noting that inter-ethnic marriages can play a role in reducing ethnic segregation over time. When individuals from different ethnic backgrounds marry and create families, it can foster greater integration and acceptance between communities.

Economic Factors Perpetuating Ethnic Segregation in Nigeria

Economic factors such as socioeconomic disparities, inequalities in the distribution of resources, non-provision of basic human and social amenities and limited access to economic opportunities contribute significantly to ethnic segregation among ethnic groups in Nigeria. The unequal distribution of resources, both natural and non-natural, along regional and ethnic lines, has intensified ethnic tensions. Nigeria’s petroleum wealth, concentrated mainly in the Niger Delta area, has been the main source of economic disparities and conflicts. The tussle for control over these resources has fueled ethnic rivalries, resource-based violence, and agitation. The disagreement over sharing quota and the view that certain ethnic groups benefit more than others has deepened grievances. 70.08% of the respondents identified economic policies favouring specific ethnicities as a key factor contributing to ethnic segregation. This refers to policies that disproportionately benefit certain ethnic groups over others, leading to economic disparities. Stewart (2008) notes that unequal economic structures that limit certain groups’ access to opportunities, land, resources, and acceptable living conditions often foster resentment and can lead to social unrest and instability.

Most respondents (62.50%) identified the unequal distribution of wealth and resources as a significant economic factor contributing to ethnic segregation. This refers to the imbalanced allocation of economic opportunities, assets, and resources among different ethnic groups in the country. Supporting this, 68.83% of respondents rated economic factors as very significant in perpetuating ethnic segregation, 29.21% found them moderately significant, and only 1.96% viewed them as negligible. These figures highlight the vast agreement that economic imbalances

are central to the persistence of ethnic divides in Nigeria. Addressing these disparities and promoting more equitable economic development can play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and integration.

The discovery of oil in 1956 gave room for stiff competition over revenue and control, new forms of conflict and rivalry among ethnic groups, and fear of further marginalisation by the sub-ethnic groups (Adebajo & Olawunmi, 2022; Kalejaiye & Aliyu, 2013). Petroleum oil is one of the major factors fueling conflict in Nigeria. While the South is more resource-rich, particularly richly endowed with oil reserves, the North is more agriculturally oriented. Since oil accounted for more than 80% of the federal government's revenues, coupled with stiff competition between states for shares in this revenue, the North tried to increase its political influence and maintain its dominance in Nigerian politics to gain access to these resources. At the same time, the South has countered these attempts of the North to maximise its share. The struggle is further worsened by the fact that local elites in the oil region want to strengthen their positions by erecting infrastructure; again, oil is located in specific ethnic areas; hence, the groups in these areas tend to feel that the oil is 100% theirs. Furthermore, ethnic rivalries have been further increased by the various governments' economic mismanagement and corruption since independence (Hussein & Rian, 2001).

A substantial number of respondents (59.21%) highlighted limited economic opportunities as a major economic factor in ethnic segregation. This indicates that certain ethnic groups may face barriers and discrimination in accessing education, jobs, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Recognising limited economic opportunities as a major factor indicates the need for policies and initiatives to create an inclusive and fair economic environment for all ethnic groups. Reduction in economic disparities and provision of equal access to opportunities can help break down ethnic barriers. It is worth noting that poverty and inequality in Nigeria did not occur due to a lack of adequate resources but due to the mishandling, malapportionment, embezzlement, and misallocation of such resources. A persistent culture of corruption, ethnicism and rent-seeking encourages this culture. Allocation of opportunities, income, and wealth is based on vested interests and biased policy. According to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Nigeria (EFCC), quoted in Ola & Bukola (2015), between 1960 and 2005, about \$20 trillion was stolen from the Nigerian treasury by public officeholders. This amount is larger than the GDP of the United States in 2012, about \$17 trillion.

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A smaller percentage of respondents (29.04%) cited ethnic-based businesses and trade practices as a factor contributing to ethnic segregation. This involves economic activities that are primarily organised along ethnic lines, leading to limited interactions between different ethnic groups. While this factor may seem insignificant, ethnic-based businesses and trade practices have the potential to induce economic disparities and social fragmentation.

Challenges Of Ethnic Segregation on Development in Nigeria

Limited Economic Opportunities

Ethnic segregation limits access to various opportunities, including employment, healthcare, social services, and cultural resources. In places where ethnic tension has become violent, economic activities are limited. Abdullahi (2016) writes that ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, especially the menace of Boko Haram in Borno state, have resulted in citizens' inability to attend to their daily economic needs and have had to contend with famine, drought and hunger. The destruction of properties, farmlands, businesses, and government infrastructure caused by ethnic conflicts has also led to a high unemployment rate and economic meltdown.

Educational Imbalance

Education is the key to the sustainable development of any nation. The high incidence of ethnic-related conflicts, which often leads to the destruction of educational structures and infrastructures and sometimes, kidnapping or killing of students and staff, has belittled and caused an imbalance in Nigeria's educational system. Adebayo (2010) asserts that the persistent ethno-religious crisis in northern Nigeria has caused grave harm to Nigeria. According to him, some effects include human capital flight, closure or shutdown of schools, an increase in school dropouts, a low literacy rate, a high rate of crime and curriculum deviation.

Social Exclusion and Marginalisation

Ethnic segregation restricts cultural exchange and social cohesion and perpetuates social exclusion and marginalisation of ethnic groups in Nigeria. Little or no relations with people from other ethnic backgrounds can lead to feelings of isolation, limited social networks, exclusion from socio-cultural and economic activities, and impede social integration. In Nigeria, ethnic segregation has led to unequal distribution and allocation of resources. Ataide & Enebong (2020) observe that in

the First Nigerian Republic, dominated by Hausa/Fulani, there was brute injustice in the allocation of funds, as most federal funds and resources were allocated to the Northern Region rather than the West and Eastern Regions. This has heightened ethnic tension, mistrust among ethnic groups and several ethnic conflicts.

