

Addressing the Issues and Challenges of Ethnic Pluralism on Nation-Building and Insecurity in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a multi-ethnic state has been bedeviled with an alarming rate of internal crises that bother on insecurity due to the ethnic pluralistic composition of the country which is tremendously affecting the development of a vibrant nation-building in the country as the various ethnic groups are at one-another neck over national issues like power-sharing, revenue allocation, state creation, among others. It is based on this disunity that this paper examined the issues and challenges of ethnic pluralism as it affects nation-building and insecurity in Nigeria. The study adopts descriptive survey design and selected one hundred and twenty (120) students through random sampling technique and a self-designed questionnaire that contained fifteen items was used as the instrument and the data collected was analyzed using simple percentage, mean and standard deviation methods. The findings indicate that ethnic pluralism significantly contributes to socio-political conflicts which in turn escalate insecurity and hinder nation-building. It is recommended that government should implement policies that will encourage inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation at all levels of governance, and government should involve local communities in security efforts through community policing and grassroots security initiatives to enhance peace and security in the country.

Keywords: Ethnic pluralism, Injustice, Insecurity, Marginalisation, Nation-building,

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria became a socio-political entity in 1914 as a result of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates with the colony of Lagos by Sir Lord Lugard (with over 250 ethnic groups living together in the country). This amalgamation was deep-seated as it led to the integration of some distinct ethnic groups that hitherto operated as separate entities. Nigeria historical journey is marked by both cooperation and conflicts among its ethnic groups. The colonial legacy, which exacerbated ethnic divisions, coupled with post-independence governance challenges has contributed to on-going ethnic tensions and conflicts (Lawan, 2022). The struggle to balance the interests of various ethnic groups while fostering a unified national identity has influenced Nigeria's political, social and economic landscape.

Nigeria is a country that is characterized by immense ethnic diversity with over 250 ethnic groups, ethnic pluralism is both a fundamental aspect of its national identity and a source of considerable complexity (Okorie, 2011). The major ethnic groups include the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, each with its distinct cultural, linguistic and social characteristics. This diversity offers a rich cultural heritage but also presents significant challenges to nation-building and stability: This implies that the aim of nation building is the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run but Nigeria's ethnic composition is both a source of strength and a point of contention. The country's colonial history exacerbated ethnic division by creating administrative boundaries that did not align with existing ethnic territories, thereby sowing seeds of discord that have persisted into the post-independence era (Lawan, 2022).

However, Nigeria's attempt to forge a unified national identity has been continuously tested by ethnic rivalries and regional disparities. The quest for nation-building in Nigeria involves reconciling diverse ethnic diversity often encounter obstacles such as competition for political power, economic resources and social influence

leading to periodic conflicts and unrest (Mbachu, 2019). These ethnic tensions have manifested in various forms, including violent clashes, secessionist movements and inter-groups disputes, impacting national governance and societal harmony. For Nigeria, ethnic pluralism has been more instrumental in the challenge of nationhood, culminating in a civil war, agitation for state creation, sovereign national conference, rotational presidency, zoning and in recent times, ethnic insurgency as well as terrorist violence. Since the end of civil war, Nigeria has been moving from one crisis to another owing to contradictory steps taken by past governments and perhaps the most serious problem in Nigeria today which have made nation-building a mere-construct are the issues of ethnic pluralism affiliation with nation building and insecurity crisis rampaging the Nigerian societies.

Yusuf (2023) emphasized that recent empirical evidence supports that ethnic pluralism has a negative impact on economic development and political stability. He emphasized that the negative impact on economic development and political stability can impede nation-building and propagate insecurity. According to him, "a high level of ethnic fractionalization is often associated with low levels of investments and worse institutional quality."

Insecurity in Nigeria is intricately linked to its ethnic pluralism sometimes encouraged by insurgent groups and extremists organizations which pose significant threats to the country's security and stability (Akinola, 2023). For instance, the Boko-Haram insurgency has exploited ethnic and religious motive to fuel violence and instability and regional militias have emerged in response to perceived marginalization and inequitable resource distribution which further complicate the security landscape.

