

THE NATIONAL QUESTION: RELATIVE DEPRAVITY AND SECESSIONIST  
AGITATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2025.5812>

IJMSSSR 2025

VOLUME 7

ISSUE 5 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

ISSN: 2582 – 0265

**Abstract:** Throughout its history, Nigeria has experienced numerous political unrests, ranging from the colonial era to the post-colonial administration, as influenced by unresolved national questions. Some evident crises include the Kano riot of 1953; census crisis of 1962; federal election crisis of 1964; coup and counter coups of 1966; Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970; June 12, 1993, presidential election nullification; and the recent incessant threat of secessionist agitations from the Eastern Nigeria, Boko-Haram terrorism and herders' crisis that is dominant in Northern Nigeria. This paper examines the influence of unresolved national questions on Biafra secessionist agitation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic using two groups—the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)—as case studies. The paper reports on a study that adopted a phenomenological design and a qualitative research method, analyzing the data thematically. Relative Deprivation Theory was employed. The study found unresolved national questions influenced the incessant Biafra secessionist agitations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In addition, the marginalization of the Igbos in the Nigerian government was found to be the major trigger of the Biafra secessionist movements. The study also found that the use of military force in combating Biafra secessionist agitations by the Nigerian government did not curb or resolve the agitation of Biafra but rather escalated it. Therefore, the study suggested indigenous conflict resolution as a means of curbing the issue of secessionist agitation in Nigeria. The study concluded that the unresolved national question triggers secessionist agitation, while the marginalization of the Igbos is the root cause of incessant Biafra secessionist agitation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Negotiation with the secessionist leaders through their traditional rulers was discovered to be a possible means for curbing Biafra agitation. Dissolution or balkanization of Nigeria was found to be the only solution to put a stop to Biafra secessionist agitations.

**Keywords:** Biafra, IPOB, MASSOB, Marginalization, National Question, Nigerian's Fourth Republic and Secession.

## INTRODUCTION

Often, secessionist agitation comes along with violent conflict. What causes ethnic groups and political factions to secede from the nations where they reside? How can leaders in government and society promote peace and conflict resolution amid secessionist agitation? This paper seeks to examine the root causes of secessionist agitations in Nigeria, a nation that has been plagued with frequent political unrest and insurrections. The "National Question," a term used in the Nigerian context to refer to the various crises that cause disintegration of the nation's unity and stability, is central to this discussion. The paper takes specific aim at secessionist agitation in the present Nigerian regime called the Fourth Republic. Two secessionist groups receive special focus in this paper: the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

The National Question, as noted by Oluwasuji (2006), is difficult to define because the concept can mean different things to diverse people depending on the individuals' standpoint or the view the individuals adopted in analyzing the concept. For instance, political ideology, school of thought, tribe, and religious identity could influence the way individual persons interpret the National Question. According to Naanen in Oluwasuji (2006), the National Questions could mean different things to diverse people based on their interests or what is called group desire, want, and needful. Additionally, Naanen (2001) observed:

...to the Islamic community, the National question could mean the struggle for the enthronement of the sharia code in the polity. To the Christian, it could mean the maintenance of a secular State. To those who believe in ethnicity as the central mediating force in Nigeria, the National question may mean ethnic empowerment. To those who see Nigeria as a geopolitical divide, it could mean the control of political power by either the North or the South. To the oil-producing State of the Niger Delta, the National question may be synonymous with the struggle for resource control and self-determination. To the middle belt elite, their quest for an identity for the region outside the control of the Islamic North could be integral to the National question (Naanen, 2001, p. 216). There are various terms that could describe Nigeria's political trend of people groups attempting to split off, but this research utilizes the term "secessionist agitation" with intentionality. Mandala (2009) discussed the disparity that exists between secession and other compound concepts. It is vital, therefore, to differentiate between dissolution, secessionist agitation, and self-determination. Scholars, most of the time, as noted by Akinyetun (2018), have interchangeably used secession, self-determination, and dissolution. Though the concepts may share a thin line, they are quite different in many ways. Secession means the "method by which a whole tries to detach itself from the entity to which it is and to form a novel entity on the part of the land of the state" (Akinyetun, 2018, p.12). Self-determination in the case of Nigeria could mean regional governance where a group of people demand to control and manage their natural resources. On the other hand, dissolution means the end of a political entity through legal means. The mode of oppression and intents different secessionist agitation, self-determination and dissolution projects. Self-determination and dissolution use legislation while secessionist agitation uses "consensual procedure but a unilateral process" (Crowford in Ojibara, 20216).

MASSOB and IPOB are ripe examples of secessionist agitation in Nigeria. MASSOB was formed in 1999 at the wee of the Nigerian Fourth Republic by Ralph Uwazurike, from Imo State, who says that the movement was a peaceful organization to achieve the Sovereign State of Biafra as stated in his 25 steps objective. It was also noted that the association has two organs, which are denoted as the Biafra Government in Exile and the Biafra Shadow Government. Nigeria's government declared MASSOB a violent group, which led to the arrest of Uwazurike and the other 280 members of the group (Biafra News, 2010; Shirbon, 2006: 6-7).

