COUNTER-JUSTICE AND RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA: SOUTHEAST AGITATION

THOMAS OBAREN IGABOR (MSc)
Department of Public Administration
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
E-mail: obaren.igabor@uniben.edu
Mobile: +23408038841011
&
FRED OSAHON OKUNMAHIE (PhD)
Department of Political Science & Public Administration
Edo State University, Uzairue, Edo State, Nigeria
E-mail: fred.okunmahie@edouniversity.edu.ng
Mobile: +23407035800851

Abstract

This study examined counter-justice and restiveness in Nigeria, with emphasis on the relationship between Southeast (SE) marginalization and restiveness in the region drawing examples from socially excluded communities across the nation and the challenges it brings to the public–economic system. Nigeria's peace, security, and corporate existence as a nation are threatened because of the prevalence of this phenomenon. The researchers adopted a qualitative research method utilizing a focus group study. The theory of collective violence explains the problems of inequitable distribution of national resources, marginalization, poverty, and unemployment that have fostered restiveness thereby creating instability in the public system. The study found that there is a positive relationship between the marginalization of the Southeast region and violent agitation in Nigeria and that counter-justice negatively impacts peace and security in the Southeast and Nigeria. The study recommended there is a need for the federal government of Nigeria to pay attention to the demands of all persons, groups, or regions in a similar manner. Discrimination of one group/region against the other is the cause of restiveness across the country.

Keywords: Counter-Justice, Agitation, Restiveness, Social Exclusion, Southeast Nigeria.

Introduction

The 1946 Richards Constitution laid the foundation of Nigeria's (regional) federalism and by 1966 after gaining independence in 1960, on the vent of corruption and ethnicity, riding at the back of bad governance, the military struck twice first on January 15th and later on July 29th, 1966. Both military interventions in political governance heightened violent conflict targeted at both ethnic and regional framing to justify the motive of taking over power. The first strike uprooted a 20-year (1946-1966) old federalist structure with a unification degree 34 from which Nigeria (by 2023, 57 years after) is still battling to return before the Aguiyi-Ironsi regime that altered the federal structure in place of a centralized military structured concomitant with the unitary system (Burgis, 2015& Bourne, 2015).

Consequently, there was expressed fear from the three regions (North, West, and East) that the possible domination of the newly independent Nigeria from any of the regions was inevitable. The first coup buttressed the fear against the Northern region that tended toward oversizing the Western and Eastern regions in the political arrangement, structured to outnumber both Southern regions in a federated central government. The size, population, votes, and representation allotted to the regions gave the North an overwhelming posture of dominance against a small enclave of the eastern region. The Eastern region was the weakest link in the equation. There was a lack of unified national identity compromised by strong consciousness and active preoccupation with protective regional identities. In a sense, competition among the three regions produced a dysfunctional state without a nation (Burgis, 2015).

Furthermore, the political independence gained in 1960 came with a weak economic base that was primarily subsistence, agrarian, and export-dependent. It lacked a manufacturing and industrial base that was massively dependent on European imports. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) were created at the federal level as a means to foster leverage in producing a vibrant local economy. The challenge was that the motivation to build a local national economy was suppressed by the quest to seize the state and capture the economy since both reside in who control power (Pritchett,Woolcock,& Andrews, 2013).

However, Nigeria's first Republic collapsed with rivalry predisposed to 1962-63 census altering, 1964-65 elections rigging, heightened corruption, political instability fostered by two violent military coups, and expectantly, the Eastern region attempted to secede out of Nigeria with a portion of the territory having the newly discovered oil. Nigeria and the breakaway Eastern region entered into a bloody civil war that was protracted between 1967 and 1970 claiming about 3 million lives to stop the Biafra republic from actualization (Aspinal and Berenschot, 2019& Burgis, 2015).

After the civil war and upon transition to democracy from 1999 till date, the former Eastern region and the Southeast geo-political zone have been marginalized, oppressed, neglected, and underdeveloped, and the absence of control of politics and institutions.

Further to the above, peace and security are part of the indicators that areused to measure justice in the state and society. In the Rawlsian tradition of justice, the term refers to giving each equal opportunities and rights as well as duties and responsibilities in the original position (without discriminatory privileges) to be what they aspire and desire to attain in an egalitarian fashion. In the absence of justice, a state is held bias that ignores the equal placement of individuals to the pursuit of their capabilities and the allotment of official constraints that limit the interest of an individual or group to attain the means or expression in policy content and symbols to the actualization of a given effect that is undesirable in a deprived sense. The outcome of counter-justice is reflected in the reverse intention of justice to promote peace and security as an end but in context reproduce relative deprivation, marginalization, and violent conflict (Huang, 2019). It is one of the strengths of the foregoing that this study intends to examine counter-justice and restiveness in Nigeria using Southeast agitation as a case study.