For a country to develop and succeed in nation-building, peace, safety and security are essential and necessary conditions, but the Nigeria society has recently been unheard-of level of insecurity which have resulted in fatalities and property damage as the rate of violent crimes in the country including politically-motivated killings, ethnic conflicts and the "unknown gunmen syndrome" is rising and has impeded the development of nation-building in Africa (Adegoke, 2010). The alarming security challenges which cut-across the nooks and crannies of the country has made national security threat to be a major issue for the government to worry as there is a rise in the incidents of militancy, insurgency, human trafficking, ritual killing and corruption in both high and low places that has made the nation's security agencies to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the current state of insecurity. It is based on the high level of crises among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria that this paper is focused towards examining the issue and challenges of ethnic pluralism on nation-building and insecurity in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study which focuses on security challenges and nation building in Nigeria are: The General Systems Theory and Primordial Theory.

The General System Theory was developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1968 and he views society as a complex system with interconnected components. In Nigeria, this theory can be applied to understand how ethnic pluralism affects nation building efforts as Nigeria with its multi ethnic composition requires that the various ethnic groups cooperate with one-another in order to lower national insecurity, because the survival of a state and nation building depend on unity among the various ethnic groups and national security. The theory states that each ethnic groups in the country should be able to interact and influence each other equally and they should be able to address their ethnic tensions and conflicts through effective government response and by mobilizing the nation's security agencies to enable them discharge their duties effectively. According to Bertalanffy, it is only through these steps that the unity and stability can be achieved in the country.

Primordial Theory: This theory was propounded by Clifford Geertz in 1963 and the system suggests that ethnic identities are ancient, natural and unchanging. Geertz argues that ethnic identities are rooted in shared ancestry, language, culture and history. According to Geertz, these ties evoke strong emotions and loyalty making them powerful forces in politics. In applying Primordial theory to Nigeria situation, one can see that the diverse ethnic groups in the country such as the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa have strong primordial ties influencing the politics and social dynamics in the country and that these ties can hinder national integration because ethnic loyalties often supercede national identity and primordial sentiments have been fueling most of the ethnic conflicts in the

country as groups prioritize their interests over national unity as can be observed in the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Militia group, Boko-Haram group among others.

These theories are applicable to this paper because they exhibit the prepositions, nature and dynamics in which Nigeria operates as a federal system. The theories therefore showcase Nigerian ethnic pluralism and its structural unbalance with asymmetric power relations among others which have caused the present ethnic pluralism and insecurity challenges in the country.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the ethnic pluralism and its attendant challenges to nation-building, it is important to clarify important concepts that shape the discourse. These include:

Ethnic Pluralism: Refers to the coexistence of multi-ethnic groups within the country, each with distinct language, culture and identity. Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world with over 250 ethnic groups. The largest and most politically significant groups include the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo which dominate the Northern, South West and South Eastern regions respectively. The other groups include the Nupe, Tiv, Kanuri, Ibibio, Ijaw and Nupe among others. Ethnic pluralism in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with regional division with the Northern part predominately occupied by the Hausa-Fulani who are largely Muslim while the Southern regions are divided between the Christian majority Yoruba in the South-West and the Igbo in the South-East. These ethnic and religious divisions have contributed to political rivalry and tension particularly in national governance and resource allocation. Nigeria's political landscape is significantly shaped by ethnic identities and the country has been experiencing constant struggle for political dominance among the major ethnic groups. Ethnic pluralism has both positive and negative implications for national integration. On one hand, it enriches the cultural fabric of the nation, while on the other hand, it poses significant challenges to nation-building.

Nation-Building: Nation-building is a normative concept that means different things to different people however in this paper, nation building is seen from the views of Ikenna and Onyemauwa (2018) that described it as a concept that help many nations and regions to become socially and culturally united by creating national identity which they use to improve their social cohesion and promote their development. Specifically, nation-building is used to describe the processes of national integration and consolidation that leads individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for their nation and to accept their commitment to the nation state The aim of nation-building is to achieve sustainable development through unification of the nation's people within and outside so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run.

Ezeani (2018) sees nation-building as the process of creating unity and sense of belonging among heterogeneous groups in the state while Gambari (2008) looks at the concept as involving the creation of a favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation-state. However, in Nigeria, most of the social traits of nation-building such as social, cohesion, stability and developing are lacking due to ethnic pluralism (Lawan, 2022).