Poverty and Socio-economic Gaps

Ethnic segregation breeds poverty and socio-economic disparities among different ethnic groups due to its tendency to limit access to quality education, employment opportunities and resources, making it problematic for individuals within these ethnic groups to break the cycle of poverty. Salawu and Hassan (2011) state that the persistent incidents of mass poverty and unemployment created isolation and insecurity, which encouraged ethnic nationalities and, over time, led to ethnic-related crises and over 1.5 million people, mostly farmers, have fled their homes due to ethnic-related conflicts in Nigeria. The effect of this is the high cost of foodstuffs and loss of some factors of production, i.e. land, capital, etc. Obateru (1994) affirms that there are connections between the unequal distribution of scarce resources, the problem of poverty and ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. The report published by Olatunji (2013) shows that over one-third of Nigerians indicated that poverty is the major cause of ethno-religious crises. Hence, hunger, starvation, and lack of economic growth and development lead to other negative outcomes like poor health, diseases, insurgencies and other social crimes.

Increased Inter-Ethnic Group Tensions

Ethnic segregation in the form of social exclusion, social disintegration, the perpetuation of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination in Nigeria contributes significantly to inter-ethnic group tensions and conflicts. These led to instability in the social, economic and political spheres and left little or no room for development in Nigeria. Odere (2014) asserts that the repeated cycle of malicious killing and destruction of lives and properties belonging to the adherence of Muslims, Christians, and traditionalists has become a permanent feature of our existence, especially with the advent of the Boko Haram menace since 2009. Augmenting Odere's view, Imobighe (2003) writes that since the end of military rule in 1999, ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have become so common that hardly any part of the country has not been affected. Imhonopi and Urim (2012) write that ethnicity has heightened political competition during electoral contests as most ethnic groups resort to winning elections by duress or through illegal means for their candidates and regions. The effects

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include waste of human and material resources due to violence, political and economic meltdown, insecurity, local and foreign disinvestments, human capital flights, increased social gap among various ethnic groups, hate and mistrust, and formation of insurgents.

Political Instability, Bad Governance and Corruption

Ethnic segregation has encouraged the culture of bad governance and corruption in Nigeria. From 1960 until the present, several administrations have mismanaged resources and weakened democratization processes, resulting in political instability and economic downturn. Isaksson and Çelik (2013) write that redistributing resources along ethnic lines makes people support candidates from their ethnic group, even if they are known to be corrupt. The persistent ethnic and religious insurgency in Nigeria, especially the Boko Haram and Niger Delta Avengers insurgencies, is triggered by bad governance and corruption. Ibaba (2008) writes that while over 80% of Nigeria's revenue is generated from crude oil sales, none gets to ordinary people. Political elites are embezzling them for their personal use, creating conditions for ethnic insurrection and violence. Corruption causes low development and aggravates poverty, debt, incapacity, mental despair and despondency. Corruption increases inequality, decreases popular accountability and political responsiveness, and thus produces rising frustration and hardship among citizens, who are more likely to accept (or even demand) hard-handed and illiberal tactics. The rule of law and liberal values of tolerance and human dignity become obstacles to needed change.

Human Rights Violations

The high incidences of ethnic segregation in Nigeria perpetuate human rights abuses and violations. Human Rights Watch (2024) reports that ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria have encouraged sexual and gender-based violence, reprisal killings, beatings, impunity for state officials and institutions, unequal distribution of resources and social injustices. These have heightened ethnic tension and have the tendency to explode into a full-scale war.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ethnic segregation remains a major challenge that hinders Nigeria's potential for inclusive and sustainable development. The prevalence of political instability arising from a lack of inclusivity and equitable representation leads to ineffective governance and uncertainty in decision-making

processes. Social tensions and conflicts among ethnic groups hinder social cohesion and intensify divisions. The limited access to resources and opportunities creates inequalities, contributing to widespread poverty. Economic disparities result in an uneven distribution of resources, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Furthermore, educational imbalances impede equal access to quality education. This affects long-term human capital development and a sustainable future for individuals and communities.

To effectively address ethnic segregation and encourage inclusive development, this article recommends the following. Firstly, equal representation of ethnic groups in government and decision-making bodies is a crucial step towards fostering inclusive governance. This will allow diverse voices to be heard, ensuring that policies are formulated to address the needs of different ethnic communities. Secondly, economic empowerment initiatives and affirmative action policies should be targeted at marginalised ethnicities to effectively reduce economic disparities, ensuring that historically disadvantaged groups have equal access to resources and opportunities. Furthermore, investment in educational programs promoting cultural diversity should be encouraged to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions that fuel ethnic segregation.

Encouraging social interactions and cultural exchange between different ethnic communities can break down barriers and foster a sense of unity. Addressing the persistent issue of political favouritism is vital for equitable resource distribution, effective governance, and policy transparency. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives should be incorporated in Nigeria's constitution to help mitigate social tensions and deter politicians from using conflicts to achieve their political ambitions. Supporting economic diversification can reduce Nigeria's reliance on specific industries (oil and gas), ensuring that development benefits are equitably distributed across regions and ethnic groups. Successful implementation of these recommendations requires combined efforts from various stakeholders, including the Nigerian government, civil society organisations, academia and the general public. Finally, raising awareness about ethnic segregation and setting up frameworks to manage and monitor its excesses is vital for creating a collective commitment to building a more united and prosperous Nigeria.

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