IPOB is a secessionist group formed and chaired by Nnamdi Kanu, a British Nigerian from Isiama-Afara, Abia State, with the objective of disintegrating all the five Igbo States from the Nigerian government. The group adopted a call for referendum as a strategy to achieve a legal break away from Nigeria, though some other controversial steps have been noted by scholars about IPOB, like the demand for firearms from the Igbos in the Diaspora and building an armed security force or Biafra army (Daily Post 27/5/2017).

To analyze the root causes of secessionist agitation in Nigeria's

Fourth Republic, this paper utilizes the concept of Relative Deprivation (RD), a theory developed by American sociologist Samuel Stouffer in the late 1940s which focuses on individual perception of hardship and lack in comparison with the status of others. In addition, the researcher gathered qualitative data from stakeholders in the context of Nigeria's Fourth republic. He conducted twelve Focus Discussion Groups (FDGs) with each of the responding groups: the teachers, lecturers, street urchins, IPOB and MASSOB members, and he facilitated seven guided interviews with Igbo traditional rulers as well as family members of the principal leaders in MASSOB and IPOB [Ojukwu, Uwazurike, and Kanu].

First, this paper provides a brief overview of Nigeria's history of secessionist agitation from 1914 until the present. Second, the paper describes its research methodology, including the researcher's methods for collecting qualitative data from interviewees and the utilization of RD theory. Third, the paper employs RD to analyze the historical survey and interviewee responses, theorizing the causes of secessionist agitations like those of MASSOB and IPOB. The paper concludes with recommendations on how to promote peace and conflict resolution amidst secessionist agitation.

## **NIGERIA'S HISTORY OF SECESSIONIST AGITATIONS**

Nigeria as a nation has experienced incessant secessionist agitations, which predated the 1967 Biafra secessionist agitation led by the Igbo faction of the nation. According to Tamuno in Almona et al. (2017), the first secessionist agitation occurred during the aftermath of amalgamation in 1914 when the North threatened to secede from the

Federal Republic of Nigeria. The threat was mainly advocated through one of the Northern political elites, Ahmadu Bello, who perceived the amalgamation as the “mistake of 1914” (Alumona et al. (2017, p. 100). The 1914 threat of secession was the first before independence, and the second that followed was in the 1950 Ibadan Constitutional Conference, where the Emir of Zaria threatened and demanded 50% of the seats in the central legislature, which the colonial masters adhered to for the sake of saving Nigeria’s national integration.

In 1953, another threat to Nigeria’s unity emanated from the Yoruba ethnic group. Particularly, the crisis happened because of the neutral status of Lagos State, the then-federal capital territory established by the British colonial master. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent nationalist from the western region, objected and demanded that Lagos should be administered as part of the western region. Awolowo’s argument over who controls the affairs of Lagos led to the push for reservation by the Yoruba faction as he maintained that if Lagos was not under the control of the western region, the Yoruba community would not be part of the federation any longer (Awofeso, 2017; Alunmona, 2017). To achieve the bid of secession from the Nigeria Federation, Awolowo, in the Constitutional Conference of 1954 in Lagos, through his party, “Action Group,” advanced a motion for a constitutional provision for the right of any of the parties of the federation to secede whenever they deemed fit. However, the motion did not survive the pressure of the time because the integration of Nigeria was then a priority, compared to what is obtainable in present-day Nigeria. Azikiwe’s National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) moved a countermotion that nullified Awolowo’s Action Group’s interest in enshrining the secession clause in the country’s constitution. The Constitutional Conference of 1954 ended the secession with ratification that no secession clause should be embedded in the amended grundnorm of the people of Nigeria (Anyaele, 2003).

In 1964, however, the paradigm of the secessionist movement shifted from the former actors, the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani, to the Igbo faction of Nigeria, who, through Azikiwe’s NCNC, moved a motion that countered the Action Group quest for secession (Awofeso, 2017). The question here should be, why the Igbos? Were they tired of playing a unifying role in Nigeria’s integration? Did it mean that the oil discovered in the region prompted their change of mind to initiate the threat of secession, as noted by the anti-Biafra school of thought (Ezeani, 2016)? Good students of history will argue that the cause of this threat of secession by the Igbos at this time was not related to oil resources because oil was discovered in Nigeria after independence in the 1970s (Odularu, 2008). Nevertheless, according to Ezeani (2016), the cause of the Igbos’ attempts to secede in 1964 was influenced by no other factor than the perceived malpractice of the federal election of December 1964.

After the federal elections of 1964, secessionist agitation or separatist movement in Nigeria took a new dimension, and this period recorded the first rebel group in Nigeria led by Isaac Boro. Boro and his followers waged a full rebellion against the government through armed conflict that lasted for 12 days, from February 23, 1966, to March 8, 1966 (Awofeso, 2017). The second secession attempt was the 1967 Eastern region move to secede from Nigeria under the leadership of Late Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, which scholars of pro-Biafra leanings agreed was influenced by the counter-coup of January 15, 1966, as termed the Igbo coup by the anti-Igbo or Biafra school of thought (Ezeani, 2016). The coup and counter-coup of January 15, 1966, according to scholars of politics, has been the springboard or catalyst to all the contemporary agitations in Nigeria’s polity. The coup recorded more casualties from the northern part of the country, which bred resentment among the northern political elites and influenced the counter-coup (Ezeani, 2016).