Insecurity: Insecurity refers to the state of instability, danger or lack of safety within a society or country. It manifests in various forms including violence, crime, terrorism, and civil unrest, often disrupting everyday life, governance and economic activities. Insecurity often involves the presence of physical, economic, social or political dangers and it undermines social stability, disrupts economic activities and weakens institutions. In Nigeria, insecurity has become a significant challenge with issues like Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen/farmers conflicts banditry and kidnapping. This insecurity has severe implications for national development, peace, and efforts at nation-building as it hampers progress, weaken institutions and erodes public trust in governance.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To determine the relationship between ethnic pluralism, nation-building and insecurity in Nigerian society

2. To analyze the challenges of nation-building and insecurity in Nigerian society
3. To highlight possible solutions to the challenges of nation-building and insecurity in Nigerian society.

Research Questions

1. Is there relationship between ethnic pluralism, nation-building and insecurity in Nigerian society?
2. What are the effects of insecurity on nation-building in Nigeria?
3. What are the possible solutions to insecurity to enhance nation-building in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive survey design to examine the issues and challenges on nation-building and insecurity in Nigeria. One hundred and twenty (120) students were selected through random sampling technique from six secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, from among Senior Secondary School Students in SS III class that are offering History and Government as they would have been taught various topics that dealt with ethnicity and security issues in the country. A self-designed questionnaire that contained 15 questions that are relevant to the areas being examined in this study and the question were to be answered based on four points Likert Scale rating and a Split half method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and the response were analysed using Simple Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation methods.

Research Question 1: Is there relationship between ethnic pluralism, nation-building and insecurity in Nigerian Society?

Table 1: Relationship between Ethnic Pluralism, Nation-building and Insecurity in Nigerian Society

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std Dev
1	Ethnic squabbles often result from insecurity, religious, cultural and language differences	53 (44.2)	49 (40.8)	11 (9.2)	7 (5.8)	4.23	0.91
2	Security challenges pose serious threats to nation-building, ethnicity and Nigeria's corporate existence	55 (45.8)	50 (41.7)	10 (8.3)	5 (4.2)	4.29	0.86
3	Insecurity and ethnic issues have significantly affected nation-building in the last couple of years	50 (41.7)	48 (40.0)	15 (12.5)	7 (5.8)	4.18	0.92
4	Understanding ethnic pluralism is a pre-requisite for nation-building	58 (48.3)	45 (37.5)	12 (10.0)	5 (4.2)	4.30	0.88
5	Insecurity is jeopardizing nation-building coupled with ethnicity in some geopolitical regions	52 (43.3)	47 (39.2)	13 (10.8)	8 (6.7)	4.19	0.90

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

In table 1, item 1 indicates that 85% of the respondents agreed that ethnic squabbles often result from insecurity, religious, cultural and language differences. The mean score of 4.23 and standard deviation of 0.91 suggest a strong belief in the link between ethnic pluralism and insecurity. Item 2, shows that 87.5% of respondents acknowledged security challenge as a major threat to nation building and corporate existence in Nigeria. The

high mean score of 4.29 and low standard deviation of 0.86 indicated strong agreement with little variability. Item 3, highlights that 81.7% of samples agreed that insecurity and ethnic issues have significantly hindered nation-building efforts in recent years. The mean score of 4.18 and standard deviation of 0.92 suggest widespread agreement, though with slight variation in perceptions. Item 4, reveal that 85.8% of respondents affirmed that understanding ethnic pluralism is essential for successful nation-building. The mean score of 4.30 and standard deviation of 0.88 suggest firm consensus, reinforcing the idea that awareness and inclusivity play crucial roles in national unity. Item 5 shows that 82.5% of respondents believe that insecurity, is undermining nation-building in certain geopolitical regions. The mean score of 4.19 and standard deviation of 0.90 suggest a broad consensus on this issue, though some respondents may have diverse views based on regional experiences. From the result, strong and closer between ethnic pluralism, nation building and insecurity in Nigerian society.

Research Question 2: What are the effects Insecurity on nation-building in Nigeria?