Statement of the Problem

The Southeast has cried against the zone's marginalization and deliberate exclusion from exercising political control of the country and denied an equal number of states as other geo-political zones in the country. For instance, the immediate past regime of ex-President Muhammadu Buhari administration excluded the zone from most of the federal appointments and development projects compared to other zones. These have generated sentiments and ill-feeling calling for the resurgence of the Biafra which was laid to rest in 1970. Sequel to the above, various tactics have been deployed to bring several governments' attention to the marginalization of the Southeast geo-political zone. Peaceful dialogue in both the National Political Reform Conference of 2005 and the 2014 constitutional conference (Confab) was unable to address the quest for the Southeast to address the issues of marginalization and provided the opportunity to produce the president for Nigeria (National Political Reform Conference, 2005& The National Conference, 2014).

Additionally, the federal government neglected the Southeast request to address the issues of marginalization centered around appointments, balanced creation of a state for the zone, and project execution to give a sense of belonging to the region leading to the instigation of secessionist groups to mobilize the Southeast region for peace dialogue. Both the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) activated peaceful demonstrations calling for a session. The leadership and members of both groups were forcefully detained and charged with treason on different occasions. The coercive engagement of the Nigerian federal government position under Buhari's administration later began to produce violent protests and militant confrontations with state security officers deployed to stop the activities of these groups. Sit-at-home orders were regularly given in various instances when arrested members of the secessionist group members were brought before courts for trials across the country (Nwabueze and Ezebuenyi, 2019; Oshita and Ikelegbe, 2019&Umoro and Asemah, 2021).

From situational protest of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the proliferation of other groups like the Eastern Security Network (ESN) allegedly linked to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader has emerged to focus on relative violence against security agencies; uncoordinated killings, kidnapping, and armed robberies by unknown gunmen across the Southeastwere predominantly visible in Imo and Anambra. The sit-at-home order is regularly enforced every Monday in defiance of the federal government's claim of sovereignty of the Southeast region. The escalation of the militant armed Fulani herdsmen clashing with farmers, Eastern Security Network (ESN), and unknown gunmen in the Southeast region is threatening peace in the region. The Southeast region is partially ungovernable and is leading to the destabilization of the region. Prior support for these groups' activities and systemic expansion are resuming in other proximate states like Delta, Lagos, and Northern states sharing boundaries with the region (Campbell, 2011; Ikelegbe, 2016; Nwabueze and Ezebuenyi, 2019 and Oshita & Ikelegbe, 2019).

With the marginalization of the Southeast, security threats, secessionist movements, and protests, the Southeast economy is suffering a crisis. Social and academic activities are grossly affected in the region. With this discontent in the Southeast, the state-society relationship is

weakening and acting as a counter justice propelling sequential restiveness and violent conflicts. To this end, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: Does Southeast marginalization relate to violent conflict in Nigeria? Does counter-justice impact peace and security in the Southeast and Nigeria?

Objectives of the study
The objectives of the study are to:
(i)   examine the relationship between South-East marginalization and restiveness in Nigeria
(ii)   investigate if counter-justice has an impact on peace and security in Southeast and Nigeria.

Operational Definition of Terms
Justice: Justice is fundamental in any society. Its importance and significance can never be underestimated in the affairs of men. Justice generally means fairness, equality, equity, rightness, virtue, or the equal distribution of resources.

Counter Justice: Counter-justice can be operationalized as an expression or an act of opposing reaction to the quality of being just, equitable, and morally right. In the context of this paper, counter-justice means a skewed lopsided form of justice in a supposedly federal system of government. Also from an equity standpoint, it underpins the opposition to any form of equitable injustice and marginalization.

Restiveness: This is usually a state of anarchy, destruction of lives and properties resulting in violence and disruption of law and order as well as various activities in the societies. In most cases, it takes the use of force such as involving the police to keep the violence in check.

Literature Review
Popular political participation and effective representation of all segments of a plural society allow for inclusiveness in bringing development to a state. The notion of neglect creates resentment and allows for agitation as a form of rebellion against the state and policies when a group or collective subsets of the population are excluded from the distribution of state resources and welfare that are given to other groups with similar dispositions and/or when political power is unduly limited to a selected few that turn to entrap others to feel discontented and exploited (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Hedges, 2015; Mouly & Delgado, 2019).