The resentment of the above conflict has threatened the togetherness and development of Nigeria since the 1960s. The Igbo, who are the losers of the war, concealed the feeling of injustice, marginalization, and persecution by the Nigerian government after the war, and this has continued to affect the growth of the country negatively (Wole, 2015). The disagreement between Northern and Eastern Nigeria triggered the Fourth Republican agitations.

The concept of the Fourth Republic, as a political dispensation in the Nigerian Government and politics, ended the last military dictatorship in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, which arose because of the death of the then-military dictator, General Sani Abacha, in 1998. General Abdusalami Abubakar, who was the second in command at this time, made it possible for power to shift from military to civilian government. According to Enyi (2014), Nigeria’s Fourth Republic was like a long-awaited event because many had prayed and wished it would come owing to the maltreatment by the then-military tyrant toward the citizens. Nigerians, at the emergence of the Fourth Republic,

thought that the era of corruption, maltreatment, and vices was gone, but the reverse is the significance of this study. It is vital to state that political parties were formed to start the newly birthed Republic, and the parties were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All-Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) (Abia, 2002). All these parties partook in the 1999 April election that ushered the former military General Olusegun Obasanjo to power on May 29, 1999, under the umbrella of the PDP.

The Fourth Republic agitations are based on the unresolved root cause of the early secessionist movements, which is generally termed "the national question" (Owen, 2016). The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) was formed in 1999 to achieve a sovereign state of Biafra, and a second group was formed in 2009, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which gained global and municipal attention.

### METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology design was considered appropriate for this research, because it allows for the in-depth examination of an event or situation, using various kinds of evidence obtained from interview and focus group discussion with those participants and analysis of relevant literature (Prushant, 2013). The Nigerian states of Abia, Anambra, and Imo constitute the population of this study. The research adopted a purposeful sample design (Palys, 2008). Umuahia North local government area of Abia State, Nneiwe North of Anambra State, and Okigwe in Imo State were purposively selected among other local government areas in the selected states. The rationale was premised on the fact the selected local government has produced leaders of the Biafra secessionist movement and has also participated more in Biafra secessionist agitations.

Data were collected through documentary reviews, interviews, and focus group discussions to elicit information from the respondents. The researcher conducted three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on each of the research respondents: teachers, street urchins, IPOB, and MASSOB members in the selected local government areas of the study, making a total number of twelve FGDs. Guided and in-depth interviews were conducted with seven traditional rulers and one family member of each of the agitators, [Kanu, Ojukwu, and Uwazuruike]. The FGDs and interviews focused on two primary questions: (1) What is the relationship between the National Question and secessionist agitation in Nigeria? And (2) What are the causes of secessionist agitation in Nigeria? Instruments for data collection were interviews and FGD guides. Data collected were content analyzed in thematic form.

To analyze the qualitative data collected from FGDs and interviews, the researcher utilized Relative Deprivation (RD) theory. RD was introduced in 1949 by Samuel Stouffer as a "post-facto" explanation for the incessant "surprising findings in the famous American Soldier series" (Pettigrew & Smith, 2015). The scholars observed that RD started as a concept but today has developed into a theory that is applied to many social sciences variables with great application in social justice (Smith et al., 2002).

### RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND SECESSIONIST AGITATION

RD is defined by Pettigrew et al. (2015) as a "Judgment that one or one's group is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent and that this judgment invokes feelings of anger, resentment, and entitlement" (p. 2). In addition to the definition of RD above, Pettigrew et al. (2015) opined that RD has three basic psychological aspects that any person or group experiencing RD must encounter. They are: (i) they make cognitive comparisons, (ii) they make cognitive appraisals that they or their groups are disadvantaged, and (iii) these disadvantages are seen as unfair and arouse angry resentment. Smith et al. (2012) noted that if the three basic indicators of RD are not experienced, then a group or individual is not marginalized. More so, it is expedient to note that scholars like Ted Robert Gurr (1970), Adekanye (2007), Richardson (2011), Mbawgu (2017), and Martin (2013) are in support of the positions of Pettigrew et al., (2015:2) on the utility of RD theory.

Additionally, Smith, et al., (2012) agree with the stipulations of Pettigrew, et al., (2015) on the three basic psychological grounds that define RD. Therefore, this study mirrors Nigeria's secessionist agitation with the above three conditions that predict RD influencing political violence, in which secession is chief in global politics. The remainder of this paper will examine the causes of secessionist agitation in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic regime, using RD as an analytical tool.

The first trigger of aggression in relative deprivation occurs when the victims discover marginalization through cognitive observation. Juxtaposing the above affirmation with the cause(s) of the January 15–16 coup of 1966, the coup was a product of cognitive observation of deprivation and marginalization in the Nigerian polity by few political elites according to the accounts of Ezeani (2016). The aggression, influenced by cognitive observation of corruption, marginalization, and misappropriation of public funds, triggered the coup. The coup plotters were driven by the spirit of nationalism to redeem Nigerians from exploitation by a few political elites, but the failure of the Eastern soldiers to keep to the plan of the coup turned the desired result into what could be called a major unresolved National Question in the Nigerian federation. This influenced the Igbo pogrom of 1966 and the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970. Analyzing the events from the coup to the countercoup and the civil war, it is obvious that the feeling of deprivation and marginalization majorly influenced the actors of those events.