Table 2: Effects of Insecurity on Nation-building in Nigeria

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std Dev
1	Insecurity disrupts economic activities leading to poverty and underdevelopment which hinders nation-building	58 (48.3)	45 (37.5)	12 (10.0)	5 (4.2)	4.30	0.88
2	Frequent security crises discourage foreign investments and economic growth, slowing down national development	60 (50.0)	48 (40.0)	7 (5.8)	5 (4.2)	4.36	0.86
3	Political Instability caused by insecurity weakens governance and effective policy implementation	55 (45.8)	50 (41.7)	10 (8.3)	5 (4.2)	4.36	0.83
4	Rising insecurity leads to mass displacement and migration, creating social and economic unbalances	52 (43.3)	47 (39.2)	13 (10.8)	8 (6.7)	4.19	0.90
5	The fear of insecurity discourages national integration and unity	50 (41.7)	50 (41.7)	12 (10.0)	8 (6.7)	4.18	0.91

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Table 2, reveals that item 1 has 85.8% of respondents agreed that insecurity disrupts economic activities, leading to poverty and underdevelopment that hinders nation-building. The mean score of 4.30 and standard deviation of 0.88 indicate strong agreement with minimal variation in responses. Item 2 highlight that 90% of respondents acknowledged that frequent security crises discourage foreign investments and economic growth, slowing down national development. The high mean score of 4.38 and standard deviation of 0.83 suggest that respondents widely recognize the economic consequences of insecurity. Item 3 indicates that 87.5% of respondents believe that political instability caused by insecurity weakens governance and policy implementation. The mean score of 4.38 and standard deviation of 0.83 reinforce this perception, showing a high level of agreement. Item 4 shows that 82.5% of respondents agreed that rising insecurity leads to mass displacement and migration, creating social and economic unbalances. The mean score of 4.19 and standard deviation of 0.90 indicate a strong consensus, though with some variations in individual opinions. Item 5 highlights that 83.4% of respondents affirmed the fear of insecurity discourages national integration and unity. The mean score of 4.18 and standard deviation of 0.91 suggest that insecurity is a significant obstacle to fostering national cohesion. From the above analysis, it can be inferred that there is a closer relationship between insecurity, national integration and unity because it was revealed in the study that the fear of insecurity will tremendously discourage national integration and unity in the country.

Research Question 3: What are the possible solutions to insecurity to enhance nation-building in Nigeria?

Table 3: Possible Solutions to Insecurity in order to Enhance Nation-building in Nigeria

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std Dev
1	Strengthening security agencies through training, equipment, and intelligence gathering will help combat security	62 (51.7)	45 (37.5)	8(6.7)	5 (4.2)	4.37	0.83
2	Promoting national unity through dialogue and inter-ethnic cooperation can reduce insecurity.	55 (45.8)	50 (41.7)	10 (8.3)	5 (4.2)	4.29	0.86
3	Addressing poverty and unemployment will reduce the tendency for individuals to engage in crime and violence.	60 (50.0)	48 (40.0)	7(5.8)	5 (4.2)	4.36	0.83
4	Government must enforce policies that ensure justice, fairness and equal opportunities to prevent insecurity.	58 (48.3)	45 (37.5)	12 (10.0)	5 (4.2)	4.30	0.88
5	Community policing and citizens involvement in security initiatives will strengthen national security.	52 (43.3)	47 (39.2)	13 (10.8)	8 (6.7)	4.19	0.90

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Table 3, Item 1 shows that 89.2% of the respondents agreed that strengthening security agencies through training, equipment and intelligence gathering will help combat insecurity. The high mean score of 4.37 and Standard deviation of 0.81 indicate a strong consensus. Item 2 highlights that 87.5% of respondents affirmed that promoting national unity through dialogue and inter-ethnic cooperation can reduce insecurity. The Mean score of 4.29 and standard deviation of 0.86 suggest that respondents widely acknowledge the role of unity in addressing insecurity. Item 3 reveals that 90% of respondents agreed that addressing poverty and unemployment will reduce the tendency for individuals to engage in crime and violence. The mean score of 4.36 and standard deviation of 0.83 emphasize the strong link between economic empowerment and national security. Item 4 indicates that 85.8% of the respondents believe that government enforcement of policies ensuring justice, fairness and equal opportunities can prevent insecurity. The mean score of 4.30 and standard deviation of 0.88 suggest a high level of agreement among respondents. Item 5 shows that 82.5% of respondents agreed that community policing and citizens involvement in security initiatives will strengthen national security. The mean score of 4.19 and standard deviation of 0.90 highlight a broad consensus, although responses exhibit some degree of variability. From the result, it can be concluded that, the government through its welfare policies, activities of security agencies and citizens involvement in security issues would help to provide solution to insecurity challenges in order to enhance nation-building in the country.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a strong correlation between ethnic pluralism, insecurity and the challenge of nation-building in Nigeria. About 83.3% of the respondents affirmed that ethnic pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups with distinct identities while 81.7% agreed that nation-building entails integrating these diverse groups into unified national identity. In addition, 87.5% recognized insecurity as a state instability and danger, and 83.3% acknowledged its psychological effects such as fear and anxiety as the majority of the respondents recognized that ethnic squabbles rooted in religious, cultural and linguistic differences contribute to insecurity. Insecurity in turn, poses a major threat to national integration and development, highlighting the need for a more cohesive approach to fostering unity among diverse ethnic groups. These findings align with the work of