In democratic societies, the possibility to exclude or marginalize a broad group of persons with associated interest different from the ruling class agenda promote clashes or struggle over the right and power to rule. Power is necessary to direct state policies and resources to interested parties. When reason and rationality fail to gain attention, a resistance momentum accelerates against the forces that control power and revolutionizes against it. Especially when the concern is targeted at a group's survival or the need to profile social welfare and public goods in appreciable forms. Once marginalized, resistance and revolts are targeted at the state and the ruling elites, including the institutions they control (Hedges, 2015).

Persistence agitations or revolution reverses state institutions to collapse. The post-colonial African State and the elites controlling it are rentiers, predatory, partial, repressive, and exploitative. The ethnicization of politics without means for producing a surplus created scarcity amid the greed inherent in the primitive accumulation desire of elites to distribute resources to the limited center of patronage. Disaggregating interests with weak economic progress have sparked up violent conflict among groups with raging tension on a spiral sequence that causes disequilibrium and instability (Bellucci, 2010&Kovacs, 2018).

Nigeria is governed by rival and collaborating leaders surrounded by patron-client networks that cut across ethnic, religious, political, economic, and military interests. These networks crisscrossed the landscape of resources with fragmented interests that snuff governance off track to deal with the chronic state failure to address the multiple challenges of the political system. With low private sector viability, winning the state is a trophy for those who capture federal power that is over centralized with concentrated resources at the center, and those outside the state domain or unconnected to power are doomed. A sense of grievance is directed at the state for attention to redistribute resources or compete for power. To regulate state violence and group aggression against the state and its agencies for failure to appropriately distribute resources, power rotation is offered between the Northern and Southern oligarchies. The Fulani with few numbers took advantage of the massive north while the western states dominated the rest of the southern minorities including the Southeast which housed the Igbo extraction considered the third major group made up of the Igbo extraction (Campbell, 2011; Hill, 2012& Onuigbo, Rowland and Innocent, 2016).

Democracy and federalism are projected with optimism to cure the tension since every ethno-religious group is given a share to distribute, but the elite capture of the state denies this possibility. With state capture, the possibility for counter-justice to prompt resistance to state function and capacity is created. Since the post-colonial African state emerged from an alien force and manipulated construct to serve outside the state interest, the society (collection of people) trapped in the state is denied justice, equity, and fairness in the distribution of public goods. Captured states produce extractive political and economic institutions that alienate society from the social relation of production and endemic poverty is created in place of an efficient market with an invisible hand to distribute resources. (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019, 2012; Asuquo, 2020; Bracking, 2018; Hill, 2012; Ikelegbe, 2013&Kenny, McGrath and Phillips, 2018).

When the invisible hand is unable to effectively distribute economic resources and provide opportunities for creating wealth as a means of human sustenance, a human security challenge is created. Market failure and lack of state capability to effectively intervene because of state capture and exclusion of society from the political institution, political conflict inevitably arise since the state is a political construct having distinctive national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups seeking common share to organize collective resources. Political conflicts have become more of an ethnic competition for power to seize the state and lock others out of it. This is reflected in different forms of collective violence targeted at separate groups or their representatives to genocide. The intensity of ethnic conflict masked in political confrontations is prevalent in multiethnic societies with scarce resources to distribute without harming the basic needs of others (Friedman, Kabernik & Pearce, 2019).

Democracy rests on the legitimacy of representativeness, transparency, and civility. It connotes the distribution of opportunities in a fairly sustainable manner that is proportionally equitable and justifiable. There is no democracy without justice, equity, and fairness to the people who participate in it. Democracy is based on justice, fairness, and representativeness to the population concerning their structural composition in the context of race, colour, identity, sex, ethnicity, class, age, distinctive abilities, religion, and region (Brandsen et al., 2017&Carter, 2016). Where these concerns are neglected, justice is reversed to account for counter-justice that promotes restiveness and violent conflict through unattended provocations meted from marginalization and longsuffering of a given region or group of persons.

In a multi-ethnic society with a perceived lack of fairness and justice; resistance is inevitable and collective violence is inherently constructed to redress claims to abridge rights excluded in social relations(Friedman, Kabernik & Pearce, 2019).

Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework adopted for the study of counter-justice and restiveness in Nigeria is the theory of collective violence. Collective violence denotes a form of organized crime that is, violent conflicts between nations and groups quite often lead to disastrous consequences in terms of loss of men, and material and economic wealth. Collective violence in its multiple forms, receives a high degree of public attention and media coverage. Violent conflict between states and groups, terrorist attacks, gang warfare, and mass hooliganism are common occurrences in all parts of the world. The progenitor of the concept of collective violence is traced to Gurr (1970) in his book: *Why Men Rebel*. The crucial argument of this thinking is to formulate a set of variables that readdressed systematically three factors. The rise of bad governance and relative deprivation, a justification for popular or collective action against bad governance which is the source that created the deprivation, and a balance between a mobilized force of protest (collective violence) and organized government capacity to repress the protest, riot or revolution for a change (Gurr, 1970). This has transformed into a state-society relationship and the dynamics of their interaction (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019; Brandsen, Trommel, and Verschuere, 2017; Gurr, 1970; Ikelegbe, 2013, 2016& Miller, 2013).

Friedman, Kabernik & Pearce (2019) expressed that collective violence is expressed in social interaction as a mechanism in response to dissatisfaction, grievance, or agitation by a group or collections of individuals acting spontaneously or adopting organized and persistent deployment of threat or inflict damage on members of other groups or the state, its agents and symbols. Collective violence is caused by the feeling of relative deprivation or prolonged expectation of economic or social needs that have not been met due largely to denial, obstruction, or a product of injustice to a perceived group by state actors or other vested interests.

The cognitive-behavioral condition of individuals with stress, emotion, and belief connected to social deprivation is a weapon that can induce participation in collective violence; hostile social and cultural settings, and organizational processes that alienate people and are affected by the continued acts of violence that combine to instigate collective violence as a product of social outcomes or response.

Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi (2019) carried out a content analysis of 240 editions of four newspapers Daily Sun, Biafra Times, This Day, and the Guardian for 15 months. The study utilized framing analysis methodology to establish that deprivation, marginalization, and oppression of the Igbos were perceived under Buhari's administration, and this constituted the support for the Biafra agitation. The perceived marginalization, oppression, and deprivation in the Southeast are directly linked to sustained collected violence as a means to respond to agitation in Nigeria. When the act of a state or its operators are considered to be predatory or exclusive of a fragment of the population, justice is reversed as those deprived or ill-treated tend to see the state as opposed to its survival. Counter-justice is assumed to be the reverse of justice that disallows the intent of the state to treat and accord everyone from the original position using the veil of ignorance. This theory is relevant to this study as it enables us to have an in-depth understanding that the activities of IPOB, and Eastern Security Network (ESN) among others are multiple forms of collective violence that have led to some disastrous consequences in terms of loss of men, material, and economic wealth in Southeast Nigeria, in recent time. The theory also broadens our intellectual horizon that violent activities such as killing, kidnapping, sit–at–home orders by members of MASSOB, IPOB, ESN and other groups in the Southeast region are reactions to their perceived oppression, marginalization, and deprivation in the Nigerian projects.

Methodology

The researchers adopted a qualitative research method utilizing a focus group study on the counter-justice and restiveness in Nigeria. Hennink, (2014) identified that a Focus Group Study is a dialogue conducted by a moderator to explore research questions that the respondents have satisfactory acquaintance and experience about. The qualitative discussion provides an in-depth understanding of the theme under investigation. It is a form of qualitative research used to extract data from well-informed respondents who are placed in a conducive environment and encouraged to dialogue on a subject of interest the researchers are investigating. The number of responses is of a manageable proportion so that the discussion is organized and properly coordinated to the purpose of the research and the question.

The respondents' participants in the dialogue are advisable between 6 and 12 members. The transcript of the record is summarized to identify the salient point in line with the objectives and questions that the research is investigating. The content of the remarks is analyzed by the researcher to test derive findings of the inquiry and also reach a verified conclusion.

The composition for the Focus Group Study was 15 university lecturers drawn from various universities in the Southeast. In other words, 3 respondents from the different universities in each of the five states that make up the southeast region namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo who live and arefamiliar with the Southeast agitation were engaged in the dialogue. The research questions were administered to the groups. The Focus Group Study (FGS) took place on 10/5/2023 (Wednesday) in Enugu town between 10.04 am and 11.39 am.

Focus Group discussion

The following research questions were presented to the respondents as a conversation to get their responses. The content was thereafter analyzed.

One.   Is the Southeast marginalization related to restiveness in Nigeria?