The Hausa/Fulani reactions (countercoup and pogrom) were based on deprivation influenced by the loss of their top political leaders in the coup, while the call for secession in 1967 by the Igbo was the result of deprivation, countercoup, and pogrom. Among other factors, the pogrom of the Igbos in Northern Nigeria, the counter-coup, and the extrajudicial killing of the Igbos during the Nigerian Civil War are some of the major reasons for the resurrection of secessionist agitation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, according to the argument of the probiafrans such as: (Odoemene, 2012; Dickson, 2013; Ayokhai & Peter, 2016; Jidefor & Adibe, 2016; Ezeani, 2016).

The assertions of Mbagwu (2017, p.95), reveal that one of the major limitations of relative deprivation theory is that aggressions take place even when the three basic psychological components of RD are met. Therefore, the above position cannot be applied to the subject matter of this study because all the secessionist agitations in Nigeria are the product of relative deprivation and marginalization. The researcher will, therefore, observe that one of the weaknesses of RD in this paper is that the theory does not define the level of deprivation that could lead to aggression because deprivation is inevitable if human beings are involved. This study observes that the major limitation of RD is that the theory succeeded in diagnosing the causes of Biafra secessionist agitations without proffering a solution to it. Therefore, because of the above lacuna, the study in the conclusion and recommendation section of this paper will provide a possible mechanism to curb incessant secessionist agitation in Nigeria.

Boyle and Englebert (2006), linked National Questions to the causes of secessionist agitations consonant to the stipulation of RD as Pettigrew et al. (2015) put it “a form of denial that invokes feelings of anger, resentment, and entitlement” (p.2). Boyle and Englebert (2006) are of the opinion that disparity exists in what constitutes causes of secessionist agitations. The scholars further noted that “economic, cultural, and political factors” are significant factors often considered. According to these scholars, the quest to understand and outline the causes of secessionist or separatist government is a difficult one because there is no universally accepted theory of “secessionism,” notwithstanding that various sovereign states today are birthed from secessionist agitation, including the United States of America (Boyle & Englebert, 2006). Comparing the stipulations of Boyle and Englebert (2006) with the observations of probiafran scholars, it is evident that deprivation is the cause of secessionist agitation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. For instance, Boyle and Englebert note that political exclusion is one of the root causes of secessionist agitation in Nigeria and a major unresolved National Question. Juxtaposing Boyle and Englebert (2006) with the claims of the probiafrans (Ojukwu the Biafra agitator 1967–1970, Ralph Uwazurike 1999–2011, and Nnamdi Kanu 2012–present) and the findings of Ezeani (2016), bolsters the view of Pettigrew et al. (2015) on the influence of RD on political unrest like secessionist agitation.

The difficulty encountered in the study of the nexus between secessionist agitation and the National Question (RD) can be unveiled through the position and stipulations of the following scholars: Buchherit (1978), Dahlitz (2003), Coppieters & Sakwa (2003), and Horowitz (2003). As cited in Boyle and Englebert (2006), the above scholars agreed that the problem with understanding the relationship between the National Question and secessionist agitation is that researchers have failed to study the concepts positively and have adopted a normative study of the variables.

According to Frankfurt (2011), defending and defining the current constitution of Nigeria is a major National Question in Nigeria. Currently, this development has influenced every other region, excluding the Hausa/Fulani, who are not calling for a referendum and restructuring of Nigeria Federation and federalism in the Fourth Republic. Frankfurt also noted that democracy in 1999 did not solve the problem of marginalization or equality

questions in Nigeria but increased the deprivation of the minority groups, which led to ethnic and religious intolerance in northern Nigeria. The Igbos and other minority groups were victims. Frankfurt (2011) also noted that the above position of affairs in 1999 revived the agitation of Biafra, "...When I returned to Igbo land for brief visits between (2000 – 2007) the option of new Biafra was widely discussed" (Frankfurt, 2011, p.57). Frankfurt, (2011) validates relative deprivation theory's stipulation. The political exclusion and uneven distribution of resources and development in Nigeria as argued by the Fourth Republic secessionist agitators is the root cause of incessant secessionist movements in Nigeria.

Additionally, Frankfurt (2011) reveals that the injustice and corruption in the Nigerian Fourth Republic prompted the agitations of MASSOB and IPOB. It is important to note that another National Question that led to secessionist agitation in Nigeria was the 1993 Presidential election nullification. According to the account of Frankfurt in his study, "...even the highest religious authority, the Sultan of Sokoto, collaborated with the military in betraying the victorious candidate, though Abiola, was a committed Muslim, and the vice President for Nigeria's Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs ..." (Frankfurt, 2011, p.58). The 1993 Yoruba secessionist movement justified the Igbo's attempted secession due to injustice and deprivation in Nigerian polity as evident in the case of the Yoruba who were denied the opportunity to lead Nigeria in the most prestigious political office in Nigerian politics: the office of the President.

