

**ETHNICITY AND MARGINALIZATION: A THREAT TO SOUTH EAST
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study investigated on ethnicity and marginalization: a threat to South-East development in Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was used. Sixty (60) respondents were sampled from each state in the South-East making a total of three hundred (300) respondents. Politicians made up the population, simple random sampling was used in selecting the sample, with a 15-items structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to collect the data. Data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

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The findings revealed that struggle for political power, allocation of political positions, high rate of insecurity and high rate of poverty. However, ethnicity and marginalization is a threat to south-east development. The study made some valuable recommendations such as creation of more state to balance each geo-political zone, free and compulsory education at all levels for Nigerian citizens and no ethnic group or religion should be seen as supreme over other groups. The study concluded that unequal number of states, uneven infrastructural development and equal opportunities will automatically reduce insecurity in each geo-political zone of Nigeria.

Key Words: Ethnicity, Marginalization, Development and Geo-political.

Introduction

There is scarcely any nation of the world without ethnic groups. What is, however, indisputable is that there are variances in the number of ethnic groups that may constitute any given country. In this vein, there are no universally acclaimed features of ethnicity that will apply with equal facility in all the nations in the globe. While some characteristics may be commonly shared by all, the number of ethnic groups in any given country such as Nigeria may generate additional characteristics that may be very peculiar to nature and origin. Its clear in Nigeria we all face problems of ethnicity and marginalization which has hampered the national development of Nigeria.

With regard to Nigeria, the characteristics of ethnicity are bewildering. They include: too many ethnic groups, common historical origin, common mother tongue or closely related dialect, ethnic affiliation or attachment, strained ethnic relations, variance in ethnic groups. According to Obijiofor (2021), ethnicity is a force in Nigeria politics originated from the colonial policies of the British who through their divide and rule policy encouraged the use of different applications of colonial policies on the traditional institutions and structures of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. This unequal impact of colonial policies saw the partial exposure of Western education by the British missionaries to the Southern part of Nigeria without doing so in the North thereby alienating the Northern part. The danger inherent in these segregation policies soon became apparent in the 1940s and early 1950s, when the more educated and vocal South agitated for greater participation in the governance of the nation. The agitation on the part of the Eastern parts of

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Nigeria soon led to the establishment of political institutions and structures. The legislative council in Lagos and regional councils in the regions were established of which political participation depended on the acquisition of Western education (Orisa 2013). Onuoha (2010) asserted there is need for equal opportunities for citizen and political power should rotate among the six geo-political zones.

As soon as this was the case, the Northern part of the council occupied by the Hausa/Fulani group soon saw themselves as not prepared to participate effectively in the discussion of the central legislative council created from 1946. The North had been excluded by the Clifford constitution in 1922. The Northern inhabitants therefore agitated separate region. Put more concisely after the British conquest of Nigeria or its landmass for administrative convenience, they divided Nigeria into two-protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. By this singular administrative fiat of the British all the ethnic nationalities, the British met in what is today known as Nigeria were forced into these two categories. This marked the beginning of ethnic consciousness or rather disintegrative nationalism in Nigeria. Let it be reiterated that before 1914 no map of the world contained a defined geographical space recognized as Nigeria, the area now recognized as the territory of Nigeria was hitherto occupied by independent ethnic groups (Obijiofor 2021).

The country has not fared better in its political life. According to Okafor (2013), our common historical experience is not one of fighting together but fighting against one another, the Northern against the Southern, Yoruba against Igbo, Ibibio against Hausa, Muslim against Christians etc. it has not been possible in spite of the efforts of the colonial masters to have a common frame of political thought, all because of the cultural and especially linguistic differences. Uchendu (2025), has described the neglect of the South-East zone of Nigeria in sensitive political appointments.