Since the end of the civil war for which the Biafran nation willingly surrendered to the Nigerian state, the assumption is that relative peace gained as a country after the civil war would have genuinely integrated the Southeast and opened up opportunities for the region as a region in Nigeria. The occurrences playing out seem to indicate a conspiracy of distrust followed by oppression for a conquered people. The fact is the Southeast agitation is a response to the oppression and marginalization of the Southeast by the Nigerian state to have equal access to power as is established in the Federal Character Act. What is good for the North and South-West is also applicable for the Southeast. When and where there is discrimination in disallowing the Southeast to have access to produce the president, acquire projects, and get opportunities like other states, then this indicates that the Southeast region is targeted for marginalization and deliberate oppression.

The violent agitation though it is an unfortunate situation, is a protest against the Nigerian state that has killed and arrested peaceful protesters in the region and across the country. The Southeast agitation is a direct response to the marginalization and the Nigerian State owes the region the responsibility to dialogue and grant the request of the Southeast region. Other regions inclusive of the whole North, South-South, and South-West had used violent confrontation to the federal government's oppressive tendency of using force against those making demands for justice from the Nigerian state. Against all odds, the region is opposed to violent agitation but the minority group is reacting according to the law of nature to the marginalization and violent attack by the federal government and peaceful protesters calling for the marginalization to be reversed by offering opportunities to right the wrong of the injustice meted on the Southeast region and its people.

Summary of Participant's Response:

The response indicated that there is a positive relationship between the marginalization of the Southeast region and restiveness in Nigeria. The Southeast is no exception in this regard because other regions have demonstrated similar responses against marginalization.

Two. Does counter-justice havean impact on peace and security in Southeast and Nigeria?

Operational justice is a form or means people understand or perceive that their rights are respected and they are treated similarly to others without exception to hidden rules for selective preference. Justice means the Nigerian State should be transparent in allowing every part of the country to participate in governance. Democracy is about exercising legitimate rights through representatives of the people but the Southeast has not been given that opportunity to represent its people and region for 63 years. This is very frustrating and constitutes a means of oppression and where there is oppression, people have the right to demand justice, fairness, and equity. Accord everyone the same rights and opportunities to get sustained peace. If everyone and region are given equal rights and justice, there will be no need for violent agitation as a response to the violent confrontation meted out by the federal government against its citizens. Looking at the persistent disregard of ex-president Buhari's administration to the call for registration of equal representation in his appointment and opportunities. The office of the president is for the whole of Nigeria's federation and not for the North alone. Once this kind of marginalization and oppression is perceived, every region is desperate to hold power at all causes to attend to its people's needs. All of these agitations

in the first place arise because of bad governance. This is not a democracy. The people of Nigeria, irrespective of their regions are not getting represented. There is a conspiracy against the Southeast region. The perceived injustice is reflected in agitations against the actions and policies of an unjust state against the fragment of its territory. This is considered counter-justice since every action of the government is resisted, rejected, and fought against. The biased position of the government against the Southeast region is an indicator that negatively impacts the peace and security of the Southeast and Nigeria. We are afraid that the sit-at-home home protest exhibited by easterners may not end in the Southeast if the demands arising from the agitations are not addressed. There is a real threat to the claim of sovereignty and survival of Nigeria.

Summary of Participant's Response
Justice is a prerequisite for sustainable peace and security in Nigeria; a reverse of justice or counter-justice hurts the peace and security of the Southeast and Nigeria.

Conclusion
The study established that there is a positive relationship between the marginalization of the Southeast region and restiveness in Nigeria. Also, that counter-justice hurts the peace and security of Southeast and Nigeria. This has promoted conflicts which have affected the peaceful coexistence of the citizens. The development of the country has been crippled by the destruction of properties. All members of society and government should eradicate selfish desires and work towards attaining public peace.

Recommendations
Following the robust discussions above, the following recommendations were offered:
1. There is a need for the federal government of Nigeria to attend to the demands of all persons, groups, or regions in a similar manner. Discrimination of one group against the other is the cause of violent agitation across the country; the Southeast is not an exception but it represents the climax of the situation.
2. A law should be made to mandatorily rotate the presidency across the 6 geopolitical zones following the federal character principle. A five-year tenure should be specified for each zone to remove the issue of bias and unnecessary competition resulting in bad governance.
3. The country should be restructured into a proper federation to allow for each geopolitical zone or region to be autonomous to remove too much pressure from the presidency. The regions should also control state and local governments under their jurisdiction to exercise autonomy and self-government.

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