The nullification of June 12, 1993, forced or compelled the Yoruba militants to call for secession from the Nigerian Federation. The Yoruba backed up their agitation with strikes, which according to the account of Frankfurt (2011), crippled Yoruba land and frustrated their economy. Nonetheless, the Hausa/Fulani, on their own, believed that the Yoruba could not secede, which was captured in the following statements in Frankfurt (2011): "We have all the resources to put down any upheaval ruthlessly" (Frankfurt, 2011, p.59). It is vital at this point to state Frankfurt's position on the reason the Yoruba called for secession after the nullification of the 1993 election. He averred thus:

The break-down of trust, prompted by the trauma of the annulled election, gave rise to a wave of Yoruba nationalism. Why should the Yoruba share a polity with people who excluded them from ruling it? Was not it better to rule themselves, without interference...Many Yoruba...turned to ethnic Nationalism... (Frankfurt, 2011, p.59).

The compromise by the Nigerian Generals made Olusegun Obasanjo, the President of Nigeria in 1999, raise a question of inequality in Nigeria, which informed the secessionist agitation from the Niger-delta region, identified as Ijaw National Congress, Urhobo National Assembly, or Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. Frankfurt went further to illustrate the connection between National Questions and secessionist agitation using the Igbo ethnic group. "The reluctance to form reliable alliances with politicians of other ethnic groups has much to do with the way Igbo remembered the pogroms of 1966 and the civil war (1967–1970). Nationalist discourses emphasize that the Igbo cannot trust other Nigerians..." (Osimen, Balogun & Adenegan, 2013, p.46).

Gurr, in Saleh (2013) added that "the most palpable base for organizing antagonism against the State is "ethnicity" (Saleh, in Onifade, 2013). Saleh, building on the above postulation, observed that the level of political anarchy in a state defines the amount of injustice in such a state. In other words, the level of marginalization and minority questions (National Questions) and deprivation in a polity is opposite to the height or level of unrest (separatist agitations) in such a country. Migdal (2001), in Onifade (2013), approached the relationship between the National Question (group or ethnic deprivation) and secessionist agitation from a different angle. To Onifade, "Cohesion is determined by how much role the state plays in individual's lives, how it responds to conflicts and how people express themselves towards it." The assertions of Onifade not only suit the rationale behind MASSOB and IPOB agitations but also explain the reason behind political apathy by some Nigerian citizens because the uneven development and political dominance of the northern region of Nigeria causes major deprivation in the other two regions, which are challenging to resolve in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Though the causes of incessant secessionist agitation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are not quite different from the causes of the Nigerian Civil War, researchers examine the positions of current indigenous literature on the subject matter in the Fourth Republic. Odoemene (2012) observed that:

...the trust remains that the root causes of the war have not been addressed, and this has tainted the memory of Biafra. For instance, one of the beliefs upon which Biafra was founded was that the Nigeria task is a façade ensnared by fraud. The general motif put forward by the Igbos is that little or nothing has changed in Nigeria following Biafra's defeat (p. 8).

The position of Odoemene (2012) on the rationale of the Igbo community in Nigeria is traceable to unresolved National Questions, namely deprivation of the Igbo ethnic group as demonstrated in the relative deprivation theory. Resentment has been pointed out by current literature on secessionist agitation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. In support of the National Question as a major cause of secessionist agitations in Nigeria, Dickson (2013) states that Nigeria's ethnic conundrum and unresolved National Questions, which include abuse of power, ethnicity, and resource control, are major challenges of Nigeria. In agreement with the above-mentioned points, Ayokhai and Peter (2016, p. 24) uphold that "the latent problems underlying inter-group conflicts in Nigeria can be unbundled to include: the National question, a clash in group's identities and aspirations; and inter-group rivalry and competition." Ayokhai and Peter (2016) further defended their position on the National Question as a major cause of conflict in Nigeria by citing examples of National Questions in Nigeria, such as the national census question and electoral malpractice. The researcher is of the opinion that the above-mentioned unresolved National Question has created problems between the north and south (Igbos) in Nigeria's polity.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This section of the paper relates the findings of this study to relevant extant literature. It compares the findings with existing literature for the purpose of validation and identification of contributions to knowledge, as evident in the following subsections:

### **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND SECESSIONIST AGITATION IN NIGERIA?**

The study shows that unequal ministerial appointment and inequality in the distribution of resources cause or trigger secessionist agitation in Nigeria. This resurfaced in the meeting held by President Buhari and the traditional rulers from Onitsha in Anambra State. The traditional rulers, according to the account of Premium Times (January 24, 2019), claimed that the Southeast is marginalized, especially in the armed forces and in terms of development (infrastructure).

Boyle and Englebert (2006), linked National Questions to the causes of secessionist agitations, as found by this study. They are of the opinion that disparity exists on what constitutes causes of secessionist agitations. They continued by noting that "economic, cultural, and political factors" are majorly considered factors. According to the scholars, the quest to understand and outline the causes of secessionist or separatist government is a difficult one because there is no universally accepted theory of "secessionism," not minding that various sovereign states today are products of secessionist agitation, including the United States of America (Boyle & Englebert, 2006).

In addition, the stipulations of Ojukwu, as cited in Frankfurt (2011, p.38), supported and justified the assertions of the research discussants: "It is better that we move slightly apart and survive; it is much worse that we move closer and perish in the collision." However, it is important to note that other unresolved National Questions, like the structure of Nigeria's government and the call for restructuring, were identified as triggers to secessionist agitation in Nigeria. Also, a high level of corruption was identified as a National Question and a trigger to secessionist agitation in Nigeria, as evident in the observations of Frankfurt (2011) "The break-down of trust, prompted by the trauma of the annulled election, gave rise to a wave of Yoruba nationalism. Why should the Yoruba share a polity with people who excluded them from ruling it? Was it not better to rule themselves, without interference... Many Yoruba... turned to ethnic nationalism..." (p.59).