In president Goodluck Jonathan's led government. He observed that the Central Bank Governor, Managing Director of Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Controller Of Customs Services, Federal Inland Revenue Service, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Chief Justice of the Federation, the Defense Chief, National Security Adviser, the Vice President and

Inspector General of Police, all come from the North. According to him, the only thing to celebrate in the South-East is the refurbished Akanu Ibiam Airport, now designated an international airport and a non-functional Onitsha port. He insisted on the adherence of the principle of Federal character in sensitive political appointment rather than basing it on ethnic sentiment. According to Tambuwal (2023), “it is unbelievable that in a country such as Nigeria, you can have from number one to number eight without a region being represented in the leadership of this country. From the president to the vice-president to the senate president to the speaker, deputy senate president, deputy speaker, secretary to the government of the federation, you don’t have one single individual from the South-Eastern Nigeria. Under president Tinubu regime which was inaugurated on the 29th May, 2023. Eze (2010) observed that South-East geo-political zone is being punished for not voting for him in the last presidential election. The ministerial nominees, North-East produced eight ministers, North Central produced eight, South-South produced seven, while South-East was given only five slots. In the 10th senate, the South-East was marginalized president Bola Tinubu did not consider the South-East, senators for the post of senate president or speakership position. The South West, the North West and North-East dominated the key positions in the senate. Mere deputy speaker was given to the South-East. This is a clear marginalization to South East zone since independent of Nigeria. Unequal state and federal allocation.

Obijiofor (2021), asserted that Nigeria is a federation of unequal partners, unequal ethnic national likes, unequal religions denomination and unequal states. Ani Chukwueze (2023) observed that ethnicity in Nigeria national life has made the South-East to be the least developed among the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. South-East has the least number of states, only five states where as others have six states with North having seven states. It means the South-East receives the least amount of allocation from the federation account and therefore has the least share of national resources. The South-East has the lowest number of local government areas in the nation. North-West has 186, South-West has 137, South-South has 125 and South–East has 95 which is about half the number of local government areas in the North-West and national resources are allocated to the local government directly. Asalu (2010) suggest that these local governments were created by fiat by the military administration without any defined and verifiable criteria. Representation

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in the national assembly and the federal executive council is based on states, it therefore follows that the South-East has the least number of representatives in the national assembly, least number of ministers in the federal executive council in almost all organs of government constituted on representation basis. The South-East is the only region that has not produced the president of Nigeria since 1970. According to Okafor (2013), the worst federal roads are located in the South-East, many of them are abandoned. Fifty percent of educated and skilled youths across Igbo land are either unemployed or underemployed.

Ethnicity and Marginalization in the South-East has increased the level of poverty, insecurity, corruption and contributed to inadequate infrastructural development in Nigeria, especially in the South-East geo-political zone. According to Okeke (2024), asserted that the apex Igbo socio-political organization; ohaneze-ndigbo has decried and condemned president Bola Tinubu nomination of only five ministers from the South-East, describing it as unfair and unjust. Uchendu (2025), observed that the key appointments in Nigeria are occupied by the South-West and the North. For examples; the Central Bank of Nigeria Governor is occupied by a Yoruba man, Finance minister; Yoruba, minister of state for finance is a Yoruba man, accountant general – Yoruba, DG custom – Yoruba, DG NAFDAC – Yoruba, MD NELFUND – Yoruba, MD NWPC – Yoruba, DG Immigration – Yoruba, IGP – Yoruba; DG SSS – Yoruba, DG EFCC – Yoruba, INEC Chairman – Yoruba, Chief Judge of Nigeria – Yoruba among others.

To reduce ethnicity in Nigeria politics, federal government should adopt true federalism in practice in which power is absolutely decentralized or deconcentrated. According to Tambuwal (2023), all the governmental infrastructures or things that arouse ethnic sentiments such as ethnic discriminatory policies such as quota system or the federal character policy for admission to educational institutions and for employment on the public service and appointment to public offices and which have enthroned mediocrity and encouraged bitterness among different ethnic groups which are not favoured by the policy but yet qualified for the competed position should be scrapped. Similarly all documents that have to do with admission into educational institutions and employment that required information on applicants ethnic group, state and local government of origin and religion should be jettisoned. The document should contain on the explicitly the