Akinwale (2021) who emphasized that ethnic conflicts and political instability undermine national cohesion and hinder sustainability development. Similarly, Okafor and Ibe (2022) found out that ethnic plurality, if not well managed can escalate insecurity, thereby obstructing nation-building efforts.

Findings showed that insecurity has severe implications for nation-building, disrupting economic activities, discouraging foreign investment, and causing political instability. The results showed that 85% of respondents believed that ethnic tensions often result from religious, cultural and linguistic differences, which contribute to insecurity. Similarly, 87.5% agreed that insecurity poses a serious threat to nation building and Nigeria's peaceful coexistence. Understanding ethnic pluralism was seen as essential to nation-building by 85% of the respondents, highlighting the need for inclusive and culturally sensitive governance strategies. Furthermore, the study revealed the significant effects of insecurity on national development. For instance 90% of the respondents agreed that insecurity discourages foreign investment and economic growth while 87.5% noted that it weakens governance and policy implementation. Also 82.5% observed that insecurity leads to mass-displacement, creating social and economic imbalances and 83.4% believed it discourages national integration and unity. This is supported by Yusuf (2023) who argued that persistent insecurity weaken governance structure and exacerbates socioeconomic challenges in multi-ethnic societies.

In proffering solutions to insecurity in Nigeria, 89.2% of the respondents supported the strengthening of security agencies through better training, equipment and intelligence gathering. Promoting national unity through dialogue and inter-ethnic cooperation was also supported by 87.5% of the respondents. Additionally, 90% emphasized addressing poverty and unemployment as a way to reduce crime and violence. About 85.8% agreed that enforcing justice, fairness and equal opportunities would help reduce insecurity while 82.5% supported community policing and public involvement in security efforts. The findings agreed with the work of Adesina and Olusanya (2021) who stressed that a holistic approach to security, incorporating socio-economic development and inter-communal cooperation is vital for sustainable peace and progress. Nigeria's ethnic pluralism is an integral part of its identity, insecurity remains a significant challenge to national cohesion and development. Addressing these issues require a multifaceted approach that combines enhanced security measures, economic empowerment, interethnic cooperation and social justice. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can work towards a more stable and unified nation.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while Nigeria's ethnic pluralism is an asset, it remains a double-edged sword when not effectively managed. Ethnic pluralism, when combined with political, economic and social inequalities contributes significantly to national insecurity which in turn hinders nation-building. If these issues are not effectively addressed, achieving a unified and stable Nigeria will remain a mirage. In order to mitigate insecurity and enhance nation-building, an approach that include addressing socio-economic disparities, strengthening security in institutions, promoting dialogue between ethnic group and ensuring justice and fairness in governance is inevitable. By and large, this study affirms that while Nigeria's ethnic pluralism holds cultural potential, it presents a challenge to national unity and development when not properly handled. It can be seen from this study that strategic and inclusive nation-building efforts are essential in order to overcome insecurity and achieving sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to achieve a unified country free from injustice, marginalization, instability, and insecurity among others.

- The government should enhance the capacity of security agencies through their funding, training, intelligence-gathering capabilities to curb insecurity.
- The government should implement policies that encourage inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation at all levels of governance, education and social institutions.

- Government should address the problems of unemployment and poverty through job creation, skill-acquisition programmes and entrepreneurship development that will reduce crime rate and insecurity.
- The government should promote equal opportunities for all citizens, fair distribution of resources and transparent governance to reduce ethnic tensions.
- Government should involve local communities in security efforts through community policing and grassroots security initiatives that can enhance peace and security.
- The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should promote awareness about ethnic tolerance, peaceful coexistence and the importance of nation-building on various media platforms.
- Lastly, the citizens that are the stakeholders should cooperate with the government in handling the challenges of insecurity through reporting criminal activities to the law enforcement agents and through community policing.

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