The study from the field data shows that 100% of the respondents of the personal interview and 100% of the FGD participants agreed that unequal ministerial appointment, inequality in the distribution of resources, high level of corruption trigger secessionist agitation. An interview with the traditional rulers (the Kings) reveals that "...National Question is, they are the cause of the Biafra agitations. Take for instance the President Buhari ministerial appointments, how many Igbos are appointed, he recently said at Enugu that he did not see any

credible Igbo person to appoint as security minister..." (Field Data from transcribed PIS 2019).

### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF SECESSIONIST AGITATION IN NIGERIA?

Corruption and bad governance were described by discussants and interviewees as the cause of secessionist agitation. The study found that unequal political appointment, marginalization, inequality in the allocation of natural resources, hatred of the Igbos by the Hausa and Yoruba, the cheating of the Igbos before and after the civil war, embezzlement of public funds by political leaders from Hausa and Yoruba region, unemployment, the use and arming of the youths by the politicians, the history of the Nigeria civil war, and uneven development are major causes of secessionist agitation. At the same time, the positions of the research interviewees and discussants refuted poor education on the side of the Igbos as one of the causes of Biafra secessionist agitation (Field Data from transcribed PIS & FGDS 2019). The assertions of the field data are supported by the stipulation of Ade (1992) that the unresolved National Question is "...the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same and privileges, access to power and equitable share of the National resources" (Ade, 1992, p. 15).

Furthermore, Researchers like Hechter, 1975; 1992 Bates, 1974; Horowitz, 1981, and 2000 have researched the effect of structural imbalance on ethnic conflict, relating it to class and political economy influences. The scholars observed that disparity exists between the privileged class and the disadvantaged class. The researchers further examined the differences between the two groups (advantaged and disadvantaged) and the group that is more secessionist-prone than the other. The positions of the scholars are in consonance with the observations of the research respondents. However, Goke (2016) mentioned resource control, among other things, as a major cause of secessionist agitation in agreement with the notions of the research participants. While Odoemene (2012) outlined that...the trust remains that the root causes of the war have not been addressed, and this has tainted the memory of Biafra. For instance, one of the beliefs upon which Biafra was founded was that the Nigeria task is a façade ensnared by fraud. The general motif put forward by the Igbos is that little or nothing has changed in Nigeria following Biafra's defeat (P.8)

However, validating the assertions of the research respondents on marginalization and inequality on the allocation of natural resources as a root cause of Biafra secessionist agitation, Morgen (2016) stated thus:

The recurring secession attempt results from the various illogicality within the Nigerian state. Various constitutions had been negotiated and adopted prior to 1966, but none addressed the fundamental social differences, ethnic imbalances, economic competition, and tensions that the Nigerian state struggled with. Before the Igbo secession that led to the civil war of 1967, the Hausa/Fulani, dominant in the Northern section, and the Yoruba, dominant in the Western region, had envisaged, even sometimes threatened, secession. The end of the civil war and the victory of Nigerian forces halted secession attempts – at least for a while. Because the fundamentals were not addressed in the interregnum, agitations resurface and seem perennial (p. 37).

Morgen's (2016) positions, compared with the assertions of research participants, make it clear that metropolitan and international marginalization is a crucial influence on secessionist agitations. Also, they confirm the assertions of the research discussants and interviewees on the influence of the counter-coup and the killing of the Igbos in Nigeria as one of the root causes of secessionist agitation in Nigeria. Ransome-Kuti (1999) noted the wisdom and justification behind Biafra's secession (1967–1970) as follows: "Our collective experience since 1960 leaves no one in any doubt that the decision to secede by the Igbo was proper and correct. You cannot kill tens of thousands of people, take over the government with arms, and expect them to stay around like sitting ducks, especially after unilaterally abrogating a negotiated settlement (Ezeani, 2016). It is, therefore, expedient to say that the responses from the research participants are in line with the positions of extant literature as confirmed in the observations of Effiong (1970): "Throughout history, injury people have had to resort to arms in their self-defense where peace negotiation failed. We were no exception; we have fought in defense of that cause" (p. 12).

Soyinka (2006) affirmed the positions of the research discussants on the aftermath of the counter-coup and the killing of the Igbo as a trigger of Biafra secessionist agitation.

It would be a distortion of history and an attempt to trivialize the trauma that the Igbo had undergone to suggest – as some commentators have tried to do – that it was the lure of the oil wealth that drove them to seek a separate existence. When a people have been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide, they have the right to seek an identity apart from their aggressor (P.101)

Also, the position of Ayokhaietal (2016) on the extant literature confirmed the assertions of the participants on the ability of embezzlement of public funds and unequal allocation of natural resources in fostering Biafra secessionist agitation.