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instruction that no statement pointing to any of these should be made. As in the armed forces and police, with a taint of national representation, all federal parastatals and agencies should have a balanced representation of all ethnic groups in their nominal roll. Segregated quarters in all corners of Nigeria particularly in cities and towns such as Sabon Gari or Ama Hausa were given ethnic group (outside their ethnic group) are domiciled should be disbanded Chukwuma (2014) insists that time has come for the government to convoke a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) where all stakeholders in Nigeria can discuss and come to a genuine understanding not only on how to make Nigeria work as a country but also how to reverse the socio-economic stupor in which the responderant majority of Nigeria are put to by reckless past government. Power rotation among the six geo-political zones in Nigeria will reduce political power struggle among the ethnic groups. The study will review all aspect of ethnicity-marginalization in South East such as unequal state, struggle for political power and unequal opportunities to South East zone.

Statement of the Problem

The country has not fared better in its political and economic life. Our common historical experience is not one of fighting together but fighting against one another, the Northerners against the Southerners, Yoruba against Igbo, Ibibio against Hausa, and Muslims against Christians. It has not been possible inspite of the efforts of the colonial masters to have a common frame of political thought, all because of the cultural and especially linguistic differences. Ethnicity is one of the factors that have caused serious embarrassment to nation building in Nigeria. Almost all issues in Nigeria are based on ethnic consideration. The formation of political parties, admission into higher institutions, employment, award of contracts, appointment into sensitive political positions are ethnically influenced resource control, unequal state, emergency of ethnic militia and high rate of insecurity in South West zone in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is as follows:

1. To examine factors contributing to ethnic politics in South East geo-political zone.
2. To ascertain perceived effects of ethnicity and marginalization in the south-east.
3. To examine measures to checkmate ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

- 1 What are the factors contributing to politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria?
- 2 Are there any perceived effects of ethnicity and marginalization in the south-east development?
- 3 Are there any measures to checkmate politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria?

Methodology

A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population is made up of the politicians from the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to determine the same for the study. Sixty (60) respondents were sampled from each state in the South-East zone making a total of three hundred (300) respondents. The reasons for selecting only politicians are because they constitute to major problems in South-East because of their personal interest, gang-up against each state and political party manifesto's. It's the politicians that will determine house his constituency will be like in terms of development because its captured in constituency projects and budgets of the year and reason for selecting only three hundred (300) was to make sure all the states are been captured and distributed to various state. The questionnaire

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were structured in two (2) sections namely: The section A: Personal Data and section B: Questionnaire responses the questionnaire which has 15 items titled “Ethnicity and marginalization question was designed to elicit information on ethnicity and marginalization a threat to South-East development in Nigeria. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using mean score (X) of Likert four-point rating scale. Therefore, 2.5 above becomes the general mean. Any score below 2.5 was rejected and any score that is up to 2.5 above was accepted base on general findings of the study. The instrument was validated by two (2) experts from political science department and management and evaluation department at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka respectively.

The reliability of the research was determined through sharing of copies of the questionnaire and administering to the same respondents on two different occasions within some time interval and the information gathered were correlated to obtain the degree of consistency.

Results

The following are the results of the data analysis

Research Question 1: What are the factors contributing to politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean rating scores on factors contributing to politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria

S/N	ITEMS	FX	X	DECISION
1	Struggle for political power	1060	3.5	Accept
2	Allocation of political position	1000	3.3	Accept
3	Resource control	950	3.1	Accept
4	Unequal number of states	1110	3.7	Accept
5	Unequal number of L.G.A in each zone	1000	3.3	Accept

The analysis presented in table 1 shows that items 1-5 were rated high by the respondents which are above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. It means that the factors contributing

to politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East t geo-politics zone of Nigeria are struggle for political power, allocation of political position, resource control. The conclusion is that these are the factors contributing to politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria.

Research Question Two: Are there any perceived effects of ethnicity and marginalization in the south-east development?