The impact of this longstanding bickering over fiscal federalism on nation-building is the increased polarization of the country along ethnic and regional divides and the institution of the culture of violence promoted by radical ethnic and regional apologists. The manifestation of the popularity of the violence option in the resolution of the National question is the emergence and preponderance of militia groups of diverse sectarian persuasions across all the regions of the country. Some of these militia groups include the Arewa People Congress (APC), the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), the Ohaneze Ndigbo, the Ijaw Youth Movement, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)... (p. 12).

The position of the respondents on the influence of oil on Biafra secessionist agitation nullified the assumption of the anti-Biafra school of thought on oil being the major reason for Ojukwu to declare a sovereign State of Biafra as observed by Ezeani (2016). Also, the assertions of extant literature justified the opinions of the respondents on the secessionist leaders having good education, as stated by Frankfurt (2011): “Ralph Uwazuruike, the leader of MASSOB, developed his philosophy of self-determination in India after his studies as a political scientist and a lawyer” and Nnamdi Kanu, obtained a degree in political economics at London Guildhall University the current day London Metropolitan University (LMU)” (Sahara reporter, 2015).

In summary, 100% of the personal interview respondents and 100% of FGD discussants unanimously agreed that marginalization, inequality in the allocation of natural resources, hatred of the Igbos by the Hausa and Yoruba, the cheating of the Igbos before and after the civil war, embezzlement of public funds by political leaders from Hausa and Yoruba region, unemployment, the use and arming of the youths by the politicians, the history of the Nigerian Civil War, and uneven development are major causes of Biafra secessionist agitation. At the same time, 90% and above of both the FGD and PI participants disagreed that poor education is one of the root causes of Biafra secessionist agitation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that there is a nexus between National Questions and incessant secessionist agitations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic; therefore, to curb the agitation, the Nigerian government needs to adopt the principles of equality and even development and stop the politics of exclusion in the country. The study concludes that the following are the causes of secessionist agitations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: the marginalization of the Igbos, corruption and bad governance, the effect of the counter-coup of 1966, war crimes committed against the Igbos by the Nigerian government during the civil war, resentment against the Nigerian government due to the coercive approach adopted in combating Biafra secessionist agitations in the Fourth Republic, and the high level of unemployment in the Eastern region of Nigeria. The inequality in development, allocation of resources, and political appointments have influenced the decisions of the Igbos to separate from the Nigerian government because the Igbos believe that Nigerian polity is played by ethnic groups and they are more marginalized than the other ethnic groups, notwithstanding their contribution to the federal resources.

Therefore, the paper recommends the following as useful approaches to curb Biafra's incessant secessionist agitations:

1. **Resolving the dichotomy of the root causes of Biafra agitations:** The Nigerian government should come to terms with the root causes of Biafra secessionist agitation to find a lasting solution to the agitations because disparity exists within what the Nigerian government construed to be the root causes of Biafra secessionist agitation and the position of the Igbos on the reason for their agitations. For instance, the Nigerian government, according to the stipulations of Ezeani (2016), believed that the oil

deposit in Igbo land and the personal ambition of Ojukwu are the root causes of the Biafra agitation, while the research respondents are of the opinion that it is the marginalization and killing of the Igbos in Nigerian government that is triggering the secessionist movement. Therefore, the first step to curb the Biafra agitation is to understudy the root causes by answering the following questions: Who are the agitators, the Ojukwu or the Igbos? Whose ambitions are the Igbos fighting after the death of Ojukwu? These few questions will help the Nigerian government to realize that the Biafra agitation is not a one-man affair. Therefore, there must be a collective pain that unites the Igbos, which could be the marginalization and killing of Igbos, as discovered in this study.

2. **Adequate promotion of National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) and inter-ethnic marriage:** One of the major effects of Nigeria's civil war is the dichotomy it created in the minds of the youths and Nigerians in general. Nigeria recorded millions of human hazards and loss of property and infrastructure due to the civil war, which to an extent have been recovered, but the resentment of the war is still afresh in the minds of the belligerent parties. Therefore, the NYSC program can be used as a medium to unify Nigerians into one nation. Also, inter-ethnic marriage should be encouraged among Nigerian youths to establish synergy in the country.
3. **Adoption of negotiation through traditional rulers:** It was established during this study that the use of military might by the Nigerian government is one of the major reasons for the escalation of Biafra agitations. However, the findings from the reviewed literature and field data elicited from the research discussants suggested that negotiation is the best practice in conflict resolution. Therefore, the Nigerian government should dialogue with the secessionist agitators or leaders through their traditional rulers to identify what the problem is and how to resolve it peacefully. Negotiation through the Igbo traditional institutions will encourage a win/win situation, and the government will not be accused of victimizing the actors.