Table 2: Mean rating scores on the perceived effects of ethnicity and marginalization in the south-east development

S/N	ITEMS	FX	X	DECISION
6	High rate of poverty in the south east	1110	3.7	Accept
7	High rate of insecurity	930	3.1	Accept
8	Uneven infrastructural development	1000	3.3	Accept
9	Emergence of ethnic militia	930	3.1	Accept
10	Paralyzing of business and investment	1060	3.5	Accept

The analysis presented in table 2 shows that items 6-10 were rated high by the respondent which are above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. It means that the perceived effect of ethnicity in the south east development are, high rate of poverty in the south east, high rate of insecurity, and emergence of ethnic militia. The conclusion is that there are the perceived effects of ethnicity and marginalization in the south east development.

Research Question Three: Are there any measures to checkmate politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean rating scores on the measures to checkmate politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria.

S/N	ITEMS	FX	X	DECISION
11	Power rotation among the six geo-political zone	930	3.1	Accept
12	State of origin, religion, should be removed from application forms	1060	3.5	Accept
13	Federal agencies should have a balanced representation	1110	3.7	Accept
14	Convening national conference to discuss Nigeria nationhood	1000	3.3	Accept
15	Equal opportunities should be given to Nigeria citizens	1060	3.5	Accept

The analysis presented in table 3 shows that items 11-15 were rated high by the respondent which are above the criterion of acceptance fixed at 2.5 and above. It means that the measures to checkmate politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone of Nigeria are power rotation among the six geo-political zone, state of origin, religion, should be removed from application forms and federal agencies should have a balanced representation. The conclusion is that these are measures to checkmate politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South East geo-politics zone.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are that struggle for political power, allocation of political position and resource control. These findings are in agreement with Tambuwal (2023) who observed that South-East geo-political zone has the least ministerial nominees. Ugwoke (2024) shared the same view that positions and committee at senate and House of Representatives are shared among the Northerns and Westerns (Hausa and Yoruba). They occupied and served as chairmen of various committees.

The present study is consistent with the findings of Ukeje (2000) who believed that equal opportunities should be given to all Nigeria citizens and need for equal state creation.

The findings of the study reveal that the perceived effects of ethnicity and marginalization in the South-East development includes, high rate of poverty in the South-East, high rate of insecurity and emergence of ethnic militia.

The findings are consistent with the findings of Igwe (2004) who indicated that vocational training and free education at all levels are needed for production of effective citizenry capable of making rational decisions. The findings of this study are in line with Ekemezie (2009) who opined that high rate of poverty and insecurity in South-East zone hinders their economic development and cause stagnation of resources. Evans (2006) also demonstrated that Nigeria as a nation needs to reflect their national objectives in totality.

The findings of this study also support that there is measures to checkmate politics of ethnicity and marginalization in South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria such as power rotation among the six geo-political zones, removal of state of origin, religion, etc from application forms. This implies of a total review of Nigeria constitution and implementations of polices Ezeugo (2020). The present study are in agreement with Oriaku (2006) noted that independent nations always carry their citizen's in mind when distributing natural resources and allocation of funds. The findings are also in line with this current study. This implies that over populated country with numerous ethnic back ground, religion, food type will always see the most populated group as superior over each other. Egbe (2012) shared the same view with Oriaku (2006) that citizen's are equal and need functional order to prevent any form of gender disparity in each geo-political zone of Nigeria

Conclusion

Ethnicity is one of the factors that have caused serious embarrassment to nation building in Nigeria. Almost all issues in Nigeria are based on ethnic consideration including struggle for power, resource control and allocation of funds etc. There is no doubt that power rotation among the six geo-political zones help each zone to improve their standard and development, also minimize

politics of ethnicity in Nigeria and will enhance the growth and development of the South East geo-political zone especially creation of more state and equal opportunities will automatically reduce insecurity in each zone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Government should promote equitable political representation across regions.
2. Policies that reinforce ethnic discrimination should be reviewed,
3. Infrastructure and economic investments should be evenly distributed.
4. National dialogue should be encouraged to address ethnic tensions.
5. Institutional frameworks promoting fairness and inclusion should be strengthened.

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