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Appendix I

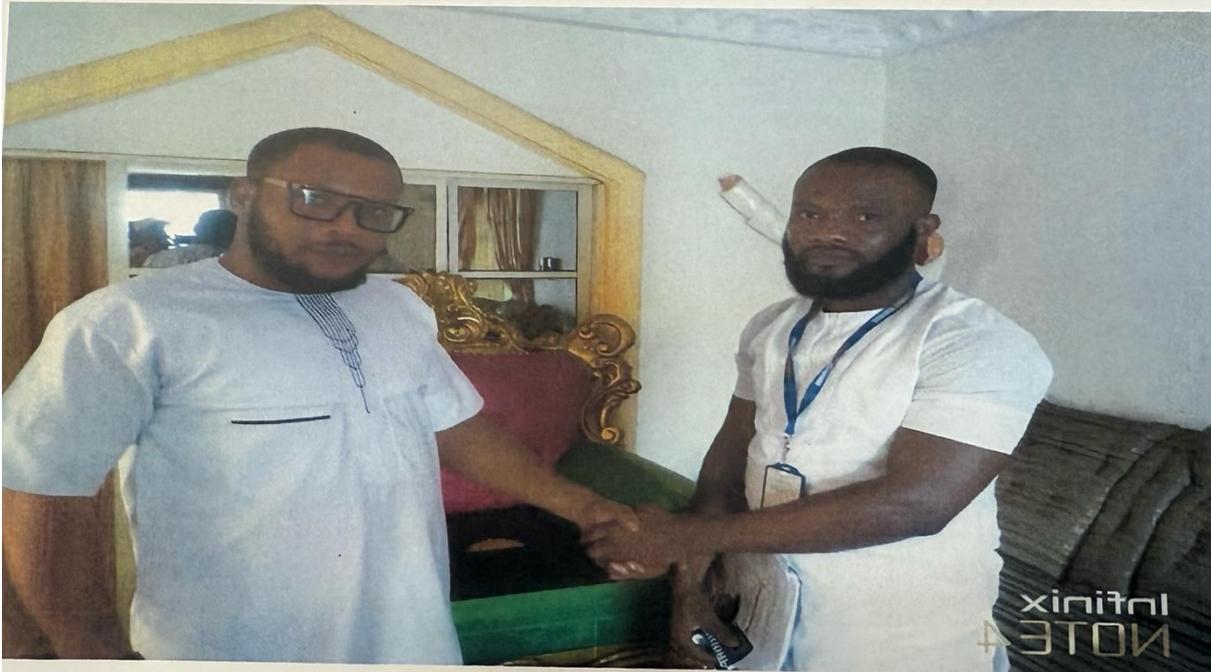


Figure 1: Mazi Nnamudi Kanu's younger brother after an interview section. Photographed during the fieldwork (2019) with the participant's permission.

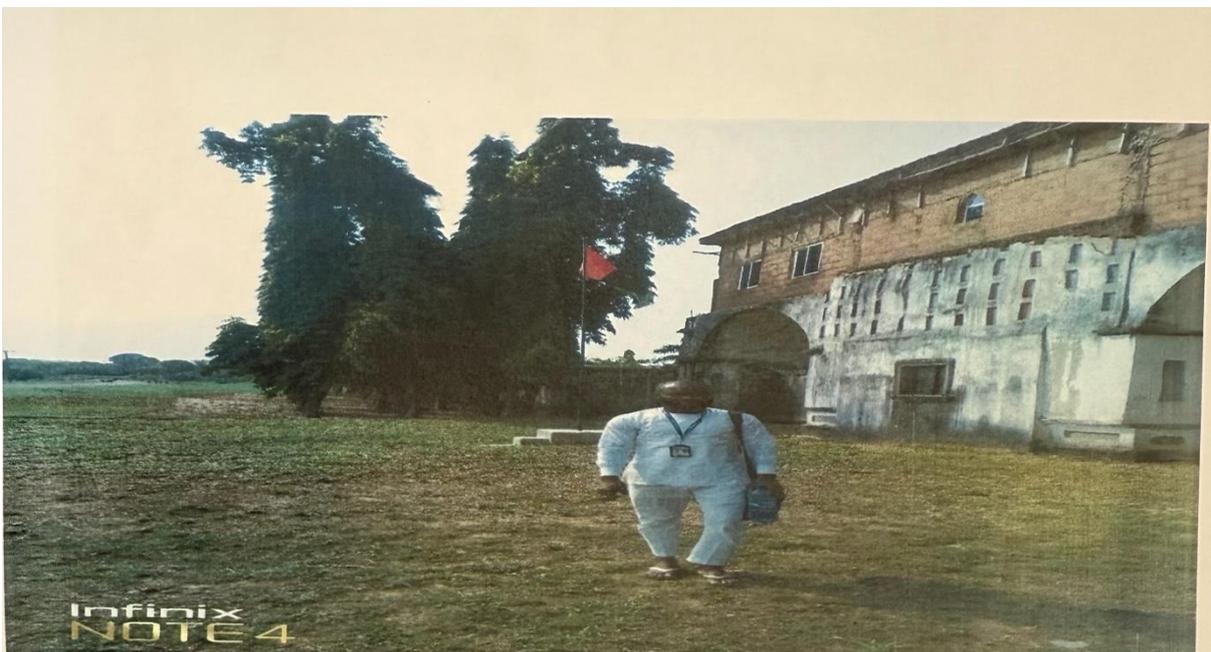


Figure 2: Mazi Ralph Uwazuruike house. Photographed during the Fieldwork interview with Uwazuruike's family member with the permission of the MASSOB guards.



Figure 3: Discussants in Abia state after focus group discussion with street-urchins. Photographed during the fieldwork (2019) with the discussants permis



Figure 4: A traditional ruler in Abia state after an interview section. Photographed during the fieldwork (2019) with the discussant permission.



Figure 5: A traditional ruler from Imo state after an interview section. Photographed during the fieldwork (2019) with the discussant permission.